

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 87

June 1980

Contents

IN VIEW OF HIS COMING

THE LITTLE SANCTUARY

THE SECRET OF THE LORD

THE CHILDREN'S WARNINGS

IN VIEW OF HIS COMING

1 Corinthians 15: 51-58; 2 Peter 3: 10-18; Revelation 21: 1-6; 22: 10-13

C.J.H.D. I want to get back to the impression that we had at the beginning of the week, at the breaking of bread, that the time of our receiving up is imminent; that is, the coming of the Lord. We started with a sister's hymn: 'We love, Lord Jesus, to recall Thyself' (No 192). In that hymn Miss Elwood speaks of standing and holding the ground that Christ has won. That ground, beloved, will not have to be held very much longer because He is coming into it Himself. There will be no doubt in that day as to who is holding the reins of power. It is clear from the writings of Paul and Peter and John - three great apostles of the Lamb - that the imminence of His coming is to be marked on our part by certain moral conditions in which He will find His pleasure at His coming. In each of these passages, after the unveiling of the truth of the coming of the Lord, the day of the Lord, and the day of God, we have certain moral exhortations which, I feel, bear on myself and on all the brethren, that there might be conditions maintained that are suitable to the One who is coming.

In the first passage we have what we call the rapture, though scripture does not use that term. It will be very quick when it comes. We need to see and to reject the disastrous teaching that, alas, was current, in which it was said that there would be delay for some in entering heaven until they 'got right'. That is a direct denial of the glory of the work of redemption. It has been said before now that we are as fit to go into heaven now as we ever shall be. While there is the sobriety of the judgment-seat of Christ, we shall be changed. We shall have no difficulty in arriving at what the Lord thinks about the pathways of all of us because we shall not have the encumbrance of the flesh. There will be nothing to hinder our immediate acceptance of all that the Lord puts before us. He will do that with us in our glorified condition. We all enter heaven together, thank God! Every blood-bought saint, from Pentecost to the rapture, will enter heaven at one time. So let us be encouraged by this

passage: "be firm, immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord".

A.R.D. It is encouraging and testing as to whether we will endure. It is "abounding always"; it is to mark us consistently.

C.J.H.D. I think so. The Lord's word is clear: "he that has endured to the end, he shall be saved", Matt 10: 22. The verse that has remained with me since the beginning of the week is the Lord's words in Matthew 24: "when ye see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors"; and it is, *at the doors*. The young people are to understand, with us all, that the Lord's return for us is not years ahead but at the doors. What we are witnessing publicly is the fulfilment of Mr Darby's ministry in prophecy as to what Russia will do. And she is doing it; she is going in the direction that Mr Darby said she would. When we see these things we are to know that the coming of the Son of man is at the doors.

N.T.M. Is the bearing of it something like the reckoning of the years to the jubilee? As it comes near you hold things lightly here and, transferring it to our day, the Lord's coming begins to govern us increasingly.

C.J.H.D. I think that. I would like it to govern me, and all the brethren. The impact of what is material around us tends to dull our senses as to the evil that is going on. We need to be alerted. We have reached the time of which John speaks: "let the filthy make himself filthy still". There is filth all around in this world, so that they cannot get away from it. But think of what we are to be, beloved, for the pleasure of the One who is going to rapture us to Himself!

N.T.M. Some of these expressions in 1 Corinthians 15 are extraordinary, are they not? "This mortal must put on immortality". It is exhilarating to think of a scripture like this.

C.J.H.D. It is, and to think that "this corruptible must put on incorruptibility"! I have to face it, in the moral exercises that Paul's ministry would bring about, that I am as corruptible a man as any around. I need to have a judgment that I have the same character of

flesh within as the filth that is outside. But the time is coming when, as it says, "in an instant" we shall be changed.

C.H.H. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 24 "But learn the parable from the fig-tree. When already its branch becomes tender and produces leaves, ye know that the summer is near" (v 32). That would be the rapture, would it not?

C.J.H.D. Yes, surely. I am glad you refer to that. That passage takes my mind back to when we had a fig-tree in the garden. I learnt something from that fig-tree in keeping with what the Lord says. The Song of Songs refers to the mellowing of the winter figs, and I observed that the embryo figs are there all the winter without the leaves. You never have, or never should have, leaves without the figs. That is the Lord's parable when He cursed the fig-tree. So the mellowing of the winter figs and then the breaking out of the leaves are the signs that summer is near. O to be, even now, in the warmth of the shining of that Man!

N.T.M. We understand that in the beginning of the recovery the imminence of the Lord's coming was very prominent in the brethren's minds. Do you think that the Lord is bringing that forward again for us?

C.J.H.D. It is needed, by myself at any rate, that our sights may be elevated off this earth. The Jews and the saved nations will have the actual sight of the sign of the Son of man in the heavens, but this dispensation in which we are, which is about to close, is in faith, and therefore we are to have an outlook heavenward, expecting that Man to come.

D.B.B. Would the nearness of the Lord's return in our minds help us to hold things lightly here? As you say, the tendency with us is more to dwell here rather than just be sojourners.

C.J.H.D. I think so. We also have that word; "dwell in the land, and feed on faithfulness", Ps 37:3. We are dwelling in the land this afternoon; we are not in the world. We are dwelling in the divine territory. It is in the hearts of the brethren. It is a land that God has spied out for us Himself (see Ezek 20: 6), and we are to dwell in it,

not in material things, as you say. We are to be 'light' enough to be raptured immediately.

K.G. Do you think we need the exercises that Caleb had when he and Joshua said "If Jehovah delight in us, he will bring us in", Num 14: 8? Caleb had a positive attitude, as he said later; "it was in my heart", Josh 14: 7.

C.J.H.D. Very good. I think the Lord is looking for the moral features in our hearts that He expects to find at the end. "Was not our heart burning in us as he spoke to us on the way?", Luke 24: 32. I hope we shall feel that He is speaking to us now.

P.R.B. Is that the present power of the victory that has been won? It is in that sense past. We are in the victory, if we are.

C.J.H.D. I think so. The victory is there, ready for us to take up and enter into. We are not to be bogged down with earthly things. Paul says that persons who mind earthly things are enemies of the cross of Christ (see Phil 3: 18,19). Our point of deliverance, towards another Man in another world, is the cross. If we will but allow the impact of that upon us we shall get through.

D.J.Wi. What does the expression 'be firm' convey to you? Is it like the Lord saying to the assembly, "hold fast what thou hast", Rev 3:11?

C.J.H.D. That is good. That is John's report as to what the Lord would have us be. The word of old to Joshua, as entering upon the heavenly land in the figurative way, is "be strong and very courageous", Josh 1: 7. It has been a joy to see such small circumstances laid hold of by the brethren so courageously. The prophet's words were that the people of God were "small, few, of no account", Isa 16: 14. How lovely to be like that - small enough! It is no good anyone kidnapping us; there are no wealthy ransoms to be paid for us! Let us be thankful that we are small, few, of no account. We get through that way.

D.J.Wi. We are not to despise the day of small things (see Zech 4: 10). It seems from the scriptures that things always have been held

in outward smallness.

C.J.H.D. I feel for myself very humbled that we have got so far from Mr Darby's teaching. He disapproved of large numbers and large buildings, in both of which I feel we have transgressed his endeavour to keep us humble and small.

J.A.T. "Fear not, little flock, for it has been the good pleasure of your Father to give you the kingdom", Luke 12: 32. Perhaps in our efforts to become great, we may have lost much of the joy of these things that you are bringing before us.

C.J.H.D. I think so. I am not saying anything against the brethren being together as much as possible. The occasion today in this city - in the smallness with which our brethren have to go on in it - is very encouraging for them. I think the Lord is pleased with the sacrifice of the brethren in coming. So the brethren here are to understand from Paul that their toil is not in vain in the Lord.

A.R.D. Peter relates our waiting to a moral condition with us. What ought we to be, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God?

C.J.H.D. We need to have our sights on long-range events. They are very near. The day of the Lord will last for a thousand years, and in that day will occur the change of heaven and earth to be eternally new heavens and new earth. The young people may well take account of the power of God in bringing about His own pleasure, and see their privilege of being found along with their parents in the time of Christianity. Everything down here is going to be swept away so soon. Nevertheless, Mr Darby says, God never annihilates anything that He has created. The psalm says, as to the present heaven and earth, "as a vesture shalt thou change them" (Ps 102: 26) - not annihilate them. "As a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed". It is not only we that are going to be changed. We shall be changed; but, Peter says, the heavens and the earth will be dissolved. But what ought we to be?

D.J.Wi. Why do the heavens have to go as well as the earth?

C.J.H.D. Well, another scripture says "the heavens are not pure in his sight", Job 15: 15. Satan's access to the heavenlies at the present time is dreadful. We have had some of the impact of that - the universal lords of this darkness. It is most humbling that it should be so. Scriptures have been misused, and persons shut out from hearing the gospel. That was the power of the enemy in spiritual things, not in earthly material things only; that came out of the heavenlies. Ephesians says that we are to stand against that (see chap 6: 11,12).

D.J.Wr. Peter speaks about being always prepared to give an account of the hope that is in us (see 1 Pet 3: 15). Do you think that, if we valued more what we have, we would be more prepared to give an account of it?

C.J.H.D. I do think that. We ought to be much more evangelical in our outlook. If the Lord's return is at the doors, what hope have men afterwards? Scripture says "the door was shut", Matt 25: 10. Then shall they begin knocking (see Luke 13: 25). But we want persons knocking *now*. It is the time of God's grace. We want all possible contact with our fellow men around and particularly with believers. In this time of recovery I have been set free to enjoy my links in Christ with every believer on earth. I can take up those links in personal speaking with any that I come in contact with. We want to hold forth the word of life (see Phil 2:16). My links *in the Lord* are another matter. I am thankful that I have links in the Lord with the brethren with whom I break bread. But let us not forget those around who are, perhaps, somewhat on starvation diet, while we are in a land of plenty.

N.T.M. So that the loaf, in its unbroken condition, embraces all the saints, even brethren we have had to separate from; they remain our brethren. Whether they would recognise us in the same way is another question: the truth is what governs us. Once past the judgment-seat, we shall all be together, without a cloud. We have to hold them as our brethren, and view them that way, otherwise we are not holding the truth of the one loaf.

C.J.H.D. No; and we are the worst sect of all if we exclude all others but ourselves. But we should not take sectarian ground. How can you, in the light of all that God is doing now on the earth in the preaching of Christ? Even if Christ was preached out of contention, to add difficulty to Paul, Paul says "Christ is announced; and in this I rejoice", Phil 1: 18.

N.T.M. As to our being "firm, immovable", relative to the gospel the believer has an advantage over a worldling. For instance, the believer knows that the earth is here for another 1000 years at least. With many a thinking person the awful power that man has for destruction is a very real thing. The believer has the advantage of being governed by revealed truth. It gives him a basis on which he can speak to men.

C.J.H.D. Yes. What is immovable in a moral sense is with us, and in the midst of a shaking world we ought to be steady persons as holding forth the word of life.

J.H. We are being encouraged in these days to realise that they *are* the last days.

N.T.M. What do you say as to these expressions in 2 Peter 3: "the day of the Lord", "the day of God" and "the day of eternity"?

C.J.H.D. They are very lovely expressions. Scripture treats the coming of the Lord as one matter. There will be a period between the rapture and the appearing; yet the coming of the Lord is one matter in the mind of the Spirit. Persons are said to "love his appearing", 2 Tim 4: 8. Miss Havergal says in her beautiful hymn:

"O what joy to see Thee reigning,
Thee, my own beloved Lord!"

Miss Havergal, in the Church of England all her days, had a life of real soul experience with Christ individually. She never knew the corporate experience that we can enjoy, but she had reality and she wanted His appearing - 'Thou art coming, O my Saviour!' - to see Him vindicated and adored where He had been cast out and rejected. I think Peter would go along with that. The entry of "the

day of the Lord" will give the present heavens and earth a run of 1000 years in blessing. We can hardly understand how complete the transference will be. Everything will give way. There will be no strikes against Him in that day, but there will be peace upon earth and goodwill towards men. It will involve judgment to begin with, but when that is past it will be the reign of the Prince of Peace. Then at the end He will deliver up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father, and "the day of God" will have arrived. That is "the day of eternity".

A.R.D. So "the day of the Lord" precedes that in this scripture. Would that suggest everything being brought under His authority?

C.J.H.D. And a final change in view of a settled eternity. As the hymn says, 'Through that blest eternity, what tides of praise will flow!' There will be nothing whatever to interfere with the rest of God.

W.S.H. What would you say as to "hastening the coming of the day of God"?

C.J.H.D. That expression could not possibly be historical, for we do not know the hour or the instant. We are expecting it by certain signs of the fulfilment of the prophetic scriptures, and by an awakening of warmth of affection for Christ among the brethren. But we do hasten the coming in the way that God can look down and see the moral glory of His own work, as in this day, shining among the brethren more than it has ever done before.

K.G. Is it the manner of life that is expressed in that which follows where Peter says "what ought ye to be"?

C.J.H.D. I think so. The 'holy conversation' might be rendered 'holy manner of life'. That is more than righteousness. In righteousness I have to do and say what is right. In holiness it is what I am to *be*. God is righteous in what He does, but *in Himself* He is holy. We are to be like that. We need to get nearer to what the Lord says; "Altogether that which I also say to you", John 8: 25. Now I have not been like that in the past. I may have said some good things and done differently. The Lord says the Pharisees are like that. You had

better do what they say because they may say truth, but you must not do what they do, because they say and do not (see Matt 23: 3).

P.R.B. Does the end of verse 9 bear on it, that He is looking for repentance?

C.J.H.D. What longsuffering He has had with us! On looking back I marvel that I am permitted to enjoy today more than I ever enjoyed. That is just like Him, of course. "To every one that has shall be given, and he shall be in abundance", Matt 25: 29.

N.T.M. As to hastening the coming of the day of God, does it convey at all the idea of being a certain first-fruits of His creatures?

C.J.H.D. I think so. I think God sees His day, particularly on the first of the week. It is the outstanding time for our taking station in heaven spiritually. After the breaking of bread we never ought to speak as from earth to heaven, because the Lord takes us in then, and what does God see? The Father looks out upon the glory that He has in the assembly. That is the day of God.

D.J.A. I was thinking of the manner of life and holiness that are referred to here, how in the early days of the church there were those who could be taken account of as being in the way. In these last days to which we are referring there should be that character found amongst us, so that each one, old and young, is found in the way. Do you think that is right?

C.J.H.D. I do indeed. That is what scripture calls 'the way everlasting'. The character of eternity is embedded in that way already. The psalmist says "lead me in the way everlasting", Ps 139: 24. So, "to be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless". you say, However can it be? But the power of the Spirit given to us is such that in self-judgment we can walk and be pleasing to God. I love Peter's doxology. When we have a doxology in Scripture, whether by Paul or Peter or John, they close it with "Amen", and I like to say it too. I would not mind if the brethren said it as it is read, because it is an immense thing: "our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen". How

fine that is, to hear the hearts of the brethren responsive to a note of worship to Himself!

A.R.D. It is a spontaneous endorsement of what is said, "to him be glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen". We all anticipate that day when Christ, vindicated, will be supreme, and we shall be with Him.

C.J.H.D. Yes. In addition, there will be an absolute change for the whole scene. We shall be glorified along with Him, and we shall be like Him and shall see Him as He is. But the whole scene is going to be changed, and John says so simply in Revelation 21. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth". What a time of calling upon persons to come in and enjoy this! "I will give to him that thirsts of the fountain of the water of life freely" . That is a climax to the gospel. You would not mind all Chippenham hearing that!

J.A.T. No, we need to think about others: Christianity is that. The Lord is considering for others.

C.J.H.D . And what I feel is, we have so little time in which to do it. There is no cause to be lethargic any more.

N.T.M. Mr Taylor said that he thought the gospel was the outstanding feature of the dispensation, as providing material for the church.

C.J.H.D. That is right, and John is still at it here, the last of the apostles of the Lamb. The gospel is John's line and, when we give thanks for Paul, we must not overlook John.

N.T.M. In another sense John remains until the end of the dispensation: "If I will that he abide until I come", John 21: 22 . Is that the spirit of John, the brother, remaining?

C.J.H.D. I think so. John's line is the last note in Scripture. The very last word is "saints". John is thinking of us, right down the dispensation to this point. It is wonderful to realise that the Holy Spirit, through John, had us in mind, that grace might be with us today.

D.J.Wr. Is it not affecting that we can touch this scene in Revelation now in our spirits, so that the things that have been removed do not exist any more? Would it be right to say that the Lord Jesus felt it as a man as He removed death and distress and crying.

C.J.H.D. That is good. Isaiah 53 tells us how much He carried. He did not only bear our sins - that was the very greatest matter - but He bore our sorrows. Think of what was involved in the title 'a man of sorrows', and acquainted with grief (v 3). Twice over in this book God is said to wipe away tears. I have seen a mother wipe away a child's tears. It is as tender as that, on the part of Almighty God. It is wonderful to think that He has set Himself to wipe away all tears.

C.S.C. It is most encouraging. We do need to be kept standing and ready, waiting for that glorious moment.

C.J.H.D. We all need to see that, for God to enjoy eternity, everything that stands in the way has to be removed. So it says "God Himself shall be with them, their God". Then the next verse touchingly brings out the clearance away of everything that stands out against the rest of God.

P.J.H. As to what you are saying about the comfort of God, and His tender mercies and the way in which He shows Himself, is it not striking that the Spirit is known to us as the Comforter?

C.J.H.D. That is it. Mr Taylor once said that if the Holy Spirit had ever become incarnate He would be exactly like Jesus. The Lord says, not 'a Comforter' - He had been that - but 'another Comforter', and Mr Taylor said, exactly like Jesus. A child that loves Jesus can understand that the gift of the Spirit to him by the Father is that he might have Someone with him who is exactly like Jesus. The prophecy of Daniel was sealed "till the time of the end" (see Dan 12: 9), but John's prophecy is unsealed. It is to be available for the encouragement of the assembly at the end, until the Spirit and the bride say, Come.

N.T.M. Would the references to the Omega show that the Lord has the last word over every matter?

C.J.H.D. Yes. We should appreciate more all our occasions of coming together over the Scriptures - ministry meetings, reading meetings, addresses, preachings - because they all open the way for the Lord's own voice to be heard distinctively. He is the beginning and end of the human alphabet. There is not a word of any value that comes to us but what comes from Him.

C.H.H. In Revelation 21 it is not simply the exercise of God's almighty power. Is it based on the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the work of redemption and the removal of all these elements of distress?

C.J.H.D. I think so. You can see the glory of the incarnation in this. It is a Man's hand that will do this. The wiping away of tears is the act of a Man's hand. The blessedness of God, as revealed in the great Name, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, is concentrated in the incarnation, the way He has taken to be so near to man. Alpha and Omega is just that. God has used the Greek language for the writing of the New Testament, as He used Hebrew for the writing of the Old - the two most colourful languages that have ever been among men. God would impress our hearts that all the speaking, the word of God by which we are to live, comes through Christ.

N.T.M. When Jesus came to Nazareth, into the synagogue, they gave Him a book. It has been said that this is how we should approach a reading meeting; we give the Lord the book.

C.J.H.D. Yes; that would deliver us from reliance on anyone but Himself. Even in the preaching, "The Lord gives the word, great the host of the publishers", Ps 68: 11. When He was here it was "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that announceth glad tidings" (Isa 52: 7); but when Paul quotes that he says '*them*': "How beautiful the feet of them that announce glad tidings", Rom 10: 15. We can be encouraged that *He* is "the first and the last", Rev 1: 17. If we put Him first, that is what God has made Him: "I will make him firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth", Ps 89: 27. Then He is the last; there is no one to come after Jesus. Then, as to all

that God will have created for His pleasure, when things are made new, He is the beginning and He is the end.

C.H.H. Earlier on our brother asked why the heavens were involved, and we see the need for new heavens. The scripture in Colossians 1 would endear Christ to our hearts, as the new heavens are brought in on the basis of His work: "and by him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of his cross - by him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens" (v 20).

C.J.H.D. That is right. It is lovely to see that what God started with at the beginning He is going to have at the end. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth", and at the end He will have a new heaven and a new earth. There will be an eternally fixed state of things in which God can find pleasure and rest for ever.

P.R.B. The last words in each of the last two verses of scripture are "Jesus" and "saints".

C.J.H.D. That is good. We are not the objectives. In a sense it is "Christ; then those that are the Christ's at his coming", 1 Cor 15: 23. So God has that Man first in His mind.

C.H.H. Why does it say "the sea exists no more"?

C.J.H.D. I think it refers to the restlessness of the sea. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest", Isa 57: 20. God's rest would be interfered with by the restless movements of the sea. The sea divides, but God is going to have all of us together. Mr Champney once said that the judgment-seat of Christ is a necessity, not only that we should start eternity rightly regulated with the Lord but also rightly regulated with the whole body of saints. Things are going to be adjusted, not only between me and the Lord but between me and the brethren. It must be so because anything divisive would involve the sea in its restless ness and that is not going to exist any more.

C.H.H. Might the sea also represent the power of death? The psalmist could say "What ailed thee, thou sea, that thou fleddest?",

Ps 114: 5. The work of Christ in going into death would be the basis for this, do you think?

C.J.H.D. Yes indeed, and that is why death and hades, the two spheres with which the enemy has terrorised men, are cast into the lake of fire. God is going to dismiss that idea of death and hades absolutely, and the sea is not going to exist any more, and night shall not be any more. Twice over God says that night shall not be there.

C.H.H. Meanwhile we know the One who has the keys of death and of hades.

C.J.H.D. How encouraging to know that, even if death does supervene, it is a servant to put us into the presence of Christ. Very soon now the dead are to be raised, first, incorruptible; then we, the living, are changed, and we shall all go up together. Mr Coates once said to me that, for one moment, the assembly will stand complete on the earth and immediately be raptured. He said the graves would be opened, the dead raised - *here*, it must be so - and the living changed. For one moment the assembly will be in the place designed for her in the purpose of God, complete, and immediately be taken up into heaven. What a prospect we have, beloved brethren!

BRISTOL

9 February 1980

Key to initials

D.J.Alexander, Richmond; D.B.Bodman, Birmingham; P.R.Besley, Torbay; C.S.Cossham, Weston Super-Mare A.R.Davies, Bristol; C.J.H.Davidson, Dorking; K.Green, Cardiff C.H.Heale, Worcester; J.Harvey, Barnet; P.J.Herbert, Cardiff W.S.Hughes, Weston Super-Mare; N.T.Meek, Malvern J.A.Turner, Chippenham; D.J.Willetts, Birmingham D.J.Wright, Redbridge.

THE LITTLE SANCTUARY

F.C.Mutton

Ezekiel 11: 14-20

This scripture has a bearing upon us for we also are in a time when some of those who are our brethren in Christ are making such claims. In our scripture those who dwelt in Jerusalem were telling the rest of their brethren, the whole house of Israel, to remove: "Get you far from Jehovah: unto us is this land given for a possession"; that is to say, they were claiming as their own special and private property the inheritance which belonged to the whole house of Israel. In the face of that claim the word of Jehovah comes. In verse 16 He refers to His government, and we would accept, I am sure, beloved brethren, that we have been, and indeed still are, under the government of God. "Although I have removed them far off among the nations, and although I have scattered them among the countries". There has been a scattering and God's government has entered into that. But the scattering in no sense means that God has forsaken His people or His thoughts for them. So at the end of verse 16 we have a most affecting and precious promise, a divine promise to the scattered saints: "yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries whither they are come". It must be one of the most precious, powerful, and profound promises of God. It is not 'I will provide a little sanctuary', but 'I will be to them as a little sanctuary'. What a remarkable expression! - as if (one would speak carefully) God adapts Himself to the circumstances of littleness and scattering. This is not a great, pretentious, or publicly impressive sanctuary; it is "a little sanctuary"; yet it *is* a sanctuary, and as regards its holiness, privilege, richness and favour, in no sense inferior to the earlier sanctuary that God had established. Indeed, if the word of God says "I will be to them as a little sanctuary", it must be a sanctuary of the richest kind, because God Himself is the sanctuary. I believe we should ponder this, dear brethren, the greatness and yet the condescension of it, God coming into small circumstances. I think it opens up a great field of enquiry. We can think of the ark, that small

item of tabernacle furniture, with its half-cubit measurements; but *God* was there. It speaks of Christ as entirely delightful to Him and securing all His will. The brethren here have been enquiring into the beginnings of the gospels. In Matthew we have "the little child" and in Luke the Babe, but *God* was there. We think of the Holy Spirit descending in a bodily form as a dove. These aspects of (if we may use the word) compression in relation to divine Persons are very affecting - that God, for the effecting of His own glorious ends, has been prepared to come into the very smallest circumstances. The manger would convey that to us - "the babe lying in the manger", Luke 2:16.

Here in Ezekiel, against a background of scattering, divine government and the arrogance of those in Jerusalem, God is prepared to be a little sanctuary. How wonderful it is! And it is meant to afford us the greatest comfort, that where there are right conditions, and the fear of God, God is prepared to come into small circumstances. We get that again in Matthew 18: 20; "where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them". It is the Lord Jesus graciously coming to the very smallest number where there are suitable conditions. This is open to us. Who would not desire to take advantage of the fact that God Himself is thus available to us as a sanctuary? It is a very rich word. No doubt it would be a realm of peace and protection, but it would also be a place where the richest thoughts of God are treasured and opened up, all being upheld and sustained in Christ, as they were in the sanctuary of old, as suggested in the furnishings of the holy place and the holiest.

Then there is this precious promise: "I will even gather you from the peoples and assemble you" - two very fine thoughts, dear brethren: first, gathering; that is, rescue from the scattering, and secondly, "I will... assemble you", which clearly is an assembly expression. It says in Acts 20: "we being assembled to break bread" (v 7). We are assembled tonight, not many of us, but it is a great privilege to assemble, not just to be together, not just to come to a meeting, but to assemble in the light of the assembly, in the fear of

God, and in dependence on Christ and on the Holy Spirit. This is a matter of great dignity and reality; God Himself both gathers and assembles His scattered people, and it is a precious matter to Him to see them assembled.

Then Jehovah says "I will give you the land of Israel" . What a remarkable thing! Those at Jerusalem were claiming everything as their own and God says, in these small circumstances, where there were conditions pleasing to Him, "I will give you the land of Israel"; that is, the whole inheritance. It is like Paul's word to the Corinthians; "All things are yours" (1 Cor 3: 21) - not one thing is withheld in the richness of divine giving. Then there is a moral clearance: "And they shall come thither, and they shall take away from thence all its detestable things and all its abominations". We are to come to God's judgment of these things. These are very strong words; there are things that God detests and that are an abomination to Him. We are to share His judgment of them, have done with them, and depart from them; but then. "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh". It is like Paul's ministry as to the new covenant and the writing by the Spirit of the living God on the fleshy tables of the heart (see 2 Cor 3: 3). What wonderful operations these are! God in His mercy has delivered us and would restore to us a heart of flesh, involving sensitive feelings; power to receive divine impressions and to be subject to them; to receive them in humility and work them out, things being thus written upon us by the Spirit.

The end in view is "that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them". This is a moral basis for what is for God's pleasure. It must be so, dear brethren; we would all recognise that there can be no conditions suitable to God unless His principles, statutes, and ordinances are kept; as Paul says, "If anyone think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things I write to you, that it is the Lord's commandment", 1 Cor 14: 37. You might say, Well, it is enough that Paul writes it; he is an apostle. That would be true; but he says also that it is the Lord's

commandment, and love would delight to walk in His statutes and keep His ordinances. Thus we can be rightly regulated and conditions be maintained among us which are suited to God Himself. On that basis He says "they shall be my people, and I will be their God". What a message of cheer this must have been to the scattered saints! - this way back to nearness, this way back to God, God having His inheritance in His people and delighting to claim them as His own. Then, "I will be their God". On the basis of repentance and recovery He becomes known in that way as our God. That is the greatest possible blessing, beloved brethren. What infinite resource we have in God - in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit - our God. May God bless these impressions to us, for His Name's sake.

Word in meeting for ministry

CHRISTCHURCH NZ

18 September 1979

THE SECRET OF THE LORD

P.S.Warren

Ruth 3: 1-5

Where we were on Lord's day this scripture was read at the reading and a brother made the comment that he longed to be in the secret of what the Lord Jesus is doing at the present time. I was reminded of that as our brothers have spoken and I do not think that this view of Boaz as active in any way conflicts with what our brothers have said as to the Lord Jesus in His present position on the throne and His occupation at the present time. We can speak in general terms, it may be, knowing that He is nourishing and cherishing His assembly, but it should be, I think, the concern of all of us to be, like Naomi, in the secret of what He is actually doing, doing tonight. Is He not doing it? She says: "Behold, he is winnowing barley in the threshingfloor tonight". That was the very activity that night; and then he would eat and drink and then lie down. We may say she was in the secret of what the Lord Jesus was doing.

It is called the book of Ruth, but then Naomi is also a very interesting person. We are not told her age, but she was attractive to Ruth. In chapter 1 Ruth says to her "thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God". Naomi had made things attractive to one that was near to her. She had gone through much bitterness of experience herself. She had had many exercises and in the feeling of them, as she comes back, she says that she ought to be called 'Mara' - but all through the book she is referred to as Naomi. I wonder whether we can be like that. There is the experience of sorrow, but there is to be fruit from it, in making the truth and in making the blessed God, our God, attractive to a younger generation and to those that are near us. It may be to those that are older or it may be to those that are younger. Can we have an influence on those that are close to us? I think somebody who is in the secret of what the Lord Jesus is doing in detail, at any particular time, would

be attractive and fruitful, because the book closes with the women saying "There is a son born to Naomi".

We should be always on the lookout, as we are left here, that there might be fruitfulness and more in the service of the blessed God. As I have said, Naomi is the one who is referred to as having a son born to her, and at this point she is in the secret of what Boaz is doing. May we be stimulated and concerned to be in the secret of what the Lord is doing and, as in the secret, be attractive to others, to draw them into the wonderful system of things in which our Lord Jesus Christ is, we might say, wondrously active and yet restful. May the Lord encourage us all in relation to it.

LONDON

8 January 1980

THE CHILDREN'S WARNINGS

You will have noticed that preachers of the glad tidings enjoy most of all speaking about the blessings of being a Christian saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But they also have to give warning of the dangers of neglecting so great a salvation as that which is offered by God in His word. The day of judgment will surely come for those who refuse the Saviour. Such persons may have forgotten their sins or may have hidden them. If not covered by the blood of Jesus these sins will rise up against them as did the evidence in the following incident which happened about two centuries ago.

A bundle of papers tied round with string and found inside a large shark caught at sea was brought after some delay into Kingston, Jamaica, by a visiting vessel. It happened that another ship, suspected of piracy, had recently been boarded and brought into the same harbour. Although there was no firm proof of crime the

matter of this ship was still before the authorities. Then the bundle of papers, which had been thrown overboard by the pirates when pursued, arrived just at the moment of judgment and was enough to bring conviction. Just think of the feelings of the captain and crew of this ship when confronted with proofs of their misdeeds which they thought to be lost for ever! But the sins of those who trust the Saviour will never rise against them thus. Even if a believer may remember some of them they would not be on his conscience.

Whilst Noah's ark was being built there must have been a continual warning of judgment to come. As the vessel took shape during perhaps 120 years the warning would also have gradually grown and become more and more distinct. Yet only few, that is, eight souls were saved through the waters of the flood. Perhaps we do not think enough about the completeness of the salvation provided for those persons and the many creatures - which may signify the variety of persons small and great who are saved through the death of Jesus. The ark must have had sufficient food of all kinds to last about a year with constant attention to the needs of all the inhabitants. Do you enjoy life "more abundantly"?

J.C.Evershed