

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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THE FATHER'S PLACE IN THE ECONOMY

Ephesians 3: 14-21; 1 Corinthians 15: 28

C.H. The scripture in 1 Corinthians 8: 6 referred to earlier sets out the formal position, we may say, between the Father and the Lord Jesus. We may not always observe the punctuation in that verse: "Yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom all things, and we for him"; that is, the Father is the author and the originator of all things; "and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him". Notice the 'of' in relation to God the Father and the 'by' in relation to Christ. This bears on the fact that we only know divine Persons as They have come into the sphere of revelation.

C.M. In Colossians 1: 16 all things are created "for him", that is, Christ.

C.H. Christ acted mediatorially all through, but the intelligent understanding of that did not come out until the full truth was declared.

C.M. We do not limit Him to what is mediatorial.

C.H. No, we cannot limit the Lord to any position He assumes. What we have read in 1 Corinthians 15: 28 is to show that the mediatorial position of Christ goes through into eternity. It is well to be clear as to that. To be with God eternally we shall need a mediator, for God is God and we shall still be creatures. Even in new creation we are still creatures and therefore One in a mediatorial position is needed, and that one is Christ.

C.M. He is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 15 as "the Son". Would that link with John 17 where the glory given to Him is given to us and we are associated with Him as sons? God has come into expression in the Son.

C.H. So that Colossians 1 states that when Christ was here in flesh, the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him. In the second chapter (v 9) it says "For in him dwells all the fulness of the godhead bodily": it adds 'bodily' for He is man now in a glorified condition. What we

should inquire into is, why the apostle in Ephesians 3 bows his knees to the Father in considering this great subject. It indicates the place that the Father has assumed in the economy. "My Father is greater than I" (John 14: 28) was quoted earlier this morning, and also "my Father... is greater than all", John 10: 29. We cannot limit the Lord to any position He assumes, but we can see that He has assumed a position in which He is placed in subjection, as 1 Corinthians 15: 28 says. It does not say who places Him in subjection; it may even be that He places Himself in that position; but He assumes a mediatorial role throughout eternity. If he does not, and ceases to be Man, we have no link with God. Yet He always remains what He is essentially. The position that Christ has assumed is important, for it says, to God "be the glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus". He is the means by which God will be glorified eternally in the assembly.

D.E.R. Our knowledge of divine Persons is entirely apprehended through the positions which They have taken up relatively.

C.H. It can only be so, but we cannot limit Them to those positions.

D.E.R. So the Father has ever remained in essential deity, and hence takes the place of God to us.

C.H. Mr Darby wrote that the Father remained in simple deity, needing to be revealed, and He has been revealed in the Son.

R.E.T. Do you have an exercise regarding addressing the Father as God and Father?

C.H. I have thought a good deal about what Mr Taylor sen said years ago, that the double appellation, God and Father, expresses reverence. I would not hinder liberty to speak to the Father by that name; indeed "whereby we cry, Abba, Father " (Rom 8: 15) gives us scriptural warrant for so doing. But because the Father has come out in grace and relationship we should not lack reverence on that account. The catholic epistles mostly refer to Him as God and Father.

C.H.S. Is "of whom all things, and we for him" similar to what you spoke of earlier as to what He "purposed in himself", Eph 1: 9?

C.H. Yes. Think of a Person great enough to purpose in Himself to do certain things! We know from other scriptures that other divine Persons were with Him in those counsels on terms of equality. Love was there, of course, yet not related to any except Themselves.

Speaking of the Absolute Mr Darby says it is 'selfexistence, love, purity' (Vol 32, p.28). Human language fails, yet love evidently existed, but it did not come into expression as to ourselves until the Son declared God.

R.E.T. John 1: 1 refers to the depths of God.

C.H. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us", John says. We shall never see the Father except in the Son. We must accept the fact that divine Persons have assumed these positions. But I think the apostle bows his knees to the Father because he felt the need of approaching a subject such as we are on now, in a priestly way in order to get the gain of what is almost to the limit of our apprehension.

R.E.T. So the title God and Father brings in a spirit of reverence.

C.H. In the service of God it is as well to note that the title generally employed in the epistles is God and Father.

C.H.S. "My Father and your Father" comes before "my God and your God" in John 20.

C.H. You cannot reach the second without the first. But at times, in our anxiety to reach the 'ultimate' in the service, much of what we say to God could be addressed to the Father. There is not a fourth Person, but at times expressions might convey that impression.

D.E.R. You mean that we widen out from the Father's realm to the full thought of God.

C.H. To address God is not exactly a greater thought. How can you have anything greater than deity, which applies to any one of the three Persons? They do not have *part* in deity because deity is indivisible.

D.E.R. But we need help as to the point you have in mind - that a greater part of the service could be addressed to the Father.

C.H. I think it is more appropriate, as when we were together this morning. What is addressed to God, including the three Persons, could mostly, but not entirely, be in song. The hymn writers have been helped by the Spirit to put the truth into suitable expression.

C.H.S. I should like help regarding the Father remaining in His position in deity. In speaking to the Father I always feel impressed with the way He has come near to us in the Son.

C.H. Mr Taylor sen said 'the Father remains in the absoluteness of the Deity' (N.S. Vol. 91, p.292). Throughout eternity we shall only see the Father in the Son.

D.E.R. The greatness of the person of the Father lies behind the relationship of love in which He is toward us.

C.H. It is that Person who "purposed in himself" to do certain things who has come near to us in relativity.

C.H.S. That applies to each of the divine Persons.

C.H. What is essential to Them remains, but the Son and the Spirit have come into relative positions to the Father.

C.M. In the service we are occupied with the Son and the Spirit in the relative positions into which They have come, but They are not to be limited to that. The worship of God at the close of the meeting would help us to get beyond any thought of limiting Them. We need to remember that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not only in relativity.

C.H. Those are the names They have taken, by which we can address Them; but when quoting Matthew 28 we should include the conjunctions.

D.E.R. You mean the name is "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit".

C.H. That is, three distinct Persons, but one name.

C.M. Although we are thinking of Them there in equality, yet you could not reverse the order.

C.H. No, for that is the way They are known; we can only go by what has been revealed. So we can only know the Father and the Son and the Spirit by the relative names They have taken. But when it says that God shall be all in all, those we know as the Son and the Spirit have Their part in that, or rather, are included in the title 'God'.

C.H.S. At the end of the morning meeting we used to address each Person and then conclude by referring to God. Was that correct?

C.H. It just depends on what is in our minds when we speak to God.

R.E.T. Is there not a sensibility about coming into the presence of God at the end of the meeting?

C.H. There is reverential response.

C.M. In Ephesians 3 Paul is making use of the access he has spoken of in chap 2: 18. I thought that had some link with 1 Corinthians 15 and the Son in subjection, for our access throughout eternity will be through Him.

C.H. He is placed in subjection that God may be all in all. Yet the three Persons we know in relativity have relations outside of ourselves entirely, in terms of equality of which we know nothing; but we apprehend that such is the case. When fully revealed, God is revealed in three Persons. What can we say as to this, as Mr Darby said, 'where all are God, all one God, God all three' (Vol 32, p.16).

We cannot speak of Them as having the same will, but one will and several willings. These are deep things, but we are to have the spiritual intelligence which is referred to in Ephesians 1: 17 - "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart". That is, both the perceptive faculties and the affections enter into the matter. Unless we approach these profound truths with our affections moved toward divine Persons we shall lack depth of feelings proper to the approach.

R.E.T. With regard to this title, would we learn something more of the mercy and greatness of God?

C.H. Yes, what you refer to are His attributes. In the service we should touch what God is in His nature, which is love, and love is our link with eternal realities.

D.E.R. God is also light, yet in one sense light must be relative, but love is absolute.

C.H. God is light in relation to darkness, but love is His nature. We cannot say that it is what He is essentially because we do know that. Love is our link, and the divine nature is formed in the saints and answers to the love of divine Persons.

C.M. Is there a link between "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him", referred to in chapter 1, and the being "filled even to all the fulness of God" in chapter 3?

C.H. "Filled even to all the fulness of God" does not mean that we can compass what God is. It has been likened to filling a bucket with the ocean, but you have not then contained the ocean.

A.L.S. Is this like "waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over", Ezek 47: 5?

C.H. That is true. Sometimes the Lord presents the truth so that we feel its greatness. It is to draw out our hearts to divine Persons and that we should know more about the relative positions They have taken. But the place the Father should have in the service of God should be relative to the position He has taken in the economy.

F.G.M. Verses 18 to 20 are in the plural, so we need all the saints.

C.H. As I sat here this morning I thought of God looking over this cathedral city and of all the redeemed in it. Our first hymn referred to the redeemed. What did the loaf represent? It represented all the redeemed. Then where are they? Alas, they are not all with us. All we can do is to present ourselves to the Lord.

C.H.S. Does the loaf represent all the redeemed on earth at the present time?

C.H. Yes; most of the assembly are "with Christ" I suppose.

C.M. What does apprehending with all saints mean?

C.H. You will notice that the word is 'apprehend' not 'comprehend'. The natural mind cannot comprehend all that has come out, but at least we can apprehend that divine Persons have come into an economy and have come within our range in a Man.

C.M. Although John on Patmos was receiving revelations by himself, do you think that he was apprehending with all the saints?

C.H. He speaks of being "your brother and fellowpartaker", Rev. 1:9. He was thoroughly with the brethren even if he was completely isolated.

F.G.M. Would what we apprehend with all the saints be related to the love that is referred to in verse 17?

C.H. "To know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge". We are to know the love of a divine Person who became Man. It passes understanding but it sustains the saints in view of being filled to all the fulness of God.

D.E.R. While it may seem beyond us, yet what we are in touch with is finite, not infinite.

C.H. We cannot compass what is infinite. If God is not what He is, things would be reduced to the level of man's understanding. Mr Darby says that Christ 'is not as truth the Absolute in itself; but He is the Absolute in Himself' (Vol 32, p.28). We need to consider a remark like that. The truth itself is relative; even the name 'God' is relative. We do not know whether the Persons of the Godhead have names between Themselves or even whether They need them. But love is revealed, love that has found expression in three divine Persons.

C.H.S. So that love is our link with the infinite.

C.H. That has often been said and I think we prove it.

D.E.R. "No one has seen God at any time; the onlybegotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him", John 1:18.

C.H. It is God who has been declared, but the Son is in that advantageous position as in the bosom of the Father, who represents God in the economy.

C.M. For us to lay hold of the love there is in God, this father-and-son relationship was necessary to make it evident.

C.H. What did the disciples behold? "We have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father". That is the glory they saw. A simile is used so that we might understand the glory they saw. Lower down it reads, "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father". That refers to the Lord's unique position when here in flesh as well as now.

R.E.T. Can you help us in regard to being "filled even to all the fulness of God"?

C.H. That depends on what precedes it, that is "to know the love of the Christ", because the love of Christ involves His position as Minister of the sanctuary, which is in view of God getting the fullest response from the saints. We are filled with what is knowable, but we are on the verge of what is infinite.

C.H.S. Paul says "if any one love God, he is known of him" (1 Cor 8: 3), which shows the importance of love.

C.H. It does, for love is the link, and it will be so eternally. Think of a sphere that will be pervaded by love!

D.E.R. Mr Raven said that being "filled even to all the fulness of God" was in view of there being testimony.

C.H. The unfallen heavenly intelligences are looking down and can see in the assembly "the all-various wisdom of God", Eph 3: 10. That all-various wisdom involves the economy and sonship.

R.E.T. So there is a possibility by the Spirit of apprehending the fulness of God.

C.H. We need to be strengthened by the Father's Spirit to reach that. We are also to "know the love of the Christ" - the One whom God has anointed in relation to what is for His pleasure.

R.E.T. There is distinct power with a person who really knows God.

C.H. With the enlightened eyes of our heart we accord the Father the place He has assumed in the economy. That is Their arrangement. The Lord accepts this fully, for in eternity "the Son also Himself shall be placed in subjection to him, that God may be all in all".

D.E.R. We should know something of the power which works in us.

C.H.S. Personally one often feels how unequal one is for these things, but this causes us to value the Spirit's help.

C.H. The great theme of revelation is the Father and the Son, but the Spirit gives power so that these truths become intelligible to us.

Access therefore is *through* Christ but *by* one Spirit. We come into the Father's presence through the Man that is there, but in the power of one Spirit. Hymn 14 says, 'By the Spirit all pervading'; the Spirit has His part in all this.

C.M. So we cannot really enjoy the access without the Spirit's strengthening at the time.

C.H. The Spirit is the power for the apprehension and enjoyment of these very blessed truths.

A.C.S. You said the title 'God' was relative. Can you help as to that? Is that His name in relationship to men?

C.H. Yes, God has assumed a name by which He can be in relation to all men.

A.C.S. Then when we come into relationship with Him we know Him as Father, but not before.

D.E.R. That magnifies to us the wonder of the present dispensation.

C.H. How do we know God? It is only through the glory of the incarnation, that One who was God became Man; otherwise God would be unknown.

C.H.S. So the ark is a great type of Christ. The mercy seat and all the contents of the ark represent the way God has come out in a Man.

A.C.S. Is the nearest we come to apprehending what is absolute conveyed in the title 'I am'?

C.H. Yes. In Exodus 3:14 God reveals Himself to Moses as "I AM THAT I AM", and when Moses is sent to the people he is told to say that "I AM" had sent him. The name involves the self-existent One.

Whatever dispensation of time is spoken of, "I am" remains. The Lord could say, "Before Abraham was, I am", John 8:58.

C.M. In this dispensation there is not only the greatness of what we can apprehend but there is something in the saints as filled to all the fulness of God.

C.H. Surely, and when Christ was raised from among the dead the assembly was raised. Paul speaks in Ephesians 1 of the "surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of the might of his strength, in which he wrought in the Christ in raising him from among the dead" (vv.19,20). What God had in mind was to have others like and with Christ.

C.H.S. Otherwise there would be no point in His becoming Man.

C.H. John says "the grain of wheat falling into the ground die... bears much fruit", John 12: 24. We might say that wicked hands took Him and crucified Him, but that is hardly the point in John. His falling into the ground and dying was a deliberate act. Death is not mentioned in John 13: 3, though it is implied when it speaks of His coming out from God and going back to God. The Lord had to go by way of death to establish an order of things untouched by death. We need to be governed by what has come out in the economy, in the sphere of revelation, where God has become known in three Persons. All this is profound, but may we each be able to say with Mr Darby that it is 'sunshine to my heart'.

ST.ALBANS

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Key to initials (*St.Albans unless otherwise noted*)

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RAISING THE LEVEL

N.T.Meek

John 2: 7-10; 2 Kings 4: 38-44; Daniel 1: 8-9

I was thinking, dear brethren, of these scriptures as containing the idea of lifting the level, or raising the tone, of a situation. Most of us will acknowledge that there is often scope for some service of this kind. I read in John in relation to this well known incident of the marriage to which certain customs were evidently wont to apply, and which may not of necessity have been ideal. That can, of course, obtain at the present time. We may have certain customs locally, or in certain areas of the country, which have not really originated from God or which may have become somewhat diverted from their original intention, and in that connection careful thought and appraisal in simplicity may be of value. One custom that was evidently extant in Cana was that things dropped as the occasion proceeded, with good wine to begin with and then something inferior. You cannot think of the Lord coming into an occasion and it being His mind that things should drop downward. Rather I think it would be that they would move upward, like the path of life, which is said to be upwards (see Prov 15: 24). Whilst what is natural is bound to wane, even at a wedding, it is not intended that any occasion of gathering of the saints should finish with our feeling flat. The Lord so operated here that the best came at the end. He lifted the level of the close of this occasion with the best wine. He is a model for us, dear brethren, in everything. John does not exactly stress Him thus but this scripture shows a manifestation of His glory, and we should look for this on every occasion of gathering. There is, of course, a right kind of natural human joy; it is sadly perverted around us but is still available and still enjoyable by those who know Christ, because the knowledge of Christ ennobles every relation ship, lifts it up, gives it a flavour and character which those who do not know Him do not experience. We see here how the Lord operated to lift the whole level so that the feast-master was evidently impressed by the Lord coming in and finishing with the best. We should remember when we

are together, for example, in each other's homes, that it is well to finish on a good level, to come away from the brother's house on a good note. I think the Lord would encourage us that way. So there is that which is natural that can be enjoyed and, thank God, we have brethren with whom we can enjoy it. We can understand how Paul, when he saw the brethren, thanked God. We do that too, we love to see them, there is something very sweet about fellowship, something very real and cheering about seeing the faces of the brethren. A person's face will remain with you, you carry it in your mind and at some time it will come into your mind again, and a cheering experience it is. One day you will rub shoulder with that saint in heaven, he will be among that throng - 'Where the saints in glory thronging' (hymn 206). Do you ever think about that, beloved? What a level of enjoyment that will be! A level that will never drop, that will never weaken, never go flat, and there will never be an end to it. Down here the brightest day comes to an end, but there you will be with those with whom you are in perfect consonance, and there will be no drop. How wonderful! Think of all being sustained at the level that is proper to God 's presence. Well, that is future but the Lord would encourage us in our relations together to maintain the level proper to our calling.

The situation in Kings, in the scripture read, is often commented on, and maybe things will be said today that are not new; but still they can be said freshly. I recall as a boy hearing a brother pray that what was said in ministry that day might be fresh. I think he, as others, was able to give some fresh touch. The idea of the living word of God must involve that; it is not the dead letter, it is living, it has that character, it is for the moment, for today. So there was this situation in Kings, and the man of God was there; the man of God generally comes to light in a dark day, a day of departure, as with Elisha here and with Timothy. Things are not too easy, a famine in the land, but the man of God is there. Then there are the sons of the prophets, in which we might include ourselves, that is we have had prophetic ministry from Mr Darby's time in the recovery and we might take our place as being the sons of prophets such as he was. Sometimes I

wonder if I could be so counted when I look at the volumes of his works that I have not read. They may appear rather forbidding thick black volumes, but there is something about them that one appreciates, and I hope it is so with you that you find some things that you can digest and that they are very sweet. Great intellect he may have had but there is what is very sweet. So you come down the prophetic line in the recovery - Mr Stoney, Mr Raven, Mr Taylor, Mr Coates and others. At times the sons of the prophets were off beam; that is not outside our own experience. Sometimes they are right and sometimes they are almost infidel, even questioning once whether Elijah had gone up. It shows how untrustworthy we can be if left to our own devices. Still there is some element with us, I trust, of the sons of the prophets, that we have some gain from prophetic speaking. There are many believers who are not so favoured, who have not got the gain of that line of prophetic speaking from Mr Darby down. So we can count ourselves happy in that sense to be in an area where it is known of and where maybe you or your father have some of those books on the bookshelf. You have not read them much as yet perhaps, they do not appeal to you, the covers even do not appeal to you like the covers of other books, but if you get into them at sometime (maybe some little bit of pressure will send you to them) you will get something that will do you good. I am not speaking theoretically, dear brethren, I can thankfully say that I am speaking from experience, that these books were forbidding and almost off-putting to me at one time, but thank God He has worked with one and has given one a taste for them. So these sons of the prophets are here and the man of God tells his servant to set on the great pot, he wants to feed the brethren; it may be like a reading, he tells his servant to do it, to set on the pot and boil pottage. Then it looks as if someone else, not the servant, did something on his own. It says "Then one went out into the field to gather herbs"; he missed the immediate direction. Sometimes we are conscious of doing that in a meeting. Maybe you feel sometimes a bit sad after a reading because you feel you may have missed the direction. Someone went out into the field and gathered a lap full of wild colocynths and brought them back and shred them into the reading; as the reading

was proceeding these things were shredded in, remarks were made that were not under direction. Notice the loose way of going on, the lap full. He gathered them, and you can picture him walking with a lap full. The wind would almost blow them out or they would tend to fall off the sag at the sides; the method is loose. One can put forward suggestions in a reading and really they are loose, they are not under divine constraint. Now this is what happened here, even in the presence of the man of God. It shows how dependent we are on one another, in a mutual way in a reading or any meeting, and how we owe it to one another (and owe it to the Lord of course) to forward what is going on that is directly of Him. I am not saying that we will never make mistakes, but let the bearing of my thinking be that way, not to speak for the sake of speaking and not to bring in a pet idea of mine, but to move under direction. Well, it is a peculiar situation, there was something here that detected it and there is a cry about it. Now that is preservative and the danger is met, the man of God says "bring meal", it is the humanity of Christ (how under direction He was!) that is brought in and there was no death in the pot. The situation is saved, and so the brethren get food, they are sustained.

You must be nourished, otherwise you will die; you can die spiritually, how sad that would be! Let there be food, food that is preserved from contamination. It is the responsibility of all of us to seek to be minded this way. So the situation is met.

Now in this next paragraph there came a man from Baal-shalishah, and I would like to suggest that he lifts the level up still further. It is not only that error is met (maybe error was met in 1970 and in 1972) but what is also needed is this man from Baal-shalishah to lift up the level. It is one thing to meet error, in one sense that is negative, but what can one bring in that is positive and which lifts up the level? This man comes from a heavenly land. The term 'Baal' in 'Baal-shalishah' involves lordship, and this man comes from a realm where Christ is Lord; hence he is not loose, he has food in a sack. How much better it would be to carry in a sack than in a lap, how much more you would be able to get into a sack than in a lap! Imagine carrying twenty loaves in a lap, you would need a big apron

to do that! This man came in with enough for a hundred men; but what I would like just to draw on lightly is the way he brought in, so to speak, an elevating touch to the meeting. It is possible to do that. There was once a small meeting in the country which reached a point where numbers were few and moreover the relations of the brethren remaining together were not, alas, too good. We visited the last old sister there and she recounted how things went; she told us something that has often affected me, that they would come together for the prayer meeting and a particular brother would get up to pray and in doing so would lift the whole level of the meeting. I wonder if I could do that - lift the brethren out of any petty personal strains and lift the whole level of the meeting in speaking to God. I would covet to be able to do that; because you get these kind of strains developing, these differences of opinion, maybe. O yes, you had the prayer meeting and you prayed for right things, things that in character were according to the Lord's mind, but the level was not lifted, the saints did not leave the meeting save as feeling that they had been together to pray, they were not really lifted by the occasion, the impress of heaven was not left on their spirits. This man from Baal-shalishah would, I think, have lifted up the brethren in this place; he had these twenty loaves and fresh ears of corn in his sack - his own fresh impressions brought, we might say, from a heavenly land. Well, that is a good thing and brings us to the point as to whether we can do this, whether there is fresh food, attractive food, fresh ears of corn in our sack. I suppose the secret of that brother who affected those tried and tested saints was that he really came from the presence of God Himself; that is how he came to the prayer meeting and, as he prayed, the Lord helped him at times especially to lift the saints out of all the local trouble.

Daniel is a young man who lived in a difficult day, a day that answers very much to our own when many of the vessels which should be available to the Lord are in the treasure house of a heathen god; that is the character that marked the day. But there were some, of whom this young man was one, who found themselves in these extraordinary circumstances. Now we tend to

settle at the level of our contemporaries, to seek out persons of our own level. I would encourage us all to seek the company of those who are better acquainted with the Lord than we are. Daniel, I would suggest, set, so to speak, the tone of this group, a group of four young men. They were given the opportunity of extraordinary education, "skilful in all wisdom, and acquainted with knowledge, and understanding science" (v 4). (It is remarkable what things are in scripture - "understanding science".) There are these four young men, may be you can put yourself among them. I think of myself and my contemporaries when I was a boy, friendly with three others, four others, five others. Young brothers, young sisters, tend to develop friendships of that character. There are certain persons who by proximity or by apparent chance have entered into your life. You are hardly aware of it but you are in a little group that has special relations together. You may not intend any danger, you may not see anything wrong in it and so far there may not be. You are in such a situation; he is your friend, you meet him on Saturday afternoon or you like to be in his company and in his house; it is that kind of thing and it may be older persons are like that too. Here it is four young ones, and what I think is true is that you tend to settle down to the level of the lowest; that is what is natural. Therefore our company always needs to be watched. I beg you characteristically to seek out those who know a little bit more about the Lord than you do. You love Him and your friend loves Him, He means much to you both; you do not speak much about it very often but you have that link. That is how you first met, you would not have me otherwise, you would have been friendly with someone else at school or at world, but you know that your father and mother would rather you were friendly with him than with others. So you are with him, and with somebody else three or four or five or six of you. Who is going to set the level? Who is going to lift the tone? Daniel did it here among these four, he purposed in his heart a certain standard. He lifted the level, so to speak, at a time when it could have continually dropped, in Babylon with all its attractions and wonders. It could have steadily dropped but this Daniel lifted the level. You see what I mean, dear brethren, *you* set the standard, *you* make the pace, that is the idea of

it; you do not want to be ahead of everybody but why should you be behind?

I am not suggesting that you should become a prodigy or endeavour to become hyper-spiritual, but to develop in committal as Daniel did. In Babylon with all its glory, what do you think he read? You say I expect he would read about Solomon in all his glory; he may have done, but what book do we know that Daniel read in Babylon? Maybe it was a book you would hesitate to read - the prophet Jeremiah. You say, a young man reading the prophet Jeremiah? Yes, and that book provided him with the vital key as to what was happening before his very eyes. The secret of the seventy years he got from Jeremiah. So he read the Scriptures, as we would say. Maybe amongst those who you are especially friendly with, there is not much discussion of the Scriptures. Why not, why not ensure that the level is up? There is what is rightly natural; I mean you are boy to boy, girl to girl, young man to young man, there is that side of course; but try to make the running in a spiritual sense, not for its own sake but for the sake of your friends. I think you will all be lifted up. I feel I have put this very imperfectly but there may be at times need of adjustment, because too much special friendship can be dangerous. Nevertheless, we would be practical, realistic, that at certain ages you tend to mix with certain ages. Take young married couples, they have certain problems, the bringing up of children brings its own problems and you can understand young married couples developing a certain friendship because of the common interest they have of raising a family, acquiring a house and of making ends meet, that kind of thing, it is a common problem. In these situations, dear brethren, let us always endeavour to be upward in our relations. This Daniel persevered and he really continued till the coming of Christ, till Cyrus came, that great deliverer that set the people free. I wonder if we will continue till the coming of Christ and the Lord takes us all. Do you think we will? Do you even think about that? You are thinking about your school, you are thinking about work; do you ever wonder if you will continue and

actually witness the Lord coming and actually be raptured? Because He is going to come, to come for His church.

Well, the se things are real, dear brethren. May the Lord help us and exercise us and keep us concerned always in our relations together, meeting wise or what I might speak of as householdly or socially in that sense, to keep up the level for His Name's sake.

CROYDON

13 September 1975

DIRECT RELATIONS WITH THE LORD

A.A.Bellamy

John 4: 39-42; 2 Timothy 1: 8 -12; Song of Songs 2: 3 -6, 8 : 1-3

It is my thought, beloved brethren, to speak simply of direct relations with Christ, not only personal and individual relations with Him, but what is normal in a local assembly. Each local assembly is to have its own direct relations with Christ, and that involves experience. It is not a matter of doctrine, important as that is in its place. The living character of response to the divine thoughts as presented to us in the good teaching depends upon the consciousness of the relationships into which God has brought us with Himself and into which the Lord has brought us with Himself. It is on these relationships, and the affections that are proper to them and our being preserved in a lively and responsive state towards God, that everything depends. We have often said that John gives us the line of life. In a day of public departure, when lawlessness prevails and the love of the many has waxed cold, we need to have recourse to John's line.

We usually turn to this chapter in John's gospel to consider the woman, but I wish to draw attention to the Samaritans. They belong to the city out of which the woman came and to which she returned with her powerful testimony regarding the Person of Christ. She says first, "is not he the Christ?" What seems to have impressed these Samaritan believers (it says they believed on Him) is that she had said "He told me all things that I had ever done". That, I think, bears upon what was said in our earlier meeting as to the roots of faith being in the conscience. One's thought is to speak of the Christian affections, but we need to bear in mind that God's work stands related to His word which has come into us by way of our *conscience*. The word of God is living and operative, sharper than any two-edged sword. That would be known by this woman and therefore entered into her testimony to these Samaritans who believed. They received her testimony and it says "many believed".

I think they represent a great principle in God's ways in blessing

men. He uses, it may be, His servants, to unfold the truth to us and to lead us into the light of His great thoughts for us. The Lord has given gifts and the great aim and object in all their service is to bring the saints into the light and the blessedness of the great thoughts of God. But then something further is needed, and that, beloved brethren, is also seen in these believing Samaritans. Not only did they believe on account of the woman's word but they heard Him themselves. That is to say, there must be with us the sense of direct relations with the Lord and of hearing Him for ourselves. I wonder if in the occasion in which we have already spoken together we all have a sense of hearing Him for ourselves. If so, that is good and let us be more exercised to hear Him, as these Samaritans say, "we have heard him ourselves, and we know" - we know! The Lord says something to us in this way and we can say without presumption, We know. It is an expression running right through John's ministry "we know". They say "we have heard him ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world". I rejoice in that glorious title of Christ, "the Saviour of the world". It is one thing to say from personal knowledge that He is my Saviour but think of the greatness of the Person who is capable of filling out this glorious title, "the Saviour of the world"! One of the titles accorded to Joseph in Egypt is 'Saviour of the world' and along with it we have the thought of the 'Revealer of secrets' (see note Gen 41: 44), and it is striking that those two cities are referred to together. Man has many secrets; there are secrets in all our hearts. They are not secrets to God; He knows, He is the heart-knowing God. The Lord is the Revealer of secrets and it is a very great blessing if He reveals to you and to me just what may be working in our hearts at any time. We do things, we say things, and what lie behind our actions and words are motives and they are largely secret. The meeting for ministry is a great occasion because the Lord may appear and speak to us as the Revealer of secrets, as when Jacob spoke to his sons (see Gen 49: 1-27). He revealed the secrets of their hearts, the bad and the good. In the secrets of the believer's heart there is what is good, there is what God has put there, what is there by way of new birth. Nehemiah speaks of something that God had put in his heart

to do for Jerusalem. God had put it there, that was not an evil thing. If God has put something in a person's heart he can keep it like a secret, he can cherish it. Now the woman has rendered her testimony, as many of those who have gone before us have fulfilled their part - Paul, Peter, John, James. Then Mr Darby, Mr Raven, Mr Taylor sen - what we owe to those men under the Lord who could say? They have rendered their part, they have completed the ministry that was given to them, but what remains, dear brethren, is the need to hear the Lord Himself, and I just desire to awaken exercise as to that with each one of us.

Now I take as an example of it Paul himself. He is writing to Timothy, a young man. Young men and young women are to be encouraged with the sense of being in a sphere where they are of interest. I have no doubt Timothy was a man of great interest to the apostle who wrote two letters to him. John also writes letters, he even writes a letter to little children. So let us be encouraged, dear young brethren, in the sense that we are in a sphere in which there is great interest in us. Now Paul is writing and enjoining upon Timothy, his beloved child, not to be "ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner". Paul was the Lord's prisoner. To be identified with a man in prison was an occasion of reproach, but we are not to be ashamed of Paul's chain. Sometimes we are accused of being narrow. Well, Mr Darby said in one of his letters, 'the feet in the narrow path, the heart as large as we can, by grace' (Vol 2, p.422). That is the secret of spiritual prosperity.

Then Paul alludes to the knowledge that he had. He says "I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed". We know that it was his exercise to have these direct links with the Lord Himself, because when he writes to the saints in Philippi he speaks of all that was an advantage to him, the knowledge he had acquired as a Jewish rabbi, the power that that knowledge had given him in the religious circle in which he had moved, but over against that he desires to know Him - that is his Saviour - "to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings", chap 3: 10. We know that Paul's desire was to know Christ. Now I

wonder what the measure of our desire is. Can each of us say "I know whom I have believed", Paul had entered, I suppose, into an understanding with the Lord; not through a mediator, the Lord Jesus is the Mediator. We do not need a mediator to approach the Mediator. With the Mediator we can have direct relations, and I think Paul is referring to his direct relations and his understanding that he had with the Lord. It is a great thing to start your life with an understanding with the Lord. There will be difficulties and tests and trials of faith, and there will be the need of sacrifice, and Paul says here that he had entrusted every thing, so far as that side of things was concerned, to Christ. He says "I... am persuaded that he is able to keep for that day the deposit I have entrusted to him". 'Our happiness, O Lord, with Thee, Is long laid up in store, For that blest day when Thee we'll see, And conflict will be o'er' (hymn 47). Mr Darby was prepared to wait to get this reward. He will get his and you will get yours, if you are faithful. It is not a time of relaxation now. It is not the millennium yet (I need not say that to anybody here) but that time is coming. The Lord comes quickly and His reward with Him, and that will be the time when what has been entrusted to Him will come out again; the Lord will have kept it for Paul. He speaks of other things that are kept for him, such as the "crown of righteousness.... to all who love his appearing", chap 4:8.

Now, in closing, just a brief word as to the local assembly and its direct relations with Christ. The Lord has rights in every local assembly, and we may say that that is a matter of principle, and so it is. The truth does not change. In Paul's teaching he shows the Lord has rights in every local assembly, and I would not like to interfere or to be a part y in interfering with the Lord's rights in a local assembly. Let us be very careful, dear brethren, to regard His rights in the local assembly. I think where there is assembly-consciousness, that is an assembly conscious of its own relations with Christ, and His with it, there is also a great element of protection. In the beginning of the Acts it says, "of the rest durst no man join them", chap 5: 13. No one trespassed upon what evidently belonged to the Lord in Jerusalem at that moment. Now there is what is the Lord's in each

local assembly. It is referred to in the Song of Songs typically as *His* garden - the local assembly. "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat its precious fruits", chap 4: 16. It is a question of His right to do so. Christ has a right at any time to come in. The spouse speaks of her beloved as the apple-tree, not among the apple-trees of the wood, but among the trees of the wood. It is of all importance that we apprehend that Christ is of His own order, and He has brethren who are of His order. That is the appletree, distinctly of His own order, among the trees of the wood. The Lord says "my brethren" - wonderfully dignified thought as to the saints. The speaker here says " So is my beloved among the sons". It is remarkable that such a touch comes into a book which is mainly feminine, a book that refers to feminine affection for Christ. Yet we have this thought of the sons, and surely it is in view of the service of God being filled out. And she goes on to speak of being brought into the house of wine and His banner over her love; she desires to be sustained, and then finally she says "His left hand is under my head" - that is, she is supported in the presence of what is beyond her in its greatness; and we are supported in the sense of the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge. "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me". It is a fine thing to come under the sense of the Lord's love for the assembly.

Now in the last verse I read I just wish to point out a certain difference in what the spouse says. She speaks of what she *would* do. "Should I find thee without, I would kiss thee", and "I would lead thee", and "I would cause thee to drink", and "His left hand would be under my head" - it would be so. She is not immediately conscious of His love. It is not in any sense, beloved brethren, to suggest that we are lacking, but there is the possibility of falling from the constant sense of the Lord's love for the assembly, to a lower level, and then we begin to speak abstractly of His love, not consciously. In the first passage His left hand is under my head, his right hand does embrace me, in the last passage she says it would be.

Let us be stimulated, as we come now to the close of this week, in view of the Lord's day, that there may be a full answer from

our hearts, assembly-wise, to the love of Christ. Amen.

RYJSWIJCK

1 November 1975

THE GREATNESS OF JESUS

C.R.Byng

Revelation 1: 7

God is operating with a view to each of us having an impression of the greatness of Jesus. This was a remarkable impression that John had. He tells us that he was in the island called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus. He was apparently alone as far as believers were concerned. Everything was adverse in outward circumstances. He had been taken away from active service for Christ and banished to Patmos, but he has this wonderful experience: "Behold, he comes with the clouds". Who was John speaking about? Who could it be except Jesus? He does not say that He is going to come in 1900 years; he says "Behold he comes". John was brought into the understanding that it was just about to happen. How much more we can be rightly expectant of it. Jesus was last seen by the world as a dead Man; many saw Him last as hanging on the cross at Golgotha, but some perhaps saw Him taken down as a dead Man from the cross. That is the Man who is going to come and be seen by all; even those who pierced Him are going to see Jesus. Are you looking forward to seeing Jesus coming with the clouds, beloved?

We sang earlier in the day of the mighty transformation of this hour. What a mighty transformation there is going to be when Jesus comes in the glory that is uniquely His to resolve all the problems that are baffling the statesmen in the world at this time.

As believers in God we pray for them in the light of the little time that remains until Jesus comes with the clouds and He personally takes control throughout the world. When Jesus reigns, peace will be brought in that is to remain for 1000 unbroken years. It will be a glorious public testimony to this very world which once saw Jesus a prisoner derided and mocked. The Lord Jesus when He was here warned some that this was going to be so. He was brought before the parliament of that time, the Sanhedrim, the

highest court of appeal in the land and He told them that they were going to see the Son of man "coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14: 62) and they said He was worthy of death. That was their answer to the declaration of Jesus.

John does not bring out this truth as something which we just note and pass on but as something that affected him, and it is intended to affect us; he says "Behold". It is very instructive to go through the Scriptures and see when the Spirit of God says 'Behold' or 'Lo'. It is as though there are certain things that the Spirit brings forward to which He would cause us to be alerted. This far exceeds all the news that men have today. Paul was moved in his spirit when he went to Athens and found people there who had nothing to do except to tell and to hear the news. The sad thing was that they neglected the news that was vital. It was spoken of by Paul in his preaching of Jesus in Athens which was to bring real good tidings not just news. Tidings of outstanding importance were preached to men in Athens regarding Jesus and the resurrection. It is still the greatest news that man could ever hear. It is a complete reversal of all that man thinks, for man plans to go up and up in the world to secure a greater position. How many alas plan for the future with no thought of Jesus and the resurrection. We could sum up sorrowfully the lives of so many in this world: they rise and fall. The history of a certain period was known as the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. Death comes in and that seems to be the end, but it is not the end as far as God is concerned.

God says "Behold, he comes with the clouds". He comes in mighty power, the very same Jesus that was once here in such weakness and sorrow. As He stood before the Sanhedrim and warned them of His coming in power, He was spit upon and buffeted. He was derided when He was nailed to a cross of shame at Golgotha. Men passed by and mocked at the very foot of the cross. They still had no room for Jesus. There was no room for Jesus when He came in, just a place in the manger; there was no room for Jesus in the world as He was on the cross. Oh! what a time that was when the world should have turned but Jesus remained on that

cross rejected by man in the very midst of people who had been witnesses of the saving power of the Man who in Himself was the Almighty. How men should have marvelled as He moved amongst them in this world! There was no person who was beyond the reach of Jesus as far as need was concerned. What mighty works of power shone out in Jesus. When we think of the creation in all its glory let us remember that it was by Jesus that the worlds were created. How many worlds there are we know not, but the one who is the Saviour was the Creator of them all. The Creator of the worlds was here as a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. How accessible He was. His mighty love was here to help and bless men, women and children. What a marvellous path of blessing was seen in Jesus here. He was not here moving as the Creator, although everything in creation was upheld by the word of His power. He was here as a Man who came to make God known in His love. His power lay behind it and was seen on many occasions but the movements of Jesus here were that the light of the love of God might be made known in a Man. What a way God chose. He sent His only Son. The Lord Jesus speaks in one of His parables of how the lord of the vineyard sent one bondman, then another, then another, and last of all he sent his beloved son. Do we think of God in all His greatness? The very creation that surrounds us has its myriad witnesses of the greatness of God. Let us think of God for a moment - the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He is the God by whom we draw breath for every moment of our lives. God was so concerned that men might be blessed that He sent His own Son as Saviour of the world. Jesus was here so that men might begin to know God as revealed. What instances there were in the life of Jesus, little as we know of the life of Jesus. All four gospels put together tell us about only a very few days of the life of Jesus. The world would not contain the books that would have been needed if everything had been recorded one by one. But thank God we have a sufficient record to know the kind of thing the Lord Jesus did when He was here and who else except Jesus could have done them? He went to the opening of a tomb and said in mighty dignity, "Lazarus, come forth". When Jesus said that, the dead man came forth. He

went into a house where there was a young girl of twelve lying dead, and took her hand and spoke to her so that she rose up. He walked on the sea with the wind contrary. The disciples were rowing away in the ship, with the right aim and yet not attaining it. They were making a little progress and yet not reaching the land, and then they see a Man superior to the difficulties. If Jesus could walk on the sea, what could He not do? Is there a difficulty in this world that is great enough to surmount our Saviour? Far be the thought. What an impression those fearful disciples must have had at that time, when they saw a Man walking to them on the sea, superior in Himself to the elements that He created. Of course He was superior to them, and yet there was the power of the devil itself behind the turbulent waves, as though the enemy would overthrow Jesus if he could, but Jesus walks in triumphant superiority. Are you ever in circumstances where you wonder how help can possibly come in? Well, remember that the Saviour who walked in triumphant dignity on the waters of the sea is still the same. With His mighty power He is able to strengthen us to be here for His glory. What impressions the disciples must have had of the glory of Jesus! Are we receiving impressions of His glory? Are we using each day in the power of the Spirit to gather impressions of Jesus - the Man who suffered for us? What feeling there was as John recorded here, "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood". John was chosen of God to stand by the cross and witness that out of the side of a dead Saviour there came blood and water. No wonder he says in a spirit of worship, "To him who loves us". It does not say 'who loved us'. We need to be accurate when we speak of the greatness of Jesus. But it says, "has washed us". Can every one of us here say today, "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood"? There is no one except Jesus whose precious blood is available to wash us from our sins. Let us remember that Jesus hung on the cross at Golgotha for three hours as the witness to the universe that there was one Man who was absolutely righteous and absolutely holy. God saw to it that for three full hours man could see that there was one Man that had lived entirely for the pleasure of God. The sinless, spotless Lamb of God hung there from the third

hour until the sixth hour. But then darkness came over the whole land, for the eye of man was not allowed to penetrate when God took account of Jesus as identified with sin and sins. Can every one of us say, as we think of Jesus hanging on the cross, that He was hanging there for me? There were two men who had been doing wrong and Jesus in the ordering of God was put in the middle of them. The one Man who had never done wrong was put in the midst of two that even their fellows. classified as those who were wrong doers. Jesus in the middle was equally available to them both as Saviour. The light of God shone into the heart of one of them. As you think of Jesus hanging on the cross, do you believe that He was there for you? "He is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world", 1 John 2: 2. He is available for all. But if we are to come into the gain of that, it means that we have each to come to it that we deserve the judgment that Jesus bore. The precious blood of Jesus is the eternal, unchanging witness that the life of my Saviour was actually given up. It as not from a living man's side the blood came, but from the side of a dead Man there came blood and water. The Spirit of God is always faithful to the blood of Jesus and to the present place of Jesus in glory. What a moment that was, when lovers of Jesus placed the body of our Saviour in the tomb. Then He came out, and was here for forty days moving amongst the disciples - a Man in another kind of life and yet a real man. If you ever have any doubts as to the reality of the salvation of God, remember that the Man who loves us and has washed us from our sins in His blood was raised from the grave and He was actually moving here amongst men. Peter speaks of those who were chosen before of God "who have eaten and drunk with him after he arose from among the dead", Acts 10: 41. Now He is in the glory. We can draw near to Him where He is in the glory as the almighty Saviour. He is no longer a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief but One who is going to come with the clouds very soon. This is not the next thing that is going to happen. Let us understand that the next thing that really matters that is going to happen is that Jesus is going to come in the air. The Lord Jesus is going to descend Himself from heaven. All those fallen asleep in Jesus will

be raised. What an assembling shout it will be from the One whose voice was once hushed in death. That shout of course is already in one sense going out. How many alas neglect the assembling call of Jesus at the present time. His request was "this do in remembrance of me". The Lord felt that there were some believers that did not remember Him in the breaking of bread today. What a privilege we have, when our Saviour is still rejected by the world, of remembering Him in the breaking of bread. Perhaps some will express the desire to break bread in remembrance of the Lord Jesus next Lord's day. There may be a next Lord's day but I cannot promise you that, for the coming of Jesus is very, very near. Think of the gathering there will be from every part of the world. The graves will yield all those who have died in faith. There will not be one forgotten. The Lord Jesus knows where every one of the dead in Christ has been buried, and every one is going to answer to His assembling shout. He is not going to send an archangel but He is going to come with archangel's voice and trump of God. What a wonderful moment that will be when we shall see our Master for the first time face to face. We expect it today and we are going to be with Him for ever.

Then the Lord Jesus is going to come out and the saints are going to come with Him. "He comes with the clouds". As we see clouds come over the earth at the present time, do we think of the mighty power of God? God speaks of the time when He is going to bring clouds over the earth, but when the clouds come let us remember that there is always a rainbow to be seen as a wonderful reminder of the unchanging faithfulness of God. To see the rainbow we have to be in the sunshine. Let us always remember that when things seem a bit obscure, the thing to do is to go back to the sunny side of the road. When you are in joy of eternal life you will always find the rainbow. Of course you will not see it fully as long as we are on earth. It is part of God's wonderful ordering that He allows us to see enough evidence of His abiding faithfulness, so that we have absolute confidence that He will carry us through. We shall not see the complete circle of the rainbow until we see it round the throne in heaven. Until we are off the earth we shall always understand there

are hidden resources of God which He does fully disclose, but they are available for those who believe in the Lord Jesus. We shall see Him coming with the clouds for we shall be with Him. What a moment that will be! There will be a complete transformation of the whole world system when God says the moment has come and Jesus comes with the clouds. At the present time the world is not being transformed. What is happening is that people are being transformed by becoming lovers of the Lord Jesus, so that the Spirit of God can dwell in them and occupy them with Christ. On the principle of obedience persons are given the Spirit and they are there as those who are witnesses for the Lord Jesus until the time comes when He is to be owned by all.

May we be numbered amongst those at the present time who are known by all as witnesses of the Lord Jesus. Whether it is in the schools or offices or factories, or at the street corner or in the shop or household, what opportunities there are for those who confess the name of Jesus as Lord. What power comes in as the Lord's precious name is confessed, but that power is going to be seen publicly when Jesus comes with the clouds. The power that is going to be in display then is experienced now, as a believer confesses Jesus as Lord. May we be brought into this more and more, for His Name's sake.

DORKING

21 September 1975

THE CHILDREN'S EYESIGHT

A song of forty-three verses by Moses tells us, amongst any other important things, that God preserved His ancient people as the apple, or pupil, of His eye. This shows how precious they were to Him and also reminds us how valuable our eyesight is to us. In fact we know that we do everything we can to protect it. We speak, too, of seeing with the 'eye of faith', which is a beautiful way of saying that the things which God gives to obedient believers are real to our own spirits. This eyesight must also be kept keen.

Although God's thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts, He comes down in grace to our way of thinking. The Scriptures mention over twenty members of the human body as if they applied to Him who is, of course, a Spirit. This is to teach us certain lessons. For instance, we are told that His behold the children of men and also that His eyelids try them. It may sometimes appear that His eyes are shut, but we must remember that He is the Observer of men! This keeps the conscience tender and assures us that He also sees all that is right and good.

The prophet Elisha had much to do with young people. There were always the sons of the prophets who represent those who have an interest in the truth of God but who need to be taught in His school by word and by example. Also mention is made of individuals such as the maid in Naaman's house and the sons of the poor widow. You will remember, too, that he brought back to life a child of tender age. The lad sneezed seven times and then opened his eyes. He could not help doing the first, although it was a true sign of life - but to open his eyes was his own action. This miracle shows that when God grants a new life to us, however young, we should use the power to open and keep open the eyes of faith.

We are taught a different lesson by the story of Elisha and his attendant. The place where they were was surrounded by a great enemy host during the night. When the servant woke up early and went out he saw them all and, as we can well believe, he was full of fear. But he had to learn that God is able to protect those who

witness for Him, in a way not seen by the ordinary eye. Therefore He "opened the eyes of the young man" who then saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire. Are you amongst those who, through faith, are kept guarded by the power of God?

J.C.Evershed