

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 51

June 2011

CONTENTS

God's Feelings

Page 1

True Greatness

John N. Darby

Page 19

Our Patron

Richard M. Brown

Page 20

The Consummation of The Ages

Tim D. Ellis

Page 29

GOD'S FEELINGS

Philippians 2: 1-11

Hebrews 2: 5-10

Romans 8: 32

Psalms 80: 17, 18

DMW God's thoughts and feelings are to be before His people. I thought these scriptures might lead us into enquiry as to God's feelings about this wonderful dispensation. Considering His thoughts and feelings may result in some further exercise in prayer in view of Christ being revived in our affections, and in view of seeing what God has in mind for us in the closing days. I am reminded of the address in Ormond Beach, by our beloved brother who was taken recently in Glasgow, as to the affections in the saints. In that address he said intelligence was important in divine things, but affections were also important, and feelings. So I thought we could get some touch of God's feelings, and see things as they are; that we would be helped young and old to fit in with some exercise to contribute, and to be in correspondence with God Himself.

I thought we could begin with Philippians 2, a well known scripture, and support that by the other scriptures, to see that God still has in mind manhood. He has thoughts about it and He would show us in a fresh way, to revive us in our affections, in our thinking, that manhood has been set out perfectly for us. We do not have to wonder about it; we do not have to guess about it. It is there in one blessed Man Himself. This verse in Psalm 80 has been before me in the past several days and it says, "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself". That shows how everything is going to be brought in and, as we had in the hymn, He is the Tree of life, the Food of life, and the Giver (Hymn 206). Through grace and God's own sovereign operations we are brought into these things.

I thought in Romans 8 we would see how deep His feelings were as to Christianity. It has in view the greatness of all things in this period of time.

JRB As you were speaking my mind went to what God says to the prophet Isaiah, "before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear", Isa 65: 24. You referred in your prayer to the Lord's interest in our gathering here, and I think God would give us a

sense of that, how interested He is in us; His ear is towards His people: that is the focus of His attention.

DMW I think we need to be revived as to this. I speak for myself. We have to be revived through what God has in the Man of His right hand.

JRB The verse you read in Romans in relation to Christ, says, “with him grant us all things”. I understand it to mean that, throughout the eternal day, even as it is today, God's blessing for man is as we are in association with the Lord Jesus, “with him grant us all things”.

DMW Very good. I wonder if the scriptures at the beginning of Philippians 2 help us in that. Oneness and sameness are characteristics of the divine company - “with him”, association with Him. There is a moral basis for that, and an exercise in relation to being with Christ in all things.

GDR The inward side is involved. It is an interesting thing, “joined in soul”. It seems to be a vital matter.

DMW It is a vital matter. It is an inward matter. It is not intelligence only; it is intelligence operating with revived affections. It is a vital matter. It is an inward matter.

DMC “He must increase, but I must decrease”, John 3: 30. Do you think that, as we get out of sight and Christ comes into prominence, we would be formed more like Him?

DMW I think so. That was the highest aspect of John the baptist's ministry, as he introduced the Bridegroom who had the bride; “He that has the bride is the bridegroom”, John 3: 29. John makes way for another order and kind of man.

TRV Is that why the first verse begins with “in Christ”, and then, “if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit”. How does that then begin and help with the line that you are on?

DMW That is good. I was wondering about that myself. It is a wonderful and vital position. There is no blessing outside of Christ; all blessing is in Christ, the “all things” are in Christ. Manhood is seen in Christ and we come into that in association with Christ. It says, “if any fellowship of the Spirit”, and we might ask about that. It must relate to the “in Christ” position, and to these features of manhood that came out so perfectly in Himself. The Spirit would be the power for that, and love underlies it. It says, “if any consolation of love”.

TRV Do you think that is the feeling side that you are referring to? But the vital side is in Christ and the Spirit helps us in that, and making it real to our souls in this time that we are living in, which is a wilderness time. So we need this love side as well as the intelligent side.

DMW Quite so. The practice of Christianity is seen in the company in Philippi. It was to be seen there. The practice of Christianity is specifically addressed in John's first epistle. We are to merge together in the fellowship of the Spirit to see that He is the instrument, and the power, for the practical working out of life in Christ company-wise.

APD It has been said that the fellowship of the Spirit involves a community of affection permeated by the Spirit.

DMW I suppose permeated would be similar to the thought of the unction (1 John 2: 20) where the thing is characteristic, it is rubbed in, it is through and through.

APD It is not just individual; it involves the company of the saints.

DMW I thought that, and of course the apostle could say, "fulfil my joy". He was a former of assemblies. He had his own company. When he was let go in Acts 16, he went to his own company. The thought is there would be no believer alone in heaven; all belong to the family of God; believers are formed for a company. The believer in the present dispensation belongs to the assembly. We work that out in a company, through individual exercise of being in Christ, to be in the fellowship of the Spirit, to be joined in soul, to be in this one thing, the oneness of it, the sameness of it. I think it speaks of manhood. I think manhood is extremely important for us, to be revived about it and in God's feelings as to it.

DMC How do you understand, "joined in soul"?

DMW I think our brother has helped us. It is a vital matter, an inward matter, it is a feeling matter.

DMC Would it be seen particularly in the beginning of the dispensation? It was seen in its fullness, but now do we see it in recovery as the work of the Spirit is seen amongst the saints and we arrive at it as appreciating the work of God in one another?

DMW Quite so, and so the formation of the assembly, Christ's body and His bride, the vessel required the presence of a divine Person who came in with hard breathing, Acts 2: 2, note. The fullness of it was seen

in those opening chapters of Acts. But because of failure in responsibility, the public position as at Pentecost will never be set up again. It is not a right thought, nor is it God's thought, that it will be set up again in the same kind of ornamental power that it had. But in remnant conditions, the thing itself continues and we are helped to have whole thoughts about what manhood is to God. We have been revived in that; it is to come out in the saints, in the company.

DMC Do you think what we have come to through recovery is even greater than what we have at the beginning?

DMW Do you mean as far as the prophet said, "the latter glory of this house", Hag 2: 9? I think so, because the apostolic, structural gifts in the pristine days of the recovery were much needed to give a universal lead to what God had in mind regarding manhood, and manhood being revived in the saints, and God's feelings being known in public testimony. Now it is up to you, it is up to me, it is up to everyone in this room, young and old, to lay hold of this in the way of prayer and exercise, to see what God's feelings are for continuing. They are not any different at the end than the beginning but the scope of things has is to be enlarged through individual exercise, and added to the company, even though that company is maybe quite small.

PH Do you think that what Paul says, that the "greater of these is love" (1 Cor 13: 13) shows the great expression of love given to us?

DMW Very good. I think that is the intent of these meetings, that our appreciation of God's feelings be revived, and that we would be joined in soul. We would see how He regards things.

SWD When the apostle speaks of the mediator, he says, "the man Christ Jesus", 1 Tim 2: 5. I was thinking of the reproduction of that in Antioch, where they were "first called Christians", Acts 11: 26.'

DMW It was not that they were trying to be Christians. No, it is what they were, they were joined in soul. Antioch was a wonderful company, Christ reproduced there in witness before men.

JRB The reference to "if any bowels and compassions", obviously refers to what is inward and compassions involve our feelings. I was wondering whether what the saints have been going through recently - because God has put His hand on a lot of our brethren in their bodies - if it is not in view of developing those compassions. It is the expression of what is inward.

DMW Quite so. I feel that myself. The tenderness and gentleness of the Christ, that is manhood, the glory in manhood, the compassions. It speaks of the Lord as having compassion, being on a journey and having compassion, Luke 10: 33. Scripture speaks of God's compassionate love, "God so loved the world", John 3: 16. That is His compassion, His love for mankind.

JRB It is referred to continually through the gospels as to the Lord Jesus being moved with compassion, as though these compassions result in some outward expression, some outward activity.

DMW I wondered just how practical this might be with us. It is a test as to whether our compassions are even alive to mankind. When we see things that occur and when we hear things, even perhaps the cruelty of man toward a child, how does that affect us? Are we in correspondence with God's feelings?

GDR "The heart and soul" were one in Acts 4: 32. In the beginning, there was one heart and soul in the people. That really defeats the enemy; his whole objective is to divide and conquer, and you know what it is to be on the front lines: you have to be clear.

DMW It is and "thinking one thing", "let nothing be in the spirit of strife or vain glory". It is to permeate the company. Christianity is a society, a community of those who love Christ, who love what God loves, and who are to come in for these "all things". Even though it might not be in the day of God's outward power, yet God is exercising His power, the power of the Spirit, so that we can come into these things and there can be such a thing as sameness and oneness.

DBB The Lord Jesus could say, "Altogether that which I also say to you", John 8: 25.

DMW Well, we marvel at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. He and the Father are one. He was perfect in all that He took up in a relative and subordinate position, and He was perfect in obedience because He knew that God has a right to an obedient Man. The Son of Man is referred to in these scriptures as well. What a representation you see in what man is to be for God. What a wonderful thing it is to feed on Christ.

SWD The weeping prophet is almost overwhelmed by the devastation of his people. He is recovered in his thoughts to say, "It is of Jehovah's loving-kindness we are not consumed, because his

compassions fail not; they are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness", Lam 3: 22, 23.

DMW It does good to lay hold of that. If things are being maintained, it is because of God's feelings and He would bring us into that as we draw from the manhood of Christ and are transformed and formed, formed in God's feelings so there is communion.

APD I think regarding what you said about our feelings towards all men, we need to have greater feelings. Paul speaks about, "when the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God", Titus 3: 4. I think we are inclined to be shut into ourselves a good deal and of course we have much to enjoy. God has given us much to enjoy in the recovery of the truth, but we need to be expanded - I feel myself - in relation to my feelings towards all men. That would be like God, "kindness and love ... of our Saviour God".

DMW It would be the life of God; the life of God spoken of in the scriptures. It is a moral idea, but it comes out as God's feelings, as we are formed in the divine nature. God's feelings and compassions are to be known in our own souls and they are to come out as representing God. It is quite right that God is interested in this meeting, He is interested in these occasions, He has laid it on the hearts of our brethren in Vancouver, year after year, to have these meetings again. He is interested, but then what is being formed? We are to have an exercise from these meetings to pray so there is more of manhood revived in our affections, manhood for God, Christ coming out, and more of God's feelings towards man coming out.

DMC Do you think too, as to our young people growing up amongst us, those that are here, those in our localities, that we should set for them an example of the order of man that God is finding pleasure in?

DMW That is right. The natural things are right in their place, but they are subjugated to another kind and order of man. That kind of man has dominion over us, He is the Son of man, and that kind of example is to be set. I say humbly it should be more so. But then, we may say a lot, but the Lord Jesus, as has already been brought forward, was, "Altogether that which I also say to you". He was altogether that, and teaching is largely by example.

DMC We cannot merely quote chapter and verse to them; we have to show it in ourselves.

DMW We do indeed. We had in the reading in the house this morning some comments that were very helpful about how each is to force his way into the kingdom, Luke 16: 16. That is a positive thought, because we are to do violence against the flesh. As Mr Darby has said, "Use a sharp knife with yourself".

GDR There is a sense of fervency. James speaks about that, "The fervent supplication of the righteous man has much power", James 5: 16.

DMW That is good. That would be a feeling man.

TRV Does this verse show us that it is for us in that new order, "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus". Could you say something about why that term, "Christ Jesus", is used?

DMW I suppose it is the anointed Man. The anointed Man has left us an example. He is in heaven, the great divine Operator, the anointed Vessel that was here. The assembly is the anointed vessel in the absence of Christ. The direction of this Man's mind is important for us to grasp. What is the direction of our minds? What is the direction of our renewed minds? Are we speaking the language of God? Are we thinking the thoughts of God? Do we have the affections and feelings of God? You see the direction of this Man's mind was that God would be honoured and that His will would be done. It says in a footnote in another place that 'I ought to have no will of my own, but to be in obedience', 1 John 3: 4. Think about that practically, and you can understand. God only has a right to a will. Here is a Man who was set to do the will of God in suffering and death.

PH Do you think this verse brings out that this feature is not beyond us - "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"? We must maintain what is distinctive to Christ, but the apostle seems to bring out that this feature is not beyond us, "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus", in relation to the feelings of God.

DMW It is not beyond us. I am glad you have been free to speak that way, as our brother has said, setting the example for younger folk, according to this order and kind of manhood. This is the only kind of man that is going into heaven. He has already entered there before us. He has forged the way; He is our Forerunner. This is the only kind of man, nothing at all of the first man, nothing - even the best, which we are slow to arrive at, has to go; it has no entrance there. It is another kind of

man, the man of God's purpose and choice.

TRV What you are bringing before us is that manhood is the mature thought, and we are to be in manhood. That is not gender specific, that is not a question of age, whether I am ten or eighty, each one of us can take the fulness of that up and walk in the fulness of it as our brother has pointed out. That is who we are as we enter heaven, but that is who we should be now.

DMW That is helpful. It does not matter as to age. Now we know the normal progression in growth is in John's epistle as well: little children, young men and fathers in the divine family. We are all children of God, and the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are in that family (Rom 8: 16), but manhood is learned by looking at the Man who is in heaven and drawing from Him. We might say that seems impossible. But it is not impossible because we have His Spirit. If we did not have His Spirit it would be impossible.

PDS Do you think that this is a humble kind of man, and we need to humble ourselves? I was thinking of Peter here, who may sometimes give the idea of a man. He seemed quite strong, but he had to be taken down first and brought to see that he was not the kind of man that God was looking for. It is just like a building that is taken down; something new is going to be built in its place, but Christ voluntarily humbled Himself. It seems to be a real part of this that we have to be humbled first. God breaks us first does he not?

DMW That is a good enquiry and comment. We speak of discipline, we speak of God's government, but discipline is required for us, and it is for that very reason, I feel. Of course there are many reasons - as J B Stoney helps us to see (Vol 4: pp 44, 45, 278; Vol 5: pp 120, 223): preventive, purgative, and that sort of thing; but really it is to negate the kind of man that would put himself forward, to make something of himself. That kind of man is not acceptable even in the best features, in terms of ability and leadership. That man has come into judgment, and the man who has come under judgment has gone in judgment.

SWD “I rebuke and discipline as many as I love”, Rev 3: 19. It is in view of God's likeness. I have been impressed with the term, “sanctification of the Spirit” (2 Thess 2: 13), as the process by which He makes us more like Christ.

DMW He has set us apart for Himself and for holy purposes, and all

the resources are from God Himself, the heavenly resources, our commonwealth, our associations in life are heavenly; and if discipline comes in, and we do need it, not that we want it, but "as many as I love" "I rebuke and discipline", is to be formative. It is in view of manhood being revived before us in faith and in our affections so that we have God's feelings about His Man.

KDD I was thinking of Gideon: "each one resembled the sons of a king" (Judg 8:18), the likeness that we are speaking about, and then that brings out Gideon's feelings, "They were my brethren", v 19. Manhood was brought out after that.

DMW Gideon was one with another spirit. He thought the thoughts of God. He had adjustment, as we all need to have, in order to be brought into correspondence with God's thoughts and God's feelings. It is wonderful the feelings expressed by Gideon.

JRBr Say something to distinguish what is before us from simply having compassion towards men - take the floods in Pakistan, China, you see people affected by drugs or whatever that might be, what is the difference between that and what we are speaking about?

DMW We have to understand that when the sorrows of mankind are public, it must have some effect upon our spirits. We also need to understand that God is behind the scenes and moving the scenes He is behind. We may have to leave things, and yet pray for the authorities, because God may raise up the basest of men to rule over nations, as He did Nebuchadnezzar, to conduct the things in the reckoning of time, but God will bring it all to a conclusion. He may do that quickly, but I do think that in what we were saying as to all men, our preaching may be with more power as we have the consciousness of this in our souls, with the compassionate love of God toward all, and the divine imperative: "the Son of man must be lifted up", John 12: 34. If these compassions and the love of God would ever be known, His Son had to go that way; it was His 'own' Son. I would like us to get hold of that, it was His own Son, God's feelings must come out in that expression, "his own Son".

DMC Would you distinguish between what we speak of as body feelings, which would be an expression amongst the saints, and what God would be doing regarding all men?

DMW Yes. So there is the inside and there is the outside. The inside is what you are referring to as body feelings. The Lord Jesus may

exercise His right and take a valuable and faithful man in his prime in order to bring out body feelings, in order to bring out some exercise that we are not very spiritual, we perhaps do not think God's thoughts, do not have God's feelings. He might use the home going of a beloved brother like that to speak to us afresh, to revive in our souls His own feelings about things. But on the outside would be what we are speaking of as to God's compassions towards man.

SWD So, in regard of all men, Paul in Athens with his "spirit painfully" excited says, "he is not very far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and exist", Acts 17: 27, 28. He was seeking to engender with them some understanding of the unknown God.

DMW We know that there are "gods many, and lords many", 1 Cor 8: 5. And all these gods many and lords many are really unknown in the sense that it is not the true God, it is not the One Lord, Jesus Christ. This is peculiar to Christianity; but what is the gospel preached in view of? I think that is a question. "Now is the judgment of this world" (John 12: 31); the prince of this world has been cast out. Preaching is not to make the world a better place, or even inject Christian moral values into the world system exactly, although the witness of it is to be there. But in the preaching of the word, the testimony of the word of Lord running and being glorified is to bring people out of that system into a wonderful divine system, the inside place, where the love of relationship, not just the love of compassion, but the love of relationship can be taken up as appointed by God Himself, for those who are retrieved from judgment.

DBB The gospel is only the starting point.

DMW Just so, it is the starting point.

DMC Mary said as to Lazarus, "if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died", John 11: 32. It was to bring out the glory of God, "if thou shouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God", v 40. What the Lord may in His wisdom allow is in view of bringing something of the glory out.

DMW That is very good. We all need a good start, but it is in view of our coming to something in the sense of death, the death and resurrection of Christ and its efficacy. It is what it is for God and how men are brought out of the system of selfishness and judgment into a system of love, into an atmosphere they have never known before, where the glory of God can be known. Morally, persons are retrieved

and changed.

TRV How do you understand that paragraph that we read? We have the death of the Lord but then that He “granted him a name, that which is above every name”. There are those who are inside, but then you have those outside: is that what we have at the end of that paragraph to bring us to the full perspective of God’s ways and purpose?

DMW It is the name of Jesus. Our brother has brought out it is that kind of man now. That is the man that God always had in mind, His purpose in view of that kind of man, like the humble, lowly, meek Man, with only the will of God before Him. That is the definition of humility, the will of someone else is in view; meekness and lowliness in subjection to it.

APD Do we see in the reference to John 11 the feelings of Jesus, “Jesus wept” (v 35), and it says He was “deeply moved in Himself” (v 38), and He groaned. It says in the note *a* to v 33 - ‘the inward feeling (in spirit) produced by the deep pain caused by seeing the power of death over the human spirit’. It shows how God’s feelings came into expression in a Man.

DMW And I mentioned earlier, when we see the cruelty of man in the world, if we observe it or are in proximity to it, do we understand something as having the spirit of Christ, do we feel that in some measure? The Lord felt it. He felt the weight on the human spirit. Man could do nothing about it, but He could.

GDR “At the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ”, Eph 4: 13. It is the divine objective, and that is what we have to come to. It may take a whole lifetime, but that is what God’s ideal is, and His desire to work out in our souls.

DMW That is right, it is the “full-grown man” there, and that is not in heaven. As I understand it, that is down here. The revival of God’s feelings in our souls in the company of the saints is an important matter, “until we all arrive”.

PDS How do we reconcile what you read in Hebrews 2, “Thou hast made him some little inferior to the angels; thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast set him over the works of thy hands”? We are speaking of Christ humbled, and then this scripture speaks of Him being “crowned him with glory and honour” and having dominion over everything. What is the idea of thinking of us reaching maturity in

manhood? This seems to be something that is completely beyond us? I know that, with Adam, God did not start with a child, he started with a fully matured man, and he did have dominion over all, but how do we reconcile the humbled Christ and the exalted Christ in what God wants to do in us?

DMW Our bodies are going to be changed "into conformity to his body of glory", Phil 3: 21. In one sense, I say this carefully, the Lord Jesus will never be king *over* us. God is going to set forth His King, He is going to set forth Christ Himself in millennial glory, but we bear testimony to the world to come now, we bear testimony to what is going to occur when the Lord Jesus is set forth in power and glory. "But we see Jesus": He is hidden from the world. Do we see the kind of Man that God exalted? It is the Man who came to do the will of God, who had the will of God in His heart. He carried it out publicly; He accomplished redemption. He could not have done that if He had not taken Manhood, because angels are not men as far as I understand. So, in Hebrews 2: 9 we are told of "Jesus, who was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death". But He is a divine Person, superior to angels; He created them. Angels could not die, but for us to come into this order of manhood there had to be a Man die for the glory of God where sin was, to remove it from the eye of God that we might be taken up. In the wilderness, we have His Spirit and we need His Spirit, not to assert our rights, not to assert ourselves, but to judge ourselves and walk in the Spirit. What do we have to offer men - that would be a big enquiry? We have compassion upon man, but what do we have to offer them?

JRB It is, "what I have", Acts 3: 6. Peter did not have silver and gold.

DMW "What I have". So when you go to work on Monday, or you are among other men, what do you offer them? There is something there that you have come into that they have not. You not only understand the compassionate love of God for mankind, but that His mind for all men is the same; you have come into that, but He has the same mind for all men. So what is seen in you is not what is normally seen in men. That is what you have to offer to them. If you had an opportunity you might say something at the right time, but may be you are not always brave enough to do that.

APD Paul says, "such as I also am", not only what I have, but "such as I also am, except these bonds", Acts 26: 29.

PDS It is a life that cannot be understood by the world; it is a life that is

sustained by another source. You cannot sustain this life or this kind of manhood by just reading the newspaper, or whatever else; it is a life that people cannot understand. There should be such elements in our life that are unexplainable to others without it.

DMW That is good. It is to be "known and read of all men", 2 Cor 3: 2. Sometimes we say, 'How can I honour Christ in my life?'. That is a good enquiry. We have to understand that the way we often think of my 'life', is perhaps first understood by what you said, that it is from an entirely new source. It has had its beginning in the gospel which has been used of God to effect that, although there could have been a work, and there was a work before the gospel came to us; yet you see there is a life unfolding that was not known before. What remains? If I have forfeited one kind of life, what remains is what is going to go through, and that is in the same person but a new life.

DMC So the man who fell into the hand of robbers, the priest and the Levite had nothing to offer, but the Samaritan poured in the oil and the wine and brought him to the inn and took care of him, Luke 10: 34. You cannot help someone if you do not have the resources to do so.

DMW The oil and wine are not available in mankind generally, but in a new kind of manhood entirely.

SWD One of the early explorers on this continent was looking for the fountain of youth; he never found it. What God has to offer man is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

DJK Would you say something about, "so that by the grace of God he should taste death for every thing"? Do you think the sufferings of Christ should promote feelings with us?

DMW That is what I thought. It is in view of bringing many sons to glory. Again, I think manhood is in view, and the redemption of the creation. So a man after God now, a man in Christ, would hold the creation for God. Sin came into the universe, things are in disorder in man's hand; and yet the believer who has been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and understands that sonship itself is worked out in manhood, holds the creation for God because Christ has redeemed it.

DMC Would you say that Adam in innocence could not have appreciated the love of God as we do?

DMW He would have appreciated God as a giver perhaps and as a provider.

DMC As a believer, a Christian, is not an improved humanity; he is a new man.

GDR Do we not have to come to it that God's thought of life is Christ, and it is to be our life as well? Exaltation of that Man is to be our engagement. I was thinking of the latter part, "bringing many sons to glory". We may say it is finality, but I think that some appreciation of that is to be now.

DMW It is, and so we have the following verses, "in the midst of the assembly", v 12. That might reflect back to Psalm 22, but nevertheless there are things which are to be touched now. To me that is the great matter of Christianity in mixed conditions. We have our links, and I say this carefully, with a fallen creation, because our bodies are still yet to be changed, yet in spirit we are with God in things. So, while it is not the day of His power - that would be the thought of the millennium - yet it is the day of His power in a greater way in a sense because in mixed conditions He has shown that persons in this room are coming into manhood. They are capable because of the Spirit to take in God's thoughts and feelings, to understand something of His own affections. He would revive those in our souls; He can do that.

GDR The beloved apostle was an exemplary setting out of that matter, "For me to live is Christ, and to die gain", Phil 1: 21. That is our whole objective.

DMW It is; we sang -

In the paradise of God. (Hymn 206)

To die is gain. There is only one way man can go to heaven. It is through death. Whether we experience that literally, the paradise of God, or come into things now that way is a matter for us to think about during the waiting time. We can touch it already I think (without going through actual death), and death therefore becomes a servant in a way. The aspect of the death of Christ presented in the Jordan is necessary for us to experience another area in spirit.

SWD "I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, *I*, but the Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me", Gal 2: 20.

PH Can you help as to what is meant as regards to the “paradise of God”, Rev 2: 7? I was wondering as to what the Lord said to the thief, “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise”, Luke 23: 43. I was wondering whether you could open up what you said.

DMW The striking thing about the thief is that he came to a lot in a few moments. He may not be part of this dispensation, in fact he is not; but he came to a judgment of himself because, I believe, of what was going on next to him. In his consciousness he knew he had done evil, and he also knew that the Man next to him had done no evil. He was next to a just Man. So there had to be a reason for that death, the death of the Lord, and the thief must have come to something in his soul about that: “Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom”, Luke 23: 42. The Lord responded, “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise”.

APD Paul has some experience of paradise. He says, “I know a man in Christ”, 2 Cor 12: 2. I understand that is not only status but maturity. He does not say an apostle in Christ, but a man in Christ, as if it is to be experienced perhaps by us.

DMW I think so. It is not I *knew* a man in Christ but, “I know a man in Christ”. We started with that in Philippians 2, “in Christ”. Now the question is, what is our experience in another area, and of manhood indigenous to that area? What is our experience there? No doubt we need the Spirit here in the wilderness, but we also need the Spirit to have some experience in another area. Now, whether you could refer to that as the paradise of God, I could not say for certain; but I think you could refer to it as the heavenlies. Paul said, “I know a man in Christ”, and he was caught up to the third heaven.

SWD He refers both to the third heaven and to paradise.

DMW So, perhaps paradise has a bearing upon us even now as that experience might show. It is a place of delights, a place of restfulness.

PH I am glad this has come out. I have carried this and that is why I am asking.

DMW I would be very careful about what I say, but it is a good enquiry.

DFH Would the paradise of God look forward to the body in resurrection and glory? Paul was not sure whether he was in the body or out of the body (2 Cor 12: 3), and certainly the thief was to be out of the body, but the paradise of God is involved in a promise in Revelation

to the overcomer: “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him that overcomes, I will give to him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God”, Rev 2: 7.

DMW Yes, and might be a present experience for us as promised to overcomers in Ephesus.

DMC Would you say the third heaven is still part of the created sphere? Is there any sense in which our final destiny might be beyond the third heavens in eternal conditions?

DMW I am not sure.

APD I thought that was as high as we could go.

DMW I am not sure that we will go any higher than what we can go now in spirit in some measure.

APD The Lord Jesus went above all heavens, that is distinctive to Him.

DFH The third heaven is the thing experienced. The second heaven is an intensification, but the third heaven is the experience of the thing, J Taylor vol 100 p431.

DMW That experience is open to us now. I realise that for the apostle it may have been special. We are talking about manhood now resulting in God's feelings being revived in our souls. He has things in mind for us, and I thought the third heaven as a created sphere was as far as we could go. I am not sure we can go further even in eternal conditions, but our bodies will be changed, and we enter on what we may only touch now in spirit but which will be actual when we are changed for eternal conditions.

DH We will need our bodies of glory to experience the things in their fulness. John 17 makes it clear, “I desire that where I am they also may be with me”, v 24. That is open to every believer in the power of Spirit.

DMW That is helpful.

JRBr You referred to the malefactor and I wondered if this does not provide some clue to us as to paradise. He says, “To-day shalt thou be **with me** in paradise”. I think where He is, to be with Him, is paradise.

DMW That explains it all. Some people are praying that they get to heaven, but what would heaven be like if the Man was not there? It is

the Man we are looking for. The next movement of the testimony will be a voice from that Man calling us up, ahead of time, so to speak, before He appears publicly and takes up the reign of righteousness in power and glory. God will show what He can do in this world with a Man, the whole thing is going to be levelled according to righteousness. And we come into that in testimony now in the assembly.

JRB It may be something akin to what we have in John 14, “for I go to prepare you a place”, v 2. I remember a brother saying here that His going to prepare a place was effectuated by the fact that He was there; that is what made it a place.

DMW Quite so, and a place He prepares by His presence there. As I understand, we will always be creatures. The assembly is a created vessel.

DMC Absolutely, it is God's masterpiece.

DMW We come in for it; we come into that community of believers, the one body *in* Christ. We are to enjoy this society that God has set up for us, this community of believers. The one body *of* Christ is something of that Man is seen.

DMC The assembly will glorify Christ; she will make much of Christ. She is suited to Him entirely.

DMW And the amazing thing about it all, as to the divine masterpiece, the assembly, it is His complement. The wonder of it is that it must be traced back to God's thoughts and purpose.

SWD As to the millennium and the eternal state, the assembly is viewed as, “coming down out of the heaven from God”, Rev 21: 2.

DMW “Having the glory of God”, v 10. I wanted to get back before we close to our brother's enquiry - did you have something further as to your comment?

JRB I asked the question really to help me understand the contrast between natural man, or man after the flesh, and what we have been speaking about as to man after God. God's standard is there and His feelings are benevolent, God towards man. His feelings are according to His own standard of holiness and righteousness, and what I have gained from what we have been speaking over is that what is intended is that we are to be aligned to that standard; and that is what Christ is.

DMW Yes. The death of Christ has established righteousness for God, and the world is held provisionally in reconciliation. It has not been judged literally yet (although it was morally at Calvary, “now is the judgment of this world”) but has been held provisionally in view of the testimony moving westward, and man being retrieved in the ways of God. But, He is “not willing that any should perish”, 2 Pet 3: 9. He has the same mind for every man that He has for you, and that is manhood after Christ. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”. That is, to turn to God and to another Man.

JRBr If I could go back to the reference to John 14, the Lord also says that the Father would make his abode with us, and that is an experience now, v 23.

DMW That is good.

Vancouver

14th August 2011

Key to initials:-

J R Bellamy, Vancouver; D B Bodman, Birmingham; J R Brien, Witney;
D M Crozier (snr), Warrenpoint; A P Devenish, Edmonton,
K D Drever, Calgary, S W Drever, Calgary; D Howie, Edmonton;
P Howie, Edmonton; D F Hugill, Vancouver;
D J Klassen, Aberdeen, Idaho; G D Rosenberry, Edmonton;
P D Soukoreff, Vancouver; T R Vanderhoek, Denton;
D M Welch, Denton

TRUE GREATNESS

John N Darby

Learn to grapple with souls.
Aim at the conscience.
Exalt Christ.
Use a sharp knife with yourself.
Say little, serve all, pass on.

This is true greatness, to serve unnoticed
And work unseen.

Oh, the joy of having nothing and being nothing,
Seeing nothing but a living Christ in glory,
And being careful for nothing
But His interests down here!

(this is the source of the quotation on page 7)

OUR PATRON

Richard M Brown

1 John 2: 1-2; Luke 22: 31-34

I desire to say a word as to the service that the Lord Jesus carries on as our Patron (or “Advocate”, as often quoted from the Authorised Version). It is a service of His that perhaps we do not speak of much, and yet it is a most important one because it bears very directly upon our personal relationship with God. The Lord's service as our Patron is very closely related to His service as our great High Priest, but can be distinguished from it. As our High Priest He has to do with our approach to God, whereas as our Patron He is has to do with our communion with the Father. As our High Priest He is sympathetic with our infirmities, while as our Patron He is concerned with our sins.

In order to understand what is in mind we might consider what takes place when a believer, a true child of God, sins. We should understand, firstly, that certain things do not happen. If a person is sheltering under the precious blood of Jesus his eternal security is assured. Nothing can subsequently overturn that because it depends entirely upon the Lord Jesus, and upon His mighty work, and upon His present place at the right hand of God. Furthermore, as a true child of God, he will never lose his relationship with God, whatever may come in subsequently.

What then does take place? It is important to understand what takes place. We have said that a true child of God will never lose his relationship with God, but what he will lose is the *enjoyment* of it. We must recognise that. Sin destroys communion. When we sin the very first thing to go is the enjoyment of our relationship with God. Distance comes in between us and God. Moreover, when we sin we become guilty in the sight of God; not guilty in the sense that we should come under His judgment, for the judgment was borne by Jesus. God cannot judge twice, for it would be unrighteous of Him to do so. But we become guilty in the sense that there is something outstanding between us and God, something which we can be held to account for, and something which needs to be settled. I will give you a simple example of this if we turn to Mark 11: 25-26. The Lord in speaking says: “And when ye stand praying, forgive if ye have anything against any one, that your Father also who is in the heavens may forgive you

your offences. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in the heavens forgive your offences.” Now it is quite clear that in this verse the Lord Jesus is addressing those who are in a known relationship with God, because he speaks of “your Father”. Yet He describes a situation where our offences will not be forgiven. Again, we need to make it clear that this does not touch eternal questions at all. It has to do with our present relationship with the Father here in the world. The Lord describes a particular situation in which the Father would not forgive one of his children. He may in some way make His displeasure felt. It may be that that person would come under His governmental dealings. What you can see from the Lord's words is that things come into our lives which need to be settled between us and God. Someone may say, 'But I thought that all my sins were covered by Jesus on the cross'. So they are, but that is a matter of God's rights. Though our sins have been atoned for, if we would come into the enjoyment of the forgiveness of our sins we must have matters settled with God. 1 John 1: 9 shows us that there is only one way for them to be settled, and that is through the confession of them. John writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”. Only confessed sins are forgiven sins. It does not matter if a sin was committed yesterday, or last year, or twenty years ago, the passing of time can never blot it out. There is only one way in which that matter can be settled between us and God and that is through the confession of it to Him and to those against whom we have sinned.

Now we know that, naturally, the last thing that one is prepared to do is to confess one's sins. I am sure we have proved that in our own experience. And that is where the patron service of our Lord Jesus is called into operation. He serves us in order to bring us to self-judgment, and full and frank repentance, in order that we may be restored to the enjoyment of communion with the Father.

In the first place the Lord Jesus is thinking for the Father, because the Father feels more keenly than we ever could the things that come in between Him and His children. The Lord Jesus, in acting in grace towards us, is thinking for His Father. He is thinking of our blessing too. He desires that we might be brought into communion once again with His Father, but He has the Father primarily in mind. He is “with the Father”. No doubt one aspect of His patron service involves communications with the Father. It is not that He has to

persuade the Father to do something which otherwise He would not be minded to do. It is not that He has to persuade the Father to be favourable towards us. But the Father, as we know from John's gospel, has committed certain matters into the hands of the Son. Judgment is one of those matters, John 5: 22, 27. That does not mean that, as having committed those matters into the hands of the Son, the Father is no longer interested in or concerned with them, but it means He has entrusted the Son with the detailed working out of those matters. And so here is one of them. The Lord Jesus has a detailed knowledge of the needs of our souls. In fact, He knows what we need better than we know it ourselves. What the Father receives is Christ's assessment of the needs of our souls, and He is pleased to grant us forgiveness for Christ's sake. How wonderful that is! John says that later on in the chapter, "Your sins are forgiven you for **his name's sake**", v 12. The Father recognises the efficacy of Christ's work and service, and He is ready to restore us to communion with Himself, for by doing so He shows the honour He has placed upon Christ.

I am so thankful that I have "a patron with the Father", and that my Patron is none less than "Jesus Christ the righteous". I say this soberly, but I wonder where I would have been today if it had not been for the activities of one blessed Man on high, unceasingly, on my behalf. To think that as we sit here there is a living Man with the Father, and He is thinking of me! I am in his heart, my soul is precious to Him, He is set for the blessing of my soul, and He speaks to the Father about me! I trust that we may use this occasion to draw attention to Him and to His faithful service, in order that our hearts may be drawn out to Him once more.

It says He is "Jesus Christ the righteous". In that expression we get some sense of the perfect acceptability of one blessed Man to God. You see, Jesus has never needed anyone to represent Him to God. He could say, "I do always the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8: 29), and, "I knew that thou always hearest me", John 11: 42. We might then ask the question: "How is it that one Man can have such influence with God? How is it that He has such ready access to God's ear?". In 1 John 2: 2 we get His qualification to be our Patron. It says, "*He* is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world". How great He is! Propitiation is that aspect of the work of Christ that is for God. Substitution - Christ taking our place - is for the one who has caused the offence. It is for the *offender*, that is, the

sinner. Propitiation is for the one that has been *offended*, that is God. Jesus has done all that was necessary to take away from before God the offence that our sins have caused Him. And it says that not only is He the propitiation for our sins, “but also for the whole world”. That of course does not mean that the whole world will be saved, but that God is free, blessedly free, to come out in mercy towards all. Dear brethren, can we get some impression into our souls of the glory of one blessed Man, who is great enough not only to be the propitiation for our sins but also for the whole world? I cannot take that in! The greatness of it! You will notice that this verse does not refer directly to His work, although of course everything is based on that, but it says *He* is it! “*He* is the propitiation for our sins.” Think of the pleasure of God resting upon Him. Surely, if He is great enough for that, He is great enough to take charge of my affairs. If He is great enough for that, He is great enough to watch over my soul. He is great enough, I say, to take charge of everything that concerns my welfare and my blessing.

I turn to the verses in Luke 22 which have often been used to illustrate how the Lord's service as our Patron works in practice. You will notice in verse 31 that the first thing the Lord Jesus does is to make a disclosure to these disciples, and to Simon in particular. He says, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat”. Now this is something that the disciples would have been entirely unaware of had the Lord not revealed it to them. The scripture speaks of “spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies” (Eph 6: 12), the unseen evil spiritual influences that are abroad. And here you get the impression that just for a moment the Lord draws back the veil to show them what was really happening. Satan had “demanded” to have these men. What a word that is! Satan had made his bid for these men, on the one hand. On the other, the Lord Jesus had been praying for them. This is something that these disciples would have been oblivious of had the Lord not disclosed it to them. And I believe we need to be more aware of this. Sometimes we persuade ourselves that we are free to come and go and do as we like. But I think we need to be more aware that Satan, in his activities towards us, seeks to exert an influence upon us, in order to spoil our relationship with God. In the first place all his forces, all his efforts, are marshalled towards preventing a soul from being saved. Thank God he has often failed. We can look round this room and we can say, 'Thank God, he has been defeated'. Does that mean he accepts defeat? Does that mean that he gives up? Alas not! If he cannot prevent a soul being saved his

next thrust, the next focus of his efforts, is directed towards ensuring that that soul never enjoys his relationship with God. "Satan has demanded to have you." We need to be more aware of this great antagonist, the great enemy of our souls.

On the other hand the Lord says, "**but** / have besought for thee". How precious that is. Peter had not yet committed the great sin that he was about to; but *already* the service of our Lord Jesus in intercession had been called into operation. Already the Lord Jesus had been active in grace on his behalf.

The Lord says, "Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat". I believe the analogy here is to the practice in the ancient world of sifting wheat by placing it in a sieve and shaking it backwards and forwards so that all the soil and other impurities might fall away. It seems that what was in Satan's mind was that he was going to shake these disciples, and he was going to shake them and shake them, until nothing was left. What a triumph for Satan if he could show to God that, having shaken these men, there was nothing left. Trials occur in our lives, such as sickness or bereavement; problems arise in our circumstances - in Peter's case it was the threat of persecution - and, I say this feelingly, but they shake us. There is no question about that. These things shake us to the very core. Satan draws near in our weakness to put dark thoughts into our minds, and we find doubts and fears arising in our hearts that we never knew were there. The comfort is that Jesus could say, "/ have besought for thee."

We might ask: 'Why was it that, instead of praying for Peter, Jesus did not stop Satan?'. I believe it was because these disciples, and Peter in particular, needed to be sifted. And, I tremble to say it dear brethren, but we need to be sifted. Peter was marked by self-confidence. There was no question that he loved the Lord, and there was no question that when he said that he was ready to die for the Lord he was perfectly sincere. But how hard it is for us to overcome the workings of secret pride and self-confidence, and how easily the flesh gets mixed up even in our best desires to love and to serve and to follow Christ. These men needed it. And, painful though it is, we need it too. The Lord, in His ways of infinite wisdom, allowed Peter to pass a way that was bitter to his soul. Peter found himself in a position that he was not equal to, where he committed a crime that he never dreamt he was capable of.

Now the comfort is that the Lord Jesus could say, "/ have

besought for thee that thy faith fail not". That prayer was answered because, although Peter's courage failed, his faith never did. And so the Lord is able to say, "and *thou*, when once thou hast been restored, confirm thy brethren". How lovely that is! You see, the ultimate issue was never in doubt. It was going to be a bitter and painful exercise, but the Lord does not say, '*if* thou art restored', but "when once thou **hast been** restored, confirm thy brethren." What a mighty Defender Peter had, what a mighty Champion of his cause! There was no question that Peter would, in the end, be brought through to that point where not only would he be restored personally, but he would also be able to confirm his brethren.

Let us follow the Lord's ways with him. Let us turn to the paragraph beginning at Luke 22: 54. I should say that we have always to remember when looking at scriptures like this that the disciples were much greater men than we are. If we take up their failures, if we seek to learn from them, we must remember that. We approach them humbly, and we approach them in the knowledge that the flesh in us is no different. You think of what a thing it would be, dear brother or sister, if your failures were recorded like this, if they were written down for everyone else to read of. It is a testimony to the greatness of these men, and what the Lord secured in them, that their failures are recorded for all to see and to learn from.

So in verse 54 we see that Peter had followed the Lord afar off. And it says, "And they having lit a fire in the midst of the court and sat down together, Peter sat among them". You notice that: *Peter sat among them*. Could I make an affectionate appeal to the dear younger brethren? Here was Peter warming himself by the world's fire. You say, 'It was a cold night and he only wanted to be warm, what was the harm in that?'. But he found himself in the wrong company, and in that company he was led to act and to speak as if he never knew the Lord Jesus! How sad, how humbling it is, when Christians act in such a way that they make themselves indistinguishable from those who have rejected Christ. Peter found himself in the wrong company and he was very quickly overcome. He who was to be the first among the apostles was thrown into confusion by a servant girl. It says, "And a certain maid, having seen him sitting by the light, and having fixed her eyes upon him, said, And this man was with him. But he denied him, saying, Woman, I do not know him". And so he goes on, and he goes on, and he goes on. And who knows where he would have ended but that it says, "And the Lord, turning round, looked at Peter". I draw attention to

this as a further example of His service as our Patron. It does not say that Peter looked at the Lord, but that the Lord looked at Peter. The cock had been crowing. We gather from the other accounts that the first time he denied Him the cock crowed, and when Peter denied Him again the cock crowed again. We might have said, 'Peter, do you not hear that sound in the distance? Oh Peter, why will you not stop?'. It speaks of the warnings which come into our lives that are often ignored. It shows the hardening effect of sin upon us. But what was it that stopped him in his course and brought him to his senses? It was a look from the Lord Himself. How blessed that is! You say, 'Can you hear that cock crowing, Peter? Does it not remind you of something?'. No, it did not. But it was when the Lord looked at him, that then it says, "Peter **remembered** the word of the Lord". It illustrates how the Lord works in order that the Holy Scriptures, often overlooked by us, are brought to bear in upon the conscience. He serves to recall us to "the word of the Lord". Then it was that Peter saw himself. Then it was that he realised what he had done. It says, "And Peter, going forth without, wept bitterly". How thankful we are that he did. That was the beginning with him of deep, heartfelt repentance. It is a solemn thing when one sins with a high hand. Such persons do not, for the moment, get the gain of the Lord's Patron service. But here was a man who was broken by what he had done to the Lord. These bitter tears were the evidence that the Lord's Patron service had been effective.

In Luke 24 we have the account of the two one the way to Emmaüs, "And rising up the same hour, they returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven, and those with them, gathered together, saying, The Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon", v 33. To whom? To Simon! What, the Simon who denied the Lord with oaths and curses? The Simon who denied Him, not once or twice, but three times? Is that the Simon? Oh the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! Of all the people in Jerusalem who could have had an appearing from the Lord, He appeared to Simon. Simon was among the least deserving of a personal manifestation of the Lord Jesus in resurrection. What perfect grace! What a loving heart He has! How He watches over our souls. What tender care He expends upon us. The remarkable thing about this particular meeting is that, though it is referred to more than once in the Scriptures, nothing is told us of what passed between them. Nothing is recorded of what the Lord said to Peter, nor of what Peter said to the Lord. It is not our business. But we do need to know that that meeting took place, because I think it was there that Peter was

restored in his conscience. I am sure that he would have confessed all to the Lord, and he would have found that the Lord restored him in his conscience.

I turn to John 21. We see that the Lord has not finished with him yet. Peter is not fully restored yet, and so the Patron service of our Lord Jesus Christ goes on. We know the story of how Peter led a group of disciples away fishing. That was not what the Lord had in mind when He desired that he should confirm the brethren. We shall not confirm the brethren if we take them fishing, or anywhere else like that. The Lord had something far greater in mind for this beloved servant. In this chapter we see how the Lord works in recovery to bring him back to His thoughts about him. You will notice that the first thing that the Lord Jesus does is to have a fire of coals ready for them and fish cooking. It is a lovely example for us of the Lord's activities in recovery: before He begins His probing of Peter, before He speaks to the disciples, He would have them warmed and fed. Thus it says in verse 15, "When therefore they had dined". It needs spiritual energy in order to judge ourselves, and the Lord Jesus would have these men comfortable before He begins the probing of their hearts. It has been noted how, just as Peter denied the Lord three times, so the Lord Jesus raises this question with him three times. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" And it comes to the point after the final question that Peter says, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I am attached to thee". Peter came to see that there was no need for him to boast of his love for the Lord, because the Lord knew just how much he loved Him. There was no question at all that Peter loved Him dearly.

How do we know that Peter was now fully restored? In Luke 24 he was restored in his *conscience*, but in John 21 he was to be restored in his *heart*. The evidence that that had taken place is in the Lord's word to him, "Feed my sheep". The Lord Jesus was about to depart, He was about to go back to the Father. To whom would He entrust the care of his precious sheep? No one had watched over them as well as He had. There is no Shepherd like the Lord Jesus. He would not entrust them to just anyone. But here He was leaving the world, and to whom could he entrust His precious sheep, the care of their souls? Whom could He rely on to watch over them in a way that would satisfy Him? Peter was the one. He says to Peter, "Feed my sheep". The Lord thus expressed His confidence in Peter. He says, in effect, to

Peter, 'I want you to look after my sheep'. We are speaking of His service towards us as our Patron. This is an example of what He can do. He can take a man like Peter, who had fallen so low as to deny his beloved Lord, and bring him to that point where He has such confidence in him that He is able to entrust him with the care of His precious sheep.

How great the Lord Jesus is! How privileged we are to have such a Patron, such a mighty Deliverer, such a wise and skilful Defender, as He is. In His gracious ways with us, which are often painful to us, never let us lose sight of the tender love and care that He lavishes upon us. He never wearies of watching over our souls. He never tires of representing us to the Father. He will never relinquish this precious service towards us until that moment when we are finally with Him. I say again, how privileged we are to have such a Patron as Jesus Christ the righteous, serving on our behalf in order that we might be brought into free and happy relations with the Father Himself. I bring these matters before you so that our hearts may be drawn out to Him once more, and that we may be more aware of, and more thankful for, that service which He carries on hour by hour, day by day, unceasingly, untiringly, on our behalf. He is Jesus Christ the Righteous, our beloved Patron. I commend Him to you, in His precious Name.

Grangemouth

22nd May 2010

THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGES

Tim D Ellis

**Hebrews 9: 26 from “But now”; 3: 1
1 Timothy 3: 16**

These three scriptures have been before me over the last week or so, in different contexts, and I had not particularly thought to speak about them tonight, but our hymn suggests to me that perhaps they link together. There is a line in the hymn, 211, that speaks of Christ in relation to God:

As the Man of all Thy counsels,
Who the universe will fill.

These scriptures are all very profound in their own way, and I do not know that I can say very much as to them, but I would like to draw them to our attention for our contemplation. In particular I would point to that scripture in Hebrews 3, “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus”. He is the One who is the Pinnacle of everything, the Centre of everything for God and the Centre of everything for man. He is the Centre of the universe and will fill that universe; and, we might say, He is the Centre of time as well.

This scripture in Hebrews 9 has often attracted me, “But now once in the consummation of the ages”. Think of the immensity of that: up until the point of the coming in of the Lord Jesus there had been some four thousand years or so, not allowing for what there may have been in the gap between the two verses at the beginning of Genesis 1; and then there have been the two thousand years since the death of Jesus. Think of all of that and all ages to come that you could consider, all brought together; and then consider that, just once in the whole of that period, the Lord Jesus “has been manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice”. For just thirty-three and a half years there was a Man here perfectly in accord with the entire thoughts of God. We were impressed on Lord's day with the perfection of One who was able to fully reveal the thoughts of God. More than that, the linkage between the scriptures where I read tonight is that He was God, manifest in flesh. What a thought that is! How impressive to think of that, and that He is also “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession”. As I understand it, as Apostle He revealed everything that there is to be revealed of God in coming out; and as High Priest He goes in taking in everything that is

perfect and complete for God. He will fill the universe for Him. What a thought that is! What a perfect Man He is! Perfect, divine, yes, but a perfect Man, One who was God manifest in flesh. Think of the immensity of God's thoughts, even just in that way, that God Himself should be manifested in flesh, "now once in the consummation of the ages". Never before had such a thing happened, never before had God been fully made known, never before had there been such an Apostle, never before the incoming of Christ had there been such a representation of God. But once He had come out, He had come out as Apostle and the nature of God has been declared. Yet He has gone in, gone in as High Priest, gone in to ensure that there is a full and complete response to God that is in accord with the greatness of the revelation of God. Think of the greatness of that! "Once in the consummation of the ages". His life was short, thirty-three and a half years, most of which we know nothing about. We know so little about what happened in those years between the incoming of the Lord as a lowly Babe and His service here, and then His death on the cross, but in all of that period there was a perfect Man here for the pleasure and will of God.

"Once in the consummation of the ages": never before or since has there been such a perfect representation of God here, or a Man here so in accord with the will of God. In 1 Timothy it says, "God has been manifested in flesh". It is part of the mystery of piety, the mystery of godliness. As I understand it, the thought of the mystery is not exactly something that we search out. It is something that we are initiated into, as we grow in our spirituality or as we are brought into it, and the mystery of piety, the mystery of godliness, is summed up in these words that Paul uses to Timothy. They are so profound in each line, "God has been manifested in flesh". Think of the magnificence of that! God's thoughts, as we have been reminded, are so much higher than our thoughts. God has taken a way that is beyond our comprehension, that He, "dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen" (1 Tim 6: 16), should find a way of coming into this scene, of coming into His own creation in a way which would not destroy His creation in so doing. Think of God finding a way of doing that, speaking reverently, by being manifested in flesh, coming in in a way that was attractive, coming in in a way that was not threatening to men but in which men could see in One like unto themselves, sin apart, the fulness of God's nature. What fulness that is: "the effulgence of his glory and the expression of his substance" (Heb 1: 3) there in a Man, the

One in whom “all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell”, Col 1: 19. Think of that! “God has been manifested in flesh, has been justified in the Spirit, has appeared to angels, has been preached among the nations”. So that there is an opportunity for **all** to appreciate Him; it is not restricted to those who were there at that time, “the consummation of the ages”, but everyone of all ages and times can be brought to God by the glory of that One who came in and who died, who offered Himself as a perfect Sacrifice, **once** offered Himself as a Sacrifice, Rom 3: 25-26. What a thought that is! Then He “has been believed on in the world, has been received up in glory”. Think of Him being received up in glory at the end of that brief period of His life: think of the Lord Jesus being received up in glory, there to fill the universe for God. What a thought that is! The “consummation of the ages”, the climax, that single, brief period on earth when everything was brought together in a single Man, a perfect Man, “God ... manifested in flesh”, “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession”, what a wonderful contemplation that is. As the writer says in Hebrews, “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus”.

Well, I leave these thoughts with the brethren for our contemplation and to stimulate our greater praise and worship. For His Name's sake.

Edinburgh

4th January 2011