

# **A WORD IN ITS SEASON**

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## **CONTENTS**

**Knowing The Time**

Roland H Brown

*Page 1*

**“Behold The Man”**

Paul A Gray

*Page 5*

**Blessings Wherewith We  
Have Been Blessed**

David H Marshall

*Page 10*

**The Divine Standard  
of Love**

*Page 15*

**Extract - The Lord’s Supper**

Joseph Pellatt

*Page 24*

**Little Creatures**

John Laurie

*Page 26*

## **KNOWING THE TIME**

**Roland H Brown**

**Luke 19: 41-44**

**Romans 13:11-14**

We have read locally that word in Thessalonians where the apostle speaks of the day of the Lord coming as a thief. People may say, "Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them", 1 Thess 5: 3. And then he says, "But ye, brethren are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief: for all ye are sons of light", v 4. Those persons in Thessalonica were awaiting God's Son from the heavens, chap 1: 10. They were not asleep and therefore what the apostle said of them would be true, and not only of them, but of all like them. Although that day would come, and will come, as a great shock and surprise to the world around us, it would not be so to them because it was what they were looking for. But when the Lord addresses Sardis in Revelation, He says in chapter 3, "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I shall come upon thee", v 3. That is quite a sobering thing because that is not addressed to the world at large; it is addressed to a local assembly of believers. It is evident that the general apathy of the world had affected the church, so that His coming would be a shock, even for those that were His own.

I thought what an exercise that is, to be intelligent as to the times in which we live. For that intelligence, we need to be near the Lord. We need Him to open it up to us, I think. It is striking how often the Lord refers to this in His own ministry. Here in Luke 12 He says they can forecast the weather; He says, "how is it then that ye do not discern this time?", v 56. Discerning "this time", the time in which we live, is always a challenge as to our nearness to the Lord. We can read in the Scriptures of many times, and they are recorded for the instruction of believers: we can read about the period up to the flood, we can read about the period of the patriarchs, we can read about the journeyings of the children of Israel, we can read about how they were taken captive, how there was a little reviving - what times have passed over the history of the testimony. We can read about the days of the Son of man on earth; we can read about the coming of the Holy Spirit, the establishing of the assembly and its brightest day. Then we can read about the labours of the apostle Paul, what he set up with such energy and vigour, and how the signs of decay were in it even before he departed. He

foresaw that grievous wolves would come in, “not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29), and even, he says, “from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things”, v 30. These things were held at bay while the apostles were alive, but there were going to be different times coming. All the apostles in their writings were anxious to prepare the saints, you might say simply, for what life would be like after they were gone. We can take up the story, how there has been a departure from what was established at the beginning, the period of what is often referred to as the dark ages, when what was here maintained by the Spirit was in obscurity. The hymn writer says,

And night like a pall shrouds the land;            (Hymn 131).

But then, just as there was recovery as in Ezra and Nehemiah's time, so there has been a great recovery of the truth, or perhaps it is more accurate to say, there has been a great recovery of believers to the truth, in the early nineteenth century. Some people speak of it - it is often referred to publicly - as the movement of Mr Darby, but it is very clear, if you look at it, that it was much more than that: it was a movement of the Holy Spirit, affecting brethren at the same time in different places with no outward connection with one another. But persons left that in which they judged God was not, and they sought a scriptural basis for their gathering. They gathered together in great simplicity and in weakness, acknowledging that the Head of the church was in heaven, not on earth. And they gathered together with the desire to maintain conditions in which the Holy Spirit was free. That recovery gained pace under the power of the Spirit. Others followed a good example, and what has come out has been a remarkable opening up of the truth.

Our brother has already referred to hymns that we have in our book, and the remarkable insight contained in them as to what is proceeding in heaven. Where, I ask, do you find that, except in the circle of the truth? You might say, if you look back, that it has been a history of conflict, a sorrowful history of schism. That is how it would appear if you only looked at it outwardly, but what it was in reality, morally, was persons seeking to preserve inviolate a sanctuary for God here on the earth, meeting together on the basis of the Scriptures, seeking their guidance from the word of God, and proving that that was answered in a living ministry and opening up of the truth, and a richness of hymns from which we benefit today. I was thinking of the hymns, because we have heard that almost the last contributor to the Little

Flock hymn book has recently died. And that therefore raises the question that if there was this richness in the opening up of the truth and finding its reflection in the provision of hymns of quality and substance, where is that today? Where is the richness and the fulness that marked the early days of the recovery? We have to say that we are in the days, not simply of the general breakdown from the apostolic church in the Acts, but that the very recovery begun by the Holy Spirit has fallen in our times into decay and departure.

The challenge therefore is peculiarly for the overcomer in those conditions, to maintain conditions for a sanctuary for God, not only against the outward indifference of the world, but against the growing indifference of many that are actually the Lord's people. The Lord, as He came into Jerusalem, in chapter 19 of Luke, was the King coming into His capital. He wept over it, because He foresaw and prophesied as to what would happen in detail to Jerusalem, as indeed it did happen. But it happened as it says in verse 44, because they knew "not the season of thy visitation". They were not aware of the character of the time in which they lived. And so, the apostle says in Romans, "This also, knowing the time, that it is already time that we should be aroused out of sleep". This is not addressed to the world in Romans; it is addressed to believers, who have become affected by the world. I suppose in Rome it was particularly persons who had been delivered from idolatry and its practices, but they may well have carried some of those practices still with them. The apostle reminds them that the character of the time was to govern their walk.

That was the thing that affected me on Lord's day when we read the genealogy in Matthew, that a man gets a reference who was not part of it: "And David begat Solomon, of her that had been the wife of Urias", chap 1: 6. There was no genealogical reason to include his name; I think it is a mark of divine honour, for this man who was so grievously wronged in his lifetime with a wrong that was never ever put right, that he was aware of the time. When he was summoned by David from the battle, he said it was not the time to go down to his house, to lie with his wife and to eat and to drink, 2 Sam 11: 11. He said the army was in the open field, the testimony was under assault, and although the opportunity was there, it was not one that he was going to take. In other words, his understanding of the character of the time was so very different from that of David at that point; it governed him in this life and walk. He gets this honour that his name is mentioned with divine

approval. We get this appeal here that we should be “aroused out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed”. This is not the salvation of our souls, which has been secured, but it is our entrance, actually, into finality. I wonder if that weighs with us?

Our brother has spoken of what is going on in heaven, the activity that is proceeding in heaven, and the distance that has come in between heaven and earth on account of sin. But, dear brethren, we are on the verge of entering into heaven. The Lord is securing, in this time in which we are, a heavenly company. Is He to find, when He comes, that it is enmeshed and entangled in the things of this world, and asleep as far as concerns His presence and His return? Publicly that is the position of the church, and it is very easy for the lethargy of it to creep over us. He says, “let us cast away therefore the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light”. It is a remarkable thing that the light of a coming day is an armour to the believer. As his life is regulated by it, it is something that is taken account of in testimony. It has often been said of a believer walking on this line that people are ashamed to swear in his presence, in the office or the workplace, and if they do, they often apologise for it. Surrounding one whose life is manifestly regulated by the return of Christ is an armour: an armour of light. He says, “let us walk becomingly”, not in these negative things that characterise the age, but in view of the coming of the Lord, so that we can say with the Spirit, “come, Lord Jesus”, (Rev 22: 20) - not only say the words, but that our lives express that desire, that we understand that it is His desire to come for His own, to receive them to Himself, and we live our lives in the recognition and sympathy of that.

One feels the importance of knowing the time as the apostle speaks of it. How frequently the Lord referred to it in His ministry that we might, in His presence, be intelligent as to the nature and character of the time in which we live and the walk that is appropriate to it. For His Name's sake.

**Word in a Ministry Meeting, East Finchley**

**11<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

## **“BEHOLD THE MAN!”**

**Paul A Gray**

### **John 19: 6 (“Behold the man!”)**

These are words spoken by Pilate in relation to the Lord Jesus. I do not know exactly why he said them. Some have said it was in derision; others have said otherwise. What I do know is that he did say them, and I believe that it was the action of the Holy Spirit to draw attention to Jesus at that moment. You might say it was the time of His humiliation, a time when He had been mocked and abused. It says, “Jesus therefore went forth without, wearing the crown of thorn, and the purple robe” (v 5), but, even at that time, there was only one Man worth seeing, and that Man was Jesus. And it remains so.

There was an item of news recently about a young man speaking about a forthcoming election and one of the things he said was that he hoped that someone would be elected whom he could *trust*. There is only one Man you can always trust, and that is the Lord Jesus. You might ask, ‘What about my parents?’. Well, I can assure you that they love you, and you *can* trust them; but, speaking as a parent, I know I do not always get everything right. And what about the brethren? They love you too, and you can trust them, but, speaking as one of responsible years, I know I have not always done everything right; but I also know that you can trust Jesus for everything. You can go back through all that is known of Him, and there is not one thing He has done that is out of place or has had to be corrected or adjusted. There is not one thing about Him as Man when He was here that had to be adjusted or corrected and, indeed, someone who tried to adjust Him was severely rebuked. There was no requirement for adjustment, and nothing He has done since He was here has needed to be adjusted, nor ever will. This gospel says, “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand”, chap 3: 35. Why is that? Because Jesus is perfectly trustworthy!

But there is another thing about this Man: He did something that no one else could do. If someone is appointed to a position of authority and they are trustworthy, they may be able to do things for you. Things have been done in the mercy of God through governments, such as the welfare state, providing for people in need, a health service, a police service, a functioning justice system, but in fact all of these things - although they are blessings from God, and we give thanks for them -

are testimony to the fact that man is trying to put right areas in which man has already failed. But Jesus was not here to build a better world, a better place. Jesus came to take away your sins, and that is something that no one else could do for you. No one else can; no one else will ever be able to; and you cannot take away your own sins either. You cannot do it for yourself because you are a sinner, and you cannot do it for someone else because the Bible says, "the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be given up for ever", Ps 49: 8. So if you cannot do it for yourself, and you cannot do it for anyone else, who is going to do it for you? The work has already been done, and it has already been done by Jesus.

You will remember the time in 2 Kings 5 when Naaman the Syrian had leprosy and he was sent to the prophet. He did not initially want to do what the prophet told him to do, which was to plunge seven times in the Jordan, and his servants approached him and said, "My father, if the prophet had bidden thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?", v 13. Of course, he would: he was the captain of the host of the king of Syria, but there was no need for him to do a great thing. There is no need for you to do a great thing to be forgiven. You must only trust in Jesus, because He has already done the great thing. He has been to the cross; He has suffered there, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God", 1 Pet 3: 18. He has died. The Bible says, "Christ died for our sins", 1 Cor 15: 3. And He shed His blood. The Bible says, "without blood-shedding there is no remission", Heb 9: 22. His blood has been shed, and He "has been raised for our justification", Rom 4: 25. We are not justified in our original state; we are justified on the basis of a risen and glorified Man. We are not justified as being made better. The Lord in going into the grave put out of sight everything that had offended God by way of sin. He Himself was perfect. We say He took it upon Himself vicariously. That is to suggest that He took it upon Himself on behalf of another, and it was on behalf of all who trust Him. He did it for you and for me. There is a hymn we sometimes sing:

Blest Substitute from God,  
Wrath's awful cup He drained;  
Laid down His life, and e'en the tomb's  
Reproach sustained. (Hymn 13)

That is what He did He took the place that I should have been in, this Man: "Behold the man!"

It is often the case when trouble arises that persons are looking for someone to come and help, to do something about it, but there is only one Man you can look to for salvation. The Bible is very clear about that: “for neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved”, Acts 4: 12. And it is not just salvation to eternity; it is salvation all the way home. It says in Isaiah 32, “And a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the storm; as brooks of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land”, v 2. “A man”: that Man is Jesus. The thief on the cross found that; Jesus was “the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land”. The work of Jesus overshadowed the thief on the cross and took him safely home. You may say that the thief was a wicked man; he had done what was wrong. Yes, but no matter how wicked he was, Jesus was willing to take his place, and that is what He did for me: can you say by faith that He is that for you, “a hiding-place from the wind”?

When the storms of life blow around us, there is “a hiding-place from the wind”. And sometimes the wind becomes so strong it is overwhelming. It says, “a covert from the storm”. That is what the man who wrote hymn 396 describes. There is a tradition that he was walking not far from Cheddar Gorge in England, in a storm, blowing branches and debris down the gorge, and he was afraid he might lose his life. It is said that he found a cleft in the rock and stood in it until the storm went by. Thus the hymn says:

Rock of Ages! cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.

There is no storm too powerful; there is no storm so great that Jesus cannot shelter you. The disciples said when He was here, “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”, Matt 8: 27. There is nothing too great, and no power greater than the power of Jesus. Nothing can overwhelm you, if you are safely trusting in that blessed One.

“As brooks of water in a dry place”: the world is ultimately a dry place, although there are many things to attract in it. I am not going to pretend that there are not things that are interesting; sometimes when we are younger certain things are interesting, and then when we get older different things become interesting. But, nevertheless, it is a dry place. There is no lasting refreshment in it. I remember a brother preaching when I was quite young. He quoted an old gospel verse:

I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,  
But, ah, the waters failed!  
E'en as I stooped to drink, they fled,  
And mocked me as I wailed!

Emma Frances Shuttleworth Bevan (1827-1909)

There is an answer to that.

I came to Jesus as I was,  
Weary, and worn, and sad;  
I found in Him a resting-place,  
And He has made me glad.

I came to Jesus, and I drank  
Of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
And now I live in Him. (Hymn 248)

That is another thing: where do you find your life? You may find your life in this Man, not in all the things that the world can offer. Pilate had to acknowledge that this was the Man. In another section, the centurion had to acknowledge, "Truly this man was Son of God", Matt 27: 54. He had to acknowledge the Man for who He is. And, you know, such a Man, the Son of God, the One by whom also God made the worlds (Heb 1: 2), the One of whom it was said, "without him not one thing received being which has received being" (John 1:3), the One of whom the scripture says He is "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb 1: 3), came to save you from your sins, and me from mine, and even if I had been the only sinner that ever was, He would still have had to come because God is offended by sin. He did it for you. He did not bear our sins in a mass; it says, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. They were enumerated one by one. Who could measure those three hours of darkness? Who could say what depths went into it? There is a touch of it in Jonah:

The weeds were wrapped about my head.  
I went down to the bottoms of the mountains;  
The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever; Jonah 2: 5, 6.

How the Lord felt it to be separated from the love of His God, and forsaken. It was more terrible than anything that could ever be contemplated. The writer says, "A thing of Belial cleaveth fast unto him", Ps 41: 8. It was indescribable - a "thing" - and for the Lord Jesus it was an *awful* thing to be made sin: will you believe that He did it for you,

as I can say He did for me? He did it in view of an answer to God's holy claims of justice, of course, but will you believe that He did it for you, as He did for me? He “bore our sins in his body on the tree”. He was made sin, and He bore those sins that they might be washed away in His blood. He died for you and for me. He is the Man that will fill eternity.

His Name has power. There was a time in the 1940s when people were taken to concentration camps and murdered, and two women, who were both believers in the Lord Jesus, met each other. They had no common language. One was Dutch and the other was Russian, but one of them said in her own language, 'Jesus Christ', and the other one understood it well enough to share in the midst of such suffering. What a Name it is, the Name of Jesus! “At the name of Jesus ever knee should bow” (Phil 2: 10), but you need to bow the knee to Him now. There is not another day; I cannot give you another hour. We were speaking in the reading of the Spirit and the bride saying, “Come”, Rev 22: 17. The Lord is coming soon; He could come before I finish: this is the moment when you can trust in Jesus as your Saviour. If you have not already done so, this is the moment to commit yourself to Him. These persons heard this word, “Behold the man!”; but there came a point when it was said to some of them, “ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers, ye also”, Acts 7: 51. Do not resist the Holy Spirit! Think of this, that the Father who is in heaven is working for the salvation of your soul. The Lord Jesus is waiting and ready and willing to save you, and the Spirit who is here is working in new birth and power in order that there might be receptive ground. Would you resist the love and grace of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, each interested in you personally? Such love has been shown that it says of God, “He who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him grant us all things?”, Rom 8: 32.

Beloved, that is really all I have to say: “Behold the man!”. The Man is Jesus. He is the Man for you. Make Him your Man forever for His Name's sake!

**Linlithgow**

**20<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

# **BLESSINGS WHEREWITH WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED**

**David H Marshall**

## **Ephesians 1: 3-10**

It is really difficult to stop when you read this passage because it follows on; but what has impressed me, beloved brethren, and I would like to say something about, is the blessings wherewith we have been blessed. This occurred to me today as looking at this scripture. It is a long time since we have gathered together like this. Much has happened in the last six months that none of us could have forecast. There has been much sorrow, much suffering, and much death. Restrictions have come in which have interrupted how we normally gather, how we normally proceed, even how we meet in each other's homes; restrictions in travel and holidays, and things like that cancelled. Much disruption has occurred, and it occurred to me that against that backdrop the believer still has a lot to be thankful for. We have been blessed with wonderful blessings; you could never go over all the blessings that we have been blessed with, but I thought it would be good just to reflect by way of encouragement, to cheer our hearts so that we gain some fresh impression as to the greatness of the blessings wherewith we have been blessed.

It is a wonderful matter that we have a God that we have come to know as a Saviour God, who is not willing that any should perish. And how rich the provision of salvation that our God and Father has made available through the work of His well-beloved Son. He seeks to attract men to this blessing. He makes the way clear; even in Old Testament scriptures He tells us, "Come now, let us reason together ... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow", Isa 1: 18. What a wonderful matter, that even then the great matter of sins and sinnership was something that God had in mind to resolve.

When we come to Acts of the Apostles, the Philippian jailer said, "what must I do that I may be saved?", chap 16: 30. Paul says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house": the way to salvation made abundantly clear in a handful of words to a man in desperate circumstances. How wonderful! When you come to Romans, it tells us there that "the goodness of God leads thee to repentance", chap 2: 4. How wonderful that God should make such a blessing so readily available. Even although we have been restricted in our gatherings to a large degree, we have been able to proclaim the word of God; the preaching has gone forth. That is an encouragement,

and that shows as well how God has in mind to continue to bless men and to attract men, even in their desperation, to His heart of love.

But when we look at a scripture like this we see that these things were foreknown even before time began. How wonderful that we have come to know a God in such a way. We sometimes sing -

Our God whom we have known,  
Well known in Jesus' love (Hymn 72).

What a matter that we were foreknown; with a natural mind you can hardly take that in, but with a spiritual mind you can.

And a further blessing is made available when a soul comes to know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour; there is great cause for rejoicing, and it is a blessing that we will always value, and it is an everlasting blessing because it can never be taken away. But there is a further blessing. There is the blessing of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and what a blessing that is, because the Father has in mind that we are to receive that gift, that blessing, from Him; that is what opens up Christianity to the believer besides his eternal salvation. That is what leads him into the joy of his current salvation; a living link with the Holy Spirit. Think of that gift. Think of that blessing that is given to us to have a divine Person indwelling us, to sustain us, to support us, to guide us. One service of the Spirit is, "he shall guide you into all the truth", John 16: 13. How wonderful that is! What a blessing that is, because we need guidance; we need understanding. We do not get everything at once; we need things to be opened up to us; we need things to be explained to us. We need our appreciation of divine things to be increased and enhanced, and in that role the Holy Spirit plays such an excellent service. He serves the Father, and He serves the Son; and He seeks to cause us to understand, and to appreciate, and to increase in, our knowledge and our affections for divine Persons.

What a blessing the gift of the Holy Spirit is to the believer, something that the world knows nothing of! It is a secret to the believer. In John's gospel, the Lord says, "I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter", chap 14: 16. How much we need comfort in these days. But the comfort is available, and what a blessing that is. We do not need to be stressed about all that is taking place. It is right to be concerned about these things; I understand that these things never have happened in the lifetime of anyone in this room, what is happening in these present days across the whole habitable earth, *but* we can take great comfort that we can, as the hymn says -

... praise Him for all that is past,  
And trust Him for all that's to come (Hymn 23).

What a blessing it is to have that reassurance, that the believer can sit and be calm about these things. He can be calm because there is an assurance that our blessed God and Father is over all these things, and we can accept that, and we can go on and be occupied with the blessings that He has in mind for us, because they are spiritual blessings. They are heavenly blessings; they are not earthly blessings. We will not be blessed with material things here, or riches here or anything like that; that is not the thought at all.

It says in the passage that we read, "Blessed be the God and Father ...", and I want to stop there because that is another blessing. "Father" - what a matter that we have come to understand this wonderful relationship of Father, these words were spoken on the resurrection morn, "go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God", John 20: 17. What a matter that there is such a relationship, that we have a heavenly Father that we can speak to. Night or day we have access in prayer, in the privacy of our chamber, in a household setting, and when we are together. How wonderful that we have come to know that wonderful relationship with the Father! A Father who cares, a Father who knows our needs and can fulfil them.

It says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ". Nothing has been held back. How wonderful, what generosity! What grace, what outstanding giving, that everything, *everything*, that the Father has in mind He has blessed us with. It is not subsistence living; the manna was there in the wilderness, and how essential that provision was that they had to gather every day. But then the spies went to a land, a land flowing with milk and honey. What blessings are in mind for the believer.

And it goes on, "every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation". We have touched on that to some degree. "That we should be holy and blameless before him in love"; the Father wants us there on His terms; He wants to bless us with what He had in mind. We often think of that in relation to the younger son, who we often refer to in the glad tidings, Luke 15. He said that there was an abundance of bread in his Father's house; there was much more than that. There

was the fatted calf, there was a best robe, there was a ring, the sandals on his feet, the merriment: all of that was there. The divine standard of blessing, is much greater than what we may have in mind. The Father did not have in mind simply to ensure that he was fed and clad; He had blessings, rich blessings, in mind for that returning son.

It says, "that we should be holy" - what a matter that we should be made holy - "and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved". What a matter that we are taken into favour in the Beloved; there could be nothing finer. Our blessing is in Him! In Him, when we enjoy that relationship of sonship. We are not there alone; we are there with the Son. We are there, and our blessing is in Him. It says,

In Him Thy love and glory

Find there eternal rest;

The many sons - His brethren -

In Him, how near, how blest! (Hymn 67)

"Wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved". Think of that: the One in whom He found His delight, and we are blessed in Him. Blessed with that wonderful blessing. Nearer we could not be. Of course His distinctiveness will forever remain, and rightly so, but our blessing is in Him. In that sense, we are seen by the Father in Him. Then it goes on to say, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace". Think of that, because that blessing involved that beloved One's life being laid down, and His precious blood being shed. We sometimes sing,

Great the cost to Thee, blest Father

For Thou didst not spare Thy Son. (Hymn 330)

There was no other way. In the Old Testament there was a ram that was caught in a thicket, and there was an escape for Isaac (Gen 22: 13), but there was no escape for the Lord Jesus. He had to go that way, and His precious blood must be shed:

Precious, precious blood of Jesus,

Shed on Calvary! (Hymn 167)

But what has flowed out from that is wonderful blessing that continues right down through the dispensation to this very day. Still

many can come under the shelter of that precious, precious blood. But the touching thing is to appreciate that for the Lord Jesus it meant that ultimate sacrifice; He had to go that way. And He delighted His God and Father in doing it in subjection, in perfection and in love, fulfilling the will of God in its scope and detail.

So indeed it can say, “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace; which he has caused to abound towards us in all wisdom and intelligence, having made known to us the mystery of his will”. These are further things that are revealed. We do not get everything at once; we continue to get things, and will continue as long as we are here, and as long as this dispensation continues. There is much to be formed, and continue to be formed in us. And that is a wonderful thing, and I link that very closely with our links with the Father, with the Lord Jesus in His current position - the Man in the glory - and with the distinctive service of the Holy Spirit to help us in these things, and to cause us to have not only spiritual knowledge but appreciation. We are to gain an appreciation and further understanding of the precious Divine things that are not known to the man in the world.

But, our heavenly Father seeks to unveil these things, because He has in mind “every spiritual blessing”; you cannot get anything fuller than that. It is nothing partial; it is nothing that has a limit on it; everything that the Father had in mind is available by the way of blessing to us. How wonderful. It would be good for us when times are difficult at the moment to acknowledge that. There is much pressure, and there is much strain, and there is much fear in the world around us, but it is good, against that backdrop, not to become overawed with it, but to appreciate the blessings wherewith we have been blessed, to enjoy them, and to enter into them in a fuller way. That would be a positive occupation for each one of us, and would help us individually and collectively, and it is wonderful to have that reassurance that we have a wonderful living link with the Blesser. We can enjoy that and experience it, to steady and help and encourage us in these days.

May the Lord bless the word.

**Word in Ministry Meeting, Edinburgh**

**15<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

## THE DIVINE STANDARD OF LOVE

**John 15: 9-14**

**1 Corinthians 13; 14: 1 (“Follow after love”)**

**RBC** I need help from the brethren in opening up a few thoughts, but I had an impression this morning about the divine standard of love: “No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends”. The Lord had friends when He was here. You think of the death of Lazarus; He says, “Lazarus, our friend, is fallen asleep”, John 11: 11. It is quite a commendation for Lazarus to be reckoned a friend of the Lord Jesus. We think of the Lord there having the power of life, and it says He wept at the death of His friend, v 35. The Lord was on such a way, and no one has loved like the Lord Jesus has loved. We might know something of friendship, and have a mutual affection for one another; discourse, trust and confidence would be the elements of friendship. The Lord's love has gone deeper than that. The impression we get as we read this section in John 15 is that the same type of love might be among us.

So I thought to read 1 Corinthians 13, and how that love might be worked out. The chapter is often read at weddings and funerals, but it does not just belong there; it belongs to us all the time; it is a matter of how love functions among us. In John 15, Jesus says, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another”. The apostle Paul would help us in this chapter in 1 Corinthians as to how love functions among us. The apostle tells us what love is not, and he goes on to tell us what love is. I wonder if we might look into that.

**AML** This first passage brings divine love before us as a very high standard. I was affected by what it refers to: “As the Father has loved me”, and “as I have kept my Father's commandments”. Would that show the divine standard - the Father Himself is the origin of love? 1 Corinthians 12 ends, “and yet shew I unto you a way of more surpassing excellence”: that is really the way of love coming out in chapter 13? I think we can be encouraged and strengthened by considering these precious thoughts.

**MJK** I am interested that you should take up this thought because I read this morning a remark of J B Stoney that you never can know what a person's love is unless you are near that person; you may know benevolence at any distance, but you cannot know love except near, JBS vol 2 p504. I felt it was really a touching comment.

**RBC** I am sure we can move freely between these scriptures read. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul uses these illustrations to show what love is and what love is not. He talks about “a clanging cymbal”. There might be nothing wrong with a clanging cymbal: it has its place in a composition of music; it can be used to accentuate a piece of music, but on its own it becomes quite harsh. You have to have that melody of love behind it. I might say all the right things and do right things, but if there is not love behind it, if there is not the presence of the Lover, we become just that, “a clanging cymbal”.

**DgJK** Just to go along with your impression, what John brings out in his epistle is helpful too: “Beloved, let us love one another; because love is of God, and everyone that loves has been begotten of God, and knows God. He that loves not has not known God; for God is love. Herein as to us has been manifested the love of God, that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him”, 1 John 4: 7-9. I was impressed with the divine standard of love. Would it be right to say, not only that love is an attribute of God, but it is what He is?

**RBC** I am sure that is something to think about, the intrinsic character of God. I understand that the word intrinsic refers to essential being, what God is, a God of love, but we often speak too of intrinsic value. I was impressed by that this morning, that of all the ways in which God could have revealed Himself, He came out to man in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the relationships that we can understand; and all these relationships are governed by love. He did not come out in any way of retribution towards man; He came out in divine love.

**AML** Would you say that John sets out divine love in a special way; he was the disciple whom Jesus loved? That description John uses is a unique reference, and it was something that characterised John all the way through. You also referred to Lazarus: it says in John 11, “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus”, v 5. It was a household that was precious to Jesus; He had friends here whom He loved. John records this: “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus”; it is a wonderful tribute.

**RBC** The hymn we started with - 'Not of the world' (No 284) - comes into that. It says in the epistle of James, “that friendship with the world is enmity with God”, chap 4: 4. But we can be like the “friend of the bridegroom”, John 3: 29. And we are speaking about John, who was one who leaned on the Lord's breast.

**AJC** That is where we want to find ourselves spiritually, is it not?

**RBC** Indeed.

**MJK** I want to go back to your thought about the cymbal, which is helpful because the cymbal is an outward expression, or could be; but if there is nothing inwardly, there is no meaning to it, is there? Love is an inward thing, is it not?

**RBC** We were speaking about it yesterday, and it is a hard thing to describe. What is inward is there, or it is not there.

**AJC** The passages you had read are interesting; John 15: 11 struck me. It says, "I have spoken these things to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full". In the previous chapter, He says, "I give *my* peace to you", v 27. He brings in joy when He is talking about love. It is interesting how the thought of joy comes in when we are talking about divine love.

**RBC** We must be careful in speaking about the feelings of divine Persons, but when we came to the Supper this morning, the Lord had delight in that. He sees that we have set aside time to remember Him, and there is joy in that as well, as we are loving one another. I do not think the Supper could proceed if there was not love among ourselves. Mr Pellatt said in the ministry, 'If I understand the breaking of bread, it does not *produce* fellowship; the breaking of bread is the scriptural and divinely-appointed *expression* of it, but fellowship must exist' (see the following extract). Loving one another, having love among ourselves, is needed for the service of God to proceed.

**DgJK** We may not be able to describe love, but we can know the effect of love; and that is really what draws us together: love for Christ brings us together for the Supper, does it not?

**PBK** What is the commandment, "that ye love one another"?

**RBC** It is a commandment, "that ye love one another". 1 Corinthians 11 is also a commandment - as to how we remember the Lord. As to love being a commandment, I do not think you can force love; we cannot force love on one another, but the Lord here makes it a commandment of His.

**AML** Would you think that the Hebrew bondman in Exodus 21 sets the matter out? He loves his wife and his children; that would extend to the saints. It has been said that we come together, not only to

remember the Lord, but to see one another. That may also link with what is seen in the one loaf. Of course, the loaf presents different aspects, but that is one of them; love to one another - the bondman would not go out free. It says, "But if the bondman shall say distinctly, I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free", v 5. Love is an extensive matter, and it embraces both the Person of Christ and all the saints.

**DgJK** Could we say that God expects nothing of us except the divine standard? It says, "as I have loved you".

**RBC** He set it on for us; that standard was set: "No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends". We could say that bar has been set, speaking reverently; it cannot be improved upon. The Lord went that way; He laid down His life for His friends.

**PBK** That is the proof of the Lord's love; but what is the proof that we love one another? I find what you said interesting, that love may be hardly explicable; that is very true. I remember a comment our brother Jimmy Petersen made once when he was here; he said that the proof that we love the Lord Jesus is that we love to be with the brethren. I thought that was interesting.

**VMK** I was thinking that it is experiences with God - "for God is love" - that grow personally before we begin to love one another. Is that true?

**RBC** I am sure it is. "God is love" is what He is in His essential Being. We speak of the root of love in us; there is a divine root in a person which would appeal to each one of us. I suppose that would be the only thing to appeal to: the best of the flesh cannot please God. You might look around us and see fine individuals, but unless they have put their faith in the precious shed blood of Jesus, there is not a lot there to appeal to. I am thinking of Naaman in 2 Kings 5. The first verse tells us all his attributes: he was a great and honourable man before his master; you might say they were fine attributes to have. But there was nothing appealing in him until he had plunged himself in the Jordan seven times. Even the little maid could not have appealed to him if that root of divine work had not been there. "Oh, would that my lord"; it is almost a plea as to the leprosy he had. It was only cured as he went into the Jordan, suggesting the death of Christ.

**DgJK** We are God's by creation rights, and we are His by redemption rights. Does that form some link with this line of the commandment? I

am thinking of the line of that hymn:

I nothing am, yet all possess. (Hymn 281)

**AML** Would you say that the maid had love for the prophet that was in Samaria, and that love extended to Naaman? Love was really behind her exercise. She presented it morally in a victorious way, but he did not get it to begin with.

**RBC** His attributes and his valour were good qualities humanly speaking, but before God there was nothing you could appeal to.

**AJC** This verse in 1 Corinthians says, "And now abide faith, hope, love; these three things; and the greater of these is love". This is true love; we need faith and hope, but love is the end in all these things.

**RBC** Love remains; it goes all the way through. There are things that will be done away with.

**AJC** The flesh loves things too, but that is a different kind of love to what we are talking about. This love is in us as a result of having to do with the Lord and being desirous to be here for Him. And then this love would shine out, the same love that the Father had for the Son, and the Son had for us. I am also thinking of what was said about the proof of it, that the things that are listed from 1 Corinthians 13: 5 onwards are not seen consistently in natural love; they fail. But I was thinking that this love that is in us, divine love, never fails, so we would see consistency in these things.

**MJK** You said that love goes through - why?

**RBC** God is love; it is the character of God; so it cannot disappear; it is what God is.

**MJK** The things that are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13 that are going to pass away are over against the nature of man - "love is not ...". But what God is is not compared to anything.

**DgJK** The passage suggests that faith and hope will cease. Faith and hope are essential gifts of God to understand His love, and they are gifts of God. Love is not spoken of as a gift of God; it is what He is. The other things are for now.

**AML** There was a man who came to Jesus, and when He had answered him, it says that Jesus loved him, Mark 10: 21. I wondered if that refers to God's creation. But there is a work of God that goes

through. Divine love has a different character altogether from what is natural.

**MJK** It is interesting what you mention. There is a verse in 2 Peter 1: 7: "in brotherly love love". There are different levels. Love there is divine love; "brotherly love" is what we have, although it can fail, but the love Peter speaks of cannot fail, it is characterised by what is of God.

**RBC** Brotherly love may include what we are naturally, amiability. That reminds us that the breaking of bread is in the wilderness setting, but there is to be love in all; it is to be the root; love is the core.

**AJC** Earlier in this chapter, the Lord speaks about abiding in the vine: if our root is in the vine, these things will come out.

**RBC** Speaking practically, I have a colleague who is very committed to his church, and we differ as to how we might move; I can have a conversation with him about the Lord and touch this root, although I cannot break bread with him.

**MJK** The divine root is the basis for that link with one another.

**AML** One word that characterises John is 'abide'. Would the Spirit help us to abide in love? It is not just something that happens now and again but it is characteristic; it is formed and it does not go away. The Lord says, "abide in my love". John was enjoying that himself.

**MJK** I am interested in what you say as to the first scripture and this love being in us, and loving one another; do you think that wanting to be in the presence of one another is an indication that love abides in us?

**RBC** I think what we have all been going through for most of this year - we are not exactly compelled by the authorities here, but we are recommended to be separated into smaller companies for the breaking of bread - I think we feel that, that we cannot be with all and break bread with all as we normally would. And we are to feel that. That is how that love is being worked out in a practical sense; there is a practical side to friendship.

**MJK** I saw a text message from a sister in Britain this morning - 'When you go to the meeting today, please take a look around at the brethren: we do not have that privilege right now'. We are to see what there is in the saints. I am touched by that, and that it has taken times like this to bring us to that. I think this is what we are speaking about here.

**AML** Would you say that Psalm 133 comes in, based on divine love?

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” It goes on to eternal life, and it is really divine love that maintains us there; it is expressed and enjoyed.

**RBC** I do not think the breaking of bread could go forward if there was not unity, and love - mutual love. I go back to what you said earlier, that when we come to the breaking of bread, the first thing you see is the brethren; and then the emblems on the table. It is part of the service. It is not a matter of waiting for other people to come in, that is why we come together: to remember the Lord and to see one another.

**DgJK** How does the Spirit enter into this?

**RBC** We referred to Psalm 133: does the oil not flow down from Aaron's head? I wonder if it refers to what would permeate?

**DgJK** I was thinking of that; it says in 1 John 4: 13: “Hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, that he has given to us of his Spirit”. I am linking on with your thought in relation to the Supper, and coming together in unity; that is all set on by the Spirit, speaking of Christ and reminding us of His greatness? He sets the brethren together in unity, but it is not just unity of mind, it is unity of affection.

**AML** It is significant too that the psalm does not just speak of oil, but “precious oil”. Love for Christ would give a wonderful estimate of that tremendous beauty: “Like the precious oil upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, upon Aaron's beard, that ran down to the hem of his garments”.

**RBC** It permeated everything, from the beard right down to the hem, and did so thoroughly.

**MJK** It says in Ephesians 4: 2, 3: “bearing with one another in love; using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace”. The whole thing comes together, does it not?

**RBC** I read in Corinthians because it is more practical as to how this divine love is to be worked out with one another: “love is not emulous of others; love is not insolent and rash, is not puffed up, does not behave in an unseemly manner, does not seek what is its own, is not quickly provoked, does not impute evil”: these are all the things that love *is not*. He does not tell us in a full way what love *is*, but Paul is writing from the divine standard, the divine standard of love - “No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends”.

**WJK** I was thinking of the unleavened cakes: fine flour mingled with oil. The oil holds the flour together, and I was thinking of the unity of the Spirit.

**JDK** I was interested when we referred to the way in which God has been revealed to us, and we are speaking now about the Spirit. And we read about how no man has greater love than this, which is the Lord Jesus. So we get the Trinity, the way that God has been revealed, His love and the different aspects of it. We have not spoken too much about the Father's love, but would that enter into this, His love for His sons?

**RBC** The Father is the root of the matter: "As the Father has loved me". It all comes from the Father. Paul is speaking to these saints and he is talking about good things that they could do: "if I shall dole out all my goods in food, and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned" - all these are outward sacrifices, but if we have not love it is meaningless, is it not?

**MJK** Are you thinking about the Pharisees; they were clean just on the outside? That is what all these things might be, an outward show; but there may be nothing inside.

**AJC** It involves trust?

**RBC** Absolutely. So we love our children; and God loves us. Our children trust us. Then there is the element of friendship that God sees there. John speaks here about friends; they should not fail; there is the element of mutual trust with friends. We can enjoy conversation, and can speak about things. A friend is not going to speak behind our back, is not going to betray us. There would be mutual affection there; it would be reciprocated. I mean that I have the same feelings for you as you would have for me. That is the element of trust in friendship.

**WJK** We have a care meeting tomorrow evening: does what you are saying enter into that, that the Lord would trust us to care for things while we are here in this scene?

**RBC** We are to be good stewards, and good custodians of what belongs to Him.

**DgJK** You already drew attention to the Lord asking Peter questions at the end of the gospel: He asked Peter twice, "lovest thou me?"; and the third time He asked, "Art thou attached to me?". Is that drawing out the Lord's own work in Peter, that He could trust him?

**RBC** The Lord reserves the right to test what is His, to test the work. That might not be very welcome to go through, but the Lord reserves that right to test and see the faith that is in us.

**DgJK** He did not say to Peter, 'Do you trust me?'. He drew it out in a different way by asking, "lovest thou me?"

**DIJK** In the section we have read in John, the Lord first brings out peace, and then He brings out joy. We have to trust in order to have peace, because if we do not trust someone, we are not really calm or at peace with them. God says, "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee", Heb 13: 5. So trust has come from His side first. So trust is a good thing to bring in, because love is absolute trust.

**AML** Does the occasion with Peter, where he was challenged three times, show that, although earlier Peter had denied the Lord three times, the Lord knew there was something there that could be drawn out? He is really equipped for his public service later on. Jesus knew what was in Peter.

**RBC** Yes, we might wonder why He did not just ask him once.

**AML** It is interesting to see that when Jesus calls him in the beginning of John's gospel, the Lord tests Peter by having a look: the look of Jesus is seen with Peter from the beginning to the end, to see what was there.

**RBC** I have often wondered why Paul puts first, "Follow after love" - it is not included at the end of chapter 13. I suppose it is the way that Paul writes: "Follow after love"; he ends with spiritual manifestations: "Follow after love" is what we are encouraged to do.

**DgJK** So we are to follow after a divine standard, do you think? The world might say, 'do this' or 'do that'; but the language Paul uses here is interesting - "follow"; "Follow after love".

**ABERDEEN, IDAHO**

**27 September 2020**

**Key to initials** (*all local in Aberdeen*)

Adrian J Croot; Raymond B Clark; Daryl J Klassen; Doug J Klassen; Jonathan D Klassen; Michael J Klassen; Phil B Klassen; Victor M Klassen; William J Klassen; Anders M Lidbeck, Jonathan D Klassen

## EXTRACT

### THE LORD'S SUPPER AS THE EXPRESSION OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP AND THAT WHICH LEADS TO ASSEMBLY PRIVILEGE

Joseph Pellatt

#### Revelation 1: 9

But look how John speaks. He says, "I John, your brother". If a man speaks of himself as your brother, you may get close to that man; there is no distance, and more - there is no difference; it is common ground. But it is not only "I John, your brother", but it is also "and **fellow partaker**". That is the language of fellowship. Now I need not say to you - because it will be very obvious to every one here - that as banished to the Isle of Patmos it was not possible for John to give expression to his fellowship in the breaking of bread; you would have to have more than one saint for that; you might have the breaking of bread with two saints, or three, or more; but let me emphasise this - John brings himself before us on common ground as our "brother", and he is in fellowship. Oh! you say, could a man be in fellowship without breaking bread? Excuse me if, in reply, I ask you: How is he going to break bread according to scripture if he is *not* in fellowship? If I understand the breaking of bread, it does not produce fellowship; the breaking of bread is the scriptural and divinely-appointed *expression* of it, but fellowship must exist. What else could you make of the order of the words in Acts 2: 42: "And they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers"? That is the right order. Does Paul call in question the fact of the Corinthians being Christians? Look at the very opening of his epistle to them. He addresses them. "To the assembly of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints" - not 'called *to be* saints'. They were constituted such by divine calling. So far from calling in question their Christianity, he speaks of it as a matter of thanksgiving, and he does not hesitate for a moment to give expression to his assurance concerning them - assurance that not only covers the present but reaches on into the eternal future; and yet, beloved, you may have a number of Christians and they may break bread - that is, outwardly; there is the table and the bread and the wine, and things may be done in a kind of orderly way - but if the truth of fellowship is not there, if they are not in fellowship, how would that affect their outward breaking of bread? Well, in Paul's judgment it would so seriously affect it that Paul would

absolutely deny that their breaking of bread was the Lord's supper. Now that may seem a kind of paradox, but that is just what he says in chapter 11: 20. Ostensibly, and possibly in outward form, there was the breaking of bread, but he says, "When ye therefore come together into one place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper". And he says why; his statement is not arbitrary, or one which is unsupported by good reasons. The first thing, then, is individuality, and we have got to be in fellowship, and the question is, How? Well, what we desire to affirm most emphatically is that everything in Christianity not only subsists in the power of the Spirit of God, but everything in Christianity must be *taken* up in the power of the Spirit of God. If the breaking of bread is taken up apart from the activities and power of the Spirit of God in us, it will lose its proper character. This was the case with the Corinthians; the reality of fellowship was not there; externally they were in fellowship and responsibly they were in fellowship, but fellowship was not there - they were carnal - fleshly. "For whereas there are among you emulation and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk according to man?" These are the specifications supporting and proving the apostle's charge that they were "carnal", "fleshly". It is a serious thing.

*From Closing Ministry of Joseph Pellatt, volume 1*

## **LITTLE CREATURES**

**John Laurie**

### **Proverbs 30: 24-28**

It has pleased the Spirit of God to leave us a record in the written word of God concerning these four small creatures that are said to be “exceeding wise”, the ants, the rock-badgers, the locusts and the lizards. Clearly that is not simply to tell us about the characteristics of these small creatures but has some particular significance for us, and I seek the help of the Holy Spirit to show how it has a very special bearing in relation to the glad tidings.

First of all, the ants are mentioned. It is said of them that “they provide their food in the summer”; that is, they take advantage of favourable conditions in order to provide for that which would sustain life. How important! What a word for us all! We are living in a very favourable time in that respect. The grace of God has appeared, and it carries with it “salvation for all men”, Titus 2: 11. That is like the summertime. When judgment comes, it will be like the severity of the winter with all its loss, but we are in a favourable time: “now is the well-accepted time”, 2 Cor 6: 2. A long time ago a prophet said, “Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near”, Isa 55: 6. What an opportunity, like the summertime, the time of favour, to provide for what would be necessary in view of securing life! Food would be essential for the life of these little creatures. They were concerned to preserve what was needed to secure life, and God does not want any of us to perish.

We often refer to that very well-known passage in John 3: 16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”. What a wonderful favour that God has moved from His own side to bring in blessing and the opportunity for life through trusting in the Lord Jesus. I add these words, 'through trusting in the Lord Jesus'. You might ask, 'How can I obtain life?'. Well, He has died, the Saviour has died, that we might live. The Lord Jesus came here and one of the prime objectives in His heart was that on God's behalf He might make life available for men. God had in mind that souls should not perish but come into the gain and enjoyment of life, and the Lord Jesus when down here was moving as a Man under the power of the anointing; He went about doing good and blessing souls, but finally He went forward to the cross

because the serious fact is that we are all as sinners under the sentence of death. We do not have life in ourselves. We are under the sentence of death, and, until that sentence be justly removed, there is no opportunity for the enjoyment of life. Well, the Lord Jesus went by way of the cross. He bore the penalty that was due to me, and I can say that instead of now remaining under the sentence of death and the final judgment of God because of being a sinner, I have found life through trusting in His Name. We are in that sense in the summertime. Peter, one of the early preachers, in the first recorded preaching in the book of the Acts, said, "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved", Acts 2: 21. What an opportunity! I am sure Peter was, in effect, seeking to tell those present that for them as yet it was like the summertime. It was a time of favour, and "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved".

Well, let us be wise. These creatures are "exceeding wise". They pay attention to these things. They take advantage of the opportunity. Oh to seize the opportunity for blessing today! Do not miss it through being careless or unwise but be like these little creatures, "exceeding wise"; God gives the opportunity but we need to pay attention from our side.

Then it says, "the rock-badgers are but a feeble folk, yet they make their house in the cliff". Well, here we have another example brought before us of creatures that make their situation secure. Some people say, 'Well, I will just do the best I can and I will just take a chance'. That is not security. That is not like the picture of the steadiness of a house on the cliff, on the rock. We are told in the Psalms concerning these little creatures, "the cliffs, a refuge for the rock-badgers", Ps 104: 18. It is a place of security for them. It is not in any sense an allusion to the danger of a cliff; it is to the solidity and strength and place of refuge on the cliff.

What a foundation has been laid in righteousness by the Lord Jesus! There is no other foundation, the apostle Paul says (1 Cor 3: 11): Christ is the foundation! Righteousness has been established as a consequence of the work of the Lord Jesus. His precious blood has been shed, that blood by which atonement has been made so that the sinner who would call upon His Name and trust in Him might come under all the security and the shelter that His precious blood would provide. What a place of shelter, shelter from the coming wrath and judgment! We have been brought nigh to God as a consequence of the

work of the Lord Jesus at the cross. Peace with God has been established.

Oh, to be wise and come into the good of it like the rock-badgers! They are “but a feeble folk, yet they make their house in the cliff”. They seize the opportunity to make their situation secure. Oh that souls might do that today, trust in the security that comes through being under the shelter of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus, secure from the wrath and judgment to come, brought into the enjoyment of life and peace, unshakeably so! We are told so beautifully in the epistle to the Romans that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”, Rom 8: 39. Could you ever find a more secure place? If you trusted to riches, or took a chance on your personal history or conduct, or sought to turn over a new leaf or do something better, there is no security in that. You have no way of eradicating the past history, and you have no way of protecting yourself from the possibility of continuing failure, but to be under the shelter of the blood is to be in a place of permanent, blessed security, brought into divine favour and blessing.

Then it says, “the locusts have no king, yet they go forth all of them by bands”. How interesting! No apparent controller or governor, and yet they are all together and concentrating on the one thing! If someone came in this afternoon to this room and asked us who the controller is in our company, what could we say? We do not have such an outward controller or an organiser, or a place where there is a committee appointing rules and regulations or any such thing. Our hearts are focused on Christ. For us, He is the Centre; He is the Object; He is the binding force. That is what keeps the lovers of Jesus together. Every heart is focused on the Centre, Christ the Centre. These locusts, to outward appearance, have no controller guiding them or steering them along. For us, the Lord at the moment is absent. What binds us together? What binds the lovers of Jesus together? It is because they have a common trust in Him, and have established Himself as the Centre of their faith and outlook. What an abiding effect that has keeping us together! It is a wonderful privilege to be in the company of the lovers of Jesus. That is not an organisation. It is a wonderful, living system of divine affections and life amongst those who love the Lord, and find their joy and home where affection for the Lord Jesus is the great binding element. The Lord Jesus said before He left His own, “By this shall all know that ye are disciples of mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves”, John 13: 35. It was a witness. There was something that

attracted their hearts and united them to Himself. That was just the example that took place with David of old. There were all kinds of personalities gathered together unto David in the cave at Adullam. At that point David was not the king. He was not ruling over them all, but they came because their hearts were attracted to him, and then shortly it indicates that he became a captain over them, 1 Sam 22: 1, 2. The influence of the Lord holds us and guides us and binds us.

I was interested in that hymn that I read at the beginning. There is a verse there that says:

Life is found alone in Jesus (Hymn 266).

I once misquoted that and said, 'Life alone is found in Jesus; that is not true. It is not only life that is in Jesus. You will find everything for your soul's satisfaction in Christ. There is peace; there is joy; there is happiness; there is privilege; there are untold blessings, much to be found in Jesus. That hymn was written by Albert Midlane; he has several hymns in the book. If you care to look up the index at the back and read the hymns, you will find that he writes about many other subjects of joy and blessing that are to be found in Christ, which would hold our hearts, just like the locusts, held together because of a binding, common influence.

Then it says of the lizards, "thou takest hold of the lizard with the hands, yet is she in kings' palaces". What are we to learn from this wise creature? I was thinking when pondering over it before the meeting that you could not take hold of a snake with your hands: it might turn round and bite you. You could not take hold of a porcupine: it might pierce you with all its many spikes and cause serious harm. You could not take hold of a lion: it is too strong; it might devour you. But you can take hold of a lizard, a small defenceless creature, just like the saints, the lovers of the Lord Jesus! They were laid hold of - that thought is used in the beginning of the Acts. It says of the apostles early on that the authorities "laid hands on them", Acts 4: 3. They took them with their hands; "they laid hands on them". They did not have to go out with riot gear and special equipment. The believers were just a simple people witnessing for Christ, but there they were. It says here, "yet is she in kings' palaces". They were brought into significant places on account of their faithfulness to the Lord Jesus, defenceless outwardly, loved by Him and cared for by Him. They found their way into public courts to render testimony. The apostle Paul was also taken with wicked hands, which sought to put him in prison, and bring up false

witnesses against him at his trial. He found his way into high courts as well: he found his way before king Agrippa, Acts 26.

What testimony has been borne by the lovers of Jesus, perhaps outwardly feeble, and able to be taken with the hands, but rendering testimony on account of love for the Lord Jesus! Oh, to be here in service and responsive affection towards the Lord Jesus who has so loved us! We have been loved with a wonderful love, a love that is eternal and very, very blessed and full in its scope. We were speaking in our reading here about being taken up that we might bear fruit, and these two things are important: bearing fruit by way of answering response in love to divine Persons, but then meantime here in testimony, wherever that testimony may be rendered, perhaps in a meeting-room. I have been in a meeting-room in another part of the world where I saw lizards coming into the meeting-room. I have been in houses where I have seen lizards drop in. It is amazing how they get in! Think of how the Lord would use one and another to render testimony. Here we are in a meeting-room today, and the testimony of the glad tidings is going out again through the grace of God!

Well, be wise! May the word reach into your heart and bring about an answer for blessing and for glory to God! These little creatures are said to be “exceeding wise”. May we be wise and not be foolish in a day of opportunity like the summertime when life and blessing are available through trusting in the Saviour's name! May we do so to His glory!

**BRECHIN**

**22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020**

