

A
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Contents

STABILITY

THE CHRISTIAN CIRCLE

THE CHILDREN'S JOY

STABILITY

Isaiah 33: 3-6; 14-17; 20-22; 2 Timothy 2: 19

R.H. What was in mind was the thought of stability, particularly the reference in verse 6: "and he shall be the stability of thy times". The previous verses speak of the unstable conditions which are very evident now, probably more than ever in history, external conditions; even men in the world realise that things are just about at breaking point, the bubble is about ready to burst. In every sphere things are unstable - politically, militarily, in governments, religiously, you can look in vain for stability anywhere; but in the midst of such conditions we have this very comforting word to God's people: "he shall be the stability of thy times"; "thy times" makes it, of course, timely. Then I thought the reference to "the King in his beauty" would direct us to the stability that is in Christ as we know Him: "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is far off". Then the reference to Zion and Jerusalem is also connected with what is stable. That is why I read from 2 Timothy 2, because God's foundation stands firm: "the firm foundation of God stands". So in spite of the apparent religious instability the firm foundation of God stands; that is not unstable. We have much to encourage us, and I think there is much need of encouragement. That is simply what one had in mind, and I trust that all will feel to contribute so that we might get the gain of what we have here in the way of gift and in the way of the work of God in the saints generally.

C.C.I. Would this link with Matthew's gospel which presents perhaps the King in His beauty? In that gospel, which is largely judicial, we have the rock in relation to what is communicated to Peter.

R.H. Yes; and Peter himself, whom we could hardly refer to as a sample of stability in the gospels, has his name related to that; so the work of God in his soul is stable. Jehovah is often referred to as the Rock, and He is compared with other rocks: "their rock is not as our Rock", for instance, Deut 32: 31.

E.C.B. Does Psalm 2 also bear on it: "I have anointed my king upon Zion, the hill of my holiness" (v 6) ?

R.H. Yes, that is alluded to specifically. It is a serious time now, everywhere you look it is a serious time; it is only people who shut their eyes to facts who are not disturbed. But we have every reason to be restful because we have resources that are unequalled. It is an amazing thing that men generally do not seem to have much sense of the seriousness of things; men have developed means for complete destruction physically, and yet that does not seem to sober men much. There is nothing stable here.

C.G.H. Why do you think that persons do not face the facts?

R.H. One has wondered about that. I suppose men shrink from the idea of facing God; the way they get around that is to shut their eyes to it, they just simply will not face the facts. That is fairly general I think in most spheres.

E.C.B. One thing it makes us thankful for the activity of the Spirit who restrains, in fact I have often wondered if we sufficiently give thanks to the Spirit for that service.

R.H. Yes, that would be included, speaking reverently, in this that God is to us - stability; "and he shall be the stability of thy times".

F.M.K. The scripture refers to Jehovah who dwelleth on high; is that where we find our resource?

R.H. Yes, and "he shall be the stability of thy times"; so He is beyond any of these unsettling elements; He is invulnerable.

R.L. In verse 2 it says "we have waited for thee". Does that not suggest a knowledge of God when it may appear that He is not at the moment acting, confidence in Him in a waiting spirit?

R.H. That is a very affecting verse because it says "be their arm every morning, yea, our salvation in the time of trouble". That would bear on what was said as to the tendency with us to overlook the presence and power of the Spirit. Every morning would make it characteristic. I think it is a very important matter. I feel it for myself;

we tend to overlook the present and characteristic and constant service of the Spirit.

E.C.M. "God is our refuge and strength, a help in distresses, very readily found" (Ps 46: 1) seems to have been a help to the sons of Korah.

R.H. Yes, it is the same God.

E.P. Is it encouraging that not only is there stability in God but there is resource in Him? It says "the stability of thy times, the riches of salvation, wisdom and knowledge", and then "your treasure". I wondered whether that would keep us steady and help us to draw on the resource for every exigency.

R.H. I think that is very important; drawing on the resource that we have should become characteristic. We tend (at least I have to speak for myself) to become very formal and say our prayers. I have a prayer list; I thought that was a very good idea at first but I find it is getting a bit formal now so I keep revising it.

C.C.I. Is there any link with Habakkuk; "I work a work in your days", chap 1: 5? The only reference to faith in the Old Testament is found in that book (see chap 2: 4).

R.H. Yes: "your days" you are linking with "thy times" here. I think it is a very impressive thing that God, in all His greatness and majesty, should use this language in a comforting way in the presence of all this disorder, distress and what seems uncontrollable; all these terroristic organisations, the power of Communism, the power of Rome, the revival of Islam, these black republics; everything is just on the edge of a knife now, it is so sensitive.

C.B. Would it be right to say that, through sovereignty and grace, it is the treasure we have found in His love that stabilises us?

R.H. Yes, and the knowledge of God.

G.W.E. Does the alternative rendering in the note help us? 'Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times': this is where it is to be found, is it not?

R.H. Yes, so it has to do with God's character.

E.C.B. Is it a point of stability there against a background where Christ is everything? Christ in Colossians is really salvation, wisdom and knowledge, is He not? Paul commends the Colossians: "rejoicing and seeing your order, and the firmness of your faith in Christ". Does the present disorder in the world relate to the unrestrained activity of the mind of man?

R.H. Yes. The reference to the greatness of Christ in Colossians (I was noticing the other day Mr Darby referred to it) is what He is Himself, His Person; it is not His attributes, it is not anything official, He is that regardless of anything, He must have the first place in all things, not because of any quality. I think it has been said that He has earned His place in heaven, He is worthy of it, but Colossians is what He is.

E.C.B. Hence does stability, as far as we are concerned, come back to the elements of the truth in us? Really our stability lies in our apprehension that Christ is exalted. If we do not apprehend that we shall be totally unstable but it all lies in the fact that Christ is exalted, does it not?

R.H. Yes. I wondered if it would be right to link that with seeing the King in His beauty and the land that is far off. I know that the King is official but it would have to do with His being exalted. I was linking it in my mind with what Stephen saw. There was great disorder then in the judicial setting and yet Stephen was perfectly restful and he saw the glory of God and the Son of man (see Acts 7: 55,56). What Stephen saw was very extensive, but there was nothing unstable about him.

E.C.B. Why do you think that Paul commends "the firmness of your faith" in Colossians, chap 2: 5?

R.H. You will have to tell us.

E.C.B. Would you think that Moses was yearning after this in Psalm 90 when he says "And let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us" (v 17)? Having lived with people in circumstances of instability

for forty years and found it in himself for forty as well, is he looking for what characterises the King in His beauty that it may characterise God's people?

R.H. Yes, I think that is very helpful; he says "thou hast been our dwelling-place", Ps 90: 1.

J.C.E. Is there the thought of what is moral at the end of verse 5? Just before "the stability" is mentioned there is "justice and righteousness". It occurred to me that on our side we shall not know stability unless those things are with us.

R.H. Yes, and even more extensively in verse 14 and what follows: "Who among us shall dwell with the consuming fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting flames? - He that walketh righteously", and so on. So the moral side is very much stressed.

J.R.S. Did Abraham come to assess things by their foundations?

R.H. You will have to explain that please.

J.R.S. It says in Hebrews that he looked for a city that had foundations. I suppose they would not be seen but he would know they were there. There is no foundation referred to in the tower of Babel.

R.H. It is helpful to see that. The foundation in Abraham would be faith, would it not?

E.C.B. That is interesting in regard to Abraham because he rejoiced, the Lord said, to see My day (see John 8: 56), really looking on to the world to come that this scripture speaks of.

R.H. Yes. I think Mr Raven said that the principles of the world to come are in the hearts of the saints now. I think it is a very wonderful thing, just the statement in itself, that "he shall be the stability of thy times". You always have resource in God; it is not just the statement but it would involve the consciousness of it. So you meet brethren who give you the impression that things do not disturb them much.

F.M.K. So while there are exercises which we have to face in Revelation 1, 2 and 3, we come to what is stable in chapters 4 and 5, do we not?

R.H. Yes, the throne standing in heaven, still standing in spite of all that is down here; and then of course there is stability in Christ, in the way He presents Himself.

J.E.M. So stability depends not only on a firm foundation but high up there are connections to what is existing that keep things right vertically.

R.H. Do you mean our relations with divine Persons?

J.E.M. Yes; the reference to Christ on high is a connection at the top that keeps things stable, supported at the bottom but maintained at the top too.

R.H. The moral side down here; but the reference to the King in His beauty and the land that is far off is very stabilising too because it alludes to the immovable place that Christ has now where He is; there is His beauty.

A.A.B. Would you say that stability is seen in Paul in the shipwreck? I was thinking of his allusion to the angel of the God whom he served (see Acts 27: 23); he was regulated from above. Then later does the prow of the ship sticking itself fast and remaining unmoved show that we are right in looking for something here of that character now in the saints?

R.H. Yes exactly; that would link with 2 Timothy 2, that that firm foundation stands, but it is based on moral qualities in the saints; it does stand and it is going to stand.

A.A.B. You mentioned the work of God in the saints with appreciation; it is in every believer. Is there a particular quality or character which is called for in this present time of instability?

R.H. I think separation from evil. What do you say?

A.A.B. I wondered that, the importance of the pursuit of righteousness; the ship was lost because control was lost.

R.H. Yes. Someone was speaking the other day about spiritual anarchy; that is the opposite to this - control being lost. I think that is a rather prophetic expression just now.

E.C.B. Say some more about that please.

R.H. It is a constant concern to me to see the inveterate activity of the enemy to reintroduce Bethesda principles that we have ostensibly gone over and judged, and yet the enemy never stops, never misses a chance to weaken authority and to bring in what is anarchical which would involve what is systematic too. I mean it is not just individuals, he has a system working and that is what we see now in the disorder in the world, these terroristic elements are all linked up in a systematic way. That is anarchy. Anarchy is not exactly someone throwing a bomb but it is part of a system to undermine authority everywhere.

E.P. Do you think that Paul's ministry, in its moral, systematic application, is the antidote to that? And thinking about what was said as to the shipwreck, all those who stayed with Paul were saved. Paul's ministry enters into the individual, into the household and also into the assembly. I wondered whether that would further this matter of stability.

R.H. I do not see how we can have stability apart from that, "If any one thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord's commandment", 1 Cor 14: 37. We must cling to that, and to the extension of it in Mr Darby's ministry especially which I think is foundational. There is a constant effort to dislodge us from that foundation.

D.J.R. At the end of Judges you get a time of anarchy with every man doing what is right in his own eyes, and consequent on that is a weakening of what is moral, apostatising from what had been set up; but does revival come in the re-establishment of authority in David, the one who had absolute trust in the foundation?

R.H. David would be the King in his beauty, would he not? So we get here "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty".

D.J.H. Is that why you get the reference in 2 Timothy: "Remember Jesus Christ raised from among the dead, of the seed of David", chap 2: 8?

R.H. Actually the foundation has to do with resurrection; so that there is a very definite link with that, indeed the very verse before where we read refers to those who would deny the resurrection. I think that the foundation is related to resurrection connected with David, the sure mercies of David; I think that refers to Christ risen.

B.E.S. In the state of disorder in the world, simple confidence in God will meet it, but what we have to face is breakdown in the assembly. What would you say about that?

R.H. It is the same principle, I think.

B.E.S. But we have to take up matters actively in responsibility in the assembly; we are not called on to put the world right.

R.H. No, but we have definite instruction in 2 Timothy 2 as to what we have to do. I think that when Paul says "what I write" it would be foundational in the same way as this. We must maintain that; the principles of the assembly would be particularly related to that which is foundational. So that what was quoted in connection with the shipwreck would link with that; that sticks firm; the other thing breaks down but the prow of the ship is firm.

E.C.M. Does the word in Hebrews, "Wherefore let us, receiving a kingdom not to be shaken" (chap 12: 28), bear on that?

R.H. Yes, it is brought in in contrast to everything else being shaken.

E.C.M. Yes exactly. Has that not been related in some way to the Spirit here?

R.H. Yes, I am sure it has.

T.B. Paul brings in the loaf in the shipwreck; he brings in food; he had the one idea before him and that everything is going through.

R.H. Food is certainly greatly needed and constantly needed in the assembly. But as to what is political in the world, it is a great comfort to see that God is in control of everything. We have not only to think

of ourselves, we have to think of our children; what is going to happen to our children, our grandchildren. What are their prospects? Well, we can trust God in relation to all that; He says, I will be the stability of your times. I think that is a great comfort to parents; it is all in God's hands.

E.P. Is the Supper the assurance that what is stable will continue until He comes?

R.H. That has often been a comfort to me, that we are going to the Supper that the Lord instituted all those centuries ago; Satan has been trying to get rid of it ever since, and yet it is almost ironic that even the calendars are dated from the year of the Lord; that shows that God is still over it all.

G.W.E. Are "the riches of salvation" available at all times? And is their wealth to help us to get through?

R.H. Yes, the riches of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. Mr Raven said salvation is different from deliverance.

A.A.B. What did he mean?

R.H. I wish he was here to tell us. I got something out of it: salvation is in connection with enemies, deliverance is more to do with the flesh.

E.C.B. Has salvation also in mind what we are saved to; deliverance has the from aspect to it, maybe to lead us to something else as Romans 7 does. But is "the riches of salvation" not merely that we are saved out of the hands of our enemies but brought into that good and spacious land?

R.H. Quite so. I am glad you added that, it makes it positive. Mr Raven was alluding to Zacharias, was he not, we being saved from the hands of our enemies; but he also says deliverance from our enemies there too.

E.C.B. In speaking in regard to the comfort that we might get in relation to our children and for that matter, as you said, grandchildren, we are nevertheless dependent on the work of God in relation to them in their day, are we not?

R.H. Yes, we certainly are, and yet in some way the faith of the parents is not separated from the children. So it speaks, for instance, of "on account of the fathers", Rom 11: 28. I have sometimes wondered about that; the wealth of what was revived in relation to Mr Darby: that is not all going to be lost. Where has it gone? It has been given up generally, but I think we can humbly say, as holding to it, that God would credit us with it. I hope you follow what I am trying to say.

E.C.B. Yes I do; and is the wide aspect of that, as we have been taught, that God will credit to the many what has been held by the few? But then as to what I might call the family line, we have it much in view in baptism, and thus it would be a comfort to brethren whose children may not be available to them at the present time, that nevertheless God remains and everything remains in His hand.

R.H. Yes, and that God is a family God. God delights in families; so there is something about our children that is special; you can say that without any assumption. The very fact of their being linked with a family that is in the truth, God is in that. I think He has, we could say without any doubt, a peculiar and special interest in our children.

A.H.M. Does Jacob bear that out; "the God that shepherded me all my life long... bless the lads", Gen 48: 16,17? If we have had a life of experience with God we know that He will see the children through too without any question or doubt.

R.H. Yes, so we are all Abraham's sons by faith. I mean what God credits Abraham with, believing Abraham, goes down the family line.

A.A.B. Regarding the principle, "beloved on account of the fathers", would we be rightly exercised to provide a moral basis for that from our side? I was thinking of Naboth.

R.H. You see that, of course, with Esau; he was in the family but he did not justify the place because he despised the birthright and then he lost the blessing and eventually he is hated by God; so the moral side must correspond. But still, we are dependent on God to revive where there has been departure, are we not?

A.A.B. Indeed. Naboth said he would not surrender what he had received from his fathers (see 1 Kings 21: 3). I was just trying to get the link in your thought as to what has been in the revival, the lustre in which it began and the character in which it is going to finish.

R.H. It seems to me it is a great thing to get into our souls that God is going to carry it through, that He did not make any mistake in that divine intervention through Mr Darby, because that was an intervention of heaven, it was not anything casual. I have thought that what Mr Darby received, in a sense, would compare with Pentecost, it was an intervention from heaven directly. That is certainly going to go through, and it is a tremendous privilege for any of us to have a part in it, and it is a tremendous matter to keep it, not to let it slip away. The way for it to slip away is what has been spoken of as this rebellious line that Satan has always been on, and he is still working on.

E.P. There is a tender but very telling word in the Proverbs with regard to the children. There is the responsibility of the children and the work in the children themselves: "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not" (chap 27: 10); and then the father speaks: "Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad" (v 11).

R.H. I think that Solomon being brought in is very apropos because God prophesied as to him and yet he was very much tested morally and actually failed on the moral line.

C.C.I. Would you say a little more as to the great recovery of the truth through Mr Darby particularly? I was just wondering whether the word "Remember your leaders" (Heb 13: 7) in the context of being carried away with various and strange doctrines, would be fundamental, that everything we are working out is particularly in the Collected Writings. There may be a tendency to underrate what is on our bookshelves?

R.H. Well, what I find with my boy is that he thinks that Mr Darby is a bit old-fashioned; I mean he finds it heavy going. He said to me one day, I am reading Mr Darby and am finding it heavy going. I said, Well, do not mind about that, I find it heavy going too. But still,

it is the real gold. We must not idolise him because it is the foundation of God that stands firm; but the revival of it in Mr Darby's time to my mind is peculiar. There was a revival in Luther's time but there has never been anything to compare with the revival which through grace, we could humbly say, we inherit. That is not claiming anything; we do if we do.

J.C.E. The evangelical volumes are much less hard going than the others.

R.H. I remember that you said that and I have read them since and it is not nearly as hard going.

E.C.B. What you say about Mr Darby, which is true, does underline another point for us, that we shall not grasp the truth unless we are prepared to work at it. Mr Darby remarks in Notes and Comments, in relation to John that "the application of [out of his belly...] is easy if the foregoing be understood", (Vol. 7, p.105). That caught me out.

R.H. That is a big 'if', is it not?

E.C.B. But we shall not get the gain of any of the truth if we do not work at it, will we? In fact Mr Taylor's ministry, profound as it is, is very simple to read.

R.H. What I find is a tendency to want to read more and more quickly and perhaps miss the point; it might be better to read until you get to something that you really feel is God's word to you then, and then explore that.

D.J.H. Is this for us "the good deposit entrusted", 2 Tim 1: 14? We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to keep it. Should we read the Scriptures as in communion?

R.H. I think that is very true and very testing too. That is not saying your prayers, or reading your morning chapter either.

J.C.E. I suppose in one sense we could look upon the fear of God as being the good deposit. I was thinking of the word here: "the fear of Jehovah shall be your treasure".

R.H. "Your treasure": that is fine.

J.C.E. I was thinking of the matter of the families; it is a treasure that can be passed on, is it not?

R.H. Yes. Solomon's regime was marked by treasuries and treasurers, not so much the military side.

E.C.B. Could you say something more as to the way in which we might make a scripture like this our own; "and he shall be the stability of thy times"? We would all be very much comforted if, for those of us who have them still, we tore off the calendar and found this text on it; that is going to be a great help to me today and so it would be. But how do we, as it were, get into the reality of it?

R.H. Well, the same thing would apply to the Psalms, would it not? So many real believers get comfort from reading the Psalms which do not really apply to them. But what I can see in it is that to claim these promises we must be genuine and characteristic believers and it must depend on faith being active in us, would you think?

E.C.B. Yes; many other scriptures would bear on it like "he that draws near to God must believe that he is" (Heb 11: 6), and also "the hope... which we have as anchor of the soul", Heb 6: 19. But it is very easy for a scripture like this to be purely objective and a comfort to us; it is almost like a baby's comforter in some ways. There is a lot of comfort but no nourishment. How do we get this in substance?

R.H. I think it is more than faith. Mr Raven said we do not get anything by faith, did he not?

E.C.B. Yes, he said we get everything by the Spirit.

R.H. Yes; well that is the answer to your question.

E.C.B. Well, it helps on the way; but then the question is how are we practically to get the gain of the Spirit in this way so that we are ourselves stable? I have thought - in fact I spoke about it not very far from here - that we tend to think of the Spirit as a kind of an emergency service rather than the necessity and availability of every day.

R.H. Yes. There is a remark of Mr Taylor's, that would connect with what you say, as to "There is then now no condemnation to those in

Christ Jesus", Rom 8: 1. He said that is not a general statement but is something to be experienced and enjoyed. So we would have to see whether that is true, whether we are conscious of being free of condemnation. That would be by the Spirit but it would not be by the Spirit objectively, it would be something known by the Spirit.

E.P. How would you regard that reference in 2 Corinthians 1: "For whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen, for glory to God by us" (v 20)? Then it goes on: "Now he that establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God, who also has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (vv 21,22).

R.H. It seems to me that in the early part of the first epistle some of the statements are looking forward on the basis of spiritual optimism; whether they were true of them at that time is questionable, in fact we know some things were not. He could not open them up and yet they were true of them abstractly; they would become true of them as they became adjusted morally and made way for the Spirit, which would go on to the second epistle where he opens up these things more. But you say more.

E.P. "Whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen" - that is in Christ - but I was noticing the proximity of the Spirit to that statement of the truth.

R.H. Yes; whatever is in Him administratively towards us would reach us by the Spirit, would it not?

E.P. Hence the expression "earnest of the Spirit", it becomes a real matter.

C.G.H. I think your observation as to 1 Corinthians and some of the statements in the earlier part as being perhaps we might say anticipatory, is most helpful, because things develop later on, do they not?

R.H. Yes. This matter of the firm foundation of God standing is very fine in relation to Paul's spiritual optimistic faith as to Corinth. We were noticing last night in the local reading that in the last chapter of

1 Corinthians Paul goes on with the positive line of the truth and how the Corinthians are to conduct themselves in a positive way, just as if the earlier part had never needed to be dealt with. He had absolute confidence that the letter he wrote under the Lord's direction and the Spirit's power would effect his word, so that he then goes on to this very same thing of what is foundational; he says "be immovable... knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord", 1 Cor 15: 58. It is remarkable that he should say that after that chapter which deals with resurrection; I think it is all based on resurrection.

C.G.H. It is most interesting and helpful too in viewing both epistles.

R.H. Yes, so after all the severe things he has had to say in the earlier chapters he is not thinking, I hope they will accept what I say, perhaps they will; he is absolutely confident. So he goes on with normal instructions; he says, greetings from the other assemblies; he does not say we will have to treat you at a distance until we are sure this matter is settled, he is optimistic spiritually. So he said on the ship, I know that you will all be saved (see Acts 27: 34), there will not be anybody lost.

E.C.M. Do you think we need help by the Spirit to relate ourselves more to what is not affected by break down or failure? What God does He does for ever, it abides and would be related to the firm foundation of God. You referred to the work of God in the saints.

R.H. I thought that would link with what it speaks of as Zion here; it says "Look upon Zion": that would be an allusion typically to the assembly. We know it has other more direct meanings, but "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities; thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tent that shall not be removed"; you have the same thing there, what is not going to be overcome. The Lord says that the gates of hades shall not prevail against it (see Matt 16: 18).

E.C.M. Very much like what it said in the Psalm: "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her at the dawn of the morning" (v 5).

R.H. I think it is a very great comfort to us now because publicly things look fragile; you feel that, and the enemy is very active all the

time; but it says "Look upon Zion", as if you look at the truth of the assembly from the divine standpoint. There is going to be something that answers to that and it will not be moved.

E.H.W. Does that link back with verse 5: "he hath filled Zion with justice and righteousness"? Are they two of the factors that cause it not to be moved?

R.H. Yes, moral foundation stones; but it is a fine thing to have this sense that God has something here morally that is going through and that is impregnable.

E.C.M. Is that what is in mind in Hebrews: "ye have come to mount Zion", chap 12: 22? Would that be that we have come to it in faith and by the Spirit, that there is that which is immovable, invulnerable?

R.H. There is a great encouragement, when you have almost arrived at the point when everything is gone, and then this is revived in your soul that it has not. It is revived in your soul and confirmed by substance, that is the work of God in the saints; you find that, it is indestructible, what God doeth He doeth for ever.

W.J.R.B. Is it just what the Lord says in Matthew 18: "For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I" (v 20). There is no question about it, is there?

R.H. Yes, excepting that that has to be examined carefully as to what is in the condition "unto my name", because there are lots of people claim that but "unto my name" is conditional.

F.M.K. Is there complete control here: "Jehovah, our lawgiver, Jehovah, our king"?

R.H. Yes, and there are no ifs or buts or doubts: "a tent that shall not be moved, the stakes whereof shall never be pulled up, neither shall any of its cords be broken; but there Jehovah is unto us glorious, - a place of rivers, of broad streams; no galley with oars shall go there, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For Jehovah is our judge, Jehovah, our lawgiver, Jehovah, our king: he will save us". That is the salvation you were talking about, is it not?

E.C.B. Yes; these references to justice and righteousness relate actually to the day when God judges the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has appointed (see Acts 17: 31). This is not righteousness on our side, it is righteousness introduced by God and established in Christ. I was just going to remark also that while much that is said here and elsewhere as to stability relates to Zion, and it says her stakes shall not be pulled up, stability does not necessarily imply stationary.

R.H. You will have to explain the difference.

E.C.B. Well, are we not concerned with the movements of the testimony still, and stability in that is as important so that we experience stability as the testimony still moves.

R.H. Yes, so that life involves movement, evidence of paralysis is that it is on the way to death.

C.B. When Paul found Onesimus he found a slave and sent him back as a brother.

R.H. I had never thought of that; you are alluding to Philemon. This matter as to movement is important because, much as we value Mr Darby's ministry and that of others, they are not Scripture and they are not the last word. No one would speak in any way derogatorily of them, but the last word is what we get currently from the Spirit, is it not?

E.C.B. Yes, I think that is important, and important that it is understood. It is not that we are looking for fresh truth; Paul said it was given to him to complete the word of God, although as was observed in London the other day, John had the Revelation after that; but we have not yet reached the fulness of the word of God that was given to Paul, have we?

R.H. No.

E.C.B. And there is progress to be made in that.

R.H. The concern with me in our meetings is that we go too fast; we have a number of intelligent brothers who can quote Mr Raven and Mr Darby *in extenso*, and you cannot quarrel with it, and yet when

you get through we have not really had more than if we had brought the volumes with us.

E.C.B. It is quite good for the saints, is it not, to spend two or three weeks on a chapter?

R.H. Yes it is, and a few 'selahs' do not do any harm. There will even be half an hour of silence in heaven once.

T.B. Is it important that the word of God should be for us at the present moment; that is, the light of God coming into the local assembly?

R.H. Yes, it is not merely historical; it is current, it is operative and living.

J.C.E. The things we are speaking of underline the great importance of the moral quality of hope, do they not? It provides us with a very strong telescope.

R.H. I am glad you speak about that. Hope is greatly needed, especially with the younger generation; we need. always to have in mind that we want to keep them with that element of hope before them so that they do not get discouraged. That requires a great deal of skill, because you might say things that are right, or insist on things that are right, in such a way that young people might lose hope. If things are not done in a spiritual way the young people lose hope. I think Mr Taylor used to say that hope was one of the scarcest things amongst us. The Thessalonians evidently slipped between the first and the second epistle in the fact that hope is not mentioned in the second one.

SOUTHEND

13 October 1979

Key to initials

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THE CHRISTIAN CIRCLE

A.J.E.Welch

John 13: 34,35; 15: 9-13; Revelation 1: 4-6

We sometimes speak, rightly, about the Christian circle. It refers, I suppose, to what is for the time being here in the very scene in which we might say the Lord Jesus formed it, and became gloriously its centre. Many of us, I hope all of us, would remember how one of God's beloved servants used to emphasise the conditions necessary for life, and he enumerated three as light and atmosphere and rule; light, atmosphere, rule. That is something that bears thinking about perhaps more than we have thought of it, and when the idea of atmosphere was enquired about it was pointed out that the atmosphere is found in the Christian circle with Christ among His beloved disciples. That is a very precious suggestion because, if I could venture a simple remark from experience of recent times, the sense of atmosphere is becoming more to us than it has ever been. We come together for a meeting like this, see our brethren, see the faces of our brethren, not faces strained by crisis conditions such as you find, alas, around us, but faces that are restful, though not without concern for what is so precious; they are not without the sorrows that the scene in which we are of necessity occasions, but nevertheless restful, and rejoicing in gathering together. That brings, beloved brethren, an atmosphere. The Spirit would have us to sense it and to enjoy it, and to give God thanks that there is such a circle yet, down here in the scene out of which the Lord Jesus went by way of death, which has Himself as its centre and furnishes the circle in which His love is paramount, in which His glory is paramount. This, however, gives us to think of what this circle really involves.

If I could divert a moment to a somewhat different connection, we read in the third chapter of Mark of a circuit: "And looking around in a circuit at those that were sitting around him, he says, Behold my mother and my brethren: for whosoever shall do the will of God, *he* is

my brother, and sister, and mother" (v 34). That is a circle disclosed in the Lord's mind to be based upon kindredship with Himself, and that is a wonderful thing. But He looked around in a circuit, suggesting something by way of a company around Him that in some sense was complete; He could go from one to another without a break. I feel a concern that we get some sense of that, beloved brethren, as we touch the side of the Christian circle. Here were persons surrounding the Lord Jesus, such that He could look around upon them in a circuit. I wonder if we realise how often the eye of Christ is upon us. He has left us here with responsibilities as to His interests, He has left us here divinely supported and supplied, with everything that we need to fill our part in His interests. I think sometimes we need to be conscious that His scrutinising eye is upon us, with perhaps the question, Is the circuit broken into? There is much that would break into it. The subtlety of the enemy, of Satan, would seek to break into it, to rob it of its completeness; not that it is complete in the final sense, but the circuit suggests something that for the moment, and in respect of matters on hand, is complete. It is very precious among the people of God at the present time that there is no break in it. It is a very real challenge because much that is taking place, and perhaps about to take place, would really work against our filling out in love for Christ a responsible, definite, committed part in what is so precious to Himself.

I was affected in my spirit a few weeks ago by a beloved brother in Germany, aged and relatively infirm, not able perhaps to comprehend much, who repeated again and again the line of the hymn, 'O how precious Thine assembly' (No.359). I wonder how much that is in our minds, how much it is stirring our hearts to faithfulness and devotion in the absence of the One for whom the assembly is, the One from whom love for the assembly is so abundantly and so richly proved. All these matters come up in the circle of those who are near to Him. He, glorious in His Person, is of necessity the centre; He in His manhood, His glorious manhood, is the centre. We would have to speak of the Father, in a place which in the divine economy is relatively greater, but if we speak of the

Christian circle the centre is Jesus in manhood, and we are to be drawn into that attachment to Christ that will keep us in relation to the centre, and keep the circle unbroken, the circuit unspoiled.

Now I read in John 13 and in John 15 where the same thought is presented in two different settings, the thought being that He would have us to love one another as He has loved us. No less a standard is allowed for, and what is to be noted specifically is that the Lord Jesus makes this a matter of *commandment*. It is not that I love my brother on account of certain features that he manifests that are pleasing to me; it is not because in some natural respects he is a lovable man; it is a matter of commandment. When you think of it it may seem a little surprising that affections should come under commandment; it is the Lord's way of asserting something which for Him is absolutely essential, for how can the Christian circle take substantial character unless there is a love working within it that holds everything together? This first scripture coming in John 13 reminds us very much of how the Lord loved His disciples. It says in the first verse of the chapter: "having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end"; and the note is of great importance, that the expression 'the end' is not a point in time, it represents a certain objective that is in His mind; and it would be in His mind for His beloved disciples. That is the kind of love that He is bringing to bear upon us, and by way of commandment, He is directing that that love must subsist in the circle of His disciples. Now that is a very real challenge, but the commandment is presented to us, as if the Lord would say, If you take Christian ground characteristically and profess to be a believer, profess to be a disciple of mine, it *must* be that you love your brother, that you love the brethren, and that you love them according to the divine standard of active sacrificial love which is seen in Jesus. Nothing less will pass under God's eye for His approval. It opens up many questions, many points that may arise, but the intent is that they be settled. It may be that differences have crept in, but this scripture would give us a solid basis for insisting that love would have those things to be settled, cleared. The Scriptures abound in indications of the way that love will take to

settle things that dishonour Christ. Let us seize the point, dear brethren, that if something comes in that brings about estrangement it dishonours Christ, because as we find in scriptures such as Ephesians 2, He has laid down His life that there might be reconciliation, not only that the distance may be removed between me and God Himself, but the distance may be removed between me and my brother, what we could speak of as reconciliation horizontally as well as upwards - a real thing. It brings out the suggestion, which I am sure is a right one, that there is a reflection really on the efficacy of the work of Christ if lack of reconciliation persists. The basis is there in the work of Jesus for us to have no distance amongst us. I know the standards are high, but that is Christianity. Christianity is a question of standards which in the eyes of men are very high: Many a man would say, You cannot achieve this, but it is Christianity to achieve in divine grace and power what according to man is out of range; that is Christianity, that is the glad tidings if you like.

So the Lord is searching things out about it. It will be noticed among other things that this passage comes in after Judas has gone out. These things could not be said to the betrayer; the betrayer had gone out, and those who remain are those true disciples, not just disciples in word but disciples in substance, gathered with Jesus; and how much He opened up to them! The Christian circle is a circle of love and of life in which the greatest divine thoughts can find their place, and I would say again, the Lord is not given to setting things forth to find no reply, no answer; He speaks that there may be an answer. If there is any way in which He is speaking to us today it is that there may be an answer, and we can see the wonderful extent of what He sets forth in the following chapters, 14, 15, 16, and then in 17 what is set forth in Jesus Himself, lifting His heart to the Father in prayer, among His disciples as it seems. What intimacies belong in what we speak of as the Christian circle! Paul would place this in relation with the assembly, and truly it belongs there. But I am speaking of things as John, the lover, the disciple whom Jesus loved, presents them to us, that he relates things to a circle of the disciples, never saying how many. It could be a very small company, but there

is a company that has the characters of the Christian circle, where the Lord is free, where the Lord, to use a word, is uninhibited by any kind of condition that would dishonour Him. I believe that is a great point to grasp in many connections, to govern us particularly in what we speak of as separation. Does this thing dishonour Christ? Does what I am saying dishonour Christ? Does what I am thinking dishonour Christ? The Christian circle is a circle of loyalty to Jesus, and that involves what the assembly is for the delight of His own heart, and the features that properly belong to a vessel of such ineffable attractiveness to Him. Let our minds work, beloved brethren, by the Spirit on those lines and we shall find that things open out before us in relation to a circle down here of which the blessed Lord is the glorious centre and in which what is precious to Him is cherished to the uttermost.

So chapter 15, presenting this matter to us in another way, traces it back to the Father: "As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you"; and then He says: "If ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love". The commandments stand as the great test of true hearts in this gospel, the commandments of Jesus. But they are the Father's commandments too, He traces matters back here to the Father Himself, a most touching thing, and brings forward His own relations with the Father, without extending the point very much, as the pattern for what follows. We need to be ready to see the glorious pattern of things in the Christian circle, to see that it is an unqualified and unmodified thing, not marked by compromise as human affairs are, but where everything is held in true loyalty of heart to the Jesus who did not stop short of death to secure such as belong to the circle of His lovers. So He goes on: "I have spoken these things to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full". It is as if He would say, This is a circle of rejoicing, I rejoice in it and I would have you to rejoice. It is a circle where everything is according to God characteristically. We may have to acknowledge from time to time that we have dropped from the proper level of what attaches to the

circle of the disciples of Jesus, but characteristically what is of God is in view there in every detail - a wonderful thing! It gives occasion peculiarly to the active service of Him who is the Spirit, but the Holy Spirit, of Him who is another Comforter in the absence of Jesus, but still the Spirit of truth, and the Holy Spirit. All that is to govern us in this circle where what is divinely precious is cherished as being precious, and held in every heart devoted to Christ in a way that would never allow what dishonours Him or bring His glorious Name into discredit, or besmirches in any way the great concept of the assembly, His bride, and what the assembly is for the delight of His heart. And so He goes on: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you". And then He tells us how He has loved us, if I could put it so simply: "No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends". It is that character of love that appears to be in the Lord's mind at this point, He laid down His life for His friends, and then He goes on to speak of them, in certain necessary circumstances, as His friends. What a circle to have part in! And the whole idea of a circle involves that each has a distinct part in what is proceeding; there are no spectators in a circle, they are all equally involved and that is how I understand the Christian circle. There may be the side, particularly in the Pauline setting, of the gifts that God gives and supports, but the Christian circle is something that embraces us all in this wonderful realm of divine affections and divinely-formed affections in the saints.

Now John at another point was in isolation, and I wanted in closing just to call attention to this remarkable greeting, as we might speak of it, to the seven assemblies. It is John taking upon himself, under the Lord's touch, to address himself to what had been promoted and established under Paul. In certain respects he is now using Pauline language, he would love to use it; the line of his ministry might appear different, the character of it may be different, but it has the same glorious objectives and presents the truth in ways, especially in these last days, which but enforce the more strongly the necessity for what is Pauline, and he addresses himself

to the seven assemblies. He has the idea now not only of the assembly but the assembly here in testimony in localities, and he is addressing them all, though conditions were so different in the seven as chapters 2 and 3 would show us. He has to address the angel of each of the seven in such different respects, but he is really saying to them here, You all belong in this great circle of disciples of Jesus, and I want to address you in that connection. So the line of his word is "Grace to you and peace". What a man of peace John manifestly was! He was ready for conflict if conflict came, but characteristically he was a man of peace. We need to learn from that. Peace is set before us often in Scripture as a great feature which occasions God's pleasure, which occasions His blessing, and it is something to be in our minds to do that which tends to peace, which leads to peace. And John has a word of peace. It is as if he would say, There are matters to be raised, there are questions of the deepest importance to be raised. Think of what he has to say in respect of Thyatira, of the pain, the intense pain of heart that John would have in writing something to the assembly in Ephesus, or to the angel of that assembly, to say that they had left their first love! What that would mean in pain of heart to a faithful man like John! But he begins his writing: "Grace ... and peace"; he has the divine thought in mind, he is thinking of the saints in their oneness under the divine eye and of what is properly characteristic of them in the circle of His beloved disciples. He addresses them rightly as the seven assemblies; he has regard for what had been formed remarkably under Paul's ministrations and the ministrations of those with him, but he is thinking of all of them still as belonging in character to that which is so infinitely precious, a circle of the disciples here of which Christ is properly the centre.

And so John says: "from him who is, and who was, and who is to come", God Himself, especially in the sense of "who is", God as we know Him at the present time, not, so to speak (to speak reverently of Him) a historical God but a God who is immensely precious and current in our knowledge. "And who is to come, and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne" - adequacy of

power in the Spirit to apply itself to every situation, and standing related to the throne of God and the rights of that throne, involving that everything will bear divine scrutiny, and everything is holy and according to Him. Lovely touch that is as to the Spirit! - "before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead". "The faithful witness" - a fine word, as if to say, follow in the steps of Jesus in a course that involves Witness, something to which we need to stand true as here amongst men in the midst of all the negative things that have tended to corrupt in the seven assemblies - faithful witness. It is to stir affections in those who love Him, that we may not be found wanting in faithfulness when the test comes. And this is how John addresses himself to them. "The firstborn from the dead" reminds us that Jesus is out of death; we stand related in this circle to a living Jesus, the glorious Man out of death, the firstborn from the dead. What a choice thought that is! What a stimulating thought it is to our affections to think of having such a One before our hearts as the centre of a circle down here! "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father: to him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages, Amen". That would be the exclamation of every true heart, to glorify Christ, to magnify Christ, to give our glorious Lord, God's beloved Son, the Head of the assembly, His unique place, and respond as He fills it with such a note of glory to Himself.

May the word, dear brethren, affect us as to what is here in this present time, bound together in such holy affections, and bound to Christ as its glorious centre, that we may fill our part in it in the realisation of all that it involves, the immense benefits for ourselves, but that which is for Christ's own heart secured among those who love Him, for His name's sake.

MAIDSTONE

28 August 1982

THE CHILDREN'S JOY

What a wonderful thing is joy, so much deeper, purer and longer-lasting than mere pleasure! The world of entertainment cannot rightly use the word. But it is much found in the Scriptures and known amongst those who live by the word of God. There is a majestic outburst of joy which appears as the same one sentence in the writings of Moses, in the Psalms and also in the Prophets. In the older version of the Bible it reads, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation".

Firstly, in the account of the Exodus, this verse forms part of the victorious hymn of praise sung by the Israelites when they reached the safe side of the Red Sea. How they must have been impressed with the *strength* that had made a way of deliverance for them between the high walls of water on either side of them! God's power shown there and the triumph gained, so often referred to in the Scriptures, are a type of His great might and His mercy to us "for we being still without strength, in the due time Christ has died for the ungodly".

Then the jubilant cry comes again in the middle of the Bible and as it is in a Psalm you would expect the emphasis to be on the word *song*. The Psalmist was not celebrating one particular act of God's power, as with Israel at the Red Sea, but he was singing because he knew that "His loving-kindness endureth for ever". It is good for every believer young or old to be established in this and to praise God for His ways as well as worship Him for the greatness of His holy Person.

Later in the Bible the same doxology occurs in the very short chapter twelve of Isaiah's prophecy which is so full of the *salvation* which is in God Himself, and yet of which we can say "my salvation". The writer adds a wonderful promise - "And with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation". You will know that in some parts of the earth's surface there are several large groups of wells, some with hot or even boiling water, others with bubbling mud and others

again full of an oily substance with flames dancing weirdly on the surfaces. These would be dangerous. But in the "land of the living" there are wells which always provide a joyful salvation to the drinker. I am thankful that the number of these wells is not specified since it means that there is one to meet each and every need. But we must ourselves "draw" this water since the joy-giving salvation is known by drawing on the Holy Spirit and involves communion with the Provider of the wells. Whether your vessel is a tiny one or a greater one do you come to these wells for satisfaction?

J.C.Evershed