

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

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THE ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Genesis 24: 15-25

Matthew 16: 13-20

Acts 20: 26-32

RGr These scriptures refer to the matter of the assembly - either typically or actually. I suggested them because in each scripture we have some suggestion of the relations that divine Persons have with the assembly. We think of ourselves as part of the assembly, and that is true and it is a blessed privilege, but I think as we understand how God values the assembly and the lengths He has gone to to secure it, it would enhance the thought of the assembly in our minds and hearts. It is something that the enemy would be against. The light and truth of the assembly is universal, but the actual working out of the features that belong to the assembly largely takes place locally. In Genesis we have Rebecca, a well-known type, and the servant has often been referred to as a type of the Holy Spirit. I have the impression that our prosperity in walking in the light and practice of what belongs to the assembly depends very much on the Holy Spirit. We may say it is God's assembly and that is true. It is the Lord's assembly - that is also true, but I believe that the Holy Spirit has had a very great deal to do with the formation of the assembly in the present dispensation. I suggested Matthew's gospel because there we have the Lord's own valuation of things. We could have read many scriptures from Matthew but time does not allow us to go into detail. And then in the Book of the Acts we have the reference to the assembly which He, that is, God, "has purchased with the blood of His own". This is a very dignified and spiritual suggestion as to the assembly and the extent to which God was prepared to go to secure it in the working out of His thoughts. I hope that we can make something of this together.

RT I am sure that it will be very helpful. Following the ascension of Christ the assembly has been committed into the hands of the Spirit to sustain, and to bring into expression down here.

RGr Yes, that is true. John's gospel would teach us that, especially from chapter 13 onward. It is a fine thing to think that the Holy Spirit is with us and in us forever; that is not going to change. The exercise at the present moment is to look for and foster assembly features in the saints, not only in our own hearts, but to look for them in one another. It is plain from these scriptures and from others that divine Persons

respect - if that is a right word to use - the work of each other. We have it here in the reference to the man being silent and waiting to see what would proceed. We have similar references in the Lord's pathway here when He took account of the Father's work, and wondered at it, and made way for it.

MC There is something very special that came on to view in Rebecca, was there, that the servant could take account of immediately? There was something in Rebecca that was entirely according to God's will, and what had been formed in her was coming to light.

RGr Yes, I think that helps because we know perfectly well from other scriptures that the working out of matters connected with the kingdom flowing into the assembly involves much exercise, and there is weakness that comes in from our side, but in this scripture there is no suggestion of that. Rebecca's lineage is right, her attitude, and her willingness to trust herself to this person whom she had not seen until very recently, is commendable. She says, "I will go" with this man. All of that points to a very fine line of things, do you think?

TDB Could you say something about the presence of the Spirit? The Lord was here according to Scripture about thirty-three and one-half years, but since Pentecost that divine Person has been present here in the saints.

RGr Well, it is something that I would like help on myself. Many of us have been brought up among those who knew the terms of the truth and so on. I wonder for my own part whether I value the fact sufficiently that there is a divine Person here in the assembly. I think there is much parallel between the Lord's service to His own when He was here; there is much that runs parallel with that in the Holy Spirit's service to the saints now. He is our Comforter and Guide, He leads us, and so on.

TDB All I was thinking about was the matter of time and the number of persons that have known dealings with the Spirit.

RGr Yes; when the Lord was leaving His own He said to them, "he shall do greater than these", John 14: 12. That really refers to the time of the Holy Spirit, and we must not underestimate the fact that the Lord was here for a limited period in the ways of God. That was according to divine counsel, but the Holy Spirit has been here for about 2,000 years. What a service that is! What a patient working out it involves.

RG Peter, in his first epistle, says, “Ye are a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, that ye might set forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light”, 1 Peter 2: 9. I was wondering if we should get our eyes lifted to see what divine Persons think of the assembly in that way. Peter was telling us really what he had gathered up from his contact with the Lord about this. We are precious: precious stones. He is the One who is “a corner-stone, the elect, precious”, v 6. What a vessel the assembly is, in the midst of darkness. Do you think we should value it more?

RGr Yes, I do, and you have touched on quite a vital point, because we think of failure a lot, and we have to judge ourselves. We have failed, and there is no mistake about that, but God is not going on with failure. He is going on with His thoughts in purpose, and He is going to work them out and is working them out. So you may say, 'Well, we are just a feeble handful here'; but let us remember that we are here for no other reason than that we have been drawn by the Father to Christ, and we are to be maintained here by the Holy Spirit. So, unbelievers or others who have a less view of things might say, 'Who do you think you are? Why make yourselves so special?'. We did not make ourselves special: God did! “Ye are a chosen race”, as you have just quoted.

RT Was not the assembly in the mind and purpose of God before ever sin came into the world?

RGr Yes. Go on; help us.

RT She is not a remedy merely or a way out, but the assembly was something that was conceived in purpose, was it not? And the Spirit has come to substantiate that until the time that she is taken back to be in glory.

RGr That is exactly the truth, and something we need to carry. I have the feeling at the moment that the enemy is peculiarly against the expression of assembly feelings and due assembly order. He would seek to bring in division, bring in disruption, bring in this that and the next thing. God is not in that; He is going on with His thoughts, and the great thing is that He will secure them.

RG That is what I thought about Peter's expression, because he says, “that ye might set forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light”. We are here for a purpose, and

the purpose is to “set forth the excellencies of him who has called you”. Would we get some impression of these excellencies at the Supper, and then it would be in testimony that these would be shown forth?

RGr Yes, I think that is right. And I think we should remember that “as often as ye shall eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye announce the death of the Lord, until he come”. So who are we announcing it to? We are just a handful of Christians; that is not the point. The angels take account of the Supper, and others do too. Others may be looking on and seeing the regular proceeding to a particular meeting room or whatever, and there is some testimony in the Supper and the gospel flows out of that, of course.

MC Mr James Taylor said that the assembly is the greatest vessel in the universe at the present time, JT vol 89 p338. That helps us to see just how great it is, and the dignity that belongs to it, do you think?

RGr Yes, I do think that. We have to be neither pretentious nor imaginative, which is what belongs to the first order, but we have to keep our eyes on what God is doing and will do. The fact is that He is going to show Jerusalem, the holy city, to a wondering universe. And it will stand the most scrupulous examination.

RG We have often been reminded in our lives, have we not, amongst the brethren, that no locality would claim to be Philadelphia? But what is Philadelphian should be exemplified and seen in every locality.

RGr That is the truth. I am sure brethren have heard this many times; I certainly have: God does not present glorious impossibilities. He presents to us what is attainable and is attainable because a divine Person is involved. The power of the Spirit is involved.

MC It has often been said that the Acts of the Apostles could be called the Acts of the Spirit. I wonder if that bears on what we are saying about the Spirit. Wonderful activities took place as the Spirit came, and then as Paul acted in ministering features in localities, all formed as a result.

RGr Yes. You have opened up a very wide sphere of enquiry there. The activities of the Holy Spirit in the beginning of Acts are remarkable. And the way the saints responded was remarkable, but we have to remember that the blessed Holy Spirit - I want to speak carefully and wisely - is not to be thought of as assertive. You might say that is a

strange thing to say about the Holy Spirit. But if I hinder Him, or if I am not amenable to what is right, He will retire. He does not give us up; He does not go away and leave us exactly, but we **must** remember that we are dealing with a divine Person with all the holiness and greatness that that involves. But the fact that He appeared in bodily form as a dove is something we should remember. Would you say?

MC Yes, that helps. So in the beginning of the Acts it says, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit”, Acts 2: 4. So there was not room for anything else, do you think, and does that help us to make room for the Spirit?

RGr Yes, I think it is a continuous exercise that we should, and do, make way for the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is what marks off the Christian pathway. You might say, 'We follow the Lord'. Yes, we do. Let us not confuse any of our young people; the Lord is the One who is on high, and we have our eye on Him, and we follow Him, but if we make way for the Spirit, what will He do? He will help us to follow Christ more actively and more fully.

TDB How do you do that? How do you make way for the Spirit?

RGr I know that in the beginning of the Acts when He came in there was the sound of violent, impetuous blowing, v 2. That was irresistible power working in the saints, but in the way that He operates we have to make way for Him and be sensitive to Him. I am often comforted by the end of Galatians where things were quite difficult; Paul says, towards the end, “ye who are spiritual”, 6: 1. Where do they come from? There must have been some in Galatia with all its shortcomings and failures; there must have been some making way for the Spirit. And in Galatians you get, “he that sows to the Spirit” (v 8); “walk also by the Spirit”, chap 5: 25. You get the fruit of the Spirit, chap 5: 22, 23. Really we have to engage ourselves with Him in an intelligent way, would you say? You help us.

TDB I was thinking of that very scripture you referred to; sowing to the Spirit involves making time in our lives, but He needs to be given time.

RGr Yes; I do not want to confuse any of our younger brethren. The Lord is on high on our behalf, and He is the One we follow. We keep our eye on Christ; He is our Saviour and He is our Lord. But the Holy Spirit is One whom we vitally need. We need to make way for Him and hence

the importance of our now being free in addressing the Spirit.

RT Elisha says to the widow that was in debt, to borrow “empty vessels; let it not be few”, 2 Kings 4:3, 4. She came into the wealth of it through an empty vessel, did she not? He needs room, does He not? The Spirit needs room to operate.

RGr That is distinctly helpful and goes some way to answer the question as to how we make way for the Spirit. It is a thing that I have been exercised about in years past. If I am sitting reading the newspaper excessively (and I am not saying that we are never to read newspapers), or occupying myself excessively with any other thing that is not exactly evil, my mind is not open or receptive to the working of the Holy Spirit. So what you say is important: “Bring me empty vessels”. That is those vessels that are ready to receive a word. Is that what is in your mind?

RT We are to take up our responsibility. The Holy Spirit is very sensitive, is He not?

RGr I think your word “sensitive” is important, and maybe better than the word I used; there is a gentleness. He is God; let us never forget that, and let us not in any sense be irreverent, but He is very gentle, and we can put Him off if we do not make way for Him.

DS snr Could you help us with the way Rebecca answered the servant here? “Drink, my lord!”, she says.

RGr Well, what comes out is Rebecca's breeding; that is, that she came from a very good family, and I am talking spiritually now. Her instincts, her spiritual instincts, were right; and she saw in this person someone whom she could address respectfully and whom she could serve. And I think the touch - it is more than a touch - the time after the breaking of bread when the Holy Spirit is addressed, is very important. I do not want to get things unbalanced in our minds. The service of praise as we have it, as it has been given to us by the Lord through enquiry, gives opportunity to bring out the quality and the variety of the Holy Spirit's work in the saints. He is with us when we speak to the Lord Jesus; He is with us when the thought of the assembly is in our minds and hearts; and He is with us as the Father's Spirit too. It brings out the variety of His service.

DS snr The Spirit has feelings too, has He not?

RGr Well, I have been thinking recently about what Paul says; he speaks of “the love *of* the Spirit” (Rom 15: 30), but he also speaks about “your love *in* the Spirit”, Col 1: 8. This suggests an acquaintance with the Person, a reverent acquaintance with the person of the Holy Spirit. That is something that we do well to think about.

HS Is verse 19 the answer to that? She did this instinctively; the servant did not ask her to do this, to pour water for the camels. It is an interesting thing, is it not?

RGr Well, what you say is helpful; when we come to the Supper - who asked us to come? It was not announced, as we often remark. We come into an area where we are drawn by love for the Lord, and our desire to remember Him, but what follows is not the subject of rigorous rules. There is a sphere where the Holy Spirit is free in the saints, and what follows is spontaneous, and very pleasing to the heart of God.

HS In that verse when she had given him enough to drink she says, “I will draw ...”. She made the move, did she not?

RGr Well, I have never calculated it myself, but it has been suggested the amount of water that she drew out of that well was very, very considerable; many, many gallons. But she had the capacity - God-given - to meet what was required at the moment, and it says there, “And the man was astonished at her, remaining silent, to know whether Jehovah had made his journey prosperous or not”. Really, this suggests the work of God appearing in this person, which was equal to the occasion.

RG Do you think there is a counterpart in the woman in John 4? She had been going back and forward to that well, but now, “the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life”, v14, There is the abundance of water that this woman was drawing here, do you think?

RGr Yes. The fact is that when we are under the control of the blessed Holy Spirit and absolutely subject to Him, without a cloud, the progress that can be made is remarkable. That woman suggests one such.

RT Typically, everything in this chapter depended upon Rebecca making room for the one who represents the Holy Spirit, did it not?

RGr Yes. I think that is an important remark. You might say, 'Well,

that was just a little aside'. Not really. The whole thing pivoted on the fact that she responded in this way, and it reminds me of the passage we sometimes quote on Lord's day morning:

Before I was aware,
My soul set me on the chariots of my willing people, (Song of Songs 6: 12).

It is a matter of willing response, do you think?

RT Do you think there is some expression of this in the Supper being maintained in an assembly setting in the present time?

RGr Yes, I do; I think that is important. In the past two thousand years there have been endless efforts to modify the Supper, adjust it, make it different; but what we have today is the Supper as the Lord gave it through Paul. And the fact that it has been maintained is a tribute to the blessed Holy Spirit's service, would you say?

RT That is very important because it has become a custom publicly, and a reduced custom publicly in Christendom, has it not? I think the maintenance by the Spirit of the Supper in its integrity is something that should sober us and it brings refreshment to Christ. He appears for it, does He not? "This do in remembrance of me", Luke 22: 19.

RGr I heartily agree with what you say; I would not like to try and survive without the Supper. Where would we get to? It is the Lord's provision; He values it and He blesses us as we value it.

TDB Is the Spirit dependent on vessels? The Spirit will see things through, as we are dependent on Him.

RGr The Spirit will see things through; God will not be defeated: that is unthinkable. But I think what you said first is important; the Spirit is dependent on vessels. What vessels? He needs vessels currently that have room for Him, and hence as they have room for Him they have room for Christ.

MC It is interesting that it says, "it came to pass when the camels had drunk enough, that the man took a gold ring, of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands, ten shekels weight of gold". I wondered if that helps us in the understanding of how pleasing Rebecca was to the servant here. We might say how pleasing it is to the Spirit that something of this kind has come on to view; and He is able to adorn immediately with what answers to this ring and the bracelets.

Is there something distinctive in the weight being referred to?

RGr I believe so. Someone might say, 'Well, we come together every Lord's day and we go through the same sort of line of things, and it is always the same'. No, it is not. It is never the same. It is always fresh, and I think these matters that you have referred to, speaking of the wealth that has come from the Father's house that the Spirit bestows on the saints, would remind us of how attractive the Lord finds His saints to be, because we have a fresh, living touch from the Holy Spirit.

RG What the Spirit gives you is valuable and will always be valuable, but we should hold it like that; it is precious. I was thinking about how the Spirit gives impressions. That is what is suggested here in this chapter - articles of silver and of gold, and clothing. Well, it does not tell you the date when the servant did that, but a time came when he said, "That is my master!". Rebecca sprang off the camel and she took a veil; perhaps that was the clothing - part of the clothing. I suggest she had kept it all that journey but the time came when it could be useable typically for the pleasure of the Lord.

RGr That is good. You might ask who these were ornaments for, and think that perhaps they were for Laban to see, or the others that were around. They were really for Isaac to see; that is who they were for, and I think we should have an impression in our hearts that the Lord actively finds pleasure in the presence and responses of His saints. It is not just that this is what we do on Lord's day morning. It is fresh and living and eternal in character.

Maybe we should look at Matthew; again we get a sense of divine pleasure. The Lord says, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in the heavens". The Lord greatly values this intelligent response from Peter. And it is on that revelation He is going to build His assembly.

RT Is there some touch of the Spirit in Peter, although He was not here as He is today, but there was some expression of the Spirit's work about Peter: "on this rock".

RGr Yes, I am sure there was. I think just to pursue that line a little; I think we little realise just what a difference the activity and presence and power of the Holy Spirit makes. Suppose we try to carry on what we normally do - breaking of bread, reading of the Scriptures and

enquiry, preaching of the gospel - without the help of the Holy Spirit: it is unthinkable. It would be barren and dead and lifeless, but because the Spirit is here we have this living response. Is that what is in your mind?

RT Think of what this must have meant to the Lord. "Who do men say that I the Son of man am?" And they are saying all sorts of things, but He heard something from Peter that was the result of divine workmanship, was it not?

RGr It was, and it is an interesting study, too, to think of the way in which divine Persons value the work of each Other. You get it in Matthew 11 when the Lord was really in outwardly depressing circumstances: Capernaum and other cities were failures; "Woe to thee, Chorazin!", and so on (v 21-24), but it is in that setting that He says, "I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth", v25. He took account of what God was doing and praised Him in relation to it.

RG It says there, "Jesus answering said, I praise thee Father", as if there was a conversation going on all the time, and that the Lord was answering.

RGr That is helpful because, being what I am, I tend to compartmentalise things, but God is not just active - I speak reverently - on Lord's day. God is active every day, every hour of every day, every minute. He is active in relation to the assembly and those who form part of it.

TDB The Lord asked the disciples, "Have ye understood these things?", Matt 13: 51.

RGr Yes; I feel sorry for the disciples sometimes. They did not have the Spirit, and it is quite evident from Scripture that they did not always follow what the Lord was saying. But He is very gracious. He says in Luke's gospel, "ye are they who have persevered with me in my temptations", chap 22: 28. He does not lose patience with them. But we have the Spirit. There is nothing that should be opaque or cloudy in regard of the truth.

RG It is a remarkable thing that they did not have the Spirit. Paul says, "I received from the Lord, that which I also delivered to you", 1 Cor. 11: 23. There was a communion between Paul and the Lord.

RGr Yes. Well, we do not have apostles now, we do not have these pillars that they had in those days in God's ordering, but we do have the

Holy Spirit, and what Paul said to the Corinthians was unerring. That is, he said what the Lord wanted him to say, and he placed it where it would be valued.

MC These impressions are very honourable, are they not? Any impression of Christ that you or I have is something we get from the Spirit, and that involves the freshness that we are speaking about. I was just thinking of the value of such impressions, and they are shared with one another. That belongs to assembly life as such, do you think?

RGr I do. But that is what the enemy is against. If he can produce a situation where my brother and I do not get on, or are at loggerheads with one another, he has successfully damaged, for the time being, God's operations in the place. So, we get the Supper. What is it meant to do? It is meant to set us together.

MC Yes, I am sure it is.

RG "But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord ... are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory", 2 Cor 3: 18. We have one objective.

RGr We are not short of exhortations in the Scripture. The Lord's own prayer in John 17 is "that they may be one as we" (v11), and then, "but also for those who believe in me through their word", v 20.

MC This is very reassuring, that hades' gates shall not prevail against it. Can you say something about that?

RGr Well, it is reassuring, and it is something that we should dwell upon. When I was young I remember when I began to sit up and pay attention a little and it was a time when the brethren could not be agreed about a matter current in the ministry. I would go to the meetings and everybody did what they usually did and so on. And then there came a day when I recognised that brethren whom I respected and valued and had been long in the testimony were not agreeing. Some said that we should do one thing, while others said it was contrary to Scripture. But God uses situations like these to bring out what He can do. I remember the Lord's day when somebody said, 'Brethren, we are not agreed; we should have a reading; that is what the temple is for'. So that is what happened, and we had a reading in the week. We had six scriptures, some ostensibly suggesting one thought and some not. I will never, ever forget the sense I had in that reading. The brethren's voices quietened down; they stopped being angry with each other. The Lord

came in and helped us, and the reading went forward. It was not all like a blinding flash of revelation, but what we had at the end of the reading was a united company. And that is one of the earliest lessons of my history. It was a real experience. The Lord is doing that today.

RG Do you not think that just as that was an experience amongst the saints, we should be exercised to reflect on our own personal experiences with divine Persons? I might ask every brother and sister here whether they can you remember the day when they received the Holy Spirit and what was it that happened. It is something I think we should be concerned about that it is not theory. Christianity is practical if it is anything.

RGr I could not agree more that we need personal experience. Joshua says to Israel when they came to the Jordan, "Hereby shall ye know that the living God is in your midst", Josh 3: 10. Is the living God here?

RT Perhaps knowing you have the Spirit grows on you, of course.

RGr That is true. Just to be simple, I do not think I could point to a particular day in my life when I was conscious that I had at last received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

RT You become conscious that you have a different taste. The things that you would have said before you would not say now.

RGr Yes, and I would say to our younger brethren, if you do have a sense in your soul that there is something working, that your tastes are changing, do not ignore it. Do not rebel; let it work and God will bless you.

RT That is part of the treasure we have in earthen vessels, 2 Cor 4: 7.

RGr That is helpful. We might say, 'If it is always as wonderful as this, why do things go wrong? Why do we not just all go on untroubled?'. What you have said is in the Scriptures. We have this treasure - it is very real - but it is in earthen vessels. We still have to learn dependence and obedience.

I just suggested Acts because it is a scripture that appeals to me greatly: "Shepherd the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own". You might ask, 'Where do we see that here amongst the brethren?'.

MC Is shepherding an essential feature for things to be maintained for the Lord?

RGr Yes, it is.

MC It means essentially that we value one another. We are to act like the Good Shepherd, who goes after the sheep that He might save it; I wonder if that activity amongst us would be of great value. I feel there is a need amongst us for more shepherding.

RGr I agree most heartily.

RG It is interesting how Paul commends Timothy, is it not? One who cared with genuine feeling how the saints got on; he was a shepherd.

RGr Yes. I think what has been said about valuing each other is very important. It astonishes me sometimes that you can have a situation where brethren will go on for a while. and then some problem comes in and overnight it almost seems as if they have become enemies. That is not of God; we are not enemies. We might not always agree - we are still in flesh and blood - but the Holy Spirit would keep us, and shepherd care would keep us.

TDB “The Holy Spirit has set you as overseers”; say something about that.

RGr It says here, “**wherein** the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers”; they were in the flock, they were part of the flock, and they were filling out their responsibility in it.

RT It says, “the flock”; then it says, “shepherd the assembly of God”. The flock can be all sorts of things in a sense, but the work of God is there. “Shepherd the assembly of God” means you maintain the dignity and the status, you may say, of what we have been brought into.

RGr I think that is helpful. In fact it is something / need to pay more attention to; that is, a healthy respect for my brethren. It is something that we used to hear a lot more about. We are set together by God. It is not haphazard; we are plants of the Father's planting, and we should respect the work of God in each other. Not only on account of that work, but on God's account, we should respect what He has done in His saints.

RG “Each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves”

(Phil 2: 3); that is the scripture for it.

RGr Well, it is, and it is an important scripture. That involves calculation.

Kirkcaldy

16th October 2016

List of initials (*local in Kirkcaldy unless otherwise shown*)

T D Beveridge; M Cowan; R Gray. Grangemouth; R Gardiner; H Smith;
D Speirs Sr, Grangemouth; R. Taylor;

THE FRUIT OF EXERCISE

Andrew Martin

Isaiah 53: 11

John 16: 19-22

Genesis 35: 16-18

1 Chronicles 4: 9-10; 7: 20-24

I have an impression to speak on this occasion about the fruit of exercise. I do not intend to dwell upon exercise itself; we all have exercises, and God allows them for a purpose. How much exercise there is at the moment; sufferings affecting the health of the brethren, household exercises, family exercises, assembly exercises. All these things affect the brethren and they can be excruciating; they can lead a soul to ask why God allows these things. God allows things in order that there should be a result. You will have noticed that most of the scriptures which we have read refer to travail, and that particularly is a form of suffering whereby something is brought forth.

Isaiah 53 speaks of the Lord Jesus and refers to the travail of His soul. What a holy subject! Who can say much about it! But the Lord Jesus Himself spoke about His soul. Remember on one occasion He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death", Matt 26: 38. Think of what He went through in His soul, His deep feelings. The Lord Jesus was a real Man! He had all the feelings of a man, but greater than those you and I have, because of His personal holiness. He felt things in a way that you and I could never feel them. O beloved, what it meant for Him! In John's gospel the greatness of the Son of God is presented. John does not dwell on His sufferings, but even in John's gospel, think of that terrible cry, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour", chap 12: 27. What a cry that was coming from the lips of One who was so holy! The thought of what was before Him prompted that cry but think of His perfection as immediately He added, "But on account of this have I come to this hour. Father glorify thy name". His motive was the Father's glory and the Father's will. He never put His own will first even though for Him it meant enduring the travail of His soul.

Luke gives us something of that on the mount of Olives. Think of Luke's description of the Lord Jesus; he says, "And his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth", chap 22: 44. What a thing to take account of beloved; He had before Him all that

was abhorrent to Him; think of what sin was, think of what death was, and He would face them alone! How often have we gone over those wonderful words -

'And for Him death was death. Man's utter weakness, Satan's extreme power, and God's just vengeance, and alone, without one sympathy, forsaken of those whom He had cherished, the rest His enemies, Messiah delivered to Gentiles and cast down, the judge washing his hands of condemning innocence, the priests interceding against the guiltless instead of for the guilty - all dark, without one ray of light even from God.'

JND Col Writings, vol 7, p169.

What that meant to Him! It says in Luke that "being in conflict he prayed more intently", chap 22: 44. There was what was before Him, and "being in conflict he prayed more intently"! There was no thought that He should ever turn aside. He said, "My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me", (Matt 26: 39), He never asked for the Father's permission to turn away from the cup that was presented to Him: no, never! He said, "if it be possible let this cup pass from me". But it was not possible. O beloved, the travail of His soul! What can we say about it? The feelings of the Lord Jesus as He was facing the most extreme form of anguish of soul! No other person has ever faced anything like that; He faced it, and He faced it alone! Why did He face it; what was the result? The result was that there was going to be something that would satisfy Him: "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied". Why does Isaiah say, "He shall see **of** the fruit"? Why does Isaiah not say He shall see the full fruit: "He shall see **of** the fruit of the travail of his soul"? I think the full fruit will be seen in a day to come, but, beloved, is He seeing "**of** the fruit" today? We were speaking of that in the reading; is He satisfied with what He sees? Many years ago Mr Walkinshaw came to Redbridge, and preached. He began by asking, 'Are you satisfied with Jesus?', that was the first half of his preaching, and of course we all loved it! Then the second half of his preaching was, 'Is He satisfied with you?'. What a test! Well the Lord sees something; I would say is He seeing it in me? Is He seeing something that satisfies Him, "of the fruit of the travail of his soul"? How much He has suffered for it! What He has been through, in order that you and I should be here today! That we should have such a conversation as we have just had, to be able to speak together mutually, about divine things; involved the sufferings of Jesus! The fact that we are here involved the sufferings of Jesus. I have often thought

that even our natural relationships came about because He went that way. I suppose most of us here would never have met our wives or husbands if it were not for the fact that the Lord Jesus went that way and we, as vessels of mercy, have been brought by His grace to one another. Wonderful is it not! What He has done! But it cost Him a great deal, beloved; let us never forget it!

Well, another instance of wonderful grace is what the Lord Jesus speaks of in this passage in John 16. He was speaking to His disciples and He used the same figure. He was saying. 'I am going to leave you and that will involve travail for you'. What grace! He was the One who was going to suffer, but He said they would go through this experience! He knew what it would mean for them; He knew what their sorrow would be when He was taken away! He knew what it would mean for them when He was crucified! He knew the agony of soul that they would be passing through! He realised how deep that suffering was and in grace He used the very same metaphor for them: He says, "ye now therefore have grief", but then He gives the encouragement, "but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice". When the Lord Jesus was taken away what did the disciples have? Some of us have been speaking about Mary; what did she have without the Lord Jesus? She had nothing! In John 20 it speaks about the disciples having their home; Mary did not have a home here because Jesus was not here! She had no home without Him! If He was not here then there was nothing here for her! What a wonderful soul she was; "they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him" verse 13. She had nothing without Christ; are we like that? As you go to work or to school, do you feel the absence of the Lord Jesus? Do you feel that He is not wanted? Maybe when people speak you recoil from some of the things they say, but do you genuinely feel His absence? Do you take account of all that is going on in the world? You see political news and people vying to become heads of states; do you not resent the fact that the government of the world belongs to another Man, but He is given no place here? Does it not mean anything to your soul that really this whole scene is going to be completely changed, and it will all be overturned? God Himself says in Ezekiel, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it!"? This also shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it to him", chap 21: 27. The government of the world will be given to the Man who is morally qualified for it! And in the meantime we are here, going through this scene and we have no home here. The One to whom we are attached is in heaven; He is rejected here, and we

are to go through this scene recognising the fact that we have no part here in this world. Christ has been rejected by it; how can I find my part in it? Our dear brother Mr Trussler, who some may remember, once said that the whole world system has been judged and condemned in the cross of Christ. It has been condemned but it is awaiting the execution of the judgment. It is like a prisoner in a condemned cell; and he added, 'Do you want to find your future in a condemned cell?'. Beloved, the world goes on for a time, and soon the whole world system will be done away with and the Lord Jesus will reign, but in this time where do we find our interests? Where do we find our life? Do we find it in Him, and in His things, His circle? That is where our life is to be.

I read in Genesis because we have this wonderful figure here. Jacob had received special light from God. He had left his home; he was in Padan-Aram for twenty years where he served fourteen years for two wives, and six years for a flock. He was exceedingly rich, and he was doing very well for himself, but then something happened in his life that changed it completely. He had already got ten sons and a daughter, and then Joseph was born. What a change it made when Joseph was born! Jacob said, 'I am not staying here any longer; I have to go back, go back to the place where God called me'. When Joseph was born, Rachel named him Joseph, saying, "Jehovah will add", Gen 30: 24. Joseph was a great type of the Lord Jesus. You might ask how God will add; once you have Christ, how will God add? What does it mean, "Jehovah will add"? We come to this point; they were on their journey, "there was yet a little distance to come" and another son is born. Rachel is passing off the scene; she is a type of Israel, and she names him, Benoni, 'son of my affliction'. Jacob says, 'No! He is Benjamin, 'the son of the right hand'. Benjamin is really a type of Christ characteristically, seen in the saints. So Jacob names him, 'son of the right hand'. God acts in power and secures what is of Christ in the saints.

Remember Paul, when writing to the Galatians, refers to them as those "of whom I again travail in birth until Christ shall have been formed in you" (chap 4:19), that there should be that work of God which has the character of Christ Himself formed in the saints. This was to be the result, the fruit of this exercise, that there should be that formed which was of Christ. It involves the Holy Spirit's own work. We have been speaking about that; maybe He began a work in new birth in you. But that work has to continue; we have to make way for Him, and as we

make way for that work to continue there will be something which will be formed substantially, something which is of Christ; it is Christ all over again. That is what is being formed in the saints, and Jacob lays hold of this in type. He says, 'My son is not to be just a testimony to a line of things that has ended in suffering; my son is a testimony to the way things are going to be carried through; he is the son of the right hand!'. Well, beloved, the Lord will carry things through:

He by his church has always stood:
His loving-kindness, O how good! (Hymn 107)

We sing those words with joy, do we not? We might also say, 'He by his church will always stand!'. He will always stand by it, right through to the end: lay hold of that! It must be so! If it was not so it would be attributing failure to divine Persons, and that can never be right. Well, Jacob names this son Benjamin. Think of the place that he acquired as the history unfolds; what a place Benjamin acquired in the affections of Joseph. How Joseph strove in order that Benjamin should be brought forward, that he should be given the place that was his. He was really elevated among all the sons of Israel; Benjamin was elevated by Joseph.

I just turn to these other passages in Chronicles, and seek to touch on them briefly. First of all this man Jabez; He was one of God's people, but one thing that characterised this man was that he was the fruit of exercise; he was the fruit of suffering; his mother bore him with pain: his very name means, 'Causing pain'. This man had to go through his life with that name! You wonder at the names given to some of these people in the Old Testament! If he were asked what his name was he would have to say, "Causing pain"! There was another man in Samuel whose mother died when he was born, and she said the glory has departed, 1 Sam 4: 21! That was what she named him, Ichabod, 'No glory'! Now publicly that might be so; publicly the glory has departed from Christendom. Christendom has become debased; terrible things are found in Christendom! Things contrary to the word of God are not only permitted but encouraged; it has all become debased, the glory has departed, but here is a different man! He prayed because he had a desire. What he desired was spiritual blessing. Have you got a desire for spiritual blessing? Get a taste for the blessing! Once you get a taste for it you will want more! Some of us were speaking in the interval about when we first started reading the ministry. Maybe you read a little bit, and then a bit more, and soon you find you do not want to put the book

down because you now have a taste for it! And it is when you get a taste for it, that you realise it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in the soul. You get a taste for divine things, and you want more. So this man says, "Oh that thou wouldest richly bless me". "The blessing of Jehovah, it maketh rich, and toil addeth nothing to it" (Prov 10: 22, see footnote)! The blessing of Jehovah! He says, "Oh that thou wouldest richly bless me, and enlarge my border"; he wanted more of the inheritance. The wonderful thing about the spiritual inheritance is that you can always enlarge your border; you are not taking anything away from your neighbour: no, you can always enlarge your border and your neighbour can enlarge his too! Our possession of spiritual things can continually grow, and they grow as we lay hold of them, and as we go after them, and he prays to God about this! Do you ever pray about that?

Well, what do you pray about? We pray for one another, we pray for the brethren, we pray for those who are sick, and those that are old and so on, and it is right we should do so. How much do we pray that we may acquire some more spiritual territory, that we may gain spiritual understanding of the truth? How much do we pray about the brethren in that sense? There was one man who prayed for the brethren in that regard. He was with the apostle Paul who was in prison, and he prayed, combating; again it was severe exercise for him, but he was combating so that the brethren might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God", Col 4: 12. I am sure Paul heard him praying; it would seem from what Paul says, that he heard him praying and saw the combat that was going on. Satan would try to deflect you from that; he would bring in other things; he would say, 'Well, you have only got a couple of minutes to pray, you have got to get to work, you have got to do other things'. Make time for prayer! Not only formal prayer, but make time for personal communion with divine Persons, and you will find that your border will be enlarged; you will find rich blessings. And then Jabez says "that thou wouldest keep me from evil"; and that is another thing! My father used to tell me to pray all the time - even walking along the road, or whatever you are doing, get into the habit of praying, and one thing it does is to keep you from evil because you cannot ask the Lord to bless you if you are doing what is wrong! He says, "Oh that thou wouldest richly bless me, and enlarge my border, and that thy hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil". Why? "That it may not grieve me". He was affected by the way things affected the Lord. How do my actions affect the Lord; how do yours affect Him? That is what this man was interested in; he

wanted the inheritance; he wanted to lay hold of it, and he wanted to be pleasing to the Lord.

Now the other scripture I read relates to Ephraim. We do not read about this incident in the history as far as I am aware, but it comes in here in Chronicles, written many years later, and it says that disaster had come upon his household. He went through terrible exercise, and his brethren came to comfort him, and eventually there was fruit from the exercise. There was a son, and then there was a daughter, and I just want to touch on this daughter and what she was doing, because this is important as well. She was building. Beloved brethren, let us be constructive! Let us build. It says, "she built Beth-horon the nether, and the upper"; it looks as though she built two places. I suppose the nether, the lower, would represent what is basic. We are very thankful for the service of brothers who instilled basic truth into us, especially when we were young. That is like building the nether. But then she built the upper as well! That would be something like the heavenly side, Ephesian truth for us; she was building the nether and the upper! Let us be building one another up, beloved brethren; it is so important in these days. Food builds us up. Paul said at a time of extreme exercise, "I exhort you to partake of food, for this has to do with your safety", Acts 27: 34. If you do not feed then you will not get through the shipwreck; that was the circumstance in which he said it! The building up is essential; let us be building up, beloved.

We are only here for a time; I come back to the passage in John. The Lord Jesus says, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice". Beloved brethren, we are soon going to see Him; that will be the culmination of everything! All that the saints have gone through will become clear, the dark threads in the weaver's hands! He will explain the reason why:

The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's skilful hand
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern he had planned!

(Grant Colfax Tuller)

It will all become clear then, and we will see Him! And when we see Him we will be like Him! Are you looking for that time? What will it be to see Jesus! To see His face! The actual face of Jesus will be before us; we will see His face and we will be in His presence where no sin, no difficulty, no trials, will ever enter, and we will be in His presence to enjoy Himself. What fruit that will be! Beloved, we are looking for that! That

is what is immediately before us. If He does not come sooner we will have the Supper tomorrow; we will call Him to mind in view of the time when He comes again and establishes His rights here. But in the meantime may we be encouraged that, whatever our circumstances may be, whatever our anxieties or our difficulties may be, there may be fruit, that we may hold the Lord Jesus increasingly in our affections, and give to Him the place that is rightly His, that we may see that God in wonderful grace and power is working something out, and producing something that is of Christ Himself in the saints, that we may have a desire to go in for our spiritual blessings, and that we may be on the line of building one another up.

For His Name's sake.

Kirkcaldy

5th November 2016

THE BOOK OF GRACE

David J Wright

Luke 4: 16-22

Today is the day referred to in this scripture when this book of grace was opened. It had remained closed for many years. Many persons would have gone into the synagogue before and read from Isaiah 61 where this is quoted from. But this day was different because what Isaiah 61 spoke of was going to be fulfilled in the One who read it in that synagogue on that day. This book of grace has remained open for well over two thousand years. God has been long-suffering, in the wonderful dispensation of grace in which we are. The Lord's day has come around again in which the gospel of the grace of God is being preached. The day in which we are will soon be closed. When it will be closed is in the Father's time, but at the moment, today, the day remains open. It is the day of opportunity; will you take the opportunity or will you miss it?

Do you think it was easy for the Lord Jesus to fulfil this section in the book He had opened? It was not easy. Why? Because it meant that Jesus, firstly, took the stoop into manhood and, secondly, took the stoop into death; and, in going into death, He bore God's judgment for sin. In those three hours of darkness when He was forsaken of God, He was made sin, that which was so abhorrent to Him. He was the only One that could meet the sin question to God's full satisfaction and therefore the only One that could open the book of grace.

He dwelt in Nazareth where He was brought up, outwardly the same as any other man. Persons would have been His neighbours, but the Lord Jesus, although coming in lowly guise, was the Creator of the universe. He was God, never ceasing to be what He was by reason of what He became, but perfect in what He became. Heaven never witnessed before a Man coming into this scene in flesh and blood conditions, sin apart, and it has never been witnessed since.

Do you know this One? Have you let Him into your heart? We sang at the outset

Christ is the Saviour of sinners (Hymn 122).

Do you reckon yourself to be a sinner? It is one of the first steps in soul history, to recognise you have a need and that need can only be met by Jesus, and He has provided a basis for it in the shedding of His precious

blood. The sacrificial basis lay in His redeeming blood whereby God could come out in righteousness; in forgiveness, but righteous in forgiving. Think of the feelings of Jesus in coming into this scene and seeing the effects of the ravages of sin, and His heart was filled with compassion! Luke's gospel emphasises that. There are several instances in Luke's gospel when it says Jesus was "moved with compassion".

The Lord Jesus deliberately unrolled this book to this scripture: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor". Do you reckon yourself to be among the poor? God is not calling "righteous persons, but sinful ones to repentance", Luke 5: 32. Do you reckon yourself that you are a debtor, you are poor? The Lord Jesus speaks in this gospel about a fifty pence debtor or a five hundred pence debtor, chap 7: 41. The psalmist says, "Behold, in iniquity was I brought forth, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps 51: 5); and we have a debt, and it is a debt that we cannot pay ourselves, but Jesus has taken on the whole sin question in order that on the basis of "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20: 21) that debt can be cleared. Have you ever thought about the greatness of the blessing of knowing that your sins are forgiven? Should we not be the happiest people who know, and can point to,

... the atoning blood

And say, This made my peace with God (Hymn 357)?

Do you know the peace of having your sins forgiven, put behind God's back (Isa 38: 17), never to be raised again? What stability it brings into your soul, what joy it brings into your soul, since it was a debt that you could not pay! But Jesus has paid the price. We are not our own for we "have been bought with a price", 1 Cor 6: 19, 20. This was the Man who opened the book of grace, and He is stretching that arm of grace out to you today. That "hand is not shortened that it cannot save", Isa 59: 1. That hand can reach into your heart. Would you yield your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ? Is He not worthy of it? He has paid the debt that you could not pay. As we were in our sins and away from God, unable to help ourselves, God has moved from His own side. He has drawn near to man in a Man, One who had the feelings of a man. He is the One who opened the book of grace, gave God a righteous basis to come out in blessing towards all.

Then it says, "he has sent me to preach to captives

deliverance". We sang -

Long I was chained in sin's darkness,
Now by His grace I am free.

God would allow you to come to a point of extremity in your soul as He did with the prodigal son in Luke 15 in order that you might appreciate the grace that has reached you and has saved you from a situation in which you could not help yourself. Think of that man that had demons and dwelt among the tombs. He came into contact with the Lord Jesus and those demons could not stand before Him.

Disease, and death, and demon,
All fled before Thy word (Hymn 189).

And those demons that had been in that man, in his heart, for so long, had to come out at the voice of Jesus. That man so long 'chained in sin's darkness' sat "clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus", Luke 8: 27-35. That, dear friend, is the gospel. What grace! Scripture abounds with persons who are brought to extremity and yet not out of reach of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody in this world today, whatever their history, is out of reach of the Lord Jesus Christ. Be assured of that! Whatever has entered into your history, the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son is able to cleanse from every sin, 1 John 1: 7. That is the Man who opened the book of grace at tremendous cost to Himself.

Then it says, "and to the blind sight". There are many instances in Scripture, in the gospels, of the Lord Jesus giving persons sight. The man in John 9 comes to mind. The Lord Jesus put mud on his eyes. You might ask how that would help a man that was blind? It would only make the situation worse. You can picture that man going to the pool of Siloam with mud on his eyes. What a picture it would be! And do you know what that was? That was "obedience of faith", Rom 1: 5. When God's word comes to you, obey it! It is the way of blessing. He could say, "One thing I know, that, being blind before, now I see", John 9: 25. Persons told him that the Lord Jesus was a sinful man. He says, "If he is sinful I know not. One thing I know, that, being blind before, now I see". What can you say about what has been effected in your soul? Is it just one thing? Thank God if it is just one thing! You could say, 'Well, I know my sins are forgiven. I had that out with the Lord. I know I am a sinner and I am saved by His grace'. Thank God for that! But this man in John 9 was faithful to the light he had. He hung on to one thing. What can you speak of in the way of experience in your soul? Do you know

that you have been justified by faith in Christ and not by good works? That was the experience of Martin Luther, and he went before the Diet of Worms knowing one thing, that he was justified by faith in Christ and not by good works; and therefore he was unmoved by the entire power of Rome.

By the end of the chapter in John 9, the man knew more than one thing. When he was cast out, the Lord Jesus found him. Jesus had been cast out before him. He found him and He says to him, "Thou, dost thou, believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, And who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?", v 35, 36. His need was met but he was not just content with that. If fresh light was brought to him, he was ready to respond to it and the light flooded into his heart in relation to another Man in another world, the Son of God, and it led him into the flock of the following chapter.

What blessings these are! The Lord Jesus has come to preach, to give the blind sight. There was another man who had a touch from Christ and he saw "men ... as trees, walking", Mark 8: 24. Things were out of proportion. But, then, he gets another touch. If you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, what will flood into your heart is the distinctiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus alone. He "saw all things clearly", v 25. I think that involved that he saw Christ in His distinction, and that is what the gospel will do. It will leave you with Jesus alone.

Then the Lord read, "to send forth the crushed delivered". There was a man called Saul of Tarsus, who was an enemy of the testimony. When he found those of the Christian way, he dragged them off to prison, Acts 22: 4. He became a great general in Satan's army. One day he was on the road to Damascus in order to annihilate the testimony there, and Jesus appeared to him. What grace! It was the book of grace that was open, even to such a man as Saul of Tarsus. It was grace that broke him down. Later he could say, "by God's grace I am what I am", 1 Cor 15: 10. The Lord said to him, "*I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest*", Acts 9: 5. What grace that was! You might say that God would have been justified in striking the man down because of his history. But He did not because the book of grace was open. Then Saul went to Damascus, blind, a broken man; but the Lord came "to send forth the crushed delivered". Later in Colossians Saul could speak about being "delivered ... from the authority of darkness" and being "translated ... into the kingdom of the Son of his love", chap 1: 13. Authority was most attractive in Christ. Saul not only knew the Lord

Jesus as his Saviour but he owned him as his Lord.

You might say he was “crushed”, but the word was, “But rise up and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do”, Acts 9: 6. You might say, 'Well, the Lord could have told him Himself', but He said, “enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do”. So Saul was introduced into the Christian circle. He was introduced into a circle where Jesus was loved and revered, a contrast to what he was used to, “breathing out threatenings and slaughter” (Acts 9: 1); and the disciple Ananias was adjusted by the Lord Himself to introduce him into the Christian circle. So “he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me”, v 17. I think the germ of all Paul's ministry can be traced to his conversion. He saw the value of the Christian circle; he saw the value of the assembly, and it worked out in his ministry. The gospel is preached not only to meet your need but to introduce you into a circle in which Christ is the Centre. It is a provision of God in the provisional time in which we are.

Then it says, “to preach the acceptable year of the Lord”. Do you think that is just one year? Do you think that is just 2016? “The acceptable year of the Lord” is about two thousand years old. It is the book of grace that was opened, “the acceptable year of the Lord”. Take advantage of it! “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”, Heb 3: 7, 8. We cannot speak about tomorrow. It may be something different tomorrow. It may be that the day of grace will be closed, but at the moment the book is open. “This is the day that Jehovah hath made”, Ps 118: 24. The Lord Jesus on the cross said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”, Luke 23: 34. It was the heralding in of the wonderful dispensation of grace in which we are.

“And having rolled up the book, when he had delivered it up to the attendant, he sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon him”. Everything the Lord Jesus did was in the dignity of the anointing. It is not only what He did, but in the way in which He did everything, He glorified God. “And he began to say to them, To-day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears”. That is what made this day different. The One that could fulfil that prophecy in the Old Testament was the very One that was standing there: “To-day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears”. There was the One who was great enough to carry it out. Nobody else could; everything for God has been secured in that glorious Man. “And all bore witness to him, and wondered at the words

of grace which were coming out of his mouth”.

What a Saviour we have to present in the gospel! Is your heart open to Him? Are you conscious not only that your sins are forgiven but that you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit? The gift of the Holy Spirit makes Christianity a real thing in your soul, a real experience. Without the gift of the Holy Spirit you would not understand what this means, but the Holy Spirit makes it living in your soul, and He draws attention to the Man in heaven, the One who opened the book of grace. Now, the Lord sits on the Father's throne, and while He is sitting there the book of grace will remain open.

There is soon coming a time when He will take up His own throne and that will require another book to be opened. That is the book referred to in Revelation 5. It says, “And no one was able in the heaven, or upon the earth, or underneath the earth, to open the book, or to regard it”, v 3. John wept because “nobody was found worthy to open the book”, v 4. That book is yet to be opened and it will not be opened until the book of grace has been closed. That book refers to judgment. Great David's greater Son is the only One that can come into this scene and restore order. I am thinking of the problems now for governments in this world, and nobody has the answer to them, and all is ripening for the appearance of the man of sin, but there is One who is worthy to open that book of judgment, and He will come and everything will be subdued to Himself. You remember that the Scriptures never record David in the Old Testament having lost a battle. The One who will come again, and will subdue all things to Himself, is David's greater Son. He will be worthy to open that book, and then He will come and reign without a rival for one thousand years in this world. What a day that will be! But for the moment it is the book of grace that is open. He remains a Prince and a Saviour at God's right hand. I would desire that if you have not extended your arm in faith to Him, and given your heart to Him, you do it now because tomorrow the book of grace may have closed.

May God bless the word!

Edinburgh

14th August 2016

CONTEMPLATING HIS GLORY

Tom C Munro

John 1: 14-18

Revelation 1: 17, 18

These references to the Lord Jesus becoming “flesh” and becoming “dead” interested me. What has just been said about what we see is very important, especially in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says, “we see Jesus”, chap 2: 9. That is not by our natural eyes; it is by the eyes of faith that “we see Jesus”. But not only that, “crowned with glory and honour”. God has given Him a position of absolute exaltation, which no other man could have. The Lord Jesus is unique in every way, but here I thought that this thought of contemplating would be looking, but it would be more than that; it would be a look of understanding. There would be something of understanding, and something would result from that. This was a careful look; it is not a casual glance. When we were reading in Hebrews we spoke about the need of looking at “Jesus the leader and completer of faith”, chap 12: 2. The note tells us there it is 'looking away from other things' (note 'd'), and that is so important if we are going to get a right view of the Lord Jesus. I think that the way John writes here shows that he was in the gain of not being occupied with other things; his gaze, and his understanding, and his contemplation, were all centred on the One who was the Word.

I just thought of this matter of contemplation; it involves taking time, being apart from other things. John had the Lord Jesus before him. He was there in Person, the One who became flesh, took up a body, a body that was prepared for Him. It has often been referred to as one of the greatest events that has ever taken place, that God was seen in a Man here. But what a Man! The result of this contemplation, I think, is that John is able to pass on what he has actually taken account of. This is shown by what he is able to say about the Lord. It says, “we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father”. There must have been something that John took account of in the Lord's demeanour, His settled disposition, His peaceful condition. The Lord Jesus was never anxious about anything. He knew what it was, of course, for His soul to be sorrowful; He knew about that. But generally, I think, He was living in the realm where His Father was: “I am not alone, for the Father is with me”, John 16: 32. So it says - what a glory this was! - “a glory as of an only-begotten with a father”, and then it

says, “full of grace and truth”: *full!* Wonderful matter that! There was nothing in the Lord Jesus as a Man in flesh and blood conditions to irritate. The religious man may have been annoyed by Him, but I think there was everything that was attractive in the Lord Jesus as a Man here, and persons who really felt their need were drawn to Him. I trust all here have been drawn to that Man. I would just encourage myself first of all to be more in this state of contemplating. Our brother Paul Martin spoke recently about the oblation, and this suggests that, the evenness, the perfection of evenness, that was seen. Not one feature stood out more than another; all was in perfection. That showed in what He said and what He did and what He was.

Then John goes on further to say, “for of his fulness we all have received” - that is a wonderful statement - “and grace upon grace”. I think that is what it would be practically. “Grace upon grace” would flow from this One who was “full of grace and truth”. That is what, I trust, we all prove; I have proved it anyway. I am sure we have all proved grace after grace after grace when we hardly deserved it, when we never deserved it, these gentle waves of grace flowing towards us with their balm, calming influence. It is God's grace. We had a word as to the grace of God recently, and our brother said a very good thing: it is God's grace. It is not our grace, but I think that feature should come out in our dealings with one another. How important that is! We always say, of course, that it is not at the expense of righteousness, but it is God's righteousness too: “grace and truth subsists”. Grace is brought to us on the basis of divine righteousness. It is all what is of God; and we need to be absorbed in the immensity of what God has bestowed upon us in all His riches, “the riches of his grace”, Eph 1: 7. And then John contrasts the law given by Moses with what subsists through Jesus Christ - grace and truth *subsists* in that Man, remaining there in all its grandeur in Christ personally.

So this scripture says: “And the Word became flesh”. John was able to go over these fine features of the Lord Jesus, and we need to learn to do that. The Man in the glory is the same Man that was here, but He is in a completely different condition. He is not in a position of weakness or feebleness: all power has been given to Him in heaven and earth, Matt 28: 18.

Well, I just read this verse in Revelation because the Lord Jesus appears, and here shows His majesty and greatness, something of what He is. He is described in the section before where we read: “his

head and hair white like white wool, as snow; and his eyes as a flame of fire ... and his countenance as the sun shines in its power", v 14, 16. What a vision this was! But there is no record of John being blinded by this. Paul was blinded by the vision he got, but I do not think this happened to John. He was able to view, to take account of, all that he was shown; but nevertheless the appearance of this Person was the same Jesus, and He is appearing as knowing everything and seeing everything. We had that during the course of the weekend; our brother, Bert Taylor, spoke of, "I know". We recently had an address about that as well. The Lord knows everything, sees everything, the things in public and the things in secret. He knows all about us; He knows all about our local assemblies; and He is going on appreciating each local assembly and ministering to each local assembly too.

John says, "And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead", but then there is this touch, "and he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not". You can understand fear coming in at this appearing, but then He says, "*I* am the first and the last, and the living one". I am impressed that where the Lord Jesus says that "*I* became dead" it is couched in the great fact that He is living. He says, "Fear not; *I* am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades". This is the Man who is living in the power of indissoluble life appearing to John here, and He is giving him the assurance of His own personal touch.

Well, the Lord would do that; He would strengthen us in view of the continuation of things. John ran through to the end; may we be helped and encouraged to continue in the line as well for His Name's sake!

Word in a ministry meeting in Grangemouth

9th August 2016