

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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WHAT SHALL WE DO FOR OUR SISTER?

Song of Songs 8: 8, 9

RWMcC Dear brethren, I feel that we will need the Spirit with us and in us in what is in mind to enquire into; grace upon grace. We have exercises, as we well know, and there are those we would love to be gathering with us that are not gathering with us at the moment for various reasons. This scripture came to me; it says,

What shall we do for our sister ... ?.

It is a question that I feel laid upon me to enquire into. We are not here to discuss any specific matter exactly - matters belong where they belong - but more to enquire into the principles that might be set out here. We understand from the teaching that the spouse here represents Judah, and the little sister Ephraim, in a day to come when Israel is re-established in her relationships with the Lord; that would be the interpretation of the scripture. But we can apply it to ourselves, and I believe it would be right to say that scriptures such as these have a moral application to us and we can use them. We need help from the Spirit to understand what the enquiry is really about; but it says,

We have a little sister,
And she hath no breasts;

it might appear to be a negative thing. I suggest that it is not that she does not have love but it is not developed, that is the way it is set out here. But then it goes on to say "What shall we do for our sister ... ?". It is not what shall she do for herself, but -

What shall **we** do for our sister
In the day when she shall be spoken for?

I just thought of these exercises that will develop her. The Lord has His claim upon all of us: the assembly is spoken for: she belongs to another; she belongs to Christ, to the Lord Jesus. We belong to Him. There are many that do, and we give thanks for every one. They are part of the assembly, as will be shown in that day when the Lord comes for us.

When we come to verse 9, we have the wall; I would like to enquire what the wall means. Then it says, "We will build upon her a turret of silver". We might enquire what the turret of silver means; what can be brought out there? And then, "And if she be a door". It is another thought; we can enquire about the door, what can be brought out there? Then it says,

And if she be a door,
We will enclose her with boards of cedar.

We might enquire as to the boards of cedar as well.

I trust that this is acceptable and we can get help together.

DJR It is a good exercise. I suppose the state of development has to be looked at. One might say there is some way to go, but there is potential, and God is looking forward to that day when it comes into expression, when she shall be spoken for.

RWMcC That helps. It is an expression we use, perhaps when we are looking at someone of the opposite gender, that they have been spoken for; somebody else has their heart. That is what I was wondering.

DJR I was thinking that the spouse is looking forward to the day when she shall be spoken for. There may be several years in between, but development is steady.

RWMcC That is right, and Mr Coates says that we cannot exactly tell somebody that they should have something that they do not (CAC vol 9 (Outline of the Song of Songs) p209); it is this desire of the spouse - what shall we do? It is not what *she* should do; it is not what we should do *to* her, it what we should we do *for* her. It is to engender an expression of love.

PJW Do you think it helps us to keep the perfection and the beauty of the assembly in mind? The next verse says,

I am a wall, and my breasts like towers.

That would refer to the greatness of what is found in the assembly, do you think? I was wondering if it helps in the exercises you are speaking of to keep that before us. It goes on to speak of peace and Solomon.

RWMcC I am glad you refer to that. It should be said that the brethren are free to bring in whatever scriptures come to mind, including elsewhere in this chapter. Verse 7 speaks about love -

Many waters cannot quench love.

I think what you say about the assembly, and keeping that in mind, is good. The spouse is fully developed in love, as we would speak of it; and I feel individually that I need help about that. She says beyond where we read,

Then was I in his eyes as one that findeth peace, v 10.

It is a great matter to find peace, and to be restful. It is important to be

restful in the exercises of the present time.

DAB Was it your exercise that the object of this concern is a young person?

RWMcC I do feel for the young. When we were young, we went through exercises of a different kind, and maybe young persons are facing exercises in Christian company that they have not had to face before. The exercises are real and we feel them. We all need help; it is not that we just address a few in the company: it is all of us. But the idea is not just that we might be developed; it is,

What shall **we** do for our sister ... ?

DAB That is my thought. The exercises you speak of are apt to cause pre-occupation and confusion, but these verses are about the committal and development of a young person; and if we take our eye off that we might lose a whole generation that is very precious to Christ. It is the Lord who has spoken for them, and is our part to secure the relationship that the Lord seeks with them?

RWMcC I think that is very much so, and it helps us to see the context of the section we have read. There is a need to be building. I think this wall has been linked with Corinthians -

We will build upon it a turret of silver.

It links with 1 Corinthians, and the apostle's exercise to secure them. It says in one place, "ye are not your own ... for ye have been bought with a price", 1 Cor 6: 19, 20. Other exercises are brought out in 2 Corinthians, and he desires that we might be perfected, which might link with the door, chap 13: 11.

PJW I am glad that you say that. Paul says in one of those epistles, "if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved", 2 Cor 12: 15. So as to this question -

What shall we do for our sister ... ?

He was prepared to do whatever he could, whatever it meant in cost to himself, to secure the Corinthians; and there were others with him, Silvanus and Timotheus. He speaks of sending the brother Timotheus to put them in mind of his ways, 1 Cor 4: 17. And he sent Titus to secure their affections for Christ, "a chaste virgin for Christ", 2 Cor 11: 2.

RWMcC Yes, that is very good. Paul says, "I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls", 2 Cor 12: 15.

GCB I did not quite catch your thought as to the expression, "in the

day when she shall be spoken for”.

RWMcC Well, we might say for example of someone who is engaged to be married that they have been 'spoken for'. What was said was helpful, that the little sister belongs to the Lord: she is spoken for Him in principle. And the young ones among us are spoken for, are they not? They belong to the Lord Jesus, and that is really what I was thinking. They have that place in His heart.

GCB We had in an earlier fellowship meeting in this area the Lord's love for the local assembly. I suppose we all feel a lack of maturity personally, and we speak of this very feelingly.

RWMcC I do agree with you about that very much. We must be with the Lord in regard to this.

JRW It is interesting that the question is raised, and two answers are given; and they both involve protection, it seems to me. Is there anything for us in that?

RWMcC I am glad that you suggest that. The spouse is motivated by love; that is the key to this. If it refers to Judah and Ephraim, there had been rivalry; but there is no rivalry here, it is pure affection for the little sister, knowing what she means in principle to the Lord. I think you are right: there is something that is looked for, and then there is something that can be done, to build upon that. What you say as to protection would be one of the features of the wall and the door; it would be one of the ways in which you could apply them.

JRW When a young brother or sister takes their place in relation to the breaking of bread, I remember it being said that at that time of committal, the enemy's attack becomes more pointed and strong. It suggests that the day when she shall be spoken for is when the enemy comes in like a flood to turn the young person aside. But there are these thoughts of protection which come in; redemption, I think, you have already touched upon, so that they belong to the Lord; they have been bought with a price. Then the boards of cedar might speak of the way that the precious qualities of the manhood of Christ might be brought before the young heart. These things would be a protection from the dangers around, would they not?

RWMcC Yes, I think that would be right.

RDP-r Are you exercised that we have a responsibility towards one another to maintain the whole thought? I was thinking of the end of Judges when a whole tribe was almost blotted out of Israel, and they

ask, “What shall we do ... ?”, Judg 21: 16. There was concern that those who had escaped might be provided for, so that the whole thought of the twelve tribes might not be lost.

RWMcC Yes, that is right as to the decimation of the population of Benjamin. As to responsibility, it is very much on my mind. We are not here to tell one another what to do, but we need to enquire as to what these things mean.

What shall we do for our sister ... ?

implies not just a responsibility - there is that, but there is also a desire, a longing; we just long to promote these features with one another.

RDP-r I was thinking of, “am I my brother's keeper” (Gen 4: 9), and that is the complete opposite of what we are speaking about now, is it not? We should be looking for all to “arrive ... at the full-grown man” (Eph 4: 13); there is what carries everything through to completion, do you think?

RWMcC Yes, very much; and it is a very challenging exercise for me, at any rate.

DJR The matter of protection which has been mentioned is so important, because it says in Hosea that “Ephraim is joined to idols: leave him alone”, chap 4: 17.

RWMcC Yes, it is a very sobering thing, our responsibility to one another, and the need to be protective. It is not exactly that the little sister is presented as irresponsible, but immature in the sense that there is what needs to be developed.

HTF “What shall we do” introduces a little pause which is so important. We may feel very weak but it is an opportunity for the Lord to come in in relation to a matter, and direction may come out of that. All of that is divinely provided resource for the situation.

RWMcC Yes, that is right. It is not that we are agitated about a situation; we should not be agitated. The Lord will come in.

TJH Is spiritual discernment needed “If she be a wall ... if she be a door”? So we should be looking for certain features which can be built upon?

RWMcC Yes. “If she be a wall ... if she be a door”: they are features we should look for. Would they represent the work of God?

TJH The work of God is there with our young ones. It is a positive thought here; it does not say it might not be so, but if it is so, we might

build upon it. We should look for these features, do you think?

RWMcC Yes, I think so. We cannot build upon anything but the work of God, can we?

PJW These are 'ifs' of consequence, are they not, not 'ifs' of doubt? So, as was said, we look for the work of God with our young, and with all of us, and link on with it. If we regarded one another in that way, I do not know if there would be the exercises among us that there are.

RWMcC Yes, that would be right. We are not all young but we all need help; we all need encouragement. Things do not come automatically; we do not just become good when we reach a certain age; we know that if we look back. Exercises will be with us until the end of our lives.

PJW A brother said in the gospel that, at first, you get everything for nothing, but from that point on you get nothing without exercise.

RWMcC Well, that is good.

DJW Paul has already been referred to, but in that chapter about what might be called collective growth; it is not segregation, but we are all in it together: "that we may be no longer babes, tossed and carried about by every wind of *that* teaching", which is unstable, "but, holding the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things", Eph 4: 14, 15. I wondered whether that would help us together to develop in the truth.

RWMcC Yes, that is very good, to develop together. We are not segregated by age or in any other way, but we enquire together, we feed together, we are to grow up together. I find it very, very testing to speak of these things.

TJC Do we see this worked out when Paul descended to Eutychus in Acts 20? He went down and enfolded him in his arms, v 10. Do you think the principle of this is in Paul's action?

RWMcC I am glad that you referred to that. Paul exemplified this; he showed love really; he took him up, and he was close enough to say his life was in him. That is a good example.

TJC It is very testing. If you take account of someone who has become cold in their affections, it is a test to bring in the warmth and the feeling that is required. We see that in the way that Paul descended, and enfolded him in his arms, and brought comfort into the company as well.

RWMcC Yes, that is good; and that would be the effect, they "were no little comforted", v 12. "They brought away the boy alive".

PJW We speak of the cedars sometimes as referring to the saints, but a cedar has a very deep root; it goes down and down. I was thinking of the Man of Philipians 2 and linking to the suggestion as to Paul; he went down and down to secure Eutychus.

RWMcC Yes, the cedar-wood is seen in the type along with the scarlet and the hyssop in the healing of the leper, Lev 14: 4. You might say that we have the greatest and most noble of the trees, and the humility of the hyssop that springs out of the wall, 1 Kings 4: 33. These things are to be with us, are they not? Cedar-wood has a lovely pattern and colour, and a fragrance too. These things would beautify the little sister, and adorn the door. We might enquire about these things, what the door means. We have spoken rightly about what is protective; there is also the thought of the door being a way in, a doorway into the knowledge of God. The Lord speaks of Himself as “the door” (John 10: 7), and He is really magnifying and beautifying that feature. What you say as to the One who went down is very fine.

DJW Luke 10 also helps with these thoughts. There was the man that had the need, and it was easy to point out that there was a need there, but the challenge was what could be brought in to help him; and there was the good Samaritan who had the oil and the wine. I feel it is easy to see a need, but I feel challenged as to what resources there are to meet it.

RWMcC Well, I agree. As we enquire, we can get some direction as to that. It required action, it required the good Samaritan to act. As we often say, divine Persons bring with them everything that is needed to meet the situation. He had the oil and wine, and the beast to carry him on. It is a really pressing exercise I feel, whether we have these things, and know how to apply them.

HTF The question, “What shall we do ... ?” comes into Acts 2: 37, when they ask the apostles, “What shall we do, brethren? And Peter said to them, Repent and be baptised, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God may call”. I was wondering if this related to what our scripture is speaking of?

RWMcC Yes, I thought about that, “What shall we do ... ?”. It was a very healthy exercise, was it not? And it was blessed of the Lord and the Spirit. That would have been an exercise about their *own* needs; but Mr Taylor says, 'The true proof of genuine love to Christ is that you

think of others', JT vol 82 p51. So that would develop from it, would it not?

DAB There are two claims here. The spouse speaks of their sister, and then there is someone who is speaking for her, or will speak for her: a day will come when another will have a stronger claim on their sister than they do. I feel that in relation to the way that we conduct ourselves. My mother used to ask, when we spoke together about exercises, 'Do the brethren not remember that the fellowship is the Lord's?'. We are apt to say we have a right to do things; but the assembly is concerned with *the Lord's* rights only.

RWMcC Yes, I think that is most important. If we stand insisting on our rights, we are Laodicean. I understand that this is what the word Laodicea means, the people's rights. It is a very dangerous direction to go in; the world is going in the direction of rights, and they are finding that the various rights conflict. We are hearing of people going into some persecution because of their stating what is the truth according to Scripture, and it was deemed to be against other people's rights.

DAB The spouse plans to augment what will be for someone else. She might make her more attractive to the one who is speaking for her.

RWMcC Absolutely; that is a very important part of our enquiry. She is seeking only to build up and enhance and beautify the little sister, and bring out these features. We have an appreciation of redemption, silver speaking about redemption - as far as I can see that is supported by Scripture. And we could not build a turret of silver if we did not have an appreciation of redemption ourselves.

TJH I was going to ask you about the 'we':
What shall we do for our sister ... ?

We have a male and female speaker. I was wondering if it was both of these, and if we are to do something for one another, it would be together with the Lord and in accord with Him.

RWMcC I think that is a good suggestion, and would link with what was said earlier as to making room for the Lord to come in. We cannot do anything without the Lord; we would tremble at the thought of doing anything that the Lord was not supporting; we need Him for everything.

PM I am just thinking of what Paul says to the Corinthians about what they were in the divine sight, and what Christ had been made to them, 1 Cor 1: 30. One of those features is redemption, and he works on that and builds a wall on it.

RWMcC Yes, the Corinthians had already been secured, and already belonged to the Lord. They needed help and he brings out those features: “But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness, and redemption” - is it that expression you are thinking of? He brings these things in as landmarks in their soul history; so that the sovereign work of God can be built upon. Paul had to work with the Corinthians, they needed love, and the apostle was prepared to do that for the glory of Christ - “most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls...”.

DJR That is important, because I might see something which I believe needs adjustment, and I might get worked up about it. I might say that I have got to do something for the Lord, and I might be so set that I act without the Lord, and, in so doing, do damage to the “little sister”.

RWMcC Well, a lot of damage has been done over the years. It is not possible to repair some of that damage; we need to carry that feelingly. What you say is right, and it is coming to me particularly, that what we do must be with the Lord. I am not a free agent; I cannot just act as I think or like; even if my thought *were* right. Even the Lord even did not act like that: “but then, not my will, but thine be done”, Luke 22: 42. We must always be with Him.

MRC It is interesting that in Genesis the creation appears to be the action of one divine Person, but when it comes to the formation of what speaks of Christ, we have, “Let us make man”, Gen 1: 26.

RWMcC That is interesting. It was not only important, but it was so precious to the mind of God. The hymn writer says,

And see Thine own great thoughts in making man. (No 61)

MRC I have been thinking about John 17 and the Lord speaking to the Father. It is as if there was a certain desire that there should be that formation after Christ in the saints: “the men whom thou gavest me out of the world. They were thine, and thou gavest them me”, John 17: 6. There seems to be a desire such as we have here, “what shall we do ...?”, in the day that they were spoken for. The Lord is with the Father now. Do you think we need to be with the Lord in exercise in a similar way as to how things are to be worked out?

RWMcC Very much so. It would be a disaster if we try to do things without the Lord. These are His things. We might say that, and we might sometimes think it is taking high ground, but they *are* the Lord's things, and we must be careful in relation to them.

AW Would it be right to say that there is a family atmosphere here? I was wondering if it would be right to say that family feelings come out here. I was thinking of Mary and Martha, and the family feelings that come in their concern for their brother in John 11. They realised that they could not do anything of themselves but committed it to the Lord.

RWMcC That is right. They sent a message, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick" (v 3); they brought the Lord into the circumstances. The Lord may seem to delay; He remained two days in the place where He was, but Lazarus was four days in the tomb when He arrived; so perhaps the Lord could not have made it in time even so, speaking reverently and carefully. But they brought the Lord into the circumstances. The family side is very important to our subject. The family relationship is there all the time, and we belong to one another; you look after one another in the family.

JRW Say a little more about your thought about affection, and the exercise there should be for that to be developed? How do we develop affection in one another for Christ? It would be affection for Christ that would be the impetus for what we are speaking about: how can we develop in that ourselves, and then help others in it?

RWMcC I am challenged as to how we can do that. Mr Taylor said that it is not implied that she did not have love, but that it needed developing, JT vol 37 p140. I know there is the side of example: if I have affection for Christ then others might see that; I might see it in you and have a desire after it. But this is the kernel of the issue: how do we do it? How can we engender affection for Christ in one another? I think it is building on these features, the turret of silver. It is not insubstantial; it is ornamental, probably, but it is substantial. An appreciation of redemption would be one thing.

JRW Yes; it is only affection for Christ that will lead my steps in the right direction, in the direction where His interests are, where He finds His affections. It is only as I have affection for Him that I will move in that direction, otherwise I will be led astray by the pressures you referred to. I feel that, the conflict of that. It is only as I keep my eyes on Christ that I will be able to move in a right direction, and then we may be able to help one another.

RWMcC In the beginning of the Song of Songs, it says,

A bundle of myrrh is my beloved unto me;
He shall pass the night between my breasts., chap 1: 13.

Mr Coates speaks of that as Christ in His suffering love, held in the

affections of His own, CAC vol 7 p32. I think that links with what you are bringing out.

DAB It recalls what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12: 19, “we speak before God in Christ; and all things, beloved, for your building up”. There is nothing unnatural suggested; there is no lack; it is just that things need to develop. Paul said that the authority he had been given was for building up, 2 Cor 13: 10. And “love edifies” (1 Cor 8: 1); it is one of the thoughts in Corinthians, is it not?

RWMcC I was struck by that: it is not just that Paul had an impression he ought to do that, but he had authority to build them up. It is a very important feature.

PJW It also speaks about “provoking to love and good works” (Heb 10: 24); it is very easy to provoke something else in my brother or my sister. To provoke to love and good works is quite an exercise.

RWMcC Yes, it is. Promoting these features in one another is something the Lord expects of us.

RDP-r Paul speaks of “the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me”, Gal 2: 20. I wonder if that is the turret of silver, the One who gave Himself, who shed His blood for me to secure my redemption, and to secure yours. We can stimulate one another by occupying ourselves with the One who gave Himself.

RWMcC Yes, occupation with Christ should have that effect. My exercise relates particularly to this question -

What shall we do for our sister ... ?

But we have needs ourselves too. How good it is to have brethren that do this for us, that can help us. We can see how these features develop.

RDP-r I think that occupation with love will develop love.

RWMcC Yes. Love is the key to this chapter.

KJM I was thinking of what was said: this situation is normal. To have a little sister, and to want to do something for her, is not abnormal. It is what was referred to as a family situation.

RWMcC That is good, and it is important to see that; there is no criticism of anyone, but it is so that the divine work might promote development in a right direction. So that, when she is spoken for, she is mature. How wonderful it is that there should be a full response.

DJW John's teaching brings in the family side of things. It has been referred to already that this question is about a family relationship. Did Mr Darby say at the end of his life, 'let not John's ministry be forgotten in insisting on Paul's', Letters vol 3 p 223? I was wondering whether the family affection and atmosphere that are seen in John's ministry go along with Paul's ministry: they go together, do they?

RWMcC Yes. That is right; the two ministries go along together, they complement each other. The Lord on the cross commits His mother into John's hands (John 19: 26); that is giving the family side its right place, is it not?

PJW Now say a little more about the door.

RWMcC Well, we are enquiring together, but when we look in the ministry about these things, you find different impressions brought out. It does not exactly speak of just *one* thing. Mr Coates speaks about the door into the knowledge of God (CAC vol 7 p211); that would be an important aspect of the door, a way in. The Lord says to Philadelphia, "I have set before thee an opened door", Rev 3: 8; it is the way into all that God has in mind for us. There would be that principle; and then there is the idea of protection. In one place, the doors were "shut where the disciples were, through fear of the Jews", John 20: 19. A door is a way in and out, it is for movement.

PJW We have been reading Nehemiah, and what has impressed us is that what Israel committed themselves to in a broken and ruined day was on the same level as what was set up at the beginning, under Moses and under David - the singers and the Nethinim, and the doorkeepers. They did not lower the level; they did not say that things had gone to pieces and they could not quite reach that standard; they committed themselves to the full thought as it was in David's day, and from Moses's time - the law of Moses.

RWMcC Some of the doorkeepers were sons of Korah, 1 Chron 9: 19. They had a real sense of mercy. We talk about feelings, and we have to be careful about feelings, but we can have right feelings, right desire; and we come to these things with a sense of redemption and a sense of mercy. We cannot take these things up as being on any high ground.

PJW We may think of doorkeepers keeping things out, but we should rather think of them as bringing things in on a right basis.

RWMcC Yes; the doorkeeper is more welcoming than a closed door!

MRC The thought is personal here - "If she be a door". Is there a

certain personal responsibility as to how I hold myself? I remember a brother saying once that you open the door to the Lord and His people; and you can close it to what is displeasing to Him. Is it important that I seek to hold myself and my affections rightly for the Lord?

RWMcC Yes, that is important. I think as to these two features, the wall and the door, they are as was said 'ifs' of consequence; as much as to say that these are the features you would look for - "If she be a wall"; "if she be a door", and then you can build upon them. It says, "let each see how he builds upon it" (1 Cor 3: 10); that is quite a challenge. Holding ourselves for the Lord in that way is important.

MRC Would you say something as to enclosing the door with boards of cedar?

RWMcC Cedar is a very beautiful wood, with a lovely grain and colour. It is a wood that carries its fragrance for a long time. It seems to me that it has an ornamental aspect; the cedar tree speaks of Christ. It is bringing out these features of Christ, the beauty of what He is in His humanity; and she is enclosed with that. The temple was built of stone; and then it was boarded out with cedar, and then it was overlaid with gold 1 Kings 6: 9. These are all precious features.

MRC I wondered about dignity - "excellent as the cedars", Song of Songs 5: 15? If you look at the Lord's people, there is a beauty and dignity about them, which is of Christ.

RWMcC Yes, "dignity" is a good description - the features of Christ coming out in the saints.

RDP-r Is that what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, to attract them? Before he takes up any matter with them, he dignifies them according to the Lord's thought in relation to them?

RWMcC Can you please read that to us?

RDP-r "Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ, by God's will, and Sosthenes the brother, to the assembly of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ", 1 Cor 1: 1-3. And then he says that they came short in no gift, v 7. It seems as though he would write the people up. I wondered if we should confer on the saints the highest dignity possible.

RWMcC Yes, I think that is right. That is one of the things that impresses you as you go through Corinthians, how there were very

deep matters to address, but Paul addresses the saints so lovingly, and dignifies them. He does not have any lesser view of them than what they are before the Lord, before God.

RDP-r Do you think that, with all the work he went through in Corinth, the objective was to bring them all through?

RWMcC As was said, he might be less loved. He was on the line of John the baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease", John 3: 30.

DAB I am reminded that Nehemiah refers to the "holy city", Neh 11: 1. If we speak of what is to be protected, it is holy; and it is not just to be protected from the wicked world outside, but from fleshly activity even in the company. Young people are exposed where things are allowed below the dignity of fellowship.

RWMcC I think that is true and might link with the thought of a wall. The wall might be seen as protective, to keep out what is wrong, but it is to keep in what is for Christ in an exclusive way. There was a path all round the wall in Nehemiah's day, and they walk it in the sense of fellowship.

DAB I was thinking that we might think it was a good idea just to have a wall, but a city serves no purpose if nobody can come in. Here we have someone who has a right to come in; she will be spoken for. So there has to be a door. The Lord has a right to come in, but the question is about what else I might propose to admit through that door.

RWMcC Everything that comes in through that door has to pass by those boards of cedar, the dignity and worth of Christ seen in the saints.

DJW I was thinking of that scripture, "God is faithful, by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord", 1 Cor 1: 9. Does the dignity of that link to the cedar, and help us in relation to our conduct in the house of God?

RWMcC Yes, that is very important. There is a big responsibility to be mature ourselves.

TJH I was thinking that this door is enclosed in the same way as those in Solomon's house, which might speak about how each of us is to be clothed in all the worth of Christ. It is not just a door, but it is enclosed in what belongs to Christ.

RWMcC Yes that would be right. I think we are seeing the importance of the door, and the wall. It is not just a door, it is enclosed; it is something attractive. We would be attracted to it.

JRW The Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as “the door”; “the door of the sheep”. He speaks of them going in and out and finding pasture; these are precious thoughts.

RWMcC He is the true door, and if the little sister is a door, if these features are to be seen, and enhanced and embellished, given dignity, that is the character we would look for - it is what is of Christ that is magnified in that way.

JRW I was also thinking of Exodus 12, where there was blood on the door-posts and the lintel, v 7. So that what goes through that door has to pass by what that blood speaks of. I wondered if that would link the side of redemption, and the silver, with the door.

RWMcC That is good; the blood is a vital matter there, and I feel challenged -

What shall we do for our sister ... ?

How can we promote these features? It is not just that we observe a door or a wall. It is almost as if to say that is not enough; there must be more: there must be these adornments. And the turret of silver is a mature and rich impression to me of redemption.

Can we show love; can we develop these features? If there are things that need adjusting, the first thing is whether I can show an example. If I can promote an appreciation of redemption, and of the dignity and beauty of Christ, surely that is what will push aside what hinders. We could say that it needs people who are part of the solution! I cannot solve somebody else's problem, exactly, but if I can promote these precious features, they will gain an ascendancy. That is my impression; that is what I would like to promote. Love would promote these features and put aside these other things.

PJW To the Galatians, who were really undermining the foundations of Christianity, Paul says, “my children, of whom I again travail in birth until Christ shall have been formed in you”, Gal 4: 19. I was thinking how he could travail, as in child-bearing, and what that means.

RWMcC We were reminded about the matter of travail recently, and the exercises Paul went through that there might be that which was formed after Christ in the saints.

AM I was wondering if the spouse really has the answer to the question when she says “our sister”; would that not convey dignity and affection?

RWMcC I think that is very good. She is not being derogatory in speaking of “a little sister”; it is affection, protective affection. And “our sister” - she is motivated by desire and love, is she not; to secure what is for Christ in her sister?

AW Could you open up how they seem to be together - reference was made to “our sister”; and you have referred to what should “we” do? In a practical way, how are we together in these exercises?

RWMcC That is a great challenge. You are thinking that we are not to be working at cross-purposes; do we need to have the Lord as the director of the work?

AW I was thinking that we all get our own thoughts, and we all want to put everything right; these are persons who are together with one objective.

RWMcC It is not presented as if the little sister is repelling advances; it is what love would draw out in the family setting.

DJR We have in Philippians “joined in soul, thinking one thing”, chap 2: 2.

RWMcC We have referred to some of these things already - the 'going-down mind', that would help us. Then that chapter speaks about thinking “the same thing” and then “one thing”. That is important. I am not saying, as men would, that we are all 'singing from the same hymn-sheet'; it is more fundamental than that. It is not just that we say the same thing with our mouths; but it is divinely inspired affection in us all, and controlled by divine Persons.

PM The Lord says, “having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is **in secret**”, Matt 6: 6. Does that individual exercise underlie unity collectively?

RWMcC Yes, that is so, and I feel challenged by that. How do I pray about matters? We can be found in such circumstances and spread matters out in the Father's presence. We have the liberty to do that; we may not understand them, but we know Somebody who does.

PJW We may think a lot about what we might say to the Lord, but how about listening? Perhaps we do not listen enough.

RWMcC That is important; we have liberty to approach divine Persons at all times. Would the thought of communion enter into that? I am not only praying and giving thanks, I am listening to what divine Persons would have to say to me.

TJC The Lord would lead us on to affection for one another, affection for the truth, affection for the fellowship. I wondered in connection with what you have brought in if what we need to be mature in is affection for the fellowship, affection for divine things, affection for the brethren?

RWMcC They are all very important; affection underlies and is the key to this: affection for God, affection for the truth, affection for the saints.

TJC I was thinking of our local settings, and how much we work out there, and it is important to be together in matters. We see in this section one who saw a need, but the solution to it is a collective matter.

RWMcC That is good.

TJH Would the boards of the tabernacle help us to see how to be together in matters? The boards were joined at the top.

RWMcC They have sockets of silver too, an appreciation of redemption.

We have spoken about this question,
What shall we do for our sister ... ?

And there has been a lot of enquiry. We have spoken of the need to promote the work of God in one another. I have appreciated what has been brought in, and the contributions. It speaks in Ezekiel about things being “as a lovely song” (Ezek 33: 32); and I trust that these things are more than just a “lovely song” to us. I feel the need myself to get help in these things, that we might retain everyone together on right principles; and that love to Christ is motivating us to do this.

Strood

5th March 2016

Key to initials:-

D A Burr, London; G C Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; T J Campbell, Glasgow; MR Cook, Folkestone; H T Franklin, Grimsby; T J Harvey, East Finchley; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; P Martin, Colchester; K J May, Maidstone; R W McClean, Grimsby; R D Painter, Yeovil; D J Roberts, Strood; J R Walkinshaw, Maidstone; P J Walkinshaw, Strood; A Wraighte, Strood; D J Wright, Havering

THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

David J Hutson

1 Timothy 3: 14, 15

1 Corinthians 3: 16, 17; 6: 19 (from “Do”), 20

I was impressed, beloved, on Lord's day with the fact of the presence of the Holy Spirit here, thinking of who that blessed Person is. It says as to Christ, “who is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9: 5), but think of the Holy Spirit and the greatness of who He is. I have often thought - and no doubt others have thought of it - of the place that He has in the divine record. We often speak of the place He has taken in what we speak of as the economy, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit Himself being here in wonderful grace, as we say, in service. And yet, in the divine record, it is the Holy Spirit who is spoken of distinctively at the very beginning of Genesis: “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”, Gen 1: 2. How wonderful that is! And there are other references to Him, to that glorious Person, throughout the Old Testament. It is very wonderful that, though taking such a place as He has done in this divine arrangement, yet there is that distinctiveness of His Person in the divine record in what we speak of as the Old Testament. How great He is! How glorious! Wonderful! I have just been impressed with it. Beloved, I am very dependent in what I say as to the greatness of His Person. If the Holy Spirit is here, God is here, dwelling in the assembly. His presence is to be known also in the local assembly and then to be known individually, hence I read these three scriptures. But I ask myself if I realise the immensity of this present time in which we are when God Himself is dwelling here in the Spirit?. It speaks of God as “dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen, nor is able to see” (1 Tim 6: 16); it speaks of Him as inhabiting eternity (Isa 57: 15); and yet the wonder of it is that that God is dwelling here in the Spirit. It is really too profound for us to comprehend, and yet it is true. But what effect does it have upon us? That is why I read these three scriptures.

Paul was concerned as to Timothy, that he should know how to conduct himself. It is remarkable he puts it that way. He does not say, 'how you ought to conduct yourself', but “how one ought to conduct oneself”; so it applies to each one of us, “how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house”. My house is where I live; God's house is where He dwells, and He dwells in the assembly by the Spirit. Again He is referred to as God, “God's house, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth”. How wonderful that is, that there

is a vessel in which God is able to dwell by the Spirit, and it is so because it is the product of His own work. That house has been built by God Himself, by the Spirit, and it is here, and God is dwelling in His house, in the assembly, by the Spirit. How wonderful that is!

And it finds its expression in our local companies. Paul is speaking to the Corinthians, and here he uses the word, "Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God," - He is speaking to the saints as together - "and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?". It is not that we can speak of being the local assembly; it is hardly necessary to say that now in this day of fragmentation. How many more there are in this place who belong to the assembly, who are not available to us! Thank God! Do we value the local assembly enough? Do I value enough that I have been brought where the light of the assembly is so that I can know something of the blessedness of what it is that God is dwelling by the Spirit in the local assembly? As I say, we cannot claim to be that, but we can know something of the blessedness of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit as we come together and have some experience of assembly life. As we were reminded, I think, on Lord's day, the Lord's supper would introduce us into it. We come together individually, and we celebrate the Lord's supper. The Lord Jesus comes in, and we honour Him, but He comes in in view of finding what is here that He can identify with Himself as of the assembly. So, as soon as He comes in among us, we are expanded in our hearts and thoughts and go beyond what we are just locally, and we think of Him in relation to what He has in that for which He has delivered Himself up: "Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it", Eph 5: 25. He comes that He might find something of that character for Himself. We prove the reality of it as we are dependent on the Holy Spirit. So there again, having that experience, we immediately turn in acknowledgement of the presence of, and the worship due to, the Holy Spirit Himself as we proceed in the service of God. How these things should be living with us! I feel that for myself, that they are not just the routine movements on the Lord's day morning, but something fresh and real. I think I can say for myself I had a distinct sense on Lord's day, perhaps as not always realised, of the reality of these things in freshness and power, and all due to the presence here of the Holy Spirit. "Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" So in the local assembly we prove something of the reality of that and what accrues to God Himself as the result of His presence here.

But then there is the other side, very searching to us: "Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you ...?".

It is wonderful that Paul speaks of that! We cannot say, each one of us, that the Holy Spirit is in us without measure; that could only be said of Christ. Nevertheless, it says, “Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God; and ye are not your own?”. How this would affect us! It is not a matter which is only true just at a certain time of the week or when we are gathered with the saints, when we come to the meeting, as we speak, but it is all the time. “Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God; and ye are not your own? for ye have been bought with a price”: these precious bodies, as they are at present, although mortal and although to be changed into bodies of glory, “into conformity to his body of glory”, Phil 3: 21. “Ye have been bought with a price”: what a price has been paid in order that these bodies might be “the temple of the Holy Spirit ... which ye have of God”.

And so it says, “glorify now then God in your body”. Again, as I say, it is not related to a particular time or a particular place, but it is all the time; so it comes as a challenge to us as to whether our movements here are in any sense for the glory of God. It is a challenge: just our normal occupation at work or domestically, whatever it be, is there something in it which God Himself can find His pleasure in? It says, “glorify now then God in your body”. I believe that means that there would be in it, in our bodies, some expression of what He found such infinite and perfect delight in in the life of Jesus. I find it a challenge, beloved, but I would encourage ourselves tonight that it might be so. It would be for God's glory, but it would be for our blessing and for our infinite delight too to feel that there is something here, even at the present time, which is for God's pleasure, which He finds as we realise the way these bodies have been taken account of, as being purchased at such a price, in order that the Holy Spirit might be here and there might be in them that which is expressed for the pleasure of God Himself.

I feel so searched in what I say. I feel the reality of the fact that “the word of God is ... sharper than any two-edged sword”, Heb 4: 12. It strikes home as much to me as to any, but I trust it may be for His glory and pleasure as we take account of these things.

In the Name of the Lord Jesus.

Word in a Ministry Meeting, Edinburgh
16th February 2016

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS HELP

Robert C Trotter

2 Thessalonians 2: 13-17

Jude 19-21

2 Timothy 1: 13-14

I had these scriptures in mind, beloved hearers, and our brother's word has confirmed my thought a little. I am not able to open up as our brother has in relation to the presence of the Holy Spirit and His part in the Godhead, but what I had more in mind is the way that the Spirit is a help to us in our wilderness pathway. So in Thessalonians we have, "But we ought to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, that God has chosen you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth". We are in a wilderness pathway, and that is what tests us. But God has provided richly for the wilderness pathway, and the ups and the downs of it. God has richly provided for that, and that would be, speaking reverently, in the Spirit. I often quote that word in the minor prophets, "The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and my Spirit, remain among you", Hag 2: 5. That is what our brother has been labouring at, that the Spirit remains. So it speaks here about "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth", these two matters: how important they are. But it goes on to say, "whereto he has called you by our glad tidings, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm, and hold fast the instructions which ye have been taught".

The Thessalonians were a young company; Acts 17 would bring out how young they were. It gives some idea of the entering in that Paul had to them: "And according to Paul's custom he went in among them, and on three sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures, opening and laying down that the Christ must have suffered and risen up from among the dead, and that this is the Christ, Jesus whom I announce to you", v 3. It was according to his custom; what a service he rendered to them. I cannot say much about it, but I just have this in mind that there is help available to us for our pathway with its ups and downs. Some know more about the rigours of the way than others. The wilderness pathway of the children of Israel would teach us much as we think of it.

But how favoured we are, because it says here in Thessalonians, "But we ought to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, that God has chosen you from the

beginning". Acts 17 was their beginning; what it is to have a right beginning. They had a right beginning - Paul saw to that. We know, of course, that the end is vital as well. There is the beginning, but there is what is in between, and that is what I really have in mind in relation to the Spirit remaining among us; how we need that. I need it. Our brother has been stressing the need of it while we are in assembly. But we need it day by day too, and He is with us: God has richly provided for us.

I read in Jude. The references to the Spirit in the epistle are few, but here he says, "These are they who set themselves apart, natural men, not having the Spirit"; how sad that is! We are in the midst of a line of things that has been spoken of as apostate, a giving up. How busy the enemy is in relation to giving up. But it says here, "But ye, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God". "Praying in the Holy Spirit ...": we pray privately too; praying is a wonderful matter, praying to God. It is a line of dependence; it was seen so much in our Lord Jesus. In Luke's gospel there are many references to Him in prayer. So, as it says here, "But ye, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit". I would love to know more of that. There may be things naturally that we desire and we may pray about them. But are we praying in the Holy Spirit? "Keep yourselves in the love of God"; what things these are, beloved brethren. The teaching of Romans is that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, chap 5: 5. But here it says, "praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God". It points to an ability by the Spirit. "Keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life". There are the great matters of mercy and eternal life. I was impressed by these things. There is what is natural, not having the Spirit: how sad that is. "But ye, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit..." We think of the prayers of many, and Daniel comes to mind especially; it was characteristic of him. In chapter 6 where it says, "prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime", v 10. He was driven into God's presence, but he was a praying man characteristically. Sometimes there are things that drive us into God's presence to pray; but how are we characteristically?

Think of the Spirit descending as a dove on the Lord Jesus; how wonderful! I was impressed with that character or type of the Holy Spirit

in relation to Noah, Gen 8: 6-12. We see Noah's tenderness with regard to the dove. He put out his hand and took her to him.

I would just like to touch on 2 Timothy verse 14, "Keep by the Holy Spirit that dwells in us the good deposit entrusted"; wonderful matter! As our brother said, we are vessels of weakness and frailty, but the Spirit is here. I think it has been said that that is some reference here to the new covenant. I feel my measure as to these things, dear brethren, but I trust what has been said may be an encouragement to us; how I feel I need it anyway, day by day, for the effort of the enemy is to draw us away, to give up, so that we have to keep the deposit "by the Holy Spirit". The Spirit would help us; He would help us to keep these things. It is right to be a depository. There is that in the believer that is divinely given; what we have along these lines is what God has given Himself. There is to be a return, but as one could say, "of that which is from thy hand have we given thee", 1 Chron 29: 14. But I was just impressed with these scriptures. There is treasure in the earthen vessel, a vessel of frailty.

I leave these few simple words with us; may we be encouraged, for His Name's sake.

Word in meeting for ministry, Edinburgh

16th February 2016

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Bert Taylor

**Psalm 23: 1 (“Jehovah is my shepherd”)
John 10: 3-5 (to “stranger”), 14-15, 27-29**

I wanted to speak, dear brethren, about the Shepherd. If you look at the psalm, David just says, “Jehovah is my shepherd”, and he pauses. What David is trying to impress upon us is that the *Person* that does it is greater than what He does. We may dwell on His kindness and grace, but it all centres on who He is. It is the Lord that is my Shepherd. The disciples in John 21, those weary fisherman, after a night's fishing, feeling helpless, go on the shore, and what do they find? They find a fire of coals, v 9. It must have puzzled them. They had been all night and they come to the shore and there is everything they needed. And John had said, “It is the Lord”, v 7. And that changed everything for him - changed his whole life, and changed the life of Peter. What would they have done if they had not had that experience, “that it was the Lord”, v 12? You see the power these men had in the beginning of the Acts because they realised that this our faith is not only in what He has done but in who He is.

We learn that gradually in our lives, even in our very young lives; very early we learn that there are things that even our parents cannot help us about: we come to find the only Person that can help us is Jesus. Did you not realise that when you felt you were a sinner? Did you not realise that when you were convicted by the awfulness of your condition as one of Adam's race, born in sin? Did you not realise that nobody else could help you, until you come to see that the Lord died for you?

But what David is speaking about is that He lives for me as He is made room for; and so you find that in the psalm as you go through it. These beautiful pastures; how pleasant they must have been: the Lord had been there. It was the Lord who watered those pastures. It was the Lord that set up that table, that gave glory to all that He did. We need to be impressed with that, dear brethren. He is not only a Priest - there were many priests - but He is the great High Priest, Heb 4: 14. He is not only the Mediator, but there is only one Mediator of God and men, and that is Christ Jesus, 1 Tim 2: 5. I would like to leave that impression upon us, that He is greater than all that He has done. We learn these things, as I have said, through our experiences. And the earlier we

learn them and take them to heart the better.

It reminded me of Jacob. At the end of his life he was at his best, because he came to see that Joseph was still alive (Gen 45: 26), and he speaks of “the God that shepherded me all my life long”, chap 48: 15. He must have gone over his history, and seen the sorrow of those years that he spent with Laban, chaps 29-31. But he came to see that Joseph was still alive. He said, “I will go and see him”, Gen 45: 28. And what he saw was not only what Joseph did but he saw Joseph, the Saviour of the world, the Sustainer of life, the Revealer of secrets, chap 41: 45, note. Typically, he saw the greatness of the Person.

Well, these are experiences, and the Psalm is full of experiences. As I said, there are these green pastures. He restores the soul; who could do that? Only the Lord. We prove through the experiences that we have that, but behind all that He does is the Person. And if we only live on what He does, we are only on the perimeter. It has been said, 'We have not come to a circumference without a centre'. There is a lot in that expression if you just think about it. There are people who are living on the circumference but the circumference only takes its stability from the centre. It all leads back to the centre: the Lord is my Shepherd.

Well, David says, “He restoreth my soul”. It is the Lord that does that. You can never go back on it. That is what He did to those fishermen that I spoke about: He restored their soul. “He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake”, v 3. Then he goes through the valley of the shadow of death. We often speak about that at burials, but it is more than that. David learned these things in his experiences. I may say he learned them when he was very young - that the shepherd was the Lord, and the Lord was his shepherd.

But you think of David, a youth before Saul, having heard Goliath roaring at the Israelites, 1 Sam 17: 23, 32. Saul says to him, 'You cannot go; you are only a youth', v 33. Well, David says, 'I know a God that delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear', v 37. He knew the Person that did the work, and his confidence was in the Person as he picked those five stones out of the brook. Did the stones kill Goliath? One did, but it was the Lord's doing. It was the Lord that pulled David's arm when he fired that stone. David was very convincing to Saul. Saul says, 'You go; just go'. And he went and the stone brought the whole thing down. It was the Lord that did it.

Well, as you go through David's experiences you can see the sorrow that filled his heart when Jonathan left him, 1 Sam 23: 18. It says they wept "until David exceeded", chap 20: 41. What was it going to be? There was the man that he loved - he was left without Jonathan, but he found the cave of Adullam, chap 22: 1. The safest place on earth that day was in the cave of Adullam. Saul was on the way down, Jonathan lost the way, but in the cave of Adullam there arose six hundred men in a very short time, chap 23: 13. David was on the road to the throne through his learning God and proving Him in the circumstances. So he says, "goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of my life", Ps 23: 6. What confidence he had. That is what I would like to impart, confidence not only in the work but confidence in the Person.

That is what you get in John. He commends the Person, the good Shepherd. "To him the porter opens". "He calls his own sheep by name"; He makes it very individual; He knows your needs. The shepherds in this country drive the sheep. The Shepherd here, He goes before them. He was there before David, and He is there before us. In exercises we pass through, He says, "he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out." He leads them out: it is very fine to hear Him calling you by name. Difficulties you may pass through, sorrows that you can hardly meet: He says, 'I know, I know'. Well, that is what He does here. What kind of sheep are we? "All we like sheep have gone astray", Isa 53: 6. Is that still our history? No, that is not John's sheep, you know. It has often been said that John's sheep do not go astray. "My sheep": they belong to Him, and He is never going to let them be led astray. He says, "I am the good shepherd; and I know those that are mine, and am known of those that are mine, as the Father knows me and I know the Father". What wonderful thoughts we are brought into. What a great gathering they are.

But I wanted to speak about this: "My sheep hear my voice". Well, dear brethren, that is something that we have to learn. "My sheep hear my voice", and they will not listen to others. Some of us carry the sorrow of that; we listened to other voices. But is your ear attuned, are your feet on the path? "My sheep hear my voice". We recently had that verse, "thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it", Isa 30: 21. But here the Shepherd is in front. May our eye be kept on the Shepherd, dear brethren. Will I be one of his sheep? Perhaps no animals wander more than sheep, and when they get away

from the fold what a state they get into. You see them on the roads sometimes. They do not know where to go; they are run all over the place. You have to keep in the fold; you have to keep within His voice. "My sheep hear my voice"; and He says, "I know them, and they follow me; and I give them life eternal". What a Shepherd He is! What a flock John is speaking about! He will give them life eternal, and they will never perish. And I think of these words, "and no one shall seize them out of my hand". What confidence it would awaken in our hearts amid the many voices there are. A lot of things are said that should not be said; but, "My sheep hear my voice". "My voice"; the Lord is saying it, and He is saying it loudly and clearly, and would have us to have our ears attuned. That would test the voices; where are they coming from? Where is the source of it all? Well, it is coming from the Shepherd. He has provided for us, in all the circumstances. May we be among those that hear His voice. "And no one shall seize them out of my hand". And He says more than that; He says, "My Father who has given them to me...". How He regards the sheep: the Father's gift!

Thou gav'st us, Father, in Thy love,
To Christ to bring us home to Thee, (Hymn 88).

Think of divine activities. The Father gave Him the sheep; He knew where to put them. Persons often speak of the fact that the Lord died for them: marvellous, glorious fact. But it is equally wonderful, if not more so, that He lives for me. He has gone into heaven itself now to appear before the face of God for us. You will be tested; the devil will test you often as to how bad you are. You can always point and say, 'There is a Man, my Shepherd, who has gone in'. Our great Forerunner - we will see Him there in all His glory.

Well, may our hearts be stimulated to have confidence, dear brethren, confidence in the Shepherd. And know something of the Father's love. The Father has given us to Him. He has placed us in good hands, while "no one can seize out of the hand of my Father."

May we be among those sheep that hear His voice, for His Name's sake.

Word in Ministry Meeting at Kirkcaldy

19th April 2016

THE WOMAN OF SYCHAR

John N Darby

John 4: 1-30

From the beginning of His ministry, the Lord had been the object of the jealousy of men who did not want Him because He came to trouble their peace and their importance according to the world. When the Pharisees had heard it said that Jesus made more disciples than John, the Lord left Judæa and returned to Galilee, so removing every excuse for the hatred of His adversaries. They rejected the light and their evil heart could not bear the presence of God in goodness.

Thus, already rejected of men, Jesus goes to Galilee, a despised country far from Jerusalem, which the glory of God had chosen to make His centre. He had to pass through Samaria, of which the inhabitants, an abomination to the Jews, had associated their idolatries with the service of the true God. Jesus had no other rest in this world than to do the will of His Father; weary with the way, He found nothing for His rest in the heat of the day but by the well of Jacob. He asks to drink of a woman; she is astonished at this, seeing that He was a Jew, for she knew that the Jews despised the Samaritans. Jesus at once addresses the question of His mission and what He Himself had to give. Full of goodness, His heart is not stopped either by the conduct of this woman, or by the fact that she was a Samaritan; He speaks of the gift of God and the living water which He had to give. The woman understands nothing of it. It is so with us all: "There is not the man that understands", Rom 3: 11.

It is important that we should pay attention not only to this, that the heart has no understanding at all, but to *why* this is so. When Jesus Himself speaks to us, why do we not understand? It is that, at the bottom of it, the conscience is not attracted by what Jesus says, though the attention of the natural man be perhaps aroused. The woman objects that Jesus has nothing to draw with; she was preoccupied with other things than what Jesus was wanting to say; her heart was in its daily occupations; the burden of her circumstances weighed on her. It is so with us all. Nevertheless, Jesus speaks in a clear, straightforward and purposeful way; the things which He says are important, but His words reveal the state of our heart. Preoccupied with the world, with business, with money, it does not understand anything of the words of Christ. Only the goodness of God can deliver it from bondage and

enlighten it. Man by his fall is without God in the world, and he has a heavy burden to bear. In these circumstances, God is only good in his eyes when He gives him something for the present life; and that is why he does not understand what God says, for he judges not according to God's thought, but according to his earthly preoccupations, in the midst of which he can neither understand nor taste the things of God. This is also the secret of the little progress that believers themselves make in spiritual things. God's things are not understood when the heart of a Christian only appreciates them according to its own needs. The things of the earth being laid hold of by a fallen heart, its cup is already too full for God to be able to add anything to it.

God offers you eternal life, but that is not the thing which preoccupies you now; you therefore have no need of it; it is your needs of the moment which preoccupy you and govern you. One would indeed like heaven for later on, but for the moment it seems more important to enrich oneself and raise one's family.

But God, to make Himself heard, produces a need in the conscience; He gives to the soul the conviction of sin. Then it cannot fail to know that God has been there, for only He can reach the conscience. Jesus lays hold of this woman's conscience in showing her that He knows thoroughly what she is and all that she has done. Now the conscience has a need; for this woman it concerns a God who is present and speaking to her. The need is current and pressing; she cannot put things off until later. When God has taken hold of the conscience, pleasures or worries cannot hush it up any more; the matter must be dealt with. It spoils all our pleasures and we cannot get rid of it, because it wants to be satisfied. One feels that eternity is at stake and that one must be clear in this respect. The conscience is intelligent because it tells us that God is there: "*thou art a prophet*".

God wants to do with us; He shows Himself to our souls. A word from Him reveals our terrible condition; but we see it to be *true*, as it is, and it is an immense advantage to see that the things which He has said of us are the truth. Confidence in the word of God is then produced. Jesus manifested Himself to this woman as a prophet, because He told her all that she had done. He does not reproach her for her sins at all, He only speaks to her of them to awaken her conscience and, from the moment He has gained her confidence, He speaks of them no more. He only brings our sins to mind when He draws near to us. Jesus had only shown to the woman one positive sin, but her whole conscience

becomes living. The end is reached; He does not reproach her sin at all, but see how He uses her to be His messenger in the whole city.

In reply to the woman's question, Jesus says: "The *Father* seeks such as his worshippers". He does not want to receive any worship whatever from a sinner. Sinful man would indeed like to put on a good face to God, but God takes no account of it. One must be a child and have the certainty of it to say, "Our *Father*", otherwise it is only hypocrisy. One must know moreover that all God's children have God as Father - "Our Father". I cannot say "our Father" with sinners and then preach to them that if they are not converted they will be lost.

We find three classes of people here: the Jews who had the truth but did not have the Spirit; the Samaritans who had neither the Spirit nor the truth; and finally the true worshippers in Spirit and in truth, God's children, knowing that there are other people who can say with them to Him, "Our Father". Jesus chose this despised Samaritan woman in the midst of a city, who did not know what she worshipped, to reveal Himself to her as the Christ. See how this woman, who an instant before, thought only of her pitcher and the water of the well, has suddenly become intelligent! She understands what the Jews and their priests had not understood. Jesus presents Himself to her as the gift of God. He demands nothing; He *gives*. It is thus evident that the sins which she had committed have not repelled this God who had known her in her sins and who humbled Himself to the point of being indebted for a cup of water to a woman of bad conduct. Does this not prove that God is love and that our sins have drawn out the love of Jesus? The anguished heart, the convicted conscience, having taken confidence in the word of God, find the love of God already manifested and Jesus who speaks to us of the gift of God. There is not a single hope for the soul that feels its sin if God is not uniquely and perfectly love.

Jesus humbles Himself to the point of saying: 'If you had understood that God gives and that the love of God has placed His Son in the position in which you see Me; you would have asked of me and I would have given you the living water'. This gift is inexhaustible; it is a fountain of water springing up unto eternal life; all the needs of your heart will be satisfied.

The woman forgets her pitcher, and runs to the city. Perhaps her family lacked water that day; she thinks no more about it. She is used by the Lord Jesus to announce His Name, because she has had need of the free grace of God. There is nobody, not even an angel, who

can speak of grace like a sinner. And that is how it is that I have been able to preach it to you today.

Translated from '*Le Messager Evangélique*'