

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE BEGINNING OF ALL THAT SHALL BE FOR GOD'S REST

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Genesis 8: 20-22; 9: 8-17

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AM Our brother in giving thanks for the emblems on Lord's day morning referred to the Lord Jesus as the one who is the Beginning and who maintained everything that is for God. The line of Mr A J Gardiner's hymn came to mind:

And now Thou are there, the Beginning
Of all that shall be for God's rest, (Hymn 39).

I was just thinking about those words about the Lord Jesus -

...the Beginning
Of all that shall be for God's rest

- it must be so. You cannot make something good if the beginning is not good. The Lord Jesus is the beginning of all that shall be for God's rest. The Lord's address to Laodicea came to mind; he presents Himself here as "the beginning of the creation of God". "These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God". You can see how these aspects in which the Lord Jesus presents Himself to this assembly are appropriate to the condition of things in the assembly. I would just add that when we speak about Laodicea we are not talking about a company as such that we can point a finger at today, but there is a state in Christendom that is marked by Laodicea and, dear brethren, we have had our part in it; there is no getting away from that. They say they have got everything - "I am rich, and am grown rich, and have need of nothing", Rev 3: 17. They might have claimed to have had the truth. Somebody commented as to these assemblies, that as you go through them you see the conditions worsening generally, apart from Philadelphia, but it starts off with a right position. Ephesus closed the door to evil men; that was a right position, although their first love had been lost. But when you get to Laodicea they closed the door to Christ; they closed the door to Him. He presents Himself as the Beginning, the faithful and true Witness, what the church has failed to be. He is the faithful and true Witness; He is the Amen; everything is assured in Him. What has impressed me for this occasion is that He is the Beginning. Laodicea might have been nominally an ecclesiastical position for years - He is saying, 'Get back to the

beginning'; the beginning is Christ.

Strictly speaking, the expression "the creation of God" would cover everything that God has made; it would cover whatever has been done. Even in the physical creation you can see that the Lord Jesus was the beginning; He was the Creator. "All things received being through Him, and without him not one thing received being which has received being", John 1: 3. He was the beginning even of a physical creation, and He puts His impress upon it. So there are suggestions of Christ even in the physical creation. You see that, do you not, in the Scriptures? Even the animals are taken up to bring in suggestions that speak of Christ. The believer takes account of the physical creation and sees the greatness of God, His eternal power and divinity expressed in it. But the believer is looking at something which is on the other side of death. Everything here is bounded by death and the believer is looking for something which is on the other side of death. And so we have the word in Colossians: "who is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead", and the apostle says there is a reason for that, "that *he* might have the first place in all things". That is the divine intent, that Christ should have the first place in all things.

I thought that in Genesis we have a figure of the resurrection scene. All that man was naturally had come under judgment; it has been dispensed with, a new world has emerged. What is the beginning of the new world? The beginning of the new world is that there is a burnt-offering. God delighting in the total devotion, even today, of the One who has brought it all to pass. And He says, 'This is the foundation of my new world; this is not going to be destroyed by a flood'. And then He says, "I set my bow in the clouds". The bow speaks of Christ. He says, 'It is my bow'. We look at a rainbow, we see how beautiful and lovely it is, and we remember this chapter. God says, 'It is my bow': it is His Christ. He keeps Christ before Him. He has established the scene of which Christ is the beginning. He remains before God, whatever the circumstances. Even when He brings clouds upon the earth - and oh, how many clouds there have been - His bow remains there, and God looks upon it.

I read in John 20 as it brings in the saints as well. There is the actual resurrection morning and there is a new order of things set on, and the Lord Jesus says, "my brethren"; they are brought into relationship with "my Father". That is an outline of what was in mind; I trust the brethren can make something of it.

AEM I think that is very helpful. The line of the hymn that prompted your exercise speaks of all that shall be for God's rest. Could you just say something about the expansiveness of that, because that might bring to our hearts just the thought of divine Persons finishing work, as in finishing what They had to do, but it extends far beyond that, does it not?

AM That is right. The rest of God is an initial thought, is it not? God laboured in order that He might have rest. There were six days of work but then what He saw on the sixth day was *very good* - the first five days what He saw was good, but on the sixth day it was very good, and then He rested. That was the object that God had before Him, and eternally He will rest in His love. He will secure it on the earth in a coming day. Israel will be brought in, and have part in that rest. We will not be here; we will have a more blessed position. God is going to secure rest in all that He has done. Think of the six thousand years of labour and toil, and yet God is going to secure rest out of it. You have more in mind, I am sure?

AEM No, that is very helpful. And for no instant of it, has He begun anywhere else other than Christ. Is that your thought?

AM Absolutely. What else could He start with? Everything else on the earth has been tainted by sin; it is abhorrent to God. Sin is abhorrent to God and everything has been tainted by it. What He has is Christ, and in Christ is everything; everything for God, and everything for us.

RDP I remember Mr Norman Meek once telling us that in that scripture in Genesis 9, just for a moment, God had the whole population of the earth round the altar of burnt-offering. That was the environment in which He says, 'I will never destroy the earth again like that'. I just thought that for a moment the whole earth was in accord with the fact that Christ is the beginning.

AM It was, and what pleasure God must have found in that. Someone might say that it did not last; but it happened. The fact that it happened is the great thing. And God is going to secure - maybe just in smallness - some who have made their beginning in Christ, and have maintained that. The problem is that we all come to the Lord Jesus when we are in our need and in our sins, but we do not maintain it, do we? We do not maintain that position. We start introducing our own thoughts, but Christ is the beginning, and Christ is the end.

AJMCK Just to refer to that hymn again, it is presented with a capital 'B'

as if it is a divine name. Do you think that is what the hymn writer had in mind?

AM I think it is, yes. The thought comes in in Colossians, does it not? "Who is the beginning"; you might say that is His title, 'the Beginning'. The Lord presents Himself in different ways in Revelation: the First and the Last, and the Alpha and the Omega, and so on, but the Beginning suggests to me that there is something set on which is going to go on. It is going to go through.

AJMcK I feel very measured by it. We tend to be bound by time, and I wonder if this goes beyond that. Do you think the Beginning really takes us into the area of God's purpose?

AM It does. The brethren will understand that there are many scriptures that have been going through my mind, one of which is Matthew 16. It says, "on this rock I will build my assembly" (v 18); that is the confession of the Son of the Living God. He was the Beginning. The assembly goes through to eternity, does it not? It is an eternal vessel of God's glory but it begins with Him, "on this rock".

MIW Naturally in ordinary things we tend to think of the beginning in relation to a process, the beginning being the start; but in relation to what is being said, is it helpful to see that the Beginning, because it relates to the Person, brings out the glory and beauty of the Person? That is what the title means, does it? As our brother said, it is like a title really.

AM Yes, and the passage of time - and much has come into time - does not affect that. It is the glory of the Person right through, and that will go through to the end. He is the Amen as well as the Beginning. The glory of the Person goes right through. He gives character to it all.

DJW Can you help us as to the idea of a creation in connection with the beginning. It is the creation of God. Is it linked with Ephesians 2: 10, "created in Christ Jesus"?

AM That is very suggestive. I like to think of divine Persons; they existed before time. We cannot go back before time began. There was what existed there, outside of time. We are limited in the use of language because we cannot use the word for time in speaking of eternity, but there came a moment when what had been established in purpose, and in counsel, began to be created, began to take effect. Divine Persons began to work; that affects me. It is a touch I got from Mr A J Gardiner (Piety and Other Addresses p58). The Lord refers to

what was before the foundation of the world, and also “before the world was”. Mr Gardiner said, “‘Before the world was’, I believe, conveys simply the thought of absolute eternity before time began; but when it is said ‘before the foundation of the world’, it has in view that God had formed a purpose, and that the world was founded with a view to working out that purpose’. That is a very precious thing to me. The whole of creation was wrought to bring about what was established in the mind and heart of God.

DJW Man speaks about creating things when he just takes material and builds something from it, but the creation in regard of God involves His making something out of nothing; it did not exist before: nothing was there materially.

AM Yes, that is right. He is able, and He “calls the things that be not as being”, Rom 4: 17. He is able to do that. The fundamental laws of men’s science are thrown into disarray by that. Men will tell you that matter can be neither created nor destroyed, it can only change state. God can create things out of nothing.

IMcK You spoke earlier about the saints in Laodicea, who you said represent a state - and said that we have to get back to the beginning. How do we do that?

AM One thing that has helped me in relation to that question is that the beginning is the Person. Brethren, please do not misunderstand me: I appreciate the ministry. The brethren generally appreciate the ministry, and the ministry brings us to Christ; we have to read it as bringing us to Christ, but there is no substitute for the Person. There is no substitute for getting into His presence and learning from Him. It is the Person. We need to keep in close contact with the Person.

QAP The Lord counsels them about three things. He says, “I counsel thee to buy of me”, Rev 3: 18. These three things are only obtained personally from Christ, are they not?

AM Yes, that is right. One of the things that we may have read in the ministry is that He presents Himself as the Merchant. “I counsel thee to buy of me gold”, Rev 3: 18. What were they going to buy it with?

QAP I might have to give up some time to go into His presence, and pray about the matter.

AM Yes, I have to give up time, and I have to give up my self, to get into His presence. “Gold purified by fire” and “white garments” and “eye-

salve" (Rev 3: 18) are in what He is offering them: wealth, and dignity, and clarity of vision.

AEM One other reason that we can have absolute confidence in this is that He is the faithful and true Witness, do you think? Deriving everything, as we have said earlier, from the One who was the faithful and true Witness to what He had seen and to what He had been instrumental in.

AM Yes, that is right. He was a witness in relation to God; He was a witness to men; He was a witness to His own and to men. He witnessed the good confession to Pontius Pilate. All that we read in John's gospel about the whole question of witness, He brings it up. He was the faithful and true Witness. Nobody could ever go back to anything that the Lord Jesus said and say that was not right. It was absolutely perfect; faithful and true. He did not shrink from saying what was unpalatable, and He did not shrink from speaking the truth, the faithful and true Witness. Really the church should have been that. You read in early Acts of Peter standing up with the eleven - the faithful and true witness was there; but it declined. How quickly it declines, does it not?

AJMcK Does this faithful and true witness continue? This is presented as present tense, "These things says the Amen".

AM Yes, and in the sense that He gathers up everything. Everything is secure in Him, is it not? Now the Holy Spirit is here, and there is a witness that is to be seen. Someone might ask where it was for hundreds of years. After the apostles' day, where was the witness? But it was all maintained by the Lord, and the Holy Spirit was here. He did not depart; He was with believers all that time; the faithful and true witness remains. But it is up to us, is it not? The question was raised in our reading on Wednesday at home: how much do we leave things to the Lord and how much do we depend on ourselves? It seems to me that there is what is maintained that is true in the Lord - you might say that is something we can rely on, but then, am I really in it?

AJMcK I was thinking that - it is a very easy thing to say, is it not? To say that in order to hear His words we have to be in His presence, but that is quite a test practically, is it not?

AM You know it when you are in His presence. You experience something that you do not experience anywhere else. And what is more, when you come out, other people know it.

AJMcK That is right.

AM Well, in Colossians He is spoken of as “the beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that *he* might have the first place in all things”. I suppose that is how the faithful and true witness is to be maintained, is it not? That He might have the first place in all things.

AEM What does this refer to, this beginning? This is not merely a title here, but something is beginning.

AM Do you have an impression?

AEM No.

AM I have the impression that the apostle uses the title - I think it is elsewhere too - to show that whatever there is to be for God, Christ is the beginning of it. There could be no other beginning; God could not start elsewhere. I would be glad to hear what the brethren have to say?

DJW It all hangs together - “the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead”; it was the beginning of a whole family for God.

AM Yes, that is right. Thank you for that. There is what is on resurrection ground - and we know in ascension too, what was established in resurrection, the beginning of a new order of things.

DJW Do you think it implies that, if He was the beginning, He gives character to everything that flows out from that?

AM Yes, the whole order of flesh and blood was closed in the death of Christ, was it not? The cross spelled the end of man. Jehovah said, “The end of all flesh is come before me”, Gen 6: 13; that was so at the cross. Now we have a Man out of death, a Man of another order, the object of the Father's pleasure, so much so that He raised Him by His glory. He is the beginning of that order.

GJR It would be a happy thing if He was the starting point for us in all that we consider.

AM Yes, that would be right.

GJR Even aspects of the truth as you are going over today - you are showing them as set out in Himself.

AM Yes, we see the truth in the gospels, do we not? Now, we have to approach that through the epistles. We get the teaching of the truth in the epistles, but we see it in the gospels. We get pictures of it in the Old Testament. Scripture is all bound together but it is all set out in Him, in a

Person. I think what you say is helpful, because we should, we must, start every question in relation to Him.

GJR How does this or that affect His honour at the present time?

AM Yes, indeed. Now, when we are children, I am sure we are often reminded of that. My dear mother used to say, 'Well, what would the Lord think of that?'. Everything relates to Him, does it not? Whatever we say, whatever we do, relates to Him.

AJMcK This reference "all things" in connection with our brother's comment is very broad "the first place in all things".

AM Yes; I like to think of the apostle Paul when he was there on the Damascus road - he heard the voice from the glory. He said, "What shall I do, Lord?", Acts 22: 10. A simple question, "What shall I do, Lord?". I like to think that he started every day after that with that question: "What shall I do, Lord?". Have you got the directions at the beginning of the day? What shall I do?

GCB It is "that *he* **might** have the first place in all things" - can we look upon that as what God has determined first, and then, as under the impulse of divine love, we take it up? Is that a right way to look at it?

AM Yes, I think so. I am glad you pointed out what you refer to, because I might have looked on this as a divine decree that He must have the first place in all things and that of course would be true anyway. But it is not presented in that way - "that he **might** have the first place in all things". It just raises the question for us: this is God's intention; is it true of me? That He might have the first place in all things.

RDP I was thinking of this reference here to the head of the body, the assembly. It is spoken about: "by him **were** created all things", Col 1: 16. I assume that was a backward look, but then it says "and *he* is". I was thinking that the beginning of everything that was for God's rest, everything that was part of the creation, did not all come out at once, did it? This reference here to "*he* is the head of the body, the assembly", was that a distinct step? I wonder if this is not almost like an introduction here, "*he* is head of the body, the assembly". And the way that God has opened up His way in Christ has not come all at once; it has come through the whole of time, really.

AM It has. There was darkness as to this through the whole of the Old Testament. God was not fully disclosed, even in the life on earth of the

Lord Jesus. What it must have meant for the Lord to speak to His disciples and to give them parables and say, 'I cannot explain this to you now; you are not able for it'. It awaited His death and resurrection; it awaited another time. And we are in that time. He is the beginning; He is the One who set it all on, and He gives character to it all.

AEM It is remarkable grace, is it not, that there should be this beginning from among the dead? It is a remarkable thing that Christ Himself should be One who began something for God from among the dead.

AM The expression "beginning, firstborn from among the dead" suggests that there are others to follow, does it not? The beginning means that; the very word suggests that there is something to follow. And what assurance this is to us. But "from among the dead" - His resurrection was distinctive. It is always referred to as, I think, "from among the dead". The resurrection of Jesus, though it made the way for our resurrection, the resurrection of all the saints, was distinctive; He was the beginning.

NCMcK Is there another order of creation? There is a physical order that has been created but consequent on the resurrection of Christ there is a new creation of God. All that is of God springs from that, the resurrection of Christ.

AM That is right. It is characterised by the expression "in Christ" or "in Him". He is the One; He is the beginning of the new order. "So if anyone be in Christ there is a new creation" (2 Cor 5: 17), not exactly a new creature, but a *completely* new creation, something that does not carry over what is of the old. It is a great thing to lay hold of that. There is a work of God in the believer, and the work of God was placed there sovereignly by God, and it is of the same order as the Lord Jesus Himself. It can never fail, it can never break down and it is perfect. Years ago if somebody had said to me that there was something in me that was perfect, I would have laughed at them, but there is. And that is not claiming anything, because it is all the work of God. The work of God is perfect; it is a new order of things and Christ is the beginning of it.

RB Is that brought out in the resurrection chapter in Corinthians where it says, "the first-fruits, Christ; **then** those that are the Christ's at his coming", 1 Cor 15: 23?

AM Yes; say some more. That is a wonderful chapter, is it not? I love that expression that you just quoted. Say some more.

RB I do not know that I can, but there is something distinctive in His

resurrection, is there not - "the first-fruits, Christ"? Who were those first-fruits for? But then there is going to be those that are the Christ's at His coming; they are divine property, are they not? They are part of the creation of God, the new creation that we have referred to.

AM Yes, that is right; so the scripture says, "Blessed and holy he who has part in the first resurrection" (Rev 20: 6); I do not know that it speaks of a second resurrection - it speaks of the second death. It speaks of the first resurrection. Someone might say surely the first resurrection refers to the Lord; He was the beginning. We will have part in the first resurrection; even the saints who are martyred on the earth after we have gone - they will have part in the first resurrection - a different time, but it is still the first resurrection character, the same character; it all bears the same character of the resurrection of Jesus Himself. What a wonderfully uplifting thought!

RJF It is all in Christ. I was thinking of the same chapter in Corinthians, "The first man Adam became a living soul; the last Adam a quickening spirit" (1 Cor 15: 45) and also in the same chapter, "thus also in the Christ all shall be made alive", (v 22); it is all through Christ, is it not?

AM Yes, that actually links us with John 20, does it not? He is a life-giving spirit, "a quickening spirit". He breathed into them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit", John 20: 22. There He was, the last Adam, a quickening spirit, you might say fresh, out of death, no trace of death upon Him. He could not be held by it. The Father would not allow Him to remain there. There He was, out of death and He is giving life to His own.

I thought the passage in Genesis would perhaps show us something of God's own feelings in relation to Him. The passage is so suggestive, is it not? There is a new earth in the sense in which we are speaking, and you have one who has gone through the waters of judgment; and he builds an altar and takes of every clean animal and he offers up burnt-offerings. How many types of Christ or references to Him are there in that verse? The richness of the passages is tremendous. "Jehovah smelled the sweet odour", and it is that which is peculiarly for God; the burnt-offering is entirely for God; Jehovah smelled it, and said, 'This is to remain'.

AJMCK The note says it is the 'odour of rest'. That supports again that hymn -

... all that shall be for God's rest.

We see that God's rest is really in the One who is the Beginning; His rest is in Christ.

AM Yes, that is right. The odour of rest went up on this altar, and it was offered by one whose name means 'repose'. All that had gone before, that dreadful wicked scene that had existed on the earth, had all gone, and God found one man in whom He could find His rest. And there was the offering, the odour of rest that went up to God. No wonder in the wilderness Jehovah said, 'I am going to have a burnt-offering every morning and evening'. He said, 'I am not going to be without that'.

RJF Every one of these burnt-offerings had passed through the flood. Had you any thought about that? It is very suggestive.

AM I had not before, but you say something; I would be glad to hear your thoughts.

RJF The flood, as we know, is a figure of baptism. I am feeling my way here, but it just seems that from these offerings every single thing had passed through that route of death before they were offered, but there was something that was particularly choice to God through it.

AM Yes, I think that is right. I think that is very suggestive. Nothing that will be consumed by death could be offered to God. It had all gone that way, had it not? That is because they are all figures of Christ, are they not? The offerer, the offering are figures of Christ; even the altar is. Death had come in, and there is what is gone through. Death removes everything else. All of nature is removed in death, but there is something that had gone right through, which is for the pleasure of God.

RB I was thinking earlier in relation to your first scripture, of what comes in in Exodus 31: 17 as to the seventh day there, "for in six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed", but here we have a thought of rest which seems in advance of that, although all to do with Christ as the beginning. Could you help further as to this thought of rest in this setting?

AM Yes; I take it that the seventh day really is the millennium, is it not? God will have rest on the earth - a wonderful day that will be. It seems to me that the beginning takes us to a new order of things. We are not going to be here in the millennium; our portion will be much more blessed; we will be with Him and like Him, in bodies of glory. What a blessed thing that is. In an order of things of which not only is He the beginning but He gives character to it all.

RB That is helpful. I wondered in connection with the scripture in Genesis as our brother has alluded to this sweet odour, for the odour of rest comes about as a result of an offering, as if there is something particularly pleasurable in that setting.

AM Yes, I think so, and it is a burnt-offering. Now there was no specification for burnt-offerings at this time, was there? When you get to Leviticus you find it was the first thing that was on God's mind - a burnt-offering. It is the particular pleasure that God had in the One who is totally in accord with Himself and devoted to His will to the point of offering Himself in death. What special satisfaction God must have found in that, what pleasure. We often quote the word, do we not, 'Never was He more perfect, never more acceptable to God, than on the cross', JND Collected Writings vol 34 p379. Now that is a quotation that we should think about. You can see the truth of it in the burnt-offering, can you not? He actually offered Himself, laid down His life. Satan says, "all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2: 4), but the Lord Jesus laid down His life in obedience to the will of God.

IMcK Just linking with that question, this word "Henceforth" is interesting, is it not? It is not, speaking reverently, a relaxation or a pause, but there is a foundation that has been laid here and it is a reference point.

AM Well it is. I suppose this was a new dispensation starting 'henceforth'. But what caused the new dispensation? It was not the flood; it was the offering. If there had been no offering the heart of man would have proved itself to be just as the same as before. God had come in and terminated that. What proved the new dispensation that God was going to come out in a new way for men, was that there was a burnt-offering that He could find His rest in.

NCMcK It links with what was just said. God could never rest in a scene of unrighteousness; it goes against everything that God is. So what you have is the burnt-offering: you have one Man who maintained God's rights and righteousness inviolate and gave that life up for God. He was entirely vindicated and justified in Christ. He found a point of rest there in Christ and that offering established it forever.

AM In the beginning of Exodus 25, you find that God has indicated to His people that He was going to have a dwelling. He was going to rest. He says, "they shall make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them", v 8. What sort of structure would it be - "And they shall make an

ark", v 10? Christ! One who would uphold everything. "Thou shalt put into the ark the testimony that I shall give thee", v 16. The One who not only upheld, but treasured every divine thought in righteousness here, the mercy-seat was there, the blood was upon the mercy-seat, divine rights were maintained, everything was maintained by that One in order that God should have a dwelling place here. What a rich field that is.

QAP In Matthew 11 He is our rest as well. "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest", v 28.

AM Yes. If there is One who is able, capable of being the rest of God, He is surely able to give us rest, is He not? If God needs nothing outside of Christ, what do I need? We sometimes think of it when a soul is in extremity, and we are very glad when a soul who is in extremity shines with the fact that they are finding their joy and their rest in Christ; it is a great joy to us. But we do not have to be in extremity to find our rest in Him. It struck me as we sang that hymn,

Lord Jesus, then these hearts shall be
For ever be satisfied with thee (No 368)

- and I thought, why do we have to wait until then?

QAP I have wondered about that, because Matthew's gospel particularly presents Him as the King. In that section in Matthew 11: 29 He says, "I am meek and lowly in heart".

AM They are features of a king, are they not? "Behold thy King cometh to thee, meek, and mounted upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass", Matt 21: 5.

DJW It is significant earlier in the chapter that it says "the waters were dried up from the earth" (Gen 8: 13); you could not build an altar on a wet earth. I was thinking of the Lord's words, "It is finished", John 19: 30; one order is finished; there is to be a new beginning.

AM Yes, that is good. The dove had come back with evidence of life on a new earth. That olive leaf was plucked off; it was not like a leaf found lying on the ground or floating on the water. It was plucked off; it was evidence that there was life. The earth was dry and there was life again on the earth and a new order of things altogether. And intelligent life comes out of the ark and God finds His joy in that.

DJW This rest could never be disturbed, could it?

AM No, that is right. I enjoy the words of the hymn - 'whereon no grief

encroaches',

Safety - where no foe approaches,

Rest - where toil shall be no more

Joy - whereon no grief **encroaches**

Peace - where strife shall all be o'er'

(No 206).

You might have some joy in something but then something encroaches on it, dampens it, takes it away, does it not? Nothing can disturb this rest.

AEM There is that word as to the offering, "offered himself spotless to God", Heb 9: 14. The moral quality and glory of the rest that God has, came from that blessed One, did it not?

AM Exactly, yes, and He was ever under divine scrutiny - spotless, "offered himself spotless to God". It has often struck me, that word. The Israelite had to bring his offering and the priest would look at it. 'Is there any blemish? Is there any flaw in his offering?' What you find from Malachi was that there were plenty of blemishes and the priest would overlook them. They should not have overlooked any. Was there an offering without blemish? It might have been very difficult to find an animal without blemish. The Lord Jesus offered Himself, not to a priest for man's scrutiny, but to God's perfect scrutiny. He offered Himself without spot to God. The offering was, we might say, gladly accepted.

GJR And, another divine Person was involved: it was by the eternal Spirit.

AM Yes, indeed. The Holy Spirit had been with the Lord Jesus all that pathway, and was involved in every detail of that pathway, even to the offering of Himself to God.

AJMcK Give us a touch as to the bow, please. You spoke about God's estimation of it. I wonder if that links with what you said as to the Lord offering Himself spotless. Is this God's view?

AM Yes, well, I think it is. The bow here is presented as for God. We see a bow in the clouds sometimes, and it is a comforting thought; it reminds us of God's covenant with men, and His faithfulness too. All the days of the earth, the seasons will be there, His covenant, that He will no more destroy all flesh. He sets the bow in the cloud but He says, "I set my bow". No one can change that. The footnote says it could be, 'I have set my bow in the clouds'. When the clouds come we often look

at the clouds. And if we do not look at them, we look down at the ground. God says, 'I am looking at my bow; I have my Christ before me'.

AJMcK I think that is good. And He says, “I **will** look upon it'. Not 'I may' but “I will”. He takes account of the One in whom everything is for Him.

AM That is very fine; we tend to think of the 'I wills' of scripture as belonging to the New Testament; and the Old Testament being 'Thou shalt'. And that is true, of course, of the covenant, but here we have before Sinai, the great 'I will' from God. “I **will** remember my covenant”. 'I have set my bow', and “I will remember my covenant”: things that nothing can change.

RDP You referred to the fact that the bow is not exactly for us; the bow is for God. We know, even the children know, the nature of the bow is different colours; there is some suggestion of Christ in that, in the varying colours that were there. It says, “I will look upon it, that I may remember”.

AM Yes, that is right. The various glories you mean? We are taught in school in physics that the colours of the rainbow are the components of light; divine light shines. God can look at it in detail; He can treasure each detail of the glories of Christ and appreciate them, in a far greater way than we can.

RMB Might there be a link between the reference here to the bow and the way that John in his epistle says that “*he* is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world”, 1 John 2: 2?

AM Go on, that is very suggestive. I appreciate that link; say some more about it.

RMB Well, I noticed that it is the sign of the covenant that God made with every living soul, and it says there in John's first epistle that not only is Jesus Christ the propitiation for our sins but also for the whole world. It has often impressed me that while, of course, it is based on His mighty work, it is what He is.

AM Yes, He is the propitiation, and it really is just this that God can look upon *Him*. If God looks upon man He looks upon Christ; He is the propitiation for our sins. It does not mean that everyone is clear of sins because they have to come to Him in faith. Repentance and faith are the essential ingredients for any blessing. If I give up myself in

repentance and turn to the Lord Jesus in faith, I find that He is my beginning in that sense. But God has already established Him, and He has satisfied God. As to the whole matter of taking up man, God is propitiated in relation to the taking up of man.

RHB There is nobody else that could have propitiated God. I was thinking of your thought as to the beginning; that God has been propitiated is the beginning of everything, is it not? The outgoings of the gospel are on that basis. Often perhaps the need of the sinner and how that can be met is stressed, but if God had not been propitiated there would be nothing for the sinner or anyone else.

AM Yes, that is right. Although historically the Lord Jesus came here after many years, yet He is the beginning; God was propitiated in relation to what went before. He was propitiated in relation to the sin of Adam, Cain, all those men. The Lord Jesus is the propitiation for our sins and for the whole world, including all that went before, so that God was righteous in passing by the sins of those who had gone before.

RJF Are these chapters amplifying the passage in Corinthians that were referred to earlier, 'the first-fruits, Christ'. It seems to me with the colours of the bow, and all of those animals there, the extraordinary multiplicity of glories give a picture of the first-fruits - the plural.

AM Yes, that is good. All that was here. Basically, everything was here. There was what had gone through the flood; there was what was established now. Christ is on high, and there is something down here which God can take account of, and it is all secured for His pleasure.

Perhaps we should just touch John 20. We are speaking about what is here for God's pleasure, and the Lord Jesus in John, as out of death, associates His own with Himself as of that new order. He is the beginning but there are others who are brought in as his brethren: "all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren", Heb 2: 11. He says, "go to my brethren". What a message this was on this morning.

AEM In terms of beginnings, help us; give us a touch as to "Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended".

AM The Lord Jesus is in a new condition. We could not have part with Him in His old condition because we, as in flesh and blood, are tainted, even if we knew Him after the flesh. "We henceforth know no one according to flesh; but if even we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer", 2 Cor 5: 16. He is in a new

condition in which we cannot in our physical state have part, but we await that.

AEM I find it very helpful, whenever I am tempted to bring anything of myself at all into this, just to remember this that He says to a woman who loved Him so much and mourned His loss, "Touch me not". There was something further; there was another area altogether in which she was to know Him. I find that quite helpful.

AM Yes, I think so. There are no disappointments in Mary here; she is not saying, 'Why can I not? I love you, Lord, so much; why can I not touch you?'. No, there is no disappointment. She had been given the light of another order of things altogether. I often think of Mary. A casual spectator might have watched Mary going past, one trembling poor soul, tearful, going to the tomb, coming back in great anxiety and fear, going back again with the two disciples, a fearful soul. What was going to happen? And then she returns; I think her feet were flying! She had got a new message, a new light in her soul. A Man of another order was filling her heart. It was the beginning of something completely new for Mary.

GCB Was this for her a happy adjustment? It was not a painful adjustment.

AM It was a very happy adjustment. Well, really all adjustments should be happy, should they not? They may be painful - I quite agree with you! But they should have happy endings anyway. But this was a matter of great joy.

GCB I was thinking it was a very significant episode in divine teaching. What a Teacher He was. What benefit we get from it too.

AM What a Teacher, *He* was, the Lord. What Mary did was to pass on a message. She did not teach the disciples; that would not have been comely at all. But she carried a message. There were those who believed Peter and John - they believed that Jesus was raised from among the dead, but Mary had the heart for Him. She had nothing here. Mary really is typical of a widow; she shows the widow character. She had nothing here upon the earth, because her Lord was not here. And then He comes and He says, 'You have a new start now'.

AJMCK So, it says that she "comes bringing word". Does that take us back to your first scripture, "These things says the Amen"? She was in the secret of what the One who was the beginning was saying.

AM Yes, she was. It was His word that she was bringing. “Bringing word to the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had said these things to her”: what a testimony that is. She had seen the Lord. There is a testimony in that.

IMcK His brethren could be found. I was looking at that reference where the Lord says in chapter 16, “the hour is coming, and has come, that ye shall be scattered” (v 32), but here has been a new beginning, has there not? The Lord is in resurrection. Mary could find those that belonged to the Lord, could she?

AM Yes, that is right. I suppose the eleven were there. We do not know who else. By Acts chapter 1, there were one hundred and twenty, v 15. Anyway, we do not know how many were in this room, but she could bring this word that she had seen the Lord. I expect that the mother of Jesus was there, but that was not the point; the link was not natural; the link was a holy, spiritual one. It was out of death.

RDP Do you think this line that we are speaking of is continued in the Holy Spirit? “He shall bear witness concerning me”, John 15: 26. “He shall not speak from himself”, John 16: 13. I was thinking of the One who is the Beginning and the End. There is nothing in man's world that finishes its course the way it started, but with this, the end corresponds to the beginning. I was thinking of the importance at the present time of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, “He shall bear witness concerning me”.

AM That is absolutely right. That is critical, is it not? That is what marks the present day. The end has to correspond with the beginning. Mr Darby said if you build a house the object is to put a roof over you, but you start with the foundations, and the roof is the last thing, Collected Writings vol 28 p344. The end has to correspond with the beginning.

Witney

22nd September 2018

List of initials:-

R Brown, Grangemouth; R H Brown, East Finchley; R M Brown, Strood; G C Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; R J Flowerdew, Sunbury; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; A J McKay, Witney; I McKay, Witney; N C McKay, Glasgow; A E Mutton, Witney; R D Plant, Birmingham; Q A Poore, Swanage; G J Richards, Malvern; M I Webster, Buckhurst Hill; D J Willetts, Birmingham

THE TESTIMONY

Andrew Martin

John 5: 19, 30, 36; 12: 49-50; 16: 7-15

The impression I have to speak about in this occasion, beloved brethren, is the testimony. It is a word we often use: it is a word you do not often hear amongst men in the context in which we use it, the testimony. The testimony for the believer is the light of God revealed and how it is revealed and where it is revealed. I suppose most of us have heard the statement of one great servant of the Lord Jesus who said 'the testimony is Christ' (FER vol 18 p90): the testimony is Christ.

God had His testimonies before that; there were many individuals in the Old Testament who bore testimony to God and His requirements from man. I suppose Abel is one. There is a testimony from Abel that he has died: that testimony stands, a righteous man who through faith offered a sacrifice to God that involved the shedding of blood, Gen 3: 4. What an expression of his faith that was; and there are others. There was a testimony from the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who lived in a land that was not theirs. They were strangers and sojourners: they lived in the light of a promise, a promise that was yet to come. These testimonies are gathered up. That is something which would be true of a believer today. He is a stranger and a sojourner here: he belongs to another world, another blessed world, like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Of course, they could see the land, and I suppose they tasted of the fruit of the land and that is what we do, do we not? We taste of the fruit:

But, my soul, hast thou not tasted
Of that Tree of Life on high?
As through desert lands thou'st hasted

(The Tree of Life - J N Darby).

That was written by one who fed upon those fruits: he was nourished by them but he was still here as a stranger and a sojourner in the land. I suppose, as to tasting those fruits, it is like what somebody spoke of, being like a son away from home but still enjoying something of home comforts, JBS vol 11 p169. That is what the fruit of the land is, home comforts. We get them, do we not, we get them regularly in our gatherings, especially Lord's day morning? Did you receive some of these home comforts on Lord's day morning? Something of the portion that belongs to you that you have in Christ in His own realm where He is

ascended up on high? They are the home comforts for the believer, greater comforts by far than what we might surround ourselves with down here, comforts of another world, beloved; and if we enjoy such comforts there is a testimony goes out that we do not belong here but our resources are elsewhere.

Then there were those who passed through the wilderness. They had their own testimony, did they not? They were heading for another land, and in Joshua and Caleb and those following it was a question of taking possession of the land. How do you take possession of the land? We have every divine resource available in the Earnest of our inheritance, Eph 1: 14. What a wonderful thing, is it not, that all these things are gathered up? Israel's history went on; there was a throne established: the place where God had set His Name in the city, the house of God. These things were established; these were the testimonies to Israel; testimonies to us too, are they not? We know the throne of God, the throne of grace; we know the temple: we have just experienced it, have we not? We know the city of the great King: yes, it is still here, it is still to be experienced. Wonderful these testimonies! All went through right from the beginning onwards.

And then came a change, a complete change, because there appeared upon the face of this earth, One who was Himself the Vessel of the testimony; He was the Vessel of the testimony. The whole testimony was embodied in one blessed holy Man here upon the earth, our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Vessel of the testimony. It was not a question of various individuals: it was focused upon Him, who He was and how perfect He was, a testimony for God. We think of all that was seen in Him, the very expression of God Himself. One said to Him, "shew us the Father and it suffices us" (John 14: 8), and He said (how those words must have pained Him), "Am I so long a time with you, and thou hast not known me ... He that has seen me has seen the Father", v 9. They had seen the Father in Christ; there was nothing you could learn of God that was not expressed in Christ. Everything was set out in Him; He was the embodiment of every divine thought, and everything that God could possibly reveal to man was set out in that one blessed Man.

We have read about Him here and He speaks about Himself. Wonderful thing, these words that come in John's gospel. I wonder about that sometimes. John gives us the greatness, the glory of the Man. If you want to see the Vessel of the testimony in activity you go to

Mark's gospel. Mark's gospel presents the Vessel of the testimony: "Beginning of the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, Son of God" (chap 1: 1), and He goes straight into the testimony, the Lord Jesus, there operating amongst men. That is the Vessel of the testimony in Mark's gospel, and there you get the feelings of God coming out. How many times in Mark's gospel we find His very feelings being expressed: Hebrew words are given because such feelings cannot be translated into common language. There we find the Lord Jesus Himself as the expression of every divine thought, and every divine feeling was expressed in Him there, and it all comes out and we see it in that gospel.

But in his gospel John presents the greatness of the Person. The glory of the Son of God shines out in his gospel, and in chapter 5 the Lord actually speaks about His power, the glory which is His. But first He says, "The Son can do nothing of himself save whatever He sees the Father doing": whatever He sees the Father doing. His actions were just what the Father would have done had He been here upon earth in corporeal form. He relied entirely upon God and, whatever the action of the Lord Jesus, it was an expression of God Himself. You think of the actions of the Lord Jesus when He healed the sick, He raised the dead, He gave sight to the blind - and nobody had ever done that before. He touched the leper, Matt 8: 3. You think of Him reaching out; that man had never been touched like that before. I love to think of that scene; that leper was there, and men would have avoided him. They would have crossed the road because he was unclean, just to pass him by; they would not draw near him; they would have turned away. I often think that mothers would have told their children, 'Come this way' because there was a leper there. The Lord Jesus came: the prophet says, He was "like one from whom men hide their faces", Isa 53: 3. The leper literally was that: the leper in his need was one from whom men hid their faces. The Lord Jesus in His grace took that place, He went as low as that, in order to express the heart of God in His actions, and He reached out and He touched that leper. God would not have a man to be unclean, to be eaten up by a disease which speaks so much of sin. God would not have a man like that: it is as if He said, 'I want you to be functioning; I want you to take your place'. The leper acknowledged his need. The Lord Jesus, in wonderful grace went down to his level even, and restored the man.

What a blessed thing: think of His actions, "The Son can do nothing ... save whatever he sees the Father doing". Think of the Name of the Father, a wonderful Name; it is God in grace. The Father is

always connected with that, and the Lord Jesus says, "The Son can do nothing ... save whatever he sees the Father doing". And then He goes on "for whatever things *he* does, these things also the Son does in like manner." Think of the importance of those words, "in like manner". It is not only *what* He did, but the *way* He did it: perfect in every respect as representing the Father, the way He did things as important as what He did. Never was a day spent when somebody could have said, 'Well, the Lord could have done that better', never. He was perfect. I was impressed a little while ago with the word of Abraham, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?", Gen 18: 25. Now, that was right: that is a matter of righteousness. When the Lord Jesus came, they went further. They said, "He does all things well", Mark 7: 37. It is not only what He did but the way He did it: He did all things well. "Whatever He sees the Father doing: for whatever things *he* does, these things also the Son does in like manner".

When He goes on He speaks of what He hears. The first verse we read speaks of what He *saw* the Father doing, now it is a question of what He *hears*. "I cannot do anything of myself; as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous, because I do not seek my will". There was no self-interest in the Lord Jesus. Men speak of having a hidden agenda - nothing like that was seen in Him: no self-interest, no secret motives which would have conduced to His own benefit - never! His will was entirely subjected to the will of His Father: a precious thing to take account of that. He had a will. You could not say He did not have a will; He had a will. If He had exercised that will, it would have been perfectly in keeping with the will of His Father, but He did not. He did not exercise it because for man there is only one will to govern Him and that is the will of God; approaching the cross He recoiled from what God's will required, and what does He say then? He says, "not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22: 42): "Thy will, not mine". It was absolutely right that He should recoil from what was before Him. He said, "My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me", Matt 26: 39. He did not say, 'Father, let me turn aside from this cup'. No, He was bound to the Father's will. He said, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me", but immediately, without any hesitation He says, "but not as *I* will, but as *thou* wilt". Oh the perfection we see in the Lord Jesus, the great expression there of a Man who was wholly subject to the will of God; and He was going forward, going forward from that point in power. He accepted what was before Him from the Father. He did not accept it from anyone else. Satan had come to deflect Him from that pathway, had he not?

Somebody said, Satan offered Him a choice in the garden. There was all the riches and kingdoms and wealth of the world on one hand or there was death and judgment on the other. Which would He choose? As that wonderful hymn says,

Thou chocest still, blest Saviour, to obey. (Hymn 318)

He went forward; Satan was powerless. All that took place after that was not under Satan's control. The matter certainly was not under man's control, it was not under the control of the chief priests, it was not under the control of Judas, it was not under the control of Pilate: they were merely instruments along the way. John tells us, "Jesus ... went forth", chap 19: 5. There He went in the dignity and power that belonged to Him alone, as the ark moving towards the Jordan. Before it had even reached the banks of the Jordan, there on the flood plain, the water was over all the banks; and as the priests' feet touched the flood water the whole river fled. It went back, right back to the city Adam; it rose up in a heap, Josh 3: 14-16. You think of the greatness of what took place - that is a figure of Jesus as He went to death. He moved forward in glorious triumph in victory into death and there, beloved, He entered a realm of the one who had held men in terror for so long. He entered into his realm and broke his power, absolutely shattered it for the believer. You think of what death is - man's weakness yes, it is that; God's judgment yes, He bore that; Satan's power - He broke that. No wonder the believer can go into death with a sense of confidence, can he not? Even to the point of looking for it, a believer can go forward because One has gone forward in absolute power and victory, entering into the very realms of death itself, breaking the power of it for the believer forever.

In chapter 12 the Lord Jesus goes on to say, "I have not spoken from myself, but the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what I should say and what I should speak." We had His actions, we have what He sees the Father doing, we have what He hears from the Father; and now we have what He *speaks*, what He says: "I have not spoken from myself". The Vessel of testimony: His words came from the Father. Those who rejected Him rejected God; they rejected the Father. The leaders of the day thought that they were rejecting a man; that is what they thought. They were rejecting God; they were rejecting God's testimony here. All that was displayed in fulness in the Lord Jesus, and all His words, was what God was.

You remember how very early on in His service He went to

Nazareth where He was brought up, Luke 4: 16-22. I suppose for most that would be the most testing place to preach, where they were brought up. They knew Him. Of course, for the Lord Jesus there was not the test that there might be for us, because the One they knew was perfect in every respect. He went to Nazareth where He was brought up. He opened that book, Isaiah, went through it, found the place, went through fifty nine chapters as we have them before He found that place, and they all spoke of Him, and then He said this is the scripture for today: "and all wondered at the words of grace which were coming out of His mouth". The Father told Him what to say. "I have not spoken from myself, but the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what I should say and what I should speak". He says, "To-day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears", and they wondered at the words of grace that proceeded out of His mouth. The psalmist says, "Loving-kindness and truth are met together", Ps 85: 10. The words of grace, they loved them.

Then followed the words of truth. He said unto them "Ye will surely say ... Physician, heal thyself" (Luke 4: 23), "there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian", v 27. What He was saying was that they could not come into blessing because of their background and nor can you. This is the truth; it is no good just marvelling at the words of grace: you have to come to the truth. The truth is in Jesus. "They were all filled with rage" (v 28) ... "and led him up to the brow of the mountain", and would have cast Him over the precipice, but He passed through their midst. Grace and truth have met together. He spoke what the Father had given Him to speak and it was evident right then at the beginning of His public service that the words that He spoke would not be accepted by men; but not only would the words be rejected, but He Himself would be rejected. But He went on, the Vessel of the testimony. Anyone who wanted to know who God is had just to come to Jesus and they would see God manifested in flesh. There He was, a full expression of God Himself.

But Jesus died, He went to the cross, He accomplished the great work of redemption and He was buried and then He rose again; the Vessel of the testimony has been taken away from the earth. What happened? Was there to be no testimony now to God? Could God allow His testimony to be extinguished from this earth? Was it a moral possibility that what had been expressed in the Lord Jesus should then cease from the earth altogether, and man have his way and silence the

testimony of God? Could that even be possible? Could anyone countenance it? We know it cannot be possible. Your heart recoils from the thought of it, does it not?

And so, before He went the Lord Jesus spoke to His own and prepared them for the time in which He would be gone, and He said there is going to be another One, another Comforter. If you read these chapters attentively you will notice that the Lord Jesus speaks about the Comforter as being sent by the Father, and He speaks about Him as being sent by the Lord Jesus Himself. When He refers to the Father sending Him, it is for the consolation and the encouragement and strengthening of the saints who are here. What a fatherly touch that is; and the Lord, in His care for His own, knew the comfort and strength that they would need when they were here, and so He begged the Father to send them a Comforter, John 14: 16. The Comforter came from the Father in order to sustain the saints down here. But then He speaks about sending the Comforter Himself, and when He speaks about sending the Comforter Himself, He is speaking about sending the Holy Spirit here in testimony, so that the saints should not only be sustained here in their weakness and in their difficulties and sorrows and griefs, but also find the very One who sustains us here is the One who is power for the testimony here.

Is the testimony here in a few scattered individuals? Look at it in the beginning of Acts: there was the vessel of the testimony. There was no preaching in Acts 1. Those disciples met together and they met with the Lord Jesus until He was taken up, and then for ten days, "These gave themselves all with one accord to continual prayer", v 14. There they were one hundred and twenty of them sustained in that continual prayer. That was private; that did not go out: but when the day of Pentecost came a great change came. "And there appeared to them parted tongues, as of fire", parted because it sat upon each one of them, but it came from one source; and it sat upon each one of them and a testimony went out straight away. There was no delay; the Holy Spirit had come. There was going to be a testimony for as long as the Holy Spirit is here. How long will the Holy Spirit remain here? The Lord Jesus said, "that he may be with you for ever" (John 14: 16) - ever! He will be with us beyond the time when a testimony is needed; the Holy Spirit will still be with us. The hymn speaks to the Holy Spirit and it speaks about that time when we are caught up

As, rising, changed, and still with Thee,

We reach our home. (Hymn 182)

He will be with us for ever! We will never be without Him, the wonderful faithfulness of a divine Person.

And you ask how He can take up His abode now? Where is He dwelling? Beloved, what was formed at Pentecost remains. There is a vessel of the testimony and there will continue to be a vessel of the testimony right till the end. You might say, 'I do not see it': no, the enemy has done his work. How he has; let none of us help him! He does not need any help. Let us be here as those who appreciate that there is something here upon this earth which is precious to Christ, and it is precious to Him because it is the expression of Himself. The whole assembly is the expression of Himself. Everything that delights His heart is expressive of Himself. It may be that publicly the assembly is now to be found broken up, believers found here and there, but the Holy Spirit remains; and the question is: what does the Lord look for, what is He looking for in His testimony here? He is looking for an expression of Himself. He was looking for that which is dependent on heaven for its resource. He is looking for that which expresses Him in that way, where His word can be heard and given expression to, where His mind can be known. He is looking for that. He is looking for that which keeps itself from evil, is not contaminated with sin or iniquity, keeps itself apart from that. He is looking for that which has His judgment about all things; yes, it is not beclouded by man's judgment. He is looking for that which has no self-interest, just as He had no self-interest. That is part of the testimony that He is looking for which is all contained in the church. He is looking for that which would move here in dignity and order just as He did Himself, where the way He did things was as important as what He did. He is looking for that in His church. That is the testimony; and you say, 'But it is such a broken day'. Yes, but we have to find our way in it, do we not?

And the Lord ministers to His assembly. He gives light, He gave one man to see the light that he could not find salvation just by resting in the church. The testimony was not to do that. It needed faith in order to be justified. He gave him to see the light as to that. What a step forward that was in the testimony of God. He gave another man to see the light that if we have the Holy Spirit we are united to Christ, and every believer that has the Holy Spirit is united to Christ and therefore He is the Head of the body here upon the earth. What light that was! He gave light afresh as to the way in which that body is to compose itself

upon the earth, that every member of the body is responsible to every other member and no one should act independently of the others. What light that was! In the same way, He gave light, did He not, as to Himself? And He gave light as to eternal life; that was what He spoke about: there was such a thing as a quality of life outside of all that is down here and is to be found among those who form part of His testimony. He gave light as to that! This developed. Then He gave light as to Himself as coming into Manhood; He came into a relationship with God here. He came into the relationship of sonship. Precious light that was! And He gave light as to the One who is here maintaining the testimony, that He is a divine Person: He is to be respected, He is to be honoured and worshipped. Precious light! These things - we may have grown up with these things, and we may just take them all for granted, may we not? These are things that many believers do not know, but they are precious things and they are to be treasured. It is the path of the testimony. You might ask how we are going to work it out because things are so broken these days; can we work it out together? Hold to the original thoughts: follow God's original thoughts; stay with divine thoughts. Do not order your life by the breakdown. Order your life by what has come from God, and that is the only way of safety: that is the only way to be preserved here in the testimony of our Lord.

Now the apostle Paul says to Timothy, "Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord", 2 Tim 1: 8. Somebody said recently that Timothy was the kind of man who would naturally have taken a back seat in the meeting and been quiet. Paul says, "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion", v 7. "Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me his prisoner": what is the testimony of our Lord? Is it that I think of what I can do for Him? Because when we are newly converted we all want to do what we can for the Lord, do we not, and we might imagine all sorts of things? The testimony involves His mind, seeking His mind. That gives Him greater pleasure, the greatest pleasure, "Be not ... ashamed of the testimony of our Lord". In Timothy's day, which was really the day in which we live, the day in which 2 Timothy was written, was a day of breakdown, but there was something there to which the name of "our Lord" could be attached. It carries authority, authority in a broken day: yes, the authority is in "our Lord". It is maintained here by the Holy Spirit. How are we going to be helped to maintain that? It is in our links with the Holy Spirit. That is the only way - our links with divine Persons. Let us keep our links with the Holy Spirit

bright, fresh, clear. We had a brother local until recently who suggested a set of readings on the nine segments of the fruit of the Spirit, one fruit, but nine segments - "love, joy, peace ...", Gal 5: 22. If we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit, walking in the Spirit, we will have our part in the testimony of our Lord; and really no other way.

May the Lord bless the word.

Witney

22nd September 2018

STRANGERS BELOW AND CITIZENS ABOVE

G Allan Brown

Psalm 137: 1-6; 122: 1-4; 150: 1-6

The people that we have read about in Psalm 137 were the people of God, but they were captives and they were in a foreign land. No doubt they would feel that they had had part in the departure which had brought about the captivity, but nevertheless they had right thoughts in their minds. They were thinking about Jerusalem; not the Jerusalem that was in ruins at that time but as it was in the mind of God. That has its own reference to Israel, but to give it an application to us, dear brethren - which is why we are here - it impresses me that we are in this situation. We have had part in the breakdown, and we find ourselves at this time on foreign soil. By that I mean, we have to live in our daily duties and relationships down here, all these things that relate to this world in which we are; the world's system, we might call it, not necessarily the wickedness of it. But the fact is that it is not our home; it is a foreign soil. I feel exercised as to this, dear brethren, as to how much we actually feel that we are strangers and foreigners in this world through which our path is set.

We could apply what I have in mind to other meetings, but I am thinking particularly of how we gather for the Lord's supper. I feel it particularly as walking to the Lord's supper. Most arrive by car, but those of us who walk pass by and see people are buying their Sunday papers, and talking about the sports results from yesterday, and they have loud blaring music. I just feel I do not belong here; I am in a foreign land. Perhaps they would want us to join in with their music and so on. That is what it says here,

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that made us wail required mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How should we sing a song of Jehovah's upon a foreign soil?

Brethren, we do not belong there. We can have no part actively in any of the ONGOINGS of this world; we are strangers below; but we are citizens above.

If I forget thee, Jerusalem ...",
then it says,

If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to my palate: if I

prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

Let us have the assembly, dear brethren, as it is in the mind of God, whatever the public breakdown may be, (and how grievous all that is); let us have the divine thought constantly before us.

Now this involves movement. I am thinking again of the Lord's supper and in Psalm 122 we have, "A Song of Degrees. Of David". It is a song of returning captives. He says,

I rejoiced when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of Jehovah.

Does that not fill your heart? Your heart leaps with joy when you think of what it is to come together with the dear brethren and sit down in assembly. Think of the dignity of that occasion. It is a wonderful thing just to watch the brethren gathering for the Lord's supper. It says here,

Whither the tribes go up ...

Consider the saints coming from their various backgrounds, different families, different places, perhaps, but they have a glorious objective before them and that is Jerusalem; that is, for us, the assembly as it is in the mind of God. Think of it: our gathering on Lord's day morning is a gathering of assembly character. We often think of a meeting of assembly character as having to do with discipline, which, alas, sometimes it does, but we have a meeting of assembly character every Lord's day. Paul says that: "when ye come together in assembly" (1 Cor 11: 18); that is the character. We are not claiming anything, but that is the character in which we come together and so -

Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.

Think of what it means when the saints gather, leaving all this foreign land behind us. We can put it out of our minds because as David says here,

I rejoiced when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of Jehovah.

Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.

What a thing it is to be actually gathered in all the dignity of what it is to be "in assembly"! We gather in the wilderness; we break bread in the wilderness; but when the Lord comes in, He floods the whole scene with His glory! What a place it is to be! Where else would you want to be?

Jerusalem, which art built as a city that is compact together.

There is nothing big outwardly; it “is compact together”, but it is something that is according to the mind of God. Let us hold on to that, dear brethren; the divine ideal is what is to be before us and to fill our hearts as we gather, and the Lord comes in and takes possession of the whole scene, and our feet are standing there on heavenly ground. We are home; we have come home; we have been away from home in captivity but now we are within our own sphere, the sphere where we belong:

Strangers below and citizens above, (Hymn 284)

as we sometimes sing. This is where we belong.

Well, as the assembly functions in response to the Lord Jesus, all these different aspects, His brethren, His assembly, the blessed Spirit responded to, the Father having received His portion, there is this glorious outburst of praise in Psalm 150,

Praise God in his sanctuary.

That is where we are! We are in the divine presence, the divine realm. I have nothing to say as to the detail of this psalm but it just lifts your spirit as you read these precious words, “Praise him ... Praise him ... Praise him”

Let everything that hath breath praise Jah. Hallelujah!.

This is the great climax of the Psalms. I think in New Testament terms it is Ephesians 3, “to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages”, v 21. What a God we have! What a portion we have, dear brethren! Let us enter into it fully, not only just for our enjoyment but for the pleasure of our God.

Let everything that hath breath praise Jah:

hearts and voices blending in adoration to our glorious God, and in appreciation of the way He has come out and worked to secure us and bring us into this, the very best and greatest of things. I trust the Lord may bless these few words.

Word in meeting for ministry in Grangemouth

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