

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 161

August 2020

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THE ONE SACRIFICE

Genesis 22: 9-14

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

Matthew 27: 45, 46

TRC We began the occasion where we were this morning with hymn 347:

The bread and cup, O Lord, recall
That sacrifice supreme, when all
The floods their voice did raise;

and these thoughts seemed to run through the occasion, the supremacy and glory of the one sacrifice. When we go through the Old Testament, particularly in Leviticus, we have the offerings prescribed, the amount of blood that was shed, the many sacrifices that were made, for it was what God required, innumerable sacrifices. We can think of the volume of blood that was shed too, but I wondered whether we could get help together to be occupied with the supremacy of the one sacrifice, firstly on the side of what it meant to the Father. I wondered whether we get that thought in Genesis 22, what it meant to the Father that such a sacrifice was required. We know from John 3: 16 that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish". We should think of the feelings of God in relation to the one sacrifice!

We could get some help together on the one sacrifice from the Lord's side too, for it was only a divine Person, God manifest in flesh, that could accomplish such a work. We might think of the movements of the Lord Jesus in manhood; it would be good if we could get an impression of what the preciousness of the life of Jesus was to the Father, and that from an early age. There are the hidden years, but we come to the waters of baptism when the heavens were opened, and also the mount of transfiguration, when again the heavens are opened and such a voice is heard declaring the Father's delight in Christ. But then, these downward movements! What it meant to the Lord Jesus! We get a touch of that in Genesis 22, the ram caught in the thicket, the devotion of the Lord to His Father's will, and that involved the cross.

I had Matthew read because here we see the enormity of what it meant to the Lord Jesus to be made sin! In hymn 347 it speaks of

All question of our moral stain

being resolved: so what a result there has been from such a sacrifice, the one sacrifice, of Jesus on the cross. Not only did He die, but His precious blood was shed.

I had Corinthians read because we have this reminder, “This is my body, which is for you”, and also the shed blood that we see in an emblem, the cup, showing the preciousness of the sacrifice.

This was the impression we had this morning. I wondered if we could get some help in contemplating these thoughts together

SCL It is a very good thought. What you were saying in relation to the sacrifice is interesting. The occasion of the breaking of bread could not go forward were it not for the one sacrifice. It is as a result of the cost that has been paid by the Lord Jesus that we are able to enjoy such a precious occasion; so really before the occasion has even begun when we walk in, the emblems on the table are representative of the sacrifice.

TRC I think that is helpful. We have that reminder; I suppose it is in the Lord's wisdom that we have it. As we see from Corinthians, Paul received it from the Lord Himself, and how simple the emblems are, but there they are. We sometimes sing that the emblems are 'tokens' of His 'matchless love' (Hymn 339), which lies behind the sacrifice, but there they are, a physical witness to the sacrifice that had been made.

JTB We started with the same hymn this morning. It is, “who by the eternal spirit offered himself spotless to God”, Heb 9: 14. The sacrifice was total. These were all blood sacrifices of old, apart from the oblation, of course, but this was a Person, a living Person, One who was perfect in every way, sin apart, and it was that character of manhood that was given irrevocably.

TRC We need to deepen in our apprehension of what that manhood was to the Father, but also to the Lord Himself! It says prophetically, “take me not away in the midst of my days!”, Ps 102: 24. Think of the pleasure that the Lord Jesus had in His life in fulfilling the will of His God and Father! “He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear”, Isa 50: 4. You might say the devotion is in every fibre of His being in the pursuit of His Father's will.

JTB Offerings were annual occurrences, or more frequent, but “by one offering he has perfected in perpetuity the sanctified”, Heb 10: 14. Once was sufficient, speaking reverently. It was complete; it was total;

but it was sufficient.

TRC “Once in the consummation of the ages” (Heb 9: 26): there it is, the glory and supremacy of that sacrifice by Jesus Himself, the sinless One, the One that was entirely pleasurable to God, but then, as you say, that life given up. What a sacrifice!

DCB It is said here, “On the mount of Jehovah will be provided”. It was God Himself who provided the sacrifice; yet it is a burnt-offering, which is for His own pleasure. I was wondering about these aspects; it is a supreme sacrifice, not only because of the excellence of Christ, but because of the grandeur of the fact that it was God Himself who provided it.

TRC Open that up a bit for us. In Genesis 22 the type falls short, but God has provided the sacrifice, and not only is it supreme in the sense of the giving but in its acceptability to God. It is the burnt-offering, what is pleasurable to the nostrils of God; so the acceptance of that sacrifice in the eye of God draws out the fact of what it meant to God, and magnifies the glory of the sacrifice.

DCB Another line of a hymn is:

Thine offering excelled (Hymn 268).

You see how Abraham, if we take it literally, provides his very best in giving his son, since that relationship was involved, but then God brings in something that is from His side; so that the ram is looking forward to what could only find its answer in Christ as the One who was so fully devoted to His will.

TRC I think that is helpful, “a ram caught in the thicket by its horns”; there is no thought of any struggle. We could apply it to Christ and say it is held there by the devotion of love, horns speaking of strength, no doubt. I think that is helpful, that God has provided the sacrifice. You get an impression then of that in the earlier verses, “Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, Isaac”, suggesting the preciousness of what Christ was to the Father; that was the sacrifice. But then as a result of that, the hymn you quote,

Thine offering excelled;

goes on to,

What odours choice He smelled:

what was fully acceptable to God.

DJH I often think of these three letters, “yea”: “He who, yea, has not spared his own Son”, Rom 8: 32. It seems as though the apostle almost hesitates before he goes forward to speak of such a sacrifice: “He who, yea, has not spared his own Son”. They seem very powerful those three letters, “yea”.

TRC That is very fine. Just a short word but how the apostle must have had some inkling as to the feelings of the Father in relation to what it involved; what that cost was! I think what you say is very touching.

CAS “Behind was a ram caught in the thicket”; I was thinking of eternal counsels being involved.

TRC I had not thought of that, but that commends itself, “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”, Acts 2: 23. Think of God having a view in eternity past of what was going to be involved not only in meeting the whole sin question but in meeting the holiness of God, meeting the righteousness of God. The typical scriptures help us: Exodus 12 refers to a “lamb ... without blemish” (v 5), showing the intrinsic purity and value of the sacrifice.

CAS Peter's preaching speaks of “him, given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”. It was always in the heart of God that recovery was going to be through this precious One.

TRC Without it we would all have been lost; such is the heart of God and His foreknowledge that there was going to be an answer to the purpose of His heart.

THB There was the sacrifice on the part of the Lord Jesus and on the part of God too. Could you say something about that? I was thinking that you said that the type in Genesis fell short. Isaac did not know what was to proceed, but the Lord did, did He not? He knew everything that was to come to pass in relation to Him giving Himself.

TRC We feel measured in what we can actually say in relation to these holy matters, but I thought that in Genesis 22 you get the Father's feelings coming out. If such a sacrifice was to be made, it required a divine Person to take the matter up. I suppose from the Lord's side coming into manhood was the first step in this great operation of love. There are the two stoops in John 8: firstly, the stoop into manhood for there was sacrifice involved in that, that He would empty Himself to come into manhood, but then the second stoop into death. These

things are very deep and beyond me: we feel measured in what we can say. The Lord went into death. We get some impression of the Lord's feelings in Gethsemane, all that that involved, His holy Person, you may say, recoiling from what was before Him, but then how precious these words, "not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22: 42), the intensity of all that was before the Lord Jesus. We sometimes sing:

None could follow there, blest Saviour,
When Thou didst for sins atone" (Hymn 298).

It is really beyond us, but food for our souls to contemplate.

NRC I was wondering in relation to what you have just said, in regard to the relationship between the Father and the Son, about the intimacy of that comes out in verse 7. Isaac said, "My father! And he said, Here am I, my son". There was a deep intimacy between Abraham and Isaac, and what intimacy there was between the Father and the Son. He woke in the morning, and His ear was opened to what His Father would have to say for that day. It is quite something just to contemplate, that sacrifice and the supremacy of it. I have been thinking of the feelings of the Father in relation to that.

TRC It is very helpful simply to contemplate the preciousness of that relationship, and what it meant for the Father and the Son that enjoyment of that relationship would be interrupted. That is why I read the Lord's words on the cross. What depths these are! The One who knew not sin, the One who loved righteousness and hated lawlessness (Heb 1: 9), God made Him to be sin for us, and, because of that, communion with His Father that He had known, you might say, moment by moment in His life here was broken. He was forsaken of the Father. It should draw out our affections towards Him.

JTB The expression "piled the wood" often affects me. Speaking reverently, you think of the father casting a faggot, a log, on the sacrificial pyre in order that the divine will might be accomplished. How that must have affected Abraham's feelings. As he took one faggot or log, or branch after the other, and put it in a pile, each must have affected his heart, his innermost being, that it was his son that was to be burnt on that awful pyre, and so for the Father. I was thinking of your reference to Gethsemane. Without stretching it too much as He heard these words, "not my will, but thine be done", what feelings, what holy emotions must have gone through His heart that His well-beloved Son would so commit Himself to His Father's will and proceed to the cross.

As the Father witnessed Him carry His cross from Jerusalem to Golgotha, the wood was being piled in that sense, was it not, in terms of the effect on His heart really that His Son would be utterly forsaken?

TRC I trust these precious thoughts soften us, and touch our affections. The Lord suffered as a Man; I think what you say is very helpful. I often think of John's gospel, where "he went out, bearing his cross", chap 19: 17. He knew in its entirety all that was going to be involved as He proceeded in the pursuit of the will of His God and Father.

JTB I am often affected by the various expressions in Scripture that contain the thought 'to this day'. This is one of them, as if the enormity of the sacrifice of Jesus should affect us every day. It is reflected in the Supper, our committal at the Supper.

TRC I thought that this morning. It is a fresh opportunity to see the committal of the Lord Jesus to us, an opportunity for us to recommit ourselves as being affected by all that the Lord has gone through.

DCB So that the further detail in verse 9 is very affecting too, "he bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood", and before that "Abraham built the altar there", suggesting deliberate activity of God to bring about what was all for His glory eternally, but at what immediate cost to Himself.

TRC I think what is coming in is very, very affecting. There is a reference to the sacrifice being bound to the horns of the altar.

JTB "Bind the sacrifice with cords, - up to the horns of the altar", Ps 118: 27. It is very affecting.

DCB It brings before us the way in which God was involved in all of this. What had been so much for His pleasure in Christ during these thirty-three and a half years: how wonderful it had been to see Him acting! And whatever weakness there was in Isaac, and what he did not see, he is subject throughout. There is no suggestion of turning away from Abraham's will and that was, in perfection, the way of the Lord Jesus. But there comes this time when Isaac is bound, and the Lord Jesus was *actually* bound, that He allowed Himself to be bound, even by His captors, John 18: 12. And, in one sense, as it has often been said, it was not the nails that kept Him to the cross; therefore He was bound to the cross by His devotion to the divine will.

TRC That hymn that we sang this morning,

Borne in Thy heart through death's dark tide! (Hymn 347)

Just to think that we were in the affections of the Lord as He pursued the Father's will. That involved that He was nailed to the cross, and then forsaken of God. It is really food for our souls just to contemplate such devotion. He held nothing back. It was mentioned earlier that He gave Himself; He would give no less: He gave His all.

MB In Luke 24 the Lord could say in resurrection, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?", v 26. Do you see there the subjection of the Lord to the Father's will?

TRC It is interesting to look at these 'oughts' that come into Scripture. The word "ought" is not exactly a commandment, but love lies behind it. It is because of the Lord's devotion and because of His love for His Father: "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?" What you say is helpful, that the Lord took on that question and fulfilled it in its totality.

JTB I was thinking of your reference to 'Borne in thy heart'. It has often been said we were on His heart at the cross. I often think of that scripture, "Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all", Isa 53: 6. He took account of *my* sins there; they would be identified there.

TRC We think of that in the preaching, that He bore our iniquities. He knew what these sins were and what they meant to the Father, what they meant to God in His holiness, and He bore them, you might say, as if they were His own. Such is the supreme sacrifice that He took my sins upon Himself, and He bore them before God as if they were His sins.

NRC Love really lay behind it all then; I was contemplating that as you were speaking. Our brother made reference at a recent burial meeting to the names being inscribed on the breastplate of the priest. It was love that was behind it all, was it not? So as He was on the tree and our sins were there, it was love that really was behind it all.

JTB In one sense He effaced my sins and wrote my name on His breastplate. That is the reality of His work.

TRC He exhausted the judgment of God against sin; so for the believer these sins are gone. They have been met in the sacrifice at Golgotha so that we have the assurance that these sins can never be raised again. You may ask how that can be. Well, Christ has borne them all. He has done it!

My sins - O the bliss of this glorious thought
My sins - not in part, but the whole (Hymn 238).

DCB It is important that you said, 'for the believer'; that is, the Lord Jesus bore the sins of believers on the cross. That is what is referred to as the work of substitution. His work in a way was broader than that in that He is a propitiation for the whole world (1 John 2: 2), but that does not mean that all come into blessing, but the whole favour of God is towards all men because of the perfection of the work.

TRC I think that it is important to say that; while that supreme sacrifice is available for all, it is those that believe that are really in the gain and appreciation of that supreme sacrifice. Is that what you have in mind?

DCB Yes, "righteousness of God" is "towards all, and upon all those who believe" (Rom 3: 22); so in the preaching of the gospel you have to lay it upon persons to take advantage of it for themselves. We cannot say to any audience that the Lord Jesus bore their sins. We can present it to them that they should seize hold of it in faith.

TRC So the apostle writes, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. He is writing to believers, those that know it as a certainty. What a privilege that is! It is not the privilege of all.

GB When the passover was inaugurated, it became a household matter, did it not? We carry things individually but, as has been said, God seeks households, and that lamb was in the household and it was the object of contemplation no doubt.

TRC That is helpful, and it is what we would look for and pray for. We see it in Acts 16 when the jailer is secured that he "rejoiced with all his house", v 34. He rejoiced householdly, so that is what we would look for. I think what you say is right.

In the scripture we read in Matthew, the Lord Jesus is on the cross, having suffered at the hands of men. We come to this time, the three hours of darkness, as we speak of them, "darkness over the whole land". I suppose the enormity of the sacrifice, the enormity of what was being borne out, was a matter between God and Christ, hidden from the eye of the world. I think it really brings out the glory again of what the sacrifice was to God Himself.

KRC I have been thinking about that. The young men that went with Abraham and Isaac were told to wait; they would come again to them.

There was something that was unique for Abraham and Isaac to experience together, do you think? I think that is what we see here.

TRC I think it is helpful so we see in the type in Genesis 22 that there was that which was a secret matter, and here it is again hidden from the view of the world. The Lord was crucified by men, a public matter, but the three hours of darkness: none could witness that.

JTB Mr James Taylor says, 'on the cross Christ was meeting God about sin on behalf of men as *Man*; and ... He was thus regarded and dealt with as if the sins He bore were His own', vol 17 p13.

NRC Just following on from that, I was contemplating the Father's feelings after all that has been achieved, when Christ was raised from among the dead and ascended on high; what it must have been to the Father to welcome that blessed Man into His presence! It is quite something to contemplate for a moment, that the work of atonement had been entirely done. What the Father's feelings would have been to welcome that Man into His presence!

TRC I think that is helpful and, too, there were those that came to the tomb, but they found that Somebody had been there before them, "raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father", Rom 6: 4. Think of the delight of the Father, a secret matter. The Father was at the tomb first, and He raised Christ out of death, and then He ascended. Hymn 350 says:

The Father's greetings, honours rare,
Are heaped upon His Son's blest brow.

There it is. I am often affected by that in reading Philippians 2 where you get these downward movements of the Lord Jesus, but then it says, "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name", v 9. Would that fit in with what you have in mind?

DCB So at this point where the Lord says what you have read, He does not, and could not say, 'My Father'; it is a Man taking these matters on in relation with God, and without being able to make any claim on that relationship of the Son with the Father.

TRC That is right, for the conscious sense of that blessed relationship had been broken in the forsaking, and Jesus was conscious of that; so He speaks of "My God". He was really before a holy, sin-hating God in relation to the question of sin and sins; so He

says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?". I think that is helpful to see that there He was, before God, as the Sin-bearer.

DCB What you are saying as to holiness is important. I was thinking of Psalm 22 where this is drawn from; He said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (v 1), and then, "And thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel", v 3. Really the Lord was conscious of the holiness of God in His presence as made sin for us.

TRC I think it is food for our souls to think about that, and what it meant for the Lord Jesus to be made sin. We have an apprehension of what sin is, but think of what sin is to God, a holy God: what even one sin is to God!

CAS At the end of these three hours, "about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice". Does that highlight His moral perfection, that He was able to meet the whole matter in perfection? We had a reading recently on compression, what was compressed into those three hours, but, blessed be His Name, He was able to exhaust the judgment of God.

TRC Again I feel measured what I can say, but what it meant to God that there was One who could bear the judgment of God and exhaust the wrath of God against sin!

When we come to our next scripture in Corinthians, you have the Supper being set on, Paul receiving it from the Lord Himself. We get the remarkable words of the Lord Jesus Himself, "This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup, after having supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me". It was the thought that there it is on a weekly basis on the first day of the week: we have before us a tangible expression of the supremacy of the sacrifice. We sometimes sing that the emblems -

Are witness to a work complete (Hymn 339).

There in the emblems is the witness to the supremacy of the sacrifice, but also a witness to a work that is complete.

JTB I was just struck by that, "which is for you". On Wednesday we are reading Luke and it is, "which is given for you" (chap 22: 19), but "which is for you" suggests a directness straight to your affections: "which is for you", for you and me. It goes straight to your heart that the body of the Lord Jesus was given for you and for me. "Given" suggests

more the way it was done. This is direct, and brings into focus that we were the subjects of the Lord's own love, sufficient that He might give His body for us.

TRC I think that is helpful. The emphasis is “for you”, the Lord's affections and His love, “To him who loves us”, Rev 1: 5. We have the reminder of that in the emblems. I suppose “given for you” might be more the historical side, that the matter has been done, but week by week there is the fresh reminder that it is not only a historical matter; His love is a current matter.

SCL I had not noticed it before until it was read today, but this passage brings out the intimacy of what the breaking of bread means to the Lord, because it is “my body”, “my blood”, “in remembrance of me”. It is not as if the Lord says, 'in remembrance of the Lord', or speaks of Himself in the third person, but it is “in remembrance of me”. There is a very deep, intimate, personal connection for the Lord with the breaking of bread.

TRC I think that is right and the fact that it is given to Paul. He “received” it “from the Lord” Himself. It is given to Paul to place the Lord's supper in the assembly. There is the suggestion of how the Lord's supper would be in Luke 22, but it is confirmed by the Lord Himself in glory to the apostle Paul. These personal references, “my body” and “my blood” should affect us Lord's day by Lord's day: or rather, every day.

Edinburgh

15th December 2019

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COUNSEL

John Laurie

Proverbs 12: 15; 8: 12-21

Revelation 3: 15-18

Romans 11: 33-36

The saints will likely have observed that my thought is to say a little about the subject of counsel. It would be evident from the scriptures read that none of us can assume that we do not need the counsel that divine wisdom would afford. The folly of those in Laodicea was that they had assumed to have everything of themselves and had shut out the wisdom that the Lord would have afforded to them. "He that is wise hearkeneth unto counsel".

I have been thinking a little about the value of the counsel that comes in among the saints and that the Lord Himself would afford to us. "Christ Jesus ... has been made to us wisdom" (1 Cor 1: 30), and counsel is a property of wisdom; it flows out from wisdom being exercised. The Lord Jesus would afford that wisdom to us. I think it is one of the things that becomes available to us in our gatherings. I was impressed with that yesterday in the reading and, thinking of it again, following the remarks that have been expressed about it in prayer tonight. We value these occasions when we come together for temple enquiry, in relation to the truth, and they become opportunities for the Spirit of God to make available that wisdom which flows from Christ so that we are not left without divine guidance. Counsel comes in. Truth is not only set out by way of positive exposition among us, and the Spirit of God undoubtedly helps in that too, so that there should be an exposition of truth and of the glories of the Lord Jesus for our contemplation, and to promote the spirit of worship among us. Truth also comes in by way of wisdom to guide us and to help us, and in that respect affords counsel to us. A wise ear would hearken to that, for there is such value in it.

That is why I read from Proverbs 8. These many things that wisdom gives expression to here would seem to show the immense value that becomes available. The voice of wisdom says, "Counsel is mine", wisdom bringing in wise counsel to help and guide in such a variety of ways. These are remarkable things that are said here by wisdom as personified. "I am intelligence": do we not all seek to have greater intelligence? The counsel that wisdom brings in helps us in that. "I have strength": we have been feeling the need of strength and guidance for walking wisely in the footsteps of the pathway that has to

be filled out. We may go astray if we do not have an ear to hear wise counsel. The wisdom that the Lord Jesus would afford among us brings that in. "I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers make just decrees; by me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth". It shows the elevated character of wisdom, and brings in the point as well that none can do without it from the king downward. Kings are made mention of in regard of the practical affairs, no doubt amongst men, but wisdom is afforded in the assembly too, and counsel to guide us in all that is needed. I think that is brought into our gatherings and is opened up through the gracious service of the Holy Spirit among us, helping us to understand something of the value of the wisdom that flows from the Lord Jesus. I do not want to enlarge too much on it, but it is very evident that there is such a wealth of blessing to be obtained through having a hearing ear.

Those in Laodicea missed out. They assumed to be "rich, and have need of nothing". What a loss when wisdom would say, "Riches and honour are with me; durable wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than fine gold, yea, than pure gold; and my revenue than choice silver". I think we often get the impression when we are gathered together in temple enquiry that we are touching things that remain inexhaustible. We can never exhaust all the wealth that wisdom would afford to us. These things become a treasury, "that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasuries". One would seek to have that desire increasingly as coming together among the saints and sitting down, not only in our reading meetings, but also in an occasion like this tonight, to have a ready ear to receive the voice of wisdom and the counsel that would come in, to be adding to our treasures, gathering up substance and acquiring these riches that are all available. "Jesus Christ ... has been made to us wisdom"; we have an inexhaustible supply, and the importance seems to be to have a hearing ear and a heart ready to take it in.

From the passage in Revelation it is very evident that those in Laodicea had assumed a spiritual independency, and felt that they were beyond the need of wise counsel. How gracious of the Lord when undoubtedly expressing His anger and displeasure with all that existed there in that assembly, yet He says, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold". It seems as if the Lord Jesus would appeal, giving a last opportunity before they might be spued out of His mouth: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold purified by fire, that thou mayest be rich", and all these advantages were to be gained through hearkening to the voice of the

Lord Jesus.

Publicly the church is heading for ruin, but there is what is of Christ that is going through, and we would desire to hear what the Lord might say, and gain the advantage of the counsel that He would give, bringing in wisdom among us to guide us through in the closing days of the assembly's history here. The enemy is doing his worst to confuse things and to make things as complicated as possible but the Lord would say, as it were, "I counsel thee". He would give us guidance and wisdom so that we might be helped to find a way through all in view of moving in the path of His pleasure.

I finally wanted to refer to Romans because while we cannot afford to do without this counsel and guidance that wisdom would afford, God has no need of the counsel of any other. He acts and moves "according to the counsel of his own will", Eph 1: 11. Wisdom is with God Himself. Reference was made in prayer earlier this evening to "the only wise God", Rom 16: 27. How wise He is! "The only wise God"! It is an honour that would be brought to our attention and would promote the spirit of worship. It forms part of a doxology in praise where it is mentioned, "the only wise God", and here it says, "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable his judgments, and untraceable his ways!" Then this question is asked, "who has been his counsellor?". Who could afford to give counsel to God? Everything resides with God. He acts "according to the counsel of his own will". It is marvellous just to think of the greatness of the God with whom we have to do! In need of nothing, how great He is! No wonder the apostle goes on to say, "For of him, and through him, and for him are all things: to him be glory for ever. Amen". But such is the God that would seek to draw us near to Himself so that we might come into the gain of all the wisdom that flows from Himself through "Jesus Christ who has been made to us wisdom", so that divine wisdom might be expressed among us and the value of the counsel that flows from it might come in to maintain and guide us in our pathway.

Well, may it be so to His glory and to the glory of God! "To him be glory for ever. Amen".

Word in Meeting for Ministry in Brechin

2nd December 2019

WORDS OF TRUTH AND SOBERNESS

Paul A Gray

Romans 5: 12

1 Cor. 15: 3-6 to “at once”

Philippians 2: 8-11

1 John 3: 14 to “love the brethren”

John 17: 1-3

In Acts 26 the apostle Paul is giving an account of his conversion; he speaks about the moment when he was on the road to Damascus at noon, and there was a light above the brightness of the sun, and he was brought down there, and given a commission. And his commission was to go to the nations. The Lord says, “to whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me”, v 17, 18. Shortly after Paul gave that account, one of those present, Festus, one of the persons in authority, said that Paul was mad; Paul responded, “I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but utter words of truth and soberness”, v 24, 25.

These scriptures I have read speak about death, and about life. The gospel *is* a matter of life and death; it is no less than that. I desire, by the help of the Spirit, to impress upon you that the gospel involves words of truth and soberness. It is not a light matter; it is not something that you can take up and lay down; it is not something you can dismiss. At the end of Deuteronomy, after Moses has spoken to the people and given them a great outline of God's thoughts for them in relation to the land, he says to them, “choose then life, that thou mayest live”, chap 30: 19. Another thing that I want to say about the gospel is that it is not a matter of choice. He does not say, 'choose life or death; make up your own mind'. He says, “choose then life, that thou mayest live”. And we sang about the source of life:

Jesus! life-giving sound (Hymn 287).

The Bible tells us that there is no other “name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 12): the name of Jesus. The hymn says

Salvation in the Name
Of Jesus, offered still;
Glad heralds sound His fame:

Ho! Whosoever will (Hymn 432).

That is addressed to you and me, because this first scripture we read in Romans involves words of truth and soberness; surely they are. "For this cause, even as by one man" - and that is referring to Adam - "sin entered into the world, and by sin death". That is the truth, and it is sober. There is not, I suppose, a more sober matter that we could speak about than death itself. "And thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned": and that includes you and me. Earlier Paul says, "all have sinned," and then it tells us about our present condition if we are still in our sins, "and come short of the glory of God", chap 3: 23. But God does not desire you to remain in your sins.

That is why I read the next scripture in 1 Corinthians 15 because it puts it - as scripture always does - briefly and plainly: "Christ died for our sins". Not only has He died for our sins, but we know from scripture that He met the matter of sin itself. "Him who knew not sin" was "made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him", 2 Cor. 5: 21. Your sins have been atoned for, and sin itself, the root cause, has been condemned. All this was done in the work of Jesus. The apostle Paul said this, "For I delivered to you, in the first place, what also I had received". Where did he receive it? He received it from the glory. The gospel is coming from the glory; it is coming from the right hand of God. It is not man's thought; it is not man's idea. Paul says also to King Agrippa, "For this was not done in a corner", Acts 26: 26. It is not a secret matter only open to a privileged few. We so often quote John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that **whosoever** believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal". I remember a brother reading the line from hymn 417,

Whosoever - glorious message:

and it is a glorious message. It says - indeed I think we read it recently in the Psalms - that God -

... raiseth up the poor from the dust; from the dung-hill he lifteth up the needy

To set them among nobles.

Psalm 113

It is a glorious message, that God has blessing in mind for you, not just for time but for eternity, and He has provided everything in order that that blessing might be yours: "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures". What scriptures would these be, because I assume that the apostle Paul in writing here would have been referring to the

Old Testament? Well, the Lord knew more than anyone what the scriptures were; it says in Luke 24 “he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”, v 27. And what scriptures are these? Well, you think for example of the first time when God dealt with sin; and it says as to Adam and Eve who had sinned, He “made Adam and his wife coats of skin” (Gen 3: 21), and He spoke about the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent, v 15. In order for these coats of skin to be provided, someone had to die, and in order for your sins to be forgiven Someone had to die. Since you could not do it for yourself, Christ died for our sins.

Then in Genesis 22 the account of Abraham and Isaac is given. Isaac asks where the sacrifice would come from, and Abraham says, “God will provide himself with the sheep for a burnt-offering”, v 8. And so He did: there “was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns”, 13. The thicket did not catch the ram; the ram was caught by its horns. It was the power of the love of Jesus that took Him the way that He went. And He went that way for you and for me: “Christ died for our sins”. Are you included in that? Are you included in these few words? “Christ died for our sins”. He did, but have you taken advantage of it? Have you trusted in Him? Have you put your faith in Him? The hymn writer speaks of “Our full confiding trust”, Hymn 6. That is what you need to have in Jesus; and there is no point in having it in anyone else, because there is no-one else who can save you, according to the scriptures. There are many other scriptures we could speak of. Psalm 22 tells us of the way that Jesus went. You can look for them for yourself; they are worth looking for.

“And that he was buried”: that was the witness to the fact that He had truly died. You do not bury someone who is alive; He was truly dead. And for him death was truly death. We thought this morning about the Lord Jesus, the One in whom life was and is inherent. What does inherent mean? It means He was not given His life. You and I were given our lives; God gave us our lives. But He was not given it; it was His own because He was God. And yet He came in as Man, came into a condition in which He could die, and although He was sinless He died. What a reality of death! I often quote the scripture in Job, “By the breath of God ice is given”, chap 37: 10. The One who had moved in such perfect acquiescence with the will of His God and Father, perfect in conformity to everything that was in the divine mind, was found in the stillness of death. Ice is formed: the coldness and stillness of death, and the darkness of the grave. That was all His portion as He went that

way. He bowed His head and delivered up His spirit, John 19: 30. He was buried, so that He Himself, perfect and sinless took upon Himself what offended God and took it away.

“And that he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures”. Now what scriptures can you find in the Old Testament that tell you about His being raised the third day? I can tell you the first one is on the first page of the Bible, when it tells us on the third day the dry land appeared, Gen 1: 9. The sea in that setting speaks of death, and on the third day, the dry land appeared, and life was found in the dry land: the trees sprouted, v 12. It is referred to in 2 Samuel 23,

The ruler among men shall be just,
Ruling in the fear of God;
And he shall be as the light of the morning ...
When from the sunshine, after rain,
The green grass springeth from the earth, v 3, 4.

That is Christ in resurrection, and the saints with Him in life: “When from the sunshine, after rain”. What rain He experienced at this time of death! What an outpouring of sorrow, the like of which had never been seen before, and yet now it is the time of “the sunshine, after rain”. Because, it says, “he appeared to Cephas” - that is Peter - “then to the twelve. Then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once”. As there is a witness to the fact that He died, so also there is a witness to his resurrection. And, beloved, the witness to His resurrection is here now, in believers who have put their faith and trust in Him; that is a witness to His resurrection.

This is not the time of God's wrath. It is the time of “the sunshine, after rain”, and in Joshua it tells us “there was no day like that before it or after it”, when the sun “hasted not to go down about a full day”, chap 10: 13, 14. God is not hastening on to judgment, and yet the time of judgment is coming. For He “has set a day in which he is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the man whom he has appointed, giving the proof of it to all in having raised him from among the dead”, Acts 17: 31.

In Philipians I wanted to mention, “becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross”. There was no death like the death of the cross, with the outward shame and ignominy of it and the suffering, and I am speaking at this moment just in terms of what is physical, the suffering involved in that death. Think of what it says in

Psalm 22, the Lord speaking prophetically, “all my bones are out of joint”, v 14. What a death of physical suffering: men intended it to be, and so it was for Him. But the death of the cross was more than that for Christ. For it tells us in Galatians 3 “Christ has redeemed us out of the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, (for it is written, Cursed is every one hanged upon a tree,) that the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”, v 13, 14. He has redeemed us out of the curse of the law. He took that place of the curse; He accepted the shame that the curse involved. He says to his Father in Gethsemane, “My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; but not as *I* will, but as *thou* wilt”, Matt 26: 39. The Lord knew what it meant to become the curse. Think of that, that the One who was perfect and sinless should become that which His very soul abhorred. We cannot encompass it, but the psalmist says, “A thing of Belial cleaveth fast unto him”, (Ps 41: 8), a thing that caused Him, we might say, horror of soul, the thought of sin, the very *thought* of it, was horror to Him. We just read recently in the gospel, when they came to the man who was deaf and could not speak right, that the Lord said, “Ephphatha”, but it tells us that He groaned, Mark 7: 34. He felt in His spirit the depth of what sin meant. And this thing that He abhorred, He was made it, for you and for me, made it in order that God’s rights might be satisfied. “Becoming obedient”: He was obedient to the Father’s will, “even unto death and that the death of the cross”. We speak about the Lord laying down His life, and so He did. He says, “I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again. I have received this commandment of my Father”, John 10: 18. The death of the cross was real, it was shameful and it cannot be measured. And He went that way for you and for me. “Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow”. Have you bowed to the name of Jesus? This will happen: heavenly and earthly and infernal beings will bow. How will it happen? I do not know exactly, but I know that it will. And oh, beloved, bow to Jesus now as Saviour, so that you may never see Him as a judge; because when persons do see Him as a judge on the great white throne, it says, “from whose face the earth and the heaven fled”, Rev 20: 11. The face that is beaming towards you with forgiveness, desiring that you might come into His love, that is the face that you want to see. That is the face that, if I may put it simply, is smiling on you now; the glory of God is shining in the face of Jesus Christ. Turn to Him in

repentance now: “and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory”. Again that will be so for everyone in a day to come, but it ought to be so now. Jesus Christ *is* Lord. Can you say that? Does He have authority over your life? Have you given your life into His hands, knowing that He can manage it better than you do?

We turn to 1 John. One of the things I wondered about, especially when I was younger, was why the brethren said that they knew things. How can you know something you cannot see? I mean, you can know things if you learn them or you can know things if you can see them, but, “We know that we have passed from death to life”. How can you know that? John writes, among other things, to give us reassurance. We know “because we love the brethren”: because we love the brethren. Now that is a question for you. And you know the answer, and the Lord knows the answer, and that is what matters. Do you love the brethren? If you do, you have passed from death to life. We love the brethren because of the work of God in them. That is why we love them, because we see in them what God has done in them, and we recognise it. I speak only for myself, perhaps I have characteristics that cause irritation, or I do things that others wish I would not do; that would certainly be true of me anyway. But the brethren still love me and I know it. I can remember quite clearly the first time I realised that the brethren loved me. A brother and sister looked after me when my mother was not well. And I realised that it was more than just somebody taking care of me, because I was about six or seven years old, and somebody needed to look after me: they actually loved me. I knew what it was for my parents to love me, and my grandparents, and I understood that, but here I found that here were these other people, too, and they loved me as well. That was a new experience and I can remember it. The love of the brethren is something greatly to be valued. There is not any love like it in the world, because the love that exists among believers is not just for time, and it does not end in time: it goes right on into eternity. So if you love the brethren, then the thing is to find your place amongst them.

I want to speak about the last scripture in John 17. This scripture does not speak about death, but it does speak about life eternal, and it does speak about eternal life. And these are necessary: if there is death there must be an answer to it. Now, “as to all that thou hast given to him” - that is, the Son - “he should give them life eternal”. And if there is a little distinction between life eternal and eternal life, life eternal is something that you have. It says that the Lord gives it to you,

and everyone who believes on Him, as we have quoted from John 3:16, shall "have life eternal". That means that you have soul salvation for all eternity, and death cannot touch you. It does not mean that nobody will die, but it means that death is not the end for the believer, but rather the entrance into the presence of the Lord. Life eternal is theirs, and no one can take it from them. That is another thing: if the Lord gives you something nobody can take it from you, and you cannot lose it either. But then, "this is the eternal life," He says, "that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent". So if life eternal is something you have, eternal life also involves what you know. And it involves relationships: "that they should know thee". It is not just what I know about things in the Bible, although it is good to know that, but it is about your relationships with divine Persons. "That they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent"; you think - is that not wonderful that God wants you to know Him?

The enjoyment of these things starts with what is individual but it goes on to what is collective, what we enjoy together. "This is the eternal life, that they" - it does not say that one person should know - but "they should know thee, the only true God". You see persons coming into eternal life in Romans 8. It says, "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these* are sons of God" (v 14), but then it says, "the spirit ... whereby we cry, Abba, Father", v 15. Persons who cry, "Abba, Father" are persons who know God. They know something about Him; they know His affections, and they want to respond to Him. "And Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent": well, was there a gathering this morning to remember the Lord Jesus? Was that not some evidence that we know Him? That we actually know Him? Could you say from what you heard that the persons who were speaking to Him knew Him? They were not just describing something they had seen, but they were talking of a living experience through faith and by the Spirit. They know Him. When we came to the end of the meeting we had an impression of the greatness of God, the fact that He is infinite, immortal and yet He wants us to know Him. And He has made Himself known to us in Christ.

We had in the reading the expression "the life of God". The life of God is seen in Jesus; that is where it is demonstrated. In the earlier part of Ephesians 4 it says, "until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God", v 13. And there is another thing. The knowledge of the Son of God is unifying in its effect; it draws us together. That is what we sang again at the beginning of the breaking of bread this morning - Hymn 4:

Thine is the love, Lord, that draws us together.

That does not only mean at the time of the Supper on a Lord's day morning, although it is a special time then, but that is what the love of the Lord does: it draws us together. So the apostle says, "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man". You feel that this is where it begins to get more difficult; I would encourage you that there are steps you can understand. "At the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ". You get the measure in Romans; that is what the Lord is morally. You get the stature in Colossians; that is what He is personally. And you get the fulness in Ephesians; that is what He is officially, and you find that His assembly is with Him in that: "the fulness of him who fills all in all", chap 1: 23. I am saying that to encourage you that there is room for progress. There is room to grow, and it is not beyond any of us. You may say that you have just started; well, if you have just started, keep going. But there is always room for progress. If you have already started keep going. I encourage you, and if you have not started now is the time to start. Now is the time to start.

We spoke at the beginning of words of truth and soberness. Another word of truth and soberness is this: "behold, now is the well-accepted time; behold, now the day of salvation", 2 Cor. 6: 2. That is a word of truth, but it is also a word of soberness, because I cannot tell you about tomorrow. But I can tell you about now, and now is the time to trust in the Lord Jesus as Saviour.

May you do so for His Name's sake.

Linlithgow

12 January 2020

JUDGMENT AND MERCY AND FAITH

Alex R Henry

Revelation 20: 10-12, 15

Acts 17: 30

Matthew 27: 41-46

Zechariah 3: 1-4

Revelation 20 is not a scripture you would normally read in a gospel preaching. This book is the word of God; I trust you value it. Many of the laws of our land, and the constitution of the United States of America, have some basis in what is found in the Bible, and, sad to say, in many cases much of it is being given up; Satan is in that. How many things are given up nowadays? To the world: the Lord's day, now just another day; marriage: given up, to a large extent; other important elements of God's order are being given up. Is the world any happier?

The world to doom is passing (Hymn 220)

- men are going on.

The first passage I read refers to hell, the lake of fire; belief in that has been given up too; it is regarded as a myth, even in some religious circles. It is not a myth! The lake of fire is real; the great white throne is real; I know the Person that is to be Judge there, and I will not be there: thank God for that! It was not down to me, friend; it is the work of Christ. How about you? The wrath of God fell on the head of Christ; that was real. My sins were borne by Jesus. These are realities. The courts of this world are so different. You can get a lawyer who might be a brilliant lawyer, and he might be able to get you off with technicalities, though you might still be guilty of the charge that was laid upon you; but he might get you off and you would be able to escape. But there is no appeal in this judgment: this is fact. "Books were opened"; a person's life is all laid out, then God's judgment. And, my friend, I will tell you one thing: you will believe it if you are there, and you will say, "God is righteous!". But in the gospel we are not preaching this, this is not part of the gospel because what God is saying is that now you can have your whole life out with Him, and He can forgive you all your sins, your whole history can be removed! Do you wish that? Do you want that? Open your heart tonight, let Jesus in!

We read in Acts; scripture is so wonderful: even in Ephesians it goes over certain things, and then it says, "but God, being rich in

mercy", chap 2: 4. That is what we want to speak about, God's mercy! When you come to Acts 17 how amazingly it says here: "having overlooked the times of ignorance"; how could God do that? I can tell you He can! If you go to the beginning of Acts Peter could say in chapter 3, "And now, brethren, I know that ye did it in ignorance, as also your rulers; but God has thus fulfilled what he had announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer", v 17-18. Even to the rulers, those that had perpetrated the greatest sin in the crucifixion of Christ, Peter can say, "I know that ye did it in ignorance"! My friend, claim it today! Claim it today when the Lord is available for you: He can be yours, He can be your Saviour, He can clear you irrespective of your whole past! Everything you have said about the Lord, about God, about everything, about the brethren, about anything, the Lord would say, 'You did it in ignorance, and I am going to appeal to you'. If Saul of Tarsus could be saved, anyone can be saved! How about you? Let your heart open, get something of the greatness of the love of God because it says, "For God so loved the world", John 3: 16. Think of God's feelings for mankind. So many things have been given up, but what is of God is going through and in the midst of it all He is appealing to you. He is appealing to you that you might accept Him.

Now when you come to Matthew you see what the cost was in view of the salvation of souls. Think of the perfection of that life of the Lord Jesus; you may have heard it many times in your house; your parents may have gone over the greatness of the life of the Lord Jesus in all its perfection, One who could say, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me", John 16: 32. But it came to a point when the Lord could say at Gethsemane, "not my will, but thine be done", Luke 22: 42. He knew what was in that cup; He knew the horror of it; He went forward because He knew everything depended on that work and, friend, for your blessing everything depended on that work too! We appeal to you to accept the Lord Jesus Christ for yourself.

So, think of what God felt when His beloved Son, Christ, was nailed to the cross and was hanging there, and there were all those passing by and they said, "He trusted upon God; let him save him now if he will have him". How awful! And then it goes on from the sixth hour to the ninth hour when the Lord Jesus was made sin. He was made it! My sins were laid on Him. Were yours? Do you know Him as the One who died for you? Think of what that meant to God, three hours when the whole burden of sin and sins was laid on Christ, and the Lord Jesus at

the end of it had to cry. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?". Thank God this happened! That was where my salvation was attended to. But, friend, how about yours? Where do you stand? Have you availed yourself of the work of Christ? You read the Old Testament; think of Exodus, think of the blood being put on the door post and the lintel, and think of God saying, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you", chap 12: 13. He was looking forward to Christ, looking forward to that great work; that comes into Acts 2, "him, given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain", v 23. The work of Christ is God's way of doing it. Not a committee: God did it; He said, 'For the way of salvation, I am going to have to lay the whole matter as to sin and sins on the head of my beloved Son!' That is what makes the gospel so wonderful, because it was not left to anyone else to try and work something out; God did it! And if God has done it, He is delighted in the results of that, and He is appealing in the gospel today for you to accept the Lord Jesus Christ and to come into the full enjoyment of all that He has in mind.

In the last passage I read in Zechariah, it says, "Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing". Satan is very active today in relation to your mind and your heart to counteract anything that is said in the preaching. But God is going to have His way, and this scripture tells us what God has to say; He rebukes Satan. Now Satan is maybe working in your heart now; maybe you are thinking something different, maybe you have taken up the idea that you are going to refuse God's offer in the glad tidings. Some people can be very stubborn; that is all of man, and the enemy knows about you. Maybe you have started to think, and maybe you have started to pray; maybe you have started to desire something; maybe you have started to read the Scriptures: Satan is against that. He knows that, he knows about you, and God is appealing, and that is what you see here. God says here, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"; you might say that just before you are lost completely, God says, 'I am going to save you'. Dear friends, open your heart. It says, "Joshua was clothed with filthy garments", and He says, "Take away the filthy garments". People have a veneer today, a certain veneer of niceness, but when you get underneath the surface, what is it but filthy garments? Think of the younger son coming back in Luke 15 in all the destitution of the land that he had been in, and what did the Father say? "Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it", v 22. God wants the best

for you! He wants to clothe you in the work of Christ. He wants to bring you into the enjoyment of His house. You might say, 'Well, I cannot understand it; I do not understand it; I do not appreciate it all'. God will give you faith to believe; you need faith, and God will give you faith to believe. You can ask God for faith; it is a gift.

And then you can ask Him for the Holy Spirit, because you need a power outside of yourself because as soon as you go out that door the world is there with all its allurements, and all the outward show to attract you to hold you. How much there is to hold persons today in the world but the work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit can maintain you and preserve you. God wants to preserve you. When a person believes in the Lord Jesus He could take them out of this scene, He could remove them, but He leaves you here so that you might prove Him, and He gives you strength. And so you come to the point where you say, 'I am going to give my life to Christ, and I am going to be here for Him, and I am going to give Him enjoyment'. He will give you peace. You will have something in your heart; you will be able to go through this scene a different person. Do you want to be a different person? You think of it: He will clothe you with festival robes! God wants to bring you into His house, into the merriment of His house. He wants to bring you into His family; that is what God wants. He does not want to leave you just to have your sins forgiven - how great that is! - but He wants you to come into the enjoyment of what He enjoys. Think of God finding His enjoyment in Christ, the One who accomplished His will in every detail. He wants you to enjoy that!

Then you want to give Him something back, and the Lord says, "this do in remembrance of me", Luke 22: 19. I wonder if you are remembering the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread. Simple and yet profound, it is what He asked. It was "in the night in which he was delivered up", He instituted the Supper, and He said "this do in remembrance of me", 1 Cor 11: 23, 24. Every Christian, every believer on the Lord Jesus, should want to do that.

Well, what are you going to do tonight? You need to make a decision; it says in that hymn we sang

The world to doom is passing,
And you are passing too.
It may be no tomorrow
Shall dawn on you or me; (Hymn 220).

It used to be said at the end of a preaching, 'There will be a preaching here next week': we cannot say that; we cannot even say what it will be tomorrow, but one thing we can say is, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart", Heb 3: 15. Just bow to Jesus today and let Him in to your heart.

For His Name's sake.

Cathcart, Glasgow

19th January 2020

OUR HEAVENLY PORTION

David H Marshall

Hebrews 1: 1-4

John 14: 1-3

I would like to speak simply, beloved brethren, as to the reality of what is heavenly. I was impressed in our Lord's day afternoon reading in Hebrews. Hebrews is a fine book; it sets out firstly what I have read, the distinctive speaking that takes place now, the speaking by the Son. God has spoken in many other ways as it tells us, but we are favoured to be now in a dispensation when the speaking is of the highest order, the speaking of the Son. How wonderful! It goes on to tell us of the divine view, God's view, of that beloved One and all that He has accomplished and how much He means and the glories that belong to Him, and it sets that out almost at the start of the book as if to say, 'This is how I want you to read this epistle', to understand that the speaking is of a new, distinctive character and the finest speaking that has ever taken place. We are privileged to be in this dispensation when that speaking continues.

But there is more to it than that because Hebrews is a book of better things, a book of excellent things. It compares a materialistic system with a spiritual and heavenly system, and that is what I would like to speak about, because the lot of the believer is one that is a heavenly portion. We have been given a heavenly inheritance, and it helps us to understand and to appreciate that the believer's outlook should not be earthly; it should be heavenly. That is something that should encourage us, should uplift us. As we look around on this sad, benighted world, there is much to discourage, much to concern, much to occupy us, but the believer can rise above all of that as the overcomer whose outlook is heavenly. His outlook is *not here*. If our outlook is here, we will be sadly disappointed; we will be let down. Even the establishments of this world fail; there are flaws. Much comes in by way of unrest; much comes in by way of sorrow; much comes in by way of weakness. You can be engaged with all these things; but the believer need not be engaged with them because our outlook is upward:

The sky, not the grave, is our goal. (Hymn 238).

The lot of the believer is a heavenly lot, and it encouraged me on Lord's day as we were reading Hebrews to think that our outlook and

our hope are not here. It is a heavenly hope and a heavenly outlook, and the whole thought in that is not only that we have that in prospect, but that it would characterise how we are here. That is a challenge to myself more than anyone. That is the divine intention that if we have this heavenly outlook before us, and if we get some appreciation as to the power and the character of the speaking that we come under now, that would characterise how we live, walk and operate here.

But, when you come to John's gospel, there is this wonderful reality of what is heavenly. On Lord's day it occurred to me, as it had never quite occurred to me before, that heaven is a *place*. It is not an idea; it is not a concept; it is not a theory; it is not something just to talk about; it is a *place*. In the Father's house, a *place* has been prepared by our Lord Jesus for us. How wonderful that is! How wonderful that we can have that in prospect that that place has been prepared. He is coming one day to take us to share that place with Him.

But we can enter into that joy now, and I want to speak about that because that is the reality of our heavenly portion, that we can experience what is heavenly here. The world knows nothing of this; it is not something that the man or woman of the world would understand. This is for those that are His; this is for the redeemed; this is for those that belong to the Lord Jesus; this is for those that have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. That place has been prepared. But when the Lord Jesus comes in amongst us on a Lord's day morning at the breaking of bread, that is the fulfilment of a promise. He says, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you", John 14: 18. That is not future; that is now. He makes Himself known, and what do we do? We worship Him! How right it is that we worship Him! How right it is that we acknowledge His greatness and glory! But then He draws us to be near to Him, and we are associated with Him. How wonderful that is that we are associated with Him, and He shows us His current love for us, not only His historical love. That has been displayed, and is a wonderful, wonderful matter, but He shows us His current affection for His own, for His brethren, draws us to be near to Him, and where does He take us? "For through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father", Eph 2: 18. He takes us to the place that has been prepared which we can enter into as we sang in our hymn:

He bringeth us to this blest place
Where we with Him can sing;
Where many sons surpassing grace

Eternal praises bring.

(Hymn 374)

That will be our eternal portion, but we can experience it now. How wonderful that by way of foretaste we can enter into what will be our heavenly portion in eternity. We can experience that. It is *not* a theory; it is *not* just something to talk about; it is something to be *experienced*, and it is *real*. It is reality. What the epistle to the Hebrews is all about is to illustrate that Christianity is a *spiritual* system and a *heavenly* system, not an *earthly* system or a *materialistic* system, but a system that is rooted in divine Persons and their love and grace and mercy for us, in all that they have in mind for us. And it brings out that so much of it we can enjoy *now* as we will do in eternity, the difference being that then we will never leave.

It is worth considering the joys that can be experienced in association with the Lord Jesus in that place. His distinctiveness, of course, for ever remains, but we are *with* Him. What a thought that we can be with Him in that place, He leads the praises, sons entering into the songs of sonship. What a choir of response that is!

He bringeth us to this blest place
Where we with Him can sing;
Where many sons surpassing grace
Eternal praises bring.

How real that is, and we can experience that, we can enjoy that; and I would say this to encourage us, for there is much to concern us. There is sorrow that we feel in our localities; there are wider sorrows; there is suffering amongst the saints - we understand all these things and we have body feelings in respect of all these things - but there is this wonderful matter as well, that our outlook is heavenly. It is our portion that we can enter into here and helps us to walk through this scene in which our lot has been cast. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit, and I felt in the reading on Lord's day a sense of the Spirit unfolding things to us. These are well-trodden scriptures; Hebrews has been read many times before, but I felt there was a spiritual enquiry, and the epistle is there to encourage us, and these things are to cause us to reflect on what our heavenly portion is. We are not just here to have a discussion over the scriptures; it is an opportunity for the Spirit to guide us and to enlarge our appreciation of our heavenly portion, make it more real to us.

I think we have a lot to be thankful for in the day that our lot has been cast. You can look at failures and sorrows, and it is easy to

become not only occupied but to become over-occupied with these things, but that is not the divine thought. The divine thought is that we should go on from strength to strength and be occupied, engaged and *live in* our heavenly portion. May we be encouraged for His Name's sake!

At a ministry meeting in Edinburgh

21st January 2020