

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 168

March 2021

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A LIGHT OUT OF HEAVEN

R Bruce Hill

Acts 9: 1-9

God spoke to man from the beginning and He continues to do so today. He wishes to speak to every man, woman, boy or girl about His glad tidings concerning His Son. Sometimes the word falls on difficult conditions and is not accepted; at other times it falls on good ground and produces fruit for God. Think back to Adam and Eve, or later the children of Israel in the days of the prophets, or when Jesus walked on this earth speaking words of grace and truth. Every word that the Lord Jesus spoke He received from His Father. Israel had some light as to being God's chosen people, but when the truth came most rejected it; they had eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, Mark 8: 18. They would sin, and even though often knew they were sinning, they did not repent. Then they would sin again. We like to think that we have improved in the present age, but unfortunately we delude ourselves. The human nature remains the same as in the beginning. The 'fall' occurred in the garden of Eden, the place where God supplied everything that man could want. The devil came along in the form of a serpent and said, 'Would you not like more? Would you not like to be smarter?'; that is really what the devil was suggesting, 'Would you not like to be smarter, not needing God?'. The woman was deceived and decided being smarter would be attractive. And so what God had said to not do, she and Adam did. God's message was very simple and clear: 'You can eat anything you want but just do not eat of that tree'. What did man do? When tempted he ate of that very tree! The devil queried, 'Surely God does not mean what He says?', but when God says something He means exactly what He says. As a result of this disobedience man was driven out of the garden. He lost access to the nicest place on earth where God had placed him and provided all that he needed. Hence man had to work by the sweat of his brow, and that continues today.

You might think this is an unattractive message, telling you that you are a sinner. Unfortunately, some feel that way; and by comparing themselves with other men end up thinking that they are good enough and thus acceptable to God. Once again, as at the beginning, man thinks that God has a flexible standard by which He measures man. If you look at the world we live in, you can see what man's standards have produced. Read the news, look around, and see many sorrowful and

gloomy faces. There are many problems, and no man is able to provide the answer to solve them. The problems just increase year upon year. Is there a sure solution? There is an answer that God provides. It comes from God, the Source of all. Everything that is good comes from God, including love. God loves you. You may wonder about the certainty of that, when thinking about all the pressures affecting us. Why do we have to go through these trials? It is because of sin. Sin is what brought all the suffering into the world, and sin continues to mark man's systems.

The Scriptures say: "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal 4: 4), and "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal", John 3: 16. Now that happened approximately two thousand years ago when a unique baby Boy called Jesus had been born. He grew up, in obedience and subjection to His parents, and then in service doing good, healing people and pleasing God; but He was rejected by those that He came to save, totally rejected. He suffered and was crucified, the most humiliating and terrible death that they could imagine at the time.

What does the name of Jesus mean to you? Who was He? Was He just an ordinary man? Physically He was similar to other men right from boyhood, growing into an ordinary looking Man, but He was also God's Son. Sometimes we sing that hymn -

God gave His Son for sinners; (Hymn 282).

He did! Who is the sinner? That is me and that is you! We are all sinners, every single one of us, and as such we have no hope. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians; he says that they had had "no hope, and without God in the world", Eph 2: 12. Without Christ, nothing is available to settle the sin question and give joy to man. The scripture refers to "the temporary pleasure of sin", Heb 11: 25. You can forget about the problems for a period of time and think that you are happy, but it is only a little while and the sorrows return. This is because of sin; your sins separate you from God who desires to have a part in your life. Jesus laid down His life; Jesus shed His blood on the cross at a place outside Jerusalem. His sufferings were impossible to fathom; they were not only those at the hands of man, but He bore the judgment of God on sin so that the glad tidings might be preached to the whole of creation. We cannot understand why He completed all of this, but divine love cannot be compared to man's love. The perfect Man had to die in this way in

order to bring salvation to mankind and allow the love of God to shine forth. He loves me and He loves you. The cross is the unequalled way in which glorious divine love was made known.

I was driving down to New York about three weeks ago, and when passing through a small town I looked up at a tall church steeple. There was a sign there on the top and what attracted me was the message, 'JESUS' - in capital letters. It said, 'You cannot approach God without Him'. I had never seen anything expressed quite like that way before, but it is the truth. You cannot approach God without Jesus; there is one Mediator of God and man, "the man Christ Jesus", 1 Tim 2: 5.

We have been given to live three score years and ten, which is seventy, or four score years which is eighty, Ps 90: 10. Moses wrote that many years ago. Some men today think they want to live much longer; that is not a new desire. I remember learning in school about explorers who went across the ocean to North America looking for the fountain of youth. There was a report that it was located in the southeast of the continent: that fountain has never been discovered! The only fountain of youth comes from heaven; that is where Jesus came from. But man still has this desire today, some even have their bodies frozen instantly after death hoping that science can permit awakening the body in years to come so that they can live forever. The goal of mankind has not changed; it continues to be independence from God. But you cannot be independent of God because God created and controls everything. He holds our breath in the palm of His hand, Dan 5: 23. The scripture talks about the nations raging together, Ps 2: 1. They rage together even today. You look at the problems between nations and between men today: nobody knows the solutions. A couple of weeks ago, the United States government added some three hundred billion dollars of extra debt in one day, when they already owe more than they can pay. Most countries are in similar positions; it does not matter where you go, the world is building on sand with no suitable foundations. Man's accomplishments are going to come to an end and will collapse very quickly. Revelation says it happens in an hour, Rev 18: 17. The whole world financial system will just collapse. A few years ago, this nearly happened, but God's time had not yet come. God allows these tests to give man a glimpse of what is to come, and to show man that he needs something that only God can supply. But if man does not accept God's glad tidings he is left without hope.

Today God is offering His answer free; His answer is the blood of Jesus to save you from your sins, eternally! All our worldly possessions become worn out or obsolete. But what God gives never changes, it never deteriorates, it is not just for time it is for eternity; how long is that? How long is eternity: can you even visualise that? The answer is that we cannot. Our minds are finite and eternity is infinite. The work done by Jesus on the cross offers eternal salvation, eternal freedom from sin.

John writes with much longing for the manifestation of Jesus: "we shall be like him", 1 John 3: 2. That means complete righteousness; not just most of our sins gone, but every last one. If there was one left, we would not be like Him. Jesus died, rose from the grave and lives for ever in heaven. There is no sin in the presence of God, none, and He is a holy and a righteous God. God remains unseen: at this time on this day I can talk to you about Jesus, but I cannot show Him to you. This is the day of faith. Where do you get your faith? You may say you do not think you have any. But you may have faith because God would give it to you. Jesus said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed", Matt 17: 20. While our faith may not feel like much, Jesus said that only a little will give you strength. We all must know for ourselves: Christ died for *me*, and He shed His blood for *me*, and He has washed away *my* sins. May we all be able to make that confession,

Now, I should speak about the scripture that we read before we close. There is a man here, a man called Saul. He was a very, very zealous Jew. He grew up at the feet of one of the best teachers that could be found in Israel, and then he heard about a man called Jesus. He did not know Him but he heard of Him. He heard that certain people believed that He had died and risen from the grave. He said, 'I am going to get rid of those people'. Anything to do with the name of Jesus he was going to wipe it out. So he persecuted believers in Jerusalem where he was and then in his zeal he decided that he would go to Damascus, as there were more disciples there. He secured special papers allowing him to do this in this foreign land. Where we read, he is almost all the way to Damascus, and what does it say? - "And suddenly". What happened? A light out of heaven, a brighter light than he had ever seen. What led me to this scripture was that in our occasion for the Lord's supper this morning, I had a sense of experiencing the light shining out of heaven, and then I thought about

Saul. He fell to the ground. He talks about this event twice later in this book, and every time he recounts the story the light gets brighter.

That is how the work that Jesus has done becomes, the longer you live after coming to Him the more important He becomes to you. Jesus never diminishes; He only grows greater. The more you know of Him, the more attractive He is. The more you serve Him, the greater the love is. With this light, Saul falls to the ground and then he hears His voice. Have you ever heard your name called from heaven? 'Bruce, Bruce', "why dost thou persecute me?". Paul had thought he was serving his God, and now he was being told he was persecuting the Person who was speaking to him. He was persecuting a great Lord; Somebody who is speaking personally to him. "Who art thou, Lord?" What an answer! "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest". This message changed Paul's life. Instead of being a persecutor of Jesus he became a lover of Jesus and he was converted. Instead of sending people into bondage or death, he was setting people free.

That is what the glad tidings does; it sets you free. The Jews turned to Jesus and said they were free, John 8: 33! That statement was not true because they were subjected to the Romans at that time. We are all in bondage, in bondage to Satan; because he influences our thinking unless we have someone to help us. In the flesh we cannot overpower him. We cannot fight Satan; he is smarter and stronger than we are. But Jesus in His love and understanding has looked after that problem. Once you know Jesus, once you know Him as your Saviour, the Son of God who died and rose again, the One who shed His blood, you can receive the Holy Spirit. Then there is power available to you that was never available before. God not only gave His Son, but also offers His Holy Spirit; it is an "unspeakable free gift", 2 Cor 9: 15. There was a man once who thought he could buy it. The answer came, "Thy money go with thee to destruction", Acts 8: 20. We cannot buy salvation, regardless of our material goods. Can we try to pay God, the Source of all? It is only available one way, through the acceptance of Jesus, accepting the work done on that cross, and acknowledging it was done for you, repenting of your sins. By believing in Jesus, His blood washes away every sin, even those that you do not know about. What a wondrous message; what a wondrous Saviour; how attractive He is!

Saul now realises that this Man who spoke to him, a Man called Jesus, is living, but Saul is blind from seeing that light. Then the Lord

Jesus visits a disciple in Damascus named Ananias in a vision and speaks to him to tell him about Saul, where he is staying and what he is doing. Saul needed Ananias to open his eyes. Ananias said, 'I am afraid of him! He has got authority to put me in prison, perhaps to put me to death'. And the Lord says, "go" to him, so he went. Has anybody ever come to see you like this, someone who cares for your soul? Ananias says, "Saul, brother". He tells him that it is the Lord that has spoken to him, Jesus, Jesus had spoken to him. Ananias knew it; the Lord had told him so, He had told him He had spoken to Saul and given him a message; and now Ananias wants to set Saul free; he wants him to receive his sight, to receive the Holy Spirit, who will be needed for all that he would have to face as an elect vessel. Saul was given everything, as promised, and Saul became a new person, a man who not only knew that Jesus lives, but that He is the Son of God!

Are you a new person, a converted man or woman, a new boy or girl? Do you know this Saviour, do you know this Person, Jesus? Do you know the greatness of His work? Do you know the greatness of His love? I hope so; I pray so! Have you received the Holy Spirit? If you are not sure, do not be afraid; do not be embarrassed; I was not sure for quite a while after coming to know Jesus as my Saviour. You know, even if you do not rely upon Him, He is still indwelling, but you have to use Him to experience the knowledge and fruit of His power. How frail we are in some of these things. But we are then brought into a relationship with God. Who is God? How great are the heavens and the earth.

The Bible opens with the four words, "In the beginning God". At school they will tell you about theories of evolution, that everything happened naturally, everything just evolved. It is not true: "In the beginning God". God created everything, God continues to look over everything; and in addition to all that, He loves me and He loves you. How great He is. What glory is associated with Him, and that is the God who sent His only Son to save sinners, poor, lost mankind. The work is done, and the Saviour is still available. God's glad tidings have been proclaimed for around two thousand years. And they are proclaimed today! They may not be proclaimed next week; they may not be proclaimed tomorrow. The believer hopes not, in a certain sense, because he waits to go to be with Jesus forever. In another sense the believer hopes that God delays it a little bit more so that more people can be saved. But God is waiting for one person, as the hymn says,

Some guest will be the last, (Hymn 70).

We do not know who it is; only God knows, maybe it is you! Do you wonder if the Lord is not yet coming and is waiting for you? He wants you personally; He wants you because He loves you.

I may have gone away from my scripture in what I have said, but I pray that this word has given you some longing for a living link with Jesus, that you may know Him and that He may mean more to you than any other person. Jesus: what an attractive name, what an attractive Person. May we all know Him as “my Saviour”!

May it be so for His Name's sake.

Maidstone

24th September 2017

THE GLORY OF GOD

Robert I Webster

Romans 3:21-23

John 17: 4

Philippians 2: 9-11

I seek to say a word as to the glory of God; it is of fundamental importance in the glad tidings because there has been a challenge raised against it. Satan has sought, with apparent success, to undermine it. I think what we shall see is the way that God has taken in the glad tidings has meant that His glory has been maintained despite the efforts of Satan and the position of man; as we sang in our opening hymn (No 133) every thought of God is maintained.

The glory of God is the shining out of all that is true of Him, the expression of all that He is. It is marked by glory. There is the evidence of this in creation - the psalm says,

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the expanse
sheweth the work of his hands, Ps 19: 1.

It is for all to take account of. Earlier on from where we read it says, “for from the world's creation the invisible things of him are perceived, being apprehended by the mind through the things that are made, both his eternal power and divinity”, Rom 1: 20. The psalm goes on to say -

There is no speech and there are no words, yet their voice is heard. v 3.

You think of the demonstration of God's power in what we can see in creation; “there are no words”, but you think of the manifest glory of God in what we can take account of. Men like to make a lot of noise to draw attention to themselves, but in the glory of creation there is a silent testimony to the power and divinity of God. It expresses something that is true of God. Yet generally as to men, the scripture in Romans suggests that they have chosen not to have God in their knowledge (chap 1: 28); “their heart without understanding was darkened”, v 21. You think of that!

And now I would like you to think of something else, dear friend: that man was created for the glory of God: *you* were created for God's glory. In the beginning in creation, the word of God was, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1: 26), suggesting that it was

in the divine mind that there would something to be expressed in man which was true of God Himself, thereby rendering glory to Him. But if you take account of the situation as it is, you will have to say that there is something seriously wrong! There is not much that can be seen in men that is to God's glory.

That is why I read in the epistle to the Romans, because it is a sweeping statement, and none can excuse themselves from coming under the scope of it: "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God". That is all encompassing: you might say it is a great leveller for all men, that they "come short of the glory of God". And that applies to you, dear friend, and it applies to me; and it is vital that you should have an appreciation of that. Perhaps we go to school, or to work, and we see people, or hear people say things that we might not say, or do things that we might not necessarily do, and we think they are worse than us. But you see that in the gospel we do not measure according to our own judgment: it is a question of the glory of God. "All have sinned", whatever that might be. Sin is the expression of our own will. That is solemn to think about. We might sometimes like to compare ourselves against others, and find some rest in the fact that we are not as bad as they may seem, but when was the last time that you did your own will? That is an affront to the glory of God. That is a very solemn thing - God's glory has been challenged. We have all sinned, we are of a sinful nature. Man was created for God's glory and was put in the garden in circumstances of great blessing that he might know a relationship with God. And yet, as we know, he was disobedient; and in his disobedience he moved outside of the true relationship that man should know before God, into one of distance. What havoc that has caused - if there is something to be attributed to God which is denied by man, then there is something seriously wrong. It is on account of the disobedience of the one, as Romans 5: 19 says; we are all of a sinful nature.

We are all sinners by practice too. We might look back on Adam and see we are all of a sinful race, but there is that too which, as far as our sins are concerned, stands out against us personally. There is something that is personal to you by way of your sinnership, dear friend: "all have sinned". It is important to see things as God takes account of them. It is not a case of how good you are when you compare yourself with others at school, or others at work, or others you come to the meetings with; it is a question of the glory of God and how you stand up

before that. There is one of whom we are told he was put in the balances, weighed and weighed justly, and found wanting, Dan 5: 27. How solemn that is when you think of it; how active the enemy has been in challenging the glory of God! How solemn it is: man disobedient, seeking his own will; and what has it led to? You only have to read the scripture in early Romans to see the result of man choosing not to have God in his knowledge; he falls into moral depravity, moral degradation, to the point where man has fellow-delight in the result of sin. And that is prevalent today. How solemn, how serious, the man created for God's glory, fallen and degraded in his sins.

Well, I do not seek to dwell on that; I really want to speak of the One who could say, "*I have glorified thee on the earth*". What is the answer to fallen man? You think of the whole sinful history of man; how it has scarred the whole human race, and the earth has been a witness to it all. But there was a moment when One could say, speaking to the Father, "*I have glorified thee on the earth*". The earth is the very sphere where sin has been so prevalent, and One could say, "*I have glorified thee*"! It is wonderful just to feed our souls, and to think of it; that One came here, and what did He have on His heart? What was at the root of every motive? It was the glory of God. What a Man! What a pure heart, what perfection of Manhood we see in One who could utter those words. It was not simply that He had not done anything wrong - and that is true - but He had glorified God. He took His place amongst men, and what was seen there was an altogether different order of man. Where the one order of man was disobedient, it could be said of Him that He "learned obedience" (Heb 5: 8): that is unique to Him because of the greatness of His Person. As to that, one has said, 'He had been accustomed to command', FER vol 9 p431. But He learned obedience, and He learned it through circumstances of suffering. He came here, the glory of God was at stake; and come what would against Him, He committed Himself to uphold it: He said, "Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will", Heb 10: 7. It was a question of the glory of God, and He committed Himself to a pathway in which everything would be resolved, and God's glory would be maintained through it all. That is moral perfection! We spoke of it this morning, the moral glory of the Lord Jesus.

We might not understand what 'moral' means. As far as I can grasp it, the simplest way I could put it is it is, how something appears before God. As far as you and I are concerned, we are morally corrupt

on account of our sinful nature and deeds and become disobedient. We have altogether become corrupted, but there was One in whom moral perfection was seen - *perfect* obedience: cost Him what it would, He would not move outside the course of His Father's will, and all the power and forces of Satan, the forces of evil, they railed against Him - infinitely more than any of us might experience; and He would not be altered on His course. That scripture in Romans 5 goes on to speak about "the obedience of the one", v 19. God was glorified in it, that such a One should commit Himself to that will in spite of all that He knew it would involve for Him. Despite the suffering that He endured, despite all that came against Himself, He would obey. How fully God was glorified in it: "I have glorified *thee* on the earth". Where every other man had disobeyed, there was One of whom the hymn could say -

Thou chocest still, blest Saviour, to obey Hymn 318.

We could speak of His dependence upon God too. It says prophetically of Him,

I was cast upon thee from the womb Ps 22: 10.

This is not seen amongst men; natural man moves in independence of God and follows the course of his own will. There is no glory for God in that. But what was seen in Jesus was a perfect dependent Man; and that magnified the One on whom He depended. Think of the Lord Jesus, cast upon God "from the womb". The place into which He came meant that that must be so: in all the circumstances He passed through, what was seen was perfect dependence on God.

You remember that the Lord Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and you think of Him hungering. It is to be noted, and it is very touching to think, that the first man, Adam, disobeyed God in the most beneficial of circumstances, the most wonderful circumstances into which he was put, and yet he succumbed to Satan. Then there is the Lord Jesus, a perfect dependent Man in the power of the Spirit, led into the wilderness, hungering, and Satan came against Him. I suppose in the pride of his own thoughts he may have thought he had found the Lord at a weak point, but what was seen was perfect dependence upon God, and the enemy found no inroad. There was no entry, there was nothing; all the power of Satan which has enticed every other man so easily was rendered null when it came against this perfect Man dependent upon His God. In that, God was glorified.

You think of the manifest moral perfection in Him that could be taken account of. God had already taken account of it; He could express His delight in it at the waters of baptism before the Lord Jesus came out in His public service in those three and a half years. Before that, the Father had His delight in the perfection of that One, speaking reverently, seen in the simple and ordinary circumstances of life. How God was glorified in all that the Lord Jesus expressed. And He moved here perfectly; as I said before, the glory of God was at stake, a challenge had been raised. How successful Satan had been in robbing God of what is rightly due to Him! You think of it: man, the top-stone of God's creation - you see all the glory of creation, and man is the top-stone - and yet become utterly degraded, darkened in his heart and at enmity with God. And there was One here concerned for the glory of God.

What I now seek to bring out is that, in saying, "*I have glorified thee on the earth*", the Lord Jesus not only did this by what He was and what was seen in Him, wonderful though that is, but God has also been glorified in what He has done.

A question might be raised: if God is desirous of blessing the sinner, then what is to be done? - Because God would not be God if He does not condemn sin. Nothing is overlooked, and it is important to get that firmly in our souls, that the glory of God demands that nothing is overlooked. Sin has been fully exposed before God; the full awfulness of all that it is before a holy and righteous God has been seen. It has been seen at the cross of Christ. So what God is in respect of sin is not in question. If you are in any doubt as to what your sins are before God, I would point you to the cross of Christ, when in three hours of darkness, the Lord Jesus Himself became the sin bearer, and was forsaken of God, in order that God's glory in respect of sin might be maintained. All that He is in respect of sin was seen there, and it was fully condemned, judged. Sin was dealt with when the Lord Jesus came under the judgment of God, as the One who was forsaken. That is what it meant for the Lord Jesus to be obedient; that is what it meant for Him to say, as He did anticipatively here, "I have completed the work which thou gavest *me* that I should do it". The work meant that all that God is against sin might be demonstrated. No one can raise a question, no one can say that God has overlooked sin; it has been fully judged when the Lord Jesus offered Himself spotless to God.

You might then ask what God is in relation to the sinner. It is not

only that what God is in respect of sin has been seen at the cross, but His heart of love to the sinner has been told out. It meant that God would give His only beloved Son in order that the issue of your sins might be resolved. It meant that that One should come here as a Man, and in love go the way of suffering, offer Himself, and know what it was to be forsaken, and enter into death itself. You think of it: the Lord Jesus lying in death, and the heart of God is told out, expressed towards the sinner; God would do such a thing for you! And His beloved Son was prepared to go such a way in order to resolve every issue that stood out between you and God. Who can question the heart of God towards the sinner? All has been done to satisfy the righteous demands of God and bring you into the fulness of salvation and the peace of knowing everything has been settled for you. All that God has required from man, Christ has done through His atoning work; and the fulness of what God's heart for you is has been seen. We sing -

'Tis love displayed by Jesus, (Hymn 212).

What a demonstration of love! Can you question God's intention for you? God's desires for you? God's heart of love for you? He gave His only Son for you! And it meant that He should be forsaken. It meant that He should bear the mockery, the despising, the rejection, the betrayal of men; it meant that for Him. It meant that He should be the One that suffered before a holy God, as the One making atonement for sins.

What momentous things these are! God's glory has been maintained; no one can raise a question - even Satan himself; no one can be uncertain as to what God is in respect of sins, because it has been seen at the cross. No one can question God's heart towards them, and God's heart is expressed towards you tonight. He is offering you mercy. The gospel gives opportunity for God to express His heart to you. You think of that: the wonder of God's ways, that through the fall of man, God has been given occasion to express His heart in ways that are glorious. He is offering mercy; it "glories over judgment", Jas 2: 13. I think that means that something supremely glorious is expressed in the exercise of mercy; and grace is known. God is gracious; He is good: "the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God", Tit 3: 4. And it has been demonstrated by this blessed One. What a thing it was for God when One could say, "*I have glorified thee on the earth*". What a triumph every lover of His feels, because it effects everything for God, it effects everything for you and me, that One was found here in the scene

in which man in responsibility has failed and could say, "I have glorified *thee* on the earth" - one Man.

We read in Philippians, and it speaks of what God has done with this Man. What is the answer? What is God's answer to the One who could say, "*I* have glorified *thee* on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest *me* that I should do it"? "God highly exalted him": He now fills the highest office in God's universe; and God has "granted him a name, that which is above every name". It is that Name that is preached for salvation and for remission of sins, the name of Jesus. And God would magnify that Name; God has ensured that there is renown attached to that Name. He is now there as an Object of faith for all those who have "obedience of faith", Rom 1: 5. As the word comes in the glad tidings, it is in order that conviction might be brought in. God seeks that you should bottom things out, not simply to gloss over them. How easy that is to do: we are listening to the gospel, and perhaps we think we will be doing the same next week. God seeks for you to be able to have it all out with Him now; He could say, "Come now, let us reason together", Isa 1: 18. His desire is that you might acknowledge your sinnership and be brought to repentance. If the word of God says it, there is no quarrel: "all have sinned, and come short of the glory". That is the issue: you come short of the glory of God. It is not that you might be a better or worse person than others, it is a question of the glory of God. And God would seek to convict you in your heart as to it. He has installed a Man in glory who has resolved every issue for you; and He is presenting Him, He is setting Him forth as "a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood" (Rom 3: 25), that you might have the peace and assurance of knowing that He has accomplished a work that maintains everything for God and brings in forgiveness for the sinner. What a work: think of the majesty of such a work! Nothing has been overlooked, nothing has been swept to one side; everything came to a head and was dealt with at the cross, and God's love has been expressed.

God has set that One forward as an Object of faith, that you may lay hold of Him, that One that we sang of this morning. He is different from every other man. He is the One that God would set forth; He has "granted him a name, that which is above every name". It says that every knee is going to bow to Him: think of that! How man seeks his own things, his own glory, but there is a Man that every knee will bow to. That Man could say at one point, "*I* do not seek my own glory" (John 8:

50), but God has set Him at His right hand, and He is going to see to it that every knee bows to Him. And then it says that it is going to be “to God the Father's glory”. God is glorified in that. He has vested everything in this Man, the One who is set apart from every other; every knee is going to bow to Him, and it is going to be “to God the Father's glory”. Everything is going to be headed up in Him. God will say, 'That is my Man', and every created being will be brought to bow to Him, and it is “to God the Father's glory”. In the exaltation of Christ, God is glorified.

What a Man He is! Everyone will be brought into subjection to Him. 1 Corinthians 15 says, “when he gives up the kingdom to him who is God and Father” (v 24); it is that eternally “God may be all in all”, v 28. That is the result of God committing everything to this Man. He is now setting Him forth as a point of attraction for you. Despite all Satan's efforts, the way he would seek to undermine and raise a challenge, God's glory has been maintained through circumstances of suffering; and the One who has done it is now in glory, set forth as an Object of faith, that you might find your trust, your hope, your joy, your rest, and your life there. Think of it - the One you have come to know so personally will be owned as Lord by the whole created sphere to God the Father's glory. He is God's Man.

That was my simple impression. We look within and we see what is so obnoxious to God. Then we look out - that is what faith does, it causes you to look outside of yourself, and look to the One who has maintained everything for God and who brings us into eternal blessing, that we might be to His praise and glory eternally. I trust that something of the wonder of what the Lord Jesus is and has done might freshly lay hold upon each one, and that we might be drawn nearer to Him in our affections, for His Name's sake.

East Finchley

16 December 2018

THE LORD'S PRESENCE

John 20: 19-23

John 14: 18

Ephesians 3: 21

Luke 24: 30-35

AJC I do not feel able to expand on this subject much, nor have I contemplated it enough, although we may always experience the Lord's presence on a Lord's day morning, as He comes to His own, I felt in a special way this morning that there was a real sense of that - the Lord being present; in that, we may be drawn completely away from everything that is around. A few of us were discussing yesterday how occupation with Christ leaves everything else behind, and we are quickly drawn into a sphere where we would experience this peace that the Lord speaks of here, twice, in John 20 - "Peace be to you". I think it is a real comfort and a real joy to us that we may have this, and I think also that it gives a great sense of the fact that He is living. If He was not living, He would not be able to come to us. I am always impressed with that - the testimony to the living Man in heaven, that He comes to us, and we may experience His presence. And it is like where we read in Luke - we get a sense of our hearts burning within us and we recognise Him. In the end they recognised who He was in the breaking of bread. I was thinking too of how the passage in John 14 would also refer to Him coming again for His own. But He does not leave them as orphans during the period here. We may experience the Lord's presence every Lord's day morning; how that sustains us in our pathway here, and how it would bring joy to us. I do not really know quite how to explain it, but it is an experience unlike any other experience that we have while we are here. The experience of recognising the Lord being present on Lord's day morning really is unique, and really does sustain us. I would like help from those who have suggested the other passages too, but I was affected when we had that passage read in Ephesians, that it is "unto all generations of the age of ages". There is no lack during this period where we are governed by time. We may have this experience - if we are in right conditions, we have this experience every Lord's day to "the age of ages" in a sense of time; and then in eternity we will be forever with Him. I think we may even get a sense of that on Lord's day morning, of being in the presence of the Lord forever. I was impressed with that this morning.

AML The disciples speak in a collective way - "**We** have seen the

Lord" (v 24), and *they* rejoiced. There was no other occasion like it. The inbreathing would refer maybe to what the Lord has delegated to the assembly; because we have the thought of His hands and His side which would bring out a great thought being developed. It is the first time after Christ had been into death that He appears to His own. The emblems speak so much of His death, but it is a living Christ that we remember, and that makes the whole occasion very living and fresh for us.

AJC It is important for us too that, in remembering Him, we have His death in mind, because He went into death that we might have the liberty to enjoy His presence now. He went into death and rose again, and the power of death is no longer upon us; and we are able to be in the enjoyment of a living order of things, and therefore able to enjoy His presence. If we were concerned and occupied with death, then we could not have that experience.

DgJK It is wonderful too that He appears where there are proper assembly conditions present. I am not taking away from the way that the Lord can be made known to an individual but what I mean by that is there is scope for something distinct where there are assembly-minded persons. I wondered if the language in Luke 24 points to that - "Was not our **heart**" not our 'hearts'? That suggests to me a link to the verse in Ephesians - "to him be glory in the assembly", which is the heart of the assembly being engaged with the Lord coming in, do you think?

AJC I had not noticed before that it was "heart", singular. We should get a great sense of oneness, that we are all together as one body and experiencing this together and each might have a slightly different experience or enjoyment of the presence of Christ. Maybe I have some slightly different impression to the next person that is brought to me by the Spirit, but it all builds up into one response to the Lord. In relation to the assembly conditions, I feel exercised about that too because we come from our own households as individuals and come together collectively, and I have to say sadly that there have been times when I have not recognised the Lord's presence because I have not been exercised and truly in the gain of the collective position and being together in the Lord's supper. That is hard to recognise, but I feel that the more we enjoy the Lord's presence, the more we would not want to miss it.

DgJK I think that is a good way to put it; it does not mean there are assembly conditions just because we sit down together in a room

together. Now it is true that there is a wonderful area the Lord can come into where hearts are awakened; and there is the individual side before that, is there not? I feel the test of it myself, but it is a wonderful thing to prove it when it does happen, and it should make us ready for the next time.

CJB It is not automatic. Does that link a little with your thought? I wondered if the “heart burning” has to do with spiritual affections, not a merely emotional experience.

AJC I do not know that I could say too much more about that other than it is a different experience. I think that we might experience our heart burning naturally when maybe we see a loved one or family member we have not seen in a long time, or enjoy the presence of one or another, but this is a different level; it is a spiritual, heavenly level. Can you say more about that?

CJB I am just struck that, when they had a sense of who was in their presence, it brought out a different level of affection beyond what is natural. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. I think this is a spiritual experience.

AML I was going to ask about the doors being shut - would that suggest the provision of assembly conditions? It would be an exercise to come together all in view of remembering the Lord. It is *the Lord's* supper and we come apart on the first day of the week - “the first day of the week, we being assembled” (Acts 20: 7) - to remember the Lord. It is striking that it says, “and the doors shut”. In a way, of course, it shows how the whole Jewish system had to be set aside because it was a new era that had been introduced by the resurrection of Christ.

DIJK The doors were shut; then when He comes in He says, “Peace be to you”; and then in verse 21 He says it again. I wondered in relation to what was said if that is the difference between emotion and spiritual affection. Emotion might be excitement, anxiety, happiness; there might be all kind of emotion, but when it comes to spiritual affection, He can say, “Peace be to you”. I think there is a real thought of a settled condition when He comes in.

AJC The fear of the Jews would not have occupied their minds after the Lord had come in. They would have had a great sense of the peace. I was impressed with how He said that twice - “Peace be to you”. The Lord desires that we should be in conditions of peace, and we would not enjoy these things if we were fearful and occupied with

things around. But we get a great sense of that peace and are able to be filled by the experience.

BRB Eyes were open. You mentioned earlier being occupied with Christ. In John 14: 19 it says, “Yet a little and the world sees me no longer”. Christ was going to leave them, and then He comes to His own. He says “but ye see me; because / live ye also shall live”. The key is being occupied before and during the meeting; so the glory was impressed upon me this morning, the glory that shines through Christ because of what He did for the Father. It is a matter of being occupied with the Lord's things, an impression, a thought, so that indeed on Lord's day morning our eyes may be opened.

AJC I like what you are referring to - “because / live ye also shall live”. We know what life truly is because the Lord is living, and we experience that. I do not think that is a natural kind of life we have, but life in a whole new order of things that we may experience in a totally different way. I think it is an eternal thought that His own are to be forever living in that way, which is quite something to think about and hard to comprehend, that the experience of life that we may have with the Lord with us, and the experience of life we have on Lord's day morning, is an eternal experience that we will forever enjoy.

DgJK I have been impressed in the past with these two thoughts of peace. Do you think the first mention of peace is over against the fear of the Jews, and He would bring in the thought that there is peace even at the present time because *He* is there? But then the second reference to peace brings in the peace of another world that they can have part in, that they would never have had part in before. It is one thing to know in our circumstances that we come to a point where we know things are settled or finished, and there is a certain sense of peace; but testing things are going to come up again: there is going to be the turmoil and the unrest. But when He mentions peace a second time, it is a peace of Himself. That is one of His names - “Peace”, Mic 5: 5? That brings in something distinct for the disciples, that they were first of all to prove that there would not be unrest anymore, but also that there was One who was going to sustain them in that peace.

CJB He adds there, “as the Father sent me forth, I also send you”: is that what you are referring to - peace from another area of things?

AJC Isaiah speaks of His name being “Prince of Peace”, (Isa 9: 7); I think that is really helpful to see that there is a progression in this peace.

It is interesting that the first time is as He appears, so He speaks of peace, but then He shows them His hands and His side. "The disciples rejoiced therefore having seen the Lord"; there was a recognition maybe that they had not initially had, and then He can say, "Peace be to you" again.

AML When He says peace twice, it may really be what is given to the assembly. Then as was referred to, He adds, "as the Father hath sent me forth, I also send you"; so it is all in view of the testimony which comes out in the Acts: the Spirit came and the assembly was formed. This first occasion is a special occasion, and Thomas missed it. Thomas may represent Israel and he lost this glorious occasion where the disciples can say, "We have seen the Lord". Their heart was full of the living Christ.

MJK I was wondering in relation to what you mentioned about Him making Himself known - is the death of Christ required in relation to that?

AJC I feel like it must be required. He is made known in the breaking of bread, and we are reminded of His death in the breaking of bread. It is important for us to remember Him as the One that went into death, and then as the One who broke the power of death; and then we can move on to this thought and the recognition that He is ascended and risen. So, I would agree with you, but I would like some help on it.

MJK I think what you say is helpful because of the way the manifestation of Himself is given in John's gospel. He could not have made Himself manifest to Israel or to any of His people prior to that, could He? The breaking of bread is associated with a Man who is indeed alive and ascended, but we could not be partakers in it outside the death of Christ. As to these two on the road to Emmaüs, I wondered if attachment or affection is what He appealed to. There is no question that they loved Him - it says they thought He was the One who had come to redeem Israel - but they thought He was dead. But the death of Christ removes everything that would stand between us and the revelation of God.

AJC They were downcast in their spirits, v 17. They were occupied with what they thought was the end. They were brought into something that was new and eternal. The experience of Lord's day morning is so valuable. We might be occupied, and naturally we are occupied, with things that are here naturally, and for some reason on a Lord's day

morning things seem to go awry, a parent is trying to get things together and might be frustrated and occupied with things that happen; but then as we are brought together and occupied with the Lord; there is just a sense of peace and a sense of everything else fallen away. That might be too much of a natural thought, but we may be taken away to a place where none of these things are a burden and we can be completely occupied with the Lord Jesus as a living Man; and He delights to bring us into the presence of the Father: so we continue on in that elevated sphere.

MJK I think the first thing when we come together is in relation to the death of Christ but then there is energy and vitality that comes in. I was impressed with that in Luke 24 - “he made as though he would go farther”, v 28. I think they were spent. But the energy and vitality that was there was only then revealed in the breaking of bread - He made Himself known - and now that opens up a whole new area of things such as we see in John 20 where peace can come in. In other words, the death of Christ has set aside all those things that are burdening us; all those things that have so tried me throughout the week - the death of Christ has set that aside. Then we come and see a Man who is willing to lead us into the area of peace in which there is energy and vitality associated with Him.

AJC So that would involve our death with Christ. The natural side has died, is done away with, and we are just in the enjoyment of life.

DgJK Making Himself known is not just a passing glimpse, is it? Later on in John 14, Judas asks, “Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us and not to the world? Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him”, v 22, 23. I was thinking of that peace that He brings in, in John 20. There is a sense of His abiding presence, abiding love, abiding peace. Is that really what we are to prove on the Lord's day? We are not able, because of our frailty, to sustain it for very long, but it gives us a view of what will be.

AML The Lord does not say, 'peace' to the two at Emmaüs in Luke 24, and yet He manifested Himself. They did not waste any time to be really set in liberty after they had an impression because they saw a Man out of death. But where they were was too limited; they had to go to the eleven and those with them. “Rising up the same hour” - that would be the vitality and liberty they were brought into. They were not told where to go; they knew what to do. That would be the touch of

Christ, in a living way, that touched their hearts and moved them.

AJC The energy, the vitality that marked them is striking. I have thought before that a lot had happened during this day and they had travelled a good distance, I understand, and yet they had the energy and the desire and vitality to rise up that same hour and go back to Jerusalem. There was no question of fatigue or anything like that. The presence of the Lord had revitalised them, and they had this experience of their hearts burning.

AML What brought them back to the place that they had left early in the morning? They went from Jerusalem to Emmaüs but they went quickly back.

MJK John 20 is a different presentation from Luke 24. Luke shows that the eleven and those with them had come together, and then the Lord makes Himself known to them; He comes in to all of them. There is a settled condition brought in as having now seen the Lord as the One who had risen.

AML John 20: 19-22 is very special. There was no other occasion like it with the inbreathing; it links the disciples on to what was coming in the assembly.

PBK The Lord cannot stay away, when there are conditions there. The assembly has a glory, and that glory attracts Christ.

AJC It is a glory that is of Him, and nothing that we have in ourselves naturally. I was wondering if someone could help as to the Holy Spirit's part in this too. The Holy Spirit would occupy us with Christ, and would help us through the week too. The Holy Spirit's desire is that the Lord's people should be in this condition where the Lord would desire to reveal Himself and come to us.

PBK Do you think that the Spirit and the bride are really joined in this? The Spirit would have to be the One who brings the Lord in, and the Spirit is identified with the bride. He is in each one who has accepted the Lord Jesus and received the Spirit; and that provides what answers to what the Lord is looking for.

DgJK When the Lord speaks about the importance of the Spirit, it was to prove that He was not leaving them as orphans. The Spirit would speak of Christ and He would bring the glories of Christ before us so that we would have a sense, always, of His coming to us.

AML Ephesians 3: 16 says, “to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man”. That would give us the strength to be able to join in the chorus of response that comes out in the assembly in Christ Jesus. We are dependent on the Spirit for that. Paul refers to the Spirit joining His help to our weakness, Rom 8: 26.

MJK In Luke 24, after the two go back, it says: “he himself stood in their midst, and says to them, Peace be unto you”, v 36. Is that a different occasion to John 20?

AML It is been said that John 20 is in *the* midst. Luke is in *their* midst.

MJK I had thought it was the same occasion, but I am asking. As far as the timeline goes, it was the same day. I understand the application you are making; *the* midst and *their* midst has two different connotations.

AML I think the account in John 20 refers to something very special because the inbreathing is there; and His hands and His side brings in thoughts of the assembly - it is very elevated. Thomas missed that.

AJC Could you open up the difference between *the* midst and *their* midst?

AML Their midst would be in a special place. We had a number of breakings of bread this morning - that might relate to what we have in Luke, different places, different houses. But *the* midst would relate to a universal principle.

CJB It seems that one of the features of the Spirit coming in in the Acts is that they persevered. I had not really thought about the assembly conditions related to that. Is that something that the Spirit brings in, assembly conditions? Paul reminds the Ephesians of that later in the next chapter; he says to use diligence. Is that something that we should be characterised by? They persevered and the Spirit came in. But we are to use diligence to keep assembly conditions and the uniting bond of peace.

AML Perseverance and using diligence are moral features which would be very much related to what is in the power of the Spirit. What you referred to in Acts, “they persevered”, really would be the maintenance of assembly conditions. The enemy has attacked that very much.

DAMcK I was just reading something in CAC. He said we would not

need the breaking of bread if the Lord was here, Notes on Corinthians vol 32 p99. It is not that we have lost the Lord, but we have gained Him in a blessed way. I found that encouraging.

AJC I used to struggle with that thought. This is a dispensation in which the Lord is not here physically, but He does come to us and is with us; and that is a greater thought and a greater enjoyment than when He was actually here. He says, "It is profitable for you that I go away"(John 16: 7), so that the Spirit might come and that His own might have these experiences. It is quite something to think about that. He is not here physically but it is not that He has left us; as He said, "I will not leave you orphans", and He comes to us.

DgJK It is a reminder that it is a distinct spiritual experience. You enjoy the company of a person when you are with them, but when they leave that is lost. But by the Spirit, that goes on. The Spirit is always speaking of Christ.

AJC Is that why it is a greater thought? The Lord is on high and the Spirit is here with believers, and therefore as the Lord is living, He can be in the midst. He is in the midst of the assembly; it does not matter where we are physically, if we are in the right conditions, gathered to His Name, the Lord would come to us. In this dispensation, that means that we are not governed by any of the measurements we have here in terms of distance or location. Those things do not come into play. It is on a completely different level and therefore we can experience the Lord's presence.

MJK It is on our account that the breaking of bread has been given, is it not, so that we might be refreshed week by week? There has been no lack on the Lord's side. We are drawn back to the point of His love and drawn in. "Their midst" is in relation to the persons. "The midst" is in relation to the atmosphere - what there is there substantially: it is found in Christ. The Lord on high and the Spirit here - that is the upper and the lower springs we are given access to, Josh 15: 19. Stephen had both, a man full of the Holy Spirit - he saw the Son of Man standing - that is the upper and the lower springs, Acts 7: 55, 56. There he was in the midst of being stoned, and he could have perfect liberty. It shows us what power there is in divine Persons.

CJB The Lord in the midst is different from our weekday experiences with the Lord? The Lord enters in a unique way as we enter into the service of God. Imagine coming from an area where the sacrament is

issued by a priest, and then having the experience like many saints did in the recovery of the truth: imagine! Breaking bread and having the experience of the Lord coming into their midst - it is a wonderful area that we have come into.

DgJK How do you know the presence of the Lord?

AJC Is it when you have a sense of the peace we have been speaking about? From my own experience, it would be when we feel like we are drawn and entirely occupied with that. Everything else starts to fall away, and we recognise that we are completely occupied with Christ, and He is the Centre. As an older brother in London put it one time, we do not feel we can sit on our seat anymore; we want to be in response, and we want to welcome Him in praise and in worship. It is hard to put words to the experience.

DgJK I am sure our experience is all very similar in that way. It is very affecting to me the way we have been in smaller groups recently, yet it has not changed the presence of the Lord. He comes to us through the affections of the saints. We can be together with one or two; you sit down, and the hymn is sung that draws us all together. A brother stands on his feet and there is something distinct. It is not just as though you are having a conversation as you might with a brother or sister. There is something unique in the way that the affections are engaged.

MJK "Was not our heart burning in us?" - do you think that would be some sense of the presence of the Lord. Maybe we do not even recognise it at first but it is made known to us. Someone may stand on their feet, and you recognise something is going on in your own soul? It may be in relation to the same thing but it is drawn to light by what has been given to us.

AML It is difficult to explain in a natural way but when the Lord gives us a touch, might the Spirit give us a touch from a scripture coming to mind, or even a hymn that we have been singing? There was a brother who said it becomes living in our hearts and becomes precious. But it is an entirely spiritual thing; we cannot make a description of it in a natural way because the Lord appears, and our impressions are all different because our measures are all different.

AJC Maybe just one thing is said, but then the Spirit will use that and it will start to grow. We get a sense of that in the service of God, that one thing just keeps growing, and we get a greater and greater impression and sense of the greatness of God.

MJK We each have a different measure, but we also each have had different experiences. That forms us. I have had a different experience through the week than you have, but those things come together because God knows the whole. I wonder sometimes if I have enough appreciation of what others have had experience in - that I might get the gain of that as well as my own experiences. God uses those things to come out formatively in worship in the service of God.

AJC The Spirit, being God, knows that, and the Spirit is in you and me; so He can use that to create that experience.

DgJK The power of expression, or the expression of power is the same: by one Spirit.

CJB I would imagine trying to get an entire company of employees to be in the flow of things would require tremendous energy, time and difficulty. But in an instant our hearts can be unified by the Spirit, maybe by a hymn, word, or scripture. I was thinking about what was mentioned, that He opened up the scriptures to them - they must have become so living! "He spoke to us on the way, and as He opened the scriptures to us" - it is tremendous.

AML They were obviously affected by it, and they got the gain a bit later. It was overwhelming to begin with and He disappeared. The Spirit can lead us that way.

AJC In relation to us all having a slightly different experience or being able for something slightly different, that is an encouragement for the younger ones. I know I did not appreciate it as much when I was younger, and maybe did not have the same level of enjoyment. But just a small piece will sustain you and help you. I can remember sitting and thinking that I was not sure that I had that level of enjoyment, or maybe there was something wrong with me that I am not doing this right. But it is not about the measure; it is about the experience of the enjoyment of the presence of the Lord and it is not something we need to be worried about; it is not measured by those things; so the size does not matter. It is the enjoyment of the presence of the Lord.

DgJK The small boy with the five loaves and two fishes was the greatest contributor at that time, John 6: 9.

MJK I think that is helpful, for an encouragement for everyone young and old alike: do not diminish your own experience with God. I can tell you that largely our experience with God comes in time of distress, not

when things are going well. I am not saying it cannot happen, it does, but largely it comes in time of distress. Why? Because we find ourselves incapable of moving forward in ourselves and we need help, then we cry to God. Those are marvellous experiences that help us grow inwardly for the glory of God.

AML “In pressure thou hast enlarged me”, Ps 4: 1.

Aberdeen, Idaho

19th July 2020

List of initials (*all local in Aberdeen*):-

Brian R Beck; Colin J Brien; Adrian J Croot; Daryl J Klassen; Doug J Klassen; Michael J Klassen; Phil B Klassen; Anders M Lidbeck; Doug A McKay

WHAT IS IMPORTANT?

Brent D Morris

John 3: 16

I have a very simple question, and that is: what is important to you? In the last six months we have all become more acutely aware of the things that are important to us in our daily lives. There may be some things that we are actually quite glad that we no longer have to deal with, such as the commute or traffic jams. There may be other things that we quite miss, such as being able to gather socially and in large groups. I would like to draw our attention to something that is more important than all of those things. I would like to speak about how each of us as individuals is important to God; and then about why it is imperative that God and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ should be important to you.

I was struck afresh by the first part of what we read, “For God so loved the world”; that is how important you are to God. As we have sung,

God, from His throne on high,
Gave His own Son to die, (Hymn 245).

Although there are many things that we think are quite important to us, none of those things are as important as the Lord Jesus was to God. He was His only-begotten Son; the most precious thing that God had, and yet He gave Him up for you and for me. It is often said that, even if it was only for one person, such was God's love, so important are you to God, that He would have given up that Object most precious and important to Him to secure you. What affection there is in that.

Why was it necessary for that precious One to be given up? As we have at the end of the passage we have read, it was that those who believe “may not perish”. Each and every one of us has a stain upon us because we are sinners; we have committed acts against the will of God. Your sins are like a scarlet stain on the soul; it is a bright, vibrant colour, something you cannot miss; and in our own power it cannot be washed out. God cannot have that in His sight; there is nothing that we can do to change that. The current public health situation really shows the true meaning of helplessness. It is hard to fathom what it means to be truly helpless; but the virus is going around, and none of us is able to create a cure on our own. The best we can do is run and hide and bunker down. We are entirely helpless; we are dependent on

something else to be saved from this peril. How much graver and how much more important is the peril addressed in the glad tidings. The danger you face is one that you are utterly helpless to resolve yourself, or to save yourself from. In that helpless state you would perish, and this is not to perish in an earthly sense. This is a far graver thing: this is to perish in an eternal sense, to spend eternity in the lake of fire and brimstone, Rev 20.

There will be a day for every one when they come before God and it will be reckoned to each according to whether or not they are saved. If you come before God without being saved, the lake of fire and brimstone is your eternity. That is the peril. You can do nothing in your own power to change that, which is why it is necessary for God to have given up this very precious One to give you the opportunity to change that. That shows how very important you are to God. God loves you so much that He does not want that peril to fall upon you; He wants you to have a route to salvation. It is the opportunity for salvation: the decision as to whether to be saved or not rests entirely with you. The work of salvation is complete, but the decision rests entirely with you.

This brings me to why it is imperative that God is important to you. We read that "whosoever believes on him may not perish". It is as simple as that: "whosoever believes on him". I appreciate it is far easier to say than actually to come to it yourself to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would like to delve into what it means to believe on Him. Firstly, it is an act of faith. Faith is a very important thing. It is accepting something as true that you may not be able to prove by natural means. I was trained as a scientist; in science, you do an experiment and if you get the same result every time, you know something is true. You cannot do that with faith. You have to accept that what is presented to faith is true, and then prove it yourself. In doing so you will prove that those things are true, but the first step is the act of faith. You can look around those in the room, and they will all testify to the fact that the things of faith are true, and what you are asked to put your faith in is true, but for you yourself to know it: you have to first take that step. That is faith.

Then we have "believes on him". What does it mean to believe *on Him*? The very first step of this is to accept as true that you yourself are helpless, and that you yourself in that helpless state are eternally lost, which is a very sobering state. Then you accept as true that the Lord Jesus Christ has the power and ability to save you from your sins,

because He is perfect, He is the only Person who walked this earth who was without sin; and therefore, when He was put on that cross and His blood was shed, death had no claim on Him. The Lord Jesus suffered the penalty for sin for you, for me, making provision for the entirety of mankind throughout human history and as far as the future is concerned; Christ bore the penalty that whoever “believes on him might not perish”. This is important, because God is righteous, that same righteousness that bars you from the presence of God in your sins, demanded that the penalty for sin and sins had to be dealt with. Your needs could not just be swept under the carpet; they had to be dealt with. How wonderful it is that the Lord Jesus Christ, because He was perfect, was able to bear the penalty for our sin; and therefore the work of salvation is finished. That is also assured because Christ is risen. Yes, He died, but then He rose again on the third day; and that is something that we have great evidence for. He appeared many times - to a few people and also to large groups. This is Someone who endured the worst method of execution that the Roman Empire knew at the time. He was put into a tomb; then Joseph put a huge stone over it, and the Jews sealed the stone and put guards over it so that He could not escape. Man tried everything they possibly could to keep Christ in the grave. What happened? His own found the stone rolled away, the garments lying there (John 20); and Christ was not in the grave, Christ was risen. You can take assurance from that; you may therefore have assurance that, in putting your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the penalty for your sins has been completely dealt with.

What does it mean to believe on Him? It is that act of faith that your sins can be forgiven: you have complete assurance when you put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ that the penalty for your sin is gone, as it says here: “may not perish, but have life eternal”.

Having secured this salvation, salvation from the greatest peril you will ever face, God in His love - because you are so important to Him - does not stop there. He has this also in mind, “have life eternal”. As I said earlier, we will all appear before God in a coming day, and those of us who have put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will be able to point to the atonement in His blood. Your eternal outlook goes from the lake of fire and brimstone to sharing eternity with Christ in heaven. What a blessing God has in mind for those who put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. How wonderful it is; and it is not just an abstract future thing, it is something that we can enter into the joy and benefit of now.

When we gather together with believers, we get glimpses of what that future will be like. The Lord is risen and seated at the right hand of God, but He does not leave us on our own down here. While we await His coming, He has provided the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is yet another blessing from God that is freely given: you only need to ask. How wondrous that is, and how important you are to God; not only does He provide for your salvation, not only has He secured your eternal destiny, there is also this gift that you can enjoy down here now. Having accepted the gift of the Holy Spirit, there is then the Lord's request that you should remember Him in the breaking of bread. What a precious thing it is, for when we break bread we "announce the death of the Lord", 1 Cor 11: 26. We are publicly committing ourselves to Him with an announcement to the world that Christ is important to each of us; that we have accepted Christ as Saviour, and are looking forward to that day when that One who is so important to us will appear, and that we expect to be spending eternity with that One, who holds us also so dear. It is a very mutual relationship that then exists between God and you.

As I said at the beginning, I had two things I wanted to impress you with. The first was that you are important to God. God has provided the source of your salvation. He has provided for an eternity in heaven and He has provided the Spirit for you while you are down here. The second thing I sought to impress you with is that it is imperative that Christ and God are important to you, because without Christ being important to you, without you putting your faith and trust in Him, eternal perishing is your future; but by the simple act of faith you can take hold of salvation that God has provided.

I trust that it is the portion of each and every one that not only is Christ essential to you, but you also have a sense, an appreciation of how important you are to God, that He has gone to such great lengths to secure your affection and that you are looking forward to that day when you shall be with Him for eternity. I trust that is the portion of each and every one.

May God bless the word.

Sunbury

25th October 2020

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81 Roxburgh Road West Norwood London SE27 0LE

Printed By ICP 18 Station Road Crayford Kent DA1 3QA

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