

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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“I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE”

John 6: 32-69

PAG My exercise for this time of enquiry is that we should be occupied with the glory of Christ. The Lord said in John's gospel, “Before Abraham was, I am”, chap 8: 58. In each of the readings it is intended to consider portions of Scripture in which the Lord says, “I am”. In this chapter we see “I am the bread of life” (v 35, 48), and the subject of our enquiry together might therefore be food. If the Lord will, in the next reading we will consider the Lord's words when He said, “I am the light of the world”, John 8: 12; 9: 5. That leads on to His word, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10: 11, 14), and we might take up the thought of light and shepherding. And then tomorrow, if the Lord will, in the first reading we will consider the portion where the Lord says, “I am the resurrection and the life”, John 11: 25. He also says, “I am the way, and the truth and the life” (John 14: 6) and “I am the true vine” (John 15: 1), and the thought of life might be in our minds in that enquiry together. The Lord's authority in His words “I am he” (John 8: 24; 13: 19; 18: 5-8) will be the subject of our final enquiry together, all subject to the will of the Lord and how He might guide us.

But in this occasion we can consider the thought of food, “I am the living bread” (v 51) and “the bread of life”, v 35, 48. What has preceded this is that chapter 1 refers first of all to who He is intrinsically as the Word: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (v 1), and “the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father” (v 18) had declared God. And then in chapter 2 man is put out of court: He “did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men, and that he had not need that any should testify of man, for himself knew what was in man”, v 24, 25. In chapter 3 He says, “thus must the Son of man be lifted up” (v 14); there is a new focus for our minds. In chapter 4 the matter of sin needs to be dealt with, and the Spirit is brought forward. In chapter 5 the matter of the law, what is legal, is to be dealt with, and the relationship with the Father is brought forward, and here in chapter 6 it is the question of how we might come out of the world, and the way out of the world is to eat His flesh and drink His blood; because in chapter 7 we come to the opening up of another Man in another world. It says, “the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified”, v 39. But to be fit for that world you must eat the food that is suited to it. We must be taken out of this world. It says, “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and

died", v 49. This world leads to death, but there is another Man in another world, who is food for us. We have to appropriate His death: "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood", v 56. That is a spiritual matter, not something that would appeal to us naturally, but we come to the point where He says, "As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father, *he* also who eats me" - that is Christ where He is - "shall live also on account of me", v 57. Can we enquire together on these lines?

JTB I am sure that would be very profitable. All this was foreshadowed by the prophets and psalmists; "Thy words were found, and I did eat them" (Jer 15: 16) looking forward, no doubt, to the Christ, all that was seen in Him. The psalmist says, "feed on faithfulness" (Ps 37: 3); so these are features of Christ. It would help if you would say something about "the bread of life", "the true bread out of heaven" (v 32) and "the bread of God", v 33. "The bread of life" obviously connects us with what is living, and that is your exercise, is it not, that we might be in life? The "true bread out of heaven" is clearly heavenly, but "the bread of God" too seems to suggest something very comprehensive, do you think?

PAG Yes, "the bread of God" would tell us about the source of it. It would be a wonderful thing if we came away from this time together recognising that God is the source of all that is good. He has demonstrated that in giving His own Son: "He who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him grant us all things?", Rom 8: 32, and then in the pouring out of the gift of the Holy Spirit. So "the bread of God" is appropriated by persons who are in the good of the gift of the Spirit, do you think?

JTB It must involve the incarnation too, and the appropriation of His blood, the supreme sacrifice that His life might be invested in us.

PAG Yes, indeed; so what is *of God* came into manhood. You get that in Luke's presentation of the genealogy, "of Adam, of God", chap 3: 38. It is a marvellous consideration for our souls that God has not only made Himself *known*, but has made Himself *available*.

DCB There seems to be an emphasis on the Father as providing this, and you have already referred to the Spirit. The glory of the revelation is behind what we have, that Christ should be available as food for us.

PAG Yes. Declaration is general, but revelation, as I would understand Scripture, involves that there is capacity to receive it; so

God has given us capacity. The question is what are we receiving as a result of that? Now the Father clearly had in mind that that God-given capacity should be available to *receive* Christ in feeding upon Him.

DCB I think it is affecting that “my Father gives you the true bread out of heaven”. There really seems to be an emphasis right through the chapter on “my Father”. The Lord could speak of the way His Father was concerned. Partly it suggests His glorification, of course, as you are bringing before us, but partly that the capacity you are speaking about has to be maintained and increased.

PAG It does, and there is a singular reference in this chapter to “the living Father”, v 57. That is the only reference in Scripture to “the living Father”. There are quite a number of references to “the living God”, twenty-eight in all in our Bible, but there is this one reference to “the living Father”, and it seems to bring before us there is an area of life: “As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father, *he* also who eats me shall live also on account of me”. So there is the revelation of God and there is the functioning of the economy, and we are brought into the economy, I think, by eating. I will not say this is the only way we come into it, but we have *access* to it through appropriation of Christ.

JCG Jesus said, “I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger”, v 35. The attractiveness of the glory of manhood in Christ is brought out in that.

PAG The Lord comes to us first before we come to Him, do you think? John the baptist saw “Jesus coming to him, and says, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”, John 1: 29. Jesus was coming to Him; God has come out to us in Christ in order that we might come to the Man of His choice. “Thus must the Son of man be lifted up”, we have in John 3: 14, and in John 8: 28, “When ye shall have lifted up the Son of man”, but then in John 12: 32, “I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me”. It is my exercise in this enquiry that Christ might be lifted up in our affections and that we might all be drawn to Him. Is that what you have in mind?

JCG It is good that you give the initial stages of it, but when you come to chapter 6, as you said at the beginning, there is some development; the Lord is asking persons to partake of Himself so they are not only attracted to Him but attached to Him. That is what the intention is, not to go away as at the end of the chapter, but to continue in attachment to Him.

PAG That is right. We might come to Him in view of having our sins forgiven. That is essential and that is initial, but when we come to Him, we find that there is infinite resource available to sustain us in relation to what is heavenly and eternal.

JL If it is not too simple a question, what are the main purposes for food?

PAG I suppose the fundamental purpose of food is the maintenance of life. If there was not food, life would expire, but food also involves what is formative. We are formed by what we eat; so if we eat good things, we will be formed in relation to what is good, and if we eat bad things, we will be formed in relation to what is bad. Food also involves enjoyment so there is what might encourage and sustain us and refresh us in relation to eating.

JL I had precisely those three things in mind: life, growth and satisfaction. They are all highlighted in this section in John 6.

PAG Yes; so what we are brought into is not simply subsistence. Growth involves formation in likeness to Christ, and satisfaction means that we can afford to leave the world and all that it is entirely behind us, because there is infinitely greater satisfaction to be found in Christ where He is.

RB Does the chapter help us to see that there is a circle of affection in John 6, and show how we can be sustained in that circle?

PAG That is what I was thinking in that verse we referred to earlier, "As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father, *he* also who eats me shall live also on account of me". What it says immediately before that is, "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him". Do you think the expression "drinks my blood" is what takes us out of the world? That is to say, it involves the appropriation of His death, and it is only as we are taken out of the world that these words can be said, "dwells in me and I in him". Is that what you have in mind?

RB Yes, we can take things up in a legal, religious way, but affection goes through the whole of John's gospel; that is why the Father is so prominent. It brings us into a wonderful sphere where that affection is enjoyed, and how can we be sustained in that? By feeding on this blessed and glorious Man.

PAG The Lord has in mind, as He says at the end of John 17, to make

the Father's name known. He says, "that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them", v 26. The hymn-writer says,

O circle of affections all divine,
The foretaste of eternity's bright scene (Hymn 207)

and that is available now.

JD It says in verse 45, "Every one that has heard from the Father himself, and has learned of him, comes to me". Do you think we are feeding on a life that really sustains the Father's heart and satisfaction?

PAG That is very good. Mr Darby has obviously inserted that word "himself" because he thought it was significant - "and has learned of him". Do you think that includes the fact that the Father would communicate to us directly what He finds in Christ?

JD That is right. He "has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom 6: 4) bringing out the Father's supreme appreciation of such a One. Now the Father, as having before Him Christ in glory, would seek to share these impressions with us, we may say simply.

PAG That is a wonderful thing because "no one knows the Son but the Father", Matt 11: 27. That obviously involves what is inscrutable as well, but, by the Spirit, the Father is delighted to tell us what He thinks of Christ. Mr Darby had an impression of that when he said

All the Father's counsels claiming
Equal honours to the Son (Hymn 14).

He had gathered up an impression of what the Father thought of Christ. Just to be very simple, if we want to know what the Father thinks of Christ, we can ask Him because He will tell us.

GBG Does that involve what is said in verse 44, "No one can come to me except the Father who has sent me draw him", so that the Father has drawn us in Christ?

PAG The Lord had said in chapter 5, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work", v 17. We might think that that meant that the Father had worked and then the Son worked afterwards, but the Father is still working, do you think?

GBG I wondered if the Father has drawn us to Christ by making Him so attractive to us that we are drawn to Him; is that right?

PAG So that helps in relation to what was said earlier as to coming to Him; we come to Him because we are drawn to Him. The prophet speaks about being drawn “with bands of a man, with cords of love”, Hos 11: 4. What a blessed Man He is, and what drawing power His love has, but also what drawing power His Person has.

JTB “To whom coming”, Peter says (1 Pet 2: 4), “if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good” (v 3); so our appetites are whetted as we appropriate this food.

PAG That is “have tasted”, but there is also the verse, “Taste and see that Jehovah is good”, Ps 34: 8. If anyone is wondering if this is worthwhile, the answer is “taste and see”: ask the Holy Spirit for an impression of Christ. “Taste and see”, and what you will find is “the Lord is good”, but what you will also find is He is the answer to everything.

JTB Hebrews says, “solid food belongs to full-grown men, who, on account of habit, have their senses exercised”, chap 5: 14. Is there a need to have our taste buds exercised to assimilate this food?

PAG Discernment, then, would come to us as we taste what is good; we will be capable of discernment. “Solid food belongs to full-grown men, who, on account of habit, have their senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil”, Heb 5: 14. The thing is not to be occupied with evil but to be occupied with Christ, and then evil simply takes its place; it can be discarded. Be occupied with Christ and all other things take their bearings from that.

JTB “To whom coming” is a constant thing; that is important.

PAG It is indeed, and these thoughts are reciprocal: “To whom coming”, and He says, “I am coming again”, John 14: 3. The Lord is never going to fail us. We might fail Him; He will never fail us, but we can keep coming to Him and even, beloved brethren, if we think we might have let Him down, we can still keep coming to Him; He is not going to turn us away.

RG Is it important to notice that it does not say, 'He that has eaten my flesh' but “He that eats my flesh”. It is a continual feast if you are a real Christian. It is not spasmodic; it is not once in a while; it is continual. But you need the Holy Spirit to be active in you so that you might be benefiting from what you are eating, do you think?

PAG That is very helpful. “He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood” involves His death. The death of Christ was necessary in order that His

flesh and His blood might be made available. It might be said rightly that His death was once, once for all, but constant returning to the death of Christ forms our souls and preserves us. Every time we come back to the death of Christ we find something fresh and living in it. One might ask how we find what is living in death, but there is a living effect on our souls of being occupied with the death of Christ. It is the end of a whole order of things. It took something away out of the sight of God, never to be resurrected again.

NJH Eating in this chapter is cumulative, is it? I was thinking that Israel attempted to change the taste of the manna, but you can never change this; but it involves moving. There is movement to Christ where He is eventually.

PAG There is. We spoke about certain characteristics of eating, life and growth and satisfaction, but it strengthens us for movement. If you do not eat, you are not going to be able to move, but it strengthens us for movement, and what you say about what is cumulative is important. Every time we have an impression of Christ it is added to what we had before. It does not replace or displace the other impressions we had of Him but it is added. We might think of the benefit of such impressions to us, but it is for the glory of God that there are persons in whom impressions of Christ are being added every day.

JL I do not think we could possibly limit the subject of eating to the Lord's supper but would you say there is a definite connection with it?

PAG There is. It would be right to say that this chapter here does not deal directly with the Lord's supper, but it would certainly point our minds towards it. What has become available through the death of Christ is *for* us: so the word the Lord Himself uses is "which is for you", 1 Cor. 11: 24.

JL I was thinking along those lines, and lest we might become forgetful, we have the constant reminder week by week of the value of all that has become available through the Lord's death for us, and there is that satisfaction and stimulation as we partake of the bread and of the cup, is there not?

PAG There is, and I think what you say about stimulation is important. We might ask ourselves why we give thanks for the loaf and for the cup separately. Firstly, we do that because that is what the Lord Himself did, but also because the cup augments what is there and brings in that thought of stimulation, so that we are enlivened in view of what the Lord

might lead us into.

JCG So His coming in amongst us bears on this matter of “and I live on account of the Father”. Mr Darby's note is very instructive as to that. He says, 'The sense is 'by reason of what the Father is and His living;". So the glory of that is brought by the Lord as He comes into the midst, in view of the whole service of God proceeding. The idea of living is in it, is it not?

PAG Yes, it is. It is as well for us to recognise that the whole of the service of praise that we enter into following the Supper takes place before the face of the Father. There is a point at which we address the Father directly, but He is taking account of all that proceeds and His life, if we may put it in this way, is bound up with what is proceeding as Christ leads the praises.

JCG Very good, and it enhances the fact that the Lord is coming in with this life. It enables us to respond to that glory of His in manhood.

PAG Yes, so we are strengthened. The thought of quickening involves life but it also involves our affections: we are strengthened in our affections, to respond to a living Man.

GBG Is this food then to help us to find our life, not in what is here but, in what is beyond death? Is it a going-over food?

PAG Yes. Verse 33 says, “For the bread of God is he who comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world”; so it is available, in that sense, in the world. It is not in view of the world, so that when we come to verse 57 it is, “*he* also who eats me shall live also on account of me”. That is Christ where He is; so He comes down out of heaven to make Himself available but He has in mind to take us to that place. John's ministry brings out in glory and in display what Paul's ministry has taken to heaven, but here in John's ministry we are being occupied with a Man who is in heaven. “The Son of man who is in heaven” (John 3: 13) is before us.

GBG The Lord purposely took a flesh and blood condition in view of ending it before God. Is that right?

PAG I think that word 'purposely' is important. So Peter says as to His death, “him, given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”, Acts 2: 23. The Lord Himself acted. He says, “Behold, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me”, Ps 40: 7. It is something just to bear in mind that divine Persons are presented as

moving, both the Son and the Spirit, in view of being sent.

GBG So the flesh and blood condition was not God's purpose for man, was it? It was not God's purpose that the Lord would remain in that condition, neither is it God's purpose for ourselves. Is that right?

PAG Quite so, because "what we shall be has not yet been manifested; we know that if it is manifested we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3: 2), not as He was, but "as he is", and He says explicitly, "a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see me having", Luke 24: 39. There is a Man in heaven, but He is not now in the condition that He was when He was down here.

GBG This feeding, eating the flesh and drinking the blood, is to be occupied with that Man where He is; is that right?

PAG Yes; we recognise that the first order of man was ended at the cross. Now, we must be careful in how we express that because Christ's order went through. He did not have to change because He was perfect. His condition changed. For us we need a change of order and a change of condition in order to be fit for what is heavenly. It is eating His flesh and drinking His blood that helps us to see that what was not pleasing to God, the first order of man, was ended at the cross - Christ having taken it on vicariously, "in the likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin" (Rom 8: 3) - and put out of sight in the grave; and what was raised was something that is new, the same order and the same Person but new before God.

RG This feeding makes us heavenly now.

PAG That is the point. Reference was made earlier to this being going-over food. We need to be in that constant attitude of mind of leaving behind what was here and going over to what is heavenly. This is impossible for the first order of man. The Lord says to them, "Does this offend you? If then ye see the Son of man ascending up where he was before?". It offends the first order of man that we cannot be perfect down here, but we cannot. "When that which is perfect has come" (1 Cor 13: 10) involves that we are in heavenly conditions.

JD Do you think God the Father only has one order of life and character before Him? It is out of heaven and it has been made available through death and it leads to God. Where we finished reading, it says, "thou art the holy one of God". It is leading to God.

PAG That is very good. It is essential to stress what you have said,

that God only has one order of man before Him and that is Christ and those who are like Him. Now, we can be like Him: “For both he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren”, Heb 2: 11.

RG The Father says, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight” (Matt 3: 17), not ‘all my delight’. ‘All my delight’ would mean there are others to be compared, but “in whom I have found my delight”, there is no comparison whatsoever! That is the One who will eternally give pleasure to the Father, “in whom I have found my delight”.

PAG We can share in that delight as we take up the words of the psalmist, “Thou art fairer than the sons of men”, Ps 45: 2. There is One who is infinitely pleasurable to God, and He can be for our unending pleasure too.

AMB I wanted to ask more about the character of the life that we are speaking of, and noting that the Lord speaks of the Father’s will being “that every one who sees the Son, and believes on him, should have life eternal”. Then He refers again to “life eternal” (v 47), “live for ever” (v 51), and “life eternal”, v 54. I just wondered if you could open that up.

PAG I suppose whatever we may use to sustain life on this earth according to nature is not “life eternal”. It will come to an end, but Christ’s life will never end. He has in mind that we should have what never ends, and hence that God should have what never ends,

AMB I wondered if it conveys something of the sense of believers participating in Christ’s life, and it is eternal, but we can enjoy it now. It is the same life and the same order that we will enjoy eternally.

PAG So God has in mind that we should have it, that it should be a possession of ours. Now, a possession is something we should be able to enjoy, but then there is also not just what we can have, but also what we can know. When John speaks of “eternal life” as opposed to “life eternal”, he refers to something we know: “And this is the eternal life, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent”, John 17: 3. We have spoken about a circle of affections and being brought into the economy, but what does that mean? What it means is that we have a present enjoyment of relationships that we will enjoy eternally.

JL Is that part of the import of these precious words, “truly food” and “truly drink”? Is there something entirely superlative to be noted

about their significance?

PAG “Truly food” and “truly drink” would suggest to us that we should not allow ourselves (because it involves moral exercise) to be attracted by other things. There are other things which might be presented as food and drink but they are not “truly food” and they are not “truly drink”. They are not food and drink that relates to what is heavenly and eternal.

JL I think that helps. It is clearly connected with the sustainment of life belonging to another sphere altogether though, as we have rightly said, to be enjoyed now, as well as continuously.

JCG “My Father gives you the true bread”, He said earlier. I was thinking of what was said as to the living character of the way in which our constitutions are made different by this bread which comes down out of heaven. Is that why He brings the Spirit in? Certain persons say, “This word is hard; who can hear it?”. The Lord calls it murmuring. We might not have said that, but the Lord detects a sense of decline, and it is very important that we have the quickening power of the Spirit that life might be sustained as He is ascended. “If then ye see the Son of man ascending up where he was before?” brings in the power of the Spirit, quickening life. Is it important therefore that we are able to absorb the bread which comes down out of heaven?

PAG We need to give place to the Spirit in order that these things should be a reality for us. Just to touch on murmuring briefly, “This word is hard; who can hear it?” - it is not right to say that we cannot do things that the Lord has asked us to do because the time is not suitable for it. If the Lord has asked us to do something, He gives us the means to do it. God has never asked us to do anything that we cannot do. What God requires in His righteousness, He provides in His grace, and we must accept that. I just emphasise that because feeding on Christ gives a constitution to do the things that God asks us to do, and they *will* be hard but we cannot say, “This word is hard; who can hear it?”.

GBG It is hard to the natural. “Who can hear it?” is unbelief; that is worse.

PAG Exactly, and the effect of saying “This word is hard; who can hear it?” is that they go away. Now, beloved brethren, we cannot go away from the Lord. “To whom shall we go?” There is not anyone else we can go to. What I would greatly desire is that we understand that the strength is available in feeding on Christ for every circumstance of the testimony.

JTB We are “saved in the power of his life”, Rom 5: 10. Say something about that in the context of what you are now bringing before us.

PAG Well, it is His present life, is it not? We might say our salvation lay in the fact that He died to set us free. That is the salvation of our souls, but our present salvation is “in the power of his life”, and it is interesting that that comes in in Romans. It may be said that Romans is about walking down here. We walk down here in righteousness, but we are “saved in the power of his life”. We are preserved in that sense in relation to what is heavenly and eternal as we walk down here in the power of the present life of Christ. Can you add to that?

JTB I wondered if consequent upon that the appropriation of this food and the imbibing of the drink really enable us to answer to what the Lord's desires are in connection with where He is at present.

PAG That is right because His desire, He says to the Father, is “that where I am they also may be with me”, John 17: 24. He wants us to be with Him where He is, and this feeding is strengthening, not just for the journey here, but strengthening for what is heavenly.

JTB The Spirit quickens in relation to this matter of life. Quickening is necessary for that, but we are actually quickened in view of our being able to live in this life. Is that right?

PAG Yes, and we are directly at one with what occupies His heart. Quickening involves our affections. And it is undeniable that the Spirit is quickening us in relation to Christ because in chapter 7 it says, “for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified”, v 39. Now He is glorified; so the Spirit is quickening us in relation to a glorified Man.

DCB I wondered if you would say more about the direct statement you drew our attention to when the Lord says, “I am the bread of life”. In fact He says it twice (in verses 35 and 48).

PAG He is not merely making a statement that is true, but I believe that particularly in John's gospel where the Lord makes many statements preceded by the words “I am”, it directly involves the glory of His Person. In this setting what the Lord is making available to us through eating or appropriation is direct access to the glory of His Person. There is what is infinite to which we have no access, but it does say as to Christ, “For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead

bodily”, Col 2: 9. Dwelling “bodily”, I think, means that is what is accessible to us. When He says, “I am the bread of life”, He is saying that in direct access to Him and appropriating Him, we have direct access to His glory and His life where He is. What do you think?

DCB That is helpful. It is a touch of grace, is it not, that He has made Himself available in such an accessible way so that any of us, while we may think there are things that are beyond us in what is being said today, can taste bread? We can all take on an appreciation of Christ in that way.

PAG So any person can say to the Lord, 'Give me a fresh taste of your love', and He would do that. There is more to it, but it is as simple as that.

RB Is that what Peter got at the beginning of Acts 5 when he came out of the prison? He was told to speak “all the words of this life”, v 20. It was not 'the words of that life'; it was Christ where He is; and that characterises the whole dispensation, “the words of this life”. That is what has come to us by the Spirit.

PAG Yes, that is helpful; so we are not looking at glory at a distance, but we have been brought into nearness, “the words of this life”. We have been brought into the life of Christ where He is. Paul speaks about “promise of life” and “the life which is in Christ Jesus”. That refers immediately, of course, to Paul's apostolic commission, “according to promise of life, the life which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1: 1) but, nevertheless, Paul was in direct contact, you might say, with “the life which is in Christ Jesus”, and so can we be.

DHM Mary had great affection for the Lord and she placed herself at His feet, and He says, “Mary has chosen the good part”. She had made that choice but she got something. It says, “the which shall not be taken from her”, Luke 10: 42.

PAG Indeed, and that is an important thing. It is one of my exercises: once we have something of this, it cannot be taken away, “the which shall not be taken from her”. External influences cannot take it away; the exigencies of the testimony cannot take it away; once we have it, we can keep it.

DHM The thought came up earlier as to what was cumulative. That is something she would have, and she would have for ever, which could be added to.

PAG Yes, and she had a real, distinct, personal appreciation of Christ that she was able to make available, and it had an influence on others, “and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment”, John 12: 3.

DAB I was just going to comment as to what was referred to as to “I am the bread of life”. Peter would say in Acts, “the originator of life ye slew” (chap 3: 15), but we have in Genesis in Joseph, who is the 'Sustainer of Life', chap 41: 45, note to “Zaphnath-paaneah”. I wonder if we get these two thoughts in “I am the bread of life”.

PAG That is a very helpful way to put it; so in a sense “I am” is “the originator of life”. As we quoted earlier, “Before Abraham was, I am”, John 8: 58. That is the Person, but then He says, 'Now I am available to you as the 'Sustainer of Life', and the 'Revealer of Secrets' too'. What secrets He is revealing to us? The Father's name! What better secret could we know than the Father's name? To be brought in to the enjoyment of a place before the Father in suitability to Him.

RG It is the Father's secrets: “I ascend to my Father and your Father”, John 20: 17. These are the persons that have the same constitution as Christ. They do not all just look like their Father but they have the constitution of Christ, that living, glorious Man the Father delights in.

PAG This fruit is for inward formation. It is not for some inward glory that we might have; it is for inward formation. We will have the constitution that is suitable for heaven itself. We are citizens: “for *our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens” (Phil 3: 20), and Christ is the food that suits us for that place.

BWL Is that what Simon Peter was enjoying? Simon was his name in responsibility and Peter was a stone, the name the Lord gave him, but he was enjoying this food.

PAG You are thinking of his word, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal”? The Lord's words can become meat to us.

BWL I was thinking the types really fail in comparison to a chapter like this. Joseph has been referred to. They had to go to Joseph, and Joseph provided food for them, but the Lord Himself as the “I am” *is* the food.

PAG He does not have to bring it out of the storehouse, does He? It is direct contact with heaven that gives us the food. , The food that Joseph had was wonderful; it was the product of the seven years of

plenty; it was laid up in storehouses; it was available; and he administered it; but the thing about this is that it is an inexhaustible food. The sons of Jacob had to go on a long journey to get Joseph's food. We do not have to go on a long journey to get this food; Christ is available to us at any time, and the Spirit would be constantly attracting us to Him in order that we might draw on that supply.

WMP Could I ask which “words” (v 68) are being referred to in that section? What were the words that Peter had heard?

PAG Well, among them would they be the words that he heard when they said to the Lord, “where abidest thou?” (John 1: 38), and they would hear what He said, you might say, in His place of abiding. The disciples missed some of the words too because they went away to buy provisions. Peter had not at that time, as far as we know, heard what the Lord said to the woman in John 4, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water?”, v 10. These were “words of life eternal”. He would come to know them, but what he knew from experience was that this statement was always true, “thou hast words of life eternal”. I do not think it was just what Peter had heard in the past, but in effect he was looking ahead. He would not even know what was yet to come but he would be able to say to the Lord, “Whatever might happen “thou hast words of life eternal””.

WMP That is most helpful. In chapter 5 the Lord says, “that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father”, v 23. That must have brought something of the glory of this Person into his soul, do you think?

PAG Yes, and the Lord's word, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that an hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that have heard shall live”, John 5: 25. These are “words of life eternal”, are they not? And what He had just said, “As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father”: these are “words of life eternal”.

AML Later on the Lord says, “because I live ye also shall live” (John 14: 19), so that shows there is a constant supply all the time by the Spirit.

PAG That is helpful, “because I live ye also shall live” would relate, I think, to what our brother drew our attention to earlier in Romans, “saved in the power of his life”.

JL That reference to “the power of his life” in Romans has an interesting footnote that indicates that is what is 'intrinsic'. We are being helped to see that what is intrinsic in Christ we are able to acquire through feeding on Him, and by hearkening to His words. That is how we come into the good of what is truly intrinsic in Himself, is it?

PAG That is helpful. That is what I had in mind in the reference to “I am”. “I am” involves what is intrinsic in Christ, does it not?

JL Yes; in that respect there is a fraction of a difference between the references to “I am” in the Old Testament and in the New, because largely in the Old it is distinctively connected with Deity, but in the New it is that same Person who has come into manhood to make the fulness of the Godhead to be expressed, and for us to come into the intelligence of it, do you think?

PAG The references to “I am the bread of life”, “I am the light of the world”, “I am the good shepherd”, “I am the resurrection and the life”, “I am the true vine”, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”, all involve the incarnation. When we come to “I am he”, we will need to enquire together about what that is, because that really involves the fundamentals of His Deity.

JL I agree.

AMB Could you say a word as to what the Lord says in verse 56, “He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him”? That is a remarkable expression of grace as well, and must involve the indwelling power in the believer of the Holy Spirit.

PAG I think this refers to a person who characteristically eats His flesh and drinks His blood and therefore characteristically dwells, because the eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood in that sense set aside all that would be unsuitable for dwelling in Christ and for Him to dwell in us. So it has both an *inclusive* sense, that is the dwelling idea, but also has an *exclusive* sense in that it *excludes* what is of the world.

AMB It is a very, very attractive thought. The fact that this glorious One of whom we are speaking and of whom Peter could say, “to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal”, should take up His dwelling in the believer is something to think about, and that in itself becomes food for our souls.

PAG “Dwells in me”; so you can dwell in the world or you can dwell in

Christ. Which is it going to be? I know that it is not just as simple as that; it is not always very simple; but that is the straightforward opportunity that the believer has to dwell in Christ.

AMB Do you think that for us the way into that is occupation with Christ and then making room for the Holy Spirit in our lives?

PAG Yes, because the Spirit comes into John 4 - there is new birth in chapter 3, of course - but He comes in actively in John 4 as a new source of life. Now we need that new source of life in order to dwell in Christ, do we not?

TWL I was wondering whether 1 John 2: 2, "and the life has been manifested, and we have seen and bear witness, and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father" is "the bread out of heaven". Then he goes on to say, "and has been manifested to us". Does that verse underlie what you have been bringing before us today?

PAG "The eternal life, which was with the Father" means that these precious relationships were something that the apostle could take account of. "The eternal life, which was with the Father": it was characteristically "with the Father". It was not just that they were aware objectively of it being so, but they could see, they could take account of, the fact that the Lord's life was characteristically with the Father.

TWL I was going back to the comment earlier on in relation to all of this that the Father never had any other man in mind. But then John's epistle goes on to what he says in relation to fellowship. Our links together are in the life of this Man.

PAG It is the fellowship of God's Son. Mr Raven's article, 'Fellowship, Privilege, and Testimony' (vol 1 p58) is a very important article. Fellowship comes first, then privilege, then testimony; it is not the other way round. We can only give testimony to what we have enjoyed in privilege, and we can only enjoy privilege if the links in the fellowship are right; that is how it stands. It is all centred in Christ.

GAB The Lord says, "He that has seen me has seen the Father", John 14: 9. Everything that was to be made available to them they could see in Christ.

PAG That is helpful. So we referred earlier to "my Father gives you the true bread out of heaven". Why was the Father giving them that? Well, it was because He had been giving them an impression of heaven. Do you think, as feeding on Christ, we can have impressions

of the Father? Is that what is in your mind?

GAB We will never see the Father literally, but all that we need to see of the Father is expressed in Christ.

PAG An expression we have referred to, “I live on account of the Father”, means, you might say, His whole life was bound up with the Father's life and therefore it is the expression of it.

JTB The reference to fellowship is interesting, but could you say something first of all about what actually drinking the blood means. It is perhaps a forbidding expression to the young people. How do you drink the Lord's blood?

PAG It is an important enquiry because we are often reminded that the blood is for God, and it meets the requirements of His righteousness. That is true, but here what it suggests to me is that the blood is the testimony to the fact that the Lord actually died. The life is in the blood, and He gave it. Now drinking His blood means, as far as I can understand, that I accept that the Lord's death applies *to me*. One might say that it was in view of the judgment of sin and it was in view of my salvation; that is all true, but the blood applies directly to me. There is what is in me that is according to the first order of man, and it has to be *finished*, and drinking His blood would relate to that, do you think?

JTB I think so; so then we have the expression, “the communion of the blood of the Christ”, 1 Cor 10: 16. Do you think that as drinking His blood, and that constitution is developed in us, we come to recognise that we are in that blessed communion? “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of the Christ?”

PAG So in that setting, as we say, the blood is for God. God's rights must come first. So if we drink His blood, we say, 'It is not my rights; it is not my opinion; it is God's rights', and we put them first, and therefore we can have “the communion of the blood of the Christ” because we say we are putting God's rights first.

JTB The matter of fellowship, which has been alluded to, is therefore vitally important, is it? We understand the basis of it in this context, the context of 1 Corinthians 10, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion” (or 'fellowship', footnote) “of the blood of the Christ?”

PAG So there is a distinct link between the blood and the fellowship. “But if we walk in the light as *he* is in the light, we have fellowship with

one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin", 1 John 1: 7. John puts these two things together. In that sense the blood removes what would be a hindrance to fellowship in order that it might be enjoyed. The worst hindrance to fellowship is me doing my own will.

JCG Do you think too it involves not only our acceptance before God but the fact that we are *complacently* in His presence? In Romans 3, while it is "faith in his blood" (v 25), the love of God is known through that. But then the idea of eating and drinking the blood involves that my appreciation of the death of Christ and His blood-shedding means that I am *complacently* in the divine presence, and therefore ready to respond in the service of God, do you think?

PAG I would say that because naturally drinking blood is something one would shrink away from, but if we recognise that John 6 is really carrying us into the sphere of what is spiritual it is the spiritual application of drinking His blood; that is to say, the recognition that the removal of what is displeasing to God makes us fit for God's presence and allows us to be restful in it.

JCG Do you think Peter really appreciated that and understood what the Lord was saying when He uses the expression "the holy one of God"? Peter accepted that the truth was coming out and the truth had to be made way for, or what was true rather, but "the holy one of God" brings out the appreciation we have of another glory of Christ.

PAG So "thou hast words of life eternal" would show that what is available in Christ would meet every matter and connect us with what is eternal. But then, "we have believed" is one thing, but "known" means that they had proved it: "we have believed and known that thou art the holy one of God". There is no one else: "thou art the holy one of God", and we have proved it.

NJH Through that remark of Peter's they are ready for collective association with Christ.

PAG That is exactly right; so we come by way of what is individual: "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood" but we are not going to be left with what is individual; we come in to what is collective. "The holy one of God" stands in contrast to the world. We are going to come out of the world. The world is not marked by holiness, but this is "the holy one of God". I just want to re-emphasise this point: it is one thing to believe, and that is essential, but it is a greater thing to *know*. We can

know by proving. Feeding on Christ is how we prove who He is.

RG They said, “where abidest thou? He says to them, Come and see” (John 1: 38, 39); it was not in the world: He took them out of the world. The glory of that position is, it says, “they abode with him that day”. They were at home, and there they saw the Lord with the Father and the Father with the Lord because it is a two-way relationship, and when you see that relationship working out, then that gives life to your soul and in that life you have part in that relationship, “my Father and your Father”, John 20: 17. We have access then by the Spirit to the Father.

PAG Well, that is a fine word: “they abode with him that day”. Well, may our exercise be to abide with Him this day!

At three-day meetings in Edinburgh,

20th October 2017

Key to Initials:

R Bain, Buckie; A M Brown, Grangemouth; D A Brown, Grangemouth;
D C Brown, Edinburgh; G A Brown, Grangemouth; J T Brown,
Edinburgh; J Drummond, Aberdeen; R Gardiner, Kirkcaldy; G B Grant,
Dundee; J C Gray, Grangemouth; P A Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry,
Glasgow; J Laurie, Brechin; A M Lidbeck, Aberdeen (ID); T W Lock,
Edinburgh; B W Lovie, Aberdeen; D H Marshall, Edinburgh;
W M Patterson, Glasgow

DIVINE FEELINGS

Jimmy Drummond

Genesis 1: 2

1 Samuel 30: 1-6

Philippians 2: 19-21

Beloved brethren, I would like to speak about divine feelings. The feelings of God have been made known in the way that He has revealed Himself in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and are seen supremely in Christ as the Son of man and the Son of God.

The word “Comforter” used in relation to the Spirit would also suggest the matter of feelings. Where we read it says in the middle of verse 2, “and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The Spirit reveals the feelings of God in a distinct way as seen in the matter of hovering over the face of the waters. The Spirit hovered with intent, suggesting the Spirit's own sovereign activities before we knew Christ as our Saviour and before we knew the Spirit as a gift from God. The Spirit's feelings are also seen when He descended as a dove and abode upon Christ, (John 1: 32); think of the Spirit's feelings in relation to Christ.

In Genesis 24: 2 Abraham says to the elder servant, “Put thy hand, I pray thee, under my thigh”. There is a committal made to find a wife for Isaac. Think of the Spirit knowing the feelings of the Father. The thigh would refer to the Father's feeling. The hymn that we sing to the Spirit says:

Thou dost know the Father's feelings
Of affection for His Son,
And His joy in the assembly
As united to that One. (Hymn 121)

How precious the service of the Spirit is.

The second scripture we read refers to Ziklag, which links with the teaching of Romans. This passage about the destruction of Ziklag speaks to us of the world as under Satanic power as it is now. Think of the awful things that happen in the world. Although these things are not our occupation both the personnel of the assembly and God Himself would feel such matters. We can think of the atrocities in London and Manchester and perhaps further away in Afghanistan or Iraq or wherever they may be - and God feels these things. God has never given up on man; if He had, the seasons would stop, all flesh would

expire. The world has rejected Christ but God is continuing in this matter of provisional reconciliation and He still cares for mankind and He feels these things. It says in verse 4, "Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep". So that the feelings of God and the feelings of the Lord enter into the atrocities that take place in the world. So when these things happen we, as those who are lovers of God, would feel these matters for our fellow men, and seek to have feelings that are in accord with God's feelings for His creation. Romans tells us that the whole creation travails and groans until now (chap 8: 22); how this should affect us as it does God. How He feels about the disasters and atrocities that take place in the world. We can carry men in our hearts and serve on their behalf by praying in faith and by the Spirit for our fellow men that they might in these atrocities come to know God.

So 1 Samuel 30 brings out the feelings of the Lord for men in the world and the effect of what is Satanic and the effects of sin. What has come upon a fallen race! Think too of the Lord's feelings as he entered into Jerusalem as described in Luke 19, "And as he drew near, seeing the city, he wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, even at least in this thy day, the things that are for thy peace: but now they are hid from thine eyes", v 41, 42. Think of the Lord weeping over Jerusalem. Think of the Lord feeling the exercises that come into the testimony; the Lord's feelings entering into such matters that belong to the assembly, His feelings in relation to conditions in the world, and His feelings He has in relation to His assembly. Then think of the Lord's feelings in relation to His own. Earlier, in 1 Samuel 20, it says that Jonathan and David wept, and it says that David exceeded in weeping; "and David arose from the side of the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times; and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded", v 41. Think of the love of Christ always exceeding. It comes down to the brother; it comes down to the individual: think of that. Jonathan loved David but his love fell short. But the love of the Lord Jesus and the feelings of Christ never fall short. Think of them exceeding. We are concerned about those that are turning away but we know if we turn our back His love continues to shine towards us because His love exceeds our love; how precious that is. It is an example of how He lives to intercede for us. It says in 1 Timothy 2: 1, "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men". That is another scriptural exhortation to have feelings in relation to all men and what takes place in the world. The footnote to intercessions in that verse

says, 'Personal and confiding intercourse with God on the part of one able to approach him'. Think of Christ having personal and confiding intercourse with God on our behalf and on behalf of every believer. We have to take up something of that as sharing the feelings of God and we can do so by the Spirit as described in Romans 8, "And in like manner the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness; for we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting", v 26. How often that may be the case but then it says, "but the Spirit itself makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered". The service of the Spirit enters into the feelings of the believer so that there may be right feelings expressed towards God. They cannot be uttered but it says, "the Spirit itself makes intercession". How blessed that is.

We read of Timothy who is a remarkable person; he was not an apostle, he was not even one of Paul's converts but Paul met him on his travels "and behold, a certain disciple was there, by name Timotheus, son of a Jewish believing woman, but the father a Greek, who had a good testimony of the brethren in Lystra and Iconium." Acts 16: 1-2. It says, "Him would Paul have go forth with him", v 3. There was something in Timothy that Paul recognised. Timothy gives us an example of how we come into appreciating and expressing divine feelings. It tells us in 2 Timothy about the unfeigned faith which he had, "which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and in thy mother Eunice", and Paul says, "and I am persuaded that in thee also", 2 Tim 1: 5. The reference to his mother and grandmother brings out that spiritual formation was a prominent matter in Timothy. Where we read in Philippians, Paul says, "For I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on". Timothy must have grown spiritually. Light came into his life but light alone is not feeling. The light needs to be absorbed and there has to be formation that there might be the forming of right feelings. We know that sometimes certain feelings rise up and we have to say, 'Well, I have that feeling but I know it is not a right feeling', and we call upon the Spirit for help. Timothy must have gone through all these things but he had given himself to reading and had taken on the teaching and had been formed by it. Paul describes him as "my true child in faith", 1 Tim 1: 2. There was something there in this matter of what is true that involved formation. He had applied himself to the truth. He was really one who must have imbibed the heavenly light that was introduced by Paul, which is why he is described as Paul's true child. Paul has to say words of encouragement to him at the beginning of the second epistle to Timothy, "For which cause I put thee in mind to rekindle the gift of God which is in thee by the putting on

of my hands”, chap 1: 6. And then he says “For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, v 7.

When Paul speaks of rekindling the gift of God he is referring to Timothy as a levite. But when it comes to verse 7, and the matter of power and love and wise discretion, he is referring to Timothy as a priest. It says, “of power”: that might refer to the shoulder pieces on the priest's garment, and Paul is saying that Timothy needed to have that on. It means that Timothy would be one that could move around as always holding in the strength of his affections the place that the people of God have in the purpose of God. He would never lose sight of the dignity that belongs to the people of God. That is the power: it is not fleshly power; it is not forceful power. It was power to maintain in his affections and in his thoughts the glory and dignity that belongs to the people of God as those that have their origin in Christ.

And then it says, “of love”; that suggests the breastplate. As being able to carry the saints in his thoughts and his affections according to divine purpose, he was able to also take account of them rightly in relation to the testimony and the working out of responsibility. The Urim and Thummim, are in the breastplate. What a resource we have in our links with divine Persons, and the wisdom and guidance that would come from this.

And then it says, “of wise discretion”. The footnote says, 'A quiet, sound, or sober mind'; that recalls the linen garments that the priest wore. It was linen that was against the flesh; there was nothing to agitate. There is no thought of Timothy being marked by natural thinking or a certain agitation, because he is wearing the linen garment. Paul is exhorting and reminding him: “God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion.” And so Paul is even able to send Timothy to a place like Corinth but Paul has confidence in him, not only because of what Paul knew of him, but he has confidence in him because of what he says here.

May we be helped to be formed in divine feelings for His Name's sake.

Word in meeting for ministry in Aberdeen, Scotland

6th June 2017

FOOD FOR THE LAND

David A Brown

Joshua 5: 10-15

John 3: 11-13

Ephesians 2: 4-7

We spoke in the reading of the victuals referred to in Joshua 1, which were food necessary for going over Jordan. I would like to say a little in this address as to food for the land. This is depicted for us in the old corn of the land and Joshua 5 gives us the only reference to it in Scripture. The old corn of the land refers to our Lord Jesus Christ, and my exercise is that we might have our souls stimulated to feed on Him where He is. The reading of the epistles helps us as to our spiritual state, and provides a way into the gospels where we find the Man who fills God's heart. The gospel writings stand alone and in particular John 17, a chapter which gives a most precious insight into the Lord's affections for His Father. When the Lord addressed His Father as "Holy Father", and then as "Righteous Father" this gives an insight into the blessedness of that relationship between two divine Persons.

Now, what the old corn of the land really means to us is that Christ is indigenous to heaven. That means that heaven is Christ's place: and ours as well! It is wonderful to think of the Lord as indigenous to heaven, as that is the place where He always lived and drew His resource from. Our brother Bert Taylor often used to speak of the assembly as being an exotic, which means that she displays down here features of heaven and that heavenly Man. How precious therefore to the heart of Christ that He has His counterpart, the assembly as an exotic displaying features of the heavenly Man and His world here. I would therefore seek to elevate our affections and our view as to what we mean when we talk about the old corn of the land. The manna did not stop until the children of Israel were in the land, and that is clear from Scripture. There was therefore no gap in the food supply. Only when they partook of the old corn of the land does it say that the manna ceased. It is very precious to consider that God in His grace continued the food supply all the way through without interruption. How wonderful therefore was God's provision for His people! They had the manna in the wilderness, provided every day, and those that were exercised were to go out and get it. It is interesting to note that Exodus 16: 33 speaks of the fact that they put the manna in a pot, as if the manna was not to be forgotten. God's faithfulness in the

wilderness was not forgotten. God followed these children of Israel with the manna, providing for them day by day.

Then a time came when they reached the land: “the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and held the passover on the fourteenth day of the month, at even, in the plains of Jericho”. That speaks of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and His suffering love. In some way it refers to Acts 20: 28, “the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own”. That is a term of endearment: “which he has purchased with the blood of his own”. In the Acts Paul did not need to put some other word after “own”. It draws the reader into a worshipful state when you consider the cost that it has been to God to give His only-begotten Son: not only for us individually, but for the assembly! How precious that was and is! It says, “And they ate of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened loaves”; there was no leaven now, “and roasted corn on that same day”. It was there! This was the 'old' corn of the land, the corn from the previous year, suggesting that it had been there all the time, and when they came into the land there it was! I liken that to “the Son of man who is in heaven”, John 3: 13. Christ is there as the old corn of the land; He is also the manna, and there are many other wonderful aspects of the preciousness of that heavenly Man that we can read of in Scripture and feed on. Go through the scriptures and see how many different appellations are given to the Lord Jesus Christ and feed your soul on them! How precious they are! One figure of Him is “the old corn of the land”, Christ indigenous to heaven!

One has the impression that after all the journeyings and wilderness exercises of the people the time came when peace and mutual relationships were enjoyed together as they sat down to eat of the old corn of the land. They would feed as respecting what there was of the work of God in one another and having their minds and affections and hearts filled with what the old corn of the land would mean to them, provided by God, and speaking to us of that blessed and heavenly Man! Man has sought to bring Christ down to an earthly level but His true and only place is heaven. And I say to my brethren too, that is our true place, “such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones”, 1 Cor 15: 48. The old corn of the land speaks of Christ in His own sphere, and He wishes us there! I do not think we realise enough how the affections of divine Persons are bound up in such a great way with the affections of the saints. They are absolutely bound up with one another but I think

we need to see the blessedness of the fact that the affections of divine Persons are bound up in the hearts and affections of the saints. God exists as the eternal God, the Spirit as the eternal Spirit, the Person we know as the Lord Jesus as the One without beginning and without end, and could have done so without any reference to creatures! However, the grace of God operated in such a way, that we as creature vessels might be brought into our eternal portion.

I just wanted to touch on verses 13 to 15. Earlier in the chapter it speaks of circumcision and it is noticeable that when they were made whole (v 8) they partook of this food. That means that everything of the old fleshly order, the man after Adam was gone, and what is before God is Christ and Christ in you and me! We can then be free and at liberty to partake of this old corn of the land. However, there is a warning given to us. Verse 13 says, "Joshua ... lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man before him with his sword drawn in his hand. And Joshua went to him, and said to him: Art thou for us, or for our enemies?". In saying what he did, it would appear that Joshua was slightly misaligned! "Art thou for us, or for our enemies?": he was really on party lines! How wonderful it would have been for Joshua to be 'on thy side!' Let us be on the Lord's side as there is only one side. "Then Joshua fell upon his face to the earth, and worshipped, and said to him, What saith my lord unto his servant?". I am not going to go any further; we know that there was conflict in view, conflict in the land, and with these nations arrayed against the children of Israel they surely needed food for the land.

I come now to John 3, and the Lord is speaking to Nicodemus. He was like a secret disciple in many ways. At the end of John's gospel it speaks of both Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, "And after these things Joseph of Arimathæa, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly ... He came therefore and took away the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus also, who at first came to Jesus by night, came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes", chap 19: 38, 39. I would like to have known what the conversation was between Joseph of Arimathæa, and Nicodemus. I wonder if Nicodemus would have spoken with Joseph of Arimathæa of his communication that we get in chapter 3. The Lord says to Nicodemus, "We speak that which we know, and we bear witness of that which we have seen, and ye receive not our witness. If I have said the earthly things to you, and ye believe not, how, if I say the heavenly things to you, will ye believe?", v 11, 12. How the Lord as the

heavenly Man would seek to bring in heavenly things. And then He says, "And no one has gone up into heaven, save he who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven" (v 13), the preposition "in" is important. The Lord did come from heaven, He came into lowly conditions, but it says here "the Son of man who is in heaven". That place is His, and our place is there, but it always was His place. In becoming Man He left the sphere of glory, but His place was always there. I speak reverentially and guardedly, of when the Lord says of Himself, "the Son of man who is in heaven". He moved here, taking up all the difficulties of man, bearing in His spirit what He was going to take away in His power; but as "the Son of man who is in heaven" Christ always demonstrated the atmosphere of heaven on this earth. Christ always brought the blessings of heaven into the circumstances in which He found Himself. Let us never detach the attributes of Christ from the blessedness of His Person! The glories of that blessed Man must fill our souls, but let the preciousness of who He was and is to His God and Father also fill our affections, "the Son of man who is in heaven". John's ministry brings heaven and the heavenly character down here; Paul's takes us up to heaven. Chapter 6: 62, "the Son of man ascending up where he was before", goes along with the verse in John 17, "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me", v 24. That was not the world but heaven, and we can be with Him there. What a blessed portion is ours!

I just finish with the reference in Ephesians. Ephesians gives us the height of the truth and really has in view the result of feeding on "the old corn of the land". I suppose that, with the Philippian saints, it is a matter of heavenly influence as a result of feeding on Christ, both as the manna for the wilderness and the old corn of the land for the heavenly inheritance. Whilst Ephesians is really the height of the truth, I think Philippians gives the atmosphere of what is arrived at in Ephesians: in other words it gives the working out of spiritual and heavenly life down here. Paul writes, "God ... because of his great love wherewith he loved us, (we too being dead in offences,) has quickened us with the Christ, (ye are saved by grace,)" It is wonderful to say, "because of his great love"; the quality that will bear upon man in the eternal day will be divine love. I would not say that it is the only quality but it will certainly be appreciated and seen in a great way, the love of God as it will pervade every heart.

Then we have, "and has raised us up together, and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus"; we are together in

unity. Paul was opening out the heavenlies to these Ephesian saints. He was really opening out the third storey! In Solomon's temple there were three floors, "The lowest floor was five cubits broad, and the middle one was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad" (1 Kings 6: 6), and the third storey suggests our heavenly portion. That is what Paul was doing, opening up to the Ephesian saints the third storey! Despite difficulties, Paul operated characteristically from the third storey (as he did at Troas, Acts 20: 9). That is where the height of the truth comes from, the third storey, suggesting heaven itself. I have been thinking much recently of Paul's missionary journeys, travelling thousands of miles, establishing assemblies; just think of the work! We think we have got heavy workloads at times but just think of the workload of Paul. During all those missionary journeys he was bringing about something of heavenly teaching, opening up the first storey to many of these saints: maybe that suggests Romans. Then when he wrote to Colosse he was opening up something of the second storey to them, but when he wrote to Ephesus I think he was opening up the third storey! What Paul had in his mind for these saints was the heavenly line.

As this is our portion we may be there already in spirit. How many times have we known a brother making reference on Lord's day morning to touching our eternal portion now? Sometimes we say just for a moment, but last Lord's day morning I experienced it for a lot longer than just a moment, my eternal portion. That phrase 'In spirit there already' was composed by a sister called Miss Mary Bowly (we have her maiden name in the hymnbook) and used in hymn No 56:

In spirit there already,
Soon we ourselves shall be
In soul and body perfect
All glorified, with Thee.

That is our outlook! Our outlook is heavenward, our outlook is the rapture, our outlook is to be forever with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Miss Bowly taken home at the age of forty three and wrote most of her hymns by the time she was thirty. She was in her twenties when she wrote:

The Comforter, now present,
Assures us of Thy love.

Well I was just thinking of these matters, dear brethren. Heavenly truth

is very wonderful: “he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren”, Heb 2: 11. There are such scriptures that the brethren can range over in their minds today, rejoicing that we are one with Christ, a wonderful portion. May we therefore know what these things are ourselves as feeding on that heavenly Man and that kind of food, food for the land; and the Spirit brings the enjoyment to us now, as being “the earnest of our inheritance”, Eph 1: 14.

May our souls therefore be encouraged with these few simple thoughts, dear brethren.

For His Name's sake.

Glasgow

7th October 2017

THE LORD IS NEAR

David J Hutson

John 14: 1-3

Acts 1: 9

It is a wonderful fact that we shall always be near Jesus, to see His face and hear His voice. Everyone in that vast throng will be near Him. We cannot understand it; it is spiritual, abiding, eternal. But He does not say, 'I am going to receive you to *the place*'; He says, "I ... shall receive you to myself". Is that not wonderful? Every one received to Himself! That is very near, very intimate. I will not say more about it because I cannot. It is so wonderful.

But then what about the present time? Some may remember a tract called '*Just Behind the Cloud*'. When the Lord Jesus was taken up from His own, they did not see Him, it would seem, as Elisha saw Elijah going away into heaven. He was taken up from them, and they gazed into heaven, but what it says is "a cloud received him out of their sight" as though it would hide them from seeing Him at a distance - as the tract says, He was '*Just Behind the Cloud*'. How near He appeared to be to them, just behind the cloud. They were gazing into heaven and, in that sense, they did not see Him at a distance.

Other scriptures could be referred to - brethren know better than me. Think of how He said, "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me", Matt 11: 28, 29. If you are in a yoke with somebody, you are very close. How wonderful that is, and that is the invitation to us if we feel burdened, "for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light", v 30. What a difference it makes to us if we realise that He is near, and that is the truth. By the Spirit, He is near.

I just want to leave that impression that it may be a comfort to us. Whatever the troubles, whatever the burdens we may carry, whatever our circumstances, He is not far away. He is always near. Blessed be His Name! Amen.

Word in meeting for ministry, Edinburgh

5th September 2017