

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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RESPONSE

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RG What is in mind in suggesting these scriptures is the matter of response. It is evident from the very beginning of Scripture that God looked for a response to His activities. God was sufficient in Himself in dwelling in unapproachable light, in conditions of deity. He came forth from that and brought in the creation in order that He might display Himself in it. What He was looking for was an answer to His activities in love. Early in Genesis it says, “they heard the voice of Jehovah Elohim, walking in the garden in the cool of the day”, chap 3: 8. He was looking for the company and the fellowship of His creature. Many other instances could be quoted. We have the reference in the time of Moses when God says, “Come up to me into the mountain, and be there”, Exod 24: 12. That is, God was looking for the companionship of Moses.

I suggested this scripture in Matthew which says, “Jesus answering said, I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth”. This was something that God had not had before. The Father was receiving praise from His own Son, here as Man. As always, we are safe when we take account of what divine Persons do and how they do it; they would set it forward as an example. In one sense we have begun at the top, first of all as to the Father, and then in John as to the Lord Jesus, the Son, and finally the Holy Spirit. That is not quite the order that we proceed with when we gather to remember the Lord. Bearing that in mind I think it would be helpful if we consider together firstly what approach to the Father involves. It is not simply a matter of the Lord saying, “I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes”; there are volumes in what the Lord says.

In John's gospel we have the movements of the Lord Jesus. His movements are drawn attention to, and eventually they provoke the question: “Rabbi (which, being interpreted, signifies Teacher), where abidest thou?”. Hearts were touched and attracted and “He says to them, Come and see”. I think we had some impression of that this morning, seeing the Lord and seeing the conditions in which He dwells; He would have us to be with Him. Even in Laodicea, where things are very weak and poor, He says to anyone who opens the door, “I will come

in unto him and sup with him”, Rev 3: 20. That is that He comes into our circumstances and then He says, “and he with me”. The Lord is really seeking that we should be with Him in conditions that are suitable.

In the reference in Numbers to the Holy Spirit I was struck recently by the fact that there was a spontaneous rising up in the hearts of the people. God had done certain things and made certain provisions but the time comes when they say,

“Rise up, well! sing unto it”.

There is an answer there for the blessed Holy Spirit. I hope we will get help together as considering these things.

HTF I am interested in your word, spontaneous. I was looking at the scripture in Matthew 11 which always impresses me because of the setting. It is remarkable that everyone had turned away, and everyone had rejected Him, but spontaneously there, “Jesus answering said ...”, in a perfect example of response to His Father, and therefore an example for us.

RG I am glad you bring that side in. I did not want to read all about Tyre and Sidon and Capernaum. Just at this point, “At that time”; the difficulties would be pressing on His spirit but for the moment He left these aside. He spoke to the Father about what He was doing and what He was securing. I think we get help on these lines as we come together on Lord's day morning. We do at other times too of course; the sphere of eternal life is opened to us as we gather. It is a sphere where the curse is lifted; there is no more doubt or fear in our mind.

JAS Does a sense of restfulness and known relationship help in this matter of spontaneous response?

RG Yes, it does. I used to wonder as a young person at the emphasis that was placed on the matter of assembling. Assembling involves that we come together with a specific object in mind as led by the Spirit. We are led so that we are suitable as we come together to enter into these restful conditions.

JAS I am sure from reading this that the Lord can retire from the surroundings and simply dwell in the enjoyment of the Father's presence. His heart is set free in response.

RG I think that is important and I say without in any sense being gloomy or anticipating difficulties that I think we are going to need that

more and more. It is not that we carelessly turn our backs on responsibilities. There is a sphere into which we can retire and be with the Lord and before the Father in conditions which please Him, hence we are free.

DHM A hymn puts it very attractively:

At home in Thy presence,
Responsive and free (Hymn 325).

RG That is good; it exactly sums it up. If we had an audience with the Queen or the Prime Minister we would not be at ease at all, we would be on edge. When we are in the Father's house as clothed in the worth of Christ, led by Christ, strengthened by the Holy Spirit; we are at home and can be restful.

PM Over against the negative side the Lord Jesus speaks to the Father of what the Father is doing. There was what man had not done, but He speaks of what the Father is doing. I was thinking of the reference, "they went both of them together" (Gen 22: 6), suggesting a relationship in which divine Persons shared with one Another what they were doing Themselves. Is that right?

RG Yes; that is helpful. I have felt more and more recently that if we are going to take on the truth and the light of Christianity, which we have done through grace and mercy, really we must see things exemplified as between divine Persons. That is where we learn and what you quote is a very helpful example; two going on together.

RWF We have used the word 'spontaneous'; Mr Raven connected it with fruit, which implies maturity, vol 20 p188. The Lord Jesus had full knowledge of the Father. There was that which was fully present in the Lord Jesus in His knowledge of the Father. I wondered whether as we are occupied with the Lord we as babes begin to develop, to grow, to mature and to be fruitful.

RG I think that is helpful. The world has its own spontaneity, outbursts of merriment or whatever it happens to be. Spontaneity in divine things involves that divine Persons are free with us. Their spirits are free, the Holy Spirit is free with us and what you say about maturity is good. The brethren are going through a great deal. There is hardly a household, perhaps not a household that is not carrying some exercise or exercises and you might say that is just the way life is; no it is not. That is the way God is working with us. He leads us through these

exercises but, shows us Himself in them.

RWF Yes; I wondered if it is an important service of the Spirit that we do keep the end in view.

RG Yes, it is; I do feel that we have not fully grasped all that is in mind in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in His service He is God. We have one reference to “the love of the Spirit”, in Romans 15: 30. What do we know about the love of the Spirit? We know about the Father's love and His care. We know about the Lord's love, but the love of the Spirit is a very significant matter.

RWF Yes; in Romans 8 we have “the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness”, v 26. That depth of feeling that we are to develop is a part of normal Christian growth. It is a result of the service of the Spirit.

RG That is an important section of scripture. What we have to make clear is that we are not talking about imaginative theories. We do not imagine things. You say the Lord comes in amongst us. Does He really? I believe it is so, by the Spirit. Faith would enter into that. We are not giving ourselves to our own imaginations, but rather seeking to taste and touch what is truly spiritual.

HTF I was thinking of the reference to depth of feeling. In these few words the Lord says, “Yea, Father”. There was a depth of feeling expressed in a few words, and again He is the perfect example, would you say?

RG I am glad you mention that. It is not merely an acceptance of the Father's will; it is that, but there is more to it. “Yea, Father” involves the understanding of, and sympathy with, what the Father is doing. We find when we are engaged in response to divine Persons it is a time when our hearts are flowing out to them. There is also the return. I believe the Lord would teach us. It has often been said and rightly so that the Supper and the service of God are not the time for ministry, but it is a time to listen and gather up impressions.

PM I have often felt that I have learnt more at the Supper than in any other occasion.

RWF In the tabernacle system there was what was offered for God, and you get the idea from that of what is food for God. Then there was the priest's portion; is that what you are thinking of?

RG Yes, indeed; we have just been reading about the tabernacle in

our local readings. It is remarkable; the provision for the people is full, but it is very clear when you come to the assembling of the tabernacle that God is in mind. God is first, we are blessed on account of being there, but God is the object.

PM In the service of praise we are occupied only with what is normal and perfect. The divine standard is there, the shekel of the sanctuary, and unless I touch that I will not be able to move in the sphere of testimony rightly representative of God.

RG That is very important. I do not want to lay undue emphasis on any part of the service, but I believe the Supper and the service of God are indispensable. What we touch is normal but, what is normal is a very elevated and dignified thought.

PHH Does the invitation of the Lord here, "Come to me, all ye who labour", and what He says, "ye shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light", have in view what you are speaking about? That the spirits of the saints might be restful in His presence as supported by Him and at liberty is true normality.

RG Yes, I think so; we need a touch as to what is normal. We get so many other things pressing on our minds and hearts. There is time when we can just be with Christ; be with the Lord, and be for Him, and see things as He sees them. It is tremendously strengthening; and what was said about testimony is important because it bears also on the preaching of the gospel.

PEH To go back to your earlier comment about the response, spiritual response is evidence of spiritual life. That would result in spiritual activity towards divine Persons.

RG That is helpful. There are times when the Lord has to stimulate spiritual response. We get touches of it in Song of Songs; He says, "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice", chap 2: 14. It is like an appeal. What you say is perhaps in a sense greater in that spiritual life comes out into expression without prompting. We could go back to this word 'spontaneous'.

DHM Do you feel that we should value more the privilege that we have from when the Lord comes in amongst us until after we have worshipped Him? We are really in association with Him right through. Although we can experience the Lord in an occasion like this it is not in the distinctive way that we experience Him in the Supper. I wondered if

perhaps we should appreciate the unique character of that opportunity.

RG That is right, and what I have to remind myself of too is that, while we address the Lord in praise after the breaking of bread and the thought of His brethren comes into our minds and hearts and then the matter of the assembly, we do not lift these things up and then lay them down. They are cumulative, so that we carry forward the greatness of these things as we go on into the service of God.

DHM It is an ascending service, and cumulative in that sense, and we are built up in these things as well.

HTF Does that closely link with the service of the “minister of the holy places”, Heb 8: 2? I would like to know a little more about it. If we are sensitive as the service of God proceeds, then it would engender liberty in our spirits.

RG Yes, it would; the tabernacle helps us, and the teaching as to the house; Solomon's temple. There are times when the matter is proceeding but God finds such delight in what is going on that He in a sense takes possession of it and glory shines; we too get touches of that.

PM Does the reference in Ephesians, “For through him”, that is Christ, “we have both access by one Spirit to the Father” (chap 2: 18) involve union with Christ? It is not exactly with Christ, but it is “through” Christ. We are in union with that blessed Man. As you said, we do not lay down one phase of the service; we carry the experience of it, and as united to Him we are led and brought into the Father's presence.

RG That is most helpful. When we do come to the matter of addressing the Father, it is in one sense a very simple situation. There are no moral questions, nothing left to burden our minds. There is God known as Father and His sons before Him; it is wonderfully restful.

AGS Do you think in this section the Lord was thinking of what He was going to secure responsively from the company? It is interesting that later on in Matthew, after the Lord introduces the Supper, “having sung a hymn, they went to the mount of Olives”, chap 26: 30.

RG When divine Persons are working with us we tend to think of the immediate circumstances. When the Lord is working with us He is working in the context of eternity. What He is doing, and what He is leading us in, has in view that something will be formed that will appear

in glory.

AGS I am sure of that; when John goes up and enters in, there is a whole scene of response. It is at this moment that the Spirit of God as moving in that scene secures something, in the scene where Christ was disowned, that is responsive at the present time.

RG I think we should see the value of the present time. You might say it is a time of difficulty; yes, it is in some ways, and we look forward to the time when we are blessedly released to be with Christ forever. That will be a wonderful time but we should not forget that the Lord is doing things now amongst the saints that He will not add to in eternity. We will not keep on growing forever; we will come to our measure. This is the time when we reach our measure as under the Lord's hand and the work of the Spirit.

AGS Could you say something as to, "And having sung a hymn"? That is something that embraces all the saints as together; it is a moment to pour out in our affections. They sang a hymn when they went to the mount of Olives; how beautiful it would have been to hear the Lord leading the singing.

RG I think in a general sense singing a hymn at the beginning of a meeting is very important because it would unite the brethren in their spirits. I have come from my problems; you have come from yours. Singing a hymn together in the Spirit unites us and really makes way for the Holy Spirit. Then there is the prayer which would have an element of the anointing; it really sets the gathering up in dignity.

WMcC I was thinking of the hymn:

And a song is sweetly thrilling
Every heart within the shrine:
Music which God's ear is filling,
Notes which could be only Thine. Hymn 161

RG Yes; we are in the Father's presence. What we see, or what we appreciate by the Spirit, is the interchange of affection between divine Persons, and that is a wonderful thing. Do you think that is right?

WMcC Yes; it amalgamates the service, the whole of God's thoughts, together.

RG That is a fine thing, and you can understand why the apostle speaks about singing with your hearts, Eph 5: 19. You can sing with

your mouth and not really be in sympathy with your brethren. I might be out at odds with them, but singing in your hearts involves that we are together.

RDW “It is the Spirit which quickens, the flesh profits nothing”, John 6: 63. I was thinking of the hymn:

Where deceiver ne'er can enter, Hymn 206.

Nothing else can enter that sphere. Everything is in operation; love, grace and praise.

RG I think what you say is valuable. We might speak of eternal life as something objective or abstract; I think we get touches of it in our spirit, and we find there is no more curse: it has been met and dealt with. We are in the realm of what is new, and nothing can befoul that. We need touches of that in our spirits to help us to go on.

RWF Is it right to understand that in the realm of what is normal, a fresh view of the glory draws a fresh burst of praise?

RG Yes, that is important because when we say that nothing will be added in eternity in the sense of stature or growth that is true, but it does not mean that we will not get fresh impressions of His glory and His Person. We will never exhaust that.

RWF “All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son but the Father” - there is what is impenetrable with Christ Himself - “nor does any one know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son may be pleased to reveal him”. That should stir a desire on our part that we might learn more from Christ as to the Father's glory, varied glories; there is an infinitude of them. There is always scope for what is fresh. Do you think our desire should be that in listening to Christ, and having our eye upon Him, He might disclose something more that is fresh?

RG I do think that; if I were a member of the Church of England I would have the Book of Common Prayer, and I would have all the prayers and so on that I needed, but that is not living Christianity. I am not decrying what godly men have written. I leave that; what you are talking about is living Christianity which yields fresh impressions.

RWF It is very much what the apostle Paul was speaking about in 2 Corinthians, as occupied with the Lord, as “we ... are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the

Spirit", chap 3: 18.

RG If we really have an impression of what the glory of God is, it transforms us. It has been said that it is not a transient change. "From glory to glory ...": you do not go back from that. If something that is of God is planted in your heart by the Spirit it is forever.

PM The Lord Jesus said to the Father, "I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world", John 17: 24. The Spirit is opening on to our view the affections and relationships between divine Persons which we do not have a part in; we behold them, and they have a moral and spiritual effect on us.

RG We are not entering into what is imaginative; what we are saying is based on Scripture and is maintained by the Holy Spirit. When Moses alone had to do with God and became in a right sense familiar with Him, he said, "Let me, I pray thee, see thy glory", Exod 33: 18. That was an entirely right request. God had to say he would not see it fully, but it is right to desire to see glory.

CCDR Relationships to divine Persons are very wonderful. I was thinking of this reference, "Jesus answering"; do you think this is some communication from the Father which Jesus is answering? It struck me as it was read, "Jesus answering said, I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth". That was an answer to a communication which, although not written, is a communication between the Father and the Lord.

RG What you say is right; I believe the Lord was always in communion with His Father. I know that as Man it says, "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear", Isa 50: 4. That relationship as Man was taken up, but in John 8 He says, "I am not alone, but I and the Father ...", v 16. That is a very precious thing, and makes the matter of forsaking a very real matter.

We should look at John's gospel. We know the Holy Spirit had not come yet, but John the baptist had something to say about the Lord which was true. He says, "A man comes after me". It is remarkable here that we have the Lord spoken of, and the Holy Spirit. "I beheld the Spirit descending as a dove from heaven, and it abode upon Him". Whilst we maintain the distinctiveness of divine Persons as revealed, when we are thinking of One, the Others should not be far from our

minds; “all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell” (Col 1: 19) in Christ.

JAS We find one divine Person delights to call attention to another. There is the side that we are not to appear before them empty. Calling attention of One to the Other brings forth that which is deposited within us in freshness.

RG Yes, it does, and it is something to note too that divine Persons are scrupulously careful to observe the rights of each Other. The Lord spoke very carefully about His Father, what He had, and what His rights were. He does not overlook the fact of their equality. He does not set that aside but He speaks too of the Holy Spirit very carefully. It is something to observe, the preciousness of these relationships

PM Is it affecting that the Father spoke to John the baptist about the Spirit and about the Lord Jesus; “he who sent me to baptise with water, *he said to me*”?

RG Yes; it would impress us afresh with how much divine Persons are committed to this present dispensation. There is a revelation of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A suffering path was in view; all three divine Persons were working together in relation to it.

PM When we come to the Spirit's descending in Acts the Lord Jesus says, “whom the Father will send in my name”, John 14: 26. Divine Persons are working together, but here the Spirit is not said to be sent. It seems to be His own action; the Spirit descended. It is a wonderful distinction of Christ; the Spirit could not stay away.

RG The Spirit could not stay away. What we have here is divine affection working and working together. Have you any thought about John seeing the Spirit; “Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding on him”?

PM It says that “the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove”, Luke 3: 22. It is not as parted tongues as of fire, Acts 2: 3. I wondered if it was to give John an impression of the complacency of one divine Person with another, and complacency with a divine Person who was here in manhood.

RG It demonstrates clearly to us the place that the Holy Spirit had in the present economy. He was acting by Himself, acting in relation to Christ.

JAS Grace and activity are seen in divine Persons. The Spirit particularly in this matter moves in a way that John the baptist could apprehend.

RG Yes that is good; it is grace. Why should divine Persons condescend to show the arrangements that they have made in their relationships with one another? They do condescend to let us see these things, and this is one of the examples of divine Persons' relationships with one Another. It really is the fabric of Christianity.

TI Is it quite a thing if we can say, "behold"? The Lord has been revealed in a different way and the saints are freshly stimulated.

RG Do you think it is a bit like our own spiritual history; what comes to us does not come all at once. We are not fit for it, but things are revealed to us as we are led, on the line of faith and desire.

RWMcC I was thinking about what you said about divine Persons and what has been revealed. It is because it is in the heart of God to reveal it.

RG Things are revealed because it is in the heart of God to reveal them; I believe that is right. When Philip said, "shew us the Father and it suffices us. Jesus says to him, Am I so long a time with you, and thou hast not known me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father", John 14: 9. The revelation is full.

This passage in Numbers 21 was the scripture used to bring in rightly the teaching as to addressing the Holy Spirit. The truth was not recovered exactly; it was always there. We were recovered to it.

PM Is this view typically of the Spirit without necessarily emphasising His service. The word is,

Rise up, well! sing unto it.

I would like help as to response to the Spirit because of who He is. I often speak to Him because of what He does, but He is greater than what He does.

RG That is a helpful line of enquiry. I sometimes wonder if the expression which we have referred to as to bodily form is intended to give us an impression of the distinctiveness of the Person; He is a Person in His own right. I share your exercise that I would like to know more of Him particularly. It is Romans where Paul appeals to them,

“because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit”, chap 5: 5. It seems to be something that they recognised.

RWF Does the reference to the lawgiver help in that regard?

Well which princes digged, which the nobles of the people hollowed out at the word of the lawgiver.

We are accustomed to think of the Spirit making Christ known, but there seems to be a touch here that Christ would draw attention to the Spirit.

RG I would like help myself as to the way in which we reverence the Holy Spirit, and the place He has. He has His place in the service of God, and I am not suggesting that should be altered or adjusted. In one sense He is with us at every step. Say more about this:

Well which princes digged, which the nobles of the people hollowed out at the word of the lawgiver.

RWF In reading this passage my mind often goes to the labour of the apostles, particularly the apostle Paul, drawing attention one way or another, one point or another, to the Spirit. There is a suggestion of what has been secured in the time of recovery. You referred to that in the conflict as to response to the Spirit. The well is hollowed out; perhaps the earth had fallen in somewhat among brethren but there were those who were active in digging, and noble in their activities, who disclosed as a result of labour what was really there.

RG That is interesting -

nobles of the people hollowed out at the word of the lawgiver, with their **staves**.

That is not what we would choose normally as our means to hollow anything out or to dig a well. It seems to be something that was recovered as a matter of process.

RWF It is part of what we would call authoritative ministry.

RG Yes, it was much opposed. It has evidently been of God.

RWMcC It is the overcomer that hears what the Spirit says, Rev 3. Do you think that is involved in the hollowing out?

RG Yes, that helps. The authoritative movements of the Holy Spirit as in, “Separate me now Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 13: 2), were

mentioned yesterday. I have the feeling that the place the Spirit has with us is very important, in the light of the coming of the Lord and the place that the assembly has; “the Spirit and the bride say, Come”, Rev 22: 17. You cannot say there is equality, because the Spirit is a divine Person, but there is a certain equivalence there.

PEH Hollowing out normally refers to capacity; you hollow something out to bring about capacity. I wondered if in this setting the more we dig the greater access we have to that capacity.

RG I am sure you are right. It is interesting that in Galatians, where things are going so sadly wrong, one of the things the apostle insists on is making way for the Holy Spirit; “he that sows to the Spirit” (chap 6: 8); “let us walk also by the Spirit”, chap 5: 25. The activities of the Holy Spirit in a renewed way have to do with the recovery. It is not to displace the Lord at all. That could never be, but we should be more subject and sensitive.

PEH You point out that staves were not ideal implements for digging. Do you think we find that there are divine resources available so that the capacity that is seen in the Holy Spirit becomes more available to us?

RG That is a very current word; we do tend to turn to natural resources. Sowing to the Spirit and making way for the Spirit is a very healthy exercise.

PM This section is a little like Romans 8 because from here they look over from the top of Pisgah, and they journey now. The Spirit is leading, and has led, in the recovery. The whole scope of the purpose of God is on our view and we can have a backward look over the waste and see the way that God has brought us. We need the service of the Spirit to be able to do that rightly.

RG There was an effort to replace that leadership with a figurehead. I believe what the Lord has in mind is the leadership of the Spirit, what we speak of as inward leadership. I think we are getting to something of that now.

PM Yes, and we are at no disadvantage.

RG No, that is right. We cannot say we have no universal lead; we do: He is in heaven, and the Spirit is bringing to us what He says.

RWF We have spoken about capacity. There is capacity, and through labour, increased capacity, but it is to be filled, filled with the Spirit.

There is a reference in Ephesians: “be filled with the Spirit” (chap 5: 18), which we might almost think when we are younger is unreachable and unrealisable. In the divine view, to be filled with the Spirit is normal.

RG The Spirit of God has not put things in the Scripture to tell us about what is impossible. When we are together in assembly, particularly the Supper and the service of God, it is possible just to get a touch of being filled with the Spirit. The sphere of eternal life is enjoyed; these things are open to us.

Grimsby

12th July 2015

R W Flowerdew, Sunbury; H T Franklin, Grimsby; R Gray, Linlithgow;
P E Hogan, Grangemouth; P H Hutson, Grimsby; T Ikin, Manchester;
R W McClean, Grimsby; W McClean, Grimsby; D H Marshall,
Edinburgh; P Martin, Colchester; C C D Remmington, St Albans;
J A Shearer, Aberdeen; A G Smith, Sidcup; R D Wallace, Spaldwick;

BEHOLD THE MAN!

A Barrie Brown

John 19: 5, "Behold the man!"

Heaven's desire is that our hearts and minds should be directed, perhaps for the first time, to the Man who is the subject of the glad tidings. You may have sat under many preachings and many presentations of the Lord Jesus before. Have you beheld Him for yourself; have you seen Him with the eyes of faith, dear hearer? Then, for those of us who through divine mercy and grace have seen Him, have beheld Him before, there is a fresh opportunity to look at Him. We sang that earlier today:

Every view of Him unfolding,
Wakes fresh bursts of joyful praise. (Hymn 83)

Is that your portion? When you consider the Lord Jesus, is there an answering chord in your heart? This is a sobering section of Scripture. We need to leave these matters in finality with God, but it is of note that the speaker of these words which we can take on our lips and use in the glad tidings is one whom we would judge was not himself a saved person. How sobering that is that God was using such an instrument to bear testimony to His Son, the Man Christ Jesus in this scene.

I thought we might consider the Lord Jesus in three aspects: the Man as the subject, lowly, obedient One, as the suffering One, and as the glorified One. It has been said of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus, that He wins our heart with His humiliation - with His pathway here, His lowly pathway and His suffering - but He satisfies them with His glory (JBS vol 2 p23), and I think that would be a good outcome from the glad tidings that we were all satisfied. God is satisfied with Him; I had a distinct impression of that this morning, and it was carried through into the reading, thinking of what God finds in the Lord Jesus. That is a wonderful contemplation.

These three words that we have read have echoed down through this dispensation. No doubt there have been many other settings forth of the Saviour from these words, but their value needs to be current and living in your heart and in your soul as beholding the Man. In one of the incidents in the Old Testament of the journeys of the children of Israel they complained, and they did not do what was right, and God sent fiery serpents among them, and the people were being bitten, some were dying and some died. And the remedy was that God

said to Moses to make a fiery serpent, and Moses made a serpent of brass and lifted it up upon a pole, and he that looked lived, Num 21: 4-9. How stark that is. If we do not behold the Man, if we do not behold Him rightly, if we do not behold Him with the eyes of faith, and put in our claim on Him and His saving work, we are in a position of great peril. We sang about that in our hymn together:

Why will you risk the peril
Of lost eternity? (Hymn 220)

There are millions of people in this world who are risking the peril of lost eternity. What a sobering matter that is, when God's offer of free, full and eternal salvation is there. It says in one of the prophets, "Take with you words", Hos 14: 2. The very words that we need to say to be saved are given to us in the Scriptures: "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved", Rom 10: 9. The very words are given; yet people are risking the peril of lost eternity; what a sober matter that is. And these children of Israel, if they had not looked, would have perished, and some of them did. But in grace, that serpent was lifted up so it could be seen, it could be seen easily by all, and it would remind us that our Saviour was lifted up on the cross as a spectacle. What ignominy and shame there was there, but what grace that, as lifted up, the Saviour is blessedly available to all who feel their need. So I trust that there would be no one in this room tonight risking the peril of lost eternity, but that we would all be beholding that blessed One.

Well, consider Him as the obedient One, the subject One. What a moment the incoming of the Lord Jesus was for God. Psalm 14 says,

Jehovah looked down from the heavens upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God.

They have all gone aside, they are together become corrupt: there is none that doeth good, not even one.

What sober verses these are; how God felt that. We have read about the Man, and God's thoughts are primarily in relation to men; that would be the race of men: men and women, boys and girls. Yes, another scripture does tell us that "the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps 50: 10) are His. It is not that He does not care for the animal creation or the vegetable creation, but God's primary concern in this dispensation is as to men, to secure them for Himself; and therefore what grief it must

have been to God to see His creation, God's handiwork, going their own way. We have spoken about that serpent that was lifted up, and it is a very striking type, one of the most striking types there is in Scripture of the matter of sin. It takes us right back to the beginning; "from the beginning the devil sins", 1 John 3: 8. It speaks in Revelation about "the ancient serpent", chap 12: 9. Sin has been spoken of as the bite of the serpent, that poison of sin, that has affected every single person who has been born, save One and that is the Man that we are speaking about in the glad tidings. Sin manifests itself in different ways; yes, there is that in human nature which we would respect such as family affections or kindness, but naturally each one of us here has been affected by that bite of the serpent, and we have all been corrupted as it said in that psalm; we have all gone our own way. Psalm 53 says, "Every one of them is gone back": gone back from God's original thought, v 3. The idea of free will that is spoken about is not a right thought; any divergence from God's will is sin. It is not exactly that sin is transgression of the law because it was there before the transgression of the Mosaic law, but "sin is lawlessness", 1 John 3: 4. It is doing what I want to do in contravention of what God would have me to do: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the ways of death", Prov 14: 12. How sober that is. Although sin manifests itself in different ways, there is the answer to every sin in the glad tidings, in the work of the Lord Jesus. But what I would like to occupy you with just for a moment is not my sinful condition or your sinful condition, although you must acknowledge that. Those children of Israel who were feeling the bite of the serpent would have known quickly that they were under a malign influence. Are you like that? Have you been convicted in your own being, in your own mind, in your own conscience? That is very necessary. All men have sinned (Rom 5: 12), and it is good to put my name in there; it makes the gospel personal. In Psalm 51 David says, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned", v 4. We may have thought we have sinned against somebody else, our parents, brothers, sisters, whoever it may be, one or another, but David there acknowledged that he had sinned against God, he had "done what is evil in thy sight"; and then, I think this is really David coming to it, "that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, be clear when thou judgest". It is easy to judge other persons; Romans speaks about that: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, every one who judgest, for in that in which thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself", chap 2: 1. It is easy to judge sin in somebody else. Have I judged it in my heart?

Well, having said that, we love then to turn to another Man who has come in. God could look down, the Father could look down, on that Man, and have complacency, have rest in Him completely and fully. How momentous that is, dear friend, to consider that there is one Man, and that really is the story in the glad tidings. There are many people that could be considered, but they all pale away into insignificance when considering this Man, the Man Christ Jesus. Scripture speaks affectingly of Him as "the child Jesus" (Luke 2: 27), and too "the boy Jesus", v 43. Another has said, His humanity was perfectly natural in His development. Think of that; He came in, "come of woman" (Gal 4: 4), but deriving nothing morally from His mother. That poison that we have spoken about did not touch the Saviour. It had no point of attack in the Saviour; the One who we present as your Saviour offered no inlet or inroad to the matter of sin. How could it be? For the One who came in in Bethlehem's manger as a baby was none less than the eternal God. Does that affect your heart freshly? I seek that it would. The One who is being presented here - "Behold the man!" - was the One of whom another scripture says, "the world had its being through him, and the world knew him not", John 1: 10. Do you know Him? He came to His own, the Jewish race, and apart from that faithful remnant they did not receive Him. Oh! let none of us be like that; let each one of us receive the Lord Jesus, receive fresh impressions of Him - perhaps receive impressions for the first time. He is absolutely flawless. We often speak about the matter of delight, but perhaps we do not consider too much what it means. We perhaps use it in relation to things of the world but delight would simply mean absolute pleasure, and God had absolute pleasure in the Lord Jesus. Just think of that, think of all the ways that God could have chosen to come in to make His attributes known. Think of Him coming down on Mount Sinai in the old dispensation; if you read the description there it is terrifying, and you can understand why the children of Israel would have felt like that. The mount was all on fire. Did God come in like that in the Saviour? No, He came in as a lowly, subject, obedient Man. We are not entitled to our own will, but there was One that was, the Man Christ Jesus, but for the whole of His pathway here He was subject to the will of His God and Father. How beautiful that is: there was no chafing; perish the thought of that. There was no railing against it as there is with me at times. Another scripture to refer to would be in Psalm 1. The Man of Psalm 1 really describes what is on my heart in relation to the subject One, "But his delight is in Jehovah's law, and in his law doth he meditate day and

night", v 2. He is the Man; he does not walk "in the counsel of the wicked"; He does not stand "in the way of sinners"; He does not sit "in the seat of scorers", v 1. "For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous", v 6. Think of the Lord Jesus in the ordinary circumstances of life in Nazareth, and then perhaps in Capernaum, moving about, perfect in everything that He did. What a consideration, those hidden years that Scripture is largely silent about; but the eye of the Father saw all. What a consideration!

That is the lowly, subject, obedient Man: food for our souls indeed but, being careful and reverent in what we say, there needed to be more than that perfect life. That life had to be laid down, the only life that was not forfeited. My life and yours are forfeited as a result of sin, but the Saviour had no need to die for anything in Himself, surely not. Pilate indeed says that; how affecting it is! The baying of the crowds here just after we read was, "Crucify, crucify him", v 6. But Pilate says, "I find no fault in him". And that was a further testimony, no doubt put there by God, but yet if I were to be freed from sin, be free to come into God's presence, it required that Man to lay down His life. "For God is one, and the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus", 1 Tim 2: 5. The work that the Saviour has accomplished on Calvary's cross as the Sin-bearer is available for you, and I would just ask you then, behold Him there. Was He there in your place? I can say He was in my place; He hung there for me. Do you know Him as the One who hung there for you? Can you say that for yourself? You cannot say it for anybody else, and others cannot say it for you. You must behold Him, behold Him there in your place. God has been propitiated and glorified in relation to the matter of sin, fully and eternally. There is a "Behold" earlier in John's gospel, "Behold the Lamb of God", behold that One, "who takes away the sin of the world", chap 1: 29. God has been absolutely satisfied with the work of the Lord Jesus. Another psalm, just to touch on, says,

Loving-kindness and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other, Ps 85: 10.

Where was that? I think that was on the cross. It has been said that the matter of glory is the conciliation of God's nature with His attributes. I do not profess to understand that in fulness at all, but I know this, that I could not have stood before a holy God were it not for the work of the Saviour. Therefore, think of the glory of the cross. Outwardly what was seen were three persons hanging on three crosses; but the Man in the

middle, I trust He is your Saviour. Think of that, the thief, the malefactor, the one who was suffering justly for what he had done said, "this man has done nothing amiss", Luke 23: 41. Are these words in your mouth? Have you come to it that the lowly, subject Jesus was there not on His own account but on your account? I commend Him to you, the suffering One, the One who "suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God", 1 Pet 3: 18. Has He brought you to God? Do you want to be brought to God? That would be a question. Are you content to go on your own way? I trust that nobody here would be like that for

Why will you risk the peril
Of lost eternity?

I would point you to Jesus, the One who has fully, and in one momentous event, taken the righteous judgment of God that was due to me. Another scripture in the prophets says that God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab 1: 13), but "Him who knew not sin", God "has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him", 2 Cor 5: 21. How full the Scriptures are with references to the Lord Jesus on the cross; the Scriptures testify of Jesus, but while it is very good to know the Scriptures it is better to know the Man, the Man of the Scriptures. We know Him through the Scriptures; so, "Behold the man" there in your place who suffered in darkness on Calvary's tree, who shed His blood that your sins may be washed away. Well, friend, behold Him there.

Repentance too, has been described as taking God's side against myself, and I think as we repent, as we come to it that the Saviour is flawless and sinless and I am anything but, we really get God's view: what a fine thing it is to have God's view of the Saviour. Do you have that, dear friend? You might ask, "How could I possibly have God's view of the Saviour?". Well, He would love to share that with you. That is one of the many wonderful things that marks God's world, the area of relationships that we have been brought into called Christianity that it is marked by sharing. The world is not marked by sharing. If I have something naturally, and I give it away, I am at a loss but the matter of sharing is prevalent in Christianity. How beautiful that is, the matter of co-heirs comes in, inheritance with Christ. That is open to you as beholding the Man.

Well, I trust you beheld Jesus by faith as the lowly, subject One; I trust your heart has been drawn to Him; I trust your heart has been affected by the suffering One. Again, another of the prophets says, "his

visage was so marred more than any man", Isa 52: 14. That is what this world did to Him, and this world is still the same, and although He has gone on high, His suffering over, His name is still traduced in this world. This world is still the same as it was when they said here, "Crucify, crucify him". If the princes of this age had known "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory", 1 Cor 2: 8. Perhaps that is some reference to Pilate, but one of the wonderful facts of the glad tidings is that, even that terrible sin was treated as a sin of ignorance; Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34. What a Man we have to deal with in the glad tidings, who after the worst treatment that could be meted out to anyone; as another scripture says, He "made intercession for the transgressors", Isa 53: 12. May each one of us know what it is to behold the Man, to know the Man, to look at Him, to live.

But then, I wish to consider Him as the Man in the glory; are you beholding Him there? We said at the outset that He would win our hearts, win our trust, win our confidence in His humiliation, in His lowliness, in His suffering. In a sense we never leave that; the emblems were on the table this morning, and they remained on the table throughout the service. The matter of glory is a wonderful thing; it is a satisfying thing: it is a moral thought. The glory of this world is largely taken up with what is material, what is showy, and what is outward. I suppose we are all drawn to that naturally to a certain degree; the glory that is in the Lord Jesus in His present position would indeed eclipse that. The sun in its shining would outshine any other light, and the Lord Jesus would desire that your affections, your life, would be drawn to Him where He is in the glory; so are you beholding Him there? You say, "How can I do that? I cannot see Him with my natural eyes". One scripture says, "we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour", Heb 2: 9. How do we do that? I think that is by the blessed Holy Spirit. What a Person He is. A brother was helping us recently as to John 16, "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you", v 14. That is a present service of the Holy Spirit. I think it is a divine committal: it is an ongoing matter. Do you know what it is to receive current impressions of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit for, as we have been told since we were young, the heart of a Man beats in heaven, the Man that went back in?

Received in glory bright up there,
The Father's greetings, honours rare,
Are heaped upon His Son's blest brow;

He is the mighty Victor now. (Hymn 350)

The Holy Spirit would seek to engage your heart with Him, to draw us away from this scene. The sealing of the Holy Spirit for the day to come is one matter, but the Holy Spirit's service is constant, it is real, it is powerful, it is vital. And He would unfailingly seek to occupy you with the Saviour. So we can almost take these words and move Pilate to the background and say, and I think the Holy Spirit too, speaking reverently, would be saying the same thing: He would be saying, "Behold the man!". There is no other man who is worthy of your affections. The end in the gospel would be this that persons are saved, secured for eternity; but then they are set up here as indwelt by the Holy Spirit, working out their own salvation, and also giving glory to God. What a triumph it is then for God that in this scene where His beloved Son was crucified, at the "place of a skull", there are those who are beholding the Man. They are committed to the Man, and love the Man. They compose His assembly which is soon to be taken to be with Christ, and then, we will see Him face to face. We behold Him through the eyes of faith at the moment, but those of us who are saved will hear first the assembling shout. But when I think those of us who believe and trust in the Saviour, who have beheld Him as the subject, lowly One, as the suffering One, as the glorified One, I do not think there will be any need for anyone to point out Jesus to us in those courts above. Think of that moment when we see our Saviour face to face for the first time!

"Behold the man"; come to Him for yourself, dear friend, believe in Him, trust in Him. For, in closing, the responsibility in the preaching is this:

Why will you risk the peril
Of lost eternity?

Think of all that is in God's favour for you, the door of mercy is open; we cannot say it will be open much longer. God has kept the door of mercy open until now, through His wonderful, marvellous, condescending, grace; to needy sinners like me and you. Avail yourself of the opportunity tonight, "Behold the man", know Him for yourself, trust in Him for time and for eternity, for His Name's sake.

Grangemouth

25th January 2015

“WHAT YE HAVE HOLD FAST”

D Andrew Burr

Rev 2: 24 (from “I do ...”), 25

We sometimes speak of these chapters, 2 and 3, as if they comprise a series of seven letters. In fact, the Lord makes clear that that is not His intention: these addresses to the assemblies are part of the content of a single book which was to be sent to the seven churches in Asia; and the result of that would of course have been that they would have learned not only of the address to themselves, but they would also have read the addresses to the other six. I wonder if anybody might have been prompted by something that was said to one of the other assemblies, as well as seeking to be exercised by what the Lord had addressed to themselves. And, if I apply this verse in speaking about all seven of these assemblies, I think that would be a legitimate thing to do.

We do not know who took this book from Patmos, where John was and where this book was written. They would have sailed from Patmos to the then port of Ephesus, and then proceeded from one place to another - as it happens, the logical order is the order in which the seven addresses are given. Each of these places is neighbouring to the one before. They would have passed by other places where there had once been assemblies - Hierapolis and Colosse now in ruins; Laodicea rebuilt from the ruins of the same earthquake. It would have been a sober journey to make, because the messenger might well be aware of what Paul had said to Timothy about these very places; “Thou knowest this, that all who are in Asia ... have turned away from me”, 2 Tim 1: 15. And perhaps they would have gone back further in their minds and remembered when Paul began to minister in Ephesus. It says in relation to that time of service that “all that inhabited Asia heard the word of the Lord”, Acts 19: 10. In other words, others in slightly earlier times had taken this same route, not now with the solemn content of *this* book, but with the precious truth of the word of God, establishing assemblies in all the cities of that province of Asia. And now I think the brethren who received these letters would have to ask themselves, in the light of what I have read, what is it that we have and how are we to hold it fast? I wonder if we might think about that question and use what the Lord speaks of to these churches which had turned away from Paul to prompt our own thoughts about what it is that we have, and whether we have the desire and indeed the affection to

hold it fast.

It is interesting that the Lord should begin what are now these two chapters by speaking of what He Himself has. It says He “holds the seven stars in his right hand”, Rev 2: 1. It should be a great comfort to us all that, in whatever circumstances local assemblies may be found, all is in the hand of the Lord. I am glad that it is so. There is a sense in which things have been committed to our responsibility, as we shall see, but the Lord holds things in His hand, the right hand of power. Without this, all would be lost, nothing could ever be recovered, nothing could ever be safe: all would be at the mercy of heresy, and opinion, and a party spirit, and all these things; but He holds the assemblies in His right hand. It might seem that some are ready to fall, that one or two might be dropped; but He presents Himself as holding to the full thought, the seven stars in His right hand.

There are things to notice that He says to all the assemblies. He speaks to them all of His coming, as we shall perhaps see; but He also says, “I know”. And that is a precious comfort to me too; it has been a stay to my soul in times of difficulty. One might turn to the Lord in prayer, and one might think one has to tell Him a lot of worries; and these two words are His answer - “I know”. So, He holds the seven stars in His right hand, and *He knows*. He knows things I will never know; He knows what is transpiring in the hearts of His people, He knows *why* things are happening, and He knows how they might be resolved.

I am not now speaking of what the Lord knows in Ephesus; I want to speak about what they *had*: let us just consider what He says that Ephesus has. What the Lord speaks of in Ephesus is a lamp, a candlestick. This lampstand in Ephesus is really rather remarkable. We could deduce from what the Lord says that each of the churches had a lamp, but He speaks of the lamp in Ephesus. He speaks of the lamp in the gospels too, and in that connection he refers to a city set on the top of a mountain (Matt 5: 14, 15); and Ephesus had been like a lamp on the top of a mountain. There was something about the early church - what is recorded of the assembly in Ephesus speaks to us of the public testimony that there was at that time in the assembly. As I have already quoted, “all that inhabited Asia heard the word of the Lord”. Think of that: “a city situated on the top of a mountain”. Think too of the power in which that testimony was being held forth: even the civil authorities were afraid of the power that there was in the church; the

Jews were forced on to the defensive by the power and glory of what was shining out in the church. The power of Satan itself was forced to yield. Think of that remarkable occasion in Ephesus, a public occasion, when they brought all these books of magic charms and burned them, Acts 19: 19. Why? It was a response to what was shining in this lamp. And now the Lord says He would take the lamp out of its place.

What had happened, and *how quickly had it happened*? I think it has been calculated that Paul's letter to Ephesus was written within some five years of his two years of ministry there. You read that letter and you might be astonished at the apparent spiritual progress that the company had made. By the time he writes his second letter to Timothy, which I think was about another five years later, "all who are in Asia ... have turned away". Some say that John wrote this book at about the same time as that epistle, and they had left their first love, Rev 2: 4. As Paul said to the Galatians, "I wonder that ye thus quickly change", Gal 1: 6. What had happened in Ephesus? Well, we know that Paul told them what was going to happen: men among the elderhood in Ephesus, people to whom he spoke in that interview in Miletus, became "grievous wolves" and they drew away the disciples after *themselves*, Acts 20: 29, 30. Their object was to make themselves a focus and not the Lord Jesus Himself. And what was lost was love - first love. Paul speaks of "holding the truth in love" (Eph 4: 15), and that is what had been lost in Ephesus. It has been said that first love was *His* love for them - my impression is that it is reciprocal; and now others were claiming the affections of the brethren in Ephesus. And as a result, their own love for Christ was waning; and what the Lord says here is that it is not possible to hold the public testimony without love for Christ; and if you want to hold that profession without reality, then judgment will come.

Now, it has also been observed that there is a contrast between what the Lord says to Ephesus here, and what Paul says to Thessalonica. To Thessalonica, Paul speaks of, "your work of faith, and labour of love, and enduring constancy of hope", 1 Thess 1: 3. We see in Revelation 2: 2 that the things in Ephesus that related to their profession, their work and activity remained "thy works and thy labour, and thine endurance"; but the spiritual context for them - faith, hope, love - had gone; the thing had become, as it were, a shell. And the Lord is not willing for something like that any more to be the vessel of public testimony: the lamp is taken out of its place. How solemn that is! We can think of the Christian testimony in the time in which we are. You

may say this is a Christian country, or that we live in a Christian civilisation, and so on; but the church, as a public profession, is not now capable of performing as we read of it in the Scriptures, with the power and glory of a heart held by love for Christ; that public shining, and influence, and glory, gone. It will not be reinstated publicly before the Lord comes.

It is in God's ways that vessels of testimony that have been taken up fail. It is not God's way to reinstate them publicly; and failure in responsibility does not remove that responsibility. More precious still, however, it does not take away what the Lord Jesus Himself has won for us. That is a very precious thing, and it is true, beloved, for you personally. You might have to regret that there are ways in which you have failed in your responsibility; but the place that is promised you with Christ is secure. And why is that? It does not rest on what you may do; it rests on what He has done. How wonderful that is! What a comfort, whenever we feel we have failed, or whenever we think about failure in whatever setting it might be, that nothing can change what He has done, because it is finished. And it is very interesting that, when He speaks to the overcomers in these seven assemblies, what He promises them are things *He has*, which He can give to an overcomer as a gift. The tree of life, the crown of life, the white robe, the white stone; a place in the city of my God, my throne: they are things that belong to Him, and they remain in His gift even though we may have failed in the public profession.

Smyrna is an interesting answer to what is lost in Ephesus. They do not appear to have anything, and they are under pressure and under attack, but the Lord makes a wonderful promise of "the crown of life", v 10. Who receives the crown of life? The Lord promises it to those who are faithful, but there is another answer to that question in Scripture. James says that God has promised the crown of life "to them who love him", Jas 1: 12. The very thing that had failed in Ephesus is found still in this assembly in Smyrna. How wonderful to think of that! I can prove that it is something they had by pointing to the reward they were going to receive; because that reward is promised to people who love Him. And therefore - although he does not speak of it - that feature must have remained in Smyrna, even though the Lord speaks of what had been left by Ephesus.

Now, when we come to Pergamos, He says, "thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith", Rev 2: 13. How thankful we

can be that things like that have been preserved. It is right and very easy to speak about the failure and mixture that has come into the Christian profession, but it *is* still a Christian profession; the name of Christ is still here. There are people who hold it - there are many of them and we can thank God for them, people who hold the name of Christ. Then as to holding fast the faith: think of the way that the Scriptures have been preserved to us. Look at the history of darkness, and heresy, and politics, and all kinds of corruption that have come into the history, and yet we have the Scriptures in their purity, the Holy Scriptures; and especially we have the New Testament. It has been preserved in spite of all that. It might be said that the Scriptures were preserved by closing them, and denying the laity the access to them that we enjoy. That may be so, but the Bible *was* preserved and we have it now, and we can learn from it, be guided by it as I trust we are this afternoon.

And then He comes to Thyatira, and it is where I read; but I want to draw attention to the point that I just made. I remember it being pointed out to us in London that there is only one assembly whose present love for Christ is expressly mentioned. You might say it must be Philadelphia, but it is not; it is Thyatira. We often compare Thyatira to the Roman church; the state of darkness there is very grievous: the woman Jezebel is permitted, and all this false line is gaining dominance to the point where overcomers have to keep things going in spite of the state of things in the church, and yet love for Christ was there. He knew it: He says, "I know ... thy love", Rev 2: 19. I do not want to be sentimental about these things, but there is something precious, there is something that is carried through; there is something that companies with more responsibility have failed in; but there in the midst of all this darkness and confusion that has rolled over the history of the church, there is still love for Christ. And it needs to be held, it needs to be held fast, beloved. It is not an option. It is love for Christ that makes us faithful. It is love for Christ that produces loyalty to His interests. It is love for Christ that seeks to preserve a pure and sanctified place to which He can come. These things depend on the heart we have for Christ. We used to hear it said as to the open division that there was heartlessness as to Christ. What a painful thing it is if we ever have to acknowledge that something that made itself its object, and tolerated things for which He died, was ever allowed in the circle in which He Himself walks, as He describes in this section.

I come to another point when He speaks to Sardis. I am not

going into the detail of what we have been taught about these assemblies, but He says to Sardis, "Remember therefore **how** thou hast received and heard", Rev 3: 3. That is what they had: they had what they had heard, and they had what they had received; and I hardly need to ask, beloved brethren, how much have we received? It is not only what we have in this precious book, the Holy Scriptures, but think of the teaching that we have received as to it. Think of the way that the service of God has been unfolded and entered into by us; think of the way that the truth and the glory of it has been delivered to us. I make no claim in saying that; I am pressing things on our responsibility rather. Think what we have received: the glorious truth that the Lord Jesus does have a body here, that that body is separate from the world around us; that He is coming - as He says here; that the Holy Spirit has come and can be received; that He should have liberty in the church to unfold divine truth; the glorious truth as to eternal life and the basis of our relationships with God and with one another. The truth is all to be worked out, and can be practically experienced in the Christian circle in which we have found our fellowship together. All these are spiritual blessings, and the Lord tells Sardis to think *how* they had received them. Some of us are old enough to remember the kind of people who taught us these things, their faithfulness, and their sobriety, and their diligence in relation to the Lord's claims and His rights in their local meeting; their readiness to stand *for* Him, and *against* things that would claim His place. And we received things from them, and we received things through them from the Lord. And we need to remember that. It pains me greatly to hear claims that these things are tradition - indeed, out-dated tradition. How wrong to say such a thing: *how* did you receive them? I did not receive them as a tradition, and I cannot imagine that what I received will *ever* be out-dated. Beloved, what a privilege it is to be the recipients of *anything* that the Lord should have given in such a way. And it has not simply come to us in books: the Lord tells them to remember what they had *heard*. We live in a wonderful time of recovery in which different ones - diverse gifts - have ministered the truth in our hearing, and set it out to us in a living way; and we let it go at our enormous loss. The Lord says, "what ye have hold fast".

And then we are familiar with what He says to Philadelphia; He says, "hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown", Rev 3: 11. It is not the crown of life; that is something different. We have more than one crown - there is a crown of righteousness as well - but let "no one take thy crown". Mr Stoney said in relation to the crown that it is the

highest thing you have got. He used to speak of the way, when a frost comes, it is the top shoots that go, vol 1 p290. You might say this is what had happened in Ephesus: the top shoots had gone. You can see the effect on the plant as a whole, its growth and development, its shape and appearance. All these things are affected by letting the highest thing we have go. How easy it is to accommodate ourselves to something lower down. It seems easier, there is less exercise, there is less difficulty, there is less challenge, there is less opposition. The Lord says, 'Do not let it go'; "that no one take thy crown".

You need to have energy, you need to have a measure of power, if you are going to hold something fast. One kind of person who loses things for not holding them fast is a person who goes to sleep; but you might lose it also, though awake, because you have allowed weakness. And the weakness comes, I believe, from neglecting our relationships with the Lord Jesus and with the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus would revive us in these things, so that precious things we have should not roll away from us.

I come finally to Laodicea, and it has struck me how Laodicea is in many ways different from the other six. The first thing that makes a difference is this, that, to the other six churches, the Lord speaks of His coming as future; but in Laodicea He has already come. And, although there are things to judge, He has not come for judgment. He says, "I am about" to do that. That is a great comfort because it might be thought that things have already passed under the judgment of the Lord, and we live now in a time when that judgment is being executed, but that is not so; the judgment is still to come. But the Lord is present; unhappily, He is present but outside. And that is something we need to reflect upon: the Lord is not presenting His coming as future but He is using the fact of His coming to test what entrance He has into the local assembly. We were reading in the gospel the other day and the Lord says, "And if he come in the second watch, **and** come in the third watch" (Luke 12: 38) - not 'or', "and". He might come in relation to any matter, and the question is whether the door is open for Him to come in.

Another thing that is different is that the Lord does not commend anything in Laodicea; and He does not say that there is anything that they have. In fact, the problem in Laodicea was that what they imagined they had was of no value to them. He counselled them to buy; they did not have what they needed - a solemn position, the climax of the course of departure traced in these addresses. But He still appeals

to “any one”; and I think the precious thing is that what He promises to any one who opens the door is nothing less than He would have promised to someone in the brightest, happiest day in the church's history. There is no greater privilege than what He offers to Laodicea. Of course, when it comes to the public and responsible side, He does not give the overcomer anything to do - while judgment is being exercised, they sit; but in relation to the precious inward and spiritual side, the blessing He promises remains. I am again reminded of a word of Mr Stoney's when Peter in Luke 18 tells the Lord, “we have left all, and followed thee”, v 28. He asks, ‘And what had He given them? Nothing but His company!’, vol 1 p42; And here it is promised to this person who opens the door in Laodicea: *His company*: “I will ... sup with him, and he with me”, Rev 3: 20. What a precious thing that is, and there it is in the Lord's gift as freely available as if no failure had ever occurred.

I just close on this note. It would be tempting to say that all this is individual, that we do not have to come to the meeting to get this; we could stay at home and all this would be ours: this is a promise I could enjoy in my own front room. I venture to say that it would be a travesty to interpret the Lord's word in that way. It has become a habit with me to associate Revelation 3: 20 with other scriptures. So, for example, the Lord says in Matthew 18, “where two or three are gathered together unto my name”, v 20. The “any one” is not just an individual but - albeit in a small number - one of like-minded individuals. I think of persons in 2 Timothy 2 who open the door for the Lord Jesus; it says, “pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace **with those** that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart”, v 22. The foundation is personal; it must be; everyone has to come into this on their own exercise and responsibility. But the Lord is not proposing here something private and exclusive, as if fellowship rightly held is no longer possible or necessary, in which the precious portion proposed in Scripture within the Christian circle has in some way given place to something else.

And the closing point I want to make is that all these wonderful, precious things, the things we share, the things we have, the things the Lord gives us, the things we have heard; all those things - the crown and all that goes with it - we enjoy now in the Christian circle. Beloved, we compromise it to our immense loss: the Christian circle is the most precious thing that exists here on earth. All around is a world of evil, under the domination of the ruler of this world; and in that world itself, God Himself has created a circle to which the Lord can come and bring

all these precious gifts. And we have a spiritual relationship with each other which makes the enjoyment of those things a reality.

May He bless the word.

Grimsby

7th February 2015