

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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GOD WITH US

Matthew 1: 18-25; 18: 18-20; 28: 16-20

Haggai 1: 12-15; 2: 3-5

RHB One of the striking features of Matthew's gospel is the way that the Lord's presence with His people, the divine presence with His people here, is drawn attention to. It is significant in that context that there is no reference to the Lord's ascension in this gospel. It begins with "Emmanuel, which is, being interpreted, 'God with us'". We have the well-known reference in chapter 18 of the Lord's own words "where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them". Then we have His word at the end in resurrection, "behold". That word "behold" is to draw attention to something the significance of which may not have dawned upon them: "behold, I am with you all the days". I read the verses in Haggai because God speaks there of being with those that are in a day of recovery, a day of small things, a day where people were giving up and the prophets were used to revive and stimulate them out of a state of apathy, and the promise was that God would be with them.

One thing that is noticeable about all these references is that it is not that the persons themselves claim the presence of God or the Lord's presence among them. We live in a day when many people do that. In each case it is God speaking, committing Himself. I thought that might promote enquiry with us as to who these people are to whom God commits Himself in that way. I am sure we would all feel the necessity for the divine presence; however small and however weak things may be, we would feel the necessity for it. Perhaps speaking of it together would increase the desire for it. The brethren will remember that after great failure in Exodus, Moses says to God, "If thy presence do not go, bring us not up hence", Exod 33: 15. If we do not have the presence of God amongst us, not simply as a matter of faith, but as a matter of conscious experience in our souls, we really have very little.

The presence of God among His people is something that is to be desired on our part, and it is certainly desired on God's part. His desire to be with men is something that comes in very early in the Scriptures and it comes in at the end. The tabernacle of God, eternally, will be with men, Rev 21: 3. I wondered if these passages would stimulate enquiry with us as to the conditions that need to be provided in order that God's presence among us restfully should be experienced. Do you think we could get some nourishment out of those few

thoughts?

RJF Certainly, it should be a very strong exercise with us that God should be with us. Apart from anything else, there is so much strength that comes in. The scripture in Romans, “If God be for us, who against us?” (Rom 8: 31), comes to mind. This is much more of the inward side. I wonder if we see that with Joseph here; he “pondered on these things” and the result was that “an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream”. When he heard the word, he was obedient to it. He woke up from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord had enjoined him. Perhaps those are two things that are features that mark someone with whom God could be.

RHB Yes, and I think your reference in Romans is helpful, “If God be for us, who against us?”. You might say He would also be with us. The presence of God provides support, protection. We are really in the enemy's territory here. We do not belong here. The hymn we sang has reminded us of that:

His presence is our home. (Hymn 12)

Our home is not here. We are in enemy territory and therefore conflict at any moment may be called upon. The presence of God among His people restfully is the great support and protection for them. I think what you have said as to Joseph is striking; there is not much said in this chapter, or indeed in the next, as to Mary. There is a lot made in professing Christendom as to Mary, but Joseph is spoken of here as “son of David”. He is spoken of by God as “a righteous man”. To him was entrusted the care of this little Child. This was the greatest thing that has happened in the history of the world, that God should be manifest in flesh. This Child was entrusted to a man who was obedient; he was righteous; and the writer says of the child that “they shall call his name Emmanuel, which is, being interpreted, ‘God with us’”. I thought this first scripture would establish us in that, the desire of God to be with men, so that He has been manifested in flesh. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1: 14): among men. We can see that in these very limited circumstances, a family that was outwardly poor, there were moral features into which this precious Child was introduced.

DAB-w Could you say a little more as to why it is Joseph? Are you suggesting perhaps that it is these sorts of masculine features that are necessary to stand fast and hold fast. It is born out of affection; it is

really being prepared to stand. Would that be a feature that marks those where the Lord would be pleased to make Himself known?

RHB Yes, it is a striking feature. The royal line is given in the first part of the chapter, “Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ”, Matt 1: 16. It is Joseph that was in the line of David and something happened that on the face of it had the appearance of wickedness, and so he purposed in himself. He reflected upon it. I think there are features set out in this man for our instruction. He “purposed to have put her away secretly”; she was obviously the object of his affections, but that was not going to hinder him. If evil was there, it was to be dealt with. I think that is one of the features that is necessary if the Lord's presence is to be known, that there is the preparedness to deal with wickedness when it arises. He does not rush to judgment. He is a man unwilling to expose, publicly, “he pondered on these things”. He reflected upon them. That gave opportunity for the divine mind to be made known to him. As we sang in our hymn,

How all things shine in light divine.

Light divine shone on this situation. It was not at all as it appeared.

PSB You have drawn attention to something I was going to ask you about: he was “unwilling to expose her publicly”. It says in the footnote c that it was what was characteristic of him. These things are not just put on for the occasion; it is what should be characteristic and mark us for the Lord to be available and make Himself known.

RHB Yes, of course evil has to be dealt with when it arises, but it is not to be our occupation, we are not to live in those things or expose them. If what he thought had happened, it was a public scandal, not something to be exposed to public gossip and talk. It is remarkable how the activity of angels comes in to convey the divine mind to him. We get it in the next chapter too: he takes the little Child away to Egypt and then from Egypt to Galilee, and to Nazareth. These movements would have been unremarked in the world, of little account, but there was a great evil abroad, a wicked king who was going to slaughter all the children of that age. These outwardly insignificant movements were movements under divine direction. I find that a challenge as time goes by, as to whether I am leadable, whether I am adjustable; or whether I am opinionated. This man was a righteous man, he was unwilling to expose, but he was one that could be directed. It struck me

that it is into those conditions, poor as they were, that the Saviour of the world was born.

DAB Is it interesting in that connection that Joseph is ready to embrace the idea that the Holy Spirit has acted? No doubt you have in mind too exercise as to our present relationships with God. We may be occupied with the difficulties and appearances, but we do need to be more attuned to the reality that the Holy Spirit is acting.

RHB What you say is even more remarkable, in that the Holy Spirit had not yet come as an indwelling Spirit, but He was active. That which was begotten in her was of the Holy Spirit; and we read elsewhere of a man to whom things were communicated “by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ”, Luke 2: 26. You might say the Holy Spirit was overshadowing this whole circumstance that was of such little interest in the world, but of such great importance to heaven.

DAB I was thinking in your opening remarks, that this prophecy that the angel quotes was more than seven hundred years old. The promise made to David as to his seed was more than a thousand years old, but it could not be fulfilled unless there were people through whom it could be fulfilled. That is where the Holy Spirit has operated. When God's word and God's promise comes to be fulfilled, the Holy Spirit has prepared conditions into which that can be brought.

RHB Yes, it is like a sterilised area, a sanctified area, into which this Babe, spoken of elsewhere as “the holy thing also which shall be born” (Luke 1: 35) could come; Something so precious. You think of what hung upon the birth of this Child: what hung upon Him for God and what hung upon Him for man, and how vulnerable and exposed it appeared to be, and yet “God with us”, which was His name peculiarly, would involve not only the birth of that Child but the Godhead involved in it.

PHM It is interesting that in each of the passages you have drawn from God is speaking, or the Lord is speaking. What we have been saying as to the Spirit is helpful because that gives us the understanding. It is not just knowing God's presence or the Lord's presence; it would involve communion with Him. John speaks of Him as a Shepherd: “My sheep hear my voice”, John 10: 27. If we apply these scriptures to our practical pathways, that is His desire. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to learn. One of the things that you are enquiring about is for us each to be able to have that desire, to know and

recognise His voice and to hear what He may have to say to us. He has something different for each of us; it all involves blessing and there is a result of encouragement and confirmation in having this communion with Him, as learning from Him and following His actions.

RHB I think that; I think His presence is to be known by us individually. Then we shall have the ability to recognise His presence as we come together. That is very important, particularly in the first occasion of the week. There has been a lot of teaching and ministry and help as to that occasion, and as to what we sometimes call the order of the service, but we do not have a fixed order of service, like the professing church. What we have, if we have anything, is the presence of Christ. He has promised to make Himself known if the conditions there are suitable and as coming in amongst His own, as the great Head of the assembly, He will give directions. Hymns will be given out if His presence is recognised under His headship, not just because we know that this is a hymn that will fit at this time of the meeting, or because we have sung it before or like it. The great Head of the assembly will indicate a hymn that will strike the chord that He strikes and we shall prove guidance, not human guidance, but divine leadership as His presence is known. It is in the assembly; we are going on a bit further now, but it is in the assembly that the praises of God are sung by Him.

KJW We had an impression last Lord's day as to the movements of the Lord, and the Lord's movements are to be with us. This first scripture that you have read was one of the supreme movements from the divine side to be with His creature. Could you say something more? You mentioned in your opening remarks as to God's desire, but that is behind all of these movements that we can understand through the Spirit.

RHB I think so. The Lord says in John, "I will not leave you orphans", chap 14: 18. He says, "I am coming to you". That is characteristic; that is John's side. I suppose this gospel brings out perhaps more the conditions that exist for His presence. We cannot assume it. We cannot come together and assume that because we break bread in this room as we have done many times, and with brethren that we have been breaking bread with many times, that the Lord will come to us. We must be in constant exercise that there are spiritual conditions provided for His presence to be known and enjoyed and proved by us.

MIW One of the features of Joseph was obedience. He was given directions as to the Lord's name and remarkably in this gospel it says,

“he called his name Jesus”. I wondered whether that is another feature that is important that as we become conscious of the word of God coming in, it is incumbent upon us to take that up in the spirit of subjection.

RHB Yes, I think so. That was the matter in which man failed originally, the matter of obedience. It is quite remarkable that he is referred to not only as a righteous man, but as one who immediately answered to the light he was given, and as a result he had more light. In the next chapter there is fresh direction and movement, and it is all for his protection and blessing as well as the protection and blessing of the little Child. I think the Lord speaks often in the scriptures of the importance of keeping His word, keeping His commandments, and that being the proof of our love for Him.

DHB God's desire has always been to dwell with man. I was thinking there were different conditions in Genesis, but when sin came in Jehovah Elohim said to man, “Where art thou?”, chap 3: 9. He felt that distance and ultimately man was expelled from the garden. Conditions were not right for God to dwell with man and He would feel that.

RHB I think what you say is right. It has always been God's desire to dwell with man. Man was taken up for that purpose. It has not always been man's desire to dwell with God. Man would often prefer that God should remain in heaven at a distance and leave him to his own devices. There is actually a reference in the Psalms to that.

The heavens are the heavens of Jehovah,
but the earth hath he given to the children of men, Ps 115: 16.

That is how persons have often thought of things. In Christianity everything is changed. Instead of God being in heaven and man on earth there is a living Man in heaven and God is dwelling here by the Spirit. The Lord Jesus, though He dwells in heaven, has promised to come. He is able to do that; though He is seated at the right hand of the Father, He wants to find a home and a dwelling. You might say He wants to find a Bethany here on earth where His love can be at rest and where He can unfold what is in His own heart, not just minister to us, but to lead us on to the knowledge of divine Persons and divine things.

DAB-w Can we say that such a company always does exist? You spoke about a Man being in heaven and God here upon the earth, but the Holy Spirit is working that there would be conditions where God makes Himself known. There always has been. The question is, am I

exercised to be numbered among them?

RHB I think that is right. Therefore, if I have found the Lord's presence, I do not enter into debates about whether other companies have the Lord's presence or not. Sometimes there is a lot of speculation about that, and people say the Lord is there, or there are good Christians there: if I have found "him whom my soul loveth" (Song of Songs 3: 1), as the espoused says in the Song of Songs, why am I concerned about what is proceeding somewhere else? The Lord's presence not only gives support, and protection, but it also gives satisfaction of heart and soul. We need that.

DAB-w We have just started Exodus locally in the week. We found that there were two Hebrew midwives, "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses", Exod 1: 21. Then there is a man of the tribe of Levi that takes a woman of the tribe of Levi, chap 2: 1. God had those people even in such a dark day that were committed to Himself and He was able to move in accord with that. I am just linking on with your thought of satisfaction, which perhaps links to the thought of God making them houses.

RHB Each of these scriptures really anticipates a dark day. When Herod the king in the next chapter heard that the king of the Jews had been born it enraged him and he carried out a terrible slaughter against young children. What a dark day, what a sorrowful day it was outside. There was a sphere where God was operating, where everything was safe and everything was blessed, "God with us".

In our second scripture it speaks of where saints "are gathered together unto my name". It has often been said that it was not exactly a promise: it is a consequence. Where persons are gathered in that way He is there.

RJF The conditions in that chapter are at the beginning: "Unless ye are converted and become as little children" (Matt 18: 3), and "Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, *he* is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens; and whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name, receives me", v 4. Becoming as a little child, having that position of humility, that is the circumstance to which the Lord can say He is there in the midst. It is not an assertion by the individual.

RHB No, nor an assumption. You read of persons in the beginning of Luke that assume that Jesus was in the company of their friends and relatives and they went on for a period of time on their journey assuming

that He was there and He was not. He was not there. Steps had to be retraced and they had to be reminded about His prime occupation which was “my Father's business”, Luke 2: 49. Those that are committed to that will find Him.

STE This is not about a theory; this is experience and reality; that is individual. Divine faithfulness is consistent. Our faithfulness may wane, but there is one thing we can be assured of which is that the Lord loves the company of the individual in a company however small it is and we prove it through reality, not theory.

RHB Yes. We want to be real, not imaginary. There could be nothing more blessed than to experience consciously the presence of Christ in the midst. What troubles me a little bit is that we often speak of that, but actually the experience of it would be transforming. It is not a commonplace thing to experience the Lord's presence.

STE It has an effect. That is the reality. Your heart and affections, all where the love is, are stirred in relation to the Lord.

RHB It must be so. Response to Him is not stilted or formal: it is spontaneous. A young brother once asked an older brother when he thought he should take part in the meeting. The answer was, 'When you cannot sit on your seat any longer'. That is really the essence of it. It is not just, 'Is this an appropriate time for me to make my contribution?'. There is some view of Christ touching and quickening the affections, there is a response that is spontaneous and God dwells in that. He “dwellest amid the praises of Israel”, Ps 22: 3. One has been thinking about that expression. It is a remarkable expression uttered by the Lord prophetically in the time of His suffering. “And thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel”. I came across a reference; someone spoke of God coming out clothed in the responses of His own, as His glory; God is glorified. That there should be such a spontaneous response to Himself and to Christ is all the fruit of His own gracious work and God is glorified in that. We think of what the service of praise may be for us, the encouragement that we get and the strength to go on in difficult times, but do we have a view of what it means to God that out of a scene of such contrariety as we live in, where apostasy is rampant on every hand and affecting every walk of life, there should rise a note spontaneously in affectionate intelligence to Himself? How exquisite that is to the heart of God.

NJH The service of the Spirit develops manhood according to God in

the saints and in that is a divine dwelling. In the second tables of the writing of God, the ark of acacia-wood was introduced (Deut 10: 3), which could hold what was of God amongst His people. You referred to the indwelling Spirit at the beginning, it involves another order of man, that has been formed in the saints in which God can dwell.

RHB Yes, in which God can dwell. That is really envisaged in this reference to persons “gathered together unto my name”. As we know this is the only gospel of the four that speaks in specific terms of the assembly. The Lord speaks of building His assembly and in this chapter in relation to sins He says, “tell it to the assembly”. You wonder what the disciples made of that when the Lord said it. The assembly was not yet in function. I think what you say is helpful; it has in mind persons indwelt by the Spirit being “built together for a habitation of God”, Eph 2: 22.

NJH At one point in the dark history of Israel the ark was taken out of its place into the scene of battle, 1 Sam 4: 11. They proved that whatever they would claim, God was not with them in that.

RHB It was very humbling for Israel at that time. Even when it came back it was humbling the way it was treated, chap 7. It shows the importance of being exercised ourselves that there should be conditions that are suitable; there should be nothing that would hinder something so precious.

DAB I wondered in that connection about these people in Matthew 18 asking for things. Do you think such people would put high on their list the prospect that the Lord might be among them? Not to make a claim, but they would not think of asking without being very exercised that conditions should be congenial if He were to answer that prayer.

RHB Do you think that lies behind the Lord's own prayer in John 17 to the Father, that they should be kept in His Name (verse 11), that they should be sanctified by the truth, John 17: 17? In making those requests did He not have in mind that there would be a company here where He would be free to manifest Himself?

DAB If you make that connection, I have thought it right that the Father has answered some of the things the Lord asked for in sending the Spirit. We have here the Father answering. The Father is not going to answer where there is not a moral condition suited to what was asked for. If there is, then the presence of the Holy Spirit would be the means whereby the presence of the Lord Jesus would be a known reality.

RHB That is very precious. It is to be known by us. He says, "whatsoever it may be that they shall ask, it shall come to them from my Father who is in the heavens". It implies that the requests are being made as the Lord's own request made as Man here, that they are made in full accordance with the Father's will. The intelligence for that is in the gift of the Spirit.

RMB Can I ask what it means to be gathered unto the Lord's name?

RHB The first thing I would say about it is that it underlines the fact that He is not here. We are publicly in a scene, not only from which Christ has been rejected, cast away as worthless by men, but a scene which He has left. "I leave the world" (John 16: 28), He said. One has felt the solemnity of that as coming to the Supper and looking at the emblems on the table. We are gathered in a scene that is characterised by the absence of Christ. What a desolate scene it is; to be living in a world where Christ is not. What a provision therefore the supper is. In such a desolate scene His presence can be realised. Although He is not here His Name is here, which would seem to me to involve the testimony to Him and the reproach associated with that. I would be glad of help on it myself.

RMB Would it include that such persons would be exercised that everything that they are going on with would be in accord with His Name, exercised about the maintenance of His rights, exercised about honouring Him and honouring His precious Name?

RHB Yes, there is a scripture that says, "whatever ye may do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus", Col 3: 17. I think each of these words in this verse 20 are important. They are "gathered together"; they are gathered together with one common purpose to make much of Christ. Where that is the case - and each of us can exercise our hearts as to whether it is the case - we get this blessed word, "there am I in the midst of them". However small the conditions, where those conditions exist the Lord's presence is a consequence for them.

AJET Linking with your quotation from Colossians 3: 17 as to doing all things in His Name, "And everything, whatever ye may do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by him", do you think that would be persons who would seek to do things as He would do them? If you transfer it to what has been said about Matthew 18, the two or three there are persons who would

desire to do things as He would do them. It is that kind of person where nothing more needs to be said, immediately “there am I in the midst of them”. There is no preliminary here or anything. Gather together unto His Name, that is the fulness of it, “there am I in the midst of them”.

RHB How sweet that is. It is there to be proved and enjoyed, and I think that verse in Colossians helps us as to the meaning of it: as has been said, everything is to be governed by His Name. I have often thought, speaking practically, sitting at the Supper, I am putting my hands to that loaf which is a symbol of the body of Christ: “This is my body which is given for you”, Luke 22: 19. It was a body that was devoted in its entirety to the will of God. I am putting my hands to that loaf. Where have my hands been? What have they been doing in the week running up to the Supper? Have they been employed in the will of God, could His Name be associated with all that those hands have done, what they have touched? These things are practical; and where that is the case, there is a blessed and satisfying experience of Him in the midst of them: in their midst. Assembly truth is worked out in localities and in that locality where those conditions exist, His presence will be known.

AJET However simple those persons may be, however hidden the place where they are meeting, the world may just be passing them by, but “there am I in the midst of them”.

RHB What does He do in the midst of them, what does He do? He takes command as the great Head of the assembly; as the Chief Musician He strikes the note that is for the pleasure of the heart of God, and He has at His disposal these persons marked by these features that are useable to Him in the praise of God. “In the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises”, Heb 2: 12.

AJET It was mentioned on Lord's day that we saw some of the movements of the Lord in resurrection. We spoke of them in the reading; we had Matthew 18 before us. We also had Hebrews 2, “he that sanctifies and those sanctified”, Heb 2: 11.

RHB You have referred to resurrection and that bring us on to this final reference in Matthew. The Lord in resurrection speaks here; He was going away. His ascension is not mentioned here because what is being drawn attention to is the support of His presence in the time of His absence. These persons were going to be sent out into all the world with the consciousness that all power had been given to Him. We have

to ask ourselves, brethren, whether we really believe that. Is that faith in our hearts that “All power has been given me in heaven and upon earth”? How easily our hearts tremble at the instability of conditions in the world, wars and threats of one kind and another; governments collapsing and so forth. How easily we tremble, but we can have the sense in the soul that all power in heaven and upon earth has been given to Him and He is the One who has promised to be with us all the days until the completion of the age. These persons were going out in service; they were going out mostly, I suppose, to martyrdom ultimately. They went out with that assurance that the One who had all power was with them.

RMB Would it be right to say that the Lord's presence as we have referred to it in Matthew 18 relates to particular occasions, but His support as He refers to it here is constant?

RHB Yes, I am thankful you make that distinction because when the number of the apostles was made up the qualification was one who had been with us all the time, that the Lord Jesus came in and went out amongst us, Acts 1: 21-22. Was there not some conflict about that at one time, the Lord in the midst? Some said it was permanent. That scripture was brought forward to confirm what you say: where persons gather together unto His Name, the Lord comes. Then He goes. His presence, this last verse in Matthew is for the support and protection of the individual.

NJH The question came up as to “in the midst”. In John 20 He is in the midst; here it is continual support as has been said. I think the reading when it came up was in Düsseldorf with Mr J Taylor, vol 77 p283. It was said He is with us all the time. Mr Taylor said He comes. That was something different from what Matthew 18 says.

RHB He comes; He is attracted to such a company. Here He is committed to the testimony and Paul could say when everyone else forsook him at one point, and there were no brethren supporting him, “the Lord stood with me, and gave me power”, 2 Tim 4: 17. There was the fulfilment of that promise. He was with the apostle when others were not.

We might touch these passages in Haggai. The context is a day like our own, a day of recovery, a Laodicean day where difficulties had arisen as to the building and then persons had given up. There will always be difficulties if we seek to do the will of God. There will always

be reasons why we should not, or could not or will not, which is why the overcomer is stressed so much in our day. The prophets were used to arouse persons in a day of recovery to rise and overcome, and the great promise in such a day, was that God says, "I am with you". It is stressed: "Then spoke Haggai, Jehovah's messenger, in Jehovah's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith Jehovah", chap 1: 13. In chapter 2, you get the other thing that hinders, that persons were looking back to a day when things were perhaps more promising, more available, and God says, "Is it not as nothing in your eyes?". People would tend to think it was not worth the effort. He reminds them that in such a day of apathy that His word and His Spirit remain among them, and He says again, "I am with you, saith Jehovah". I think it is an extraordinary comfort and it comes out in the addresses to the overcomer in the addresses to the churches. The Lord's interest is in those who in a dark day such as our own overcome. Perhaps the feature of the overcomer in our day is seen in that way, in the desire to maintain the truth of the assembly in such a broken and small day as we are in. That is what attracts the support and presence of God Himself.

RJF What you say is very helpful. I wonder if we see four features coming out in the verses that you have read. They "hearkened to the voice of Jehovah their God". In other words, they were actively listening. There were "the words of Haggai the prophet, according as Jehovah their God had sent him". He was one who was divinely directed and that was what was being sought. "The people feared before Jehovah"; that is the third feature. There is an appreciation that God is greater and that there needs to be a subject spirit; and then in the second chapter we have this injunction of God, "be strong". Do you think those things are all helpful in seeing how we can seek the presence so that God can be with us?

RHB I think it is very helpful what you have said, to see those features. They are features that attract the presence of God and His support. It is that to which He lends His power. Paul uses an expression, "Having therefore met with the help which is from God", Acts 26: 22. He was in the way of that help. Those features that you have helpfully drawn attention to indicate where the help from on high can be proved, and it is needed. Weakness is felt.

RJF Something that is really shining out through this whole enquiry together is that the matter of God being with us is not a matter of my will or your will. It is a question of whether we have meek and subject

spirits, desiring it rather than trying to will it.

RHB There is no doubt that He desires it. He desires to be at liberty among His people. He draws attention in the Old Testament through the prophets to the things that hindered that. He is very quick, I speak reverently of God Himself, He is quick to bring in the assurance of His presence when there is any movement of heart towards Him.

PSB So in what is being said, they hearkened and immediately there is that which comes in that stirs up the spirits. That would be the result of hearkening to the voice of Jehovah.

RHB We want to listen for it when we come together - the brethren like to have fellowship meetings. When we come together like this, the spirit of judgment should mark us as to what we are hearing. The contributions that come in from one and another: is that just a brother's thoughts, or was the Lord speaking in that? Was He drawing attention to something? The Lord sought to arouse that spirit of judgment. He said of the ministry of John the baptist, "whence was it? of heaven or of men?", Matt 21: 25. When we come to these meetings, what do we want? We want to see one another, we understand that; we love one another. There is the social side of an occasion like this in a right sense; we like to come together. Do we want the divine presence and divine speaking amongst us; and then as the meeting proceeds is that what I have experienced? Let us exercise the spirit of judgment about it so that we learn to recognise divine communications because our spiritual life depends upon them. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which goes out through God's mouth", Matt 4: 4. In the day we are in we especially need living communications from the Lord if we are to be kept alive in a scene of death; otherwise we just become another sect of Christendom. If we want to be maintained in life towards God, we must have an ear attuned to divine speaking.

PSB What you say is very important because there are many voices abroad. It speaks of "having an itching ear", 2 Tim 4: 3. Do we when we come together? Does it have an effect upon us? Does it stir us up? It is not just a matter of, 'Yes, we have had a good time', but does it stir me up and does it challenge me?

RHB I think if it is the word of God it will challenge us. God being who He is and we being what we are it would necessarily involve a challenge to our hearts and consciences, but it is not all challenge. God loves His people and there is nothing more satisfying; nothing outside in the

desolate world can compare with Christ being ministered to us in the power of the Spirit.

AJET This is a word for us all, not only for those who lead: “But now be strong, Zerubbabel, saith Jehovah; and be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land”. If I am exercised to be one of the people of the land: the word is as much for me as the people who lead.

RHB Yes. In fact, if you look in the book of Ezra you find that the prophets - these two prophets Haggai and Zechariah - helped the people in the work, Ezra 5: 2. They did not just deliver a sermon, but they rolled up their sleeves and helped in the arduous work of building with them. They set an example as well as conveying the divine mind.

Sunbury

22nd June 2024

List of initials:-

D H Bailey, Maidstone; D A Barlow, Sunbury; P S Barlow, Sunbury;
R H Brown, Maidstone; R M Brown, Strood; D A Burr, Sidcup;
S E Eagle, Dorking; R J Flowerdew, Sunbury; N J Henry, Glasgow;
P H Morris, Sunbury; A J E Temple, Sunbury; K J Walkinshaw, Sunbury;
M I Webster, Buckhurst Hill

THE GIFT OF SONSHIP

Roland H Brown

Galatians 3: 26; 4: 4-7

Romans 8: 14-17

I seek divine help, dear brethren, to say something about the glory of the gift of sonship. The second section that I read says that "God sent forth his Son ... that we might **receive** sonship". Mr Darby has a very helpful note to that word: 'It is receiving the position of sonship as a gift', because the Jew was under bondage of law and the Gentile had no right to anything. God has given many things. If we know God at all, we know Him as a Giver and a Blessor. So much so that the apostles could say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". Paul says that in his epistles and so does Peter, 2 Cor 1: 3; Eph 1: 3; 1 Pet 1: 3. I think those men had a great sense of the blessedness of the nature of God through their knowledge of Him, through His dealings with them. They said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".

But among the many things that God has given to us as believers is sonship. That is what the first verse that I read brings out, that "we are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus". It is not a question of whether we feel like it or whether we feel up to it; it is what we are as having put our faith in Christ. And it reminds us that faith in Christ Jesus has more in mind, much more in mind, than simply the relief from sins and security from judgment to come. Many professing believers stop there. You might say they live in the gospel. Now of course the forgiveness of sins is essential; it could not be more essential. I hope it is the property of all in this room that they know as a certainty that their sins have been forgiven and that they can look ahead. John says, "they may have boldness in the day of judgment", 1 John 4: 17. They can look ahead without fear because, as John says, "as *he* is, we also are in this world", as He is the Saviour in glory above, as He is in all His acceptability to God as a Man. What a statement that is, is it not? What thoughts God has, far exceeding our thoughts. He said that a long time ago, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways", Isa 55: 8. God is going to be praised eternally for the greatness of His thoughts and the glory of His ways, the way that He has taken, often not understood by us because we are poor limited creatures. But the way that God has taken, as well as what He has done, will redound to His glory eternally.

Now I think this verse brings that out. You see that faith in Christ Jesus is not simply a question of what I am saved from, important as that is. It is not an end in itself; the forgiveness of sins is a means to something much greater, and that is that God wants to confer, *sonship*. That is a most blessed thing, as I hope to convey, and not just blessed, but it is a glorious thing that God has done.

Brethren are familiar with the passage in Romans 8. It speaks of those that God "has predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son". "But whom he has predestinated, these also he has called; and whom he has called, these also he has justified; but whom he has justified" - that is persons whose sins have been forgiven, and they have been justified in another Man - "these also he **has** glorified". It is not simply that He will glorify them, but He *has* glorified them. And I have felt for myself recently that I have not thought enough about that. God "has glorified his servant Jesus", as one of the early preachers said (Acts 3: 13), but He has glorified those whom He has justified, and He has glorified them by giving them His Spirit. Persons that are indwelt by the Spirit of God have been glorified already, and they have been called through divine grace to sonship.

Now sonship is not a difficult word to understand, is it? We understand that it means a relationship, brought into the family of God. That is how John speaks of the assembly - not formally as the assembly, but he speaks of the family, the family of God. He speaks of Christianity in its essence. So when he speaks of fellowship, he speaks of having fellowship with God. We can so easily perhaps get over-occupied with externals and what is formal and so on, but the very essence of Christianity is that we are brought into the family of God, to have a relationship with Him that is of the most intimate and blessed character, and to have relationships with those that are His. I do not think sonship is presented in the scriptures in relation to us exactly in the singular, because if you have received the Spirit of God and have been brought into the family of God, you have been numbered among a most exalted company. God is "bringing many sons to glory", Heb 2: 10. That is something that He is committed to. They have been glorified already by the gift of the Spirit, but they are being brought to glory from all sorts of backgrounds and circumstances, some of the most unusual people. You might say, 'Well, I do not think that they deserved it'. No, none of them deserved it, but they received it as a gift and they received it through faith in Christ Jesus. I trust everyone here

in this room has faith in Christ Jesus, not only for their eternal security, but that you might be awakened to the glory of what God has conferred upon you.

So it says in chapter 4 that “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, come of woman, come under law”; that is what God did. But what was the purpose of Him doing that, sending forth His Son, “come of woman, come under law”; that amazing wonder that we were speaking about in the reading, what was the purpose of it? The purpose, no less, was that we might receive sonship. So great was the divine desire that we should be brought into this holy and intimate relationship that God sent forth His Son in such a lowly way. I have said before, the ways of God are not our ways. We might have thought that this was a strange way to impart sonship to many sons, but this is the way that God chose. And eternally, He will be glorified in the way that He did it, as well as the result of it. And it says that He sent Him forth that we might receive sonship, might receive it as a gift from God. Do you treasure that, dear brother, dear sister? Does it enter into your thanksgiving to God that He has made Himself known to you; that in the sovereignty of His grace, you have been brought to know Him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent (John 17: 3), and not only brought to know Him, but to receive from Him the gift of sonship?

Well, now there is something else. The writer says first, “because ye are sons” - that is what we are, dear brethren, as having faith in Christ Jesus. We are nothing less than that. May our hearts be stimulated to walk worthy of it. It struck me recently that we have many relationships. Some of us are married, we have husbands or wives, we have children, we have parents, all sorts of relationships. We go to work; these relationships are all covered in the scriptures. We may be the master at work, or we may be an employee; that is a relationship. We enter into all sorts of relationships, but there is one relationship that is supreme to every other, and is to give character to every other, and that is the relationship of sonship. As a husband, I should be marked as one of God's sons in the way I behave. And we have to acknowledge, as Mr Eric Burr once said, that we may speak of the testimony, but our testimony begins where we are known best; that is in our home. If I am known as a husband who is impatient or loses his temper with his wife or children, how is that to be characteristic of a son of God? In my household and in the relationships of nature into which through God's ways I have been brought, what is to characterise every inferior relationship is the dignity and grace - and I say the glory - of the

relationship of sonship. It is to mark everything that I touch, the way I treat my wife, the way I treat my children, the way I treat my employer, or my employee. Every inferior relationship is to be marked by that, that God has conferred upon me the glory and the dignity of sonship and brought me into this most intimate of relationships with Himself.

Well, now he says, "because ye are sons" - that is what you are as having faith in Christ Jesus - "God has sent out Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father". Now we are the sons of God by adoption and we all know that a child that is adopted may come readily to love the persons that have adopted them, and feel grateful to them for having adopted him. They may get on well with the natural children of the family, but they are not a blood relation. They will express in their appearance perhaps features of the family from which they came, not the family that they have been adopted into. But God has done something very wonderful: He has imparted to those that He has adopted as His sons the Spirit of His Son. Now no natural or earthly father could do that to an adopted child, but God has done it. And you may ask, 'Well, why has he done it?'. He has done it that you might not simply have the status of sonship, but that you might have the feelings and affections and emotions that are proper to the sons of God. How affecting that is, is it not? And only God could do it; that you might see things as God sees them and feel them as He feels them, and be an integral part of the divine family as having the Spirit of His Son.

That is to convey to us the consciousness of sonship, that it is not just a doctrine, it is not just a verse in the Bible, but it is something that is to enter into my spiritual consciousness. God sheds His love abroad in my heart through the Spirit that He has given to me in order that I should know at its most basic level that I am loved. It is a wonderful thing to be loved. When you read and see some of the things that go on in the world, you pity men. There are men and women on the earth who never seem to have experienced love, even natural love, abused and deserted and abandoned from infancy, falling into a life of criminality, coming under the severity of the law, ending up in prison, brutalised there; persons passing through life having never experienced what love is. What a wonderful thing it is to be loved and to know your love; to know that you have a place in someone's heart is a very precious thing, but how much greater to know that you have a place in God's heart.

Who could measure that? And God wants you to know that. He

has given us a spirit of adoption in order that sonship may not simply be a doctrine or a truth, but as you get up in the morning and go to work, you are doing so in the consciousness that you have been supremely blessed. God has blessed you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, and He chose you in Christ before the world's foundation, and He marked you out. Notice this, He marked you out beforehand for adoption. He marked you out for that, long before you knew anything about it. Mr Bert Taylor used to tell us when he was local with us in East Finchley that it is like a door, and on one side of it is written, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16: 31), and you go through that door and you look back and written on the other side of it is "chosen ... in him before the world's foundation", Eph 1: 4. These things to me are very wonderful, that God should not only bestow the glory of sonship, and the Lord spoke of it as that. He said to the Father, "And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them", John 17: 22. The glory of sonship was set out in all its perfection in the Son, who went His way through this world. He was doing good; He was healing those that were oppressed; He was giving sight to the blind, making the lame to walk, raising the dead, healing the leper, giving hearing to the deaf. But He went through in the consciousness of sonship. He could say, "I do always the things that are pleasing to him", John 8: 29. It was not just that He was the Son - He was, but He lived in flesh and blood conditions on this earth in the consciousness of sonship, the consciousness that He was loved, the consciousness of the place He had in the bosom of the Father. We too, dear brethren, are to be conscious of it.

I say these things, not because they are not known - I am sure that what I am saying is better known to the brethren than it is to me - I am going over things that have been said before, but I have felt for myself the need to be awakened as to it, awakened to the glory of what God has done in order that I might walk practically here in the dignity and grace of it.

That brings me on to this final passage, because in Romans 8 the apostle says not only that those that have been justified have been glorified, but he speaks of those that are *led* by the Spirit of God. I find that quite an exercising verse. You see, it is one thing to have received the Spirit from God because I am one of His sons, but am I led by Him? That means, am I prepared to give up my own will? Am I prepared to be guided? The Spirit of God is a guide: "he shall guide you into all the

truth", John 16: 13. He is a Teacher; "*he shall teach you all things*", chap 14; 26. But He is a Leader too. I just wanted to close with a reference to that. He is a Leader that has taken up His abode in the believer. He gives a prompt as to the way to go. You will find in life that there are choices to be made. You will find that something looks very attractive, but is it the will of God for me? Is that what God would want me as one of His sons to do? You may say there is no harm in it; it is not wicked, but is it worthy of me as one of God's sons? Perhaps there is another choice and a voice that I should hear behind me. The prophet says there is a word saying, "*This is the way, walk ye in it*", Isa 30: 21. And you hear that voice and you wish perhaps it would go away because you really want to do the other thing, but there is that insistent voice, the voice of the in-dwelling Spirit giving the prompt. What are you going to do? I can tell you from bitter experience that if you ignore that voice, if you take the path of self-will, perhaps self-pleasing, self-indulgence, it will be to your loss. Whereas if you take the path at the fork in the road that comes into all our lives, if you take the pathway of the will of God, you will prove blessing.

But this verse is not just that you will have proved blessing, but you will become visible as one of the sons of God. There will be a testimony. I go back to where we began. We are all God's sons through faith in Christ Jesus, but you cannot see my faith. My faith is inside: you cannot see that. What you can see, and what others can see too is that, when confronted with decisions in life, I may follow my own tastes like Isaac. He "*loved Esau, because venison was to his taste*", Gen 25: 28. He loved the man that God hated. It is a solemn thing, is it not? Whereas Rebecca, who had been to God and asked him about these two children she was about to give birth to, had had it revealed to her that Jacob was the man of God's choice, v 23. Now, Isaac was governed by his tastes. And, if when I reach that fork in the road, what prevails with me is my tastes, I am a slave to my own tastes. That can be taken account of. Whereas if am led by the Spirit of God, it will be seen even in testimony, that I belong to the divine family and that I am not here to please myself but I am here to please Him who has given me that inestimable gift. I have received it from Him. He sent forth His Son in order that I should receive it. He has imparted His own Spirit so that I should have the feelings and emotions that are proper to the sons of God, that I should have a divinely given ability to minister to God's heart. You think of the immensity of that.

If we gather together tomorrow to serve under the leadership of Christ in the praise of God, it is all with a view that God's heart should be gratified. And that passes my comprehension, that I as a creature of God should not be a mere creature, but that I should be brought into this relationship with Him and invested by Him with the ability to minister to and gratify His own heart. Could there be anything more exalted for man? It is the most exalted portion that man could have to serve God with reverence and fear, but to be conscious in the joy of sonship that you are gratifying His blessed heart. Is He not worthy of it? The heart of God has been told out in the giving of his Son, in the giving of His Spirit, in the giving of sonship. Is He not worthy to receive a response that is so gratifying to Him, because it is the fruit of His own work and ways? It is all of Himself. As David said, "for all is of thee, and of that which is from thy hand have we given thee", 1 Chron 29: 14. Everything is going to return ultimately to the God who gave it and rightly so, but may we be helped, dear brethren, to get some impression of the glory of what God has conferred upon us and to seek the grace that He would give to walk here in a contrary scene worthy of such a high calling.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

Sunbury

22nd June 2024

THE TESTIMONY BEFORE THE TRANSLATION

Neil C McKay

Genesis 5: 21-24

Philippians 2: 19-30

1 Timothy 6: 11-16

We have read of three men as representative of those who have their part in the testimony in the period immediately prior to the rapture, the translation - they represent features and principles that are to mark those who have part in the testimony of our Lord just before He comes again to receive us to Himself. Enoch was one who was translated, "he was not, for God took him", and therefore is a type of us - the saints of the assembly. Timothy represents the truth, the testimony, continuing in the last days - Paul passed the baton on to Timothy, and he represents that element of what would continue. Epaphroditus represents that feature of making up what is lacking, in having a brotherly spirit and affection for the saints. These things are all needed and important, that the testimony should continue, and we should be here as living in it in the last days of the dispensation.

Enoch does not need much introduction, and we see in the progression of the teaching in this section of scripture that after Enoch begets Methuselah he walked with God for three hundred years, and then "he was not, for God took him". Consequent on Enoch's translation mankind began to multiply on earth and evil became worse and worse. The translation of the saints will result in that - there will never be a time on earth such as will exist after the saints are raptured. Noah is introduced at that point, a righteous man, and his history shows the salvation of the remnant through the tribulation, Gen 6: 9.

As far as we know Enoch was the only man at that time who walked with God; there would have been quite a large population by that time, men "began to multiply on the earth". So, in the midst of a very large population and with evil waxing worse and worse, he began to walk with God, day after day, for 300 years. Hebrews tells us that "he has the testimony that he had pleased God", chap 11: 5. You may ask, 'Why are things so small and so weak, why is the world so evil? Why are things prevalent now that were not so in my young days?'. Enoch was one man in the midst of a generation that was going on without God, when, seven generations prior to this, man had known God. He was seventh from Adam, Jude records (v 14); seven generations

earlier, God sought to walk with Adam in the cool of the day (Gen 3: 8), but in Enoch we have God giving testimony that He would have victory over death. What a man - he had no Scriptures, he did not have the indwelling Spirit, he did not appear to have the benefit of godly company, it does not seem that he had any help, but he walked with God; Enoch and God, enjoying communion together. What communications he must have received, because in Jude we learn that he prophesied. There is not much, if anything, said about what Timothy says, or what Epaphroditus says, but we do have a little of what Enoch said. Jude tells us, "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied also as to these, saying, Behold, the Lord has come amidst his holy myriads, to execute judgment against all; and to convict all the ungodly of them of all their works of ungodliness, which they have wrought ungodlily, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him", v 14,15. He could not have gained such knowledge without walking with God; he got God's judgment on the whole scene. He was with God in every matter, and God took pleasure in his company. You might ask, 'What was it worth having Enoch, one man in the midst of all this evil?'. If it was not for Enoch, God would have had to remove the whole scene; God never leaves Himself without a testimony on earth, and Enoch was that man: he had a judgment of everything here.

'Where were all these holy myriads, Enoch, where are they? I do not see them', you might ask too. But Enoch had faith. He did not have the indwelling Spirit, but he had faith. He had been born anew, and had the work of God in him, and he knew from his walk with God that God was going to meet every form of evil on this earth. What a judgment he had of things! I do not suppose that was all that Enoch enjoyed with God. I suppose they must have been wonderful days, every day Enoch being in communion with God, not just regarding the state of things here, but having God's approval, His approbation of all that he went on with. Enoch represents what a believer is to be, what a man of faith is to be, immediately prior to the translation, and as it says in Hebrews, God was pleased with him. Before his translation, he has the testimony that he had pleased God. What a thing! How would you like that testimony, dear brother and sister, that you please God? What a testimony that is to have. I do not know who understood it of the people that were there, but some persons saw that: 'There is a man that pleases God'. He did not please himself; he did not go after the ways of this world; He pleased God.

And so he prophesied: "the Lord has come amidst his holy myriads". He says to all, 'You can go on in your evil if you will, but God will secure holy myriads'; the Lord will come and with Him there will be persons entirely in sympathy with God, and He will clear the whole scene of evil. He derived a knowledge that God could not abide for ever in the scene which He had created, but had turned to evil. He represents what we can arrive at and understand through experience with God. We value the ministry, we value the Scriptures, we value the brethren, but Enoch walked himself with God; how needful that is.

The brethren in Thessalonica were concerned about that. Paul had taught them while he was with them, and they understood that the Lord was coming again. They had that burning brightly in them, because he says that they had "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens", 1 Thess 1: 9, 10. In every chapter in the first epistle Paul mentions the Lord's coming, to ensure that he does not belittle that truth, so as to keep them brightly awaiting it. It keeps believers bright and vital, to know that the Lord could come at any time. Paul was at pains not to lessen that desire among the Thessalonian saints. But then some among them had died, and they thought, 'Well, if the Lord is coming again, and we are going to be with the Lord when He returns again, what of these ones that have died? Where are they going to be when the Lord comes again with His holy myriads?'. They had some clouded understanding of what was going to happen when the Lord returned with His own to establish peace in the earth, and reign in righteousness and clear the earth of evil. What they did not understand was what Paul proceeded to tell them in 1 Thessalonians 4, which we know was a special revelation for Paul to give to the saints: "But we do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are fallen asleep, to the end that ye be not grieved even as also the rest who have no hope. 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", v 13, 14. He said, 'You believe that Jesus died, and God raised Him from the dead. Do you think that God has raised one Man and is going to leave everyone else in death? Of course He is going to raise them all. Everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus who has died will be raised'. He says, "we ... are in no way to anticipate those who have fallen asleep; for the Lord himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God, shall descend from heaven", v 15, 16. He will come to receive us Himself personally. "And the dead and Christ

shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds", v 16, 17. That would settle the Thessalonians! It gave them to understand the two parts to the Lord's coming: the rapture (or translation), and the appearing. The vast part of Christendom is unclear as to what is going to happen. Yes, the Lord is going to come again, and yes, He is coming with His holy myriads. But the order is that the dead in Christ shall rise first, and then all the saints will be taken together to a personal, private, meeting with the Lord before He comes again to the earth with His saints. Enoch had no understanding of that; he could not know how this was all going to transpire. But he knew that God was God, and that God was going to meet the whole matter to his own glory and satisfaction.

It has been said that there is, in every epistle, some brother or sister who sets out the truth of that epistle, and Epaphroditus is a brother who sets out somewhat the truth of Philippians; he embodies the truth, gives it personality. In Philippians, we see the state that is true to believers. We see Paul's exercise that the Philippians should be bright believers, and have the light burning within them. He speaks firstly about Timothy, and then, "but I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-workman and fellow soldier, but your messenger and minister to my need". The context to this is given in chapter 4: 15, "And know also ye, O Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I came out of Macedonia, no assembly communicated anything to me in the way of giving and receiving save ye alone; for also in Thessalonica once and even twice ye sent to me for my need". That is, they had given him gifts, whether it was money or goods, because he had ministered to them. He had been in Philippi, and he had left them for Thessalonica. As I understand, he was only in Thessalonica a short time, around three weeks, and twice within that period of time the brethren in Philippi had sent him gifts - because they appreciated Paul's service so much, and he credits them with that.

Now, that was an obligation they had. Paul did not always work; he had no steady income. He gave his life to the gospel, and to the ministry of the assembly. Paul might have expected to live on account of the brethren's giving. It is not clericalism; it is simply a principle that he could have expected those brethren to whom he ministered and who owed the gospel of their salvation to him to provide for him, 1 Cor 9: 14. And they had done so very well; they ministered to him twice within

three weeks. But it says at the end of chapter 2 that Epaphroditus ventured “his life that he might fill up what lacked in your ministration toward me”, v 30. Paul knew how to be in privation, how to be in need, chap 4: 12. That is, following their initial gifts, they had lacked in their ministration towards Paul, and consequently he had suffered privation. It was a lack, and Paul does not ignore it; he proceeds to show them how this worked out in testimony. Epaphroditus comes in at this juncture, most remarkably in the ways of God, to make good the whole matter.

It was a very dangerous journey to go from place to place in those days, with robbers and bandits common. No doubt he would be carrying money and goods and material wealth to maintain Paul - it would not have been an easy journey, and at some point Epaphroditus became sick, and that sickness was close to death. You might ask, 'Well, Paul healed many people. Why did Paul not heal him?'. Paul could have healed this man, no doubt - he had apostolic power. “For he was also sick close to death, but God had mercy on him, and not indeed on him alone”. The Philippians lack had to be made up, and God allowed that it was made up by Epaphroditus, not only by his coming and giving a gift, but by showing personally what Paul meant to the Philippians, and giving Paul opportunity to express what they meant to him, showing personally that the love and grace which the Philippians had towards Paul necessitated that Epaphroditus should go as far as to draw near to death. God determined that this was an important matter, and the Philippians were such a fine company that there was a filling up to do, and Epaphroditus was a brother that was able to come in and fill up what was lacking, suitably to God and suitably to Paul and to do so he ventured close even to death. What a matter; you may think, 'but this is just a gift', and 'the Philippians were not well off', but this was a matter of importance to God, that the link between Paul and the Philippian saints should not at all be changed or diminished. Can you see the glorious ways of God in that?

So Epaphroditus represents a brother who will do everything he can to make up what was lacking in a company. He represents someone who is Paul's fellow-workman and fellow-soldier; he represents someone in the locality who values Paul's ministry, who is prepared to do everything to maintain all that is due to Paul. He represents someone who loves the saints so much that the reason he is happy when he is well again, is that the Philippians are not vexed about

it - are not distressed that that he was ill; he represents a link between Paul and the Philippian saints. "He had a longing desire after you all". It is open to us all, dear brother and sister, to bring in the wonderful ministry of Paul, and bring in the truth and make up whatever is lacking. It was a distribution of love between Paul and the Philippian saints, and he maintained the brotherly link between Paul and the Philippian brethren at great expense himself, involving great suffering.

Paul speaks elsewhere of his own sufferings. In Colossians, "I rejoice in sufferings for you, and I fill up that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh, for his body", chap 1: 24. There are sufferings that are needed in the testimony, and if we do not fill them up then someone will fill them up. It is important to be prepared to do whatever is needed for the testimony, and Paul was prepared to make up all that was required. He would not hold the Philippians to account but, now that the matter has been made good, he shows the wonderful ways of God to maintain the brotherly link between Paul and the Philippian saints. It has been said that the fact that Epaphroditus is introduced in this chapter, when such lowliness of mind is expressed in the Lord Jesus Himself, shows the kind of brother Epaphroditus was. The Lord Jesus was "obedient even unto death", Phil 2: 8. Well, Epaphroditus could not do that, but he would go as far as he could. Later on when there was an issue in the locality with Euodia and Syntyche (chap 4: 2, 3), who were not of the same mind; having written this epistle, most likely by the hand of Epaphroditus, Paul says, "I ask thee also, true yoke-fellow, assist them, who have contended along with me in the glad tidings". He does not write them down, he says, 'You assist them, and you are the kind of brother that is going to be able to help in these situations, a brother that loves your brethren, and a brother who would venture your life; go to the full extent to help your brethren'. Well these things are needed, dear brethren, to maintain life among the brethren, to maintain the brotherly covenant, to maintain the testimony.

Timothy is well known, and the scriptures that relate to Timothy are often referred to. We read one of them in Philippians 2: "I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on". Now Timothy became one of Paul's company, and Paul speaks of him as his "child" (1 Tim 1: 2), and somewhere also as his "beloved child", 2 Tim 1: 2. He has a genuine link with Paul, and he represents the continuation of Paul's ministry to the end, the continuation of the

testimony in dark days; because in 2 Timothy Paul writes to him when things publicly in the church were broken down and Paul saw that the great departure had already begun. He speaks in chapter 3 of “in the last days”, that is, the last days of Christendom, that “difficult times shall be there; for men shall be lovers of self ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”, v 1, 4. It is striking to think that these features in 2 Timothy 3 relate to apostate Christendom and not to the world. Timothy was a brother who was used of Paul: Paul was a great general in the battlefield, the testimony, and he disposed of Timothy with regard to the needs of the testimony. Paul was hoping to send him to Philippi shortly; he had also sent him on another occasion to Corinth; and he had left Timothy in Ephesus too at one point: “Even as I begged thee to remain in Ephesus”, 1 Tim 1: 3. He must have been quite a brother to have in a locality - “who shall put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ”, 1 Cor 4: 17. We speak of him as a young man; I presume he maybe was in his thirties, but he was able to go to Corinth in the midst of such wrongdoings that were happening there, and he was there as Paul would be there. He was there as representing Paul, Paul's ministry, and Paul's line in Corinth, in the midst of big men, who thought themselves to be spiritual and wanted to rule in the local assembly. Paul sent to them Timothy, to “put you in mind of my ways”. Left at Ephesus, in that company which represents the height of Paul's ministry, he was to help maintain the great truths which Paul expounded there. You would have loved to have heard Timothy in the service of God.

Paul is now beginning to pass off the scene, and he sees the need for the testimony to continue, and he enjoins Timothy, “But *thou*, O man of God, flee these things”: that is evil things: love of money, and temptations, and so on, “and pursue, righteousness, piety, faith, love, endurance, meekness of spirit. Strive earnestly in the good conflict of faith. Lay hold of eternal life”. Then he says, “I enjoin thee before God who preserves all things in life, and Christ Jesus who witnessed before Pontius Pilate the good confession, that thou keep the commandment spotless, irreproachable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ”. He says, 'The Lord is coming back; the rapture is imminent, and then the appearing'. He says, “keep the commandment spotless”: 'maintain the truth; teach the brethren these things; pass them on to faithful men. Maintain all that is due to the Lord Jesus'. I do not know that there is any injunction in scripture quite so solemn or sober as this one that was given to Timothy. If a brother said to you, “I enjoin thee before God ...

and Christ Jesus”, would that not be a sober injunction to you? This was not written to a rebellious person - Timothy was a fine brother. It has been said that he would go to Corinth and exemplify subjection and obedience - the Corinthians would have learned subjection and obedience in that young man. We are not told what the commandment is, but it must involve faithfulness to Christ in His absence, what we have to do in the absence of Christ in a world which crucified Him. We are left here in the will of God, and we have to maintain all that is due to the Lord Jesus.

Well, none of us feel that we are able for these things, but these men represent *us*; they represent the features that are to be found in us just before the rapture: to keep the commandment, to maintain the truth, and to help the saints and to minister to them, to maintain brotherly love and make up what is lacking, and to walk with God; to be right in our individual links with God. That there are some godly persons in the world who are a testimony to Christ gives God a basis to go on with this world. It is striking to think that God values every godly person in this earth because without such He would have to come in in judgment on the world. If there was nothing here at all for God He would have to rid it of evil, but because there are persons here in this earth He can stay His judgment, He can maintain the gospel, and He can continue the testimony. These things are in our hands; it comes down to us to keep these things, to be preserved in life, to lay hold of eternal life, to value what it says here: “before God who preserves all things in life, and Christ Jesus who witnessed before Pontius Pilate the good confession”. Paul would say: 'It has been done before; Christ witnessed a good confession before Pilate; the world was all against Christ, and now the world is against you: maintain it and do not slip away, and do not give up on the truth, and do not go back on things, maintain the good confession, and keep the commandment spotless, irreproachable. Do not give anyone reason to speak anything against you in regard to your walk'.

I trust we are encouraged, for His Name's sake. Amen.

Grangemouth

18th May 2024

THE DOOR AND THE DOOR-POST

Paul A Gray

Exodus 12: 7; 21: 6

Deuteronomy 15: 17

In Exodus 12, the blood was on the *door-posts* and the lintel, but the children of Israel were not to go out of the *door* of the house once the blood was applied. They could not go out of the door to associate themselves with Egypt, or they would die.

In Exodus 21, where the bondman is a type of the Lord Jesus, the bondman is taken to the door *or* to the door-post, so the mark of His committal applies to both. He is Lord to us in relation to salvation - that is the answer to the blood on the door-post, because we are told in Romans 1 that God's glad tidings are concerning (or about) his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. He is also Lord to us in relation to our associations, that is the door, because we are called into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, see 1 Cor 1: 9. We have a way in to the fellowship, and that is by owning Jesus Christ as Lord and committing ourselves to Him.

In Deuteronomy 15, which is a type of the believer, the bondman is taken only to the door. We can do nothing to accomplish our salvation, because that has already been done, so we are not taken to the door-post. We come into that by believing. But we have a responsibility in relation to our associations, hence it speaks of the door. We cannot associate anything unsuitable to Jesus Christ our Lord with the fellowship; by keeping our associations clear we maintain the *joy* of our salvation.

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