

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 26

May 2009

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FAITH

Hebrews 11: 5-7, 13-16, 39; 12:1-3

RHB The Lord might help us to speak together about faith: what it is and where it is. The Lord said to some at one point, "Where is your faith?", Luke 8: 25. Peter speaks of it as "precious faith" (2 Pet 1: 1); he speaks of it as "much more precious than of gold which perishes", 1 Pet 1: 7. I wondered if, in speaking together about it, we might have a fresh appreciation of the preciousness of faith and what it is to have faith as a gift from God; and how it is to be exercised in our daily life. There could not really be anything more basic in Christianity. We might get some help together in our enquiry as to why everything is based on faith. Why has God chosen that way to reach His end? We know that we are saved through it (Eph 2: 8); we know that we can be healed by it (Jas 5: 15); we know that we are to live by it, Heb 10: 38. We are exhorted to pursue it (2 Tim 2: 22); we are exhorted to maintain it (1 Tim 1: 19). We know from the scriptures that practically it can be overthrown in the soul: we read of some who overthrow the faith of others, 2 Tim 2: 18. On the other hand it can be built upon, we can build up ourselves in our most holy faith, Jude 20. There is great comfort to be had from faith. The apostle says, "to have mutual comfort among you, each by the faith which is in the other" (Rom 1: 12), and I wondered whether we might experience that in a reading like this; not simply to speak of it as a matter of teaching - though we must in what we say be within the bounds of the truth - but to speak of it in that way, "each by the faith which is in the other". The apostle says, "I have believed, therefore have I spoken" (2 Cor 4:13); so what he believed was what he presented in his speech to others. Faith comes by report, and the report by God's word (Rom 10: 17); but the scriptures warn that it can be feigned. The scriptures speak of "unfeigned faith" (2 Tim 1: 5), and I feel, and have no doubt that others share it, that there is much abroad that has the effect of undermining faith. We need to be built up in it, to build one another up in it; to maintain it ourselves, and to exercise it.

In this great section of faith, the apostle draws on Old Testament saints to illustrate its nature and character in operation. But the *present* dispensation is spoken of specifically as "God's dispensation, which is in faith", 1 Tim 1: 4. It is not that it is limited, as these passages show, to this dispensation; it is a feature that has marked God's dealings with men from the outset, but it is particularly in this dispensation that it comes into its own. I wondered if we might get some help together as to

why that is.

JB You spoke of faith as something we exercise. Do you think that as we exercise faith more is given?

RHB Yes, and confirmation is received in it. Help us as to what faith is.

JB Do you think Enoch was looking to someone outside of himself in a day which was outwardly difficult? Jude gives us a little idea as to how he saw the Lord, “come amidst his holy myriads”, Jude 14. Do you think Enoch's eye was on something outside of this world, and on what God was doing?

RHB It says of him that he walked with God (Gen 5: 24) in the midst of a wicked world, and he foretold God's judgment upon it, “Behold, the Lord has come amidst his holy myriads, to execute judgment against all; and to convict all the ungodly of them of all their works of ungodliness” (Jude 14, 15). But where did he get that view? That is what he saw, and that is what he said, but he must have had that from his communion with God.

KM Is faith the work of God in the soul? It is God's work.

RHB Yes, it is God's gift. The apostle says, “For ye are saved by grace, through faith; and this not of yourselves; it is God's gift”, Eph 2: 8. The question often arises with young persons, and it may arise sometimes after they are breaking bread, as to the reality of things that are unseen and yet eternal, 2 Cor 4: 18. I think in its essence what faith brings into the soul is the substantial reality of things that are unseen.

RDP Man's mind and heart are dark because of sin. It helped me some time ago to see that faith is light. The first thing is that God in His sovereign operations brings light into the heart.

RHB I think that helps, it is light from God and it only becomes that as it is received in faith. We sometimes say we have a lot of light on the bookshelves, and we know what we mean; but light is not exactly in books; it is God communicating something Himself and opening our eyes to see the reality of things that we could not have any apprehension of, apart from divine revelation.

RDP The human mind could not reach it even in its most sophisticated form. It says of the Lord Jesus, “there is no beauty that we should desire him”, Isa 53: 2. That would be according to man, but

God's light illuminates His thoughts in relation to Christ and sheds that abroad, and I suppose it is extended by the Holy Spirit in the heart.

RHB So Peter says, even of Him, “whom, having not seen, yet love; on whom though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory”, 1 Pet 1: 8. That to me is a most remarkable tribute to what you have spoken about as to God's work, that there should be ardent affection for the One whom we have never seen. It is a tremendous thing.

This man Enoch is brought forward - there is a chapter of personalities, but he is brought forward as one that could be translated that he should not see death. We know that if God is able to do that with one man, He is able to do it with myriads, but the writer's point is that before his translation he had the testimony that he had pleased God, or as Genesis says, 'walked with God'. He establishes in this passage that, “without faith it is impossible to please him”. I thought that underlines the importance of it for us, who like him are awaiting translation.

RDP One verse which always strikes me is, “By faith we apprehend that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb 11: 3); I think we have been taught that that is more than that they were made, but framing involves intelligence. I suppose it introduces us to the fact that the area of things that we are in is not just a physical thing but a moral thing. The framing of the worlds involves a scene in which God is going to work His will so that nothing is merely ordinary, or an event, or a coincidence, or luck or any of these kind of things, but we apprehend that, “the worlds were framed by the word of God”. That is a tremendous light, but all men do not live by that.

RHB It is very much under attack in the world, and the educational system, but it brings in the moral element, the activity of God. Scientists can study rocks and processes and make intelligent guesses as to how things may have changed in their character and so on, but that is the limit. They can only study material things which can be seen, but faith goes beyond that to see that God was behind it. Then not only that God was behind it, but that Christ was the One by whom He made the worlds - we learn that in John (chap 1: 3), but then we learn something even greater that, “all things have been created by him and for him”, Col 1: 16. Not only that He was the author of them. They were made, or framed by the word of God, but they were made *for* Him. I think that gives us a very different view of things when we apprehend

that.

GMcK What do you say about the definitions in verse 1 - “Now faith is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”? I have always found the conviction of things not seen easier to understand; that describes what faith is, something that is not seen that you are convicted about. I wondered whether there is something additional in “things hoped for”. I wonder whether the rest of the chapter goes on to that, those who saw the promises afar off and embraced them, and the city that is prepared, there seems to be something more. It is not just a thing that is not seen, it seems to be something that is reached out for.

RHB Faith is very intimately connected with hope, the two really go hand in hand. Paul says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are the most miserable of all men”, 1 Cor 15: 19. It not only gives us the conviction of things not seen, things that exist, they exist now, they exist for God, and they exist for faith, but there is the hope of what, for the believer, is yet to come. That entered very much into the lives of these persons, they were prepared to accept present loss in view of eternal gain.

DCB I was just wondering as to what faith is. In one way it is a contrast to sight: perhaps we can learn in a sense of contrast to sight, but it is also in contrast to the law. It is wonderful that we can have this conviction. We can be absolutely certain of things: our souls have been so affected that we are absolutely certain of things that we cannot prove by human means or human logic. But then it is seen as our way of entrance into blessing as contrast to what we could not enter by way of law. That was a previous dispensation. Man was tested by that but in fact the writer had to go back to these persons who mainly pre-dated the law.

RHB That entered into the preachings in the early days, “all things from which ye could not be justified in the law of Moses, in him every one that believes is justified”, Acts 13: 39. What a statement that is. The law could never justify anyone, it served only to condemn, but faith, and justification by faith, was God's great answer to that. I think what you say as to the contrast with sight is important too, because he says, “we see not yet all things subjected to *him*”; we shall see that, we do not see it yet, “but we see Jesus, who was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour”, Heb 2: 9. It might be a simple question for us as to how much a

glorified Man in heaven is a reality to our souls.

RCT Twice in Genesis it says that Enoch, “walked with God”, Gen 5: 22, 24. Could you help us as to what that might involve? He was obviously near to God.

RHB That is the point that the company of God was sought by him and no doubt his company was congenial to God, “he has the testimony that he had pleased God”, or the note says 'walked with God'. It is the same expression. Putting it simply he would have walked where God walked. To walk with God must involve in him an absence of will. He walked where God walked and he found the company of God in it. It was apart from the whole course of things. In other words the reality of the presence of God to him was such that his course was apart from what was so hateful and abhorrent to God. The scripture speaks of, “thy countenance is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore”, Ps 16: 11. This man found his joy, as well as his daily occupation, in divine company, apart from a scene which, had he immersed himself in it, would necessarily have taken that joy away.

RDP According to Jude he looks on to the Lord's appearing, “the Lord has come amidst his holy myriads”, Jude 14. He was only the seventh generation from Adam, and I think he was probably a nomad or had some other very limited way of living. We do not know what kind of education and so on these men had, but he looks right on to the Lord's coming. That is amazing. He could not have got that as graphically illustrated by anything in the world as seen around him. That came from God.

RHB I was thinking of that when we referred to sight, because these men, all of them, had a long view. They took the long view. How often we take the view of short term, present advantage, or expediency, and it works to our disaster often, but these men, their course was settled on a long view. The Lord says of Abraham, “Your father Abraham exulted in that he should see my day, and he saw and rejoiced”, John 8: 56. A nomad living in tents, he looked for a city that had foundations, “of which God is the artificer and constructor”, Heb 11: 10. The only cities on view at that time were idolatrous places, but God in His communion with Him gave Him the reality of these things as a promise. The light of it was so great that it governed his course down here. The man you refer to had that view of the Lord's coming and then one day he was not there. He might have been thought to be an oddball, somebody that did not conform, but one day, as Mr Fred Trussler once said, he went for a walk,

and he did not come back.

DCB It is interesting that it does not say that Enoch walked with God by faith; it says, "By faith Enoch was translated". Could you explain that?

RHB I am seeking help with this, but I think that is an important distinction, he was translated by faith, but that he had the testimony beforehand that he had pleased God. No doubt faith did enter into his walk, but the way it is presented was that the expectation of that, of translation, the faith of it in his soul, was what governed him.

DCB I was impressed by the simple fact that he was translated by faith. There must have been that light, the light as to the Lord. He had a long view, but he had that for himself, that he was one that was going to be caught up to be with Christ.

RHB As we are; we are literally on the verge of finality. What effect does that have upon my walk, upon my priorities, upon the decisions of my life? Things that are going to disappear, that are for a time and disappear, I find still have such a claim to my attention; but this man is presented to us as one whose life was regulated by the prospect that he was going to be with God eternally.

JM It is quite a remarkable thing that what is said first of him was that he was "translated that he should not see death". The penalty of death was upon the whole race, and yet he did not see it. I think there must have been that in him that was extraordinarily pleasurable to God, so that in a certain sense God said, 'I cannot leave you in the scene in which you are, I must take you to my scene'.

RHB It has been said, on the basis of this scripture, that God translates what pleases Him. It would stimulate that desire with us. I think what you draw attention to is important, "that he should not see death". The great test of faith is the resurrection world, the reality of it. Death is the terminus of everything here: however attractive or appealing it may be, it terminates in death. This man did not actually even pass through the article of death. It seems to me that faith with us is particularly involved in the truth of resurrection.

JM The other remarkable thing about him was that he was the seventh generation, but he becomes a model for us. We look forward to the possibility that we should not see death, and that God will translate us; that should be paramount in our minds at the present time,

and faith would lay hold of that. Although he came very early in the history of man Enoch in a certain sense becomes a kind of a model for those of us at the end of the dispensation.

RHB That is very much what I have in mind, that the Spirit of God selects these men. There is tremendous detail in the chapter. We have only read of two of them, but they do not belong to this dispensation. In the dispensation in which they lived, man in the flesh was to some degree recognised, there were still signs and things to be taken account of, there were the appearances to Abraham, the angelic appearances, the pillar of cloud by day and the fire by night for Israel. Angels were active throughout the Old Testament, there was a good deal that could be seen and, even when you come into the New Testament, the Lord was with His own and in the days of His flesh could be seen, but still faith was required. The Lord said, "Where is your faith?", Luke 8: 25. And then when He healed persons, "Do ye believe that I am able to do this? ... According to your faith, be it unto you", Matt 9: 28, 29. I wondered if we could get help as to why faith is so essential. What is it about faith that it is so fundamental to Christianity?

MJM In verse 13 there is reference to those who "died in faith", would that mean that they were sustained in their course?

RHB They died as they had lived. They had lived in faith, and they died in it; the approach of death itself did not shake the faith on which they had lived. I thought that was the force of faith that it embraces the substantiality of what is beyond death. These things are not simply texts or doctrines, but they are great eternal realities and faith lays hold of them, and in the light of them death is vanquished. Death for the believer has been overthrown because he has been taken up with a view to having part in what is beyond it.

RDP It is God's gift. We often speak about the Lord Jesus and His gift, the Holy Spirit, but faith is His gift as well. Without that gift there would be nothing; so God must begin the work that He will finish. I am not sure at what point in the believer's history faith comes in, taking into account new birth and so on, but without it there is no illumination at all of God's world. You spoke about the world of resurrection; the whole of Christianity is on the basis of resurrection: it is the platform of it. Man has not light as to that at all, it forms no part of his world, his hopes or his projections. But everything for the believer is based on resurrection, and faith is linked with that.

RHB It seems to me that it is the great test for faith. People say, 'I am a believer' or 'I am not a believer', but a believer in what? Lots of people would say they have faith in all sorts of things, but "if we believe that Jesus has died and has risen again" (1 Thess 4: 14), and, "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from among the dead, thou shalt be saved", Rom 10: 9. I think you get the very kernel of faith there, that there is one Man out of death and that is the pledge and assurance that there are going to be myriads of men out of death for God's eternal pleasure. But if I believe *in the heart* that God has raised Him from among the dead, then my heart must necessarily seek after that resurrection world where Jesus is. It opens up another sphere altogether. If He has been raised from among the dead, or as the eunuch was told, "for his life is taken from the earth" (Acts 8: 33), in the principle of it I do not want to live here any more. I want to live where He is.

JBI "He that draws near to God" - do you think that that colours both these men? I was thinking that perhaps we may have a poor view of faith, as perhaps we may yet eke out an existence until the Lord comes. Do you think it is far greater than that, that it is in view of drawing near to God?

RHB I have wondered whether the fact that everything for God is on this basis is related to what came in at the fall. God said certain things, He gave man great blessings, but He set limits upon it. And another voice spoke not only in deception, but the cunning suggestion was instilled in the heart of man that God had some ulterior motive, and that His word could not really be relied upon, and things would not actually be as God had said them. That poison was what was injected into the human heart at the fall. I think the divine answer to that is that God will have, in glory, myriads who have never seen Him, but have trusted Him and have trusted His word *implicitly*. I think we need to lift our view so that it is not, as you say, just getting through the course of things until the Lord comes, but that God is glorified in that. There should be persons living on this earth, surrounded by so much in the way of materialism to seduce them away from the path of faith, that are living in simple implicit trust on God and on the unshakeability of His word. I think we have little idea what pleasure that is to God and what an answer it is to what came in at the fall. There must be more in it as to why everything for God is based on the matter of faith. The hymn writer says:

Repentance only, God requires from man

We can understand that as sinners, but he adds:

And faith in Christ, His well-beloved Son. (Hymn 123)

It is a sovereign gift from God; there is nothing really for us or for God apart from it.

TI I wondered if Noah was an example of obedience in that way. You spoke of implicit trust in God's word. The verse brings in the word, "moved with fear"; is that a simple obedience to God? He believed God, he believed the word of God unshakeably through so much opposition as he preached. I wondered whether we might think of fear in terms of respect for the greatness of God over us?

RHB I have no doubt it was that, and also fear for what was coming on the scene in which he and his family were. Faith anticipates that what is anti-God in this scene must pass away in judgment and that is a solemn thing to be enlightened as to. The result was that he wanted to save his house. That is a responsibility that no doubt presses on heads of houses. It is not just a question of how I am going to get through, but how are my children going to cope. Noah "prepared an ark for the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith". I think that "condemnation" is part of the more blessed side which is brought out in Enoch. He walked with God, apart from things here, but the other side of that is seen in Noah who was left here in a corrupt scene, and he maintained by his action his condemnation of it as a scene under judgment.

KM When you come to think of the skill, the ark was a masterpiece. The skill necessary to build that. Think of how people might speak today of the mathematics, and the absolute skill, of a man who could build that and work to God's dimensions, and yet that masterpiece was not the most important thing. What was the most important thing was that he built it for the saving of his house; so that the saving of our houses is far greater than any masterpiece could be here.

RHB I think God will honour faith where it is in activity in the saving of a house. The word to the jailor was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house", Acts 16: 31. I think we can take from that that in taking up a man for blessing God will have in view the sphere of influence which he has, that the whole should be secured

for the testimony and for the service of God. But it involves the obedience of faith. Noah was oracularly warned. The scripture says, “faith then is by a report, but the report by God's word”: this had been revealed to him. The Lord says there was nothing outwardly that would have caused people to think that the end was imminent, but “they ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage” (Luke 17: 27), and then suddenly one day the flood came and took them all away. Life was going on as it always had done, and in the midst of it there was a man who was saying, 'I am not going on like that', and he was constructing this huge vessel, and it was a living testimony that he and his household were headed for another world altogether. One man said, “as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah”, Josh 24: 15. I think that is the conviction that we need to bring into our households, that God has given us, as heads of houses, a sphere of responsibility for which we are accountable to Him. But He will help us and support us as we move in relation to our households, in relation to what He has said in His word.

MJM Does this emphasise the necessity for the maintenance of the preaching? You referred to the subtlety of Satan in undermining this line of faith, and the stress in our education system of the 'multi-faith' idea is all part of Satan's activity to undermine the very line that you are speaking of.

RHB And to imitate it. The apostle speaks of “unfeigned faith”, 1 Tim 1: 5. We could go on with the outward, we could take account of how brethren generally behave, how they generally look; and I could adopt that, and pass amongst them without any personal attachment to the divine centre. It is noticeable in the gospels that the greatest opposition to the Lord came from religious persons. It did not come from ignorant people who did not know the scriptures, it came from people who were very, very intelligent in relation to the scriptures. Even the devil himself quoted the scriptures to the Lord at one point; but the fiercest opposition to the path of faith - if it is right to use that of the Lord Himself being in the path because He is spoken of as the “leader and completer of faith” - came from persons who were well acquainted with divine writings.

BE All these souls, according to the revelation that they had, were able to boast in a God who could not lie. Has God not made it easy for us to be maintained in the power of faith?

RHB Yes, every time we pray it is an exercise of faith; every time you

Speak to God, whether privately or in the meeting, it is an act of faith. Outwardly people might say you are talking to yourself, but your soul is in communion with God, you are conscious of that, that you are speaking to God and that He is hearing you. That is a very blessed thing, to live in the consciousness of that relationship and to be sensitive about anything that would disturb it.

BE So, how absolutely we can trust in God who cannot lie. Trust is very closely allied to faith. How shaky everything else is. Faith in this One will never let us down.

RHB So the Lord said at one point, "Where is your faith?", Luke 8: 25. If it is not in Christ, where is it? What can you rely upon apart from Him? You rapidly come to it that there is nothing else for my soul to rest on than what God has revealed to you in Christ.

PW It is important that faith is in relation to Christ, and I was thinking of certain conflicts that have happened when we were urged to be one hundred percent with a certain person. That is not right: it would just be faith in a mere man.

RHB Christ is the great object for faith. We are "justified on the principle of faith" so that "we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5: 1), and scripture also speaks of "through faith in his blood", Rom 3: 25. Our faith is in the Person, but our faith is in His blood too. The divine testimony from God is that that blood meets every claim of His holiness and righteousness, and I can rest the eternal welfare of my soul implicitly upon it because it is God who says it. Then what comes out in these persons is that they *lived* by faith, "the just shall live by faith", Heb 10: 38. There are many believers, who are believers in the sense that their eternal destiny is secure, who do not live on the principle that has saved them. They may be saved, but faith is not the governing principle of their lives. I think the scriptures would encourage us, and this epistle particularly, that it might become the prevailing principle in our lives.

RDP The Lord said to Peter, "I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not", Luke 22: 32. It seems that, in the working out of it, it is possible for sight to overtake it. It is very striking and touching that the Lord should say that to Peter. He does not say, 'I have prayed for thee that you will not fail, or you will not be tempted', but "that thy faith fail not".

RHB You feel that there is a lot against it. One danger is that we may

fail, and then the enemy in his subtlety says you are failure, you are hopeless, and you can begin to despair. We know that Peter took his eye off the Lord at one point and he sank. He started off to walk upon the water, but he sank, Matt 14: 25-33. Then there is the scene in which we live where present advantage is so stressed and people are measured by their material prosperity and success. This is the world in which we live, and faith therefore might seem, particularly when we are younger, to be nebulous. It may seem to be insubstantial, but He brings forward here this great crowd of witnesses, of men whose lives were on that principle and who were blessed by God. They may have suffered privation and loss, but they proved a present blessing as well as an eternal one.

JM It is very encouraging in the previous chapter that you have the reference, "But the just shall live by faith". Mr Darby's footnote suggests, 'my just man', (note d) the one in whom God delights as though faith is the real basis for God having delight in persons.

RHB I think you have provided the answer to what I was seeking after as to why this matter of faith is so important: that God has always looked for it from the outset of time. I think that helps that it is what pleases Him, the "the just shall live by faith". So he says, "But we are not drawers back to perdition, but of faith to saving the soul", Heb 10: 39. There is always the tendency to draw back, but the pleasure of God is in those that are maintained on that principle.

KM The fact is that if we do fail - and perhaps we do fail, and sometimes quite miserably - it says in Numbers as to the fiery serpent, "it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, and looketh upon it, shall live", Num 21: 8. It is not that they existed or survived, but they lived. Is communion as to walking with God restored?

RHB When that scripture is brought forward by the Lord in John 3 it is in relation to eternal life, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up, that every one who believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal", John 3: 14, 15. It is not only that I should be saved from hell, but that I should be brought into the enjoyment *now* of eternal life. That leads on to what is enjoyed in the assembly in the circle, the sanctified company. Paul speaks of an "inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me", Acts 26: 18. What we are speaking of is preliminary to that. We could never enter in to what is available in the sanctified company if we are not individually grounded in this principle.

As to failing, I think faith is spoken of too in relation to conflict, to combat, that we might not fail. You get reference to the “shield of faith” (Eph 6: 16), and you get reference to the “breastplate of faith”, 1 Thess 5: 8. We have “the inflamed darts of the wicked one” (Eph 6: 16), and the apostle says, “I have combated the good combat, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”, 2 Tim 4: 7. We are conscious of weakness and failure, but I think that faith is to be exercised. There is an expression in the world in relation to physical things, that if you do not exercise it you lose it, and I think there is a sense in which that applies to faith. If it is not exercised consciously, the faith that God has given me, I shall lose the reality and enjoyment of it.

BE It is not faith that fails me is it? It was Peter's failure to use his faith that led him to start to sink outside the ship?

RHB Yes, he looked away. He looked at other things and it is only written for us because Peter was a very great man. Whilst we speak freely amongst ourselves of his weaknesses and failures as they are recorded in the scriptures, none of us would put ourselves on a par with the apostle Peter; what a trophy he was of the Lord's work. These things are written for us because our eye is easily distracted from the Lord. There is an expression used in the world, 'blind faith', but the person who has faith is the one that sees things as they are. It says, “the god of this world has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, so that the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ ... should not shine forth for them”, 2 Cor 4: 4. The unbeliever is living in darkness and unreality, it is faith that lays hold of realities as they exist before God.

DCB James is an epistle which brings in works in relation to faith. Sometimes it is thought that it contradicts what we have here, but what would you say?

RHB I think Luther and others sought to get that epistle excluded from the Bible. I think it brings out that faith is practical and it is evidenced through works. I read the verses in chapter 12 to bring that out that we are to, “run with endurance the race that lies before us”, and there are resources to do so. I think what James is bringing out is that you cannot see the faith in my heart, the smallness of it or the greatness of it, but what you can see is how I live my life and that testifies to the measure of faith. God has dealt to each a measure of faith. We may not all have the same measure, but I think it increases with use.

DCB In the whole of this passage in Hebrews, as soon as someone has faith they act, they do something. That will apply to believers: as soon as they have faith they will act in faith.

RHB And it is especially referred to in relation to Abraham, “the steps of the faith ... of our father Abraham”, Rom 4: 12. The way I have understood that is that God gives you the light for the next step and as you take that step, trusting in Him, not necessarily seeing the end or the consequences, but taking that step, then light for the next step will be given. But if that step is not taken then, in a sense, the benefit of that is lost.

DCB On one side there is the long view that you have spoken of; you see the completion of God's ways, but in practical matters it is step by step.

RHB Scripture speaks of “the proving of your faith”, 1 Peter 1: 7. It says of this man of faith, Abraham, that God tried him. He tested him as to whether his trust was implicitly in God and whether he loved God more even than his own son, “Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, Isaac”, Gen 22: 2. I often think of it with amazement that he answered to that test, he took that precious boy, the only child of an old man, in whom all the promises of God were centred, and he went to offer him up. “And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slaughter his son”, v 10. There was no question that he was going to go through with it, and he did it in the faith that God was able, even if he put him to death, to bring him back to life again. What pleasure there must have been for God in that. He did not want the death of the son, but what he saw was a man whose implicit trust was in Himself and in His word.

JB I was thinking of the man in John 9; he spoke faithfully as to what the Lord had done for him and something happens. He is cast out because he is true to the light that he had been given, and then he is given much more light. The Lord found him and opened his eyes as to the greatness of His own Person.

RHB So it is step by step, and it is running the race, and laying aside things that will hinder. It is remarkable that the Spirit of God tells us of things that hinder us and things that will help us. We have weights and sins, they will hinder us, a secret course of sin, or my encumbrance with things which may not be sinful and may be legitimate, but will hold me back. But then there is “a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us”.

Think of these persons, they did not have “so great a cloud of witnesses”. Enoch was only the seventh from Adam, but we have a whole history of persons who have overcome in the power of faith, and above all we have Jesus. We are not looking exactly at the great “cloud of witnesses”, but “looking steadfastly on Jesus”. I think that would be a great result from our reading if we valued more the preciousness of the faith that enables us to look beyond circumstances to One who is the “leader and completer of faith”.

RDP I was thinking of what we have said about Peter - you get the two things there, he walked on the water, he began to sink, but he walked on the water. He did something that was totally impossible as far as this world is concerned; and then he saw the waves and began to sink. His view of Christ for that moment was distracted and he begins to sink, but never let us forget that he walked on the water, and that is something that belongs to the sphere that is beyond this one.

RHB It is good to be reminded of that and he knew where to turn when he did sink, “Lord, save me”. Think of that hand reaching out to lift him up to his true characteristic calling. So we are to look on Jesus, the One who has overcome and has entered in. We not only see an example in Him, a model that He has left for us down here, but we see in Him where faith leads. It leads to glory, and He is the “leader and completer of faith”, and He endured so much, the cross and the shame, but He is “set down at the right hand of the throne of God”. The path of faith leads to the glory. I think if we could get some impression of that we would be stimulated in it.

Manchester

20th September 2008

Key to initials

D C Brown, Edinburgh; R H Brown, East Finchley;
Ben Eastwood, Worcester; J B Ikin, Manchester; T Ikin, Manchester;
K Marshall, Rotherham; M J Matthews, Birmingham;
G McKay, Manchester; J Mitchell, Chester; R D Plant, Birmingham;
R C Trotter, Edinburgh; P Wilson, Manchester

FATHERLINESS

David J Wright

Luke 24: 13-35

1 Corinthians 4: 14-17

Philippians 2: 19, 20

I seek the Lord's help to say a simple word as to the need of fathers. I hesitate to speak of it because I am very conscious of my own shortcomings. Paul had to say to the Corinthians that there were not many fathers. I do not think that was normal, but the state of things in Corinth at the time militated against it. There were persons there who were reigning as kings and there was party activity; all these things militated against the development of fatherly features.

The scripture in Luke 24 has often been used to draw attention to the priestly service of Christ to these two, and we need to maintain that impression, but I also wondered whether you would see the features of a father in the Lord Jesus in His service to these two. They were two that had known Him, two that had loved Him; and He had loved them. The Lord Jesus could say to His Father, "those thou hast given me I have guarded, and not one of them has perished, but the son of perdition", John 17: 12. I think that relates to His fatherly features. When He said to them in John's gospel that He was going to leave but that the Spirit, another Comforter would come (John 14: 16), they seemed to block it out of their minds because they could not contemplate being without Him.

The setting in Luke 24 is well known to us; things had not worked out quite the way these two had thought that they would work out. So they were downcast. There are many things that can make you downcast today. The enemy would work on the circumstances, the smallness of numbers that continue; all these things bear in upon you and make you downcast. Some of us are old enough to remember in our youth when there were bigger numbers and what has come in subsequently you would never have thought, but it did. Things did not work out quite the way that we would have envisaged. That is how these two were; they were going off into the country because they thought there was no point in staying here in Jerusalem. They are going off into the country. The Lord Jesus had His eye upon them, and it says, "Jesus himself drawing nigh, went with them" a beautiful touch. He could have said, 'You are going into the country, you are going away

from where things are operating', but He did not do that; He went alongside them. The first thing He does is to enquire of them as to why they were downcast. They were talking about why they were downcast. He knew, of course, He knew perfectly well. One thing about a father is that he will listen. Young people, you might have concerns, you might be troubled about things, but the Lord Jesus listens; He listened to these two. He did not brush them aside; He listened to them. Even in natural things you may know what a listening ear can do. It will share the burden. He said to them, "What discourses are these which pass between you as ye walk, and are downcast? And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said to him, Thou sojournest alone in Jerusalem, and dost not know what has taken place in it in these days? And he said to them, What things?" He knew, but he was drawing it out from them. "The things concerning Jesus the Nazaraean, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people; and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to the judgment of death and crucified him. But we had hoped that *he* was the one who was about to redeem Israel". They had their own thoughts as to what they thought should have arisen, but it was not God's way. God has His own way, and His way is best. Not only was Israel redeemed, but the finished work of Christ could redeem all. What a thing that is, the greatness of the Person who could take on such a work. All these uncertainties have happened, "besides all these things, it is now, to-day, the third day since these things took place. And withal, certain women from amongst us astonished us, having been very early at the sepulchre, and, not having found his body, came, saying that they also had seen a vision of angels, who say that he is living. And some of those with us went to the sepulchre, and found it so, as the women also had said, but him they saw not". There is the evidence from the vision of angels, the women went to the sepulchre, and it was empty, and they did not see Him. They had been used to seeing Him, been used to being with Him, used to His company, used to His love, used to His interest in them. I think the Lord Jesus was preparing them for the transfer from the sight system to the faith system. What a thing that was, "him they saw not". They were still troubled because they did not see Him, but there was a faith system coming in and that involved that He would suffer and enter into His glory, and subsequently the Holy Spirit would come. Thus, the present dispensation has been launched. These persons were without hope.

In the beginning of the chapter the question is, "Why seek ye the

living one among the dead? He is not here, but is risen”, v 5, 6. Christianity is a living system of things because there is a living Man in the centre of it. So these persons were filled with hope as a result of the personal service of Christ. The resurrection of Christ from among the dead filled them with hope. But, it is not only that: He has entered into His glory, and He is there at God's right hand. He lives there to make intercession for us. The fact that He is not actually still here in this scene makes no difference to the fatherly service of Christ on high. He takes account of you and me in our circumstances and He would serve us in His love, but we need hope. These persons thought everything was lost. There are persons today who think everything is lost, but everything is carried through in a glorious Man, the One who is living.

He said to them, “O senseless and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” they were words that were spoken in love. A fatherly feature is that whatever is needed is said, but it is totally in love. That was the crux of the problem, they were slow of heart to believe, and I am sure that if we were there in that day we would have been no better. “And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”; these persons had the Old Testament scriptures in their hands, and there is prophetic reference after prophetic reference in relation to the Person of Christ and what He would do in relation to His death, His rejection and His rising again. He goes on to say, “And they drew near to the village where they were going, and *he* made as though he would go farther”; what grace that is. However far was needed the Lord Jesus was prepared for it. “And they constrained him, saying, Stay with us”. Even though at this point their eyes were not opened, they did not want to lose the presence of this One, “Stay with us”. There was something about Him. Later they said, “Was not our heart burning in us”, that is what only He can do. “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is declining”. Beloved brethren, we are in a day when the day is declining; morally the day is declining. All around us there is moral decline; may we be preserved from it. The Lord Jesus will preserve us from it as we seek Him.

“As he was at table with them, having taken the bread, he blessed, and having broken it, gave it to them”, He had done that before. The idea of His acting as a father to these persons is confirmed by what has been said that in relation to this verse, that He took the house father's place. What He did, the way He did it, only He could have done; “their eyes were opened, and they recognised him. And he

disappeared from them”. It was His own touch. There is no touch like the touch of Jesus. He disappeared from them because He was setting on the faith system, things were not going to be the same, but as He had said in gospels, they were not going to be worse off. He says, “he will give you another Comforter”. What a day it is! What resources are available to us from Christ on high, and the Holy Spirit here.

“Was not our heart burning in us as he spoke to us on the way, and as he opened the scriptures to us?” They were suddenly filled with hope; they were filled with energy. They were no longer downcast, because all they needed was that touch from the One who had broken the power of death. “And rising up the same hour” - it has often been spoken of; they did not wait until the next day. They knew what to do, as from the touch of the One that they knew. They had no doubt as to where they were to go - back to Jerusalem. “Rising up the same hour, they returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven, and those with them”, the Christian circle. They found the eleven. One had fallen to go to his own place, Judas, which speaks to us of the fact that it is a day of breakdown. We do not need to be reminded that we live in a day of public breakdown and ruin. Are God's thoughts not going through? They are being carried through in Christ; He does not depend on you and me. Everything is dependent upon Him: “in him is the yea, and in him the amen” (2 Cor 1: 20); everything has been carried through to God's full satisfaction and He is sustained in His own power where He is at God's right hand.

“And they related what had happened on the way, and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread”. It was the true fatherly service of Christ, and they had something to contribute to the Christian circle. They had their own experience. Nobody else could have brought this impression in; it was their experience. I wonder what you and I can bring in the way of our own experience to enrich the Christian circle. What a circle it is. You look around this room; you take account of God's work, and you respect it. It is the sphere in which the Spirit can operate, who would magnify the Lord Jesus in our affections, “made known to them in the breaking of bread”. That was their own experience. There was no doubt, no uncertainty, no being downcast with them now. It is assured. It was His touch that they had felt. Nobody else but He could have brought in that touch; so there is no uncertainty. They were able to bring it in for themselves.

In Corinthians, Paul has said that there are not many fathers.

Things were not normal at this point. Paul had been used to secure them; he had been used to form the assembly in Corinth. What they knew of the truth they had learnt through Paul, and he says, "For if ye should have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers". There were persons there who had gift and were using it to their own glorification. They could no doubt quote Paul's teaching because they got their teaching from him. They got it from Paul, he was their spiritual father. He speaks of them as his beloved children, even though they were very critical of the apostle; what they had and had learnt they had received from him. Did their conduct make any difference to the fatherly approach of Paul to the brethren? Did he go round and speak of them in a derogatory way? No, he did not. He spoke well of them, because he was a father to them. But, "not many fathers". It does not say there were not any; it says, "not many". No doubt there were those there that took on, not only the teaching of the apostle but his ways.

He goes on to speak of Timothy, "For this reason I have sent to you Timotheus, who is my beloved and faithful child". Timothy is spoken of as Paul's child and so is Titus, but what marked them was that they not only had Paul's teaching, but they took on his ways. I can remember localities where there have been persons who you could speak of as a father, and when they have been taken, there has been another generation that have taken on features that were seen in them. It is not only what their teaching was, but the way they were in their life. Paul says, "Be my imitators, even as I also am of Christ", 1 Cor 11: 1. "Beloved and faithful child", they are not two words that we would readily put together, but they are not incompatible. David, as a type of Christ, was a lovable man. The Lord Jesus, think of how lovable He was to His disciples, and so Timothy was not only beloved, but he was faithful. He would bring in a word that was needed in order to feed them, in order to remind them of the truth, "who shall put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ, according as I teach everywhere in every assembly". He is not only what he said, but there were his ways. They were seen in Timothy, a true child of Paul. And yet he would send such a one to Corinth where things were difficult and he would remind them of Paul, not only in his teaching but in his ways.

In Philippians 2 he says to the Philippians, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus to you shortly, that I also may be refreshed, knowing how ye get on. For I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on". It is as if Paul is saying, there is

one here that I have confidence in, that he will care with genuine feeling how you will get on; there is one that I can hand things over to. I am going to pass off the scene, but Timothy remains and he was one there who cared with genuine feeling how the saints got on. That is the feature of the father, to take account, and to be able to draw near, and to be able to teach in such a way that the thing is exemplified in the persons themselves.

“For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ” that is the day in which we are, “all seek their own things”. I speak for the encouragement of the younger ones here; there are a good many and we are thankful for each one. You could have been elsewhere doing your own thing, but you are here as seeking the things of Jesus Christ. The Lord takes account of that. He would take account of that, and He will see you through, He will encourage you. He would use the Christian circle to encourage you too. That is why I feel the need for the promotion of this feature of fatherliness, that would bring out the best, to know what is of God's work in you, and bring it out so that the Christian circle will get the gain of it.

That is the simple word I have; I am very conscious that I have shortcomings in this, but I do see the need of it.

May God bless the word.

Malvern

30th August 2008

BELONGING TO GOD

Alan Wilson

Genesis 48: 5-6

John 13: 1; 17: 9-10

I wondered, dear brethren, if we might be helped to have some appreciation of the fact that we belong to divine Persons. It says in Ephesians 2: 13, “ye who once were afar off are become nigh by the blood of the Christ”. And 1 Corinthians says, “and ye are not your own? for ye have been bought with a price”, chap 6: 19-20. I think in our histories that is where we would start: with the appreciation of the cost, “bought with a price”. We have been “afar off”, but tonight I would draw from a touch I got on Lord's day, a simple yet a wonderful thought, that we belong to divine Persons, we are a divine possession, but not in a slavish way. There have been those who were owned by their masters, they were the possession of their masters, but this is a different kind of possession, a different kind of ownership. I just wondered if that might encourage our hearts as we go through the different exercises that are amongst us at this time, that we might just be preserved in our love for Christ and our understanding that we belong to Him.

The first scripture we read speaks typically of what we mean to the Father. We received a touch as to this not so many months ago at the Supper. It is the kind of thing that lingers with you; they “shall be mine”. Think of the desire of divine Persons that we should belong to Them, that we should have an understanding of that. He says, “as Reuben and Simeon”. He knows all that Reuben and Simeon are. You read what he says about them further on in this book, but think of what these two children, these two sons that were born to Joseph, meant to Israel; they “shall be mine”. I think that suggests the position we are brought into. We are brought into the Father's presence in the sense that we have been brought through death to know this position that is ours, being those who belong to the Father. There was a cost involved. Joseph was rejected. He was put in the pit (chap 37: 24), with all that that meant, but think of the Father's appreciation of what is secured. I was struck in our reading too on Lord's day, when we read, “loved his own”. That is how the Lord Jesus views each one of us; we are “his own”. He is speaking typically of what there is of the remnant in this section that we read, but it comes down to us, “loved his own”. Think of

the affections of the Lord Jesus for each one of us, and He wants us to be maintained in the appreciation of that position that is ours. It is not to be taken lightly. Beloved, you feel in your history how often this has not been true characteristically of you because of what you let yourself into, but this is how the Lord Jesus views us. This is the standard He wants us to be maintained in, to be His own, not our own. He is the One who has paid the price. We are the ones who have gone into the distance, but He has brought us nigh. What a wonderful place to be found in the presence of divine Persons for their pleasure! That is what I had a touch about: as we are brought nigh we get some sense that the Father has delight in us. He has perfect delight in Jesus, absolute delight in Jesus, but as we are in this position there is delight for the Father.

And as we have an appreciation of this it brings us to an appreciation of one another, to realise as we handle the saints, as we get further on in John 13, that we understand whose we are. They belong to Christ. Jesus has paid the price. How do I view my brethren? How do I speak of them? How do I think of the saints? Do I have different categories of thought in relation to my brethren? Do I place them at different levels in my affection? I think the Lord Jesus, when He says this, has every one at the same level in His thoughts. Beloved, I think we need to have something of the divine perspective in our appreciation of one another. We belong to Christ. The saints belong to our Lord Jesus Christ and He wants to bring us into the enjoyment of this position of nearness, a place that is to be very much appreciated, to be enjoyed. It is not just a picture on the wall. It is not just a text, not just a theory. It is not just something that is said amongst the saints. It is something that you and I can enjoy, but it requires that we answer to that in our responsible histories. It is not just a mystical thing that happens when you come together on a Lord's day, or when you come amongst the saints. There is a secret history. There is something that has been wrought out. I think what the disciples came into later on in John 13 must have been a wonderful feeling, to have the hands of the Lord Jesus washing their feet and wiping them with the linen towel. That is not to be sentimental. I think these things bring out the personal touch that each of us has to know by experience with the Lord Jesus and it is a constant matter. I do not think it is a once and for all thing. I think this is a constant matter. We need it. In the world in which we are, no matter which stage of life we are at, young and old, we need these touches from one another to maintain us at this level, to maintain our thoughts of one another at this level, to understand that the saints

belong to divine Persons. They have secured them for themselves.

We read in John 17 what the Lord Jesus said in His prayer. This is a wonderful section in John 17, worthy of much contemplation. Think of what the Lord Jesus says in the verse we read, “but concerning those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine”. Think of that. The Lord Jesus brings us into that place. He wants to maintain us in that. We read on in this book and He asks that the disciples might be maintained; He says, “that thou shouldest keep them out of evil. They are not of the world, as I am not of the world”, v 16. What a standard! Do you feel you live up to that? Do I feel I live up to that? That is the view that Jesus has of us, and that is the position He wants us to be maintained in, and that is how we have to be here for Him.

Now, beloved, I just feel we need to get some sense of this in our affections, to encourage our souls to be stimulated so that we might seek to be here for Christ. In spite of all that comes in may we have in our affections that we belong to, and are the possession of, divine Persons. He “loved his own”. That is a wonderful thing to know that we are loved by the Lord Jesus, “having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end”, loved them through everything. Whatever comes in, the Lord Jesus is there and able to maintain us and sustain us and bring us through in triumph. That is the wonderful thing in Christianity, despite the smallness that we might know, despite the frailty that we might find, that He is able to bring us right through to the very end, right through everything. There is nothing at all that He cannot bring us through to.

Well, may we just be encouraged in our affections to know that we are a divine possession.

Kirkcaldy

21st October 2008

“DO YE KNOW WHAT I HAVE DONE TO YOU?”

Robert Taylor

John 13: 12 last sentence

Genesis 32: 24-28, 31; 14: 18-23

1 Corinthians 6: 11

On Lord's day in the reading on John 13 we read that the Lord, having washed their feet leaves this question, “Do ye know what I have done to you?”. I would just like to leave that on all our hearts, dear brethren. It is not what He has done for us exactly. These persons the Lord was speaking to were apostles. He is not speaking to them about their sins being forgiven, but He says, “Do ye know what I have done to you?” It is something we all have to experience, a blessed experience, and it leaves its mark. That is what I want to call attention to. The Lord comes and He serves you; He washes your feet. The chapter would tell us He does it through the saints, through the ministry, through many ways, but He says, “Do ye know what I have done to you?” Well, it left its mark on them, I am sure. I think they would speak about this often, 'Do you know what He did to me?' Could we each say that, what He has done that has changed us? Paul knew it very well, the kind of man he had been, he knew what the Lord did to him. He took him from being an insolent, overbearing man to be one who exemplifies the true grace of God.

So here is what He does to Jacob, a man whose history is most interesting, much like our own in many ways. He spent a very large part of his life living to himself, as we would say. He did well, but the Lord took him in hand and did something to him and he became a far better man. He had prospered in his business and had great possessions, but it did not bring him satisfaction. The Lord had done something to him earlier, as He has done to us all earlier in our lives perhaps; He put in His claim to Jacob, but Jacob went on his way through his own wisdom. But God here is bringing him back. He does that to us in His grace. He goes after us to bring us back to Bethel. That is where Jacob is coming back to, he is coming back to enjoy the fellowship, coming back to God's circumstances and God's arrangements, instead of living to himself. And God meets him here and He touches him. He knew from this moment what God had done to him. Instead of being a man who lived on his own abilities, here he is, a dependent man. God makes him that. From this time on, Jacob walked with a staff.

Wherever he went, you would see Jacob going on his staff, day by day. It says, “the sun rose upon him”. What a morning, dear brethren! A new man whom God had touched, taking away the arrogance and the pride of nature: and “the sun rose upon him”. Did the sun not rise on the world? Of course it did! But Scripture does not say that, it says, “the sun rose upon him”. What warmth that must have felt to Jacob's soul. Here he is a new man with the sun rising upon him, limping on his thigh, staff in his hand, and God says, 'Israel will be your name'. He knew what God had done to him; he knew, and it left its mark.

Well, in Abram you get the same thing. It is like the believer going on in his path and the world says, 'Well, let us join together'. It says these men were coming to meet him. He had been successful and they would like to join with him, but someone else met him. Melchisedec the priest of the Most High God blessed him, and you can see that Abram's whole outlook is different to theirs. The world comes to tempt him. He says, 'You cannot add anything to me'. They set out great things for him. They will offer you great potential and great possibilities, but it is a beautiful word from Abram. “And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up my hand to Jehovah, the Most High God, possessor of heavens and earth”. That was the one who had touched him. He says, "What can you give me?". He says, “if from a thread even to a sandal-thong, yes, if of all that is thine, I take anything ...”. He was made independent of the world and all its resources and all that the world could give. Abram would not be drawn into these things; will you? How often we get tempted. Matters arise and we are attracted to the things that the world would offer us and temptations abound, but here Melchisedec, “priest of the Most High God”, met him with bread and with wine, heavenly resources. So he was able to stand against all these temptations, and He says, 'What can you give me?'. There was a man who had been touched, and he goes forward. As Jacob went forward to Bethel, here is Abram going on to the promised land. He is not going to see the fulness of it but he is already linked with the One who is “possessor of heavens and earth”; all the resources of heaven are available to him. That is what He is doing for us. He has opened the whole wealth of divine purpose that we may come into it.

Well, may our hearts be exercised each of us to go over these things in our hearts, because it is very personal. You may have been brought up through grace in an area where the fellowship is known, but you must have this touch for yourself, “what I have done to you”. Jacob

got it, Abram got it, and Paul is writing of it to these Corinthians. He says, 'You were once these things', "but ye have been washed". God had done that. They had been set up here in all their dignity. This is Jacob being transferred from Jacob to Israel; he is set up as a prince. Paul is saying, 'You once had your life in the ways of the world, in its fashions, in its customs and all the things that engaged you'. But Paul says, 'See what God has done to you'. "Ye have been washed". Oh, they would be careful, like these apostles who had their feet washed, not to go back to these bad habits, those things that would bring "pollution of flesh and spirit", 2 Cor: 7: 1. He says, "but ye have been washed": not only washed by the blood for our sins, but we have been washed like that feet-washing we have been speaking about, by the cleansing power of divine grace. It says the Lord Jesus came "not by water only, but by water and blood", 1 John 5: 6. The water also remains in its efficacy to keep us from the temptations of the world and the pollution that is all around us and the customs that may easily attach to us. We are washed from these things, dear brethren, that would be defiling. Paul had to remind them, "ye have been washed, ... ye have been sanctified". This means you have been set apart. That is what God has done to you. "Do ye know what I have done to you?" He says, 'I have washed you, I have sanctified you', and it says, "ye have been justified". These are very beautiful things. It is fine to know them in your own heart. Things of the world may still appeal to you, but you know that you have been washed. That is what God has done. The temptations come to join their ways of doing things, but it says, "ye have been sanctified"; you have been set apart. That is what He has done to you. Oh, what love that He should do that to me, wash me, sanctify and now it says, "ye have been justified". That means you have been set up in God's sight. The world may still have its condemnations. You think of these martyrs, what the world said about them, but went to the stake in the sense that God had justified them. You see that from the confessions that they uttered going to their martyrdom. They had the sense of what God had done to them.

Then he says, "in the name of the Lord Jesus". What authority is in it, dear brethren, what authority in what He has done to you! In what He has done, there is great authority that can never be overthrown, "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God". That is what God has done to you. Paul says to these Corinthians later, "do ye not recognise yourselves?" 2 Cor 13: 5. There is a danger of that, that we take up the world's customs and its ways and

its fashions. Peter tells us that our very habits, our very deportment, are to be different because we know what the Lord has done to us. May we open our hearts to be formed by it so that it leaves us changed, and Paul is urging these Corinthians to come into the great wealth of blessing of what God has done to them “in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”. Think of the whole divine economy active toward us that we may take on divine grace all for the divine pleasure. I often say to myself, 'Why did He save me?'. Why did He take us up? Infinite love! There is nothing in us. Paul is saying that, we were all like the rest of men, but God in His own grace did something to me. He did something to every one of us. May we make room for it to develop! For His Name's sake.

Kirkcaldy

21st October 2008

“THE LORD HAS NEED OF THEM”

Alan J McSeveney

Matthew 21: 1-7

Romans 16: 3-5 (1st clause)

Ephesians 5: 22-33; 6: 1-4

I am sure it is a great encouragement to all here today to see our brethren setting up a household together or, to use a simple expression, settling down. Many of us have prayed for our brethren and I think we can say that God in His mercy has answered those prayers.

In Matthew 21, the ass and the colt illustrate how the Lord Jesus has need not only of one, but also of two persons. It is good to settle down and set up a household together, but we do have to tell our brethren that the Lord has need of both of them for something further in their lives in His service. He is greatly concerned that they might surrender themselves to His claims and as they have found their need of Him, so He now is putting in His claim, not just for one, but for both of them. It is essential to start up a married life together with both husband and wife committed absolutely in faithfulness to the One who has loved them so much to give His life at Calvary.

It is important to make it absolutely clear, in an occasion like this, that the only reason that we have found one another - those of us who are Christians - is because we first found the Lord Jesus Christ. There was a time when we felt our need of Him and had to come to Him and accept Him as our own personal Saviour. After that, we found other persons who had done the same thing - not just simply members of our family, because some persons here do not have any family who claim to be believers in the Lord Jesus. We felt our need of Him but we also have to see that He needs us. He needs us, not just as individuals but also if we are married, to commit our households to Him, so that we might be serviceable to Him and testify to His greatness.

Not only does the Lord have need of persons, but Christians have also need of married couples who are committed to the Lord. In Romans 16 we find a married couple mentioned, Prisca and Aquila. They are referred to by Paul as “my fellow-workmen in Christ Jesus”. They were so together in their committal to the Lord Jesus that they were prepared to stake their own neck (just one neck). It is to such persons that Paul was thankful but not him alone but “also all the

assemblies of the nations". It is important to see that there was an assembly in Prisca and Aquila's house. In setting up a household you become one of the bulwarks of the local assembly. I am sure the brethren in Walton are rejoicing, because they have gone on in smallness, and now God is adding to them another household. That is a great encouragement, and it is the responsibility of our brethren as married to make their house available for the saints and to help the local assembly.

There is one final thing that as married we need to commit ourselves to and it is something that tests us all. Some here have been married for a long time and I am sure they will confess that they feel tested by what is referred to in Ephesians 5. This scripture gives us very helpful and practical instruction as to how married couples are to behave towards one another. It shows that not only has a Christian married couple the responsibility of staying together for the rest of their lives, but also to set out practically the truth of Christ and the assembly. All who are married here will feel limited as to how much they are in the gain of this scripture, but I think the Lord Jesus uses these occasions, not only to have a word for the couple who are getting married, but to test all married couples as to how much they have set out practically in their lives the truth of Christ and the assembly.

In getting married, the man leaves his father and mother and commits himself to his wife and a household is set up. Love enters into that; particularly on the husband's part, with submission and obedience on the wife's part. That is the way the scripture sets things out. There is something else I want to draw attention to so that everybody here is clear as to where we stand as to these things. When a couple gets married it involves that they both leave the authority of their parents and they set up a household together. Our brethren therefore would have one another before them and the husband would be head of the house. There is a close relationship in a household that no one should interfere with. Parents of married couples have to respect that. However, even though you might leave the authority of your parents, you are still to honour your father and your mother. That commandment is not abrogated. There should be no one who honours his or her parents more than a Christian does. A Christian would see to it that they would help their parents in any way possible. Marriage does not set that aside nor coming to the Lord Jesus and owning Him as Saviour or coming into fellowship, as we speak of it. We must honour our father and our

mother. No doubt the Lord has the first place. He must have that. He is the centre, as we heard in prayer, but those who trust in the Lord Jesus ought to be able to take up family relationships in a marital sense and in relation to their parents and children and set them out in a way that commends itself to God.

Well, I just leave that simple word with our brethren. May God richly bless them. Amen.

Walton-on-the-Naze

12th September 2008