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"OUR COMMONWEALTH" - V

ANCIENT PATHS

CHILDREN AT WORK

## **"OUR COMMONWEALTH" - V**

**Revelation 21: 3-5; Luke 15: 22,23; 10: 33-37**

J.A.G. I wondered if we could consider the thought of hospitality. We have been lavishly entertained in divine circumstances today. We are not there exactly as guests; it is our home, it is where we belong as we have sung: 'O the wondrous joy of dwelling, Father, in Thy house above' (Hymn 83). You get an impression of how caring and considerate God is that we should be made thoroughly at home and at ease in these glorious circumstances. It is the effect, of course, of the result of the work of Christ in reconciliation, man brought back in infinite nearness to God. I thought what it says here is very beautiful: "God himself shall be with them, their God". Then there is the sweetness and blessedness of divine love, that He is going to wipe away every tear from their eyes, every person having a very intimate and distinctive consciousness, you might say, about the service of divine love. And the throne is there as the confirmatory power and authority that all is going to come to pass: "And he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new". There is a complete change of circumstances; we are going to be eternally in the glory and blessedness of divine circumstances. God is over them and provided them for Himself and for the whole of the redeemed. It is the greatness of His house, and in order to confirm it to our souls He said to John, "Write, for these words are true and faithful". This is a very exhilarating thought. Luke 15 speaks of the Father's house and is, as we know, provisional, into which we come in sonship and begin to understand and appreciate the ministry of reconciliation: "all things are of the God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ", 2 Cor 5: 18. The father's house in Luke 15 is a very hospitable place. In Luke 10 we are taken care of; the glad tidings brings us into the inn and our infirmities are all taken account of, any discordance is sorted out and healing takes place, the wounds are bound up. We learn from the good Samaritan how to be neighbourly, hospitable. We would get great help I think if we were to prepare a lodging for Paul, to extend hospitality to Paul. He would

greatly help us about the wonderment of divine circumstances; he would tell us he knows a man in Christ, and would demonstrate the fulness of the word of that reconciliation which was fully in a person who was caught up as far as the third heaven and into paradise. Nobody has entered into divine circumstances in such a full way as a man in Christ; yet that is available to us. It may seem an unusual sort of topic for conversation.

J.McK. Just give us a touch as to why you began with the eternal state while both the other scriptures you read belong to the experimental side.

J.A.G. I thought that we have just come out from that sphere and the fragrance of the eternal side is on our spirits. We have been in to God and experienced how He received us. What a reception we have had from God today as we have been brought in Spirit into the glory of His house in heaven!

J.McK. The negative things mentioned here have been fully met and taken care of by God before we arrive at the eternal tabernacle. It is not after we get to glory that God is wiping away tears, He has already wiped them away and we are fit to enter into the joy you spoke of in the Father's house and its fulness.

J.A.G. I thought that was very sweet. I use that word because it came in in the hymn - the sweetness of the Father's love (Hymn 178). He has received us into it and I believe the Spirit might use these scriptures to assure us of the receptiveness of the heart of God for us. The experimental line is the other line, beginning at the inn, so that we can practically enjoy the blessedness of the best robe, and the fatted calf, and the music and the dancing; that, I suppose, would be the testimony at its height.

J.McK. It says in Isaiah, "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is far off", chap 33: 17. I felt this morning that we were in that land and now we are back to working out the truth as we are preparing to get into it.

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. It says in that chapter in Isaiah, "no galley with oars shall go there, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby" (v

21) which suggests the Corinthian position and the Galatian side of things, but now there is room to spread your tent abroad and enjoy the blessedness and expansiveness of the land.

L.McF. Do you think this would be the celebration of grace? We need to be increasingly affected by the grace of God, that He would consider for us in this way so that we might be complacent in His circumstances.

J.A.G. I think so. In Revelation 21 it is the fulness of divine love, "God himself shall be with them, their God". How near and intimate that is!

G.H. That is very beautiful. It says in 1 Thessalonians, "for the Lord himself ... L shall descend", chap 4: 16. It is very affecting the way it is put - "the Lord himself".

J.A.G. I think that all bears on the side of intimacy, and none of the former things are going to intrude into the blessedness of the realm of the dwelling of divine love. He brings that in here - "for the former things have passed away". The former things relate to the circumstances in which we are now. I think it is brought in here to confirm our hearts and assure us of the eternal blessings of dwelling with God in His own circumstances. There will be nothing of ours ever to intrude "for the former things have passed away".

T.E.D. Do you think the reference to hospitality at the close of the shipwreck in the end of Acts would bear out what you are saying, that going through the breakdown and the sorrows at the present time we are to prove the hospitality that is available in the circle of affection amongst the saints?

J.A.G. I think it bears on this idea of receptiveness, we are to receive one another to the glory of God as Christ has received us (see Rom 15: 7). How do we receive the brethren, exercise hospitality, care and concern and in simplicity make them feel perfectly at home? Reconciliation means that there is no distance whatsoever.

J.A.P. We were saying yesterday that the Supper involves more the burnt-offering side, acceptance. Now we are going on a little further to enjoy reconciliation which God has worked out by Himself and for Himself.

J.A.G. Exactly. You know better than I do that the new covenant is God come out towards us in the fulness of His love and that reconciliation is that we are brought back to God in perfect and holy intimacy and nearness. How beautiful that is! We are as near to God in love as Christ is.

J.McK. So that line of things leads up to new creation. Reconciliation is entirely God's work towards us presented in the glad tidings.

J.A.G. I think that is beautiful. He goes on to say, "Behold, I make all things new". That is the fulness of new creation.

J.McK. "If anyone be in Christ, there is a new creation", 2 Cor 5: 17. That is God's sovereign work in each one of us by the Spirit.

J.A.G. That is right. "I make all things new" - a new heaven and a new earth, not a trace of the old to be left. As we have been taught, new creation involves things as well as persons; He says, "I make all things new".

C.S.E. I was thinking of the exhortation in Hebrews 13: "Be not forgetful of hospitality; for by it some have unawares entertained angels" (v 2). Is that the opening up of our affections? It brings in the largeness of our hearts with regard to the saints. Do you think that is why we are exhorted to do that?

J.A.G. I think so. In that setting he says first of all, "Let brotherly love abide". That is expressed in not being forgetful, as you say, of hospitality. We referred to that in regard of Abraham - some have entertained angels unawares. The object, I think, the ultimate in hospitality, is that there should be an increasing appreciation of God and His love and the way that He has met us so that our affinities are together; not just certain ones - you hold all the brethren in your heart. That is where you begin to entertain in your affections.

K-n.A.O. I read recently that it is in our households that we have the opportunity to enjoy eternal life with the saints by showing hospitality; it is not just in the meeting that we have that opportunity.

J.A.G. That is how it is on the horizontal level, we might say. But think of how God has entertained us today! We have had access to the Father - "through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2: 18) - and He has freshly assured us of the wonderful love and desire and the anxiety, you might say, that He has to make us feel perfectly at home in His presence. If anybody has any doubts about God, reconciliation is the answer to them. So that there is never any stiffness or long pauses and silences in the Father's house, the music and the dancing is continuous.

L.McF. The first one to set this matter on is Abraham in Genesis 18. Then in Acts 16 there is a man rejoicing with his household. Is that not the spirit of what is going on in heaven?

J.A.G. I think love begins to know increasingly what to do and it does it; it is not an abstract thing. Paul went through a fair bit of suffering; the jailor laid the lash on them, but then he takes them and washes them from their stripes. Then there was the practical side of course; they would need a meal, so he spreads a table in the same hour of the night. Love meets the need. I think this is a very beautiful setting here, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall tabernacle with them". Think of God in the infiniteness of divine love; He dwells in light unapproachable and He has come into revelation and in this position of eternal and holy intimacy He is going to be with them. Not exactly that they are with God, true as that is, but God shall be with them, their God.

J.A.P. We referred earlier to Manoah's offering and to Abraham entertaining angels: all that helps us, but there is nothing like this passage; this is distinctive, it is God and His sons here.

J.A.G. Exactly. And everything else flows from that. That is why I thought we should begin with this passage. The height of it will continue eternally and God will sustain us in it for ever and ever.

N.S.B. Is the spirit of hospitality exemplified in Paul at the end of Acts? He is in his own hired house and receiving all who came to him; the note says 'received with welcome'. Is he really 'expressing this whole idea even though he is looking on to martyrdom?

J.A.G. It is the expression of God in the riches and glory of His grace.

J.A.P. This passage is very distinctive.

J.A.G. It is one of the few passages of Scripture which relate to the eternal side of the truth, beyond the millennium. Think of the greatness of God Himself! Why should the Spirit say "God himself shall be with them, their God"? Then He goes on and says, "And he shall wipe away every tear"; I think that is very sweet, very comforting.

J.R.C. Why is the throne mentioned here?

J.A.G. My impression is that it is brought in as confirmatory. The whole book has shown the supremacy of the throne and He that sits upon it. There are the twenty-four thrones and the twenty-four elders, there is the carrying forward of the courses in the service of God and everything else that was in the divine mind is secured. He brings the throne in here: "He that sat on the throne said Behold, I make all things new". He has the power to do it. Then, in case they do not believe it, He says to John, "Write, for these words are true and faithful". How beautiful that is, beloved!

J.R.C. This has to do with the thoughts of God that will never change; they have been established.

J.A.G. The eternal thoughts of God. Love has its perfect free course. You do not even have a conscience in eternity because you do not need it.

A.S.H. I was thinking of the greatness of God Himself. Another scripture speaks about God sending His angels as ministering spirits (see Heb 1: 14), but here it is God Himself. The excellency of the thing is very great indeed!

J.A.G. It is tremendous, it is the tabernacle of God, the assembly where He dwells, the residence of glory. 'O residence of glory! God's tabernacle then' (hymn 221): that is the assembly. It is coming down into the eternal state and, you might say, He is calling the whole of the families to attention to see the masterpiece of His work coming into the universe out of the heaven from God. And then he says, "God himself shall be with them" - that includes them all - "and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God". What a triumph, what a marvellous victory for divine love! God is thoroughly justified in making man.

K.N.P. Do you have anything else in mind regarding the fact that it says "he shall tabernacle with them"?

J.A.G. I think He is near to everybody; that is my impression. It comes through the assembly. It is a mediatorial system eternally in function, I suppose, God all in all, the Son Himself placed in subjection. What a Person He is, the Son Himself, more excellent than angels!

J.McK. And every person in relation to the eternal state will come under the blessedness of the joy of God tabernacling with men; but, as you said, it will be through Christ and the assembly; the mediatorial position is always maintained in that way.

J.A.G. That is marvellous, indeed it is. The economy - if it is right to use the expression - has taken on eternal conditions, God supreme and the Son Himself placed in subjection. The kingdom has done its work. He has ruled to dwell and He dwells to bless.

J.A.P. The last verse of Mr Darby's hymn (No.76), I think confirms that:

'There no stranger-God shall greet thee,  
Stranger thou in courts above! -  
He, who to His rest shall greet thee,  
Greet thee with a well-known love'

It is not left to an intermediary. When Joseph invited his brethren he did it through the man over his house because there was distance,

but your thought is that God Himself is having to do with us directly.

J.A.G. Now you carry this thought into Ephesians 2, "a habitation of God in the Spirit" (v 22). That is fine; the dissolution of the universe is yet to come, but in these lowly Corinthian situations, wilderness conditions, there is a habitation of God in the Spirit, reconciliation having been effected.

J.McK. I think it is wonderful to trace God's ways and get a glimpse of the results which the Spirit would unfold. We do not literally see them now but the Spirit by His service from Christ and the Father brings us into the consciousness of what it will be eternally for God to dwell with men. Every family will come into blessing, but the choicest of God's work is the assembly with Christ in that time when God is made known through the assembly and that is how He dwells.

J.A.G. I think that is beautiful.

J.McK. Sometimes you hear brethren speak as though they were already in the eternal state, but it is a touch in our spirits by the Holy Spirit through Christ mediatorially that brings us into the apprehension and appreciation of what God is going to bring in eternally.

J.A.G. And what is going to be eternally in fulness is now realised, if our state is up to it, in the local meeting. I think that is the habitation of God in the Spirit.

C.F.D. The habitation of God in the Spirit would indicate that the economy into which divine Persons have come will function eternally and that They delight in the place They have come into. Therefore it is important that we should never think of speaking or have the feeling that we get beyond the economy.

J.A.G. We are creatures and God is God who dwells in light unapproachable, but there He is as coming into these circumstances, glorious circumstances, eternal circumstances, because His heart has been set on men.

C.F.D. The fact that it is a habitation of God in the Spirit would suggest that the reality of the thing is secured through the service and support of the Spirit Himself.

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. I think it is fine on a Lord's day afternoon just to sit down and enjoy what you have already touched; the taste remains. It is wonderful to be with God in His circumstances.

J.McK. This came up in a three-day meeting in Chicago: some wanted to bring in the idea that we came to the border of what was experimental and could get a view of what is inscrutable over the other side. Mr Taylor would not agree and said, God dwells in light unapproachable but by the Spirit's and Christ's service mediatorially we may get an impression, perhaps just for a moment, as to the glory of what lies beyond and awaits our coming into it. [*The allusion may be to JT 40.545 - Ed*].

J.A.G. Yes. We cannot touch what belongs to divine Persons in Their own setting as in deity. Even the glory in John 17 when the Lord says, "Glorify me ... with the glory which I had along with thee" (v.5), no creature can ever see that; that is for contemplation. But if we did not even have a touch of that we can at least enjoy the thought. I think it is something tremendous to enjoy. "God himself shall be with them", He will make you absolutely and perfectly at home, you yourself, because you will always be you, you will never be somebody else.

E.F.C. I notice that in Revelation 21 verse 3 is collective, and then in verse 7, which we did not read, it says "He that overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be to him God, and he shall be to me son". Is that more how we come into it? Morally now we must be overcomers.

J.A.G. I would think so, because the whole teaching of reconciliation in Ephesians 2 is that the enmity has been slain and He has reconciled both in one body to God. Then there is the thought of growing to a holy temple in the Lord. The assembly is the repository of all the divine light and wealth that has come out from God. I think it has been said that in the millennium you can ask any questions of

the assembly, it is the library of the universe, a reference library; but in the meantime, Paul says, you are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit. So somebody comes in at Corinth to the ministry meeting and says, "God is indeed amongst you" (v 25).

E.F.C. The Spirit is the custodian of the truth, as has often been said, and the assembly is the depository of the truth.

J.A.G. Yes, exactly. So we begin to learn something about divine hospitality.

E.F.C. We are just conversing now as they did in Acts 20 where it says, "and having broken the bread, and eaten, and having long spoken until daybreak, so he went away" (v 11). I was thinking about this kind of conversation when we are able to converse about what we enjoyed in the morning.

J.A.G. I think it is very fine just to sit down in a relaxed atmosphere and converse over what we enjoyed. So the Supper is a relaxed occasion. I received a touch about that today. It has been pointed out that it is the last meal of the day (all the business of the day is finished), we do not have to rush through it, we sit down and enjoy it, the Lord is there and we enjoy His company and go over the impressions, taste the sweetness of them. In Christianity we are to enjoy the Supper, the eating and drinking.

S.E.H. In verse 7 it speaks of sonship: "I will be to him God, and he shall be to me son". Could you say something about how sonship works out in this exercise as to hospitality?

J.A.G. I think that is the level of it. When God met us in the gospel He came out of the house and welcomed us in. The father went out and besought him, it says. And before you go in the Father gives you the best robe; He says, You do not go in there with anything else but the best robe: that is sonship. When you are in there you begin to understand what is meant by reconciliation; the fatted calf is that.

S.E.H. The overcomer is something that Revelation brings up much in the addresses to the seven assemblies, and here also it is the overcomer: "He that overcomes shall inherit these things". I

wondered if overcoming is needed to enter practically into these thoughts.

J.A.G. I think the whole moral side of the truth relates to the wilderness position, which is Corinthians - the law of the house underlying the Supper. The brethren have overcome, they come to the Supper as overcomers. That would be normal, that is the way we would look upon one another when we are going into the inheritance. I enjoyed that remark of Mr Stoney's: Every Lord's day, he said, he read the first chapter of Ephesians and went over his title, then he went out to enjoy the inheritance - 'this is my title for being there'.

G.D.P. At the feast of the tabernacles the Lord speaks of rivers of living water flowing out of the belly (see John 7: 38); would it be right to connect that with these living conditions, hospitable conditions?

J.A.G. I think that is the result of it. "In the last, the great day of the feast", the eighth day, the eternal day - and there they were as dry as dust. The Lord said, Come to me, I will really entertain you, show you hospitality. So that the river of divine grace will flow out from you; it is tremendous to be like that, I wish I were more like that. On the eighth day I think you are really touching divine circumstances.

L.McF. In Luke 15 the father said to his bondmen "Bring out the best robe". How can we as bondmen bring out the best robe and clothe him in it?

J.A.G. I suppose, in a way, that in saying to the bondmen, Bring out the best robe, it would bring out the character of the preaching. Bring out the best robe, come up to the house, the father has met him and covered him with kisses and assured him of the attitude of his heart, and now the bondmen have to bring out the best robe and clothe him in it. It is quite a thing to do that, to find out where it is and bring it out and clothe him in it. I suppose the whole teaching of Romans is that, being clothed in the best robe.

C.F.D. Is that where the gospel begins really? Paul says to the Galatians, "for ye are all God 's sons by faith in Christ Jesus", chap

3: 26. The gospel begins at that point when we receive Christ, and immediately the Father says, You are My son.

J.A.G. That is right. You are in the family, and everybody in the family has the same status, everybody has the best robe and is clothed in it. You look around the brethren and you see the best robe, and that preserves us from being social in our links together or anything like that; we stand related to one another, as Paul would say, on the ground of new creation. The social side and all that belongs to that side of things has to be judged by us, the best robe is not for that at all.

J.McK. It is really Christ, which is the only thing in the Father's house in which to clothe the returning prodigal.

J.A.G. It shows the importance of having the glad tidings related to the house.

E.F.C. The best robe is for the weak brother for whom Christ died just as much as it is for everyone else.

J.A.G. Oh, yes, I think so. On this line there is no weakness or anything else. That may be true, the man was wounded and suffering and was not feeling too well, but Luke presents as the great physician and He can bring in healing. The best robe is for everybody.

K.A.O. Would you say something more as to the glad tidings being linked with the house.

J.A.G. If I recall rightly - some of the brethren will know better than I do - there was conflict about that in Chicago in 1905; it was a question of salvation in the assembly. The gospel stands related to the house, otherwise it comes short. If your converts do not come into the house there is something missing.

J.McK. It was likened to the city of refuge. You find your salvation in there, and in the assembly you are preserved in the power of Christ and the Spirit for the praise of God.

J.A.G. Exactly. There is no thought of a man being clothed in the best robe and then going back into the far country. He stands

related to the house, he comes into the house and he enjoys salvation amongst other things.

J.McK. The truth was distinctly set out that salvation was linked in principle with the cities of refuge, there was salvation for every one that went in there until the high priest died. He said that our High Priest never dies, He lives in the power of an indissoluble life.

J.A.G. Exactly. The truth was brought out so clearly - the location of the living water, the glad tidings related to the house the great sphere of salvation. There are the ingredients, you might say, for the music and the dancing.

J.A.P. Was it not brought out that the assembly was formed first by the Spirit and then Peter preached? That is the order. So his father's house was there all the time when this son was sinning, just like ourselves: "we being still sinners, Christ has died for us", Rom 5: 8. How wonderful!

J.A.G. That is beautiful. The Spirit came down at Pentecost and the house was formed. Peter did not preach and say, We have to wait, the house is just getting built. The Spirit came down and God set up His house; then the preaching went out from the house. We should remember, too, when the matter came up about the preaching being in the hands of the preachers. In those days the matter was just left open and somebody would stand up and preach. A brother said that the scripture for the preaching is 1 Corinthians 14, let two or three speak, but Mr Taylor said the scripture for the preaching is Acts 2, Peter stood up with the eleven, and the background is Peter amongst the brethren. Immediately that brought conviction. Then you have the official side of the house supporting the family side; you go into this house and you feed on the fatted calf.

K-n.A.O. Is it important too for us to see that what precedes coming into the house is the father going out? You remarked that he did not just stand at the door and say, Well, he could have come in.

J.A.G. He saw the son coming. It is like the city of refuge. The lad is coming, he is concerned: "I will rise up and go to my father" (v.18). Well, that is the work of God; God is looking for His own work

to appear and He gives it every possible encouragement; He will not put a stumbling block in a man's way when he is coming to the city of refuge.

K.A.O. It has been said that we were quite ready to speak to other believers about the Lord Jesus but we were not very ready to speak to them about the assembly, and that we should speak to them in faithfulness of what would involve the house. It is some thing that we need to think about more because it has to do with what there is in the house that is to be enjoyed by the believer as coming under the influence of Christ and as indwelt by the Spirit; he is to be at home there.

J.A.G. The man's first concern was hunger - he began to be in want, God ordered the conditions, I suppose - a violent famine and he says, I know there is an abundance of bread in my father's house; When souls get converted they need feeding. So in the house there is all the food that you need. To preach the gospel and have faith campaigns and so on and then leave persons high and dry has nothing to do with it; they are to come into the house of God, have the gift of the Spirit and a place in God's house. The house was established before the preaching went out.

G.H. God will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (see 1 Tim 2: 4).

J.A.G. That is the whole point; it is not only to be saved but to come to the knowledge of the truth. And as the preaching goes on like that it is the expression of divine hospitality.

T.E.D. Is David in the gain of it when he received Mephibosheth as one of the king's sons?

J.A.G. Very beautiful! He looked around to see if there was anybody not in blessing and Mephibosheth gets his place at his table as one of the king's sons. At the time of the rebellion of Absalom Mephibosheth represents the justification of life. He is saved in the power of His life, He reigns in life and represents the justification of life because he stands related to it completely - he sat down at the

king's table. Solomon would be there and a few others; it is a very fine place.

G.D.P. We had the scripture this morning, "In my Father's house there are many abodes ... I go to prepare you a place", John 14: 2. Does that in any way link with this?

J.A.G. I think so. It is the greatness of the assembly's place; the Lord went there, that was the place He prepared. What we are waiting for is a change of condition. We are just waiting for that to go into that place. It stands related, I suppose, to predestination.

T.E.D. Do you think then that if we really enjoy God as coming into our circumstances, and a sense of His dwelling, we would be more ready in hospitality and love to serve the saints and there would be a greater practical flow in affection amongst the beloved brethren?

J.A.G. I think that is how it would work out because love is active there. Love does not just sit in a seat and say, I hope you all serve me; love gets on and does things. That is hospitality, it is that kind of thing.

N.S.B. "Freely ye have received, freely give", Matt 10: 8 (A.V.).

J.A.G. Yes, I think God is reflected in the glad tidings in the measure in which we have received them, according to the level in which He has set us: the glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God, for instance (see 1 Tim 1: 11).

N.S.B. Mr Darby expands on that scripture. He says, 'freely' there is giving without a second thought; you do not have to calculate about it. God's heart has been expressed in the way He has given and we are to reflect that.

J.A.G. Yes, exactly, and the measure in which we have apprehended it. I suppose if we enjoy it, that is the measure in which we reflect it.

J.McK. I am impressed with the grace of Christ that we get in Revelation 3 in relation to Laodicea; they had grown rich, they had need of nothing. However, the Lord says, Ye know not ye are the blind, the naked and poor, but He is standing at the door knocking

and if anyone opens He will come in and sup with him; and then the beautiful side is "and he with me", into the Lord's own sphere and His circumstances that relate to things of God's throne.

J.A.G. Is that not wonderful grace? There is that side, He keeps on knocking come out of your circumstances and be with Me so that you can come into My circumstances.

J.McK. We are hoping that, at the preaching today, somebody will turn the handle and open to let Christ in.

J.A.G. 'Swing your heart's door wide open': that is what the hymn says.

J.R.C. In Luke 10 Jesus gives that injunction, "Go, and do thou likewise" (v 37). How much we have received! The question is, What is our reply?

J.A.G. Go and be neighbourly. The man's wounds have been healed, he has no wrong affinities, the word of that reconciliation has been effective, he has enjoyed the fatted calf. The grace of the Samaritan has been known by him, the new covenant - that is the Samaritan, divine love in all its fulness and blessing. No questions asked, nothing to pay, he has paid for the whole thing himself. He put him on his own beast and took him to the inn. How liberally we have been dealt with.

J.A.P. It is not said that the man the Samaritan helped repented, but the younger son repented and returned. What difference do you see in these cases and what should we see in it?

J.A.G. I suppose the younger son had a bit of history. He left his place and comes back. I think the Samaritan is just the full outshining of divine grace. It is the working of divine grace, for he has been healed, he has been taken care of. He has had everything done for him.

N.S.B. The Lord says "I have overcome the world", John 16: 33. The world as Satan's system produces bondage in souls, such as the condition in which the man in Luke 10 found himself, and the Lord reverses all that, He has overcome it. That is Revelation 21.

Mr Darby in his Synopsis says that in that verse about cry, grief, distress and tears, is really in a few words the history of the world. The Lord has overcome all that.

J.A.G. Yes He has. Why should this man go from Jerusalem down to Jericho? Why did he want to do that? He falls amongst thieves, they rob him and leave him in a half-dead state.

L.McF. This certain Samaritan was moved with compassion, the compassions of God. Seeing the condition in which we are God was moved to help, to be hospitable.

J.A.G. I think that is how it works out. He has the resource - the oil and the wine. This is a man who knows what the inheritance is. Now you are healed and are able to sit down at Jesus' feet and listen to His words. When you do that you make way for Paul, you provide a lodging because he is going to enlarge on the whole scope of the heavenly side of the truth and the purpose of God.

K-n.A.O. Does it help to see how the Lord develops this parable in response to this man's question about "having done what, shall I inherit life eternal"? He said I have done all these things. But there is something more. Is it important to see that it is not enough that we are with the saints and remain in a right position but that then we are to go and do likewise?

J.A.G. Yes, I think so, for we have received and enjoyed the greatness of divine gift and eternal life. We might spend half our lives on the doing line trying to inherit eternal life, but God says, Just enjoy the greatness of divine grace, the wonderful supper of chapter 14. I have prepared the supper, my oxen and my fatted beasts are killed. In chapter 15 the guest comes in on the line of divine grace. He proves the riches of His grace and the glory of His grace. The legal side is very deeply ingrained in every one of us, we always want to do something, a little thing maybe, to get a little favour. But the work is finished; it is the magnitude and the plenitude of divine grace. That is Christianity.

J.McK. I remember that Mr Raven said, Grace wants to relieve us and help us in the wilderness but love operates to satisfy itself.

J.A.G. Yes, that is fine. We were saying that Mr Raven said that if it were only grace - and I am not in any sense minimising grace - God would not be satisfied. It is love; and that is John 17. The men Thou hast given Me have capacity to love like God and Christ; the Spirit gives us that.

K-n.A.O. You asked the question about why this man should go down to Jericho. The man in Luke 15 also had something put on his feet. If we fully appreciated what God has done for us in Christ would it help us and preserve us from going on this downward line?

J.A.G: I think so. I was reading Mr Coates yesterday; he was speaking about the books, the city of books. He said, I get all the entertainment I need in the Scriptures and the ministry. Well, that is a big question, is it not? It is the Father's house, it is like God to make everybody perfectly happy.

J.McK. Paul refers to "how ye ought to walk and please God", 1 Thess 4: 1.

K.A.K. What would you say about the energy expended to make this happen? I was thinking of the father running, Abigail hastening, and Abraham the same way, to show hospitality towards persons.

J.A.G. I think it is the expression of the divine nature coming out in persons; we are being made partakers of the divine nature so that we act like God.

K.A.K. Perhaps we should have a little more energy in the way that we are prepared to enter into these things. The scripture was mentioned which speaks of being saved and coming to the knowledge of the truth. It seems as though there is a real need for helping persons into this, a need to expend energy towards this end.

J.A.G. That is a very fine scripture because it stands related to the house (1 Timothy 2): "first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men ... for this is good and acceptable before our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (vv 1,3,4). So that we are in the flow of divine desire. Not that you get

somebody out to the preaching and ask them if they are saved and what are they going to do now; I think it is the power of moral influence. Let us be imitators of God and walk in love.

E.F.C. Paul and Philemon.

J.A.G. Exactly, there it is. Paul is just exuding it, pouring it out. He meets a slave in the jail and he puts the best robe on him and effects reconciliation. He gets Philemon to receive him "not any longer as a bondman, but above a bondman, a beloved brother", Philem 16. Then there is the sister Apphia; she might be brooding over any little thing that he had done wrong, and maybe he had taken certain things with him when he ran away. Paul says, Well, just you put that to my account, I am wealthy enough to meet all that. "Putting in us the word of that reconciliation" (2 Cor 5: 19): he would have that in the sister as well. So Philemon prepared him a lodging; it is a fine thing to have Paul in the house.

## **ANCIENT PATHS**

**Eric Burr**

**Genesis 48: 15,16 (to 'lads'); Jeremiah 6: 16**

I had in mind principally the verse in Jeremiah which says "ask for the ancient paths". My impression is that Jacob knew that there were such paths: they were paths in which his fathers had walked. We see older brethren departing to be with Christ, one after another, and the word in Ecclesiastes bears upon us, that "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh", chap 1: 4. I think it is a matter for exercise whether the generations that come are going to walk in the paths in which their fathers walked.

It is perhaps a more serious exercise than we might from time to time be inclined to think, but there were ways in which our fathers walked and they are valuable ways. In Deborah's day highways were unused. I would not like to think that a day will come when the ancient paths are unused and the way in which our fathers walked was unused. I am sure that none of the brethren would wish to see another generation growing up that went by crooked paths. I do not suggest that they do, far from it. One thing that gives very great cause for thankfulness in these days, and I say it without wishing in any way to be patronising is the way the hymn that we sang (No 345) echoes in the minds of a lot of the younger brethren. I say with no fear of contradiction that among our younger brethren there is a desire to be wholly committed until the Lord comes, but it is a committal from which our minds easily slip. It is likely that if our minds slip from that path of committal, however old or young we are, we may find recovery to the path more difficult than we would have wished it to have been. I am not going to go into details of things which might illustrate what I have in mind, or to appear to make new laws, but we know from our own lives that a diversion from that path of committal, even for an evening, introduces an area of crookedness in the path which we would afterwards wish had not been there.

Therefore I think that it is a matter, in which the Spirit would help us all, to be maintained in the way in which our fathers walked. There are a lot of brothers and sisters here whose fathers I can remember, who walked in those paths with honour and they honoured the path by their walking in it. But the possibility is that the day in which we live and its particular character may tend to divert us from paths in which God would be desired to be as fully honoured as He can be and as He has been. I do not refer to particular things but it is a matter of exercise for us all, as we had in Romans on Lord's day: "walk in the steps of the faith ... of our father Abraham", chap 4: 12. Jacob refers to that, he says "before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked".

One thing that we know about old paths is that unless they are used all the time they become overgrown. Within a couple of years a path that has not been walked on would be so overgrown that successors might have difficulty in finding it. The responsibility, therefore, is to keep walking those paths so that they may be kept open. Sometimes it requires courage to walk in those paths. The brethren are familiar with Pilgrim's Progress and they will remember 'By-path Meadow'; it looked very attractive, it looked much easier than the road on which Pilgrim was going, but where did the man end up who took 'By-path Meadow'? He ended up in conditions from which he would very quickly have wished to be recovered. It was in fact the road to Doubting Castle and Giant Despair.

I allude to this because the nature of the day in which we are is seductive in relation to the bypass. Things come in with current technology which lead us away, things come in with the character of the world which lead us away, and what is required when these things come in is that somebody will boldly walk the old path. You may be surprised who will follow you in it if you are willing to walk it; you may find that more of the brethren young and old than you expected are willing to follow you in it. It therefore behoves us to keep these paths open, to walk in the ways that we can still remember. There are ways that we can still remember which are not always walked in today. There are things which are done today

which were not always done, there were things which were once done with sobriety which are not done with much sobriety now. There was a consistency about the Lord's day which was in the old paths. These things are to be maintained. We are to encourage one another to maintain them. If we do not know where they are, let us ask for them.

It says in Jeremiah "Thus saith Jehovah: Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the ancient paths, which is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls". Is that not encouraging? (Our beloved brethren who have spoken already have spoken about encouragement). But they said "We will not walk therein. Also I have set watchmen over you", so there was going to be help in walking in these ancient paths.

We can think of various things which we do and we do without a thought, but are they in the ancient paths? Let us go back. If we do not know, "ask". You could ask your father, one of the older brethren, Used the brethren to do this? And they could say, Yes, the brethren have always done it and they felt that the Lord was with them in it. In that path you will find rest to your soul. If they say I am not so sure, I do not think that we did that in my day, I do not think that we used to do that, I do not think that the brethren used to do that - not that they had rules, but that there was a climate of spiritual formation in them which did not do it and they would advise you. If you ask, you could be told. You need to ask and then you would be told and advised and you would be encouraged to find the old path and in it you would find rest to your soul. I think that this is the only occasion in the Old Testament save for the allusion in Psalm 116 (v 7) where that expression occurs; it occurs in Matthew 11: "ye shall find rest to your souls" (v 29).

I just draw the beloved brethren's attention to this. I think there is something in this scripture in Jeremiah for us and we need to help one another in it, and we who are older need to be approachable so that we can be asked, and we are not standing there with a stick but we are standing there with the counsel of experience, memory, recollection. Let me say to the younger brethren that when we were

young there were quite happy times among the brethren; we did not need this adjunct, that adjunct and the other adjunct. The brethren went on happily with one another, everyone contributed to it. If people are to ask for the ancient paths it requires that the older men and women be approachable so that the young people if they ask do not feel as though they are going to have their ears boxed; they feel that they are going to be advised that this is the way, this is in the ancient path, or it is not.

I leave this thought with the brethren that we might encourage one another by seeking to maintain these ancient paths lest they become overgrown. As the older generation goes to be with Christ (which they are doing at a rate we have hardly experienced before), the younger generation is growing up and this should give us all great cause for thankfulness, but it would be a tragedy if the ancient paths were no longer marked out and they had somehow to find their own way. The Lord would help them but we could help them. I just leave this thought with the brethren.

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## **CHILDREN AT WORK**

There are in the Scriptures instances of children who were actively helping the testimony of God in various ways. This would apply of course more to the older children although it is not always easy to tell the ages of these young ones. Amongst girls we have an example in Miriam, about twelve years old, who had the task of keeping vigil over her younger brother, later called Moses, when he was put into an ark by the sedge of the river. It appears to have been her own idea to keep watch in this way, and she was thus able to arrange for the child to be protected in dangerous times.

As for boys, we are told that Samuel served in ways taught him by the priest. One of his regular tasks was to open the doors of the temple-house so that persons might enter and worship God. From these beginnings, whilst still quite young, he was entrusted with a message from God to His unresponsive people. Oh, that more children would grow up to seek God and receive His word, causing others to do so, especially now that He has been made known in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Josiah, who became king at the age of eight years, was active, as he grew up, in things that were right in the sight of Jehovah, his God. In this he is a wonderful example for young and old. As a reward he was led into further secrets of God's mind and he caused the temple to be restored. That building was a material one made of stone; God's house now is "not made with hands" but consists of believers having His Spirit and serving Him in love. Do you desire to do so?

**J.C.Evershed**