

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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AT A MARRIAGE - (i)

THE HOUSE AND THE HOUSEHOLDER

A.J.E.Welch

Matthew 10: 11 -13 ; 13 : 36, 51, 52

Our houses stand in very close relation to the prospering of God's work. It is of deep interest to review the houses that are specifically spoken of in New Testament scriptures, because to a very large degree indeed they are spoken of in a creditable sense, as if the Spirit would remind us that the household side makes way for the elements of distinctiveness that belong in the assembly. This is particularly so when we consider the Pauline ministry, Christ and the assembly, and reflect upon the houses that are referred to by Paul in his letters. We often speak on these occasions of the house of Lydia, and the house of the jailor; they come to light in commendable connections, leading in a distinct sense to the kind of increase that the Spirit would bring about. It impressed me that more than once in Matthew's gospel, particularly, the Lord retires into the house.

Scripture is interesting in distinguishing several times between what was public or among the crowds and what took place in the house, showing us how the Lord delights in a certain protected sphere where the truth can be unfolded in its fulness. Whilst the application of that would primarily be to our assemblings, the atmosphere of the house has a large place as furnishing the distinctive elements that take their place as the assembly is convened. As the Lord sends out the twelve for their distinctive and powerful service he has in mind that there would be worthy houses to receive them. We are not told what constituted a house worthy; we are not given detail of the exact features of a worthy house; but the scripture is put in a way calculated to stimulate us and to search out whether our houses, in the circumstances that the Lord touches, could be spoken of as worthy houses. "If the house indeed be worthy, let your peace come upon it". The desire of our hearts today is that the house that is this day founded shall at every point in its history be a worthy house,

available in the interests of Christ, whatever those interests may require, and fittingly a place of residence for one who is distinctively a servant of the Lord. These matters arise with all of us and challenge us at a time when there are evidences of increase and prosperity in God's work. Are our houses such that they can fit, in divine grace and ordering, into a distinctive place in what the Spirit of God is prospering at the present time? We are searched therefore whether the house in which each one of us is could be spoken of by the Lord Himself as a worthy house. He has in mind that in the course of the testimony such should be available. It would be a very solemn thing for a house that was not a worthy house, in the light of what the Lord says; but let us see the positive side of what a worthy house can be for the furtherance of His interests as his servants are sent out by Him.

In chapter 13 the Lord went into the house, and very remarkable teaching ensued. The Lord would remind us that our houses are to be related to the prime thoughts of God at every point, available to the Lord for the furtherance of the truth, spheres where the truth is loved and is held in faithfulness, into which the Lord could come and proceed with His matters without any limitation being set upon Him. So the Lord, it seems, selected a house. We are not told much about the house, but there was a house that He entered into, and He was at once free to unfold the most wonderful features of the truth. First He is enquired of by them, asking that He expound to them the parable of the darnel of the field. He does it, but the Lord adds the most precious things in speaking of the kingdom of the heavens as like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls. The Lord goes further than the immediate point of enquiry among the persons who come. The Lord is going further and touching what is dearest to His own heart, bringing out in a figurative sense what the assembly is to Himself, the preciousness of that vessel. The Lord adds these things. As He has to do with us in our houses, dear brethren, can the Lord add, can He bring in, in His own wonderful initiative, what is precious to His own heart? Have we grasped the point of the treasure and the pearl? Have we seen the assembly in something

of the Pauline view as distinctively precious and exceedingly costly to Christ? It cost a great deal, and yet the Lord in His grace and His love has paid the price that this precious vessel might be fully secured. To what extent, beloved brethren, are we free in our homes to find a part and place in what is distinctively precious to the heart of Christ? The Lord goes into the house and He brings out these things. He has in mind that in every house what is precious to Christ is to be cherished. There are the questions as to the truth, enquiries as to the teaching. It is fitting that we always bring these enquiries to the Lord, but the Lord is pleased to add something of a singularly distinctive character as He finds His place among His disciples in this house. Well, this calls for conditions, beloved brethren; and who of us would not seek to maintain the conditions in which the Lord can be free to speak to us of what is most precious to His own heart?

Then, at the conclusion, the Lord Himself raises a question: "Have ye understood all these things?". They say "Yea, Lord". The Lord is concerned that we have the understanding of things, and the household is one sphere in which we can proceed into the understanding of things. We recognise that the assembly, especially gathered in temple character, is outstandingly the sphere where we can have the truth unfolded and things made clear to us; but in our houses there is room for enquiry and conversation, for pondering over things, for getting to the Lord about things, so that the whole extent of the divine truth becomes precious to us and according to measure understood by us. The Lord says "Have ye understood all these things?". They say to Him "Yea, Lord". We might have thought it was a very bold reply, but at least it brings out for us the point of the Lord seeking that we come into an understanding of what is precious to Himself. It is not just that we hear things, or even retain them mentally, but we are to come into a spiritual, priestly grasp of what relates to the interests of Christ. Then He says, "For this reason every scribe disciplined to the kingdom of the heavens is like a man that is a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old". We now have the householder, not just the house but the householder, a responsible man who can fulfil his responsibility,

a man who is furnished with what is precious. He "brings out of his treasure things new and old". We covet for our brethren that they may accumulate treasure, and there is abundant treasure to be accumulated. The grace of the Spirit among the people of God in these days is bringing in much that indeed is treasure. The treasures of which the Lord is speaking currently to His beloved people are to be valued by us, and we are to know what it is to bring them out. Things new and old involve that we are kept in touch with the blessed Spirit day by day. Our brother and sister have the day by day course before them, and they will begin day by day to look for something from the Lord that is to enter into each day. Let the practice, dear brethren, of reading the Scriptures and having prayer together be maintained in every household as a beginning to the day; it makes singular place for the Lord to come in, but the result is that not only is there a house but a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old. The old things are of value; there is much that in a certain sense is old; in one way the whole of the truth is always fresh, but there are certain elements of the truth that are basic, and we are to know them, to keep them, and to stand by them. Then there is the new, the fresh side of what the Spirit is immediately asserting in a living way for the instruction and gain of the people of God.

So, dear brethren, our houses and ourselves as the householders are of deep interest in the Lord's sight, and our dear brother and sister today are among such; we covet that all our houses may be such that the Lord finds them to be worthy. For His Name's sake.

THE HOUSE AND THE LORD'S COMING

C.R.Byng

Revelation 22: 17 (first sentence)

The Spirit would use every marriage day to quicken the affections of the saints in relation to what it will mean to the Lord Jesus to have His bride, in all the glory that has been wrought to merge the saints into one as the bride of Christ. There is reference in Revelation 19 to the marriage of the Lamb having come, but in Revelation 22 it is the bride's feelings and her longing for Christ to come into His own rights publicly. This involves the glory of the appearing of Christ when all will recognise that the Man who was once nailed to a cross of shame has the supreme right to the adoration of every created being. The bride is looking forward to that. It is the Spirit's glorious quickening work that the bride is found saying characteristically and continually to the Lord Jesus "Come". It is not something to be arrived at at some future date but it is always current "the Spirit and the bride say, Come". The Spirit of God would use this very occasion to quicken in our hearts a longing for the vindication of Christ, our glorious Saviour and Lord. He is the One of whom every one of us can adoringly say: "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me", Gal. 2: 20. The Spirit is working to bring about these bridal features of longing with the saints increasingly.

He is using every occasion of assembling and is using every hour of the day to quicken our hearts in relation to the rights of Jesus. This enters, of course, into every local assembly. If things are to be maintained according to God in a locality it is in the power of the Spirit who with the bride says to the Lord Jesus "Come". He knows and values, as none of us can, the worthiness of the Lord Jesus.

The Spirit is operating in every locality to bring about conditions where the saints in true bridal response say "Come". This is to affect the bridegroom and the bride, and is to extend to every house.

There is a glory about a Christian house which is peculiar to this dispensation. No other dispensation has had such a glorious feature marking it as a Christian house, where the rights of the Lord Jesus

are recognised. The Spirit of God would lay hold of our hearts freshly today as to the wonderful possibilities if every house is in keeping with the coming of Jesus in glory. It is not that things will have to be suddenly put right. The Spirit is active so that things can be right all the time. It is testing to speak of the truth in this way. Our beloved brother and sister will be tested, and we are all tested. It does not only refer to households where there is a brother and his wife, but to every household that is held for God, whether there be only one brother or one sister. The Spirit of God would guard our minds and our hearts lest anything may come into our homes that is out of keeping with the appearing of the Lord Jesus in glory. The Spirit is strengthening us in spiritual affection after the Lord Jesus Himself so that the glory that is proper to the assembly flows into every household. There may be difficulties or sorrows or there may be joys, but the Spirit is using it all to bring about in every household what is in keeping with the sanctifying power of the person of Christ Himself.

Our brother and sister are peculiarly upon the prayerful affections of the saints, that as starting a Christian home together they may be maintained in dependence on the Spirit every day. How different a Christian house is from the houses of those who make way for the world and the things of the world. It is easy to allow into our houses what is common in the world but a household that belongs to Christ is intended to be a sanctified household where the Spirit is able to dwell complacently as conditions are provided where He can open up the great things of Christ. May the Spirit of God lay hold of our hearts today that every one of us may make way increasingly for Him so that our homes may be in keeping with the glories to be seen when Christ comes to be glorified in His saints. For His Name's sake.

THE HOUSE AND THE HEAD

E.C.Muggleton

Isaiah 61: 10 ; 1 Peter 3: 1-6

This passage in Isaiah is a very attractive scripture and I trust the Spirit of God will use it to encourage us today. The prophet breaks forth in saying "I will greatly rejoice in Jehovah, my soul shall be joyful in my God". The first part of the verse sets out what God has done and we are to be rejoicing in His salvation. This is to be an occasion of joy and rejoicing. There is what God has done, and then what the bridegroom does and what the bride does. We read in Revelation that the bride is adorned and made suitable, the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (see chap 21: 2). The Spirit of God would impress us today that this kind of adornment is to be put on, for this is the time of preparation. And the bridegroom is to deck himself with the priestly turban; it points to headship and it is to be exercised in priestliness.

The idea of the priestly turban is connected as we know from Exodus 28: 36, with the high priest; he had to wear it and the golden plate on which was inscribed, Holiness to Jehovah. So the feature of priestliness would enter into the thought of headship, for the sons of Aaron also had head-caps. One is thinking of the responsibility that our brother is taking on today; he will need to have the priestly turban on, that is to say he will have functions now in headship in his house. It is important that this should be exercised in priestliness if there are to be conditions suitable to the Lord in our households.

The breakdown of headship is manifest to us all around, but it is to be maintained in the way in which the prophet draws attention to the bridegroom here, he "decketh himself with the priestly turban". I am thinking of every one of us who are heads of houses, because the breakdown has come in on this very line of headship. We can trace that in the book of Esther; it says that "the queen Vashti refused to come at the word of the king" (chap 1: 12) and it endangered the whole realm of Ahasuerus. Then the Spirit of God immediately records the word: "Every man should bear rule in his own house" (v

22). It indicates that the breakdown was in headship. We can see that when insubjection and failure come in, it has to be traced back to some failure in headship. Therefore I just refer to this passage as showing the importance of the priestly turban; headship is to be exercised in a right way for the salvation of our houses.

Then it says that the bride adorns herself with her jewels. She is thinking of her husband. This is the time when the Spirit would help us to put on these features of adornment. Peter refers to the kind of adornment which in the sight of God is of great price. The Spirit of God would exercise us as to what is of value in the sight of God, not the outward adornment but the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. The Spirit would work in that way with us as to what is inward so that there is this kind of adornment in the saints, not the outward but "the hidden man of the heart". We are to escape the corruption that is in the world and, on an occasion like this, the Spirit would exercise us that we all may escape corruption and be related to what is inward and incorruptible. God finds great pleasure in what is incorruptible. Peter says in that same epistle that we have been redeemed "not by corruptible things, as silver and gold..... but by precious blood..... the blood of Christ", chap.1: 18,19. We need to be reminded of that; and as Paul says at the end of 1 Corinthians 6, ".... and ye are not your own? for ye have been bought with a price: glorify now then God in your body". So it is not to be the adornment that is outward but the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit; and I think the outstanding feature of adornment is subjection. Peter goes on to speak about how the wives are to be subject to their own husbands. Think of that feature of adornment in that the assembly is said to be subjected to the Christ; so we have the standard before us of Christ and the assembly. May we make room for the influence of the priestly turban, the intelligence that is to be regulated by priestliness. We have the perfection of it in Christ; but then, too, we have the answer in the assembly to every feature of adornment that in the sight of God is of great price. So Peter says that wives are to be subject to their own husbands, and of course the husband has to mould his

wife as Mr Raven said, he is to mould his wife to himself. The Spirit comes into that and would encourage us in the working out of what is pleasing to God. We are in a wonderful time, and the features of adornment are being put on by the saints. Peter says as to husbands, "if any are disobedient to the word, they may be gained without the word by the conversation of the wives". So our sister and our wives today are to see about the conversation, or manner of life, that would add to this feature of adornment.

That is what I had laid on my heart, to remind us that we all need to fill out our part, those who are heads of houses to be like the bridegroom decked with the priestly turban. The function of headship is to be carried out in a priestly way for the preservation of the household; then the influence is to extend and be for the prosperity of the testimony. Then the word to the wives is to be subject to their own husbands, and to exhibit the incorruptible adornment which in the sight of God is of great price. May we be exercised, the Spirit helping us to take on these features, in order that there might be right conditions in the assembly. I think it is right to say that if we are not right in our households we shall not be right in the assembly. Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord. She recognised the authority vested in the man: "woman's head is the man" as Paul reminds us in his epistle (1 Cor 11: 3). As we see around us in the world the terrible breakdown of what God instituted in the beginning, we are to be exercised to maintain what in the sight of God is of great price. May we be encouraged for His Name's sake.

OXTED

9 August 1975

AT A MARRIAGE (ii)

TESTIMONIAL HISTORY IN HOUSEHOLDS

A.J.E.Welch

Luke 7: 44-46; 10 : 38 -42 ; Acts 10: 22

The glorious matter which rightly fills our minds at such a time is that of Christ and the assembly. We have touched the glory of Christ in our hymn and prayer, and I get a sense that it is to run through this whole occasion. I am thinking of these three houses, the house of Simon into which the Lord came, the house of Martha in which He was received, and the house of Cornelius, which relates particularly to the way in which the truth as to the assembly is brought forward.

Our houses are to be intelligently and affectionately set for the glory of Christ, for contribution to what answers to and satisfies His heart - set in relation to what He has in the assembly in service and testimony here. A new household is set up this day. We know from long and affectionate acquaintance with our brother and sister that it will not be like the house of Simon where a critical spirit prevailed.

The Lord reminds Simon in the passage I read that He had come to his house and it was by invitation that He came. "I entered into thy house", He says. It reminds us that the Lord would have the fullest access to our houses and that He has a right to scrutinise what conditions exist in our houses. But He brings forward the matter in the wonderful positiveness of divine grace. In what takes place in this house of Simon the whole character of our time in the outshining of God 's grace is brought to bear. The household is often the sphere of working out things. The assembly is greater, the local assembly is greater, and nothing that we say is to conflict with that; but the house, as available under the Lord and as a sphere where the Spirit has place, has a great part in the working out of things in divine skill. The Lord asserts Himself in this house. He calls attention to this woman, saying to Simon "Seest thou this woman?".

The Lord delights in relation to our every affair to bring forward what is substantial related to the assembly. He has something in Simon's

house to which He can in an unreserved way call attention. The lack on Simon's side is plain, and the Lord makes it plainer if it were possible. But the Lord would remind us that He is looking for a substantial expression of what relates to the longings of His own heart. "Seest thou this woman?" He says. And then He brings in these contrasts, which are used to remind us of the element of genuineness and reality that was here in this repenting woman. "She has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with her hair... *she* from the time I came in has not ceased kissing my feet... *she* has anointed my feet with myrrh". You sense the feelings of Jesus as He draws specific attention to features which relate to a direct answer to Himself. This is where our houses are to fit in, in furnishing the conditions and the features to which the Lord would delight to call attention. He has something for Himself. He will yet secure more for Himself. The Spirit will yet bring in more for Himself. But we want our respective households, including the household of our beloved brother and sister, to have part in what is brought to light, in substance and character, answering to the affections and longings of Jesus.

Now I had particularly in mind the other two houses. The Lord in chapter 10 "entered into a certain village; and a certain woman, Martha by name, received him into her house". She received Him. You might say in certain respects she does not shine later in this passage; she was occupied, careful and troubled about many things, as the Lord says; but she received Him. Here is a house where the Lord is received. That is to be a prime thing in every household among us, that the Lord in every sense is welcome there. It may be there are conditions that call for adjustment, and the Lord is able to bring the adjustment. In what positiveness of grace He brings it! I would press that side, the immense positiveness of the Lord's service and the grace which characterises it. The Lord comes in and He, in that grace, adjusts matters in the most positive way in this house. But it is a house where He is received. If that is basically true of a household, there is room and way for the Lord there. I am more and more impressed with the need in our time of a more

settled occupation with Christ, a more definite pursuit of those holy links of communing with Himself. Such links are to expand us in the appreciation of the moral worth, the moral perfection, the moral excellence (the fine flour mingled with oil, as we might say, referring to the oblation) that we find in Jesus. The Lord finds that in this house in Mary. He says she "has chosen the good part, the which shall not be taken from her". She was, as it says, sitting at the feet of Jesus "listening to his word", a fine attitude which the Lord commends without question. I am concerned that we see the point of this episode. We might be so busily occupied, even in our household relations, that a due contemplation of the glory of Christ is wanting. We may find that things hasten us on from one point to another in the day so that the Lord has but little time, little opportunity, to engage us, as He loves to do, with Himself. This house is a right house. Martha received Him into her house and she is one who receives adjustment. The household relations may bring adjustment, in the grace of the Lord Jesus, but it is that the house might be brought into accord with the depth of His own feelings as seeking that which answers to Him receptively. Mary was sitting at His feet, listening to His word. She is receptive of what He may say, and that is a fine feature, making way for the glory of Christ to come in and affect us; there is attentiveness at every point to what He may say.

Now the house of Cornelius has a distinctive place in the course of the testimony, but the scripture is at pains to show us that conditions pleasing to God were there. The summons to Peter comes through the messengers, men who speak of Cornelius as "divinely instructed by a holy angel to send for thee to his house, and hear words from thee". What happens in the house of Cornelius is wonderful. The passage is presented to us in such wise that we see what transpired in a house, peculiarly in relation to the whole course of the testimony of God. It is the setting in which Peter's vision, as to the sheet let down from heaven thrice, is really filled out into substance by the bringing in of Gentiles according to the Lord's intent. But the Lord used in that relation a right house. Persons

there were needing instruction, and who of us does not need instruction? What a time of education we are in! We begin each day, I trust, with a sense that the Lord would have us to learn something that day. It is a time of instruction. And here was a man who was ready for instruction. Cornelius said (v 30) "Four days ago I had been fasting unto this hour, and the ninth I was praying in my house, and lo, a man stood before me". What an experience for Cornelius, praying in his house! Our brother has a house to pray in, in that sense, and our sister, too, and all of us as matters are normal. The point would be, to what extent are we thus engaged with the whole great area of the interests of God? How much do we pray? Here was a man who fasted and who prayed, and great things took place in his house; the Spirit came down, according to the reference later in the chapter, and entered into those persons. The full, glorious light of the assembly was beginning to take distinctive form; room was being made manifestly for Paul, who had already been secured according to the account in chapter 9. It was a critical time, and the house of Cornelius just fits into the whole history and becomes used of God to bring out the choicest elements of what He has in mind, leading on to what Paul, in due time, would bring in. So that every one of our households is to fit into testimonial history and that in a positive sense, through availability to the Lord, through conditions that the Lord can take on, through conditions that the Spirit can take on and into which He can come for the furtherance of what belongs in the assembly for the heart of Christ.

So we have in Martha's house Christ made much of, in Cornelius' house eventually the Spirit made much of, and the assembly in mind. Every one of our households is intended to be marked by those features in view of the fast approaching end of this time in which we are. May God bless the word.

INHERITING BLESSING

C.R.Byng

1 Peter 3: 8,9

The Spirit would give us a fresh sense of the wonder of the sovereign grace of God that we have been called to inherit blessing. The assembly is characteristically a sphere where blessing is experienced and I think our beloved young brother and sister would be conscious that they are surrounded by the brethren today in a spirit of blessing. We can be simple and say that we wish them well. What a wonderful sphere, beloved; we have been called into!

A fresh sense of the wonder of the blessing of God would affect our brother and sister today and remain with them and is intended to affect us all, because the word today is for us all.

It has always been God's mind to bless. We prove it in the assembly more than it was experienced in any previous dispensation, but it has always been the mind of God to bless. In Genesis 1, after it says that "male and female created he them", it immediately says, "And God blessed them", as though God's primary thought in creating man was to bless them. Truly the end will be that men bless God, but it begins by God blessing, and it runs through Scripture. We can think of Noah, of Abraham, of Moses and Aaron, of David and of many others. The great underlying thought of God seeking to find ways of blessing men ran through all His ways. But what a wonderful sphere of blessing we are brought into! It was set on as the Lord went up. What an impression was left on the disciples of Jesus as He went up with His hands lifted up in blessing. "As he was blessing them, he... was carried up into heaven", Luke 24: 51. The Spirit, as coming down ten days later, would, I think, have brought an impression to those beloved men and women that Jesus was still in an attitude of blessing. And is that not so today?

Are we not proving increasingly the wonderful grace of the Lord Jesus in blessing us? And the blessed Spirit of God is blessing us and leading us into a deeper understanding of all that is related to the assembly of God. What blessings we can trace back to the heart

of the Father! How we can truly give thanks for the sphere of blessing we have been brought into - called that we might inherit blessing.

Now as that is experienced in the local assembly, it is intended to flow into every one of our homes, so that each home becomes a recipient of blessing. That is what characterises a Christian home, that it is a recipient of blessing from God. An atmosphere of blessing in that way particularly comes into a marriage day. There is a glory about a marriage in the Lord which has a special blessing related to it. How thankful we can be that there are abundant resources in the Spirit so we do not have to resort to worldly customs and methods to bring happiness into a marriage in the Lord; yea, rather, if those did find a way in, they would but spoil. We draw, perhaps, particularly on the Spirit of God on a marriage day, that nothing that is natural may come in to spoil the blessing from God. As we think of the marriage in Cana of Galilee, things were inferior there until the Lord brought in the good wine, and immediately matters were according to the proper standard.

We are assured that not only will our brother and sister have a sense of blessing from the brethren, and above all of blessing from God, today, but they will continue to prove blessing as they depend upon God for help. This household is intended to be abidingly a sphere in which an atmosphere of blessing pervades. That means that our brother and sister will need help by the Spirit. Scripture makes provision for a husband to praise his wife; it makes no provision, as far as I recall, for a wife to praise her husband. But a husband can praise his wife. One husband in scripture is recorded as calling his wife blessed, and praising her. He says to her "Many daughters have done worthily, but thou excellest them all", Prov 31: 29. I think that would be the language of our brother today. May it remain so, not only today, but throughout their happy life in the Lord. These things are to continue. Our sister is a bride today; she is to continue a bride. Think of the glory of the assembly as coming out after a thousand years still as a bride adorned for her husband. A sister as a wife surely takes on cares and responsibilities, particularly

when her husband is not there, but she is a bride always to her husband as a spirit of blessing is preserved in the household. As that is maintained, every Christian household becomes a sphere from which blessing flows out to others. Not, as it says here, "railing for railing; but... blessing others". Because we have received such abundant blessing, there is to be a spirit of blessing emanating out from the hearts and the homes of the beloved brethren. And that is intended not only to strengthen the testimony but to gather moral power and strength in relation to the service of God.

Blessing in scripture is a word that is difficult to define. It is like glory, in a sense; you cannot exactly define glory, you are just conscious it is always the outshining of love. What a wonderful thing blessing is, beloved brethren! As we receive blessing, instinctively our hearts rise in blessing to God. So this occasion (with its atmosphere of spiritual simplicity, of blessing and, I believe, of approval from the blessed God) this home that has been set up, and all our homes are to have their own part in contributing to the enrichment of the service of God. We call down a blessing from heaven. "Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee" (Num 6: 24) - what a blessing that was of old! How much fuller the blessing today! As we are here in a spirit of blessing, surely we can truly say that our hearts rise in adoration and worship to the blessed God who has blessed us for His own sake; and to Him be all the glory, for His Name's sake.

HEIRS TOGETHER

J.C.Evershed

1 Peter 3 : 1 (first clause), 7; Ephesians 3: 6

I desire to further, dear brethren, what was said as to blessing and what is enjoyed together. Firstly, what is peculiar to the union into which our brother and sister have entered in the Lord today, and then what is true of believers, Jews and gentiles, together. Peter speaks of husband and wife being "fellow-heirs of the grace of life", and I suppose that in order to enjoy this there are at least these two requirements that he brings in. I have sometimes wondered whether persons who received this letter and read about the grace of life might wonder how it would work out. They would say, we are persons of the dispersion, we have no place of fixed abode, we are sojourners from day to day; but it is in that setting, beloved, that Peter says they should be "fellow-heirs of the grace of life". This is a way of expressing what has just been said as to blessing.

One requirement is that the wife should be subject to her husband. The relationship is not mentioned in this epistle exactly as being in the Lord, but the word 'likewise' carries down from verse 13 of chapter 2 the thought of something being done "for the Lord's sake". I think that is a very beautiful touch that could be brought into this occasion, that our sister's subjection to her husband is not only because she is subjected to him, which is true, and ought to be subject to him, which is also true, but that it is for the Lord's sake.

The Lord is brought before us in this epistle especially as One who has suffered for us and as the Lamb whose blood has been shed for redemption. I am sure our sister will not find it difficult to be subject to her husband. I have not read all that Peter writes about the matter but it is manifest that it is an inward one, that it has to do with the hidden Man of the heart and with the Spirit. An illustration is given of Sarah who ennobled her husband by calling him 'lord'; she did not do so in public but in the privacy of her own place. So that it should be in our sister's heart now to ennoble our brother her husband and to be subject to him as such.

The husband likewise has to dwell with the wife according to knowledge, so that wisdom is required and here also for the Lord's sake, in order that she may be considered as a weaker vessel, her rights acknowledged, her needs cared for, and to give her honour. If she ennobles her husband, then her husband also ennobles her and gives her honour. So that, as has been said already, marriage in the Lord is raised on to a very lofty, moral ground, and we are thankful for it and desire that it may be so maintained. Our brother and sister should be consciously "fellow-heirs of the grace of life". What the extent of that would be they will find out, but it has to do with such matters as invoking God as Father, as later in this epistle; it has to do with tasting that the Lord is good, which Peter also brings forward, with things that are acceptable to God, with learning the will of God. But then that is in view of something further; not only the enjoyment of blessing, but in order that their "prayers be not hindered". I think that means that God looks for something additional from those who are in the marriage bond, by way of prayer together to Him, than there might have been from them individually.

They will maintain their individual links with the Lord, but this has in view that their prayers together should not be hindered; in other words, that God would get an increased portion from the relationship entered into and enjoyed. Although I have no doubt that our brother and sister will, in their prayers, include many matters of practical need and the like - and rightly so, because we may bring our requests to our God and Father - this has in mind what was earlier drawn attention to, that there should be in the home desires strongly and fervently put before God for the furtherance of His testimony.

Now I refer in the scripture in Ephesians to what Paul brings forward as to being "joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings". We should have a fresh sense at this time, dear brethren, that we are all heirs together. I suppose inheritance in the New Testament always has some reference to death having taken place and it is touching to us, and necessary too, that we should remember that on account of the Lord having gone into death and of the place He now occupies, we

can be associated together as joint heirs, and are, indeed, heirs with Him. It is necessary furthermore that the heirs should be discovered and brought to light. In natural things, if there are joint heirs who are not all known, very great trouble is taken, enquiries might be made all over the world, in order that they be ascertained and come into the enjoyment of their inheritance. The glad tidings, dear brethren, goes out with that in view, and God has continued the time, for one reason, so that the heirs might be gathered in to enjoy together what is theirs as joint heirs. And I think this attaches importance and dignity to the persons themselves. We might go elsewhere in Scripture to know what the inheritance is in its detail, but this gives prominence to the persons themselves whom God has chosen and selected to be joint heirs.

Then a joint body means that we are all necessary to one another. We might say, how is this to be experienced in a day of breakdown? Well, it is to be experienced in our realising more and more the importance that we are to one another and one another to us, as being members of the one body. I think that it again lays stress on the dignity of the persons who form the joint body and it is for the expression here of what the Lord Jesus is, because it is His body.

And then there is "joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings", which I take it is the enjoyment of all that the Holy Spirit would bring as dwelling in us; not only the fact that the Spirit indwells us, and in that sense we are all partakers, but that we are partakers practically of all that goes on in a spiritual way by His dwelling in the house and His activities in connection with the reproduction of the features of Christ Jesus and making Him personally more and more precious and essential to us. So that it is the promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings. As we told the Lord as we assembled, we are very glad to be together, and it is glad tidings that we have - that there is blessing in mind for our brother and sister in their pathway together and blessing for all of us in the place that God has called us to. In the name of the Lord Jesus.

LONDON

27 September 1975

AT A BURIAL - THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST AND THE LOVE OF GOD

D.R.Freeman

Romans 8: 31-39

One has an impression, beloved brethren and friends, in regard to two things in this section that we have read together. First, the personal and priestly service of the Lord Jesus on high for all His own, and secondly, the love of God of which Paul speaks. One is confident of this that our beloved brother, now with Christ, proved in a special way the gain of the Lord 's priestly grace and support, as it is said here, "who also intercedes for us". The love of Christ is no less now than it was when He gave Himself for us, for it is the precious portion of every blood-bought saint to know that he was and is loved. The love of Christ is a present matter and burns with the same intensity now as when He gave Himself for us as lost sinners. How affecting that is and what a comfort it is to realise that it is the portion of the saints as children of God here to know His priestly service and prove the gain of it! The Lord, I am sure, has acted at this time. We are thinking of His activity on high and can think of Him drawing near to us, too, to sustain us and support us here. His sympathy is a very real thing and reveals the depth of His affection for us. The Lord wept with Mary, as we know; His feelings entered into that occasion as they do into this, to lift our hearts above to Himself in whom all our blessing is centred for time or for eternity, the One who is the resurrection and the life, the One who is our hope, the One for whom we wait. For whilst we have to part here from one another in the Lord's ways, perfect as they are, yet the time is coming when we shall all be caught up together, as it says, "to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord", 1 Thess 4: 17. What a cheer that is to our hearts!

One was impressed recently with our departed brother saying to us at Kingston that it was his great desire to be with the Lord. He was referring to being with the Lord in the movements of the testimony and in the path of the will of God here. Surely that marked

him, as was referred to in prayer. But more blessed still is his present portion, as it says, "absent from the body and present with the Lord", 2 Cor 5: 8. So nothing can separate us, beloved friends, from His love, and He would leave us with the impression at the present time of His personal service, the personal service of the Lord Jesus and the love of Christ. As it says here, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" There might be those active against us but this is our portion whatever the circumstances may be; it will be our sister's portion too, as that of all the beloved brethren, particularly those in sorrow at this time, to know the love of Jesus in the very circumstances of sorrow here in the world into which He entered on our account and where He proved that love beyond measure in giving Himself for us on Calvary's tree. So this lifts our hearts above the sorrow of the present moment. We know that these things are for a time but a brighter day is coming when we shall see Him, and be like Him, and be with Him eternally. But in the meantime we prove His service on high at the right hand of God, as it says, who also intercedes for us".

But then there is a further thing, and the apostle concludes with it in this section. This wonderful chapter brings in something of our blessings at the present time as children of God here in the world having the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. So there is what sustains us in a very real way though we are in the presence of sin and death; "but in all these things we more than conquer through him that has loved us". That refers to His love in the past; as Paul could say, "the Son of God who has loved me" Gal 2: 20. Each one of us should be able to say that the Lord's love was proved in what He did for us: "the Son of God, who has loved me", that is in the past, "and given himself for me". What a wonderful stay that is to the soul, lifting us above all the dreadful consequences of sin that have come in and giving us the victory through His precious blood! But then Paul refers further to the love of God, and lists a number of things, saying that he is persuaded that none of them can separate us from that love, not even death - he begins with death. So what is our persuasion? What a comfort it is to appropriate these concluding

words of the beloved apostle. What assurance they bring into the hearts of us all, even of the youngest! So that we can say like Paul, who puts it in the first person, the personal pronoun being used, "I am persuaded that neither death" – the last of foes, the last enemy who will be annulled - can separate us from the love of God. Death has not separated our brother from it; indeed it has been the gateway, we might say, to his entering into that blessed portion of being with Christ where he enjoys that love in a way that he has never known before. But this is our portion too; life cannot separate us from that love, death cannot separate us from it; for the believer it is but to be with Christ which is very much better in the consciousness of love. We do not know how long any of us will be left, but whatever life involves, and the circumstances at the present time, we know that that, too, cannot separate us from the love of God - "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present". This bereavement is a present one, but things present cannot separate us from the love of God, "nor things to come".

Whatever may be before us - God holds the key to that - we have this persuasion that things to come cannot separate us from His love. "Nor powers, nor height" - the Lord has gone to the highest height; "nor depth" - the Lord has been to the lowest depth; nor any creature power or element in the universe "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". That love is our portion. Our brother enjoyed it, we know; he walked in the consciousness of it and affected others by it too. He was one who often spoke about being lovable; our brother became lovable, and he enjoyed the blessed sunshine of divine love. That is open to us all, beloved brethren, as it says: "keep yourselves in the love of God", Jude 21. We might write these words over John's gospel. We have referred to the occasion at Bethany and we might think also of chapter 17 where the Lord intercedes for His own at the highest level; but over it all there is the love of God, the love that has prepared for us a place in the Father's house above and that will bring Him again to raise the dead, the sleeping saints, our brother being one of them. We shall be changed and caught up together - "together", notice that. How we should value our meetings in the

light of that, "caught up together... to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord. So encourage" or comfort "one another with these words". That is what we seek to do, beloved brethren, at this time, for we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God. How wonderful the love of God is! It is not a creature love, it is divine love, a love that is immeasurable but a love that we can know through the service of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. May it be so for His Name's sake!

(At burial of E.T.Maynard) - BROOKLYN NY

24 September 1975

THE WAITING TIME

J.Renton

Acts 1: 14

It is very desirable that exercises should be completed; but sometimes we have to wait, and I am thinking of the importance of the waiting time. The persons we have read about in Acts 1 were waiting. The Lord told them, according to Luke 24: 49, to "remain in the city till ye be clothed with power from on high". In verse 4 of the chapter from which we read, the Lord "commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father, which said he ye have heard of me". These persons therefore were waiting for something to be completed.

The idea of waiting is interesting, because the whole dispensation of Christianity is, in a certain sense, a waiting time. It comes between the Lord leaving His own and His return. What saints have waited for right down through more than nineteen centuries has been the Lord's return; therefore, in a broad sense, we are in a waiting time. The waiting time is the time of testimony, the time of learning, the time of growth. When the waiting time is over we will have no more part in testimony as we have now, and there will be no more growth. Therefore the waiting time is a very important time. Our period of active testimony is a very short one.

Some who have gone before us in the great testimony of God had

their part for a much longer time in the testimony. Enoch, for instance, walked with God for three hundred years. Others in that line of testimony in Genesis chapter 5 lived many years and had their part in the testimony for centuries. Our time is quite brief, but it is very important.

Now besides the general idea of being in a waiting time there are certain exercises in which we have to wait for completion.

Certain of our brethren have exercises they carry in prayer every day before God, and there are household exercises. There are local exercises, matters which have been outstanding for months; there seems to be as yet no solution and therefore we are in a waiting time; but the Lord intends that the waiting time should be profitable, that spiritual gain should come during the waiting time. The Lord Himself waits. When He was here He could say prophetically "I waited patiently for Jehovah; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry", Ps 40: 1. Think of the Lord Jesus as a dependant Man waiting on God! Even in His present position He is waiting. Paul writes to the Thessalonians of "the patience of the Christ", 2 Thess 3: 5. He is waiting the moment of which we sometimes sing: 'the Father's perfect time', when the Spirit's work will be completed and the assembly will be raptured to be with Him for ever.

What is specially in mind is the waiting time in relation to certain exercises. The persons here "gave themselves all with one accord to continual prayer". It does not say what they were praying about. Later in this chapter, when they were to appoint one to replace Judas, there was specific prayer; but "these gave themselves... to continual prayer" is not a specific request being made; it is an attitude. How comely for us in the waiting time to have the attitude of prayer! "Pray unceasingly", Paul exhorts (1 Thess 5: 17); that would be an attitude of implicit confidence in and dependence on God. "These gave themselves... to continual prayer"; the waiting time was a profitable time, it was a time when persons were ready and became suited vessels to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

In chapter 9 of this book Saul of Tarsus "was three days without seeing, and neither ate nor drank" (v 9); he was waiting. Ananias had to be adjusted. He was a pious man, he was a disciple, no doubt one who carried some responsibility in Damascus, but he had to be adjusted, and Saul of Tarsus had to wait while Ananias was being adjusted. The Lord said to him "Seek in the house of Judas one by name Saul, he is of Tarsus: for, behold, he is praying". Saul of Tarsus spent the waiting time in prayer. It does not say what he was praying for; he was in that attitude of prayer. The waiting time until Ananias arrived (by his visit Saul received the Spirit and came into fellowship) was not lost, something was gained; the waiting time was profitable: "Behold, he is praying". When Ananias was adjusted he was able to go and lay his hands upon him; he laid his hands upon a praying man. Not only was he a converted man, not only was he affected by the objective view he had of the lord Jesus personally, but there is a certain attitude in him: he was praying. The waiting time, dear brethren, is meant to sober us. It is meant to modify our outlook, to soften our outlook; that whereas there might have been extremes of view, the waiting time, as used of the Lord, would bring us together, especially if we are in the attitude of prayer, and seeking the Lord' s mind. It is not a question of everyone coming round to my view but of all gradually, as utilising the waiting time, coming round to the Lord's view; and so we shall be directed towards unity. Certain exercises exist at the present time; there is waiting, but the waiting time is meant to be profitable. I am certain the Lord intends this.

In chapter 10 the Spirit has in view a certain movement of the testimony, and Peter has an extreme view which is opposed to the view the Lord has. The Lord as in mind that the testimony should go out to the nations; Peter had other thoughts, and he is quite entrenched in his thoughts, and no doubt he could quote scripture to support them. He could refer to the Old Testament and how God confined His dealings to the nation of Israel. No doubt he could prove from scripture that his view was right. But Peter has to be adjusted, and he puts himself in the way of adjustment by prayer. It

says, "Peter went up on the house to pray, about the sixth hour" (v 9). In that attitude of prayer Peter put himself in the way of receiving adjustment. We can be quite adamant and others may think the way we think, and so it builds us up in our own adamant attitude. Peter put himself in the way of being adjusted by going up on the house to pray, and the Spirit took advantage of Peter's attitude to adjust him.

He was not easily adjusted; it would seem that the vision had to take place three times before he got the point of it, but he did get the point of it, and he *was* adjusted. He put himself in the way of adjustment by being in the attitude of prayer. He did not go to pray, as far as we read, for any specific thing; it is the attitude of prayer. Oh! what value it would be for everyone of us, indeed for those who walk in the truth universally, if in the waiting time we were concerned to be in the attitude of prayer and getting the Lord's mind about a particular matter, or about any matter. Thus would the unity of the Spirit be kept in the uniting bond of peace. While we look for completed exercises, sometimes we have to wait for exercises being completed, and the waiting time is no doubt allowed of the Lord that we might come round and be directed towards unity.

In chapter 13, in Antioch we find there were persons who were ministering to the Lord and fasting. It does not seem clear to me whether it was the whole assembly who were ministering and fasting, but certainly these five prophets and teachers were ministering to the Lord and fasting. The Holy Spirit was looking for vessels to use in the great outgoing work of the testimony and He found available, without requiring to be adjusted, just available to hand, two vessels who were in this attitude of ministering to the Lord and fasting.

May the Lord help us to get into this attitude that we all may be preserved together, not only in this city but universally, for the Lord's own Name's sake.

EDINBURGH

9th September 1975

THE CHILDREN'S GROWTH

The gospel-writer, Luke, who records most about the early life of Jesus tells us that as a child He grew and *became* strong in spirit.

He was greater even than John the baptist who also grew up normally as a child but who was *made* strong in spirit. No doubt this was for his special service later on of making ready for the Lord a prepared people, but it also teaches us that heaven watches us grow, not only in our bodies, but in our spirits where we first have to do with God.

This kind of growth therefore is by the true knowledge of God which comes through His word in the Scriptures. Timothy in childhood had known the sacred letters which would develop him in this way - but by faith in Christ Jesus. Although the Lord in His life here has left us a model, it is by knowing Him in glory that the result in us is increase in soul and spirit. A child growing in the normal way becomes first able to reach up and touch a thing and then to grasp it.

Timothy, although no longer very young, was told by Paul to *seize* eternal life which he had already known about.

A lesson we can learn from the creation around us is that a believer, like a tree, must take root downward before being able to bear fruit upward. With Samuel this unseen growth was by his secret knowledge of God - as the deep, spreading roots of a fruit-tree bring it strength and food. Paul wrote about being rooted in love - which is like the fine net-work of roots near the surface which benefit by the sunshine, air and rain to give quality and flavour to the fruits.

No doubt you can think of a number of kinds of fruit mentioned in the Bible, each of which has a distinct meaning.

Our heavenly Father looks for us to grow up to the standard of His thoughts for us. When the boy Samuel's mother came each year to see him she would expect him to fit the new coat and not the new coat to fit him! No doubt each coat was perfectly made but had some new feature of which he should be worthy. There have been

times when God's work has depended on quite young persons such as Miriam, Samuel, the shepherd-boy David, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, the little maid in Naaman's house, the little boy with loaves and fishes and Paul's nephew. Can He depend on you?

J.C.Evershed