

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE EVENING OBLATION

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PM I have been thinking a little since Lord's day as to the evening oblation. It comes into this section in Daniel, and is perhaps peculiarly applicable in the present time as a feature marking the end of the dispensation. There was what was inaugural, at the beginning, but Daniel brings out to us a man who, although in the midst of such breakdown and failure, is maintaining the evening oblation. The oblation speaks of Christ, here in perfect, lowly, obedient manhood. It is not quite the same as the manna, although the manna was fine and granular: the manna came down from heaven and was food for the people in the wilderness; the oblation relates to what grew up here in all its fine character and was for the pleasure of God, and, in wonderful grace, the blessed God has given to us the opportunity to feed on what He feeds on in the detailed perfection of the humanity of Jesus.

It seems that Daniel was feeding on that, and here he is not taking his bearings from the breakdown and the confusion that was all around, so that what gives character to Daniel's intercession before God is a man who is feeling things in the light of the oblation. I wondered, dear brethren, if we might consider that a little together. As to the Lord Jesus coming into manhood and growing up, it says in Isaiah 53: "For he shall grow up before him", v 2. Think of the perfection of every detail of the life of the Lord Jesus: "he shall grow up before him". It has been said that the Father could not take His eye off Christ because every detail of that humanity was so delightful and was manifested in a way that had never been seen before. The divine standard in relation to man came into expression in one blessed Man. The divine standard was there, and the divine standard was there for God, and it is there for us. What wonderful grace!

In Leviticus we have the law of the oblation. In chapter 2, we have the presentation of the oblation in all its fineness, but in chapter 6 we have the oblation in relation to the priest, and it is to become the priest's food. It was not voluntary in chapter 6; it was obligatory. No doubt, in giving the law of the oblation as a provision for the priest to feed on, Jehovah had in view what would be maintained throughout that dispensation of which we read, and throughout our dispensation, that there would be maintained that which would be for the divine

pleasure according to the divine standard.

I thought something of it came out in Philippians, although we may not cover the detail of these passages; but might get some impression of Christ.

JDG It is very, very interesting. We were actually looking at Daniel in this city on Wednesday night to see how he functions publicly in the testimony in administration in man's area, but secretly; but beside that, he had this other aspect of what was secret with heaven as "one greatly beloved".

PM It is most affecting that here was a man praying to God in a day of breakdown and departure; he is taking his bearings from the evening oblation and immediately there is the support and confirmation of heaven: "for thou art one greatly beloved". At the end of the book he is to go his way and stand in his lot at the end of the days, chap 12: 13.

JDG His exercise sprang from his desire to see the deliverance of the Lord's people by the Lord's coming at the end of the seventy weeks.

PM Yes. He was feeling in relation to God's people as to what they were before God. Is that not something of the feature of the oblation, if I might speak carefully, a type of Christ, feeling things as they are before God? Daniel takes that up.

JDG He takes on himself the burden related to the whole people. That is a feature of Christ, vicariously.

PM How affecting that is! "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us", 2 Cor 5 21. What movements they were, the One who was here knowing what was before Him. I was thinking of the reference in Luke 9 where it says, "*he* stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem", v 51. Think of the Lord Jesus committing Himself to go that way, "the dying of Jesus", 2 Cor 4: 10!

JCG You have more in mind as to the *evening* oblation; you were stressing the fact that it was in the evening? In Leviticus the continual oblation is taken, morning and evening, half and half. Do you have something in your mind about that?

PM You can help us, but I thought we might look at the evening oblation as bearing on the close of the dispensation. There was the morning oblation. Think of Peter and John going up to the temple! There is something wrought out in those men. They say, "Look on us",

Acts 3: 4. There was something of the feature of the morning oblation, the opening up in those early days of the dispensation as to the glory of the One who not only was raised but who was glorified, the place that He had in the Father's affections. Peter says of Him, "ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain. Who God has raised up", Acts 2: 23. Think of what was there at the beginning! But we come to the end and it is to be commensurate with what was at the beginning, and what was being offered to God at the close of the dispensation in Daniel's day was to be commensurate with what was at the beginning, and is that not to be so with us?

DCB It says of Daniel that he "continued"; "Daniel continued unto the first year of king Cyrus", Dan 1: 21. He continued with this food, so what was at the end of his life was commensurate with what was at the beginning of his life.

PM And it was a long life. We were speaking about this in the house before we came out, the length of time in which Daniel was in captivity, and yet it appears that through that time Daniel held to what God's thoughts were for His people. He had that view of God's thoughts for His inheritance and he is sustained in it. He says, "about the time of the evening oblation". Where are we taking our bearings from? Is it the perfection of what has come into display in a Man in lowly circumstances here?

DCB You have referred to Luke. There is something of the character of the oblation with Luke, and Luke continues - "Luke alone is with me" (2 Tim 4: 11) - as in a broken day, and he is also one who is referred to as "beloved", Col 4: 14.

PM We might have read in Luke because Luke, of all the gospel writers, brings out features of the oblation. I would just say for the young people: do not read the gospels as a life history of the Lord Jesus here, because that is not how they were written. They were never written to be a life history of Jesus. They were written to present the Person and they were written in the light of where He is now, and that is how we are helped to take them up. The oblation comes after the burnt-offering. If we are to get the gain of it, it comes in the light of the death of Christ, because all that was here in perfection had to be given up, and had to be given up for God, and it is in the light of that that we can partake of the oblation. Luke brings out the character of what that manhood was, "the holy thing", chap 1: 35. He begins that way.

RG Daniel was doing this at a time when Jerusalem was in ruins, but he is not seeing Jerusalem in ruins. He is seeing the oblation and its suggestions of the wonder of the Person, of the manhood, of Christ that is going through in triumph, and will go through in triumph until the true Jerusalem comes in all its beauty and glory to be seen by us all.

PM That is very helpful. He was seeing what the purpose of God was for Jerusalem and he was looking on to the days in which all that would come into its own expression in perfection and in glory, and God will have done it all. He is feeding, as you say, on the One in whom everything has been centred for the establishment of God's ways with Israel and for the establishment of His ways with man. How great this blessed Person is!

JTB As remarked, the matter of time comes into the law of the oblation, as you read in Leviticus, as distinct from the presentation of it in Leviticus 2. This is also carried forward to Numbers 28 where it is linked with the burnt-offering and the drink-offering, a blessed, holy combination which lends particular satisfaction to the heart of God. Is that really one of the products of the oblation as brought by His people, satisfaction for the heart of God? So he refers to it as "My offering, my bread for my offerings", Num 28: 2. What holy feeding for God in the blessed perfection of that holy One, do you think?

PM That is helpful and important because generally the oblation was offered along with the burnt-offering. I think what you say is helpful, and think of God giving us to feed on what He is feeding on! The Lord Jesus spoke of Himself in John as "the bread of God" (chap 6: 33), and yet He has come within our range. What a constitution is to be built up in the saints. In Leviticus 6 it was essential for the priestly family to feed on the perfection of this blessed Man if they were to function rightly as priests for God, and is that not so for us?

JTB It is very significant that the truth of the oblation is carried forward to Numbers, the wilderness, you might say. So the blessed features of that holy life are represented in the saints in the offerings which they send Godward.

PM That is just one's exercise, that there might be formed in us something of the features that were there in the manhood of Jesus in perfection and fullness, and those features in the oblation are Godward. When the Lord Jesus was here, every thought of His was Godward. It all centred in what was for God. He found His meat in

doing the things of the Father. That was His meat.

JDG Would the matter of “before Jehovah my God for the holy mountain of my God” be a feature of a man that was seen in Christ, now seen in Daniel, concerning God's great thoughts and purpose, and in time too?

PM You are linking that with the mountain?

JDG “The holy mountain of my God”: it is down here; it is something seen down here in the saints that is in accord with Christ in glory.

PM Very fine. He is taking a view of the purpose of God, and the Man in whom all is centred, but the way in which it is wrought out here in testimony. Although publicly it is in ruins, and so it is today, someone who is taking their bearing from the oblation can begin to see things as God sees them. What a wonderful thing that is!

JDG And God sees in that man the features of the oblation. His practice is bringing out that the oblation is formed in him.

PM That is just the point.

NJH Would the feature of patience be formed in Daniel by taking the oblation? He did not shorten the time that had come through the prophet Jeremiah. Others thought it would be reduced. But “the word of my patience” comes in in what is written to Philadelphia (Rev 3: 10), and I wondered if that is not produced through the oblation being partaken of.

PM I am sure it is, and it was seen here in Jesus. We might just ponder that, the feature of patience. I think it has been said by another that the Lord never rushed; rushing is a sign of a lack of spirituality. The Lord never rushed. He waited on the Father. He waited for the Father's word. “He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed”, Isa 50: 4. Think of the perfection of that manhood! Although He knew all that was before Him, He waited for the Father's word.

RG One of the greatest tests of faith is patience, and we see that worked out in the Lord, “the leader and completer of faith”, Heb 12: 2. How patient He was in fulfilling the Father's will for the Father's pleasure!

PM Yes, and moving here as a dependent Man, the feature of patience was in expression.

JCG Do you think also that associated with patience is Daniel's references to prayer? He "was speaking, and praying ... and presenting my supplication". Does that bring out the fact that he waited on divine Persons in relation to what was to be revealed? That would be another feature for us at the close of the dispensation, would it?

PM Is that not also a feature of Luke's presentation of the oblation, the Lord Jesus, the praying Man? We are told very little as to the prayers of the Lord Jesus, but Luke brings out the character of the Man that prayed.

DBR There is "the man Gabriel" and then his word, "to make thee skilful of understanding", and then later it says, "consider the word, and have understanding". Is understanding an inward feature? You spoke about what is constitutional. I thought understanding was really on that line; it is a constitutional thing.

PM Does not Daniel here show that he was the character of man to whom divine Persons could open things up? We might say that divine Persons are willing to open things up to everyone, and from one point of view that would be true, but Daniel was the kind of man that could receive them. He was a man in whom these features were formed. He waited and sought confirmation by the divine word.

DBR I think it is important. It says, "whilst I was speaking". God took the opportunity to impart something to him. On our side we should be ready for that kind of word. It would involve more than knowledge; I think it is an inward matter involved in understanding.

PM "Think of what I say," Paul says to Timothy, "for the Lord will give thee understanding in all things", 2 Tim 2: 7. We are thankful for the knowledge of the truth. Would that we had more - I speak for myself - but understanding is something deeper. I think what you say is helpful; it is inward. It comes from being in the divine presence. Daniel says, "whilst I was yet speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel ... flying swiftly, touched me". It shows, does it not, how heaven delights in this kind of feature formed in the saints?

RT It looks as if heaven was looking for a man like this, does it not? "Whilst I was yet speaking in prayer ...". In a sense, as has been referred to, it is as if God would like to make him a confidante of how He was carrying things through.

PM Do you think that is suggested in the fact that he "touched me"?

He identified himself with a man that heaven was looking for, to whom he could show what was going to yet take place in divine ways. I believe it would be perhaps an incentive to us, especially when we are young. We may have exercise; we may have desire. Speak to divine Persons about it, and in prayer you get some impression from divine Persons themselves. It may not be through an angel like Gabriel as Daniel had, but think of divine Persons looking for those to whom they can impart something of the treasures that are in their own heart.

RT It reminded me of Simeon in Luke: "it was divinely communicated to him", chap 2: 26. It was as if heaven was looking for vessels to be in line with their movements. He does not act independently.

PM No, and he was there in relation to the temple which would suggest what you say, that he is not independent in his movements, but he is available. It is a great thing to hold myself available. I think this matter of prayer and waiting on divine Persons, in order that there might be the impartation of some understanding, is important. One who helped us said, 'I fear much activity without much prayer'.

Perhaps we should go on to Leviticus. Luke's gospel really opens up in a peculiar way what we have in the setting out of the truth of the oblation in Leviticus. In Leviticus 2 we have the "fine flour mingled with oil", v 4. That underlies any understanding of the oblation, really, that every feature, all that could be seen in expression in that perfect humanity, was of the Holy Spirit. Nothing was out of accord with the operation and power and support of the Holy Spirit.

JAB Could you say something about the regularity of this and what that means for us as believers? It was offered every day, in the morning, and in the evening, and we know from Daniel that he prayed every day. What does that mean for us?

PM It is the priestly service Godward that is in view here, is it not? That begins in secret in the believer's life, both in the morning and in the evening. It is important to seek to get some impression of Christ, and to speak to the Father of some impression of Christ that I might have received, in the morning and in the evening. That is not only for my blessing, but it is for the Father's pleasure.

JAB I feel greatly tested. I do not suppose there is anyone here who does not pray when they get up in the morning and then before they go to bed in the evening, but how often that involves asking for things! It

can become almost routine with us, but what you are suggesting, I think, is that we should offer to the Father some impression of what you are speaking about as to the Lord Jesus, and get some impression for ourselves of His preciousness to the Father even in the regularity of our morning and evening communion with divine Persons.

PM I feel more tested than any as to it, but it seems to me that in reading maybe just a few verses in the morning - and the Father understands what time we have - if we make a little time to get some impression of Christ and to speak to the Father about Him, it brings out divine pleasure and helps to form the features of priesthood in the saints.

JAB Is that what the handful is?

PM You will only get a handful. That is my measure, is it not? I could not take it all. I could not encompass the whole of what God finds in that perfect humanity of Christ. That is immeasurable, but I can take my handful. What a wonderful thing that is: take a handful and present it on the altar to Jehovah.

RG It is "his handful". How big is my hand? That is the test for me anyway.

PM And that would characterise what the offerer did with his hand through the rest of the day. He has taken his hand and he has taken a handful of the oblation and offered it to Jehovah. You can see how it forms the priestly constitution. It links a little, I think, with what we have in Romans 12. Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service", v 1. It seems to me that what is proceeding there in the believer with the renewed mind is the appreciation of Christ that causes the believer to say, 'I want my body to be entirely in accord with what God found in Jesus'.

DBR It was presented before God, but then the remainder had to be eaten. Is that what is in your mind? So again the constitutional thought enters into the moral being of the believer, do you think, as we eat? What would the eating involve?

PM You will help us, but does not eating involve that it is not only that my mind lays hold of what is presented to me, but that, in going over with the Holy Spirit the light that is presented, it becomes formative in me? It must involve that the Holy Spirit works in the heart and soul of

the believer to make way for the effect of the presentation of Christ, not only to my mind. I fear the danger of receiving truth in the mind only, but it involves that the affections are stirred and that the believer's heart is satisfied.

DBR I think that is very helpful. I was thinking that as God in His grace takes us up, He has the whole man in mind, not merely his mind, and this must be how morally we are built up in our constitutions, do you think?

PM I am sure of that. In the day of which we are reading in Leviticus the whole life of the priest was devoted to the service Godward. That was his life. He did not have the favour that I have. He did not have the gift of the Holy Spirit. He did not have a Man in the glory for his affections, but his whole life was devoted in service Godward. Now where is mine?

GAB Do you think what is presented to God is a limited amount depending on my capacity, but the remainder seems to be endless? It is on-going; there is enough for us to feast on for ever. I was just thinking of the word John gives us at the end of his gospel: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they were written one by one, I suppose that not even the world itself would contain the books written", chap 21: 25.

PM How boundless the supply for our affections! Mr Hutson used to remind us that there is a world that could contain all the books written.

DJH I was just looking at the note to the word "take". It says, "he shall take of it his handful". The note says 'Or "heave".' It suggests there is something very substantial. Although my capacity is so limited, what I take is something really substantial.

PM Is that not so in every aspect of divine things? My capacity is so small, as you say, but what we are touching is eternal and glorious and limitless. Paul had his handful in writing to the Ephesians. He said, "and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge", chap 3: 19. He had his handful.

DJH I think that is good. I have often thought of that scripture: "to know" something "which surpasses knowledge". I often think of expressions in scripture which the grammarian and the literal man would say are a contradiction and impossible, but it is wonderful "to know" something "which surpasses knowledge". That would be like the

handful, the substantiality of what is there.

PM There are young men and women here who are committing themselves to get the truth, and we thank God for that, but let us always bear in mind that what is presented there to us is always greater than what any one of us could ever encompass.

NJH What difference do you see between “mingled” and “saturated”? In verse 21 it is “saturated with oil”.

PM I would like to know what you feel as to that, but it seems to me that the mingling relates peculiarly to the incoming of the Lord Jesus. He came in, a different kind of Man to all that had come in before, “that which is begotten ... is of the Holy Spirit”, Matt 1: 20. Luke says, “the holy thing also which shall be born”, chap 1: 35. There was there intrinsically in Jesus that which was completely apart from all that had come from Adam's race. It was “of the Holy Spirit”. But then as he came into manhood it became manifest that every movement was of an entirely different character, and He acted by the Holy Spirit. How perfect, how glorious! And what was there was entirely for God. The priest would get some impression of the expression of the holiness and the perfection that was entirely for God apart from what was of man, entirely for God. Does that not link with the saturating with oil? The priest would say there is something quite different here.

JDG Does the eating produce in me features of holiness characteristically?

PM Yes, and maintains them.

JDG I was thinking about what you said about morning and evening and in between is the day, but I develop this characteristic feature of holiness in me, begotten of the Holy Spirit. Features of Christ in the believer are begotten by the Holy Spirit.

PM In Jesus there was nothing that militated against what was of the Holy Spirit, but with me there is, and I need the Spirit's help to judge what is of the flesh and to form in me the features that are in keeping with the humanity of Jesus. In us “the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh”, Gal 5: 17. That was never so in Jesus. The oblation was saturated with oil. There was nothing else.

NJH It is without measure. Christ had the Spirit without measure.

PM Yes, “God gives not the Spirit by measure”, John 3: 34. That

was so in relation to the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit came upon Him “in a bodily form as a dove” in Luke (chap 3: 22), full identification of one divine Person with another, and in that humanity there was nothing there other than what was pleasurable to God. God found in Jesus every feature He looked for, and found nothing that displeased Him.

JTB Why is it that in the law of the oblation it is only the pan that is referred to, not the cauldron and the oven?

PM I wondered about that. Go on, please.

JTB I wondered if it just bore on what you are saying. The oven brings out the intensity of enclosure and heat. It has often been said the intensity of the heat was there in the oven, but is the pan something more open? I notice it says, “It shall be prepared in the pan”. Does it bring out just what you are saying? It involves our scrutiny of that perfect life, do you think? As we prepare it, fresh features of that holy life come into view, do you think?

PM I am sure of that, and going on to the cross, what He suffered, both in His spirit and in His body as He moved onward to the cross! It was there for man to see. He took the disciples with Him to Gethsemane. They saw as “his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth” (Luke 22: 44) and heard Him saying, “Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me”, v 42. Was that not something of the oblation in the pan? What was baked in the oven was unseen, what He felt in His spirit. “He came to his own, and his own received him not”, John 1: 11. How much He felt that! He did not assert His right over them; He appealed to them in grace; He never appealed to man as the Creator. He could have appealed to man as the Creator, but He did not. He “emptied himself ... becoming obedient even unto death”. What feelings were in His heart as He went on, spat upon and rejected and buffeted, standing before a priest who should have been the one who would receive Him. What feelings were in His affections, and that all relates to the sufferings in the oven, what He suffered in His spirit, but in the pan, it was what was seen by man.

DHM The gospels bear that out to an extent, do they not? The gospel writers who were with the Lord Jesus must have had some impression and reflection of these fine features coming out, which they could reflect on as seeing Him at close quarters. Often you must think of how the Lord spoke, the way He spoke, the way He comported Himself; they would have special touches of that, and that comes through and shines

out in the gospels.

PM Yes, and in every circumstance in which He was, He is considering for God in it all. "I have food to eat which ye do not know", John 4: 32. Then when you come to John, He says, "On this account the Father loves me", chap 10: 17. "For the Father loves the Son and shews him all things which he himself does", John 5: 20. Think of the detail of what was there in the perfect life of the Lord Jesus that the Father found His delight in! It is as if the Father would say to the Lord Jesus, 'I will show you what I am doing today'. It says here, "he shall take of it his handful of the fine flour". Maybe when we are working we have limited time and pressures are great, and we may tend just to bundle things together - I speak carefully. I feel that feeding on the oblation would help us to appreciate grain by grain of the fine flour.

PAG Can you help us then as to why in verse 17 of Leviticus 6 it says, "as the sin-offering, and as the trespass-offering"? Why are these offerings brought in also?

PM "It shall not be baken with leaven. As their portion have I given it unto them of my offerings by fire: it is most holy; as the sin-offering, and as the trespass-offering". You will help me here, please, but while the type speaks of the lowliness of the Lord Jesus, yet the holiness and the glory of what was manifested in the burnt-offering, and the holiness in the sin-offering which had to be offered, not from the earth, but on the basis of life being given up was equally as holy for God.

PAG I think what you say is helpful because, as you have rightly said, we need to appreciate the detail and distinction of the features of Christ, but it is all one Person. I was thinking of the line of the hymn that says:

All that God's holy mind
Has sought in man to find,
All that His love designed,
Secured by Thee! (Hymn 268),

- all in one Man!

PM And only one Man could be the anti-type of all these offerings. Everything that was going to be secured for God was secured in Him. Everything that was going to be upheld for God was upheld in this blessed Man, and everything that He did drew out the Father's pleasure.

RG Does that link with your reference in Philippians, "becoming

obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross. Wherefore ...". You do not get the "Wherefore" until you get "and that the death of the cross". You get the oblation in "becoming obedient even unto death", but then the sin-offering and the burnt-offering in "and that the death of the cross". God understood as no other could what was happening at that time, "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name".

PM That is helpful. All had to be worked out on the basis of death, His death. What a death it was! But there was the pathway of the Lord Jesus leading up to the cross, as you say, "becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross". He was not obedient to death. Death had to give way. It fled when He went into it, but He was obedient as far as death "and that the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him". The basis for man to answer to the feeding of the oblation was laid in the death of Christ and in His rising again in order that the Spirit might come. Everything depended on that.

RG-y Do you think that what we are saying now bears on the matter of understanding that we touched on earlier in the reading? I am thinking of the verse in Jeremiah which says, "but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me", chap 9: 24. We know God from the day of our conversion, perhaps before, but to come to understand Him would involve something of His motives, would it not, understanding of His mind, or am I going too far?

PM No. and also the understanding of His heart and of his grace. The apostle, great man as he became, never lost the sense of that.

RG-y Understanding really would take us as far as sonship, would it not? And that is what God would greatly desire that we are with Him, as thankful, of course, but with Him in that sense as understanding why He is doing things the way He does.

PM I think what you say as to sonship is helpful because Leviticus 6 actually leads on to that. It is Aaron's son that will rise up after the death of the priest. It is sonship. True sonship is maintained in the dignity of priestly service. As you say, and helpfully, priestly service is maintained in an understanding of the God whom we serve.

DCB There are features in the oblation which are solely for God, the frankincense and also the priest's oblation. It is for God. Do we have to bear in mind that there is what only God can appreciate of the moral glories that were shown in Christ?

PM I am sure that is so, the frankincense speaking of the fragrance to God that was there in the perfection of Jesus. It was for God. The priest might have some sense of it. He had to take it and offer it, but it was entirely for God. The hymn-writer says:

Where men God's rights withheld,
Thine offering excelled:
What odours choice He smelled,
So rich in Thee! (Hymn 268).

That is priestly service in that hymn, just bringing out something of what was there for God's pleasure. There in that perfect humanity the fragrance was ascending for the nostrils of God.

RT “And being in conflict he prayed more intently”, Luke 22: 44. He sought no other means of resource although some were available. He was wholly committed to God.

PM Yes, what can we say as to that?

RT Perfection in a Man!

PM Indeed. Think of the Lord Jesus, who He was here as a dependent Man, being “in conflict”. “He prayed more intently”. He is to be the model for us, is He not? We are not speaking of imitating the life of Christ. We could never do that. But what we are speaking of is feeding on the order of humanity that would form the features of Christ. It seems to me that the passage you refer to as to the Lord Jesus praying and praying “more intently” shows us where His resource was all the time, in relation to the Father.

RT And the feeding brings about constitution, does it not?

PM Yes.

DBR Do you think Moses would have that in mind in his prayer in Psalm 90: “And let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us”, v 17. You mentioned that in prayer, the beauty of Christ. That beauty is to be seen in the saints now: “let this mind be in you” (‘be found amongst you’, Phil 2: 5 Note ‘I’). It is a great test. It becomes a great exercise as to in what measure the beauty of Christ is seen in us.

PM Do you think that the feature that was seen in Jesus of considering for God in every moment is to be seen in the assembly? There is not only what proceeds in our normal assembly calendar, as we speak of it, but also in the constitution of the local assembly, if we

could use that expression, and in the assembly generally: there is to be that formed feature of considering for God. That brings out divine pleasure.

DBR It was the bent of the Lord's mind that in everything God should be glorified, and that should be the bent of our mind too. It would govern us in all our affairs and all the principles and regulation of our lives and fellowship, do you think, that that kind of mind is active amongst us?

PM I think that. That is really why we touched on this passage in Philippians. It says, "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus", to think as He thinks. Paul says to the Corinthians, "But we have the mind of Christ", 1 Cor 2: 16. As having the Spirit, we have the resource to be able to think as Christ thinks, and that is what Paul is working at here with the Philippians because, in writing to the Philippians, Paul is writing as a heavenly Christian in view of a heavenly testimony in a company that was here. Now, is that not to mark us at the present time, the heavenly testimony, bearing the features of Christ, "holding forth the word of life"?

NJH Reference was made to Luke 22. It says, "rising up from his prayer", v 45. Speaking with reverence, His prayer was the expression of Himself, and that is a test as to our approach to God if it is a true expression. Is that right?

PM It is, yes. In any approach to God what we say and what we are in the eye of God go together. It says as to Cain, "upon Cain, and on his offering, he did not look", Gen 4: 5. The offerer and the offering are together and if I say what I am not equal to, God knows that and measures it. But with Jesus that was never so. He was always equal. He says to those that questioned Him in John 8 about who He was, "Altogether that which I also say to you", v 25. I do not know about you but I often say things that I am not equal to, and the Spirit would help us to be exercised that we might not move here just knowing the truth, but that we might be formed by it, and that the features of the oblation might in some measure come into greater expression.

JCG "That ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God": these are the features of Jesus coming out in the saints, do you think? He was that in perfection, but do you think we have to express something of that? The idea of "simple" is 'single', singleness of eye.

PM And what is coming into expression is the "children of God", and having their origin from the work of God itself so that there is that

worked out here which is of God here in testimony. Is that not a wonderful thing in the midst of a scene where as we finished, "For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ". In the midst of such a scene there are the features of what is of God here in testimony.

JCG It is very testing.

PM Yes, the expression of the One who was "meek and lowly in heart", Matt 11: 29.

JDG These are very simple things for us all to get the gain of as a result of our speaking together. "Do all things without murmurings and reasonings, that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation; among whom ye appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life". That brings together all we have been speaking about, these features seen in the saints in a simple way.

PM I wondered that.

RT He took "a bondman's form". Would bondmanship be one of the early fruits in us of feeding on the oblation?

PM Yes. He could have come in in another way, but He took "a bondman's form". We can hardly understand what that is. Not only did He serve as a bondman, but He took "a bondman's form". He was here in the lowliness of a bondman and thus he was here to do the will of Another.

RT The Authorised Version says He "made himself of no reputation".

PM And yet who was it? It was the Creator. The Creator was here having taken "a bondman's form".

Edinburgh

11th January 2013

Key to Initials:-

D C Brown, Edinburgh; G A Brown, Grangemouth; J A Brown, Grangemouth; J T Brown, Edinburgh; R Gardiner, Kirkcaldy; J C Gray, Grangemouth; J D Gray, Edinburgh; P A Gray, Grangemouth; R Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry, Glasgow; D J Hutson, Edinburgh; D H Marshall, Edinburgh; P Martin, Colchester; D B Robertson, Dundee; R Taylor, Kirkcaldy

“SHALL TWO WALK TOGETHER EXCEPT THEY BE AGREED?”

Paul Martin

Amos 3: 3

1 John 1: 7

Micah 6: 8

This verse in Amos is a very important one because it brings out a divine principle. God has principles. He has principles even in relation to the physical creation. He established lights “to rule the day”, Gen 1: 16. That is a great principle of God's: “light to rule”. He has established principles in His ways for our education and help, not that God needs the principles for Himself in that way. When I was at school, I learned that there were principles in physics, and you cannot change them; they are fixed, and they help you to understand how the universe, and what is in the universe, operates; and God has done the same morally. This great principle here in Amos was established because God Himself found His delight in it. He loves what He does. We have often been reminded that God does what He likes and He likes what He does, and what He does is perfect.

He has already found His delight in two walking together. You will remember at the beginning of Genesis that Jehovah Elohim came down in the garden. It says, “they heard the voice of Jehovah Elohim, walking in the garden”, (Gen 3: 8) and there was no-one that would walk with Him. Man hid himself. Think of the feelings of the heart of God! The top-stone of His creation hid himself from God because they heard Him walking in the garden to commune with man. That was the result of sin. That is why man hid himself. Thank God for the work of Christ that has met the whole question of sin.

But, if I might speak reverently, He found a companion in Enoch, the seventh from Adam. Enoch was not hiding himself. We do not know much about his life, but it says that “Enoch walked with God”, Gen 5: 22. He may have heard from Adam - Adam was still alive when Enoch was here - about the fall, and how he had heard Jehovah Elohim's voice in the garden. I do not know - Scripture does not say; but Enoch found in his heart the desire to walk with God. Apparently, he may not always have done that: but we know he did it from when he was sixty-five years old. It says he begot Methushelah when he was sixty-five years old. And then it says, “And Enoch walked with God after he had begotten Methushelah”. Think of the life of a man walking with

God, bringing up children and walking with God. We are not told much as to what Enoch did; in fact, we are not told anything other than that he prophesied and he pleased God. That was the object of his life. That is the object of the believer's life to be here pleasing to God. That was the object of Enoch's life and, from some point onwards, "Enoch walked with God". What was the result? God showed him great things. He showed him of a coming day that we yet await and Israel awaits when the Lord will "come amongst his holy myriads", Jude v 14. God showed him that. The blessed God loves to show His great thoughts to persons that are interested in keeping company with Him. It is open to us all, and it was open to Enoch.

And then we have Noah. Think of these wonderful privileges that were open to men, men "of like passions to us", Jas 5: 17. "Noah walked with God", Gen 6: 9. Apparently, he did not wait until he was sixty-five. It seems that it was the character of his life: "Noah walked with God". What a wonderful thing, if I might say reverently, for the heart of God, to have in His creature that which was entirely in agreement and sympathetic with Himself.

Noah and Enoch, these men, must have been in agreement with God. Amos tells us that. They could not walk together unless they were agreed. There is something wrought out morally in the lives of these men that our blessed God found His delight in: "Enoch walked with God", and Noah did too. No doubt they were pious men, but it is more than piety. Piety is essential in the believer's life. There is no right walk in the circumstances of everyday life without piety, but this was more than piety. This was walking in relation to God's circumstances. Noah had, no doubt, a judgment of the scene through which he was passing: "he condemned the world" (Heb 11: 7) through the building of the ark. Here was a man preaching righteousness in an unrighteous world, and in that world, through the obedience of faith, "he condemned the world" in the building of the ark. What a moment! Here was a man fully sympathetic with the heart of God in relation to a scene of moral evil such as the scene through which we are passing today. We cannot, dear brethren, take our bearings from the world through which we pass. We cannot take our bearings from the Christendom in which we have a part. We take our bearings from a Man who is at the right hand of God. We take our bearings from another world, and Noah, in walking with God, was taking his bearings from the heart of God in relation to a world that was under judgment, and Noah judged the world

in the action that he took, before God destroyed it judicially in the scene that He covered in water. What a man he was! He was in agreement, two walking together and agreed.

It reminds me a little of Abraham. Abraham and Lot were close together and Lot said, 'I need more space'. Do you ever say that? 'The path is too confined. I need more space'. Abraham said, 'Well, you choose'. And Lot looked and saw the well-watered plains and, it says, he "pitched tents as far as Sodom", Gen 13:12. Do you know what the king of Sodom does? The king of Sodom said to Abraham later, "Give me the souls, and take the property for thyself", (chap 14: 21), and he is doing the same today. "Give me the souls, and take the property for thyself". Abraham would accept neither. The business world does that. It says, 'Give me your whole life and it will be worth your while; you will have great reward'. That is the business world. May we be kept near to God! It is not that the world can take away our eternal salvation. That could never be. That is founded in the work of Christ. But it will take away the enjoyment of our eternal salvation. It says, 'Give me your life, give me your soul, and think what you will get as a reward!'. Abraham says, "if from a thread even to a sandal-thong, yes, if of all that is thine, I take anything ...; that thou mayest not say, I have made Abram rich", v 23. Why? Because his resource was in another world. And he goes out, and God shows him the whole of the heavenly scene. It says, "Look now towards the heavens", chap 15: 5. That was the character of his inheritance. How puny Sodom looked in the light of the heavenly inheritance that God was giving to Abraham, centred in a Man out of death, glorified. That was Abraham's inheritance, and he goes.

Then, later, you will remember in chapter 18 God comes down, and those two men come down to go to Sodom to pour out God's judgment upon it; and it says, "and Abraham went with them to conduct them", v 16. Think of that: he conducted them to judgment. How could he do it? He could not do it if he was part of what was to be judged. The house of God is apart from the scene that lies under judgment, and that really is represented in Abraham. It says he "went with them to conduct them". He stood and spoke with Jehovah and he said, "I, who am but dust and ashes" (v 27); and he says, "There are perhaps fifty", v 24. 'Will you not spare the city for the fifty? If there be forty ... if there be thirty ... if there be twenty'. Think of a man who kept company with Jehovah, you might say, causing Jehovah to wait in the path that He was on in the execution of His judgment! Abraham caused Him to do

that. He says, 'If there be ten ...', and it says, "And Jehovah went away when he had ended speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place", v 33. Think of a man like Abraham detaining God from the execution of His judgment. That is the present moment in which we are, the moment in which divine grace is operating in relation to the world. If there be fifty, forty, thirty, twenty! It says, "Abraham remained yet standing before Jehovah", v 22. Think of the moment, dear brethren, the effect, if one might speak carefully, of persons belonging to the house of God, having God's judgment on the world, yes, the world that justly lies under judgment; and of someone sympathetic with God and seeking that there might be an answer secured in a day of grace that would be for God's pleasure.*

Well, I touch on these things, but Amos says, "Shall two walk together except they be agreed?". Think of how that was seen in the life of Jesus! In Luke's gospel it says, "the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him" (chap 3: 22), and He "was led by the Spirit in the wilderness", chap 4: 1. In Luke you have the Lord Jesus and the Spirit moving together. In verse 18 He says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach glad tidings". That is the character of Luke's gospel, two divine Persons going together: one blessed Man here in lowly, dependent form and a divine Person, the Holy Spirit, moving together.

When you come to John's gospel, it is the Father and the Son going together. What movements they were! John's gospel is so attractive, bringing out the glory of the Person, but bringing out also the glory of the relationship into which that Person entered. I wonder if I appreciate it, that one divine Person should come into manhood and enter into a relationship that He had never known before, and in that relationship find His enjoyment and satisfaction in answering to the Father's heart and drawing from the Father's heart. The One who lived "on account of the Father" (chap 6: 57) was moving here. The Father was His source and His object. He lived "on account of the Father". Everything that He did, He did with the Father, and in the enjoyment of what the Father was doing. From the age of twelve He could say, as Luke records, "did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?" chap 2: 49. What a business that was, having in view the working out of the great work of redemption. There was one blessed divine Person moving forward committed to the working out of all that would be for the divine pleasure. He says, "I do always the

things that are pleasing to him”, John 8: 29. At one point He says to His own, “Behold, the hour is coming, and has come, that ye shall be scattered, each to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me”, John 16: 32. Think of the Father and the Son going on together! It says as to Abraham and Isaac “they went both of them together”, Gen 22: 6. You could write that over John’s gospel: “they went both of them together”, the Father finding His delight in the affections of Christ and in that perfect, dependent manhood, here as the Son, and the Son finding His delight in the Father and His love that the Father had for Him, and the Son giving fresh cause day by day for the Father to love Him. What movements they were: “they went both of them together”! Was there any moment when there was not agreement? Perfect agreement! Each divine Person having the same objective, the same desire, the same motive, each having the same object in view. What movements, beloved! “They went both of them together”! Our brother reminded us in the reading of when the Lord Jesus came to the Mount of Olives, “And being in conflict he prayed more intently”, Luke 22: 44. There was never any divergence even in such a moment between the Father and the Son. Think of what it cost the Father, having in view what it would be to deliver up His own Son: “He who, yea, has not spared his own Son”, Rom 8: 32. I often think of what it cost Christ, and rightly so, but think of what it cost the Father that He should see His Son go that way into death; and go that way, if I might speak reverently, without a murmur of disagreement, everything in total and perfect agreement. “Shall two walk together except they be agreed?” What a wonderful principle! What a wonderful, established fact that God has secured and He will never relinquish because He has reached it in the Person of the Lord Jesus!

When you come to the book of Acts there were those two men going up to the temple to pray. The Holy Spirit had come. Think of the movements of the Spirit in the book of Acts. What movements of the Spirit there were, and as a result of the work of Christ, there were men here who were given to Christ “out of the world” (John 17: 6), upon whom the Spirit had come, and they were moving forward in testimony in the power of the Holy Spirit: so much so that persons said, “They are full of new wine”, chap 2: 13. Peter said they were not “full of wine” (v 15) but “he has poured out this which ye behold and hear”, v 33. Think of the glory of what came into expression upon persons like ourselves, beloved, persons who had been divinely wrought upon, and the Holy Spirit being pleased to come. At Pentecost He came with “parted

tongues, as of fire”, v 3. He never had to do that at the baptism of the Lord Jesus, but with us He has to do that; nevertheless He came and abode upon those who were the product of the Lord's own work, and they move forward, and they move forward in His power.

Now, we come down to the present day. We have read in John's epistle in relation to the present time because it affects our pathway together. It is a wonderful thing that believers have been called not only to be saved as individuals for the coming day, but to be set and have a part in the body of Christ! What a wonderful thing that is, to have a part in the body of Christ. The Lord Jesus is not here now. He has been worthily glorified, exalted above all, bearing “a name, that which is above every name”, Phil 2: 9. How worthy He is of it! If we are left here till the morning, we shall seek to show to the world that that One who was crucified is worthy to bear the Name that He bears, worthy to have the office that He holds, worthy to come again and take up His universal dominion. All that is in view as we come to “announce the death of the Lord, until he come”, 1 Cor 11: 26.

But we are set together, beloved, as those that have part in the body of Christ. You say every believer does. Yes, every believer on the Lord Jesus who has the gift of the Holy Spirit has a part in the body. What does that mean then for me? The first thing it must mean for me is that I must know where the Head is. If there is a body, there must be a Head. Where is the Head? The Head is in heaven. A man asked me once, 'Who is the head of your church? Where is he?', I said, 'That is easy. He is up there'. That is where the Head is. That is the light that dawned upon the souls of many believers two hundred years ago, that the Head was in heaven and the body was here. What a wonderful thing that we have a part in Christ's body! You say, 'That must be very dignified', and so it is. It carries responsibilities, and so it does, because it is Christ's body. Does that mean I can behave as I like? No, but, you know, if I am drawing from the Head, I will behave in a way that is suited to Him; then there is no divergence in the body. Sadly, we are living in a day when divergence has come in among the members of the body, and systems - and I do not criticise the persons - have heads, and a head other than Christ. We live in a very sobering time when the church publicly has made way for things that the Lord hates. What a sobering time! I do not intend to go into the detail of it, but it has made way for corruption within its own camp. What a sobering thing! We should feel that, dear brethren. We do feel it and we should

increasingly feel it: it professes the name of Christ but does what He hates.

You say, 'Where does that leave me?'. John helps us. John was one of the last writers to write and he says, "But if we walk in the light as *he* is in the light, we have fellowship with one another". We can walk together, agreed. It means that I have to separate myself from persons who are not walking according to the truth, and this is set before us in 2 Tim 2. What wonderful light has come out from God, the light of a glorified Christ, light as to the presence here of the Holy Spirit. Paul says to the Corinthians, "Do ye not know that ye are temple of God", 1 Cor 3: 16. What a sobering thing to be "temple of God". It would preserve us in relation to the dignity that belongs in the local assembly and in our walk here. Our bodies are "temple of the Holy Spirit". 1 Cor 6: 19. What great light has come through the Scriptures that we have before us - and we thank God for them and I would that I knew them better! I would say to young believers here today: read and learn the Scriptures while you are young because the time will come when you will read them and not be able to remember them as clearly. Read them when you are young! We have light from God in the Scriptures, indited by the Holy Spirit. An old brother - some here will remember him, Mr Charles Hammond - said to me once, 'Paul, if God has taken the trouble to put His word in writing, you should take the trouble to read it'. I do not say that I answered to that exhortation, but it is true. If God has taken the trouble to put His word in writing, we should take the time to read it and to read it all. Paul says in writing, "the things that I write to you ... it is the Lord's commandment", 1 Cor 14: 37. You say, 'Was it not just what Paul thought?'. No, it is "the Lord's commandment". You cannot question "the Lord's commandment", can you? He is the Lord. You could not question His commandment.

When you come to the epistles to the Corinthians, they give us "the Lord's commandment" in relation to our conduct in the local assembly. In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul says, "Be not diversely yoked with unbelievers", v 14. We understand that. He says, "for what participation is there between righteousness and lawlessness? or what fellowship of light with darkness? and what consent of Christ with Beliar", v 14, 15. You say, 'Of course, there could be none'. If we think back to Enoch and Noah and Abraham and, of course, to the Lord Jesus Himself there was no "fellowship of light with darkness". Everything was perfect. Everything was light. There was never

darkness in Him. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1: 5), and in God's wonderful ways He has given us the ability in a broken day to walk in the light as God is in the light. If we do, John does not say, 'You will have fellowship'; he says, "we have fellowship". It is there. We do not form fellowship. God has established it, for it is "the fellowship of His Son", 1 Cor 1: 9. And He has established it in relation to persons that desire to be apart from a scene of ruin and breakdown and iniquity. God has established it and He has established it for our blessing and for the pleasure of our Lord Jesus. So he says, "what participation is there ...?" There could be no participation in these things, between light and darkness. The matter is clear. It is a principle because two cannot walk together unless they are agreed.

It comes down to everyday company that I keep. Maybe as we are young we seek a companion and it is right that we should because it is normal. I say this, I trust tenderly, because some of us have been very much blessed. You establish your link in walking with God (and that would be walking with Jesus as our Lord) before you seek to establish a link with anybody else, and if you establish your link in seeking to walk with God through the midst of a scene of chaos and breakdown, in God's ordering, if it is His will, He may provide for you someone who themselves seeks to walk with Jesus as their Lord, and you can go on together. That is how marriage proceeds with the believer. You establish your link with the Lord first - that must come first - and then seek that you might find someone else who has established their link. You say, 'You are making it all very spiritual'. I am not seeking to make it spiritual. I did not love my wife just because of what she was in the meeting. There is what is natural, but if there is to be stability in marriage, and if we are to walk together, and if my partner is to be one whom I can walk with in happy fellowship, both of us must be established in our link with Jesus as Lord. I touch on that simply because you may say, 'I have met this friend who is a very real believer and I want to take her out'. I just put you this picture: if you married and you were not walking together, come Lord's day morning you would go to one place, and she might go to another: what would you speak about in the home? What would you share? Would you be able to enjoy entertaining the saints? All these practical things flow out from our own link with God, and I cannot emphasise it sufficiently that there must be the individual link and walk with God and our Lord Jesus before there can be a link with anyone else.

It is important to touch on this because the Lord Jesus is looking

in the present day for overcomers. If we think of Sardis, He says to the assembly in Sardis, "But thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments", Rev 3: 4. They have kept their relationships pure. The believer's garments suggest his relationships of life. We can understand that, can we not? People say you rub shoulders with someone. Your garments are in contact. The believer's garments suggest his relationships. The Lord says to Sardis, "But thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me". Think of that! Persons who were here, seeking to walk with the Lord Jesus here in the scene of testimony, and He says, "they shall walk with me in white". They did not do it for the recompense. They did it because they loved Him. They did it because they enjoyed His company and did not want that company disrupted. They did not want to have it marred and they did not want the unfoldings that the Holy Spirit gives in His wondrous grace as to the glory of Christ hindered, and so they kept themselves and the Lord Jesus says, 'I value that, and those persons are going to walk with Me'.

With Thee in garments white,
Lord Jesus, we shall walk;
And, spotless in that heav'nly light,
Of all thy suffrings talk. (Hymn 270)

How worthy He is that we should devote our lives, our all, to this glorious, blessed One of whom we have been speaking today, and to walk in company with Him and to prove something of His approval. It is the only approval that matters. You may serve in the preaching and persons may come up to you, and pat you on the back, and tell you how well they think you have done - they seek to be encouraging; but the approval that is perfect is His approval. The love that is perfect and unchanging is His love. The enjoyment of relationships that are eternal centre in Him. Oh, may we know what it is to go in for them in an increasing measure!

I come now to Micah because there is just a simple word here. Again it was a day in which Jehovah had to rebuke His people, and it says, "He hath shewn thee, O man, what is good". Where has He shown us? He has shown us in Christ. He has shown us what is good. "And what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" That is what is proper to the present moment. "He hath shewn thee, O man, what is good". There is no room for pride, no room for self-exaltation, no room for

human thrusting forward, even in fulfilling our responsibility in divine things. There is no room for it at all. But “to walk humbly with thy God”! Think of the One who was here, One of whom we have read already today, who “emptied himself, taking a bondman's form, taking his place in the likeness of men”, Phil 2: 7. Who more humble than Jesus? Who more lowly? And it is our portion in the day in which we are “to walk humbly with thy God”.

It may be, dear brethren, that we may - and I say this carefully as bearing on myself more than anyone else, - because we have some understanding of the truth, however small it may be, we may have the local assembly calendar, and we thank God for that and may we be committed to it; but underlying it all, if there is to be power and continuance in the testimony, it must involve that we walk humbly with our God. May the Lord help us to continue to do so for His Name's sake!

Edinburgh

11th January 2014

CONFIDING IN THE LORD

Richard M Brown

Psalm 37: 1-7

One of the things that make the Psalms so precious is that they record for us the experiences of real saints of God. We read of their sorrows, their joys, the things that made them afraid, and what their hopes were; and especially how they proved God, how they learned to trust Him. We read of how they got into trouble - at times this was through their sins, but at others they suffered on account of their righteousness. We know that when the Holy Spirit prompted them to record what they did record, it often went far beyond what they experienced. But it is a comfort for us in reading of them because sometimes when we pass through difficulties, we may think we are the only ones who have had that experience, and then we find in the Psalms that the saints have been this way before. The Psalms record the times of spiritual decline that saints passed through, and how they were recovered. That is something which has marked all our histories to a greater or lesser degree.

This psalm refers in its prophetic bearing to a time still future when evil will be rife and the wicked will appear to have the upper hand. The great point of the psalm is to encourage the saints to trust in Jehovah and to look forward to that day when God will intervene in His government; when He will deal with the wicked, and vindicate the righteous. It has a bearing on our position, because we are living in an evil day. Evil appears to triumph. The Scriptures, and the Psalms in particular, lead us to believe otherwise. But as far as things outwardly are concerned, evil appears to triumph, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for the people of God. The question is, 'How are we to get through, how are we going to get on in these circumstances?'. I think this psalm points the way. It shows how exercised saints, who desire to please God and to practise His will, can get through in such times. Verse 18, for example, says,

Jehovah knoweth the days of the perfect;
and their inheritance shall be for ever:
they shall not be ashamed in the time of evil,
and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

We may feel that we are living in times of spiritual famine. But we need

to be careful of complaining, for example, about being impoverished, of being spiritually emaciated, because, according to this verse, even in an evil day, the perfect - those that are walking uprightly - can know what it is to be satisfied by God; which is a great comfort.

The first exhortation is not to fret because of evil-doers: their time will come. We are not to become agitated by the trouble. We might extend that to the crises that come into the testimony: to fret, or to be agitated, is really unbelief. This is seen with the disciples, when they were in the boat with the Lord, and were afraid of perishing, Luke 8: 22-25. To fret is a sign of unbelief, or it is a sign that we may have ourselves before us in some way. We are not to fret because the time will come when things will be put right.

It then says in verse 3, "Confide in Jehovah". What impressed me about verses 3 and 4 is that they raise the question with us as to what God is, what the Lord Jesus is, to us *personally*. The other verses speak of what He can do for us, and how we are to get through. But the first matter is what the Lord is *personally* to us. It says, "Confide in Jehovah". When exercises and questions arise we may turn to this one or that one, when really the Lord is the One to whom we must turn. We are liable, I think, to be influenced to a greater or lesser degree by those that we speak to, but it is essential that we should have to do with *the Lord*. The measure in which we are truly able to confide in Him will reflect what the Lord is to us personally.

So it says, "dwell in the land, and feed on faithfulness". That raises two questions: first, as to where it is we are living, and then what is it we are feeding on. Dwelling in the land, I think, would point to the great spiritual inheritance which God has given us. You might say, 'Well, there are things that need to be faced' - and there are. But that is not where we are to live. God has given us a spiritual inheritance, and that is where our souls are to dwell. It is a practical test, while we must be occupied with the interests and needs of the testimony, as to where it is that our souls repose: where do they find their rest? Is it in the blessings of God? Is it in the sphere of things that He has provided in His goodness?

Then it says, "feed on faithfulness". I take it the thought directly is to feed on the faithfulness of God. Now that is a wonderful thing to feed on. When matters come up we tend to be much occupied with things that are said and done. I think every assembly-minded person

would make it his business to know what is passing among the people of God. But that is not to be the food of our souls. We are to “feed on faithfulness”, to feed especially on the faithfulness of God, as expressed in the Person of our Lord Jesus. While we ought to be occupied, as I say, with the interests and needs of the saints, we need to be watchful that it does not become our *food*. We ought to feel deeply the sorrows that arise amongst us, but we also need to take care that these matters do not become *food* for us; and that we are feeding on the Lord Jesus.

One specific aspect of the faithfulness of God which has been a comfort to me is in 1 Corinthians 1: 9, where it says that “God is **faithful**, by whom ye have been **called into** the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord”. I think we have been taught that, in the first place, God is faithful to the *fellowship* - faithful to the fellowship of His Son. To my mind that is a great comfort. It is what gives us the assurance that the fellowship of God's Son will never be overthrown. Whatever may come in, in the course of the testimony, the fellowship of God's Son will never be overthrown, because God is faithful *to it*. Of course, much exercise has to be entered into in order to locate it for ourselves, and then to be in the power of it. But let us feed upon the faithfulness of God, dear brethren, because that is what will put strength into our souls; and that is what will steady us for the pathway.

Then it says, “delight thyself in Jehovah”. You see, it comes back to what the Lord is to me *actually*. Do I find my delight in Him? It is one thing to speak about Him, it is one thing to share precious thoughts as to Him when we are together; but is the Lord Jesus really the present delight of my soul? For the verse implies that, if He is, “he will give thee the desires of thy heart”. In other words, He will satisfy us. What a wonderful thing that is to know, in days which are marked by such weakness and breakdown. What a wonderful thing to find that, notwithstanding all the conditions that exist, the Lord Jesus is still able to satisfy our hearts as we find our delight in Him. I think that is something to be proved by us.

Verses 3 and 4, relate to what the Lord is to us personally. Then verses 5 and 6 have to do with committing our way to Him. “Commit thy way unto Jehovah, and rely upon him”. That also involves something which is very blessed for us. We might be anxious as to how things are going to work out, but the note to “Commit thy way unto” is ‘roll thy way upon’ Him - roll it upon *Him*. In other words, speaking, I trust, with the

greatest care and reverence, let *Him* take the burden of it, let Him take the strain, as it were. Roll the whole matter upon Him.

Now, if we are going to commit our way to Him, we must be exercised as to whether it is a way that He can approve of. That raises the question as to what our motives are; whether it is our desire, for example, to walk in the truth; whether it really *is* our desire that, in all that we do, it should be honouring to Him. But I would say, dear brethren, that where our motives are pure and our desire is to please the Lord - again, notwithstanding all the conditions that exist - I am assured that the Lord will help us. May we commit our way unto Him, in simplicity and dependence, and “rely upon him”. That does not in any way excuse us from taking up our responsibility, or being ready to act for the Lord as He may direct. But the great thing is to “rely upon him”. I think the Lord would exercise us to do that increasingly.

Then verse 7 says, “Rest in Jehovah, and wait patiently for him”. As having committed matters to the Lord, we can wait for Him. In the meantime we have *always* - at every moment - to practise His will, to do what is right, to speak the truth; but, according to this scripture, we are to bring matters to Him and wait for Him. It says, “fret not thyself because of him that prospereth in his way, because of the man that bringeth mischievous devices to pass”. We are not to become agitated by what others may be doing, but as waiting on the Lord we can be assured that He is available to support and guide His saints.

I bring these few thoughts before us that they may encourage our hearts. May we be helped to take matters to Him in simple confidence in the Lord. To seek His mind about every matter, and to be directed by Him is a very present exercise for us. It does not in any way relieve us of our responsibility. In verse 3, it says, “Confide in Jehovah, and **do good**”. We are required to do good. We are required to do what is right. Similarly, in verses 27 and 28 it says,

Depart from evil, and **do good**, and dwell for evermore;
for Jehovah loveth judgment, and will not forsake his saints.

I notice that word, “Depart from evil”. It shows that the obligation on the people of God to separate from evil is a very old one. It is important to understand 2 Timothy 2 and all that it involves. But there is nothing new about the principle that the apostle Paul draws on in that chapter. He gives it a particular application to the broken state of the church, but the principle that underlies it is very ancient, because God's people have

always been required to “depart from evil”. This verse indicates not only that they must depart from evil, but that they must also “do good”. We must not forget that side. Not only are we called on to take right ground, in separation from the world and from vessels to dishonour, but, dear brethren, let us not forget to do good.

What a comfort that word is, “Jehovah loveth judgment”. “Judgment” here means bringing to light the true character of things, discriminating between good and evil, and doing justice. God loves it. It is something that marks Him. It is part of His character. Then it says He “will not forsake his saints”. What strength that is intended to impart to our souls. What a mighty Champion we have in the Lord Jesus! We can say now, with the benefit of two thousand years of church history, that the Lord Jesus has never forsaken His saints. There has never been a need on the part of His church that He has not been able to provide for. I think the Lord would encourage us at the present time to draw near to Him, to find our delight in Him, and to trust Him more. May it be so for His Name's sake.

East Finchley

15th October 2013