

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE LORD TARRYING

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What I have in mind to speak about is the effect of the Lord's tarrying, or apparent delay, on every believer and on every man and woman. He has gone to heaven. He has not come back yet. When He will come back, we do not know. That is not ours to know. Scripture says that times and seasons are in the Father's hand, Acts 1: 7. But I tell you this, everyone here, His tarrying is going to have an effect on your life whether you are a believer or an unbeliever, whatever you are. There is not one of us in this room can escape the effects of the apparent delay of Christ in not coming back. Is that true? I am sure it is true.

These dear believers in Peter's second letter were Jews. They had a knowledge of Scripture. They were Jews that were scattered in the dispersion; that is, they had left Jerusalem and scattered. At this point in their history they were about to suffer the destruction of Jerusalem by the emperor Titus, around AD 70. Peter is warning them and encouraging them. He says they are going to find that mockers would arise "walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?".

We are in the days of the mockers. They pass by this hall and other churches and pay little attention. Over a lifetime you can see what a change there is. It used to be in the villages where we came from that there were several churches, and people filling the churches every Lord's day. Many are empty now. That is the state of things. If you pass by Straiton Retail Park, it is full of cars every Lord's day; there is plenty social life, plenty trade and commerce. Christ is outside. What a scene! "Where is the promise of his coming?" The noticeboard is out there, announcing the preaching 'if the Lord will'. "Where is the promise of his coming? for from the time the fathers fell asleep" so it is until now. Burials take place in churches, in this hall and other places. People continue to die: "Where is the promise of his coming?"

Well, Peter reminds them here, first of all, of divine judgments. This may be a little obscure; "earth, having its subsistence out of water

and in water". "Out of water and in water" refers to the initial state of affairs in Genesis 1: 2. God began in the next verse to prepare the earth for man. He cleared the waters and made the dry land appear. Then the next matter is, "by the word of God, through which waters the then world, deluged with water, perished". That is Noah's flood. What is Peter saying? He is telling these dear disciples to remember God came in in judgment and cleared the scene before, and He is going to come in in judgment and clear the scene again. He says, "But the present heavens and the earth by his word are laid up in store, kept for fire unto a day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men". Men may not realise that there is only a limited time. Finally, it will be judgment. You may say, 'What a forecast! What kind of gospel are you preaching?'. There is one bright verse in this passage. It says, "one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day". Then scripture says, "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some account of delay, but is longsuffering towards you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance".

What a God! He says, 'I am waiting'. Who is He waiting on? On persons that do not know Christ, but, more than that, on persons who know Christ. Life is before you. What is it going to be? The time that remains, what is it going to be? Thank God for this word, "longsuffering towards you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance". What a good thing it is to come to repentance! I trust we have all had some experience of it, and that the children will come into it, "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ", Acts 20: 21. What is the apostle saying? Jesus is the Saviour of sinners; Jesus is the Saviour for me. That is what he is saying. Christ is still the Saviour. We can receive the remission of sins. Why? Because His blood has been shed on the cross. What a moment when He said, "It is finished", John 19: 30! Then one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side. Malice pierced His side; love expressed itself in the blood of Christ coming forth:

Thy blood love's answer gave (Hymn 230).

Dear friend, you can trust Christ as your Saviour, and your sins are forgiven.

What if I sin afterwards? It is still forgiven. You can never be lost once you come to Christ in reality. You can never be lost. What a blessed hope! So God has waited nearly two thousand years. Peter

wrote this almost two thousand years ago, about AD 60, before AD 70, and it is still true today. I say, friend, when you come to Christ, you find blessing and salvation, comfort and consolation, but it is a test to men, mockers. Will they believe? God in His patience has waited. God's patience is waiting, and He is waiting on you to come to Christ.

And it is also a test for the believer. Christ's apparent delay is a test for the believer. What is your life going to be? Is it going to be for Christ or is it going to be for yourself and for the world? Every one of us here has a life to live, whether it be long or short. What is your life going to be?

Well, I come to Hebrews 10. Now this is written to believers too, like the believers that Peter wrote to. It is written to Jewish believers of the dispersion. As I said, they knew the Scriptures; so when Peter referred to the earth being "out of water and in water", they knew about God's writings in the Old Testament. It was not unintelligible to them. So here again the writer is writing to them advising them to flee Jerusalem. This again was just before AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus, and they did flee. They left their homes and fled, set up homes elsewhere. There were no policemen in those days to protect their homes. In this passage in verse 34 you will find that their houses were plundered when they were at the meeting; so such happenings and other tests caused some of them to stay home, and miss the the Lord's supper. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together", I understand, refers to the Supper, especially. Never overlook the Lord's supper! Always bear it in mind! Some dear believers were "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together". Christ had not come yet. They were in suffering and persecution, and what was the worth of it? Do not forsake the Lord's supper. You will get something for your soul. Do you know, friend, when you take the loaf and break it and eat of it, and when you take the cup and drink of it, what are you saying? What are you saying to yourself? I "announce the death of the Lord, until he come", 1 Cor 11: 26. Everyone here who took part in the Supper this morning was saying when they did that act, I "announce the death of the Lord, until he come". Who do you announce it to? I announce it to you and you announce it to me. I believe in faith that Christ will come. He has not come yet. But I "announce the death of the Lord, until he come". Take part in the Lord's supper! It is a preservative for you through the week. Week after week, partake of the Lord's supper! "And the first day of the week, we being

assembled to break bread”, Acts 20: 7. Let that be a habit! What a precious habit to have the privilege to gather with the saints!

And then the scripture says, whatever your testings may be, “For yet a very little while he that comes will come, and will not delay”. He will come. Do you have faith in that? Do you have any faith that Christ is going to come? You have great testimony in Scripture that Christ is risen. That is the fundamental matter. Christ went into death, His blood was shed, but He came out of death and was seen, and not only was He seen, but Peter says in Acts 10 that they ate and drank with Him after He was risen from the dead (v 41), a blessed Man, a real Man. He did not have to eat for His subsistence, but He did it to show He was a real Man. They saw a real Man leave this earth when “a cloud received him out of their sight”, Acts 1: 9. Do you believe that? So the angel said that He shall come again in like manner, v 11. He will put His foot on the Mount of Olives, Zech 14: 4. He will do that. He will come again. Be encouraged, Christ will come again, but do not forsake “the assembling of ourselves together”. Let it be a habit to be present at the Lord's supper! You may not be able every time, but let it be a habit as long as you have your health and strength and ability, and circumstances do not on some occasion prevent you. I know occasionally things may prevent us from being at the Supper. That is not what I am speaking about. I am speaking about what is characteristic. It says here, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together”. That is a test. Time is a test; life is a test; the Christian pathway is a test. What is my life going to be? Is it going to be for Christ or for myself, and my pleasures? What is it going to be? It applies to every man, every woman and every child: Christ or the world? “What then shall I do with Jesus, who is called Christ?”, Matt 27: 22. “Let him be crucified”, they declared. You would not align yourself with the crucifixion of Christ? No, I do not believe anyone here would do it, but remember the test! One week after another week the Lord Jesus says, 'Remember me'. I want you to grasp hold of the sense of divine affection, Christ's affections to have you remember Him. If you do not remember Christ, be exercised to do it if you are a lover of the Lord Jesus: “this do in remembrance of me”, Luke 22: 19. Be among those who say when you partake of the bread and the cup, I “announce the death of the Lord, until he come”. I believe Christ will come. What a hope! May it be your portion!

Then I come to Joel. Now, Joel deals with the Old Testament

but he also prophesies in relation to the New because you will find this verse that I read in chapter 2: 28 in Peter's preaching in Acts 2: 17. He quotes it to affirm the pouring "out my Spirit upon all flesh". God said it in this passage here. Wonderful things that God said in Scripture! He did not just say, 'I am going to pour out my Spirit on the Jew'. I am speaking about the nation of the Jews. No, He said, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh", a divine secret. God had a secret at this point in time and Judaism or the Jew, whom He had taken up, did not understand, but God understood. Then He discloses His mind when the Spirit comes. Speaking to the Jews, Peter asks if they did not remember the Scriptures. Do you not know what the Scripture says? God said through Joel, all these years ago, five or six hundred years before, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh". Then He says, "And I will shew wonders in the heavens and on the earth ..."; and then in verse 32, "And it shall be that whosoever shall call upon the name of Jehovah shall be saved". "Whosoever": not just the Jew or the Greek, but all the nations of the earth if they call upon God's name shall be saved. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of Jehovah shall be saved". That is a wonderful thing: the Spirit came and the Spirit has continued here. He has been here for the two thousand years that the testimony has been here. He has been indwelling persons and He has been seeking persons, but judgment is about to come. We are tending to the close of the dispensation.

God's house is filling fast.

The day *will* come when it will no more be said:

Yet there is room! (Hymn 70).

There is still room today, but, friend, there are "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!" People are not prepared to make their mind up: Christ or the world; Christ or my pleasures; Christ or my ways; Christ or my will. They ponder and ponder and ponder. In one sense we all come through a "valley of decision". Do not tarry there! Make Christ your choice! "What then shall I do with Jesus, who is called Christ?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16: 31): that is what Paul says to a man. Do not tarry in the valley of decision!

I was at a preaching once and the brother preached from this scripture appealing to his audience not to tarry, to make a decision for Christ. There was an older man present. He came most Lord's days to

the preaching. A member of the audience told me that those who knew him were very concerned about him. When asked about his soul's salvation he always says, 'I am keeping my options open'. What a thing! 'I am keeping my options open'. Do not tarry, friend! Do not put off decisions in life! You may reach a stage in the government of God where you are unable to make a decision. What options do you have if you are lost? If you have not come to Christ, what options do you have? If you are in a state of unbelief, you are lost. You are a sinner. What are the options? The option now is to take Christ as your Saviour, but you have no option other than that. If you do not take it up now, you may never be able to take it up. I leave that word with you. Be warned! Do not procrastinate! Do not put off decisions that are vital in life! "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!" You will find people like that all around you. Unbelief is at the root of it, despisal of Christ, despisal of the gospel; so beware!

Now I come to Genesis 24. I have taken up this passage and want to explain it. The servant here is a type of the Holy Spirit, and Isaac speaks of Christ in glory. Paul says the Old Testament gives "types of us", 1 Cor 10: 6. The passage illustrates how the Spirit has come down seeking what is for the divine heart, for Christ's heart, seeking believers for the heart of Christ. That is what is announced. He finds a young woman. It could be a young man. Rebecca is her name. She is by a well of water. He seeks to captivate her life for Isaac, that is for Christ. Now, the servant comes to this city. The note ('b') says it is 'Syria of the two rivers', Aram-naharaim. It says, "and he arose and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor", but he does not abide in the city. This is a word to believers as I am applying it tonight, and to young believers with life before them. It is a city and he comes along, and the Holy Spirit (the servant in the type) is looking for someone prepared to follow Him to where Christ is. Where? In glory! This young woman is like someone who never yet understood the fact that Christ was in glory. She was by the well of water. She was not in the city; she was not by the rivers; she was not in the commerce or social life of the city of the two rivers; but she was by a well of water. She was in an area where she was protected in her father's house. And she knew Isaac, as a soul may know Christ, but she had other exercises to learn. What exercises do you have to learn when you come to Christ as Saviour, when you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Typically she receives the gift of the Spirit. He speaks to her heart.

Has the Spirit of God spoken to your heart? Has He spoken to my heart? We need this all the way through, dear Christian friends, not just to start with. The Spirit of God has to speak to our hearts, to keep us on the narrow way, the way of Christ's pleasure. It says, "for *our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens" (Phil 3: 20), our associations of life. Her associations of life may have been amongst the people of God, and she was to be encouraged in that and set her life for Christ. That is what I want to lay on all our hearts. There are a good number of young people here and there are those in middle-age too, a little older, but there it is: life, what is it going to be? Are you prepared to go where Christ is in glory? Your life will be different. It will not be by the rivers of the city of the two rivers where you will find your pleasure. You will find it amongst the people of God, find it amongst the fellowship of God's people. There are many Christians on this earth. You will find this kind of life among them. So the Spirit speaks to her heart and says, 'Will you come with me? I will take you to a Man in heaven. I will take you and make your life enriched. I will speak to you about a Man in glory. I will speak to you about Christ in glory. I will bring you into a way of life where things are not finished by death. I will bring you into an area of life where you have a light and a hope'.

And you are in a race. Have you ever been in a race? What do you do? Everything is given up to win that race; so this is what I am speaking about in Genesis 24. Read Philippians chapter 3; I cannot go into the fulness of it tonight. You will find Paul says, 'I am all out. I am leaving everything behind that does not matter to me. I want Christ in glory. I am going to find my associations of life amongst persons who are waiting until their bodies are changed'. That is what he says: 'I have a body of humiliation but I am waiting for another body, a body of glory. I want to run that race and finally I will get it'. Every believer will get it in Christ, but he says, 'I want you to come into the race and lay aside things that do not matter, "every weight, and sin which so easily entangles us" (Heb 12: 1), things of this life that would entangle you'. This is for everyone here, not just for one or two, every one here. What is your life going to be? Where are you going to find it? What are you going to do? Are you going to commit yourself to the Lord and to the Holy Spirit and ask His guidance and help to put your foot in the pathway, the divine highway? You will never regret it. You will have problems, trials in life, too, but you will have One to support you, help you through, and you will have a joy that you can never experience otherwise.

So what I wanted to come to was that the Spirit captivates the heart for Christ. The Spirit of God does that. Then somebody says, 'Just put it off for ten days! Do not start yet! No, do not start yet! It is a good thing to have before you, but do not start just yet! Just put it off for a time and have your pleasures where you are!'. There was to be a journey before her, and it was her mother and brother that wished to delay her in this setting that I am speaking about. They said, 'Just wait a few days, or ten days'; they had little appreciation, as it were, of Christ in glory, but she had. What do they say, "Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go". It says, "And Rebecca arose, and her maids" and then it says, "And the servant took Rebecca, and went away". Where is he going? To another Man in another world! Isaac was coming from Beer-lahai-roi, 'Well of the Living who was seen (or "who reveals himself")', note 'c', Gen 16: 14. She is going to meet Christ in glory. On the way the Spirit of God says, 'I will help you. I will teach you about that blessed Man. I will bring you into companionship with persons who are on the same way as you.' What a thing, what a challenge, what a reward, to be in the pathway that is leading to Christ in glory!

Well, I leave these thoughts with you for His Name's sake.

Loanhead

23rd June 2013

“WHAT SHALL I DO?”

Roland H Brown

Matthew 27: 22

Acts 2: 37-38; 16: 30-31; 22: 10

You will have noticed that these passages speak of persons who ask what they should do. And it struck me as coming to this gospel preaching that the glad tidings call for a decision. The first man that we have read of said, “What then shall I do with Jesus, who is called Christ?”. He put the question to the wrong people and therefore the answer he got was the wrong answer. But he was faced with a decision as to what to do with Jesus. And that is a decision, dear hearer, that is presented to *you* in the gospel preaching: “What then shall I do with Jesus”, a living Man? It is not simply a doctrine, although there is much precious teaching as to Him and as to His death, but a living Man! What are you going to do? At the end of this gospel preaching, what will you do with Him? One hymn writer says -

Jesus lingers still, 'tis for you He waits (Hymn 439).

Will you ignore His overtures, or will you make a decision for Christ?

The first man that I read of purported to wash his hands of the decision; but he made a decision, v 24. He knew that the One before Him was righteous. That was a remarkable thing. He was in the position of a judge, he had authority from the Roman emperor, and it was his duty to decide whether this man was guilty of anything, and if so what the penalty should be. But God ensured that he had testimony as to the righteous character of the Man before him. Even his own wife bore testimony to him and said, “Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man” (v 19); and Pilate says, “I am guiltless of the blood of this righteous one”; “Jesus Christ the righteous”, 1 John 2: 1. He stands alone in that title. None of us are righteous by nature; the scripture tells us that we are sinners, deserving of nothing from God but His judgment. But before this governor stood One who was righteous. The scripture tells us that He “did no sin” (1 Pet 2: 22), and He “knew not sin” (2 Cor 5: 21), and “in him sin is not”, 1 John 3: 5. He was a Man of another order altogether. This governor knew something else too. Another scripture tells us that he knew that he had been delivered up by the Jews through envy (v 18), but he says, “What then shall I do with Jesus”?.

Well, we see what he did: he consulted the masses. If there are any resolves of heart for Christ aroused in your heart, you will be tested. It is one thing to sit in a meeting room in the company of those that love Christ and to make a resolution that you will be for Christ, but when you go to school or to work there is great pressure to conform, to be the same as everybody else. People speak of peer pressure. None of us likes to stand out from the crowd, and the world thinks it strange if you do. Peter says, "they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same sink of corruption", 1 Pet 4: 4. I have often thought that, when Peter wrote those words, he was thinking about that incident of the Gadarene swine when they all rushed down the steep slope into the sea and perished, Matt 8: 32. And this world is going on to judgment and those who have not in simple faith made a decision for Christ are going on to judgment with it. God presents in Jesus a Saviour.

But this man wanted to appease the masses. From what we read he was probably a weak man, a politician, and not exercising his role on the basis of principle but influenced by the prevailing trend of the day. And we see what happened; he washed his hands of the matter. Well, that will be brought to his remembrance; "God shall judge the secrets of men" (Rom 2: 16); He is going to bring every matter into judgment, Eccl 12: 14. This man had his responsibility; it was not, as the Lord Jesus said elsewhere, as great as the responsibility of the man who delivered Him up. His was the greater sin (John 19: 11), but he had his responsibility. Pilate had before him the Son of God, the One who was the truth. Jesus spoke to him about being born into this world that he might bear witness to the truth (John 18: 37); and Pilate washed his hands of him. You could do that; you could listen to the gospel preaching and decide to leave it for the time being. 'Perhaps later on, when I am older, I will give my mind to these things.'

When I was a boy, there were preachings of the gospel on Friday evenings in a hall in the centre of London. They were arranged so that people could get to them after work, or after school. Lots of persons came to them after work, and sometimes brought their office colleagues to the gospel preaching. And there was one gospel preaching where the preacher was urging that there might never be another opportunity and that it was important to come to Christ now. There was a young woman in the audience, and she wrote in her diary against the entry for the gospel preaching, 'I will take my chance'. Those were the words that she wrote, and we know that she wrote

those words in her diary because, as she left that gospel preaching, she was knocked down by a car and killed. And of course the police were very anxious to know where she had been, what she had been doing, the events that had led up to her death; and that diary was discovered with those words written in it: 'I will take my chance', she wrote. But for her there was no chance to take. How easy it is to be lulled into a false sense of security. The long-suffering of God in His patience waits upon men. How long God has waited in grace upon man. The dispensation, and the length of it, is a wonderful testimony to the patience and long-suffering of God, but He has said that His Spirit will not always strive with men, Gen 6: 3 (KJV). One gospel preacher in the Acts said that God has set a day when He is "going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the man whom he has appointed", Acts 17:31. God has set that day! I do not know when it is, I do not know where it appears on the calendar, but God knows; and those who have rejected His Son will be brought to account for it.

But God in the gospel does not desire to be known as a judge, but as a Saviour God. His desire is to save men; He is a God who saves. He has been saving men and women, and boys and girls, right down through this dispensation. He has a righteous basis on which He can extend mercy and forgiveness to the sinner. It is a wonderful thing to be able to say that. Without relinquishing anything of His holy attributes, God is able to extend mercy to the guilty. There are two things in the scriptures that it says God cannot do. One man in the Old Testament said, "I know that thou canst do everything" (Job 42: 2); but, you know, there are two things that God cannot do. One of them is that He cannot lie (Heb 6: 18); with us sometimes, naturally, an untruth, trips off our lips very easily, does it not? But another thing that is said about the Lord is that "he cannot deny himself", 2 Tim 2: 13. You see the essential moral dilemma: how was God going to approach guilty sinners like you and me as He desired in His heart to do, to express the feelings of His love, without compromising His essential integrity as a righteous and holy God? And in the cross of Jesus we learn how God has done that, how He has upheld all that He is as a holy and righteous God. The judgment of God fell upon One who was sinless, who became a sin Bearer, who bore the sins of believers, and among them He bore my sins. How thankful I am to God for it! You know that it is one of the things I can say honestly that I appreciate more and more, that He bore my sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2: 24), so that I may look ahead to the day of judgment without any fear. John says "that we may

have boldness in the day of judgment, that even as *he* is, *we* also are in this world", 1 John 4: 17. You say, 'Well, I am looking forward to being like Jesus eventually when I am with Him', but you think of that remarkable statement that "as *he* is", as *Jesus* is, "*we* also are in this world". That is how God sees the believer; He sees him as clear of his sins as Jesus is. So that there is no condemnation for the believer, there is no fear of the judgment of God, there is a conscious peace in the soul. It is a wonderful thing to have peace in this world, a world that searches endlessly for peace. We hear about the 'peace process' and peace deals that men try to make to keep the lid on violence and social disorder, but that is not peace. Peace is the fruit of righteousness (Jas 3: 18) and, righteousness having been established at such great cost, you can "have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ", Rom 5: 1. That is a wonderful thing in a troubled and uncertain world where people are so worried. They are worried about the economy, what is going to happen, worried about tsunamis, and disasters in the creation; in this city many people must be very worried about the level of crime, the threat and fear of it, what is going to happen to them, the dangers that abound in the world as a whole. What a thing it is to have settled peace with God in your soul and, as one woman said, 'Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God'. That is a wonderful thing! It could be yours, but it is only through our Lord Jesus Christ. You can have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. You can go through all the great blessings of Christianity and they are all connected with a living Man. You cannot have them without Him, but in having Him, you can have them all. God withholds nothing! He does not give grudgingly; the scripture says, "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly", Psalm 84: 11. You think of the fulness, the freeness of divine giving in Christ.

Well, I have referred to these persons in the Acts because they were guilty persons. They had witnessed, or been responsible for, the crucifixion of Jesus. Peter says that He had been "given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2: 23); that was God's side. God took what men did but He turned it to account. There was what men did, but there was what God did; God gave His Son. He was given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God but Peter says "ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain". Peter was not afraid of peer pressure; Peter had moral backbone. He stood up in this city where Jesus had been crucified and he proclaimed that the very man that had been crucified by them was

living. I think we can little understand the dramatic effect of that on these persons. They thought that they had stamped out His Name and the remembrance of Him. "When will he die, and his name perish?" (Psalm 41: 5); that was what was wanted by those who cried for His execution. But immediately there is this testimony by persons who had seen Him, who had spoken with Him, who had eaten and drunk with Him in resurrection life (Acts 10: 41); it was an undeniable testimony. And Peter says that He was not only raised but He has been exalted by the right hand of God. And He sits there at divine invitation: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I put thine enemies to be the footstool of thy feet", Acts 2: 34, 35. What an uncomfortable moment for these persons to hear that scripture referred to which they no doubt knew well, because they had been His enemies. These were the wicked and lawless men by whose hand He had been crucified and slain. And the Spirit of God brings conviction home to them. "They were pricked in heart"; you see, they had a conscience. The man we read of first of all did not appear to have a conscience that was effective; his was a conscience that, as the scripture says, was cauterised, (1 Tim 4: 2), it had ceased to work. He was prepared to wash his hands of the situation and allow an innocent man to be executed. But this company had a conscience that still worked.

You have got a conscience and, if it is still working and has not become cauterised, it is working on God's side; and it alerts you to good and evil when God's light reaches it. They were pricked in heart. And then, as the truth reached them, the enormity of their position came home to them: "What shall we do?". What could they do? What they had done could never be undone. The situation looked hopeless. This Man that they had crucified, or to whose crucifixion they had assented, had not only risen, but was at the right hand of God and waiting for His enemies to be made the footstool of His feet. They were numbered among His enemies. What could they do? Well, Peter tells them what they could do. They asked the question of the right person. This beloved servant of the Lord could tell them what they could do. They would not find the answer among the religious rulers of the day, but this man - later described as an unlettered and uninstructed man (chap 4: 13), a fisherman, a simple man - he had the answer as to what to do. He says, "Repent". That is the first thing. It has been described as the first act of practical righteousness on the part of the sinner, that he repents. He comes to an acknowledgement in the presence of God as to what he is and what he has done; "and be baptised, each one of you, in the

name of Jesus Christ", in that Name, "for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." These persons were not only to be freed of fear and of the guilt that was undoubtedly theirs - all that was presented to them, and it is presented dear hearer to you and me in the preaching, but there was far more than that presented to them. It was not simply to be relieved from that nagging fear of what might happen as a consequence of what I have done, but to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is a wonderful gift! Precious gift of God, the gift of the Holy Spirit. I wonder if you are conscious of having received that gift. God is very willing to give to repentant sinners the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you are in any doubt about it, if you are not sure whether you have received the Holy Spirit you could ask God to bless you with the assurance of that gift. It is a very precious gift. Those that have received the gift of the Holy Spirit value that gift greatly, because the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in the heart the love of God, Rom 5: 5. It is not only peace with God, but the consciousness inwardly of being loved by God.

It is a wonderful thing to be loved by somebody. Many of us have been brought up in a family where we have been loved, and we have known that we have been loved. It is not that everything was a 'bed of roses' in the family, but we knew that whatever happened we were loved; it was settled love towards us. It is a wonderful thing to have the love of God shed abroad, diffused in the heart. The Holy Spirit does that and He is the power to walk here so as to please God. That is how we answer to His love shed abroad in the heart: we walk so as to please Him, and He gives the power for that, the power to refuse the lusts of the flesh, and practically to get our freedom from sin and the bondage of sin. But above all He links the heart consciously with that living Man above. That is a very blessed thing! The love of God is made known to us in Jesus, and the Spirit of God links your heart with Him. The Lord Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God. As the preaching goes out, that is where He sits. You cannot see Him sitting there, but through the gift of the Holy Spirit you can have an indissoluble bond with Him. The apostle Paul says that not even death itself can separate us from "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord", Rom 8: 38. Is that not wonderful? You think of loved ones dying; and we become separated from them, and they from us. We no longer experience their love as we have known it in their lifetime, nor they ours, but *nothing* can separate us from the love of God; there is inexpressible comfort in that. You think of the persons that we have known that have died; although they may not now enjoy our love or we theirs, nothing

can separate them from the enjoyment of the love of God; how blessed to know that! To have that indissoluble link was something offered to these persons, you might say to the most guilty persons on the planet; the gospel was preached to them first, and it was not only a gospel of relief, but it offered this immense blessing.

Well now, the jailor in chapter 16 was a man in crisis. He had been told to look after these prisoners, charged to keep them safely. There was no question what happened to a jailor who lost his prisoners: he lost his life. You read of that in this very book, the guards whose prisoner was released by the power of God were themselves executed, Acts 12: 19. And these men had been beaten up with unnecessary cruelty and cast into the inner prison, which I understand would have been little more than a hole in the ground, and their feet secured to the stocks. Men who had been so brutalised and were sitting in such depressing circumstances “were praising God with singing”. They had a joy in their hearts that was not dependent upon the circumstances in which they were. I sometimes find that when things are going well I am up, and when they are not going so well I am down. But these men had a joy that no sorrow could destroy. And in these circumstances the service of God was going on, they “were praising God with singing, and the prisoners were listened to them”. It has often been said that it was a strange sound to be heard in that prison: oaths and curses, wails of agony, pain, yes; but “praising God with singing, and the prisoners listened to them”. It was not only the prisoners that listened to them, but God listened to them too, and this earthquake changed the circumstances. God can change the circumstances. The Scriptures abound with examples of how God allows circumstances to arise to reach an end, and once that end has been reached it is a small matter for Him to change the circumstances. Circumstances seem very large to us; we may pray to Him about them, but a change of circumstances is a small matter with God. These circumstances had in mind that this man should be changed, that he might experience something of the grace of God. And so he sees that the doors are open and he thought the prisoners had fled; and he was so desperate that he was going to commit suicide. But the word is “Do thyself no harm”. That is the appeal in the gospel: do not harm yourself. If you ignore the overtures of divine grace, you will do great damage to your soul; do not harm yourself. “We are all here”, Paul says. What a wonderful thing it is that the saints are still here. The gospel is preached while the saints are still here. One day those that belong to Jesus will be taken to be with Him

and the gospel as we know it will come to an end. But Paul says the situation is not as desperate as you think: "we are all here". And the gospel is still being preached and the Saviour is still available. And the jailor ran in and in his despair he says, "what must I do ... ?".

It sometimes used to be said, 'Well, there is nothing to do, it has all been done'; and as far as the matter of atonement is concerned there is nothing you could do, nothing you could give to God for the atonement of your soul. That atonement has been made by Jesus alone on the cross; He made "by himself the purification of sins", Heb 1: 3. He did what you and I could never do, but God looks for what you can do, and what Paul says is still the gospel message: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house". You see, God had in mind the salvation of this man as the head of his house, and then that his whole house should come into blessing.

I close with this reference to Paul. He asked the same question, but he asked it of the Lord personally. Like Pilate, he had the Lord before him, but now in glorified conditions. The Lord was speaking to him from the glory and Paul says, "What shall I do, Lord?". He was not only confessing Jesus as Saviour, but he was confessing Him as Lord. That is a wonderful point in a believer's history, not only to own that Jesus is my Saviour, the One who saved me from my sins and brought me into blessing, but He becomes Lord to me; that is, I defer to His authority: He has authority over me. And Saul, as he then was says, "What shall I do, Lord?". Now the Lord's answer is very interesting because He tells him to go to Damascus and it will be told him what he must do. He was to go into the Christian circle and he was to subject himself to them. He speaks in one of his epistles about "submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ", Eph 5: 21. The Lord Jesus had accomplished the great work of redemption and He had gone up on high to glory, but His own were still here. He speaks of them as the "me"; He challenges this man as to why he was persecuting Him by persecuting His saints. What an astonishing revelation that was to Paul. He thought that Jesus had died and His name would perish, but He was still here characteristically in this Christian circle. And this man who asked what he should do was told to go there into the circle that he had vowed to annihilate. The Spirit of God uses the most graphic language and says that he was "breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord", Acts 9: 1. It describes a heart that was as full of hatred as you could imagine, and these persons

against whom he had such hatred previously were the ones who were going to tell him what he must do. The Lord Jesus on high was not acting independently of His own here on the earth. So Saul was led. It says "And as I could not see, through the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came to Damascus".

"What shall I do"? The gospel does not leave believers without direction and aimless. There are some that preach to save persons from hell but they are left adrift in the world. This man wanted some direction in his life; he did not want to be aimless; he wanted to know what the Lord would have him to do, and the Lord's mind was found amongst His own here. That is a very blessed thing, to find a circle on earth that is in concert with the one blessed Man who has gone up into heaven.

Well, the gospel comes to an end and we go home, but the question remains; what will *you* do? Others may have made a decision for Christ, but what are *you* going to do? You say, 'Well, there is great pressure in the work place or at school, and it would be very uncomfortable; people will think I have suddenly become religious, or holy': what will you do with Christ? Dear hearer, there was never a more vital question for you to address. Your welfare both for time and eternity hinges upon it, I urge you on God's behalf to make a decision for Christ, I urge you in repentance and faith to receive from Him the living water, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to find in your life a direction and a course that He would set that would be for His pleasure. This man that said "What shall I do, Lord?" says at the end of his life "I finish my course", Acts 20: 24. What a course it was. It was a course that had changed from what it had been into a course that was directed by the Lord. It involved suffering for him but he looked ahead for the "crown of righteousness" that was laid up for him and for all those who love His appearing, 2 Tim 4: 8.

May we be numbered among them dear brethren.

For His Name's sake.

West Norwood

28th July 2013

HEAVEN - A REALITY TO US

Brian W Burton

John 6: 57

Colossians 3: 1-4

Ephesians 2: 4-6

I have always loved this hymn, No 14. I have known it well, as I suppose most of us have done, from childhood. It is a beautiful hymn. If you look at the volume of *Spiritual Songs* by Mr Darby, you will find it was written in 1835, when he was a relatively young man of 35; and the impression that he had in this hymn, and of course in many others, was of heaven's proceedings. I find this impression bows my heart in worship, and I would like to think that everyone here is vitally interested in what is going on in heaven at the present moment. We shall soon be there. You may say, 'Well, as an old man, he is bound to say that'. Surely the older ones of us are looking forward to it, but I just wonder about the younger ones. Things might not go on much longer here. We are mindful of the instability that characterises man's world, clouds that are gathering - especially in the Middle East and, although I am not suggesting for a moment that we can deduce when the Lord is coming from earthly events, nevertheless the time of Jacob's trouble will begin in that part of the earth. But what I have in mind would be to direct your thoughts to Christ in glory. He is soon coming, dear brethren; whether you are young or whether you are old, let us be amongst those like the Thessalonians who are waiting for His Son from the heavens, 1 Thess 1: 10.

If we think about this hymn, there are beautiful touches in it -

Praise the Lamb! - the chorus waking,
All in heav'n together throng.

You see the great unifying power of the name of Christ, as every one that is there will be conscious of the blessing that has come to them through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will be precious to each one. I suppose He is precious to each one here tonight, but may He increase in that preciousness; until we reach the glory realm that this hymn speaks about. There is so much richness in it -

Grateful incense this, ascending ...

All the Father's counsels claiming ...

By the Spirit all pervading,

Hosts unnumbered round the Lamb ...

And it is a remarkable thing when you think about it, that the author was a man only 35 years old who had this light as to the proceedings of heaven. It is very impressive; and I would like to think that everyone here is exceedingly interested in the proceedings of heaven. We do find that it is so easy to be occupied with what is happening on earth, and we may be cast down by it sometimes. But, as was said to someone, 'There is another world'. There is another Man who fills it - "that world, and the resurrection", Luke 20: 35. Mr Darby must have been very much in the light of that, and the reality of heaven. I would like in this address that each one of us might get a fresh impression, a fuller impression, of the reality of heaven; and the fact that it is resounding. It is resounding with the glories of Christ; it is resounding with song. Mr James Taylor made the comment once that he thought the service of God was largely in song, vol 43 p 434. In the Old Testament, that is obvious; but I think it is so even now in the assembly. It is often our experience that we are lifted in the service of song; we are lifted out of circumstances here; we are lifted into that eternal sphere where Christ is everything and in all. That is beautiful, and I would like to enlist the interest especially of the young, but of all, that you might have your eye on heaven; that you may spend time meditating on the Lord Jesus, and speaking to Him about all that is happening at the present moment, speaking to Him about His ways with you and me, and His great thoughts too in relation to the assembly. You find that the interest of Christ is engaged in these things, and I think this is what guided Mr Darby to write this beautiful hymn -

Joyful now the wide creation ...

And then ends up

Hark! still louder swells the singing,
As the notes are heard again;
Through creation's vault is ringing
Joy's response, Amen! Amen!

I trust that singing that hymn, and speaking over it a little, will touch our hearts with what is possible, with the saints singing it together, and exulting in the glories of Christ.

Well, I read these three scriptures because I wanted to bring

home the greatness of what it is to have part with Christ in that realm. This verse in John 6 is a wonderful one. The subject of John 4 is 'life' - the water of life, the springing up of the well, springing up into eternal life, the gift of the Spirit. The subject of this chapter is 'food'. It begins with the feeding of the multitude. The Lord goes on to speak of Himself as "the bread of life" (v 35), "come down from heaven", v 38. And then He touches on a subject that we do not often refer to - because I suspect we do not too much understand it - as to feeding on the flesh and the blood of the Son of man; that is, those two things separated, feeding on Him in death, and realising that He sprang out of death in relation to a new realm and a new people altogether. It is a wonderful thing. It is the fulness of the glad tidings as we have had before us, and the Lord is looking for that, for these things to be formed in us, in contemplation of Himself, as having been into death, and come forth triumphant. The one verse I read here goes beyond that. The Lord says, "As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father, *he* also who eats me shall live also on account of me". It is a very brief touch but, dear brethren, it is a very powerful one, the idea of feeding on Christ. This is not now as in death, it is as He is - "eats me", a glorious Person where He is at God's right hand in glory. He is available to be fed upon, and I think as we meditate upon all the things that have flowed out of His death, and the reality of what it is to have a link with Christ now in glory, you find it is food for the soul. You find that you are built up. The Lord links it here with "As the living Father has sent me": you think of the closeness of that link, the preciousness of it, the faithfulness with which the Lord Jesus represented the Father in everything, and what He brought into manhood in that way. "As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father, *he* also who eats me shall live also on account of me". Do we know something of that, dear brethren, dear young ones? It is possible to feed on Christ now. It is possible, of course, to feed upon Him in His sufferings and in His death, and there is the element of feeding upon Him in the Supper - not that this refers to the Supper here in John 6. This is an additional touch: "*he* also who eats me"; and I think that is available, dear brethren, at the present moment - to feed on Christ as He is in glory, where He is, having had to say to everything and settled it to divine satisfaction. There He is, a glorious Man in heaven; and He presents Himself as a subject of food: "*he* also who eats me". I do not know that I can say too much about it, because I expect we would all have to admit that we have not done as much of it as we ought. But there it is, it is possible; and the Lord Jesus

presents Himself as an Object before us, that we might eat Him, as and where He is. Think of that: the Man that fills the glory, the Man celebrated in this hymn, No 14.

Heaven resounds with His glory: are you in the gain and blessing of that, dear brother and sister? Each one of us here, do you know what it is to eat Him as and where He is, to feed on that glorious, heavenly Man? What a pattern in manhood, dear brethren. When God said at the beginning, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1: 26), of course he had Christ in mind. Now He does not only have Christ *in mind*, but He has Christ *actually* in His presence and we are going to be "conformed to the image of his Son", Rom 8: 29. I hope that attracts you, attracts the younger ones. There is so much that might deflect us, so much that might attract us in relation to man's world, but God has a world and He is peopling it with people like Christ. That is what heaven will be, a sphere of delight, and everyone there will be conformed to His image. When we see Him, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is", 1 John 3: 2. Think of that, dear brethren: what it will be to see Christ as He is. There will be no modification, no alteration, no change in that: He "is the same yesterday, and to-day, and to the ages to come", Heb 13: 8. What a wonderful thing it is that Christ is available; He is available as food in this setting. These latter verses of John 6 have been linked with the victuals that they had to prepare for crossing the Jordan, and it is the way into what is heavenly. I trust that attracts you, and that it attracts the young ones, that you should feed on what really motivates heaven. There are heavenly hosts, and they are glorying in Christ. I trust that everyone here is too; it is not the way perhaps that Paul presents it in Colossians which may be a little more intelligible but it is a wonderful thing to appropriate Christ as and where He is. As you feed on Him there, you become like Him; you begin to build up a constitution which is heavenly and will sustain a heavenly life, and will sustain a sphere of response to God Himself. What more could we wish for, beloved brethren, while still here in flesh and blood conditions?

Well now, the verses in Colossians perhaps explain it a little more simply. "If therefore ye have been raised with the Christ, seek the things which are above" - that is the first thing that we have to do: it is our responsibility to "seek the things which are above"; and you will remember that Jesus, when He was here, said, "he that seeks finds", Matt 7: 8. I am quite sure, dear brethren, that if you "seek the things

which are above", you will find them. They centre in Christ, and the Spirit will help us in relation to them. I was helped many years ago as to this by a comment of Mr Coates, 'We need to ponder the gospel of John to get an idea of the things above', vol 9 p312. That gospel opens up this great sphere of things. Christ, of course, was here on earth when He uttered the words, but He also said, "the Son of man who is in heaven" (John 3: 13), and what He spoke of was so much the sphere of which He is the Sun and Centre; and that is where He is now. If you want to "seek the things which are above" you must find Christ, and you must make room for the blessed Holy Spirit of God. These verses go on: "where the Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God". I wonder if you have seen Him there, dear brother, dear sister, dear young one? The enemy will bring in so much that will engage our sight, our attention; and it is all bounded by earth and the things that belong here. Christ is not in them; He has died out of them. I remember a comment of Mr Stoney's (vol 6 p328) that what really strikes the believer, the lover of Jesus, every time he goes out into this world is that He is not here: Christ is not here. I wonder if that has occurred to you: it is a good thing to lay hold of, to see that all that is around us is an order of things for man's delight, man's pleasure, man's glorification. And Christ is not in it: you will find Christ in heaven. You will find Christ in the saints too, but as to the glory of the Person, He is in heaven. And there is no barrier to that: the Spirit is well able to open our eyes to the glory of Christ, and the reality of those things that centre in Him. These verses are exceedingly beautiful. It goes on, "have your mind on the things that are above", and then it adds, "not on the things that are on the earth". Now the mind is a very powerful element of the believer, and what we want is the renewed mind that has been taught to think in God's way, to think by the Spirit; and to think in accord with the thoughts of the Lord Jesus towards us. But, as we have our "mind on the things that are above", we shall come to this, as it says: "not on the things that are on the earth; for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God". Is that not lovely? I trust that everyone here has come to that. Where is your life? You dear young ones, it is quite a challenge, is it not? I look back to my young years, and it was a challenge to us too. Where is your life? It is so easy to fit in to this world and its system, and to listen to what men listen to, and to look at what men look at; but you will not find Christ in any of it because He has died out of it. It is a sobering thing, and we need to realise that, and come to a judgment of all that, and look to Christ. It says, "for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in

God". Hiding has a great place in this Colossian epistle, and I believe that God hides what pleases Him, what He finds precious; and I think He would delight to find that in each one - to find that you are seeking these things that are above, so that your mind and heart are filled with Christ. God will find His rest in you; is that not beautiful? Is that not attractive? There are many other ideas in the world around us. Then Paul goes on to say, "your life is hid with the Christ in God. When the Christ is manifested" - and just note these little words - "who is our life". I would like to raise that challenge with myself and with all of us: *is* He our life? Is He your life? It will bind you with the saints beautifully, will it not? If your life is hid with the Christ in God, you will be one with all His own. Everyone comes in there; there is no class, no division, but each one, if their life is really "hid with the Christ", is bound up in that wonderful sphere, a wonderful company of those who are living at the present moment. So, "your life is hid with the Christ in God". Then it goes on to say, "When the Christ is manifested who is our life". I would like to pause there and raise a question: would it be right to say, dear older one or younger one, that Christ is your life; or do you give a certain amount to Christ but a lot to someone else, or something else that fills this world? It is a sobering question, is it not? I know, of course, that we have to fulfil our responsibilities. If you are married, you have to fulfil household responsibilities; you have to fulfil responsibilities in work, and so on. But then there is what is greater than that, our part in relation to assembly matters. We need to fulfil those too, and our life should be bound up, hidden with the Christ in God. Is that not very beautiful? Think of God looking down on a company like this, and seeing that each one is committed to His beloved Son. Each one of them loves Him, and each one has given up something for Him - or given up many things perhaps for Him - that Christ might be their life, Christ might be their Object; and that they might have that outlook in relation to things - not now how much they can work out of gain from life here. Paul said he had counted all those things loss that he might *gain* Christ (Phil 3: 8), and that is a wonderful exercise; I present it to each one of us - that we might "gain Christ".

Then the final phrase here is, "then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory". Is that not lovely? It is something to be looked forward to, when the Lord comes and takes His own to be with Himself, including the myriads that sleep at the moment. You think of that voice, that almighty voice, raising the dead and changing the living. We shall all be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, 1 Thess 4: 17. Then there

will be a day of manifestation. God is going to show to a wondering universe what He has wrought in Christ, and the myriads He has secured in Christ. Now every one that loves Him and delights to serve Him finds a place in the body of Christ here, and finds a place in His affections too. And they know what it is to minister to Christ. It is a wonderful thing that they have been taken from a position in the world and set apart and called now in relation to the interests of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, I just commend these verses to you that you might think of them in your own soul history: "When the Christ is manifested who is our life". I would like each one here to ponder that phrase: "who is our life" - to what extent can you and I say, "who is our life"? We know that there is enough in Christ to satisfy everything. There is enough to feed the soul of everyone that belongs to Him. Think of the ages to come when we shall actually be with Him in glory, what it will be to derive everything from that blessed One who once suffered and died for us on Calvary's cross but now lives for us above. He is waiting for that moment when the Father's command is given to come for His own. You think of that mighty voice that will be heard, when the living are changed (1 Cor 15: 51) and caught up to meet Him in the air; and the dead are raised incorruptible "and thus we shall be always with the Lord", 1 Thess 4: 17. I like to think of that, brethren: think of being *always* with the Lord - why not be with Him now? That is the challenge of the present moment, not to put it off but to think of the reality of what it is to belong to Jesus now in the day of His public rejection, but in the secret that He has been glorified and has His place at God's right hand. He is just waiting for you and me to come into the gain of that, that we might be held in the fulness of His life, in the fulness of His love. Think of that! He proved His love in dying for us, but He would prove His love at the present moment, I believe. It is an everlasting love, and He would draw near to each one of us at this time, draw us away from this world and all that is going on. How much we all need this - the younger ones especially - because the enemy makes his bid; he makes things attractive. They all belong to time, and what is more Christ has died to them, and He has risen triumphant; and He is just waiting for you to join Him in the sphere of life and glory.

I refer briefly to that verse in Ephesians. What a triumph this is: "God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us, (we too being dead in offences,) has quickened us with the Christ, (ye are saved by grace)". How beautiful that is, dear brethren. God

has had to do with each one of us, I suppose, or we would hardly be here; and how wonderful that is, God's operations with each one. He has quickened us with the Christ, made us to live. This of course is made to live with the Man who fills the glory, the Man who is the theme of that hymn we began with, No 14. Think of those heavenly hosts, and the eternal song reverberating around those heavenly vaults. Mr Darby seemed to have a real, vital sense of it. I trust each one of us might get a real, vital sense of it today, if never before. There is something vital, something precious, proceeding in heaven; and God wants you and me to be fully in it; and as we are I think we will find the triumph and the glory of the love of Christ, which has been proved in the way that He gave Himself for each one of us; but proved now in the reality of that love for His own, for His assembly. He wants you, dear brother, dear sister, to fill a part in relation to it - dear young ones too. Do not put it off: have it very much before you now, that you might be in the living joy of this.

It goes on to say here, "and has raised us up together, and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". This is viewed as an accomplished fact in Ephesians. It is wonderful; we do not have to wait for this. It is something that God has done now. He "has raised us up together". It is in spirit of course, it is not in actuality at the moment, but in the Spirit we know what it is to be raised up, to be raised up together with the Christ. He has quickened us, made us to live, and to "sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus".

Well, I trust, dear brethren, as we think over these things, that the heavenly sphere might become more of a reality to every one of us. May it be so for His Name's sake.

Malvern

23rd August 2013

THE PERSONAL GREATNESS OF CHRIST

Neil McKay

John 1: 14

I have been thinking about the Lord Jesus as to His personal greatness, and this ever remaining - "God manifest in flesh", God come into Manhood. He was seen, a remarkable matter. The "mystery of piety is great", 1 Tim 3: 16. It is a wonderful and holy subject that the Lord Jesus was, and is, and always will be a divine Person in His own right.

We often think of the Lord in manhood as Luke considers Him: His coming in as a babe, the reality of His manhood. He came in as a Man in order to take up our liabilities, to fulfil what was due to God from us, to be here as a perfect Man; to show what manhood according to God actually is, and that is most important.

The other side is that He came in to manifest what God is. Not only what God required from man, what man was to be, but to manifest what God is. And underlying that is the fact that He was God in His own Person. He manifested God perfectly. He represented God. In Colossians 1 it says, "for in him all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell", v 19. So that the Godhead was pleased to be there. In Colossians 1 we have what was there in Christ in manhood. In chapter 2 Paul says, "For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily", v 9. That is what He is to us now. Christ is in glory in manhood now, but what a matter that God was pleased to come in in manhood in Christ and therefore make Himself known. God could not be known otherwise.

More than that, the right of redemption belonged to Him who was Creator. That is One who was God in His own Person. The Lord as dying as a Man on the cross in perfection was absolutely acceptable to God and perfect for God, but in order that it would be suitable for us it involved that One who has the right of redemption. We get that thought typically in Ruth, chap 3: 9.

If the value of His work was to be conferred on us, it required not only that the Lord Jesus should die on the cross, as a Man, but, that the Lord Jesus, who died there, was as to His Person God. These are very deep matters. It required that that One should have the right of redemption over us in order that the value of redemption should be

passed on to us that we should be redeemed. The law could not redeem us, but the true Boaz has the wealth and the right to redeem us. The Redeemer is the One who already owned us, and the Lord owned us because He created us. He is God. It says at the beginning of this book, "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", v 1-3. Here was the One with the right of redemption. He was the One who could come in and, not only as Man take up our burdens and our sorrows and our sins, but as a divine Person in manhood confer upon us all the benefit of that blessed death, that sacrifice. He gave Himself for us in His body on the cross. What a blessed matter.

So John comes in at the very end of the writings we have of Scripture, when breakdown had come in and so much had gone wrong in the church publicly; and he writes to confirm that the Lord is not only a Man but He is a divine Person in manhood. I think that would establish us. One of the reasons that John writes is to establish us in the face of all that is around in many religions. Many say the Lord was a prophet, or the Lord was a good Man - but John comes in to establish what is true. The Lord is not a mere man. No religion, no other creed or dogma, nothing, can compare with this, that the Lord Jesus was God manifest in flesh; God perfectly known, and the only way in which man will ever come to God, or ever know God in any way, is through this blessed Man. These are wonderful facts, wonderful truths.

The first chapter of John particularly gives these things so perfectly. How He came in as light, light for men. He became flesh - He took up a condition of manhood which He will never give up. What He is in regards to His Person never changed. That Person, His personality, you might say, as God, never changed and never will change. But the condition of manhood (He "became flesh") He retains forever - for us. He took up that condition for us in order to redeem us, in order to bring us to God; in order to have man, as God would have him, before God eternally. What a blessed work it has been and what a matter it was. "The mystery of piety is great". "God had been manifested in flesh, has been justified in the Spirit, has appeared to angels, has been preached among the nations, has been believed on in the world, has been received up in glory." 1 Tim. 3: 16. What a blessed Man He is! A divine Person in manhood. Scripture presents such a One, so great; He is worthy of all homage and of all worship. It is a right thing to worship the

Lord Jesus. Worship Him as Man - yes but who He is.

Well, may our hearts just be affected by that; may we be affected in our souls as to the greatness of that blessed One. It is One thing to be affected by His manhood, how precious the reality of that is a real Man, the perfection of One who came into such a condition - but then to see the divine side, a divine Person in manhood - the greatness of His Person. What a blessed Person He is! May our hearts extend in worship to Him for His Name's sake.

Glasgow

7th August 2012

AFFLICTION AND JUBILEE

Leviticus 23: 23-36

We have considered the first two sections of these feasts: 1) the Sabbath, the Passover and the unleavened bread; 2) the wave sheaf and the first fruits.

In the verses which we have just read, when the harvest was finished, in the seventh month, a figure of a perfect lapse of time, there was the “*Jubilee*”, the gathering of Israel, and their joy to be the object of Jehovah's favour. Although rejected, this people is still the object of God's interest today. If they had received the Messiah, there would have been no question of pure grace towards them, for in receiving Christ, they would have shown that man could be blessed without expiation and without a Saviour. Having rejected Jesus, Israel becomes the object of God's pure grace and finds itself on the same footing as the Gentiles. They have lost all right to the promises. “Jesus Christ became a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises of the fathers; and that the nations should glorify God for mercy” (Rom 15: 8, 9); now in order for Israel to become an object of mercy, it must be that they should enter in by grace, like the nations.

Once the time of the Gentiles is finished, God resumes His ways with His people of old on earth, and the thought of celebrating a Sabbath on the earth arises anew. There is a rest, a memorial of jubilee.

It is at the time of the new moon: the light of Israel begins to be manifested again. Every new moon was a feast, but that of the seventh month particularly typified the gathering of Israel.

In verse 27, we see in the great *day of atonement*, the application to Israel of the sacrifice of Christ. It is only by an offering that one can approach God. One finds the details of the feast of atonement in this same book of Leviticus, in chapter 16. It is there that the sin-offering is seen. Here, nothing is said of it because, as applied to the future history of Israel, there is no sin-offering; but in this day they will afflict their souls, in looking on Him whom they pierced, and then they will grasp the efficacy of the blood of Christ, already shed for them, and without which there is no expiation. To enjoy the sacrifice of Christ, the soul must be before God in the place to which this sacrifice applies, and realise that God has seen our sin, and [that it was] put and visited

upon Him.

For God to be in relationship with our souls, it is necessary for us to be in relationship with Him, according to His thoughts, and that we should see as it is the sin of which He has taken account in [the atoning work of] Christ. In this way we will judge sin in its horror, but nevertheless in the calm of a soul softened in the thought of what He has suffered for us. In the presence of the fact that God has taken account of our sins in Christ, we thus take account of them, but in peace because all is grace in the blood of Jesus, and God cannot impute sin to us for He has "condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8: 3) in Him who has been made sin for us.

In this day to come, Israel shall afflict their souls (Zech 12: 10-14), which shows us that, at this time, the family links are no longer anything when the heart is convicted of sin. Each is absorbed in his mourning, knowing that he has rejected his Messiah. The grace which leads them back makes them see their sin, and they mourn because of it, but they are at the same time brought back to God's thoughts in seeing that His wonderful faithfulness has kept them in spite of their iniquities, to cause them to enjoy the promises at last. They understand that Jesus is not only a Messiah, but a *Saviour* and, called to enjoy God's favour, they judge [their] sin as God judges it.

It is in the presence of the atonement that we understand how horrible sin is in God's eyes, and how perfect is the love of Christ, who, instead of pouring scorn on our hatred, devotes Himself to death without any thought of Himself. Man always looks after himself; the Christian hates this selfishness and nevertheless falls back into it continually; but if he has by the Holy Spirit the conviction of the devotion of Christ, he is absolutely disgusted with all that he finds in his own heart.

Before these things the soul is afflicted; it is in bitterness. All is stirred up in the heart; it must be emptied. It even gives up judging itself because it has lost all hope of any kind of improvement whatever. It leaves the judgment to the Lord but this is how this judgment *reveals love*. Sin is condemned in Christ; the soul relies on the judgment of God and enters fully into peace. It is no longer judging itself; it leaves this to God, and God is all grace. It only remains to it to judge itself continually in its *walk*.

In this feast, such as our chapter presents it to us, it is a question of the application to the soul of a sacrifice made long ago; it is not

therefore a question of imputation. First of all, all is jubilation; then God reveals their state to the soul of the people, as having rejected the Messiah. "For every soul that is not afflicted on that same day, shall be cut off from among his peoples". The expiation is made and, on this day, it is the only thing which is placed before God. Woe to him who rejects it!

From verse 33 to 36, we find something quite different. It is the only feast to be called a *solemn assembly*: the great congregation. It has taken place only twice in Israel, at the dedication of the temple by Solomon, and when Nehemiah restored the service. Apart from these two cases, Israel has never properly celebrated the feast of tabernacles, any more than it has [enjoyed] rest on earth.

The people, spared then, will be a righteous people because the wicked will have been cut off; they will enter into the rest of the earth. These people will need a new birth to enjoy earthly blessings, Ezek 37; John 3. It is all the more impossible that we should enjoy heavenly things without it. The Lord presents this contrast to Nicodemus. The flesh does not understand the principle on which one can enter into the kingdom of God down here. Only, those of Israel who will have received the efficacy of the cross of Christ will enjoy "the sure mercies of David", Isa 55: 3; Acts 13: 34. They will have communion with God about these blessings; moreover, the curse will be removed and the liberty and glory of the children of God introduced.

The feast of tabernacles had an eighth day; the other great feasts only had seven. This day belongs to the resurrection. They were to rejoice on this day in recalling the condition of Israel in the wilderness, and the goodness and the faithfulness of God who had led and kept them there.

We also, when we shall have entered into the rest, will know that grace has led us our whole life long down here. Our outward condition is now affliction, but at the same time we can enter, by the cross, into the enjoyment of the heavenly glory where all is joy, pure joy for us.

This feast of tabernacles has in no way yet been accomplished; it is entirely to come. It is Israel's rest in the land, when they will have returned to Christ and will have recognised Him.