

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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Psalm 23

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PJM I would be glad of help as we enquire, and I trust that our time together will be contemplative. The exercise in reading Psalm 23 is to look into the nature of this psalm. Now Psalm 23 is probably the most famous psalm in the world. "Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want." Some of us were taught it at school; if one wants comfort and to be lifted up in one's spirit then Psalm 23 is an excellent psalm to go to, because we can all put ourselves into it, *if we know God, if we know the Shepherd*. But Psalm 23 fits in between Psalm 22 and Psalm 24; and both of those psalms have distinct prophetic credentials and refer to the coming Messiah. Psalm 22 refers to the Lord's suffering. It gives us a view of what went on in the life of the Lord Jesus at the time of His intense suffering and should be familiar to every believer. Psalm 24 gives us a glimpse of His millennial glory, and the question is asked, "Who is this King of glory?", v 8. Of course we know the King of glory is the Lord Jesus. So what about Psalm 23? And, of course, Psalm 23 is also prophetic. The psalm can be considered at different levels. When it was written, David was describing his experiences under the hand of God, he was describing what God was to him day by day; "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want" was really a declaration of faith in Jehovah his God. And he speaks of his soul being restored and so on. But the passage is also speaking on a prophetic level about the relationship of the Father and the Son. That I believe is its prophetic interpretation. The Lord Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God. And I trust we will get help to ponder the fact that in that life He proved some of the very things that David experienced. For us, the Lord Jesus is the Shepherd, "the great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb 13: 20), the Shepherd who dealt with all the threats that came against His own, even to the laying down of His own life. He dealt with everything so effectually and completely, He became our Deliverer. But in His humanity, as a Man here, blessedly divine as He was, He came into a relationship with His God and Father which is reflected in this expression, "Jehovah is my shepherd". The Lord Jesus gave up so much as He humbled Himself to come into this relationship, and He set us a very precious example. The wonderful thing is that David, as seen

in this psalm, has a Shepherd before he himself becomes a shepherd. The Lord Jesus lived a life, a hidden life, with His Father for thirty years before He came out in public ministry. And we cannot look into that time in any detail, we do not know very much about it, but we *do* know that “Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men” (Luke 2: 52); and that He grew “up before him as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground”, Isa 53: 2. He derived nothing from the system of the world into which He had come but lived an infinitely precious life with His God and Father from whom He derived everything. At the end of that private time there is a public declaration as to the glory of Jesus. “This is my beloved Son”, Matt 3: 17. And John the baptist helps to focus our eyes on Him as the Lamb. On the one hand he speaks of Him as the “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”, John 1: 29. But then, perhaps even more profoundly, he simply points Him out as the “Lamb of God”, v 36.

Now one thing we need to say, quickly, is that Jesus was not a sheep. We tend to think of a sheep as something that is mindless, not knowing how to look after itself. It needs care, it needs provision, it needs everything. You cannot leave a sheep to fend for itself. A dog would get by, but a sheep needs care. The Lord Jesus never ceased to be God, but He comes into a relationship at which we can but wonder. I think David's experiences encapsulated in Psalm 23 are seen in the gospels as well. In the gospels we perhaps see how some of these details are worked out. In fact I wondered if we would just refer to the passages as they come into our enquiry, or as the Spirit led, but we have read a number of passages which perhaps brethren can consider as to whether they fit into Psalm 23. But we have to be careful in our considerations and what we say, because of His Person, and the special nature of His relationship with His God and Father and I trust nothing will reduce that in our minds.

MC Would the reality of His humanity into which He came help us in that consideration then? He was One who was perfect and complete before God.

PJM Yes. He was perfect and complete, and coming into this place under the eye of God, there are things that He receives from God: instruction, guidance, things that He learnt which were not appropriate to Him until this time. And in His relationship as a Man here, under the daily guidance of a Father whom He loved, we see that He has joy, and at times I believe what caused Him to wonder. The daily provision of

His God and Father causes Him to respond with praise. He proves in His life that His Father is able to provide for every exigency, at every turn of His pathway. And some of those times were not easy. There were valleys, the shadows, the enemies and there were many threats. But His trust and confidence was in His God and Father.

MC I am always struck in considering the Lord's life how much He resorted to the Mount of Olives, and His resource was in His Father.

PJM Yes. There were secret times there that nobody else was aware of. It was His habit to spend time alone with his Father.

RT It says He “emptied himself, taking a bondman's form”, Phil 2: 7. Does that underlie what is in your mind?

PJM Yes, exactly. In a bondman's form, as you say; He never ceased to be who He was intrinsically, but He was found here “in figure as a man”. But in that figure He perfectly demonstrated for us how someone in relationship with God as Shepherd should be, subject and receiving guidance, protection and provision. If we are to take up Psalm 23, He has left us a Model. His life has been set out for us in its public order, but also how He was subject to that Shepherd's leading.

RG When He was about twelve years of age He said, “did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?”, Luke 2: 49. We know that He asked the teachers questions and so on, spoke to them, but all the time He was in communion with His Father.

PJM Yes, and what a relationship that was, was it not? He could say at one time, “thou always hearest me”, John 11: 42. And He would see something happen as part of the Father's acting, and then He was caused to respond. “I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to babes”, Luke 10: 21. I think that every day for the Lord Jesus was a matter of wonder as He saw what the Father had been doing. It would seem that His guidance for each day was received in the morning: “He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed” (Isa 50: 4); and some of these passages we have read were thus in the Father's ordering. In John 4 where we read, Jesus comes to Sychar; the Father has sent Him there at some cost to Himself physically and the woman comes out of the city, and I think it suggests what we have in Psalm 23, “Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want”. He was weary. He was weary with the way He had

come, and the Father was going to provide for Him. As a boy in the temple, He is seen sitting in the midst of the intelligentsia of His day, the clever doctors of the law, but He was not worried. His parents had gone off without Him. Humanly speaking you would expect Him to be distraught, but He was not, because He was occupied in his Father's business; and His Father would provide for His every need. Now we speak of these things, but the Lord experienced them. I believe His object for each one of us is to help us to surrender to the Shepherd. "For ye were going astray as sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls", 1 Pet 2: 25.

RG It says, "though he were Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered", Heb 5: 8. It is remarkable, that the Lord should go that way. He never had to learn to be obedient, but He came into this condition in which we are, so that He might in every step of the path know the direction and the care of the Father. And that is for us too, is it?

PJM I think so; if we can be contemplative of the life of the Lord Jesus it will help us in our own lives. At the end of the thirty hidden years the voice from heaven is heard; the Father acknowledges what was there that had already been so pleasurable to Him in the dependent life of the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit descends as a dove and abides upon Him. It was His anointing.

JCG The Lord's pathway was marked by grace and love, which is suggested do you think in, "Surely, goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of my life", but is it underpinned by being led "in paths of righteousness for his name's sake"? The Lord provided the perfect blend in that sense, do you think?

PJM Yes, and for us there is often a tension between those two aspects. It is as if to ask us, which way we are going - the path of righteousness or of grace. With Him you see the perfection of His manhood, and the perfection of the way that He represented the Father. At the end He could say, "He that has seen me has seen the Father", John 14: 9. There was no divergence from the way that the Father would have been and what the Father would have said in the circumstances, or would have done. In fact the Lord was giving efficacy and effect to what the Father wanted done.

TWL Is this what is said in the beginning of John, "we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father",

chap 1: 14? It is descriptive of the relationship and does that underlie this as well, what is descriptive of the relationship?

PJM Yes, indeed. John had had time to think about it, had he not? And he brings it in early in his gospel and it is as though he is struggling for words to describe that relationship. 'How do I describe it? It is "**as** of an only-begotten with a father" - it is presented as a simile; the relationship itself is infinitely profound. But John is contemplative there, is he not? "Full of grace and truth". Wonderful! And you think of John the baptist as he sees Jesus walking. He did not see the Father, but the Father was there. He says, "Behold the Lamb of God".

PAG Is it your thought, then, that the Lord is really as man exemplary in suffering and in dependence and in obedience? That is how He is a Model for us.

PJM Yes, He is the Exemplar. David was also an exemplar in his life, but a flawed one. When you read some of the things that he writes, you say, 'Well, David, how could you write that? How can you be empowered to say those sorts of things? Look at your life'. But he is speaking prophetically of Someone who was greater than he was - "Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand", Ps 110: 1. David understood the coming of the Messiah. He understood that One was coming out of his stock that was greater than he. And you can lose yourselves in these Psalms if you see beyond David, see beyond his failings; because he is writing about the Lord Jesus. The Lord could say, "and they it is which bear witness concerning me", John 5: 39.

JSp I was thinking a little of the line of the hymn,

In Thee all human graces blend,

And to Thy Father did ascend

As incense rare.

(Hymn 313)

A true burnt offering, was He not?

PJM Yes, very good. What fragrance! What a fragrance for God. God would draw our attention to it, would He not? He does in His utterances. Think of those men on the mount of transfiguration, and the Father is speaking again, and He is drawing attention to Jesus, "*This* is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: hear him", Matt 17: 5. God is saying as it were, 'Focus on Him; listen to His words'. I was looking today at a Bible where all the utterances, the words of Jesus in the gospels, are in red. And I quite like the idea, I must confess;

suddenly those special words leap out at you. Sometimes we take particular notice of the utterances of important people. There is no one more important than the Lord Jesus. Paul is aware of this when he quotes that the Lord Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive", Acts 20: 35. Do we take notice of the Lord's words? And do we take notice of the Father's words, words of deep appreciation, as He distinguishes His Son above all others? Moses and Elias may be very impressive, but there is Somebody greater present.

JAB When Isaiah wrote of Him prophetically in chapter 53, he said, "as a lamb" (v 7), but John the baptist got a divine touch, "Behold the Lamb of God". Could you say something about that title of the Lord Jesus, "the Lamb of God", because it is a title, and John was given that touch just for that moment, was he not?

PJM I would like to learn more myself about the Lamb of God. There is what He was going to do sacrificially and John had already alluded to that. As such He takes away the sin of the world. And the thought of the Lamb in the Scriptures, generally, is sacrificial. It begins early with Abel's offering, and then we see in Exodus that if a captive people were to escape the land of Egypt, the yearling lamb was to be slaughtered in the house and its blood was to be put on the doorpost and the lintel. We understand the sacrificial nature of the lamb. Ultimately, horrifically, that had to happen to Jesus, the One who was so unique, so special. The simple title 'Lamb of God', perhaps also shows the beauty and flawless nature of His walk with God over and above what He would accomplish. In Psalm 23, the thought of the shepherd, suggesting the Lord's relationship with his Father in that way, is softer, is it not? But on the cross the cry goes out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt 27: 46.

RT Is it linked with what Abraham said, "God will provide himself the sheep"? He was the Lamb of God providing alone what could meet these things?

PJM Yes, exactly. "My son, God will provide himself with the sheep for a burnt-offering", Gen 22: 8. How wonderful! "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the sheep for a burnt-offering?" v 7. For the time being that boy was the sheep. There was no substitute apparent until the moment that his father stretches out his hand with the knife. But Abraham had understood God would provide Himself with a lamb. *And He did.*

JCG Do you think that we contemplate Christ in that sense as the Lamb of God when we partake of the Lord's supper every week? Well, the emblems are there on the table, and it is an opportunity for contemplation. I know that someone has to give thanks, and that is good, but in the intervals, it has been suggested in ministry, as the bread and the cup go around, each one participating, there is a time for contemplation. It is not for vacant minds?

PJM Well, it is significant that we are not left much by way of physical things in Christianity. There is no temple; there is no altar. The offering that has been made has been made "once for all", Heb 7: 27. So the Lord graciously gives us the emblems. He gives us the loaf and He gives us the cup. And He says: "Take this: this is my body", Mark 14: 22. And what a precious thing that we actually have something physical that concentrates the mind. We have an opportunity for our minds to focus in contemplation on what we have been given, and its deeper significance and meaning: the Lord's body, reminding us of His perfect life and His death; and His blood speaking to us of His love and what He gave up. So if we do nothing else perhaps we can remember Psalm 23 as we sit there. It is as though the Lord is saying, 'Do not forget my life'. And, as has been said, it is not that we come to remember the Lord as though somehow we had forgotten Him. As a believer and a lover of the Lord you have not forgotten Him. But you are remembering Him, including His life here and the fact that it was given up. It is something that we have to hold onto, do we not?

JCG What you say is very helpful. I wondered if the reference, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies", is a prophetic reference. When the Lord initiated the Supper He was surrounded by enemies.

PJM Yes, I am sure you are right; it was a precious moment for Him. Think of the Lord coming into that upper room and the saints are there and the enemies are all around, but they were safe. They were with Him again. I thought maybe Simon the Pharisee's house was another example, which is why I asked for it to be read.

RG To refer back to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest" (Gen 22: 2); God could have just said 'Take now thy son' and then his name. He is identified through the fact that he was his *only* son. Now you might say he was not his only son, but he was his only son as far as the father was concerned - "whom thou lovest". If we

had some appreciation of how the Lord had that unique place in the Father's heart, the Supper as it has been referred to would have a unique place in our hearts; because that is the One that is depicted before us in the emblems.

PJM It is very affecting; Abraham and Isaac going along together; you see the enactment of the very thing that God was going to do Himself. And God speaks to him directly about it. "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, Isaac". There are four references that identified the son beyond doubt, but in different ways. That special, special son who had been waited for for so long was to be taken and killed on "one of the mountains which I will tell thee of", v 2. More was to come and the significance of it all is beyond the scope of our reading, but it is as though God is having Abraham enact the very thing. Abraham has the faith and intelligence to know that if God had promised him a son, and if his seed was to be "as the countless sand which is by the sea shore" (Heb 11: 12), then resurrection was in view. Marvellous! Had he ever seen resurrection before? No, but he believed God.

PAG So is it an important feature of the Lamb of God that death is not the end? It speaks of "a Lamb standing, as slain", who has come through death, and redeemed to God by his blood "out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation", Rev 5: 6, 9. So that the Lamb of God is unique in His power, and also unique in His glory.

PJM That is another wonderful reference, and thank you for taking us there. John was anxious that there was no one worthy to open the book, to break its seals. And a search is made. What drama! We have had about Abraham - but you think about what happened in the Revelation. God sets this whole thing up, again to focus our minds on Christ, and the last place that John looks is at the throne. And there perhaps he might have expected to see the Lion. But what he actually saw was "a Lamb standing, as slain". John has that special impression as to the glory of Christ, does he not? Tell us some more about it.

PAG Just in line with what you are bringing before us, it would strengthen us to see that the Lord went through suffering, unfathomed suffering, but He came out in victory. It is the sufferings and the glories after these in the sequence of the Psalms you have drawn our attention to. Peter says, "when the chief shepherd is manifested ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory", 1 Pet 5: 4. So Christ is glorified and He will

glorify us, along with Himself.

PJM Yes; is interesting to me that in John 17 you see that the Lord Jesus is speaking to God as an equal. He says, "I demand concerning them", John 17: 9. He demands concerning His own, and He deliberately includes us also; He is seeking glory for His own. What a wonderful thing that the One who had been so dependent throughout His life, as He is speaking to His God and Father, is in effect saying, 'I have shepherded them, but now I hand them back to you, Father'. The Father was to become the Shepherd of those whom the Lord had received from His hand. This interplay of divine affection and relationship is once again something for our hearts to contemplate.

RT Is the culmination of all that the Lamb has a wife (Rev 21: 9)? I just thought of the fruitfulness of this pathway that, at the end, there is someone that is taking on the same features, shining in its radiant glory.

PJM Yes, indeed. Isaiah in his own psalm, as it were, in chapter 53, portrays the Lord as a suffering Lamb, but goes on to say: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied", v 11. Out of weakness and apparent defeat there is a result for the heart of Christ and the glory of God.

DCB Would you say something as to Psalm 23, where he is made to lie down in green pastures and he is led beside still waters? Is it important to see how His sacrificial pathway here was really one which the Lord Jesus enjoyed? There were green pastures and still waters.

PJM Yes, indeed. And no suffering is mentioned in Psalm 23. Interestingly, there is not even a reference to a lamb or a sheep. But we know what it is about. I think the Lord in His life enjoyed these things that the psalm describes. Now David, before he could become a shepherd, had to know what it was to be a sheep of God's calling. The Lord Jesus, it seems to me, speaking reverently and carefully, is presented first as the Lamb of God. He was in that relationship in which He was totally dependent, you might say, on the governance of His God and Father: "thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me". I do just wonder that in John 4 that we see the Lord Jesus as Someone who is under the direction of His Father as Shepherd. He must needs go this way, must needs come to this place, and He is weary and He is thirsty; and He says to this woman, "Give me to drink", v 7. There is no record that He got a drink from her. She immediately goes into some debate as to the Lord even asking her for a drink, because of who He was and who she

was. And later the disciples marvel that He was even talking to a woman, v 27. But here He is in His humanity, and in His grace, and also He says to her, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is ...", v 10. The Lord is saying: 'You would have asked Him, and He would have gladly given to you'. I thought maybe this fitted in with Psalm 23 in two respects: restoration and food: "He restoreth my soul". You think of Jesus as "wearied with the way He had come", feeling the pressures and weariness that a man would feel. He was perfect in what He became, and He felt weariness. And in one extreme time He also was depressed, Matt 26: 37. And this woman satisfies His soul, because later on when the disciples come back, they say, "Rabbi, eat": 'We have got you food; we have got our provisions now'. "But he said to them, I have food to eat which ye do not know", v 32. I think that is wonderful. "I shall not want". So there is that side, but there is also the restoring. "He restoreth my soul". I think perhaps both are here. The Father's provision for Christ and for His pleasure was seen in this woman taking an interest in the great things of God. You think of that. The Lord is satisfied, is comforted, is restored because somebody expressed an interest in the things of God, and asks Him for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

TDB I was thinking that when John wrote this gospel he could simply have said in verse 6, "Jesus ... sat just as he was at the fountain." But he brings in this reference to weariness, which is also a very real experience in the life of a Christian. I would like you to say something about that.

PJM Well, in Hebrews we learn: "For we have not a high priest not able to sympathise with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart", Heb 4: 15. When some of us are pushed to extremes we do things which are not in accord with our calling. Some people who are really hungry have been known to rob to get food. Or to break in somewhere to get a drink. But the Lord Jesus waited on His Father, for the satisfaction that came from doing His Father's will to the limit. There was no other bread for Him than doing His Father's will, was there?

TDB No; I am just appreciating what you are saying about restoring. If we pass through these experiences there is the experience of restoration.

PJM Well, I think it is part of the divine provision that we should be restored. Maybe it is Lord's day morning and watching those emblems:

“He restoreth my soul”.

RG I have wondered if the restoring is a reference to the Spirit, “He restoreth my soul”. The Lord says to them, about the Spirit, “he abides with you, and shall be in you”, John 14: 17. He was there in the Person of Jesus. And no doubt when the Lord went to that night retreat, you might say, He found the restoring power of the Spirit, as He spoke to the Father. Is that not open to us too?

PJM Yes, I think so. How can we be restored into the enjoyment of the service of divine Persons? We have to make it our retreat, do we not? We have to make the journey into the presence of God, to beseech the Spirit for His help, the Father for His provision and the Lord that we should be appropriately in His testimony.

MC I was thinking of the Lord's prayer in Luke 10. It says, “Jesus rejoiced in spirit” v 21. He spoke to the Father and then He goes on and brings out the wonderful truth as to the things that were hid from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes, and then “no one knows who the Son is”: “All things have been delivered to me by my Father, no one knows who the Son is but the Father, and who the Father is but the Son”, v 22. I wondered if it perhaps helps in what we are saying now, that He rejoiced in spirit.

PJM Yes, what a wonderful thing for Him to see that the Father had been working. “My Father worketh hitherto and I work”, John 5: 17. He would come across the Father's work as He did here. And He could say to Simon Peter in Matt 16: 17, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona”. It was, I think, a time of surprise, glad surprise, “for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in the heavens”. It is His work. The Lord rejoiced as He saw, I think, what the Father had been doing before Him.

GBG He goes on, “he leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake”. The Lord in John 5 says, “I cannot do anything of myself”, v 30. In John 8 he says, “I do nothing of myself”, v 28. In John 5 it goes on, “I cannot do anything of myself; as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous, because I do not seek my will, but the will of him that has sent me”. So He is giving a moral reason for His judgment in doing what is right, because He did not seek His own will, but the will of Him that had sent Him.

PJM Yes, that is very helpful. The Lord was entitled to have His own

will because of who He was, but it was subordinated to the will of His Father. "Not my will", He says in Gethsemane, "but thine be done", Luke 22: 42. And His dependence is evidenced by the fact that every step of His way was guided by the Father. I often think of the time when Mary and Martha sent Jesus their distress message, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick", John 11: 3. It becomes clear that they were really saying, 'Please come quickly'. What would the Lord Jesus have wanted to do, because of His infinite love for them, and in His care for them? Humanly speaking, He would have wanted, as a Man who had enjoyed their fellowship and hospitality, to go and be with them, and to intervene. But who tells Him to stay? The Father; everything that He did was what the Father gave Him to do. That morning the Father would doubtless have spoken to Him about it. 'You are to abide where you are. It is my will that is being done.' That is like the will of the Shepherd. And, according to Hebrews 5: 8, "though he were Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered". Later He suffered as He witnessed the distress that ensued in Bethany. John in writing his account points out that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (v 5), as though he would say, 'I do not want you to misunderstand this!'. Jesus loved them, but it was a question of timing and the Father's will. It is like the Shepherd in this psalm, and so the Lord waits. Often we rush in, because we think 'Of course I know what God wants to do here. I know His rights. I know how to defend them'. And suddenly you are made to realise that actually divine Persons have a different agenda.

RT Do you see that further in the man of John 9? "Jesus heard that they had cast him out" and He found him, v 35. As you say, He was under direction there as to the man who had been cast out, and that he was ready to receive an impression of the Son of God.

PJM That man had been left isolated, scorned and excluded but what a wonderful work of God is beginning in his soul even though Jesus was missing. His detractors completely missed the point of the exercise: "Thou hast been wholly born in sins, and thou teachest us? And they cast him out." v 34. And to such a one as that the Lord is going to reveal himself. He was to be gathered in.

JCG If we could revert to this experience at Samaria, the result was that they wanted Him to stay, and He stayed two days. That would involve further enlightenment as they contemplated the Man who had been there and saved the woman and saved them as well. It brings out

really what the prophet Hosea brings to them - "After two days will he revive us; on the third day he will raise us up", chap 6: 2. It shows that we need to see that the will that He followed had great results and the fact that there was an extension through the Samaritan, to Sychar.

PJM That is very interesting, because you might think, 'Lord, what are you doing in this place? You have come to the lost sheep of Israel, but this is Sychar, with its false religious pretensions'. But it was all in the will of His Father. The Lord had lifted up His eyes and seen His Father's work. This was an object lesson for the disciples; while they had been away, somebody had refreshed their Lord and Master. And it was none of their doing. Had anybody given Him to eat? And the great Shepherd had led Him into this place where His soul could be restored and His thirst quenched. And it is as though He says, 'I do not need food; I am satisfied now'.

BB Christ was not a sheep. I was just thinking that, at the beginning of Mark when Jesus was baptised, He puts Himself on the level of a sheep because He did not have to be baptised; but He was going in the same way as them there.

PJM It is a good enquiry - the Lord fully identified himself with God's chosen people. John seeks to prevent Him, "But Jesus answering said to him, Suffer it now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffers him", Matt 3: 15. Even though there was no need of repentance with Him, He subjects Himself to baptism as part of His righteous walk. We are often like sheep and we wander about. You see what happened in Luke 15, the ninety and nine were safely in the fold and the one wandered off. And thank God in His grace He reaches out to us. But the Lord Jesus was different: Jesus was the perfect obedient One amongst lost sheep that sorely needed a shepherd.

BB Yes, He was always different. I just thought of the way it says, "and having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross", Phil 2: 8. He went that way; He had His mind to go that way. He was under direction the whole time.

PJM Yes, I think you see that in John 17; His will was subordinate to the will of His Father. Were He not the perfect Man, things would have been different. It was not just that His life was to be given up, but the horror that He was to be made sin. In Gethsemane, you see the true horror of all that to His holy mind. This does not fit into Psalm 23. In

Gethsemane, the full awfulness of what He was to face flooded into His soul and into His spirit; the whole agony and depression that it brought, He lived through it there. But on the cross you see His supreme superiority to everything. He was “dumb in the presence of him that shears him, thus he opened not his mouth”, Acts 8: 32. He was the perfect example, the Substitute that God had provided Himself with.

JAB What you are saying helps us to contemplate as you brought in at the beginning. The Samaritans came to Him and He abode with them two days. John the baptist, when he drew attention to the Lord Jesus, and these disciples (we understand that the third one was the apostle John himself) when they abode with Him that day all contemplated His glory. You are bringing before us the supreme attractiveness of the Lord Jesus, because that is one of the great features of the Lamb. Jesus as the Lamb is to be tremendously attractive to everyone here who knows Him as Saviour, is that right?

PJM I think so, and we see that, do we not, in the people that were coming out to Jesus, as we read in Mark 6? We started where the apostles were gathered together to Jesus. What a point of attraction He was. However, some later went away - and Peter says, when they are challenged by the Lord, “Will ye also go away?”, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal”, John 6: 67, 68. What a privilege to be with Jesus. He had sent them out on this missionary activity but then He says, “Come ye yourselves apart ... and rest a little”, Mark 6: 31. And, of course, they are glad to go apart, “For those coming and those going were many, and they had not leisure even to eat”. We need to be careful of too much activity, do we not? Whilst activity is good and idleness is to be decried, it has to be under the influence of the Lord. First, we need to spend time *with* Him before we can do anything *for* Him. And they were telling Him what they had done and what they had taught. They had gone out with power and they had affected something, obviously quite incredible to them, and they would doubtless say, 'Lord you have got to hear about this story. And hear about this healing'. And He says, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest a little.” And they go by ship but there seems to be no rest for the weary. “And on leaving the ship Jesus saw a great crowd, and He was moved with compassion for them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd.” But a marvellous lesson is ready to be unfolded to them. One thing I love about this passage is the green grass. The green pastures are referenced in Psalm 23 as a

place to lie down in, and then there is the simile “because they were as sheep not having a shepherd”. So He was going to take on that role for them. He raises exercise with the disciples, but there was probably not enough money to pay for food, and then it was a question of “How many loaves have ye?”. And they say, “Five, and two fishes”. And He orders them to make them all sit down by companies on the green grass. So my question is where the green grass came from. It was after all “a desert place”.

JCG Where the Lord provides an oasis, is that like the local company at the present time? Where the Lord is. His Name placed there. He is supplying the needed food for those that are wishing to see Him and gather together with Him.

PJM Yes. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures”. In this context in which we are speaking, I think we could consider that the Father provided the grass. It did not seem very likely in that place. I remember being in a plane and flying over Spain and it looked so arid. And if it is like that in Spain what is it like in Palestine? I love the green grass. It is divine provision, food and relaxation, the Father’s provision for us where we can contemplate His Son, and we can receive of His bounty.

RT In another gospel in speaking of this it says, “he knew what he was going to do”, John 6: 6. They were in a dilemma, were they not? But He knew. He knew that table furnished and those green pastures where the resources came from.

PJM Yes, exactly. “And having taken the five loaves and the two fishes, looking up to heaven, he blessed”, or ‘gave thanks’, the note says. He broke the loaves and gave them to His disciples. You think of them passing out of His hand and multiplying and multiplying and these people sitting expectantly on the grass, and He is saying to his disciples, ‘We have got to take responsibility for them’. His compassion was towards them. His grace was towards them and He did not just leave it there. He looks up to heaven and He fed them.

TWL Is the importance of this then looking up to heaven and giving thanks?

PJM Yes. He did not just say, ‘This is all from me; this is my gift to you’. He directs them to the Father. I suppose He became their Shepherd. He took responsibility for them.

TWL Yes, I was thinking of what you said earlier about being too busy, and how He draws them apart. The Lord did not live in His work. He lived in His relationship and the work was consequent on that. Would that be right?

PJM Yes, I think so. This was His pavilion. This was His place. He lifts His eyes to His Father. He would get up into the mountains, would He not? The garden on the Mount of Olives for instance, was a place He frequented. "Jesus was often there, in company with his disciples", John 18: 2. He would get apart from the cares of this world, and He took His own with Him, out of the world and its system; out of its duties and its demands. In this passage He takes them apart. It starts as a desert. You might say, 'Well, I do not really fancy going to the meeting tonight. I am tired. I have had a big day'. And I am not pointing a finger at anyone but myself; but what a wonderful thing to walk in and see the green grass and think, 'Well, somebody has been here ahead of me. Somebody is providing for my soul'. He restores my soul. That was the experience of the Lord Jesus and it is to be ours too.

JAB This passage starts in the desert and then you get green grass. Psalm 23 goes on to dwelling in the house of Jehovah for the length of the days. Is that where our experience develops as we come nearer to the appreciation of all of this?

PJM Yes, I think so. What provision there is in His Father's house. "In my Father's house there are many abodes", John 14: 2. Everything is there that you could possibly want. And "I go to prepare you a place". He was on His way home, was He not, and He was going to take His own with Him?

JAB That is where we can really contemplate, is it not?

PJM Yes, and no distractions there.

MC Nothing stale or dry; everything is fresh and living. Is this really what we are brought into, and really where we should always resort to?

PJM Yes, you do not have green grass without rain. You go to Ireland and come to Scotland and there is plenty of green grass: emerald green grass. There is more green grass than we have got in the south. You realise the need for the refreshment of the rain. And that is something that God gives, gentle rain.

AMB It says, "I will dwell in the house of Jehovah". I wondered if

Mephibosheth really came into it at the king's table - "I will dwell", 2 Sam 9. He had known what Lodebar was, a place of no pasture. He had known that. There was no green grass there. Do you think that is something we reach through to? Would that be fair?

PJM Yes, I think so, it is a wonderful type. Though he was king, David again rises to the role of the shepherd, even if but briefly: 'Is there any lost sheep', he is saying, "of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God to him?", 2 Sam 9: 3. David had a special table that was prepared daily. And Mephibosheth's place was to be there continually. Mephibosheth in that sense came home. And home for him was where the king was.

RG You get green grass in the east where there are wells of water under the ground. And just for the interest of the young people, that actually happened in the late 1940's when there was a great influx of migrants to Israel. They wondered what they would do with them. They went to the Scriptures and they located from the Old Testament where the wells were in the early days, and every time they drilled they found water, and that is where the kibbutzim are today, where the oranges and the grapefruit and all the produce of the land is grown. So that I think the local meeting is where you find the green grass as has been already said, and that is because the Spirit is made way for under the hand of the Lord, and under the guidance of the Father. It is a remarkable thing that Mr Raven said (vol 5 p3), he was the first to make the remark, that the Spirit was the bond between the Father and the Son. And the Son, He did not do things by Beelzebub, as the Pharisees said, He did them in the power of the Spirit, under the guidance of the Father, Matt 12: 24, 28. Is that right?

PJM Yes, very good. We can look forward to a time when, "The wilderness and the dry land shall be gladdened; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose", Isa 35: 1. God would turn the very nature, and not only of the desert tracts, but also on His holy mountain: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith Jehovah", Isa 65: 25. The effects of sin in creation will be reversed. And so it is today spiritually, is it not? For those who are old and feeling the pressure of the way, even in the drought we can experience the Spirit's help and the refreshing that comes from Him - "a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life", John 4: 14. You have it now, you have it forever.

I just wondered if we could touch on this Pharisee in Luke 7, in the context of the verse in the psalm, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies". This man was an enemy. He had not shown even social decency towards the Lord Jesus. It was traditional, as I think everybody knows, that if you had somebody into your house that you would anoint their head and you would wash their feet and you would make them comfortable. It might mean demeaning yourself to do this, but it was the host's job and responsibility to make his guests welcome. And why did the Pharisee ask Jesus into his house? Why did he do it? Maybe he was forced to do it. Maybe God *made* him do it. But what it provides again is an arena, an environment, in which God can demonstrate His care for Christ, His care for His Son. Into this house comes a woman who is a sinner. But the wonderful thing is she knows she is a sinner. And God has a special offering for persons who know they are sinners: His own Beloved Son, who is shortly to become the Sin-offering. And here He is. He is sitting at table and this woman comes in. She does not seem to care that it is the house of Simon the Pharisee, a man who took great pride, because the Pharisees did, in being perfect. She knew that Jesus was there sitting at meat at the house of the Pharisee and she takes the alabaster box of myrrh and standing at His feet behind Him weeping, begins to wash His feet with tears. And because, as we have already seen, the Lord's food was to do the will of His Father, a table is thus prepared for Him in the presence of His enemies. Or so it seemed to me.

WMP Are you stressing for us the great matter of affection in all of this then? We could be taken on in a certain line of things with our intelligence, but how He values love for Himself.

PJM Yes. It seems that she has an impression as to where these feet were going to go, that if her need was to be lifted, if her burden was to be lifted, those feet had to go to a place that was too awful for her to contemplate. But it affects her. Tears come and she is addressing the Lord's feet with everything that she has got.

RG I remember reading that it does not give her name. Could it have been Mary of Magdala? And if it was, see what she came into and what a message she was given in John 20. It is the greatest message of all, you might say. Here is this woman, she is carried forward, right through and then she has that wondrous message, "go to my brethren", v 17.

PJM Yes. Well, thank God for the women. Men are a little stuffy sometimes in terms of showing their emotions and their feelings, but this woman showed what she was feeling. It was surely a cold hard house, but there in the presence of His enemies a table had been set.

AMB I was just impressed with the fact that she takes up her position in relation to the Lord. She stands behind Him, and then she really abased herself, did she not, to do what she did? But everything that she did was in relation to the Lord. She took up her position in relation to Him. The Pharisee wanted the Lord to come in and the Lord to take up His place in relation to himself, but the woman took up her place in relation to the Lord.

PJM Yes, very good. She does not ask for permission. She would have known the answer, and she comes straight to Jesus. A greater than Solomon was here and she had liberty because she knew Him enough to realise that it would be all right. She had that confidence that she could come, whatever had transpired already; maybe something had, we do not know, and the Lord opens up this wonderful opportunity to talk about the creditor and the debtors. And He manifests divine grace and the authority He had to forgive sins. And this woman finds peace. She finds in her own way the green grass; the pastures that the Lord is opening up to those who fear Him, to those who seek Him out.

Kirkcaldy

2nd November 2013

Key to initials:-

B Batchelor, Knaresborough; T D Beveridge, Kirkcaldy; A M Brown, Grangemouth; D C Brown, Edinburgh; J A Brown, Grangemouth; M Cowan, Kirkcaldy; R Gardiner, Kirkcaldy; G B Grant, Dundee; J C Gray, Grangemouth; P A Gray, Grangemouth; T W Lock, Edinburgh; P J Mutton, Walton-on-the-Naze; W M Patterson, Glasgow; J Spinks, Grangemouth; R Taylor, Kirkcaldy

THE LIGHT OF LIFE

Marshall Cowan

Matthew 4: 12-17

John 12: 34-36 ('light'); 44-47

2 Corinthians 4: 5, 6

You will see that all these scriptures refer to “light”. It is a wonderful thing to see that God intends that light should come into man's heart. We have to do with a God who is interested in His creature. He is interested in the blessing of His creature. As sinners who are far from God, we are not in light; we are in darkness. It was not God's intent that men should dwell in darkness, but it was His intent that they should dwell in light. In the beginning, you will remember, if you read in Genesis, it says, “And God said, Let there be light. And there was light”, chap 1: 3. Then it says, “And God saw the light that it was good”, v 4. He did not say the darkness was good. And it says, “God divided between the light and the darkness”.

That is the position today, beloved. We know that in actual fact physically, but morally too, and that is what we want to speak about. There is a vast difference between the light and the darkness. I suppose you could say that the darkness is Satan's domain. It is the domain he works in and it is against the light. John says, “And the light appears in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not”, chap 1: 5. There is such a difference; they are completely opposite.

God has made the great lights. We referred to the moon today. Genesis says, “And God made the two great lights, the great light to rule the day, and the small light to rule the night”, chap 1: 16. The celestial area of things in which God put these lights, and all the stars: the galaxies of stars are quite a study, beyond man's ken, they are so great and so vast. And that is like God. God cannot be compassed by man. He is far beyond man. He dwells “in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen, nor is able to see”, 1 Tim 6: 16. That is God in His deity, something that we can never enter into, but what we can say at the present moment is that God has come out in light, a light that you and I can understand, that persons can understand. Why? Because He has manifested that light in His Son, in a Man, a glorious Man, a Man who came from heaven, came into this scene and walked amidst the darkness. And He was light; He said, “I am the light of the world”, John 8: 12.

What a Person He is, beloved friends! I wonder if you have come to know Him. It is God's intent in the glad tidings that you should come to know Jesus, glorious Son of God, the One in whom God has centred the light, but to get advantage of the light, you have to let it sink in, sink into your heart. The light is shining and it has continued right down through this dispensation until this very moment, the outshining of God in His Son. We sang about it:

O this precious light is telling
God's full favour now to man; (Hymn 219).

How blessed that is! Many of us have come into the blessing as a result of accepting Christ, accepting what God has placed in Christ, and all the work He has accomplished to bring about our salvation and our forgiveness and to bring us into God's presence and to set us free there, to be in liberty. God wants persons to be in liberty in His presence, but it says, "men have loved darkness rather than light; for their works were evil", John 3: 19. They do not want to come to the light because they know that their works are evil. How sad that is, beloved friends, how sad! Persons go on without God. Ephesians says, "having no hope, and without God in the world", chap 2: 12. Persons without Christ and without God have no hope. God will have to come in in judgment in the coming day because He is a holy, righteous God, and it is a requirement - you might find it difficult to understand - but it is actually a requirement of His love that that kind of judgment will have to take place for those who refuse the glad tidings that God has presented concerning His Son.

But we are here tonight in a time of grace, a time of great opportunity. That is what impressed me about this scripture I have read. It is a time of great opportunity. The light has come in, right where we are here in Edinburgh, in Loanhead. It is right here. It is in persons all around you because believers in Christ have that light. It says not only that Christ is the light of the world, but that believers in Christ are also the light of the world, Matt 5: 14. So that light is here. It is here in this land. It is very interesting, this land of "Capernaum, which is on the sea-side in the borders of Zabulon and Nephtalim". It says "that that might be fulfilled which was spoken through Esaias the prophet". It is very wonderful to see how God has operated. These things were spoken about hundreds of years before by the prophet, about this very moment, and here it is. It says as Jesus speaks at this moment in time, "Land of Zabulon and land of Nephtalim, way of the sea beyond the

Jordan, Galilee of the nations:- the people sitting in darkness has seen a great light, and to those sitting in the country and shadow of death, to them has light sprung up". The opportunity is still the same. It was at that moment in time when Jesus began to preach. What a service that was, beloved, as He began His service, entered into that service, as sent by the Father, in relation to the Father's will: "From that time began Jesus to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh". What a matter then that we can say that moment exists now right where we are here at the present time, and it is here for our blessing: "the people sitting in darkness has seen a great light".

I have to ask you in the glad tidings, 'Have you seen it? Have you seen this light, dear friend?'. It is shining all around. I know many have not seen it because they have not opened their eyes to see it, but through the glad tidings you can be alerted to the fact this light is shining tonight. The goodness and the grace and the mercy of God are shining out in His Son at this very moment, and it is amidst the darkness. We all know the darkness is very real. You do not have to look very far around to see it. What a world we live in! What evil exists! The powers of darkness are so distinct, but amidst that there is something here very precious and it is there for you, dear friend, for you and for me. God has made it available in His Son. It says, "has seen a great light, and to those sitting in the country and shadow of death, to them has light sprung up". Such is the grace and mercy of God that God would make this opportunity available to all men at the present moment, this very moment, that they should believe on His Son.

Well, He says, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh". The only way to come into this is by way of repentance, come to the acknowledgment of what you are, of what I am, in my sins, away from God - because if I am in my sins, I am in the darkness, but God wants to dispel it and dispel it for ever. If you believe on the Son, you can have that light shining in your soul and it will never dim. That light will never dim. That light that is shining in Jesus, God's exalted Man, will never dim, and we can be in the enjoyment of it through repentance. We must repent of our sins, repent before God, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God", Rom 3: 23. That is the truth, dear friend, and nothing else will suit God except what has been secured through the death and burial and resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything God has planned for man is centred in that glorious Person.

Well, it is all there for you and me to lay hold of, but you must believe. You can only have it by believing. "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved", Acts 16: 31. The jailor came to that. That is what the apostle said to him: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house". He believed and he accepted it. What a change there was in that man, a cruel man, no doubt, who had had these two in the prison, Paul and Silas, and God released them through an earthquake and brought them out. Paul preached the glad tidings to the jailor, and that is what he said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus". The jailor asked, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?". Oh what a cry! Have you made that cry, dear friend? "What must I do?" Well, it is not what you do, nor what I do, but what God has done and what He has done in and through the Lord Jesus. "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house." What a wonderful message! It is open to everyone at the present moment that we might come into it!

So I go on to John. John speaks a lot about the life at the beginning of the gospel. He tells us about the Lord Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. *He* was in the beginning with God. All things received being through him, and without him not one thing received being which has received being. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light appears in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not", chap 1: 1-5. What a wonderful Person Jesus is! He is a glorious Man, a real Man, but never forget that He is also God. As here, He was the Word. The Word is the full expression of God. Everything that God wanted to express He expressed in Jesus, in that wonderful Man! "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." Some would dispute that; it has been disputed by many. Clever men think they can use their minds to arrive at the truth and they never can. It is arrived at by faith and believing in Christ, believing in the Lord Jesus, accepting God's word, and Christ is the Word, and that is what we are speaking about tonight. He is the Word: God's full expression of what He is in Himself is declared in Him.

I was thinking of the opportunity given in this wonderful setting when the Lord had already said, "I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me! But this he said signifying by what death he was about to die", John 12: 32, 33. When the Lord Jesus came here, He came to die. He was here, as I have said, as the full expression of all that was in God's heart, displaying the love of God, the mercy of God, the

compassions of God. They were all seen in Him. Think of all the things He did, bringing in forgiveness, and raising the dead, and healing the sick and the poor and the lame and the blind. All these things indicate man's lost moral state. The Lord Jesus met it all and He met it fully. He brought persons back even into life from the dead; such was His compassion and His power - wonderful! Light in the scripture here, and particularly in John, is related very much to life. If you want to come into life spiritually, you have to do it by accepting the light. The light is shining but it needs to be absorbed, taken into your soul, and if you allow that, you will come into life. So He says, "Yet a little while is the light amongst you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness may not overtake you".

It is a sobering matter that we are at the end of this dispensation. God is still speaking, He is speaking today, but it may end, dear friends, tonight. It could end at any moment, and that is a sobering matter; so it is an urgent matter that we take advantage of what God is presenting in Christ at the present moment. When the time is gone, it will be too late. That would be a terrible thought, would it not? If you did not believe on Christ and you had not accepted Him as your Saviour, and suddenly the day of grace is closed and there is no more hope; what a thing, what a matter! No-one would want to come under God's judgment and be lost for eternity and be without Christ eternally. What an awful matter!

Well, what a time we are in! He says, "Yet a little while is the light amongst you". That applies today, just the same, "a little while". "Walk while ye have the light, that darkness may not overtake you. And he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes". Many persons think they know where they are going. They go in for ambition of all kinds in every sphere of life and they want to make things better, and make something of themselves, and have great riches too, and all that kind of thing, and they think that they are walking where they know where they are going; but the sad fact is, dear friend, that they do not know where they are going because all that we have in that sense is only going to end in death: "And forasmuch as it is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment", Heb 9: 27. Well, these are sobering matters. What a time we are in then, a time of acceptance, a time when you can believe on this blessed Man. I would love to commend Him to you. I am sure every believer in this room would commend Him to anyone who has not accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

He says, "that ye may become sons of light". Is that not a wonderful thought, "that ye may become sons of light"? You who were away from God, lost in your sins, at a great distance, and God wants to make you a son of light! That applies to women as well. He would make us all "sons of light". Sonship is a wonderful thought in God's purpose, and that is what He wants to bring every man and woman into, into sonship. That means we are in God's favour, we are enjoying His presence and we are brought into a place of liberty in the enjoyment of the presence of God, the presence of Christ, and all because of the way God has shone in His Son. And in addition to that He gives the Holy Spirit to those who believe on His Son. It is a wonderful matter so that you can be sustained, come to the Lord Jesus, believe on Him, accept Him and know Him as your Saviour, but find then that you can live here as sustained by His blessed Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, pleased to come and dwell in the believer, so that he might be sustained in life and joy and enjoy the blessings that God has in mind for him.

So the Lord's own feelings enter into it in this section. How much He felt things! The real feelings of Jesus come out. It says, "Jesus cried, and said, He that believes on me, believes not on me, but on him that sent me; and he that beholds me, beholds him that sent me. I am come into the world as light, that every one that believes on me may not abide in darkness". What a great matter, dear friend, that the Lord Jesus came from the Father. He said, "He that has seen me has seen the Father" (chap 14: 9), the Father originating things. The Lord Jesus came from the Father into this scene and exhibited these wonderful features that belong to the Father Himself. How very great that is! And so He says, "He that has seen me has seen the Father" and "I am come into the world as light, that every one that believes on me may not abide in darkness; and if any one hear my words and do not keep them, I judge him not". God is not condemning the sinner. He is not condemning anyone at the present moment. The Lord Jesus is not now the Judge: He is the Saviour. I think it is a very sobering thing to realise that the time of judgment will come, but He says, "He that rejects me and does not receive my words, has him who judges him: the word which I have spoken, that shall judge him in the last day". Well, it just emphasises, as I have said, the great moment that we live in, to take advantage of at the present time, a time of divine mercy and grace, a time of salvation - "now is the well-accepted time; behold, now the day of salvation", 2 Cor 6: 2.

So when we come to Corinthians, we come into something that is very blessed. The apostle speaks about “the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ”. I think that is a wonderful expression. I can hardly say any more about it than what it conveys to me, “the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ”, shining out towards all men at the present moment. It says, “it is the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine who has shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. You see what a very great privilege God would have you to come into, to come into that knowledge in your soul and in your heart, “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. That is what is going to occupy us eternally, what God has brought us into. We are going to see that Man and look upon Him and look upon His glories and we will be engaged with that eternally. Is that not a wonderful matter, “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”? Nothing more blessed than that! Well, that is what you come into through the glad tidings, through the gospel: you come into the knowledge of God's great thoughts for man, not just that you should be saved from your sins, but that you should know the enjoyment of that and have peace in your soul, that you might come into the blessing of what God has provided for you in Christ because God has a whole system that He has set up in that glorious Man. It relates to the kingdom of the heavens, and it is fine to be in that kingdom and to know that you love Christ and you want to be here for Christ and you want to be subject to Christ. That is what God has brought us into. That is the kingdom of the heavens, “the kingdom of the Son of his love”, Col 1: 13. Wonderful matter that you can have part in that and enjoy it at the present time!

I just want to refer to Psalm 43 in closing. Here is a man who has come to know His God. You might say he is a man who is converted, and he has had experience with God. He has come to appreciate certain things in his heart and in his soul and he has problems like most of us, and he has learned to turn to God Himself. He has learned that he has not got the answers in himself but he has found that the answer is in God. If you have problems, dear friend, if you have difficulties in your soul, and they afflict us in many different ways, the answer is in God, the answer is in Christ, in turning to Him as this man did. He says, Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; deliver me from the deceitful and unrighteous man.

For thou art the God of my strength: why hast thou cast me off?
why go I about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?
Send out thy light and thy truth: *they* shall lead me,
they shall bring me to thy holy mount, and unto thy habitations,
v 1-3.

Is that not very blessed? That is a man who has learned his God, and that is open to every one of us, beloved friends. We have come to know Him through the Saviour and appreciate the way that God is concerned about us and cares for us in our links with Himself. "Send out thy light and thy truth". They have all been expressed in Jesus, His light and His truth. The Lord Jesus said that: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", John 14: 6. It is all in Him. Send them out, and "*they* shall lead me". The Lord Jesus is a wonderful example for us all. Peter says, "that ye should follow in his steps", 1 Pet 2: 21. I find that very testing, I have to admit, and I find that I fail. I suppose most here would say that. But it is a very fine thing that we can fall back on divine support and find that His light and His truth "*they* shall lead me, *they* shall bring me to thy holy mount, and until thy habitations". It is a great experience to come into the area where God dwells, where God is at rest. God is at rest in all He has secured in that blessed Man, and you can enter into the enjoyment of that wonderful privilege that is open to the believer in the Lord Jesus.

Then he says,

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto the God of the gladness
of my joy:
yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God, my God. v 4

What a fine resolve! I think that is what God is looking for, an answer like that, from you and from me, full enjoyment of our salvation, but, more than that, "I will go unto the altar". This man has learned what God is looking for. He has learned what God wants from a soul. He wants a response from your heart and mine, beloved, in reality and in life. May we be encouraged then, as believing on the Lord Jesus, to come into these glorious things, for His Name's sake!

Loanhead
16th March 2014

PUTTING OFF THE OLD MAN, AND SOWING TO THE SPIRIT

Alistair M Brown

Colossians 3: 9-11

Galatians 6: 7-9

I want to convey a simple thought about these injunctions from the apostle as to things that we have to do. We have to put off the old man with his deeds; we have to put on the new; and we have to sow to the Spirit. These are all very practical matters. The old man with his deeds relates to the flesh. We have to learn that the flesh has no part in what is for God. It has to be put off: it is not reformed or modified, nor is it renewed: it has to be put off. God would teach us that important lesson. He may take different ways to teach you and me, but He desires to bring us through to the conclusion that the only way to make progress for those who love Christ is to put off what is according to the flesh - not to modify it or improve it, but to put it off. There is a whole line of behaviour, activities and attitudes, and all the things that go with it - indeed a whole life and character of things - that has to be put off. But it does not stop there. The putting off is so that something else can be put on. The scripture speaks of it in this sequence for a reason. There is a moral sequence. You find in the scriptures that there is a moral sequence in which things are put forward. The old man with his deeds has to be put off with a view to what is new being put on. "Having put on the new, renewed into full knowledge according to the image of him that has created him", the apostle says. Without putting off the old there cannot be any putting on of the new, and without the putting on of the new we cannot come into the knowledge of God - "according to the image of him that has created him".

Now what is in view is full knowledge of that blessed One. As we read this passage, we see that there is what is characteristic of the old man that has to be put off, but then what is characteristic of Christ is formed, what is spoken of as "the new". It is the features of Christ. It is not an abstract concept; it is not an outline. It is tangible, substantial and real features, seen fully and perfectly in Christ. It is all there for God in Him, and the injunction to us is to put on these features.

Our brother has been speaking about the reality of divine things, and the importance of us seeing the reality of them. "Putting on the new" is real: it speaks of putting on the features of manhood that were seen in Christ. They were infinitely pleasing to God and He looks

to see them over again in His people. You might say, 'He cannot possibly see all the features of Christ in me'. No, but if He sees a feature, or some features, of Christ, God takes account of that. Remember too that this is really a collective matter. When all the saints, ourselves among them, come out in display, all these features of Christ in individuals who have "put on the new" will be seen together in myriads, and then there will be a complete counterpart, a complete answer to Christ. All these features will be seen gloriously together. That is what God has in mind. He will bring to pass unerringly what He has in mind. You and I, and every other true believer, will be part of that. But God's grand concepts, which He brings about in moral substantiality, require an answer in me. That requires me to put off all these old things, all these deeds - how obnoxious they are - and to put on the new.

I can only do that by the Holy Spirit and that is what we get in Galatians. We have already been considering the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit speaks of the result of the activity of the Spirit. That fruit has one source; the source is the Spirit. It is one fruit, one blessed moral whole. That fruit is the result of sowing to the Spirit. One thing to say about sowing to the Spirit is that a seed is a very small thing, and what grows is much larger than the seed was. If we make room for the Spirit perhaps by reading, by contemplating, by prayer, and by thinking about the Lord Jesus, it may not seem very much, but the result of sowing to the Spirit is wonderful. It says "he ... shall reap eternal life". There will be the enjoyment together of a whole scene of things of which Christ is the centre and God is over all. The Spirit is the power for us to come in and enjoy that scene fully. We are able to enjoy a tremendous harvest of fruit from sowing to the Spirit. If we enjoy something of what the Spirit would do, then as is often said - God is enjoying that in us, in you and in me. These are real things. Our brother has been speaking about what is real. When we sow to the Spirit and we reap the fruit of that, we reap eternal life. These are things that are eternal, they come from God, and they are blessed. They are not affected by death nor are they terminated by death; they are not tarnished by what goes on in this world, because they proceed from the heart of God Himself. They are wonderful things and real things. They are also simple. The way into them is made accessible to us by sowing to the Spirit and, as doing so, reaping eternal life. That speaks of great blessing enjoyed together with the saints and in the power of the Spirit in freshness, vigour and vitality that will never end. These matters are laid out before us as

being in God's mind for us. We come in to the experience and enjoyment of them through exercise and desire.

I would encourage myself and each one of us to do so, for His Name's sake.

Grangemouth

23rd July 2013

