

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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HOLINESS - 3

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AMB In the first reading yesterday we spoke about God's holiness, and the holy nature of God's love, and how, in order to fulfil its purpose towards us, it required the forsaking of Christ, as we see so feelingly portrayed in Psalm 22. We spoke about the holy love of God, and the holiness of the Lord Jesus, the One who "loved righteousness and hated lawlessness", Heb 1: 9. We also spoke of the Holy Spirit, the One who came down complacently on the Lord Jesus here, descending as a dove in bodily form, and who also came to indwell believers at Pentecost, and does so now.

In the second reading we considered holiness in relation to believers in the sanctification that Christ has accomplished and which is maintained by the Holy Spirit, and also our responsibility to keep ourselves in sanctification and to purify ourselves. Our brother spoke very appealingly in the address about God's activity in building what is inward in the saints, and how attractive it is to be involved in God's building. God is building what is for Himself, which is for our blessing certainly, but for His glory.

Today we might seek help to continue in this enquiry as to holy matters, and what we might consider in this reading is approach to God. God's presence, as we were reminded yesterday, is holy and the way into His presence has to be according to Him. Holiness is according to God: mention was made of Exodus 3, where Moses turned aside to look at the burning bush and God spoke to him out of the bush, v 2. The first thing that God said is that the ground that Moses stood on was holy: he had to take off his sandals, v 5. There is a reference to approach to God there. God had not of course made Himself known fully at that time, as He has done now, but the same principle would apply, that God's presence is holy and therefore we must approach Him according to Himself - on His terms.

The thought of approach to a holy God is a searching and challenging one but it brings before us the blessedness of the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly as Priest towards us. The service of

the priest is mentioned either implicitly or explicitly in these scriptures that we have read, and we could consider His priestly service in preparing us to enter God's presence, including His intercession in maintaining us here and preparing us in our spirits to approach. We have a suggestion of that in Romans 8: the activities of the Holy Spirit are spoken of and then I think the reference to "he who searches the hearts ... intercedes for saints", is a reference to the holy activity of the Lord Jesus interceding. It is "according to God"; the intercessions are "according to God".

Where we read in Hebrews 7, which was alluded to yesterday, there is this reference to "such a high priest became us, holy, harmless" and One who is "always living to intercede for" us. How effective His intercessions are; how great He is as the high Priest! And then we might think about the force of that expression "such a high priest became us". That makes the saints great; there is a great high Priest needed to intercede for the saints, and then to enable us to approach to God. There is a striking reference in what "became us" to the greatness of the saints.

Then we can see in the Revelation that the thought extends to us being made priests, "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father"; so the service of the Lord Jesus in terms of our approach to God goes on to the wonderful matter of making the saints priests and then sustaining us there. We remember that the saints have been made like Him, and are of Him. He is the Sanctifier: "he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one", Heb 2: 11. It conveys the thought of one nature, and holiness in the saints implicit in that. And then in the midst of such a company the Lord is active. It says in verse 12: "I will declare thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises". He declares His Father's name to His brethren, and sings His praises in the midst; how elevated it is. So what the Lord has in mind is a company whom He has sanctified, a priestly company, in the midst of which He sings the Father's praises.

It is very affecting to see that the quotation in Hebrews 2: 12 is from Psalm 22; so the result of the holy sufferings of the Lord Jesus is that He is securing what is according to God for the response that God seeks. We are included in that through divine grace.

WMP I am sure we will find this a very profitable enquiry. What is in view in approach to God? What is the end in view in that?

AMB God desires to have people in His presence; that is according to His holy will and mind. His will is that He should be worshipped in spirit and in truth by those who are like Christ and bear features of Christ - the saints. And because the saints are the subject of Christ's work, they become like Christ and like God. So God's purpose is to be surrounded by worshippers led by Christ who are according to Him. This is not done at a distance: we approach God to be near Him, and in His presence. If the Lord will we might speak a little more about that in the second reading today, as to the service that proceeds in God's presence. There is also a side to approaching God which I think is brought out particularly in the first two scriptures that we read: our needs are met, and I am thinking of our needs as believers, our affections and longings being satisfied.

JL Our brother has rightly made reference to the objective in view in approach to God, but would it be right to say that we find that there are levels of approach? How did you first approach God?

AMB In relation to my need!

JL 'Come as you are in all your sin', (Hymn 245).

There was no holiness of state at all at that point, but it shows the marvellous forbearance of God in mercy. The thought of approach to God is a progressive one, is it not?

AMB I am glad you bring that in. God has born testimony to Himself in Christ. That testimony has continued in the Spirit and the saints here, but His desire is that people should come to Him, and come to know Him. The greatest blessing is conveyed in the Lord's words: "that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent", John 17: 3. That is how we will be satisfied eternally, by the knowledge of God and the knowledge of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. How are we to arrive at that? We cannot even begin when we are still in our sins, because it would mean nothing to us, and we would not be able to enter into that holy place, but God has made provision for us in our need. Then He desires us to progress in the knowledge of Him. We come to know Him first as a Saviour God, and a God of grace, and then a God of love who wants us in His presence to bless us there with Christ and in Christ, and thus become worshippers!

JL I think the construction of the tabernacle system gives us an illustration of all that, and what was in God's mind. The brazen altar

comes in early on in the way of approach, but no doubt God's intention ultimately is that there should be entrance into the holy of holies, which has now been opened up fully. But that is running ahead too far!

AMB It is very helpful. Young brethren would be interested to follow through the pattern of the tabernacle. It was located at the centre of the camp of Israel, and at the centre of the tabernacle was the holy of holies. There was the tent of meeting, and round that was the court, and within the court and in the holy place the priests worked at their service, but the people were outside. They could come in to the brazen altar with a sacrifice, but not into the tent of meeting. And only the high priest could enter into the very centre of the Jewish system, the holy of holies, and that only once a year. But in Christianity we have access to the holy of holies, to God's very presence.

DCW So the service not only of the Lord but of the Spirit is essential, is it not? "For through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father", Eph 2: 18.

AMB The Spirit's service is essential towards us and in us, for the enjoyment of everything in divine things.

DCW So this chapter 8 contains various references to the Spirit and to His service, and the various appellations applied to Him.

AMB Romans 8 is often spoken of as the Spirit's chapter. It would be good to touch briefly on what we read in verses 26 and 27. It has to do with the Spirit joining His help to our weakness, and the Spirit itself making intercessions, which is a remarkable thing, and then "he intercedes for saints according to God", which I think is a reference to the intercessions of the Lord. It could be a reference to the intercessions of the Spirit, but the striking thing is that these divine intercessions are for saints according to God. What would you say further?

DCW An intercessor must be someone who has influence, and of course the prefix 'inter' means 'between'. In order for an intercession to be successful that person must carry weight and carry influence.

AMB That makes us think of the priestly service of Christ on our behalf. He is a Priest on our behalf; He intercedes according to God. He also knows the mind of God; He is the One whom the Father loves, and He is the One who is able to sustain in holiness everything for the

Father in His presence. What influence that One has, making intercessions for us according to God!

NJH Would the sense of our weakness be appropriate in this context? In Ephesians it is “according to the power which works in us”, chap 3: 20. But here the sense of weakness seems to make way for the whole range of mediatorial activity.

AMB What you say sheds light on that reference to weakness. It is not our sins and our failures that are in view here. The sense is that “we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting”; we want to pray, we want to have the mind of God about things, and to pray for things as is fitting, but we do not know how; but there is divine help and strength available. I trust we would all desire to know more of the things of God, and to be strengthened in them. Intercession in relation to that is carried on by the Spirit and also by the Lord Jesus. You would encourage us to desire earnestly to grow in our knowledge of and love for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and to ask for divine help to grow in that.

NJH It is the new state in the believer that the Spirit is linked with. It says, “joins also its help”. On our side it is appropriate in that sense to be conscious of weakness. We are dealing with a holy God and we have the new state, but we are advancing. Progress has been referred to. When you come to Ephesians it is “according to the power which works in us”.

AMB And we are not alone in the desire to grow in our affections and in our understanding; we have the Holy Spirit on our side.

PAG It has been helpfully remarked that intercession is between two persons, but could you say what intercession is.

AMB It is requesting something that is in the interests of the person who is being interceded for. The request is made by one who is really in a superior position, in a position of influence as has been said, and who has in mind the interests of the person interceded for: that is us! So the Spirit and the Lord have your interests and mine in mind as they intercede for us.

PAG That is helpful. Because it is intercession according to God, it is not about asking God to reduce His standard so that we might get on a bit better; it is rather intercession that we might be maintained at the

height that God has in mind for us.

AMB Thank you for bringing that in: it is exactly what is in mind in referring to this scripture, that what is according to God is maintained at His standard. It is a holy standard, and while we are weak, as has been said, the question is how we can be maintained in what is according to God. The answer is in this scripture, through the intercessions of the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus.

PJW So there is no thought of conflict in it. Sometimes you hear of an intercessor between two opposing parties, but it is not that thought here. Can you help us as to that?

AMB Both the Spirit and the Lord have God's mind, and they have God's mind about the saints. We have spoken about the interests of those who are interceded for; what would our interests be? No-one knows what our best interests are better than God Himself, and the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus are included in that. The scripture here refers to the mind of the Spirit; the mind of the Spirit would be the mind of God for us. That relates to our safety and our being secure here and being maintained here in the testimony. The interests of the saints would include these things, but then they also go on to our heavenly blessings. What would you say about it?

PJW That is helpful; Job at one point said, "There is not an umpire between us", Job 9: 33. There were certain barriers there, because of his state perhaps, but there is more in the thought of the intercessor than Job thought of. The intercessions are to bring us up to the divine level.

AMB I think intercessions according to God are a wonderful matter. What resources are available to us, because divine Persons are on the side of the believer, the side of the saint!

RDP I was thinking about what our brother has said as to different levels of approach. The context here seems to be the sufferings of the present time and the creation groaning, and we are "saved in hope", v 24. It strikes me that the prayer here is not the prayer of the hopeless. We can sometimes bemoan the state of things and before we know it, we are telling God about the wretchedness of everything around. But the scripture brings in this matter of hope, suggesting that the approach to God is in the light of all that He is going to do. We are preserved from a litany of hopelessness because the approach to God involves the way

that He has been revealed, and has also made known His great thoughts.

AMB Yes. As we come into the knowledge of the truth, as the truth is in the Lord Jesus, that brings assurance into our hearts that He is true, and that what He says is true: it proceeds from God. We can have complete confidence and assurance in Him and in His word, and we hope in that! I think 'hope' is a lovely word. It is used in scripture to convey complete and implicit confidence in what God has said and in Christ. It does not indicate uncertainty, which is the sense in which the word is commonly used now. But we can be maintained in hope through the intercession of the Spirit and of the Lord Jesus according to God.

JW I was thinking of Psalm 51, which was referred to last night in the address. David says, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not the spirit of thy holiness from me", v 11. And then he says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise", v 17. David had sinned grievously, but his heart was right and there is One here who searches the heart.

AMB That is a challenge to us, but also a comforting matter, that whatever is in our hearts, all that is true in affection for Christ and a desire to be loyal to Him, is known about in heaven, and that is according to God.

JW So if we approach God, we cannot pretend to be what we are not.

AMB Exactly, that is very important. He looks for sincerity and truth.

JCG I want to enquire about this matter of the Spirit making intercession in relation to our weakness. The reference to us not knowing what to pray for suggests that the Spirit is interceding when we do not really realise it; is that how you would understand it? In which case, do you think that divine Persons act in view of prompting us inwardly to develop what is of the work of God? I was thinking of the younger brethren. Often there is hesitation, and the fear of man in expressing ourselves in public, but it is encouraging that the Spirit would prompt us and help us in view of moving forward and approaching God. Would that be in order?

AMB I think that is helpful. The Spirit would join Himself to any right

desire in the believer's heart. Your point is that such a desire may not even have been expressed, it may be simply right feelings, and therefore weak in a sense, but the Holy Spirit joins Himself to that. If there is faith in Christ in the believer's heart, that provides a new area which is a result of God's sovereign operations and the Holy Spirit is able to work there, however small and weak it may appear to be.

PM Would you say something as to the “groanings” of the Spirit?

AMB It conveys deep feeling, “groanings which cannot be uttered”. It is a remarkable expression relating to a divine Person. Such deep feeling would suggest that this matter of intercession on behalf of the saints is a very important matter among the Persons of the Godhead. The “groanings” of the Spirit would convey something of that.

PM The Lord Jesus Himself groaned when there was a man who was unresponsive (Mark 7: 34), but the Spirit groans also. I wonder if I realise the feelings of divine Persons in relation to their testimony. The apostle is speaking of the scene of testimony here and what is being worked out in the present time. I wonder if the Spirit is forming something of those feelings in the saints.

AMB Do you think that the Spirit earnestly desires to bring about in us feelings that are according to God? It is really the great service of the Spirit to form and bring into expression features in believers that are Christ-like and that are therefore according to God. We have spoken about progression already, and the Spirit works in that way; He builds things up in believers.

QAP Would this section encourage us to be sensitive as to the presence of the Spirit? Speaking practically we pray daily about matters, but we need to be sensitive as to His leading. It says of the Lord Jesus at one point, “And being in conflict he prayed more intently”, Luke 22: 44.

AMB I think that is a good word. The exercise to pray according to God's will, being sensitive to the Spirit who would help to bring His will before our hearts and minds, is very important. The Holy Spirit would recognise true and sincere desire in any heart that loves the Lord to find God's will as to a matter and to be in subjection as to it, and He would help us.

DCW I was just thinking about what has been said about prayers and

intercessions and thanksgivings; that would indicate a development in believers in godly features.

AMB Intercessions that are made here by the Spirit and by the Lord on our behalf are taken up. The result is that the believer is strengthened, and is able to have God's mind as to things. We are then able to supplicate and give thanks ourselves.

DCW It is a complete matter. I suppose we sometimes tend to overlook thanksgivings, but intercessions too are an important part of the prayers of believers.

AMB We can intercede for one another too.

AM Could you say something about the mind of the Spirit that is referred to here? We get the mind of the Lord elsewhere, the mind of Christ, but this is the mind of the Spirit.

AMB It seems to convey the thought of what is prompted by the Holy Spirit in the believer. The Holy Spirit is the great connection between the believer and God; He is God Himself and He indwells us. So that to have the mind of the Spirit would mean that we understand God's feelings about a matter. "The mind of the Spirit" would also remind us that "the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit life and peace", v 6. There is a spreading in the believer of divine blessings, of life and peace. What would you say?

AM I think what you say is helpful. As regards the reference to life and peace, something would be evident in the believer.

AMB Yes. If we make way for the mind of the Spirit, it will become obvious outwardly.

GAB So there are things we do not know, but verse 28 brings us on to things we do know. Does that involve formation in some degree? There may be a long way to go, but there is something being formed in the believer, is there not?

AMB Yes. What "we *do* know" would include this matter of being "called according to purpose", which means that believers have been the subject of divine forethought. There was a divine plan to secure you and me, and that does not bring any credit on us at all; it is all through God's initiative. The way that He has brought it about would draw our hearts out to Him. Why has He thought of us beforehand in this way? It

is for His pleasure; we are for Him!

GBG I was thinking about what has been mentioned as to “groanings which cannot be uttered”. Do you think the Spirit would form these “groanings” in us, in relation to the testimony? That is happening at the present time: there are “groanings which cannot be uttered” in the saints. You feel things, and you hardly know what to say about it. There are persons whom we love, turning aside for the moment. That would cause “groanings which cannot be uttered”.

AMB They are divine feelings, but the point you are making is that these same feelings are brought about in the hearts of the saints. It is a good word and a sobering one. It challenges me as to what depths of feelings there are in me, and whether they are in some way like God's feelings. How does God feel when dear ones turn away, or are stumbled? Am I going to feel as God feels about them? It seems to me that the principal thought conveyed is one of feeling. We are not told what the outcome is, but we groan, and we desire earnestly that God would come in and show His way, and that the Spirit's power will come in. We look for that, do we not?

JCG Do you think the “groanings” and the searching of the heart lead to what is positive? The Lord's service and the Spirit's service would bring about what is positive. It would not result in believers hanging back or slipping away, but what is in mind, as is mentioned earlier in the chapter, is “as many as are led by the Spirit of God”, v 14. That would be the objective in the “groanings”, would you think?

AMB There is always a positive outcome in mind. The Spirit would love to increase our knowledge of and our love for God; He always works in that way, and He always brings Christ before us, so His “groanings” would have that in mind. The mind of the Spirit would be to magnify Christ to us.

EJM Do you think in Acts 13, as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, there was evidence of feelings among the saints about the stage reached in the testimony at that time? The Holy Spirit says, “Separate me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”, v 2. While they were feeling the matter, the direction of the Spirit came in.

AMB In Antioch the saints put the interests and feelings of the Lord first - they were ministering to Him, and the Spirit came into that, and

gave express direction, and the result was great blessing.

Could we look at where we read in Hebrews chapter 7?

WMP We have already touched somewhat on the wonderful characteristics of the One that intercedes. What do you make of this expression, “For such a high priest became us”?

AMB It adds to the greatness of Christ: “such a high priest” draws attention to His distinctiveness and glory. But then it adds, “became us”. This scripture emphasises the greatness of the “us”. Who are the “us”? The “us” includes every true believer; it means that believers are themselves marked out and dignified, and the blessedness and glory of the high Priest is suited to their dignity and their standing.

JL “Such a high priest”, in the context here seems to signify One who is unchangeable and lives forever to intercede. These are marvellous glories connected with the high Priest, are they not?

AMB They are unique: the scripture here contrasts Christ's high priesthood as unchanging, 'intransmissible' (note h), with the high priests among men who die and whose terms of office therefore end. Christ as a divine Person continues changeless, and as Man He is towards us as the blessed high Priest.

JL It is a cause of praise to God that God has arranged that such a high Priest should be available to serve the saints of the assembly; that is a very blessed thing. Our hearts are comforted that not only have we got One who intercedes for us, but One who is of such a character, on our behalf before God.

AMB It gives us a sense of the holy and heavenly character of what God has in mind; “he is able to save completely those who approach by him to God ... for such a high priest became us”, and then it enumerates these qualities, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners”. These are all holy qualities, and they mark such a high Priest that is suited to the saints!

JRW That is emphasised in the next section, “such a one high priest who has sat down on the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens; minister of the holy places”, chap 8: 1. It is as though it is emphasised there, the glory of such a One.

AMB Yes, it refers in chapter 3 to Him being “the Apostle and High

Priest of our confession, Jesus, who is faithful to him that has constituted him", (v 1-2); He is such a One who has established in Himself everything that is for God, and now He upholds it as the Priest.

JRW I would like to explore a little more what is in your mind as to "became us".

AMB To 'become' in the sense that it is used here means He was suitable to those in relation to whom He is the Priest. We maintain in our minds always the glory and distinctiveness of Christ. He is greatest of all, but as great high Priest He is suitable to the saints, which would distinguish and dignify the saints in our eyes as reading this scripture. He is a "holy, harmless, undefiled" high Priest, "separated from sinners", and that is suitable to us as saints. That gives us God's view of the saints. Do you think we are justified in saying that?

JRW Does that link with "he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one"?

AMB We begin to get a fresh view, I trust, of God's view of the saints, how uplifting and edifying that is!

RT Earlier He is spoken of as "the Apostle and High Priest". I understand Mr Raven said that as Apostle He maintains the calling at its height, and as High Priest He maintains the people at the height of their calling, FER vol 16 p309. I thought that put it very well. God sees what is being done, and we come to a settled position.

AMB So that the calling is "the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3: 14); it is what God has in mind for His saints, and Christ has secured that for God and established it. He then maintains as high Priest the height of the calling as you say, serving us so that we might answer to God's view of us.

RT We realise we have come to a fixed position; this is not going to change; this is something that is settled. It settles us to know it.

AMB And God's desire is that we should be at home there.

RDP I recall a brother once saying that "so great a people" (1 King 3: 9 KJV) called for so great a Priest. The "us" here is not believers viewed as guilty sinners, weak and so on, this is the "us" as to what believers are in Christ, so great a people. This is what they are according to God and it requires, it calls for, so great a Priest.

AMB Yes; you have put that very helpfully. It is not presumptuous to take the words of scripture as they are. Clearly the “us” includes every true believer, and He is a suitable high Priest for so great a people. If I had a clearer view of how God regards His people then I think it would help to see that it is a position firmly established by God. It is what God has set out, and Christ is serving us to bring us into the enjoyment of it.

JCG What has been said about this system involving life is helpful. The approach to God is in life, and earlier in the chapter it speaks of Christ as “of the order of Melchisedec” (v 21); that is, He is established in “power of indissoluble life”, v 16. His service as high Priest has in mind that the saints should not flag or drop, but that they should be maintained in spiritual life. Is that what is in view?

AMB That is helpful. It would also remind us of the vigorous energy that the Holy Spirit brings in as we make way for Him. Those who entered into the presence of God to serve Him in the old dispensation were anointed; typically, the Spirit was upon them. Would the service of the Spirit and the service of the Lord help us in that way? The Lord is before us as the object of our affections and our Model, and the Spirit within us is the One who would link us up with Him, so maintaining the saints in life practically.

JL When did He become a high Priest?

AMB I think when He entered into heaven. What is your thought?

JL I am interested in the expression that is used, “Christ being come high priest”, Heb 9: 11. He was not always so; it seems to link with the glory of the position as coming out of death, overcoming its power, and taking His place as a living Man before God on behalf of the saints.

AMB Yes, very good! And He “has sat down on the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens”, has He not, and He serves as high Priest there? It is a remarkable thing that we can use that language about One so great, that such a One serves us as high Priest.

NJH Does He not cause those of the assembly to enter into the matter of intercession? I was thinking of such a high Priest who “became us”. It is not a reference to the order of priesthood that had been removed, but it has in view what is established in the saints, and as a result they are interceding also, according to 1 Timothy 2: 1.

AMB You are suggesting that as a result of the service of the high Priest, the saints become priestly? I wondered if we could speak together about that.

We read in Revelation 1 as to what Christ has done. It is wonderful to go over this: "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood". So that all we have been speaking about in relation to the Lord Jesus as our great high Priest is based on this, that He loves us! There was a lovely reference yesterday to the Lord as seen in the figure of the Hebrew bondman in Exodus 21; He was the great Lover, and (as our brother brought out) that underlies His priestly service. He is the great high Priest sustaining everything for God, and for us, and He does that as the great Lover. It is, "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood"; He has "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father". So that this is a further thought, with approach in mind: the saints are priests, serving God, serving the Father. And then where we read in Hebrews chapter 2, it brings out our association with Christ, being all of one, and then surrounding Him, as He praises in the midst of the assembly.

NJH The fact that it is "made ... a kingdom" shows that the intercession and service Godward is now maintained even in the presence of evil.

AMB The kingdom speaking of what is down here? Yes; so there is One who has authority in the kingdom, and He is also the Priest who maintains things. Something of the glories of the Lord Jesus open out to us, do they not?

RJF Do these verses bring out the fact that approach is always on the basis of sacrifice? But then that always has in mind acceptance; it comes out beautifully in the beginning of Leviticus: the offering is made there, but it is for acceptance, chap 1:4.

AMB And acceptance conveys something of the pleasure of God in what is brought before Him, and it is always Christ! These offerings, which are very beautiful types of the Lord Jesus, all speak of Him in the holy perfection of His sacrifice and the Father's complete satisfaction and pleasure in Him is holy. The saints come in on that ground.

JTB So it is a very affectionate reference to the fact that the Lord Jesus has personally washed us from our sins. In John's epistle it is the blood that is the instrument, and that of course must always be the

case, but this is a personal touch of the Lord Jesus, He “has washed us from our sins in his blood”, as if it is His desire that we should be fully suited to functioning as priests in the kingdom which is made for us.

AMB There is tremendous affection conveyed in that! It says, “To him who loves us”. The proof of it is in shedding His blood to wash us, and then He has something great in mind - that a suitable and holy company should be available under His hand.

DCW It is very reassuring that this comes in right at the outset in view of all that is to follow. John had the experience, but he is writing this in retrospect. He brings in this comforting and establishing thought initially.

AMB Yes; so it is to such people and with such assurance that all the rest of the Revelation is opened out. If we appreciate and value being made “a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” that would increase the capacity of saints to take in divine thoughts and to answer to them.

RDP Peter brings out the thought of priests, 1 Pet 2: 9. But here it is priests to His God and Father, and then it is priests of God. Perhaps there is significance in the order there, that priesthood first of all is in relation to God before it is in relation to men. “Priests to his God and Father: to him be the glory” might suggest that what we have been speaking of earlier as to being priests to God precedes anything by way of testimony to men. I think in Revelation you get that - the priests to God come before the priests of God.

AMB So the worship and service of God is the highest and most important thing. Christ undertakes to maintain that service at its full height as the One who loves the Father and whom the Father loves. He knows the desires of God, which is to have in His presence those suitable to Him, serving Him. It is a beautiful reference, “priests to his God and Father”, Christ presiding over all, and all according to God.

BWL The verse finishes with a doxology. What would you say about that?

AMB I think that is fine: “to him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen.” It is a recognition of the glory and the grace of divine arranging, through which the saints are to be brought in as priests to worship under the hand of Christ as high Priest. We are brought in as priests to worship and serve His God and Father. It would cause a

great welling up of appreciation and thanksgiving in our hearts. That is, there is praise and glory to the One who is the source of it all, “to him”, that is Christ's God and Father.

BWL Do you think that would be the normal outcome of the occupation? Making way for the Spirit, and the Spirit's leading, and occupation with Christ, would all lead to this.

AMB Yes. We do become occupied with things down here and our responsibilities, and maybe failures too. That is understandable, but the most important thing in Christ's heart is to secure worshippers, priestly worshippers, those that are able to maintain what is according to God's mind and at the level that He desires; that is what Christ is set for. There are many other ways in which He serves us and helps us, but that is what He wants to go on to.

JRW Is what we are speaking of what we would call the holy of holies? I wonder if you could help us a little as to that. We have spoken of the priestly system, but we are brought right into the holy of holies, and given boldness for entering. Can you open that out a little for us?

AMB It says in Hebrews 10, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness for entering into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way which he has dedicated for us through the veil”, v 19, 20. The holy of holies is the very presence of God. It was so in the old dispensation; we spoke about that at the beginning of the reading. God was known to dwell in that place, behind the inner veil where the ark was, where He would meet and speak from off the mercy seat. Only the high priest went in there and that was once a year. Moses of course could go in because of his unique place, but the holy of holies was a place of obscurity; it was actually dark within the veil. But now that Christ has completed His work He has made a new and living way, “through the veil, that is, his flesh”, into that very place, the way into the presence of God for those that are His.

JRW I was wondering if these wondrous matters we are speaking of are really what we find there in the holy of holies, the presence of God Himself.

AMB To have access to God's presence, the holy of holies, is a blessed matter. We might speak about that a little more in the next reading, to know something of the blessedness of the presence of God and what goes on there. One thing that we can say is that the mind of

God is known there. The saints with the help of the Holy Spirit and through the priestly service of Christ supporting us, are able to know the mind of God as we are in His presence in spirit.

JL In the old economy it included a place, but now it is connected with the presence of God known and enjoyed rather than being defined by a place.

AMB God's presence is wonderfully expansive. Really the place is defined by the presence. Think of that: He has “made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father”. Peter also refers to “a holy nation”, as has been referred to already, “a kingly priesthood, a holy nation”, 1 Pet 2: 9. There is a great expansion as a result of Christ's work. The way has been opened up for every one with the Spirit to enter in.

DCB You referred to worshippers. I was thinking of the way in which that comes in in John 4. That scripture shows how immediately the Lord has in mind that we should approach.

AMB If we are conscious of the power of the Holy Spirit within us and the leading of the Lord Jesus, we can enjoy the experience of approach and worship swiftly. We often think of entering into the presence of God as being experienced on Lord's day morning in the worship meeting, and that would be the greatest experience. But we can enter into the holy of holies at any time. On the basis of desire, and as we are conscious of the help of the Spirit and with Christ before us, we are able to enter into the holy of holies.

DCB So that worshippers are persons, and these persons are priests all the time. You do not become a worshipper simply as you enter the presence; so you are ready and available to be responsive at any opportunity.

AMB It should be the spirit of our minds, to be worshippers. It is what we should revert to, what we should be. I am not saying that it is so always. To be reminded that we are always priests is a sobering matter, but also very blessed. This is what God has in mind for us, and what Christ has achieved for Him. Reference was made earlier to the calling on high: it is a dignified and holy calling. That is what God has called us to; we can remind ourselves of that.

RT This is by the blood. That should affect us, should it not? That is a settled matter.

AMB The blood is forever before God, speaking of the worth of Christ and the greatness of His sacrifice and the unchanging character of His love.

RT It settles my conscience, gives the liberty to walk in to the holy of holies: the blood has settled it.

AMB We have boldness then for entering in.

JCG Do the references to a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, involve that there is unity? There are two divine Persons who are there supporting us as we go into the presence of the Father, especially the Lord as the Minister of the holy places. That would remind us of where we are.

AMB I like what you say as to unity. There is a great pleasure for God in seeing a company in this way. There is something uniquely pleasurable to God in a company responding to Him as united under the hand of Christ and in the unity of the Spirit. You might say it is the high point of His handiwork!

JB It is in that company that “the glory and the might” are known and expressed in a very full way.

AMB Yes; that is fine; “to him be the glory and the might”: all belongs to Him! What was mentioned earlier as to that doxology is very fine. It is really the united response of the company. To have a part in this is an immense privilege. As is often said, when we enjoy the things that God has purposed for us, God Himself is enjoying what is rising to Him, which is what a doxology is: the appreciation of His glory and of His might expressed and welling out of full hearts. It is a blessed matter for God!

GBG Do we function as sons, but then does the service of priests relate to our state?

AMB Certainly sonship would underlie priesthood, but what do you have in mind in referring to functioning as sons?

GBG We are in the relationship of sons to God the Father. Persons were priests in the past dispensation; that thought is carried forward into Christianity, but I wondered if priesthood was carried on in the presence of what is evil, and that refers to our condition or state.

AMB I would be glad of what brethren say. Sonship particularly is

derived from the Father Himself, and then priesthood has in mind functioning in praise and worship. It would have service in mind and praise maintained and continued according to the divine ordering. It is a working system that is for God's glory and praise. Sonship is the relationship, as you say.

JCG It is only a type, but when Solomon dedicated the temple, the priests eventually could not stand to do their service and then it says, "Then said Solomon", 1 Kings 8: 11, 12. So that sonship really is the greatest thought.

AMB I think that must be so. It is a helpful scripture to bring in: the glory of Jehovah filled the house; everything was according to Him. Solomon suggests the great Son, the Son over God's house, as the scripture in Hebrews speaks of, chap- 3: 6.

We read in Hebrews 2: 11-12. This scripture brings on to our view something of the delight that Christ has in those that are associated with Him. Having sanctified them He "is not ashamed to call them brethren"; He delights to call us brethren. It is with a view to declaring the Father's name to such, "to my brethren", and to sing the Father's praises in the midst of the company of those secured by Him. It seems to go beyond the matter of priests; we are surrounding Christ, sanctified by Him, He in the midst. He is anointed with the oil of gladness, and elevated there, singing the Father's praises. In the midst of the assembly, His many brethren join Him in these praises.

QAP There is a verse in John 17, "They were thine, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word", v 6. I was thinking of what the saints are in the purpose of God, but then practically they kept His word, involving what was formed in them.

AMB That is helpful, and if we love Him we will keep His word. All of that would be covered in "those sanctified"; we are sanctified by the word and by keeping it, and then there is this "all of one"; one nature as has been suggested. The pleasure of the Lord is so much brought out in verse 12, He declaring the Father's name to His brethren. The Lord Jesus did that on resurrection's morning; He gave that message to Mary, "go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father", John 20: 17. What a blessed and holy message that was, and then "in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises": those that He has sanctified and made His own are led by Him in this blessed

matter of praising.

PM Do you get some impression of the delight to the Father as well as to Christ that there is a vast company that is all of one order, the same order as Christ, in which He will find His pleasure?

AMB We spoke yesterday morning of the pleasure that the Father has, and had in that holy One, "*Thou* art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight", Luke 3: 22. Here He has sanctified myriads, made like Him, and He has revealed the Father to them and declared His name. In the midst of such a company He sings the praises of that One. What satisfaction and delight for the Father, and what fulfilment of His joy!

PJW I seem to recall it being said that the approach is equal to the revelation (FER vol 19 p196); could you open that up for us please?

AMB God sees to it that He secures from the revelation of Himself in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a fitting answer to Himself. He has done that in love and in holiness through the operations and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and through His present service. Through the work of the blessed Holy Spirit, He is securing and will secure what is fully responsive to that revelation of Himself. What would you say?

PJW That is very helpful. I think the reference is to the approach in Christ being equal to the revelation. Is that the key do you think?

AMB That is helpful because it is in divine hands! You could never think of God revealing Himself and not finding the answer that He desired. It is in Christ's hands and in the hands of the Spirit, and there must therefore be a full answer to the heart of the Father and of God Himself.

RDP What a lovely thing it is; this is the fulness of the divine thought. I was just reading the note to "those sanctified", and it says, 'without reference to done or doing'. We tend to be preoccupied with the thought that we do not come up to this matter of sanctification, but this is the divine thought!

AMB God is entitled to think of us in this way because of what Christ has done. Reference has already been made to the assurance that we get from the blood. What Christ has done is immutable and it is absolutely according to God. God is entitled to look upon us in this way because we are in that blessed One.

DJW This reference to song elevates our thoughts about the place that singing has in the service of God.

AMB I agree very much with what you say. Singing is such an important part in the service. We are able to sing wonderful hymns that are the result of the exercises of spiritual people, no doubt with the help of the Spirit. We should value that more. It is also part of the service which everyone can audibly join in, which is a blessed matter. I think there is an outpouring of united feeling, because in singing the hymns we unite together in praising divine Persons. It is a very important aspect.

DJW I recall the older brothers saying that the end of the service is largely song.

AMB I think we prove that.

Glasgow 3 Day Meetings

11th August 2018

Key to initials:

A M Brown, Grangemouth; D C Brown, Edinburgh; G A Brown, Grangemouth; J T Brown, Edinburgh; R J Flowerdew, Sunbury; G B Grant, Dundee; J C Gray, Grangemouth; P A Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry, Glasgow; J B Ikin, Manchester; J Laurie, Brechin; B W Lovie, Aberdeen; E J Mair, Buckie; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; P Martin, Colchester; Q A Poore, Swanage; R D Plant, Birmingham; W M Patterson, Glasgow; R Taylor, Kirkcaldy; D C White, Sidcup; D J Willetts, Birmingham; J R Walkinshaw, Maidstone; P J Walkinshaw, Strood; J Webster, Fraserburgh

THE OBLIGATIONS OF LOVE

Terry W Lock

John 13: 3-5, 12-14; 21: 7-12 to “dine”

Philemon v 11-18

I have been thinking, beloved brethren, in relation to these scriptures, about the obligations of love. There are, indeed, many things to be enjoyed in a company like this where the love that exists is according to the love which comes from God. It does not have its origin in man: it has its origin in heaven; it has its origin in the One whose very nature is love. That is where everything that we have, everything that binds us together, everything that claims us and sets us together begins, with the love of God. God who “has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all”, (Rom 8: 32); “God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us ...” (Eph 2: 4); God setting out all these things according to Himself. That is a glorious and a wonderful thing, and I hope we are all settled in that. I hope that we are absolutely sure of what our origins are, absolutely sure, indeed, that we have a personal link with the God who loves us so, because it is of the utmost importance. I feel exercised to speak this way about it because if it is not there, these other things will fail.

The obligations of love are the things that the Lord took on in John's gospel. He took them on in John 13. You go through the whole of the book up to this point and there is what is there in His public testimony, there is what is setting out the glory of Himself, there is what He is in Himself, what He is as the I AM; but you get to John 13 and this is private, what is going on secret from the world, but it is the obligation of love, the Lord setting Himself in relation to the maintenance of what was precious to Himself. Beloved brethren, if the saints are precious to us, if the things of God are precious to us, if Christ is precious to us, we have an obligation. Love lays an obligation upon us, not indeed to maintain things in a legal manner; the Lord did not maintain things in John's gospel in a legal manner: the Lord maintains things in John's gospel according to the glory of His nature.

So in John 13, we might wonder why the Lord does this; after having supped He takes this linen towel and girds Himself and goes and puts water in the washhand basin to wash the feet of His disciples. The Lord here is maintaining what was true of Himself, and He did it by washing them. He does not tell them that they may have been defiled

by the places where they had had to walk, or by some of their associations of life; He does not do any of that. He maintains what is true in them that is according to Himself. He does it by washing them and He does it with gentleness. He also shows them the necessity of the action by His reply to what Peter says (v 10), but what an obligation of love this was. Indeed, you think it was the Lord of glory here, the One who will indeed come out in a coming day amidst His holy myriads, that Man is this Man, and yet He takes this linen towel and, speaking very reverently, in humility takes a place where He washes the feet of His disciples because they were precious to Him. They were going to carry forward the testimony of Himself. He wanted to maintain them in that; He wanted them in comfortable conditions.

Beloved brethren, do we have this obligation? Indeed we do, and the reason we have this obligation is found in what the Lord says to them; He does not just leave it that He has washed them, "When therefore he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, having sat down again, he said to them, Do ye know what I have done to you?"; and then He says, "Ye call me the Teacher and the Lord and ye say well, for I am so. If I therefore, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet". The obligation of love lies on us as it was expressed by Christ. Christ is the model, and that is quite a test. You may say, 'Well, I cannot do it like Him'. Why? That would be the test, why? You can, beloved brethren; we all can. We can all take up this exercise. The Lord has shown us how; the Lord has given an example and the Lord never puts things before us that He has not shown us how to do. This is one of them. The maintenance of things, the obligation of love in relation to the maintenance of things, is of all importance for our day. Do we want everything to go through to the end for the Lord's sake? Do we want to have here a testimony suited to His own glory? Do we want to have here what pleases His own heart? Then the obligation of love is upon us to do what He has shown us to do. The first thing here in John's gospel is that you wash the saints' feet to maintain them as He would according to His love.

But then it goes on to the end of John's gospel. This chapter is almost like an addendum, it is almost like a piece that is added on to the end of the gospel, but it is a very precious chapter. We were reminded recently in our fellowship meeting, in relation to what one of the brothers who has gone before has said, that here in this chapter there was night, nakedness, and nothing, JT vol 74 p374. Well, that was true. You might say there were moral conditions that were abominable. The Lord

knew they were abominable too: He had to die because of them; He knew better than any, and He knows better than any about the conditions that exist now. There is no point in time, ever, that the conditions govern the affections that are true in Christ; they are never altered by conditions. How He may be able to express Himself may be a different thing but it does not alter the love. You cannot alter the character of the nature of Christ, speaking very reverently. God is never put aside by what He is in Himself due to the failures of men. It has never happened and it never will.

So in these conditions you might think that the disciples would know better, and that is true, and you might say, 'How is the Lord going to meet this?'. Well, here the Lord feeds them. Does He say to them they were wrong? Does He say to Peter he was wrong? If you think about Peter's history here, Peter had denied the Lord and been recovered. Now he has no sooner been recovered than he is away again fishing, naked in a boat. That is after his recovery. You say, 'How can those conditions exist? Why does the Lord not correct them?'. He does correct them, and He does it by feeding them. The obligation of love as the Lord showed here was to feed the man He loved, so that he could come to a moral assessment of his own condition himself, and bring himself into line with the Man who loved him and died for him and who had restored him already. That is what the Lord did. What a wonderful thing that is! Beloved brethren, are we going to feed the saints? Are we going to do that? It is a wonderful thing. I was thinking about this in relation to Abigail who is, in a certain sense, a perfect type of what I have in mind, because David was going on in a vengeful spirit in relation to Nabal's house and there he does not shine as an example of Christ. He was going to go on in impetuosity to do something that he ought not to do in a manner that fulfilled his own rights with nothing in it for God. What does Abigail do? She brings food, and as she brings food, and as she feeds him and his men, what does she say? "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living", 1 Sam 25. She raises him up to see the estimation that God had of him, and she did it by providing food for David so that he had the constitution to take in the moral import of what she was saying. Beloved brethren, it was an obligation of love.

Here the Lord fulfils an obligation of love. Peter gets restored. The Lord goes on from this point here, and He says to Peter, "lovest thou me?". He lays it on Peter. Peter then needs to search himself. How did he have the capacity to do this? How did Peter have the

capacity to judge where he had been and what he had done? How did he have the capacity to move from where he was to being alongside the Lord, to preach at the beginning of the Acts, to be the lead apostle there? How did Peter move to that point from where he had been as naked on a boat? How had he moved? He had moved by the food that the Lord had given him so that he had a moral constitution according to the glory of the Man that had saved him. That was the result of the obligation of love, and the fruit of it was an apostle able to preach the glad tidings. What a glorious thing. The obligation of love accomplished that.

But then you come to Philemon, and Paul was one who was very aware of how much Christ had paid to save him. He was well aware of the debt that he owed. Beloved brethren, so should we be, well aware as we see, “that for your sakes he, being rich, became poor, in order that ye by *his* poverty might be enriched”, 2 Cor 8: 9. We should never forget what it has cost Christ to purchase us. We should never forget what it has cost God to purchase us “with the blood of his own”, Acts 20: 28. That is the level of the love that has set us together. Paul understood that. Paul was willing to take on the pain, to sacrifice what was his own, what was his right. Did he have an obligation in relation to Onesimus? Yes, he did. He had an obligation of love to pay another's debts. He was willing to sacrifice what was his by right that another should be set free as a brother in the Lord. So that is what he takes on here. He says in relation to this, “but if he have wronged thee anything or owe anything to thee, put this to my account”. Paul was a wealthy man in Christ. He was able to take on others' debts and pay them in full so that the brotherly covenant could go forward in all the glory of what it is in Christ. What a wonderful thing that is, it was an obligation of love.

Beloved brethren, we all have it, we all have an obligation of love. If we are attached to Christ, if we love what He loves, we need to love what He loves *as He loved it*, and in order to do that we have an obligation to care as He cared, to act as He acted, to love as He loved, to hold what He holds so that what goes through to the end of the testimonial day is according to the glory of the Man who has died for us.

May it be so! For His Name's sake.

Word in a ministry meeting in Edinburgh

5th February 2019

“WISDOM IS BETTER”

Phil Brien

Proverbs 8: 11

Ecclesiastes 9: 16-18

James 3:13-17

I was struck by our thought in the reading about the attachment to Christ that Peter had, and then the testing that the Lord put Peter through to prove that attachment. Then in the prayer meeting I noticed we had quite a few prayers as to wisdom; and it has been running through my mind. I was struck with these thoughts as to being proved by the Lord as to our attachment and in our pathway here; and how much wisdom we need. There are many distractions that might distract us from being attached to the Lord Jesus. As I was contemplating, I was thankful for our hymn as it said:

We contemplate the Christ, our Lord. (Hymn 412)

In that contemplation I was thinking how the Lord grew in wisdom (Luke 2: 52), and how when He was young various ones observed the words of grace and words of wisdom that He spoke, that were given to Him. Later, in Revelation, I was struck with how that is one thing that is given to the Lamb; wisdom is given to the Lamb: “power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing”, Rev 5: 12. What a great contemplation for our hearts to be attached to the Lord who has wisdom, who has been made wisdom to us. These thoughts were running through my mind and heart as to wisdom, wisdom for being attached to the Lord Jesus, to help us with our focus, to be kept from distractions - and that takes great wisdom in this earthly sphere. And while our heavenly home is our destination, that is our objective where Christ is, it seems to me in this complex world we live in, we need such wisdom - there are so many complex things; the world is complex because of the effects of sin. The complexities come in the way of difficulties relative to relationships, and relationships primarily with God. These complexities arise in our daily walk, and we all can experience them in one form or another, and the impact that they can have as to our physical health, spiritual health, financial health, emotional health, mental health. And so, it just struck me how much wisdom is needed to help us to be undistracted in the way of dealing with things so that we may remain attached to Christ.

This proverb really affected me, and there are other references

too, with this very thought that “wisdom is better”. There is a contrast to what wisdom is better than “better than rubies”, and then later in Ecclesiastes 9 we have that it is “better than strength”, and “better than weapons of war”. This phrase really struck me as to being attached to Christ, and in this world we are journeying through, how much “wisdom is better”. The wisdom of man is referred to in the Proverbs showing that the ways of man leads to death and destruction, but this is the wisdom from God, and that is what is in James, the characteristics of wisdom, and that wisdom leads to life. And so wisdom that comes from above would attach us to Christ too. “But the wisdom from above first is pure, then peaceful, gentle, yielding, full of mercy and good fruits, unquestioning, unfeigned”. These characteristics of wisdom, and contemplating them, would reflect something of the assembly and our appreciation of the assembly and the Lord's appreciation of the assembly. Maybe I am stretching the thought a little bit, but it struck me that wisdom is found in the assembly too, and so, this thought of “wisdom is better” is in contrast to what is found in the complexities and the thoughts of man that surround and influence us: “Wisdom is better” and “the wisdom from above”.

So, “if any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God” (Jas 1: 5); I just feel the need as we are facing things individually, household-wise, in local conditions, and among the body of believers in general: there are so many complexities that the devil is working so much harder to distract us from being attached to Christ that we need wisdom, wisdom from above. I cannot say too much more about this, but I was contemplating this wisdom and just this phrase “wisdom is better”. Then we have the thought too in Peter's epistle as to what is better; it weaves into the idea of wisdom a little bit. In 1 Peter 3: 17 it says, “For it is better, if the will of God should will it, to suffer as well-doers than as evildoers; for Christ indeed has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in flesh, but made alive in the Spirit”. The way that Peter presents the thought “it is better” stuck me, and the fact that as believers we may suffer, but suffer as well-doers. This affects me as being part of this “wisdom is better”, because it is better to suffer as well-doers than as evildoers. And the devil would be distracting us with distractions that would lead us away from Christ, and where the devil would be operating there is much that is evil-doing, but “wisdom is better”; so therefore this idea of “wisdom is better” would extend I think into this being better “to suffer as well-doers than as evildoers” if it is the will of the Lord.

This was on my heart and on my mind, and I share it so that it may be for our encouragement and strengthening to seek wisdom from above in order that we might be attached to Christ, in a deeper and more appreciative way. May it be so, for His Name's sake.

KEEPING AND PONDERING

Michael T Holland

Luke 2: 19

2 Corinthians 12: 1-5

Matthew 13: 51-52

I have a simple impression and was encouraged by what our brother has said from Proverbs as to wisdom. Mr Coates called Proverbs "Wisdom's Guidebook", The Paths of Life p22.

These scriptures may not immediately connect in our minds; I need help to say a brief word about what is before me. It is something that has been a challenge and a test to me, and it has come before me in different ways. I was encouraged as to this verse in Luke 2, and we will not go into the detail of these things: the impression I have is about this thought that "Mary kept all these things in her mind, pondering them in her heart". There is something very attractive, very simple, in that comment: "kept all these things in her mind, pondering them in her heart". I think this is something for all of us, young and old; it certainly has been a word to me recently. I read that if you read too much, of anything - even Scripture - it may become a mere intellectual exercise, and so I think what we have here instead is perfect balance between the mind and the heart. I am not saying that Mary was perfect, and there is not that thought here; but rather there is perfect balance in that she kept all these things in her mind, pondering them in her heart. I think both are absolutely necessary; that was really the word to me. It would have been good in one way if she kept all these things in her mind - I think that would be attractive to us, that she held all these things there; but I think the danger of merely keeping all these things in one's

mind, is exactly what that reference led me to consider, and that is that it might become merely an intellectual matter.

Of course, there were certain things she was keeping - wonderful things, great things. The apostle we have read from had heard wondrous things too, and they could have been kept in his mind, but there is a perfect balance with pondering them in our hearts. It is not pondering them in our minds: again that they should be developed into some mental, doctrinal thing alone. There would probably be a doctrinal character in some respect, but she was "pondering them in her heart"; so the affections come into that. The mind is there, and how great it is that we have the mind of Christ. We have the Spirit, and I am always glad when we sing to the Spirit at the outset of an occasion of this kind, and I am specially thankful for how He would take the things of Christ and show them to us. Hymn 211 refers to Him unfolding things - 'heights of glory' - , but all of that is to come to us in our minds and in our hearts. You might ask what we are to do with them then. Do we keep things in our minds? That would be good, but do we balance that by pondering in our hearts? Do we have the balance between the affections and our minds? I will not say much more about it, again I have been very tested by that recently.

The reason I read in Corinthians - these passages may not on the surface necessarily immediately link together -- is that Paul heard things "which it is not allowed to man to utter". He says, "I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago"; so I would suggest, and I do not think it is going too far to suggest this, that what he writes is the product of keeping impressions for fourteen years. Think about how long Mary kept those things in her mind and pondered them in her heart; think about how long the apostle kept what he heard in his mind and pondered it in his heart. I would venture that that would be the case; and it would also colour his ministry from then on. What he heard were unspeakable things, not allowed for man to utter; so he would not be specifically uttering those things; but they would colour his ministry as he kept these things in his mind, pondering them in his heart. We do not know exactly what those things were, because it was not allowed to man to utter them, but I think we can see the character of those things in that he was caught up to the third heaven. If he was in heavenly places then they would have that elevated, heavenly character. We know the character of those things by what he writes in these two epistles. We can see clearly that his mind and his affections are involved as he writes to the Corinthians, and all the other epistles; there is balance between

the mind and the affections. I might even say that the mind-matter is seen in the first epistle and the balance of the affectionate side is seen in the second epistle. How he handles the things he received, and then conveys them to those to whom he writes. So even when these things are kept and not spoken, they can have this effect, if they are held in a right way, kept in the mind and pondered in the heart. Paul writes to Timothy about keeping that which is entrusted, and that is very attractive. He was entrusted with such a wonderful deposit and the Spirit is involved in keeping that; that would bring these thoughts together once again.

The passage in Matthew led me to consider that although the apostle in Corinthians does not utter those things which are not for man to utter, here we have one who, using wisdom by the Spirit, brings out of his treasure things new and old. There is something very attractive in this: that that which is kept in the mind, and pondered in the heart, can by the Spirit be brought out of that treasury, and be put into circulation. It can be in a reading meeting, a meeting like this, whatever it may be; it can be, by the Spirit. It can be brought out of that treasury in the morning meeting, in the service of God, as the Spirit would bring those fresh unfoldings of the heights of glory as the hymn refers to it. Something might impress anyone here, and something that is kept in your mind and pondered in your heart may be brought out fourteen years later maybe, as with Paul. That might be things old, and things new. The Spirit has access to all those wonderful things of God. He searches the depths of God; so it is really limitless those things which He can bring before you.

So these scriptures might not immediately tie together, but the thought that impressed me that I would seek to encourage the brethren with, is that this is something that all of us can do - have this balance between receiving something, keeping it in our minds, not merely in our minds, also not merely in our hearts, so that it does not become exceedingly intellectual and it does not become exceedingly sentimental; it is perfectly balanced. It might colour how we handle one another, how we deal with one another, how we are towards one another as the apostle is clearly affected in that way. It may be a long time that something is treasured there, kept there, pondered there, but it can be brought out. That is the work of the Spirit; that is the wonderful thing that the Spirit can do.

This householder is a scribe, and we may just pass over that,

but a scribe is one who, I would suggest, with wisdom and care and method, would take the right thing - new or old - out of the treasury that it might yield the greatest glory to God. I think we can know something of this in the service of God. I think it is a wonderful encouragement that those things which we keep in our minds and ponder in our hearts can be brought out and used in this way. Treasures, if they are kept rightly, held rightly, pondered rightly, can be things new, things old, but they can be brought out: "brings out of his treasure"; I think that is something very attractive. They can be held, as we have read with the apostle, but they can be brought out, and so that is something that can be an encouragement to us all. It is so simple to keep things in that way, but then they can be brought out with the touch of the Spirit.

May we be encouraged, for His Name's sake.

Words in a Ministry Meeting, Calgary

9th January 2019