

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 129

December 2017

CONTENTS

**The Glad Tidings
of The Christ**

David J Hutson

Page 1

**Jesus Crowned
With Glory and Honour**

Jim T Brown

Page 8

“Thou Art Mine”

Paul A Gray

Page 16

**The Continuance of
The Testimony**

Bob Gray

Page 21

Influence

David McLaren

Page 24

An Assembling Shout

Philip E Hogan

Page 27

THE GLAD TIDINGS OF THE CHRIST

David J Hutson

Hebrews 9: 24-28

One glorious Man is the subject of the preaching of glad tidings. He is referred to twice in this section that I have read as 'the Christ'. I suppose the children here especially would treasure that precious name of Jesus. It is 'Jesus the Christ'. Sometimes the full name is given - the Lord Jesus Christ. What a Man He is! And not only is He a Man, but let us say at the very outset who He is in His Person. It says "Of whom ... is the Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever", Rom 9: 5. He said of Himself, "Unless ye believe that I am, ye shall die in your sins", John 8: 24. It is absolutely imperative that you should recognise who He is; and yet the blessed fact is that He became a Man and that He came into the world to save sinners; He came into the world to save *you*. If you are not saved yet, I trust that as the Saviour is presented to you this afternoon for your acceptance by faith you might go out of the room as knowing Him and able - as we had in the last line of the hymn - to say -

The One who gave Himself for me. (Hymn 34).

We have been speaking of great things in these meetings. He delivered Himself up for the assembly. But how wonderful that the saved sinner can say 'He gave Himself for *me*'. How great He is. The apostle Paul could say "The Son of God who has loved me and given Himself for me", Gal 2: 20. Could there be anything more wonderful than that such a One as He could come into the world to save such a one as I am? He came in love, love unchanged and unchanging and unchangeable, love which has its place in Himself because He is God and God's nature is love. What a Saviour! He will occupy the saints - those who love Him - throughout eternity, tirelessly, for we will never exhaust the glories of this blessed One. You might well say 'How can we, in the short time available to us, speak adequately of such a One?' How dependent we are on the Holy Spirit that what should be said may be said, and we count on His help as we go forward.

In this scripture He is referred to as 'the Christ'. We are often reminded that the Christ is the One who does things for God. He is the One who has effected a mighty work that none other could do because of who He is in His Person; but in order to do it He became a Man. We present to you the Man, Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for

me. Can you say that? How did He do it? There are many figures about which we can read in the Old Testament, about the offerings; we can read about the dedication of Solomon's temple, when - it has been said - the city of Jerusalem must almost have been awash with the blood of the offerings. Yet all that blood - though it pointed on to the blood of Jesus - was itself of no efficacy for the removal of sin. But the blood of one blessed Man, the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son, is able to cleanse from every sin, see 1 John 1: 7. Have you put your faith in the blood of Jesus? Have your sins been cleansed in that precious blood that was shed at Golgotha? It is available to you now, just where you are. The immediacy of the effect of it can be seen in that dear man who put his trust in the Saviour dying at his side; Jesus could say "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise", Luke 23: 43. What an answer! No process is required. Speaking reverently, the process has been gone through by Jesus. Think of these hours of His forsaking on the cross. What it meant that He should suffer there, the Just for the unjust, that He should bring us to God. The sins of many were laid upon Him, and yet it is also true that "and *he* is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world", 1 John 2: 2. God is satisfied in relation to the matter, in relation to the whole world. You can come into the gain of it by faith at this very moment.

This scripture that I have read does not speak exactly about *everybody*. It speaks about the Lord bearing the sins of *many*. Then it says "He shall appear to those that look for Him". Has He borne your sins? Are you looking for Him? He came once in the consummation of the ages, the whole focus of time was on the coming in of Jesus to resolve this question. As it says here, "Now once in the consummation of the ages he has been manifested for the putting away of *sin* by His sacrifice." John the baptist could see Him coming to him and said "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the *sin* of the world", see John 1: 29. The whole scene is to be cleansed of sin, and this One is able for it, able to take it all away, He is the taker away of the sin of the world. It says not only that He was "manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice" but also that He was "once offered to bear the sins of many". I often refer to an unanswered question that was put to Jesus. People said to Him "Sir, are such as are to be saved few in number?", Luke 13: 23. It speaks about many here. What answer did Jesus give? "Strive with earnestness to enter in through the narrow door". That is, it does not matter how many there are, you make sure that you are one of them.

That is what I would say to you this afternoon, dear friend. If you do not know your sins forgiven, do not concern yourself about anyone else but make sure you come under the shelter of the precious blood of Jesus. Make sure you avail yourself of His one offering - "He offered Himself without spot to God", Heb 9: 14 KJV. What could I offer for my sins? Nothing, sinner as I am. But He offered Himself by the eternal Spirit without spot to God. And God has accepted that offering, so that those who believe in Him can avail themselves of it and of the value of that precious blood that was shed when He offered Himself, the judgment already having been borne in these three hours of darkness, when God forsook Him and that awful cry was heard on Golgotha's cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?", Matt 27: 46. But God is satisfied in relation to the matter, so that now we can come into the value of that great offering. He offered *Himself*. No other priest could do that. The priest had other offerings to make, and blood was shed - it all pointed on to the blood of this One glorious Saviour -

Shed for rebels, shed for sinners,
and, I can say - can you and do you mean it?

Shed for me (Hymn 167).

Have you really come, in repentance towards God, to acknowledge not only all that you have done but also all that you are, and come into the gain of that great offering when He offered Himself without spot to God?

It says, "And forasmuch as it is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment; thus the Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many". I plead with you to put yourself among the many today by putting your faith and trust in the Saviour. He is not now on the cross - thank God He was there, and not only on the cross but also in the grave - but He is not there now, nor in the grave when He put out of sight for ever the man that in me was so offensive to Him. But so glorified was God in all that He did that Christ is raised from among the dead by His glory, and God has set Him at His right hand in that place of power in the universe, where He is mighty to save, and mighty to save *you* today. Put your trust in Him there, in the virtue of where He has been, in the virtue of what He has done, and in the virtue of the blood that He has shed. Oh, what a Saviour He is!

It says here that there is that which is the portion of us all. Whatever men may say about the Bible, whether they believe it or not,

this is something that you cannot escape: "...it is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment". But when we come to speak of these things, these great realities of the scriptures, often things are put round the other way. Jesus bore the judgment and then He died. But if you die without your trust in Jesus, you will after you die be under judgment eternally. But the wonder of it is that Jesus in those three hours of darkness bore the judgment. I would seek to convey something of what it means to my soul. For me, the judgment would involve an eternity of banishment, for ever, from the sight of a holy, sin-hating God. An eternity! I say carefully, 'whatever that means'. For how can our poor feeble minds compass what eternity is? But that is what it is. An eternity without Christ and without God, banished for ever, in untold suffering. But all that was compressed into three hours for me. And not only for me, but for all who put their trust in Him. He laid a basis for the cleansing of the whole scene, the taking away of sin. I just pause so that for a moment you might think of it. We shall never fathom what Jesus bore. He suffered at the hands of men. And He suffered at the hands of the God against whom I had sinned, so that I might be brought to that God in such a way that He views me in the same favour as He views the Saviour who died for me. Is it not wonderful? When you start to speak of these things, you realise how helpless you are and how dependent on the Holy Spirit that the reality of these things might sink into every heart and cause a response such as never before. I say this to my brethren, my brethren whom I love, my brethren who know Jesus better than I do; but may it be that something of this enters into all our hearts in view of a richer response to Him, and in view of enrichment of the service of God in which we are privileged to have our part each Lord's day and as we go on through the week.

The portion of men is once to die and after this the judgment. But as I said, Jesus bore the judgment, and in bearing the judgment He bore the penalty that was due to me because of the judgment. He died and He was buried, a complete matter; and He was raised again, and now we announce Him as a glorified Saviour, the Christ, who has done everything for God. What a Man He is!

We must come into this individually, and faith in Christ alone will suffice. I say this very carefully, because I do not want in any sense to seem to reduce the value and meaning of the precious privilege we have in breaking bread in remembrance of Himself each Lord's day. I do not want to diminish that in any sense. If you have not committed

yourself to the breaking of bread, dear fellow believer, I plead with you, while you have an opportunity - if you have another opportunity next Lord's day - to answer to that request of the Saviour before He died to remember Him in the breaking of bread. But what I wanted to say is that that alone is not efficacious for the forgiveness of sins. In the same scripture that I referred to in Luke He speaks of those who plead with Him when the door is shut and they are shut out - "then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten in thy presence and drunk". Another has said that he was gravely concerned about the eternal security of some who put their hands to the loaf and the cup. Mr C A Coates says on page 10 of his letters - 'There are many in fellowship of whose eternal security one stands in the gravest doubt. They have picked up a kind of dogmatic Christianity, and have certain truths in their minds, but one does not see them being morally formed in any way. You can only leave such with God. "The Lord knoweth them that are his ..."'.

Beloved young brethren, I say this soberly and I say it to myself, as to the reality of my trust in the work and blood of Christ. It speaks of bearing the sins of many. You are to be brought into company. You will not find it out there. There is no company like the company you are brought into through the death of the Lord Jesus, and through His ascension into glory, and the Holy Spirit coming from the glorified Man. Dear fellow believer, are you conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit? Are you conscious that you are one with every other believer? "Baptised by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor 12: 11), to be here as the very body of Christ so that when the Lord says to Saul of Tarsus "Why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9: 22) we often say that this is the truth of the body; but then we cannot separate the body from the Head. He felt it personally, you see. You can consciously be in the body by the Holy Spirit. And the Father is prepared and willing to give you the Holy Spirit if you will make room for Him in your heart which has been cleansed and purified by faith in the blood of Jesus. And so you come in to what we speak of as the assembly. What satisfaction that gives to the heart of Christ! We have been speaking of it, that you may have part in that which soon in its entirety He will present to Himself glorious (Eph 5: 22) for the eternal satisfaction of His heart as Man. But you can have part in it now and have some sense that you are giving satisfaction to the One who has given Himself for you.

So it says that He has been offered to bear the sins of many. And then you come among those of whom it says that He shall appear

to “those who look for Him” the second time. Oh, you say, He is coming again? Coming publicly? But before He comes publicly He is coming to “those who look for Him”. That is a private matter. Do you not want to have part in it, when Jesus comes? He is not going to send an angel to do it. He is going to come Himself. The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven - how wonderful. He is going to gather up all those who have been secured by virtue of the precious blood that He shed at Golgotha. What a Saviour He is! He is coming. The Lord Himself! Is He your Lord? Have you acknowledged His rights over you? At what cost they have been secured!

I present Him to you not only as Saviour but as Lord, and the Lord Himself is going to descend from heaven with “assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God” (1 Thess 4: 16); assembling all who have been thus secured. My dear father had an impression about these three things that are mentioned in that scripture. It is not only the believers of the present time who are going to be gathered up; “the dead in Christ” go back a long way. You read about men of faith in the Old Testament - anticipatively they were men of faith, although they did not know about the Saviour, they did not know about His shed blood, they did not know about that work on Calvary, but they are among “the dead in Christ” because in faith they accepted God's provision and they were able to go on in faith in the pathway here. My father used to say: the assembling shout, we know what that is; that is for us, the assembly. Then it will be with archangel's voice - Israel was accustomed to angelic service - it will be the same voice, but they will recognise it, as the archangel's voice. But then there are others too - think of Cyrus, Nebuchadnezzar, these men - the trumpet of God is for them! What a great military assemblage it will be when they are all gathered in, it will be a secret matter from the world. They will wonder what has happened to us all.

He shall appear to those who look for Him. Are you looking for Him, looking for the Saviour? If you look for Him, is it not going to make a difference to your life? What are you going to be doing when He comes? I know it is in a different setting, but the apostle John says in his epistle: “that if he be manifested we may have boldness, and not be put to shame from before him at his coming”, 1 John 2: 28. I know that does not really apply to this, but I would not want to be out watching a football match when Jesus came. I have said in these meetings earlier that Christianity is essentially simple, and this is another of the things

that makes it simple. What will I be doing when Jesus comes? Would I like Him to find me doing this or that, whatever it may be? Put it another way: suppose there is a meeting, and I say 'I will not go to the meeting tonight, I have got something else to do' - and He came! Would you like Him to find you in that other place, or in the meeting? These things are so simple. It is not putting rules and regulations on us, but love for Jesus - the One who loves me and gave Himself for me - should control everything that I do. So, I present my body a living sacrifice.

You might not find it easy. It says there "that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God". You know the will of God is good - it must be, because it is God's will. We know it is perfect - it must be, because it is God's will. But for it to be acceptable - it is like the meat in the sandwich, you see - between the good and the perfect will. Do you find the will of God acceptable? That is the secret of it. If you are brought to God - "Christ indeed has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" (1 Pet 3: 18) - if you are brought to God and you know God then His will is to be acceptable to you. And you also know "that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to purpose", Rom 8: 28. And the great end of His purpose is that we are pre-destinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. Is that the end? "So that He should be the firstborn among many brethren". Would you not like to be among those who give Him that place? It is all in the gospel, it is so attractive, there is so much to be brought into. Do not think about what you have got to give up. What you give up is not worth having in the light of all these things that we are speaking of! I appeal to you, dear friend, He is going to come the second time without sin and He is not going to have to say to it any more. The work has been done and you can be in the gain of it today, this very moment, where you are sitting on your seat, by putting your faith in Jesus and coming under the shelter of His precious blood. May no-one here miss it. Amen.

Preaching at three day meetings, Grangemouth

17th August 2008

JESUS CROWNED WITH GLORY AND HONOUR

Jim T Brown (Edinburgh)

Hebrews 2: 9 (to “honour”)

2 Timothy 4: 6-8

Revelation 2: 8-10

1 Peter 5: 3-4

Revelation 3: 11

How fine to get a fresh impression of Jesus crowned with glory and honour; He is rejected publicly but enshrined in the hearts of His own and crowned in heaven too. What a day it must have been when Jesus entered heaven. The Father had raised Him from the dead by His glory, “raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom 6: 4), but how special must have been the meeting when the Father welcomed Jesus as He entered the realm of glory, “whom heaven indeed must receive”, Acts 3: 21. Why must heaven receive Him? In order to crown Him! It was a glorious coronation day when Jesus entered heaven: “For thou hast met him with the blessings of goodness; thou hast set a crown of pure gold on his head”, Ps 21:3. “Gone into heaven” Peter says, “angels and authorities and powers being subjected to Him”, 1 Pet 3: 22.

The Father's greetings, honours rare,
Are heaped upon His Son's blest brow;
He is the mighty Victor now.

(Hymn 350)

What a telling contrast to the crown of thorns! Mark, in his gospel, puts his account of it in the present tense, as if ever to remind us of what it meant to Jesus to suffer and to die in order to secure our place in these wonderful thoughts of divine purpose: he says, “they clothe him with purple, and bind round on him a crown of thorns which they had plaited”, Mark 15: 17. Wicked hands had plucked these thorns, wicked hands had woven them into a crown, and they bound that crown of thorns on to the head of the Lord of life and glory. Satan, you see, used men to heap upon the Lord Jesus every shame and every humiliation. How keenly He would feel, in the perfection of His Manhood, the taunting, the jeering, the sneers. He was struck with the palm of the hands of His creature, and then He was spat upon, the nadir of human behaviour. It reflects the essence of man's fallen nature that wicked men would dare to do such a thing. We read in Numbers about the altar, covered with a cloth of purple. The scripture says, “they shall cleanse the altar of the ashes, and spread a purple cloth thereon” (Num

4: 13), spread upon it, as if to convey that there was not an aspect of these precious sufferings that was not faced with moral and kingly dignity. How deserving He is of the Father's laurels! Indeed I suppose that every day of that precious life met with the approbation of heaven.

But then John says, in that remarkable, majestic parenthesis in chapter 19: 5 of his gospel, "Jesus, therefore, went forth without, wearing the crown of thorn, and the purple robe". That is a unique expression; John refers there to the crown of thorn as singular, as if to suggest that the whole race was collectively guilty of the rejection of Jesus; elsewhere in the gospels, it is referred to as a "crown of thorns". We read in Psalm 22, "Bashan's strong ones have beset me round" (v 12); how the Lord Jesus must have felt the contempt, laced with envy, of the religious hierarchy. Then the Roman soldiers, with their gross brutality and insults, making game of Him, as it says, "an assembly of evil doers have surrounded me", v 16. All these awful atrocities were perpetrated on the blessed Saviour as men sought to thwart what was according to the divine will; but they never could. In regal dignity, "He went out, bearing His cross", John 19: 17. Wonderful Jesus! "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory", Phil 2: 9-11. Men speak about the social divisions, they speak about cultural differences, but at Calvary, never was the world so united and unanimous in its rejection of the Lord Jesus. But one day soon, every knee will bow - will have to bow - to Him. How fine to give glory to Jesus now as God has done. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in Him, God also shall glorify him in himself, and shall glorify him immediately", John 13: 31-32. How choice to think of God in Himself glorifying Jesus. He spared not His own Son but then in Himself He has glorified Jesus. May we have a fresh view of Jesus glorified.

But there are these other crowns. There is first the crown of righteousness, conferred by the Lord Jesus as righteous Judge, suggesting a fine consonance between the One who confers the crown and the person who receives it, because, of course, if we think of righteousness, our minds turn to the Lord Jesus. He Himself said, "thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness", Matt 3: 15. Everything Jesus did was exercised and discharged in perfect righteousness. He did always the things that pleased the Father, John 8: 29. Then, part of His sufferings was on account of righteousness. What He endured at the

hands of men was on account of righteousness. Peter says, “when reviled, reviled not again; when suffering, threatened not; but gave himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously”, 1 Pet 2: 23. What it must have meant for Jesus to have His creature treat Him in such a despicable way. It was 'the violation of every delicacy which a perfectly attuned mind could feel', JND Collected Writings vol 7 p172. Jesus felt things with a sensitivity which no other could. But then, at Calvary, supremely, He met God in order that the claims of righteousness might be met, in order that the righteousness of God might be extended to you and extended to me, “righteousness of God ... towards all, and upon all those who believe” (Rom 3: 22); “that we might become God's righteousness in him”, 2 Cor 5: 21. Then one day soon, a bright scene will be ushered in, where righteousness will reign. What a day that shall be when He, the King of righteousness, will reign. We too look forward to a day when there will be “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness”, 2 Pet 3: 13.

Here in Timothy was Paul coming to the end of his pathway. His life was being poured out: wonderful expression. How much was for the divine pleasure in Paul's life. As it was being poured out, every drop, as it were, would be assessed by the righteous Judge according to the divine standard, and Paul clearly had the assurance that a crown of righteousness was laid up for him. But you might ask why there should be a crown of righteousness for Paul? Was not this Saul of Tarsus, the man who persecuted the saints, “who ravaged the assembly, entering into the houses one after another, and dragging off both men and women delivered them up to prison?”, Acts 8: 3. In all of this, was he not seeking to crush the seeds of Christianity, and to exterminate all that was for God, all that the Lord Jesus had secured?. Another scripture says he persecuted believers “even to cities out of our own land” (Acts 26: 11); hot pursuit it would be called nowadays. Saul of Tarsus did all this in his determination to catch believers whose simple act was to have received Jesus into their hearts and were “of the way”, that is, loyal in their testimony to their Lord and Saviour, Acts 9: 2. So you might ask if he was really worthy of a crown of righteousness?. Ah, but the same Saul of Tarsus could say, “for me to live is Christ”, Phil 1: 21. The Lord Jesus intervened as he journeyed to Damascus and took over his heart, his affections and his life. He gave himself wholeheartedly and with total commitment to serve his Lord and Master. Christ had taken possession of him. What suffering, pain and hardship that entailed for him - riots, afflictions, necessities, prisons,

stoning, even shipwreck, but he endured it all in fidelity to His Saviour, as he proclaimed the glorious truths, which God, in His grace, had given him. What an example, but also a challenge, to us all!

So Paul is assessed as worthy of his crown according to the divine standard. Thus the references in the Bible to the shekel of the sanctuary are interesting, and a subject worthy of consideration. What questions it raises. It is referred to in the Pentateuch but not thereafter. Who had custody of it? What purpose did it serve? Why is it called the shekel of the sanctuary, and not, for instance, the shekel of the testimony, or the shekel of the tabernacle? By the reference to the sanctuary, divine holiness is clearly involved, and thus it sets a divine standard. It comes into various situations. Blessedly, we come to appreciate that we are all redeemed on the same, sure, basis. Jesus paid the price of our redemption with His precious blood - by the half shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary, Exod 30: 13. All the gold for the work of the sanctuary was measured according to the shekel of the sanctuary, indicating how God's great thoughts are given effect according to His own standards, chap 38: 24. Affectingly, too, it is part of the instruction in relation to the trespass offering, showing how our responsibilities to maintain what is right must be in accord with divine requirements, Lev 5: 15. The princes, also, had an appreciation of what was due to God as the offering each brought on his day for the dedication of the altar, was according to the shekel of the sanctuary, Num 7: 13. So it enters into every aspect of our sojourn here. It is the divine standard by which things are to be measured and evaluated, be it in the assembly or in our personal lives.

There is a helpful reference in Deborah's song. It exhorts those that walk by the way to consider -

the voice of those who divide the spoil in the midst of the places
of drawing water;

There they rehearse the righteous acts of Jehovah ...

Then the people of Jehovah went down to the gates.

Judg 5: 11.

How often we judge things by human standards: woe betide us if we do. When God acts, He does so righteously. So here the emphasis is on "the righteous acts of Jehovah". How extensive they are. How wonderfully God has operated through every dispensation and, supremely, in the giving of His Son. How wonderfully He has wrought in our own dispensation and in the way the testimony has come down to

us in the recovery of the truth in the last two hundred years or so. All of this reflects “the righteous acts of Jehovah” and is to be valued and cherished. I recommend our younger brethren to read the book, 'The Recovery and Maintenance of the Truth'. It shows how precious truths were contended for and cherished, and the rights of God asserted. Thus it says, “rehearse” them; that is, there is benefit in going over things again and again so that truths and scriptures are embedded in our souls and we become familiar with them,

In Proverbs, wisdom says, “I walk in the path of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment”, Prov 8: 20. The path of righteousness in that particular scripture is singular, meaning that there is only one such path, whereas it adds, “in the midst of the paths of judgment”. That is to say, one might explore the particular issue at hand in traversing “the paths of judgment”. But while there is discrimination in judgment, the paths of judgment flow into the path of righteousness, and there is only one. So in the darkening days foreshadowed in the second epistle to Timothy, Paul speaks about “cutting in a straight line the word of truth”, chap 2: 15. He is asserting that righteousness is to be followed.

Thus Paul says, “For I am already being poured out, and the time of my release is come”, chap 4: 6. That life was being poured out, and such was the intimacy of his relationship with the Lord Jesus, whom he had served so faithfully, that he had the assurance that what was being reserved for him was the crown of righteousness. And that, too, will be the portion of all those that love His appearing.

We come then to Smyrna, where the crown of life is promised. The name Smyrna means 'myrrh', which in turn means bitter and therefore suggests suffering for the will of God, see C A Coates vol 30 p119. Although there was decline in the church generally, there was apparently nothing to rebuke in the saints in Smyrna; yet the Lord uses tribulation to preserve them. But in His grace He assures them that there was a resource to meet the tribulation. So He says, “Be thou faithful unto death” but assures them that He is “the first and the last, who became dead and lived”. Though some might need to become martyrs, He affirms to them that He Himself had been into death and triumphed. What encouragement that would be for these saints in Smyrna, as facing death imminently perhaps, that they had an indissoluble link with a Man who had conquered death. How gracious the Lord Jesus is. He says to them, “I know ... thy poverty; but thou art

actually rich". Not Laodicean wealth, not Laodicean riches acquired in whatever way; Laodicea arrogantly says, "I am grown rich, and have need of nothing" (Rev 3: 17), but the Lord Jesus assures these suffering saints in Smyrna that they are rich in a spiritual sense. Why? Because the surpassing riches of His grace were towards them, the wealth of heaven was theirs, and so they were fortified with the resources to meet whatever might come upon them. Persecution and imprisonment they might have to endure but the Lord, in His compassion, limits it to ten days. It says, "that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days". How fine to understand that God can contain oppression in such a way. No doubt this refers to the ten great persecutions which beset Christians in the early days of the church. But God restricts it to "ten days" in His grace. He hastens to assure these dear saints in Smyrna - as He would us - that He would provide the resources to meet whatever afflicted them. What an encouragement that is for His own in difficult days. We can approach the throne of grace to "find grace for seasonable help", Heb 4: 16. Whatever the circumstances that may occur in our lives either personally or in the assembly, we can "find grace for seasonable help".

Then He says, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give to thee the crown of life". How bright is heaven's answer to a suffering church. What a reward for fidelity to the Lord Jesus in His absence! To all this, He adds: "He that overcomes shall in no wise be injured of the second death", Rev 2: 11: What an anchor for the soul. They might have to die as martyrs as Stephen did, or face daunting trials, yet death was for them but the gateway to an eternity with the Saviour they loved. It is stimulating to retrace the history of the church. Foxe's Book of Martyrs, which I commend to the young brethren, is a chastening and humbling study. In it you read of simple believers in the Lord Jesus tortured, placed on the rack, burned at the stake, drowned, beheaded, yet despite these awful atrocities clinging unflinchingly to their faith. They had that blessed assurance of a link with the Man in the glory who would see them through every situation.

In Peter's epistle, there is another crown, "the unfading crown of glory", conferred by the Chief Shepherd. Who can that be but "the Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep", Heb 13: 20? He is also the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep, John 10: 11. He laid down His life that you and I might be ushered into the flock of God. Dear young person, value your place in the flock of God, come to appreciate more deeply the care that the Chief Shepherd of the sheep

has invested in you. It says of David that “he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and led them by the skilfulness of his hands”, Ps 78: 72. Ponder these hands of the Lord Jesus that, in grace in His pathway here, had touched the leper, now engaged in care for His flock. He is guiding us by the skilfulness of His hands, nudging us along, pulling us out of difficulty, preventing us from falling into trouble; How gentle His touch. Psalm 23 says:

Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, v 1-2.

That has touched my heart recently. Sometimes, speaking practically, it is very difficult to find solace and to find peace in your heart with so much going on around us of every kind, be it personally or relating to the assembly. But “He maketh me to lie down”: He causes us to enjoy the peace, which He alone can give. He encourages us to enter His presence, to enjoy some fresh touch of His love, and feed on the green pastures, which can build up our constitutions, to set us forward in the way, strengthened, encouraged and assured. So it says where we read, and this is a word to the elders, “not as lording it over your possessions, but being models for the flock. And when the chief shepherd is manifested ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory”. He is the Chief Shepherd, which clearly suggests that there are others. If there ever was a need for shepherding it is now. What is the reward of shepherding? - The unfading crown of glory. Paul said of Timothy he had “no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on”, Phil 2: 20. Timothy would have learned the need for care from Paul; he learned from his spiritual father how shepherding was to be conducted. The reward was: “Ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory”. Heaven's distinctions never fade; they never grow dim. The charms of this world, how they fade, how they lose their lustre, but the crown of glory is unfading. Scripture also refers to an incorruptible crown (1 Cor 9: 25); it cannot be tarnished or demeaned.

Finally in Revelation, if these crowns we have spoken about are for the future, there is a crown which exists at present: “hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown”. It is not exactly that you might lose it, but the challenge is that no one should take it. Someone would seek to prise your fingers from it. Mr Stoney says that if you want to dislodge a man from a ladder, you would strike his hands, JBS vol 2 p210. It is what you have your hands on that the enemy attacks. What the Lord is saying here to these Philadelphians is, 'Do not lose your grip

on your crown'. What is the crown? I suppose it is our appreciation of the love of Christ and all He has introduced us into. Philadelphians would be those who live in the true grace and blessing of Christ, in ardent affection for Him, and who long to be with Him. So He says, "I know thy works", Rev 3: 8. Not exactly what they say but what they do in fidelity to Him and to uphold what is precious to Him. Thou "hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name", Rev 3: 8. They were true to that precious Name, the Name of Jesus, and had not denied it. We have the opportunity to confess it, to pledge our fealty and our loyalty to it. Then He says, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience", v 3: 10. How affecting that is. It suggests a two-way thing, Christ longing to have His own with Him but finding an answering desire in their affections to be with Him,

The word of Thy patience we're keeping,
Thy radiancy draws us apart (Hymn 131).

It is He who says, "I come quickly." The coming of Jesus will shortly take place: it is the hope of the church that Jesus will come and take her to be with Himself. Then every care, every sorrow, will be forever over. We shall live eternally with Him, "thus we shall be always with the Lord", 1 Thess 4: 17. What a prospect! May we be attracted to this glorious Person, and then, when we get to heaven, it will not be so much a question of crowns for us which will engage us, but rather the attraction of the Person Himself. The elders in Revelation 4: 10 cast their crowns before the throne in full-hearted appreciation of the One who secured all for them. What will we do but simply bow in His presence, acknowledge His greatness and His glory, and pay tribute to the One who died and shed His precious blood to give us a place in such a glorious system?

May our hearts be attracted to Him! May He be freshly crowned in our affections, for His Name's sake.

Grangemouth

11th March 2017

“THOU ART MINE”

Paul A Gray

Matthew 16: 18

John 10: 14, 15, 3 (from 'he calls'); 20: 17

Isaiah 43: 1-7

The hymn that we sang (No 288) and our brother's prayer referred to the Lord's voice and the Lord's speaking. The verses that we have read are the Lord's own voice, and in each case He claims what is His own: "my assembly"; "my sheep" (John 10: 27); "my brethren"; and then the great claim of redemption, "thou art mine". I desire to encourage our hearts because what the Lord has claimed for His own, He is not going to allow to fail. Scripture tells us in John 3 that "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand" (v 35), and His hand is perfectly trustworthy. He is never going to let go of the purpose of God, nor will He let go of those who are His own.

I start with the words in Matthew, "my assembly". It is good to start at the top. We say that it is His assembly and it will be carried through, but what does the Lord think of His assembly? "Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it" (Eph 5: 25); so we know the value that He places on it. He gave Himself for it and He is attending to it even now, in "the washing of water by the word", and He will "present the assembly to himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things", Eph 5: 26, 27. He regards the assembly as unique because it is. When Adam saw the woman, he said, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: this shall be called Woman", Gen 2: 23. There was something that answered directly to Adam's own heart; the assembly answers directly to Christ's affections, and He *will* carry it through. He tells Peter that "hades' gates shall not prevail against it". That suggests that they will make the attempt, but they will not prevail against it because the Holy Spirit is here. She has her Head in heaven, and "hades' gates shall not prevail": the Lord will see to it. But He is also building His assembly. The recognition that He is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" remains the basis for the building of the assembly, and He is doing it. He is not leaving it to others to do; He is doing it Himself. What could fail of what the Lord Himself is doing?

In the quarry when the stones are being prepared, the edges may have to be squared off. We have to accept that at times. There

are times of sorrow and discipline, but what is in view is the building of that which is perfect, without stain, having no need of adjustment. The adjustment takes place in the persons, but the Lord's building is perfect. We might observe that Peter was given a wonderful revelation, first of all from the "Father who is in the heavens" (v 17), and then further a revelation from the Lord. He says, "And I also, I say unto thee ..." - and almost immediately Peter failed, to the extent that he had to be rebuked very severely by the Lord, v 23. But did the Father withdraw His revelation? Did the Lord suggest to Peter that He would turn back from what He had just said, "I will build my assembly"? No! We feel perhaps greatly rebuked by certain things that have come in, but the Lord is not going back on what He said He would do. And He is not turning His back on the persons either. He went on with Peter and brought him through so that Peter came through the discipline, came through the suffering, and came out like one of those "vessels of shining copper, precious as gold", Ezra 8: 26. At the end of his life he could have been occupied with other things and thinking of the fact that he was going to die. He says, "knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle is speedily to take place" (2 Pet 1: 14) - but what does he speak about? He speaks about the transfiguration and he speaks about the excellent glory, "such a voice being uttered to him by the excellent glory ... being with him on the holy mountain", v 17, 18. Peter was ready to go, to see that Man, but yet before he went he said, "but I will use diligence, that after my departure ye should have also, at any time, in your power to call to mind these things", v 15. So at the end of Peter's life there was a true and living testimony to the fact that his mind and his heart were occupied with the Man in the glory, and he was no longer thinking about the discipline and the rebuke. He had got the benefit; he was a delivered man; and he was going through and carrying with him these impressions of Christ in glory.

"My assembly" is the place where these impressions can be appreciated. You do not get the transfiguration until you first have the Lord's statement about "my assembly". That is where the Lord's glory is truly appreciated, and that is also the vessel to which He entrusts administration. You get "my assembly", and then you get the glory, and then you get administration. You get it in that order, not administration first and then the rest: the glory makes way for the administration. It is all "my assembly". When you come to Matthew 18, it is "tell it to the assembly", v 17. There is only one assembly, and it is the Lord's assembly, and He will carry it through to be His eternally.

Well, what about the day-to-day then? Well, we come to “my sheep”. He knows them individually: “he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out”. He says, “I am the good shepherd; and I know those that are mine” - that is one thing, but then He says - “and am known of those that are mine”. As we know Him, we see that He is set to carry through all that is His because He holds it on the Father's account. He says, “as the Father knows me and I know the Father”: think of that! He is beginning to open up these bonds of affection that exist, ever existed, but we are brought into them. He introduces them in this gentle way in John 10. He has more to say about this later on, but in order that there might be a righteous basis laid, He says, “I lay down my life for the sheep”: that was prospectively for all of them. He does not say, ‘I lay down my life for **my** sheep’ although that is in fact what it amounts to, but every one was in view: “I lay down my life for **the** sheep”. Why? So that they might become “my sheep”. This is the Creator speaking; they were His already; He had rights in creation over them, but He would establish too rights in redemption. “My sheep hear my voice”, v 27. Well, what a wonderful thing to hear His voice! As the hymn says,

Enough, that we have heard Thy voice,
And learned Thy love's deep woe -

Thy glory, Lord: this living waste
To us no rest can give; (Hymn 47)

Well, why? Because the One who has claimed us is the One who desires to hold us and will carry us through.

In John 20 it is “my brethren”. Now, would we ever have said that if He had not said it? But He did. He claims us as His brethren: “go to my brethren”, identifiably His; “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. What a dignity is conferred on those whom He would gather around Him, those in whose midst He would stand, “in the midst” (v 12), indeed, and what a place, surrounded by his brethren! They are like Him. When Gideon refers to his brethren, he says, “They were my brethren, the sons of my mother”, Judg 8: 19. Why had he said that? Because he had been told “each one resembled the sons of a king”, v 18. The One who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, the One who said in this very book, “My kingdom is not of this world” (chap 18: 36) says, “my brethren”. He claims them as His own.

Now, if the Lord has these claims, “my assembly”, “my sheep”, “my brethren”, are we therefore to be concerned about whether He will carry things through? And that is why I want to touch on Isaiah, not to go into the detail, but this brings together creation and redemption: “Jehovah, that created thee”, but then, “I have loved thee; and I will give men for thee, and peoples for thy life”; so there are rights of redemption expressed here too. But “I have called thee by thy name”, it says. It may be said that refers to Jacob and Israel. It does, but it also refers to each of us individually, although the reason I read this was in part because God has never given up His thoughts about Israel. It is two thousand years since Israel turned their back on their Messiah, and for that whole period of time Israel's praise has been silent, and yet God has not given up His thoughts about them. Therefore, I trust, it might be for our encouragement to understand that God does not give up His thoughts about His own. He will carry through and bring out in victory all that His heart was set upon. He speaks to them about what would pass over them: “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee”. That is because this is the One who stood against the Jordan; it overflowed all its banks. He says, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee ... neither shall the flame kindle upon thee”. That is because when the flame of judgment kindled, the judgment was borne by the Lord. He took the place that we should have taken: “neither shall the flame kindle upon thee”. God is not looking on us in view of judgment or condemnation. The judgment has been borne by Christ on the cross. We know that “God, having sent his own Son, in likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh”, Rom 8: 3. The judgment has been borne and the condemnation been dealt with, and God is looking on us with favour; so in that same chapter Paul says, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death”, v 2.

He says, “For I am Jehovah thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour”. Now, if we are His people, is He our Saviour? Yes, He is. Can each of us say, 'My Saviour'? He goes on to exalt them, “Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee; and I will give men for thee, and peoples for thy life”. Now, you would not have said that about Israel if you looked at what they did in responsibility, but that is not God's view and He will bring them all back. “I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back:

bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the end of the earth” - and this is important - “every one that is called by my name,” - none will be missing - “and whom I have created for my glory: I have formed him, yea, I have made him”. What God has made for His glory He will bring through to His glory, and the glory will belong to Him because it is all His. It came from Him in the first place; He is the source of glory; and He will have an answer in glory eternally in those whom He is set to bring through.

I trust that these thoughts will be for our encouragement and that the Lord might bless them for His Name's sake.

Word in meeting for ministry in Grangemouth

6th June 2017

THE CONTINUANCE OF THE TESTIMONY

Bob Gray

Matthew 28: 16-20

Acts 1: 21, 22

John 20: 14-19

I have an impression, which has been strengthened by the hymn and the prayer and the word that we have had, as to the continuance of the testimony. Our brother has been speaking to us about the way the Lord will maintain what is His. I have had this impression since Lord's day as to the truth that the Lord will not only save the personnel of the assembly and keep them, but He will keep His thoughts, these thoughts that have been set forth so vividly in Himself. What God has made known, His thoughts in Christ, and brought to us in the power of the Holy Spirit, God will maintain.

And so it says in Matthew where we have this reference to the place of reproach, Galilee, and the eleven disciples seeing Jesus, "And when they saw him, they did homage to him: but some doubted". What is really in my mind in this section of scripture is, "And behold, *I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age*". This is not exactly centred on any particular aspect of the truth; it is the whole thing: "*I am with you*"; that is, the Lord was going to maintain what He had set on. We have had it in Matthew 16: "I will build my assembly", v 18. How is that going to be maintained? "*I am with you*". He was with them, those whom He had left behind, and He would be with us, not on the grounds of claiming anything, but so long as we walk on the path in which He has set us by the Spirit. "*I am with you*"; that is, with persons who hold and love and maintain what He loves, that is the light and truth of the assembly. And it is not a mere matter of a set of rules or anything like that. What He has in view is making "disciples of all the nations, baptising them to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". There is going to be somewhere, and there *is* in the hearts of His own, where that Name, that glorious Name, is held and revered, and it is this that He is maintaining, where the greatest thoughts of God are held and maintained.

But, thanks be to God, they are maintained in persons, feeble people as we all are, ordinary, weak, failing, but we are not merely that when the Lord takes the matter in hand: "*I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age*". His thoughts are being maintained, and will

be maintained, and the fulness of the wealth that belongs to them will be maintained. It will be said that no company can claim to be the assembly. That is true; we cannot because of the public breakdown. But we can carry in their fulness divine thoughts as to what God has set on in His purpose and has worked out and is working out in His ways. And so the Lord says through the angel in the last page of Scripture, "to you in the assemblies", Rev 22: 16. We would say even amongst us that things are broken, things are very confused. There are many brethren suffering for various reasons and feeling things, tested in their spirits, tried by what goes on from day to day. "And behold, I am with you all the days"; the Lord would help us to stand true and faithful to what is pleasing to Him and to hold to the truth at its height.

We read in the Acts. I was struck on Lord's day by this; they were choosing the twelfth disciple under the Lord's hand, and they referred to "all the time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us"; being with Him was, apparently, a necessary feature that was to belong to the one who would be selected, and I submit that it is a necessary feature for the maintenance of the testimony. We have just said the Lord is with the testimony. That is true, but this is something else to think about, that He comes in His movements: in His maintenance of the testimony, He comes in, and what does He find? Other accounts in the gospels make it clear that, even before the Spirit came, the Lord found amongst His own what He looked for; and He came in among them: "all the time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us". It impressed my spirit that this is a vitally important part of the maintenance of the testimony; He is not here corporeally but as we gather in faith and dependence and obedience, the Lord takes account of that. He would not ignore the fact that His saints are gathering in faith, in dependence. He came in on specific occasions we read of in John but here it is "all the time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out". What did He go out for? The day is coming when we will "go no more at all out", Rev 3: 12. He goes out, I believe, and takes us with Him; much more could be said; this is a very wealthy section of Scripture.

I will just touch on John to complete the matter, God willing, because this is a very, very precious scripture. This was a time of confusion, indeed. The Lord had died; they did not even know where His body was. I am speaking simply but reverently. They were utterly distressed and bereft by what had taken place. He came to the place where Mary was: "Jesus says to her, Woman, why dost thou weep?".

Well, He knows; He knows what the brethren feel. He knows what the sore parts are; He knows about them. "Why dost thou weep?" She says, "Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus says to her, Mary". That struck me recently. This was a confused, difficult, very sad situation but two words put it right: one word was, "Mary", and the other word was, "Rabboni". That was it; the link was formed; the thing was complete; they were there together. It is almost - I trust I am not wrong in saying this - a hint at least of what lay ahead when the Holy Spirit came, that is, union. The link was such that it needed no words, no explanation, just the name, "Mary", and the whole thing wakened up in her, "Rabboni". It was like the sun rising; here He was, this Man! A moment or two ago her heart had been filled with grief. Here He was and He had things in His hand. He set matters on right away: "go to my brethren". He did say, "Touch me not", I know, but I do not want to go into the detail of it, but He took her in hand, and she became serviceable. What did He say? "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God. Mary of Magdala comes bringing word to the disciples that she had seen the Lord".

And then He seals the matter, in a sense, a little later: "When therefore it was evening ... Jesus came and stood in the midst". I do not want to be fanciful, but do you think the Lord has been here amongst us? Will I go back out of that door exactly the same way as I came in? Our brother brought that in in his preaching. You come to the Supper; you come with impressions; and that is right; but do you go out of the door exactly the same way as you came in, no difference, no change? No! He comes and He leaves His own impression and, in a sense, when He goes out, He takes us with Him; that is the case here. In that sense He is taking them right in, or giving them an impression, at least, I should say more accurately, of the name of the Father, "my Father and your Father ..." - what a Father! - "my God and your God".

Well, He "stood in the midst". The midst is still here, brethren. The midst is still available to the Lord. God grant by His grace that each one of us remains part of it and free and useful in it! May it be so for His Name's sake!

Word in meeting for ministry in Grangemouth

6th June 2017

INFLUENCE

David McLaren

Judges 5: 31 (from “And”); 6: 1-6, 11-14; 8: 28

Our brothers have spoken of influence, and how we should come under the Lord's influence, and how we should come under right influence and not wrong influence. I have been thinking about this section, particularly since it was raised in the fellowship meetings in Brechin recently, because Gideon here was anxious to secure a food supply. In that way, he was providing a good influence because there was very much a bad influence here, in that the food supply was not available.

I am interested in some of the detail, because Gideon was not exactly like Joseph, for instance, although he was like him in the concern to secure a food supply. It tells us at the beginning of chapter 6 that “Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years”, and, of course, we get the detail that follows which was not quite the same as it was in Egypt in the sense that there was a harvest, but it was the same as a famine in that they did not have enough to eat. The Midianites were very crafty; they were a very bad influence; they did not destroy the land as such, but what they did was to allow the children of Israel to do all the work: then they could not get the benefit of it because the Midianites took it all away. It says there was “neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass,” but of course, there was not any wheat either. That would mean that not only were the children of Israel impoverished, but God was robbed too because there would not be anything available for the offerings in the service of God.

The history of Judges is largely ups and downs. The people started off well but then they declined and they fell away, they started to serve idols; and when they realised they had done wrong, they cried to God and He brought them in a saviour. They had just been through the experience here of being saved under Deborah and Barak, and it tells us that “the land had rest forty years”, which is why I read the part of the verse at the end of chapter 5. Now, forty years is quite a long time. It is not quite like the time in Egypt when Joseph rightly prophesied that there would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine; they had forty years rest. In practice that would mean there was a long time in which they should have enjoyed God's blessings, and they should have had the wherewithal to serve Him, as He had laid down in the law

and as He would wish, and as they would wish if they were right, but instead of doing that, they fell away.

So the question for me and for many of us is, we have had forty years of peace and rest: what have we got to show for it? Forty years is often seen in Scripture as a period of testing to bring to light good or evil: so my exercise would be, for myself especially, what do I have to show for the forty years or more than forty years since some of us faced big problems and a shake-up among those we walked with? What do I have to show for it? Are we just declining? I am not suggesting we are, but the question is whether I have got the gain of the forty years of rest.

What it tells us about Gideon is interesting, because after the forty years of rest, when they could and should have had plenty; they effectively had seven years of famine because they were not able to enjoy the produce of the land. What it says of Gideon is that he “threshed wheat in the winepress, to secure it from the Midianites”, and the clear suggestion is this was a rather difficult and awkward job to do. It is not the way you usually thresh wheat, but, of course, it was “to secure it from the Midianites”. The Midianites would not expect him to be doing this, and it would almost certainly mean that it was hidden from them so they could not steal it from him. We sometimes think that this was something that Gideon did just at this point, but I understand, having read it somewhere, it might mean that this was characteristic of him: that he had been doing this for some time. He may have done this in several harvests. The original could mean that he 'used to thresh wheat in the winepress'; that is, he had been doing this habitually: it was not something he did suddenly, but it was his practice.

Verse 12 says, “And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him, and said to him, Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour”; while in verse 14 he says, “Go in this thy might”. If I can put it this way, he was able to use his influence rightly because he delivered the people; I am not so much concerned about that aspect, but it does tell us that he delivered them. It tells us in chapter 8 that “Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, and they lifted up their heads no more”, v 28. That was really because of the influence of Gideon's faithfulness and, of course, there are other aspects too. They wanted him to rule over them, and Gideon uses his influence rightly there also. He says in effect, 'No, I do not want to be a king; God is going to be your king', v 22-23. Not only was Midian subdued so that they no longer troubled the children of Israel and robbed them of what they should have got the

benefit of, and too, by implication, robbed God of His portion; but they were saved, Midian was subdued, and it is significant that once again “the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon”; so Gideon was a good influence during the time he judged the people.

Well, I am exercised that like Gideon we should have a good influence and be able to provide food for the saints, and yield something for the service of God too.

May the Lord bless the word!

Word in a ministry meeting, Dundee

25th April 2017

AN ASSEMBLING SHOUT

Philip E Hogan

1 Thessalonians 4: 16-18

Nehemiah 4: 17-20 (to “us”)

Mark 6: 38-42

Hebrews 2: 12

We may say that we are gathered here tonight in the spirit of expectancy. We conduct our lives as Christians and believers in the Lord Jesus in the same spirit because it says in Romans, “but hope seen is not hope; for what any one sees, why does he also hope? But if what we see not we hope, we expect in patience”, chap 8: 24, 25. So you could say there are two things that would mark us: firstly, expectancy because we can all agree that we are all waiting for the moment when the Lord will come with an assembling shout; and secondly, the need to be patient.

What was in my mind was this phrase, “assembling shout”. You think of what that will actually and literally involve, bearing in mind that where we have recently read at the beginning of Genesis speaks about man returning to dust, chap 3: 19. Think for a moment about what that assembling shout will do. It says, “the dead in Christ shall rise first”. There will be persons who have been dead for hundreds and hundreds of years and all that will be left of them is just a handful of dust, and the Lord Jesus will be able to raise that. There will be some persons who have been dead for years and years at the bottom of the ocean and long since forgotten about! But the Lord Jesus will be able to raise them as well. Others who are alive in , different countries with different cultures, in different parts of the world, persons who may have come to know the Lord Jesus a long time earlier in their lives - some may even have believed and then forgotten about Him, and yet He has not forgotten about them so they will also be caught up. Think of children at school; think of persons in prisons, hospitals, the multitude of persons who will be drawn up by that voice!

Now my impression is about this same Person, and this same voice: He and only He has the power to assemble and, more to the point, it is only He who has the power to assemble *us*. You could say that is why we are here tonight. It is the same Person, a real living Person, and that One who will assemble all these millions and billions of people has the power and the means to assemble us now; so while we

wait in expectancy, the hope that we have is a living hope because the relationship that we have is a living relationship. The love that we know is a love that is currently experienced, and that relationship is a known relationship. The One who has been into death but the One who is now living will take us very soon to be with Himself. It says here, “then, we, the living who remain”; that is present tense. It shows that is what characterised the apostle's life. Nearly two thousand years ago, this characterised that man's walk as he went through his life, “then, we, the living who remain”. It was present to him then, and it should be present to us now; and, as it is present to us, I think it has a formative effect upon us, (or it *should* have a formative effect upon us), to think that the Lord Jesus, the same One who will assemble all these persons then, has the ability and the power to assemble us now, and He does do that.

We experience this in different ways as we are gathered together. We go through our so-called wilderness lives and we go to work, some are at college, some are at school, and we all have different experiences; during that week of experience, different things happen to us. That is why I read in Nehemiah. It speaks about these builders, and it also speaks about “they that bore burdens” and “those that loaded”; so there are different persons doing different things. You could say they had different jobs to do, and as they were building that wall, they had a sword which meant there was something worth protecting, something that was valuable. If you are building a wall (and I know there are some here who know better than I do about building walls) and you look along that wall, you might see a point in your workmanship when there was a corner that had to be turned. Looking back on our own experience, we can see that, although most of us might be described as having been brought up in fellowship, there does come a point when each of us has to turn a corner. We have to have experience with divine Persons; we have to realise there is a corner there that has to be turned. And that is how we make progress.

Then there might be another bit on the wall. Perhaps they were going through a difficult patch where - without being too imaginative - the raw material is hard and was difficult to work with. What is the raw material? The raw material is there: it is you and me. The raw material is sometimes very difficult to work with, but the Spirit would help us, and the way He would do that is by directing us towards the Lord Jesus in all His perfection so that we find the building becomes easier. We also find then that we are less occupied with what we are naturally, with our weaknesses and our difficulties and all these things; and we are also

less occupied with other people who are also building on the wall; especially when we look at the pattern. To build something properly you need a plan or a drawing, and in Christianity we have a pattern, and that pattern is the Lord Jesus.

Then it says, “The work is great and extended, and we are scattered upon the wall”. You might look along the length of that wall and there are persons working here and there, and it looks as though they are scattered along the length of the wall, one far from another; but the Lord Jesus has the ability to assemble these persons, and He will and He does. Then it says, “in what place ye hear the sound of the trumpet, thither shall ye assemble to us; our God will fight for us”. Sometimes we get occupied with the difficulties and all sorts of things, but we can leave the matter with God, and we have to leave it with God. We have to know what it is to depend on Him. What He leaves us here to do is to carry on with the building. Sometimes along the way we may stop building for a while; that can happen. But the Lord Jesus and the Father would have in mind that we continue building. There is building work to be done and as we build, we build in relation to one another. Think of these stones it speaks about in Peter. These stones are interlocked together, and the Lord Jesus would have in mind that we should build according to Him. He is the pattern; so as we are building we look at the pattern and as we look at the pattern, we find the work gets done.

But then He would assemble us: “thither shall ye assemble to us”. It is all these different persons, all these different experiences, that are assembled to the Person of the Lord Jesus. I believe a result of that experience would be evident on a Lord's day morning when something which has been accumulated during the week comes out in praise and worship towards divine Persons. As we gather in a simple way, which the world does not take any account of, we can do that; and we can remember the Lord Jesus in a world where He has been rejected. Think of all these years that have gone by and the many persons who have simply gathered to remember the Lord Jesus in a world where He has been cast aside! Think of what pleasure that gives to Him! Think of His joy at seeing persons do that and think of Him as seeing and knowing what has gone into that experience in order that this experience has brought about formation, and the formation has brought about a response, and that would rise to His heart; it would bring pleasure to Him. You and I can also benefit by it because other persons' impressions can lead to something we can work with as well.

Where I read in Mark, these persons were made to sit down in ranks. Over the past few weeks we have been reminded locally that we need authority, food and direction, and I thought in this section of Scripture these three things come into play as you see persons who are gathered together. There is authority: He made them all sit down so they were brought together, made to sit down and given food and the result of that is they were given direction. There is an environment, an area, a circle, where these things are worked out when persons are assembled, where they come under the authority of the Lord Jesus, and as we are within that area of authority, I believe He would give us food for the way, substantial food, food that would build us up and give us strength for the pathway. But then He would not just leave us there. He would point us forward. He would give us direction, and that direction is not here in this world. You could say it is not horizontal direction. I would say it is vertical and heavenly direction, and at the moment I think that is what we need. We *need* to be looking upward. It is so easy for us to look around, horizontally, and what do we find there? We often find there is what disillusions us, what disappoints us, what discourages us, and sometimes unfortunately that can involve persons. The first person I have to think about in that regard is myself; so I need to learn that I have to look at Jesus rather than look at myself. As we do that, we find that our hearts are lifted, and there is something worked out there that would be for our blessing in a greater way.

But then it says, "And they all ate and were satisfied". I think we can say we are brought there, brought where there is what can be partaken of, what can be fed upon, and it brings about satisfaction. We have been very blessed and very privileged, to be brought up in an environment where we can do this; and not only that but we can do it regularly. There is what is settled. The Lord has made us sit down. and He has made us sit down in companies; so that means we are able to sit down one person in relation to the other, a person sitting side by side with another person. First of all, we have been placed there in relation to the Lord Jesus, but then we are put there in relation to each other, and that is how the thing is worked out.

Finally, we read in Hebrews and what we see is how these things are worked out: "I will declare thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises". Think of that in its entirety, the complete thought of all these persons brought together as one entity and in the midst of that the Lord Jesus is singing praises to His God and Father. Think of the pleasure divine Persons get from that!

The persons are no longer looked upon as a mass of individuals but rather one entity, and divine Persons get immense pleasure from that, and as well as that, underlying all of this is the great matter of divine love in all its greatness. Well, the fact is the Lord Jesus is going to come soon; He will come soon with that assembling shout. In the meantime as we are gathered here in a state of expectancy, let us all be looking towards that point! May the Lord bless the word!

Word in meeting for ministry in Grangemouth

22nd August 2017