

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 119

February 2017

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THE BLOOD AND FELLOWSHIP

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DAB It was not my thought to take these scriptures in turn if the brethren are able to keep all three before them at the same time; but it came to me when I had agreed to accept the brethren's invitation to serve here that the Lord might prosper an enquiry about the connection between His blood and fellowship. It is a genuine enquiry, and I would be interested to hear what the brethren have to say about it.

Each of the scriptures we have read describes the Supper in full. There are two parts to the Supper, the loaf and the cup, and one might hesitate to take up part of that matter without the other. I have noticed that, when the Lord speaks of the Supper, He does not develop very much what is in His mind about the loaf. He says it is His body and it is given for us. Paul develops that in the teaching, as we know, and it is a very important subject of truth. But I did notice that, when the Lord Jesus speaks about the cup, He adds more in the way of teaching to it, linking it not only with His blood but with the new covenant; and in Matthew with the remission of sins also. These are two very great matters, touched on very briefly in what He says; and what He said about the cup connects with "my blood". We do not perhaps speak about the blood of Jesus as much as we might. Although it recurs often in ministry, articles of ministry specifically *about* the blood are not easy to find; but it is a very great subject.

I will say briefly what I had in mind in these three scriptures. The passage in 1 Corinthians 11 links the blood with the covenant; and the covenant here, I think, involves our relations with God. There is a brotherly covenant, which we might touch on, but this one here in chapter 11 is about our relations with God. In chapter 10, the idea of communion, as I understand it, is with one another. It is not that we are communing with the blood, but we have communion, or fellowship, with one another. It strikes me that what we might call the medium by which we are placed in relationship with God is the same as that which governs our relationships together. That sets the level for those relationships, which is where we are tested, of course. Those two elements I would describe as spiritual; and we might be helped to see that fellowship, although it has a social and human side to it, is actually a spiritual matter - Christian fellowship is anyway.

But it has occurred to me, and brethren can say if they agree, that it is common, when *spiritual* truth is presented in Scripture, that something is also supplied about *moral* truth. That is why I read the scripture in Matthew, because there the Lord touches, unusually, on the remission of sins. Those who have taught among us have discouraged the brethren from getting too occupied with sins at the time of the Supper. We seek to maintain a level above one in which we are simply thanking the Lord for what He did for us, because that does not necessarily conduce very well to worship and does not really belong in the holiest; but we do have this reference here to "remission of sins". I understand that in relation to the Supper and, if I am right in my thoughts, in relation to fellowship, all that might be tainted or labelled sin is taken away. The Lord does not merely tell His own not to think about their sins, as if we might overlook them for the time being, or leave thinking about them for the preaching, but He speaks of, "remission", and that is an act of power. It involves that the circle in which the Supper is taken, and in which we enjoy fellowship together is - actively and as a matter of power - cleansed morally from things that would hinder the right level of spiritual enjoyment. That is my thought.

DMC That is very interesting. We have been having readings locally on the matter of fellowship so what you are saying will, no doubt, bear on it and help us. I was just thinking of what you were saying about the remission of sins. Is it the consciousness and the reality of that which really sets us in liberty as the service goes on? It is the cup that liberates us.

DAB I think so. No doubt there is a reference here to what we speak of as the 'scapegoat'. That is not a word which Mr Darby uses in his translation of the Bible, but William Tyndale coined it. It does not say that the goat upon whom Israel's sins were laid was left to wander off, but that a *man* took it away, Lev 16: 21. What we have before us at the Supper is that a Man has taken away all that might be put under the heading of sin. That is an act of power, and the result is not only that the Supper can be enjoyed clear of all such questions; it seems to me that fellowship also, rightly held, ought to be clear in the same way. If it is not, fellowship is tainted, and the difficulties which that causes are quickly felt.

RFW Could you just open up what is in mind in Scripture in the references to the blood of Jesus?

DAB Others will say what they understand, but my strong impression

about the blood is that it was a testimony for God, and the testimony was that His beloved Son had died. We need to remember the order in which the great atoning work is presented to us. There was the offering, and then the hours of judgment, and at the end of the hours of judgment, Jesus delivered up His spirit - so He really died, and the shedding of His blood follows, you might say miraculously, John 19: 30, 34. That is the spiritual order of it, and it is a testimony *to God* that death has come in. It is a very important thing, and the general principle about the covenant, that when God makes a covenant, the things upon which the covenant are founded are accomplished. God does not propose a covenant in relation to something that He has yet to do, but He proposes a covenant when the foundational work is done. That is a very important thing in relation to the peace of our souls, that the blood of Jesus settles every question *for God*. The way it settles every question for me is that I put my faith in the truth that it has settled it for God and, on the basis of a great matter settled for God, He can propose a "new covenant in my blood". What do you say? Is that helpful?

RFW Do you think too when the soldier pierced the Lord's side - and John very carefully points out, as you say, that He had already died at that point - there is a testimony to the world as well that the blood is, as it were, available? The cleansing power and whatever is connected with the blood is freely available now.

DAB And, without diminishing the gospel aspect of what you say, that comes into this passage in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul does not say we announce the Lord; we announce His death; and if we are announcing His death, a right apprehension of the blood becomes very important, because that was the testimony to His death. Of course, the fact that the emblems are separated from one another is itself a testimony to His death, but the testimony that Jesus has died lies especially in the blood. Now, we come to the Supper, and that is what the emblems say, and there is a testimony to the world, even in that. My parallel exercise is that there should be an equivalent testimony to that in our fellowship together, because we have the *communion* of His blood, the same thing.

EJP So when Jehovah says in the Old Testament, "and when I see the blood" (Exod 12: 13), we know now the blood has been shed, and that is a historical fact; but does God still take account of that?

DAB Yes, He has taken account of it. It is not now that it has to be repeated; it is an abiding testimony before God. We have in Hebrews

the idea of “the blood of the eternal covenant” (chap 13: 20), and that covenant is the same as this one, and the foundation of it is in the immense fact. In relation to what you refer to as to the passover, the children of Israel took a lamb into their houses - a yearling lamb, and over those four days, they came to know it and, no doubt, to love it. And they were required for their own deliverance to sacrifice something that had become precious to them. But, when we come to the Supper, and when we consider our fellowship together, their foundation is the sacrifice of something that was precious to God. It becomes precious to us, but we have to learn at first that He was precious to God.

DMC It is the blood of such a One! There is a uniqueness about the blood of Christ. The Lord Jesus took part in blood and flesh. He never had that condition before, but He came into a condition in which He could die and bear the sins of many, “for remission of sins”. He came for that purpose.

DAB It struck me in that connection that this makes Christian fellowship an extraordinary thing, that it is the communion of blood like that. Now, people have various fellowships: there is one next door to this hall, and it has its foundation; there are various documents which people sign up to and so on; but what about the communion of His blood? That should arrest us. Have I consistently held the idea of fellowship in my mind on that level?

DCW Does the knowledge that our sins have been remitted enable us to prove ourselves?

DAB Well, yes. That is quite a searching exercise because, if we took the blood up rightly in the way that the Lord is speaking of it in Matthew 26 where we read, it would help us not to resume things that we would profess have been remitted when we come to the Supper. I am not just speaking about personal misconduct, but the deficiencies that come into our links together should not survive the next occasion of the Supper; nor should they be renewed after it.

DCW So there is no suggestion that we should withdraw or withhold ourselves from remembering the Lord, is there?

DAB That is a very precious thing about the blood of Jesus: it “cleanses us from all sin”, 1 John 1: 7. That provision is there, so that in the face of the exercise you speak about, the proving exercise, we can be assured that whatever we discover, God has an answer to. It is not a question of my working out if there is an answer to it. We put our faith in

God's answer to it, and that leaves us pure and purified to engage in spiritual experience.

DCW It is important to notice that this is the definitive and the prime record as to the Supper, coming as it does from the Lord Himself and preceding, as I understand it, the writing of the gospels.

DAB Yes, I understand that this epistle was written before the gospel of Matthew and therefore there is a connection with the glory, and we need to remember that in relation to the blood. The death of Christ is not a terminus, as we often say, but it is a step to His present place above. It is interesting that, although He is now in that place, He rests the foundation of the covenant of which He speaks upon the work He finished here.

RDP-r Could you explain or distinguish the difference between the cup and the blood?

DAB Well, one is a token of the other. We would not contemplate drinking blood; it is for God after all; so we would not be free to do that anyway, but the Lord Jesus says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood". We can put aside any suggestion about transubstantiation and ideas like that, but it is to be taken as a full representation of His blood, and, His blood shed. In Mr Darby's translation in Luke, He uses the word "poured out" (chap 22: 20), which is a very full word. It is the same as the word we have in Matthew for "shed", but the sense is "poured out". To share a cup, certainly in our culture, is an unusual thing to do; it is very intimate. We usually have our own cups; but to share a cup that has this significance should cease to be just a habit with us, and the mighty force of it should have more effect with us. That is my thought.

PAG I was reflecting that it is not only Paul who brings these things in, but John and Peter also do. Would that emphasise the importance of what you are saying?

DAB Just help the brethren with some references.

PAG John says in his first epistle, "But if we walk in the light as *he* is in the light," - so that is our fellowship with God - "we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin", 1 John 1: 7. That is John. Peter says, "ye have been redeemed ... by precious blood", 1 Pet 1: 18, 19.

DAB Which relates to our standing before God.

PAG Exactly: Peter says, “who by him do believe on God,” (1 Pet 1: 21); and then, “Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth to unfeigned brotherly love, love one another out of a pure heart fervently” (v 22); so the apostles are all agreeing with one another. Now, we would not expect them to disagree, although John and Peter and Paul do not always cover the same aspects of the truth, but in this they do.

DAB Those references are very well chosen because they bring out these two sides. Many of us may be further on in our thoughts about the importance of the blood in relation to our relationship with God, but we need to catch up a bit on the effect in those scriptures and others on our relations together; and the passages you quote bear some reflection in that connection.

DC You remarked earlier that the blood, as in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus, is for God. Who, then, is the cup for?

DAB The Lord says, “Drink ye all of it”, and that is a very precious idea. I am reminded by your question of a comment that God makes in the law. The blood was for God (Deut 12: 27), but He says, “I have given it to you upon the altar”, Lev 17: 11. That, I think, is what the exercise of fellowship includes, and the Supper should guide us into that channel; so that we are appropriating something that in its first place belongs entirely to God, and He would have us appropriate these things and see that fellowship is founded upon it.

DC That is helpful; so the cup is a reminder about the blood. You referred earlier to the scapegoat, the goat for Azazel, in Leviticus 16, but in that chapter you get the blood sprinkled seven times before the altar; so the Israelites had to be reminded, as do we.

DAB It has often been said that the one sprinkling upon the mercy-seat is enough for God; but it was seven times before the mercy-seat, which is where I stand. We may need repeated assurance, and that enters into the proving exercise referred to; the seven times would help us in our proving of ourselves. We do not prove ourselves at a distance from God; we prove ourselves in His presence: there is no other satisfactory place to do that. And when we come into His presence, we learn that we are standing on the ground that He has provided, which is given in that passage in John's epistle related to the blood.

DMC It is interesting that it was Joseph's cup that was used: “it in which my lord drinks, and in which indeed he divines”, Gen 4 5. The cup was the important thing, and that really was a challenge to his

brethren.

DAB Yes, there was a secret in it. I think that links with my thought that there is a secret in the cup. Someone coming in and observing might just think it was a ritual, but it is “the communion of the blood of the Christ”. That is a secret that the partakers of the Supper ought to enter into.

DCW So throughout the emphasis is on the cup rather than on the contents; so that would imply fellowship, would it not? Normally we would not all be drinking out of one cup, but this is what makes the Supper so special.

DAB I do not think it would be profitable to get into questions about the contents of the cup because they are not prescribed in Scripture, but the point is the cup, and the Lord's will was that they should all drink into it. Now, we all have a relationship with the blood of Jesus. I trust everyone has faith in it, and my exercise is that we may understand that we also have communion in it with one another.

DCW So all partake of that cup, which means common sharing.

DAB Yes; when the Lord said, “Drink ye all of it”, He did not mean that the contents were to be finished, but that everyone was to participate; and fellowship in that sense was intended by the Lord to be an inclusive idea. You mentioned, and it is very sadly the case, that there are occasions when one or another will abstain from coming to the Supper. That is overt, and anyone can see that that is happening. But it might be the case that I come and actually take the emblems, but I am not in communion with the company.

TCM I was thinking about when Paul appeals to the elders in Acts 20 as to taking heed to themselves and “to shepherd the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own”, v 28. Is that an affecting matter, really?

DAB Yes; he is speaking there, maybe not comprehensively, about the great matter of redemption. Now someone may say that they do not think the assembly was redeemed, but *we are*. The idea of redemption involves a purchase. It involves a ransom, and the blood is the means of redemption: “we have redemption through his blood”, Eph 1: 7. But redemption brings us on to new ground, which is what we have been referring to, because it gives us access into the holiest. It is not exactly that we come one by one in some selfish way, but in Christian privilege,

to come in fellowship: “**we** have redemption through his blood”. That seems to be a very exalted thing, that what is of such unique value to God should become something that I can partake in or associate in at all.

GMcK Is the setting of the Supper not always collective? I suppose it is a simple thing to say, but it is important, is it not? What you are saying helps us to see that when the Lord set this on, He was thinking of fellowship among His own. It is an astounding thing. One of these scriptures says, “in the night in which he was delivered up”, but He is thinking about what is going to regulate our links with one another.

DAB And I think also to establish something collective that is unique. We know they gathered for the passover here, and they took the passover, as far as I understand. That was a collective experience for Jews - for Israelites - and they were to take it in that way, not just in their households, but to involve their neighbours if necessary. It was - or had become at any rate - very much a collective thing that expressed Israel's relationship with God. And then the Lord said in Matthew that there was something He was not going to do any more, “I will not at all drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of my Father”. I have gathered from the teaching that, speaking very simply, the Lord is referring to what I might call a social relationship He had had with His disciples. That is, they shared their meals; they had done that for three years; they had shared their hardships; they had shared and enjoyed one another's company; they had walked together. As He says elsewhere, they were His friends. The Lord now was leaving them to go to heaven, and He says all that friendship and association as they had known it was going to come to an end. It is not that they would be disconnected from Him, but the way in which they enjoyed it had to change, and it was in that context He created *this* thing and set it among them. And He gathered them. He could have just taken Peter aside and told him to tell the others about the Supper after He had gone. He does not. The Supper was instituted not just by describing what was to be done but by taking it, and He insisted that they *all* participate; and that is to show that although we may be speaking about something spiritual, it is not in any sense abstract; it is intensely practical. Maybe we skip the practical side of things in our minds, or we are satisfied with the formality of it, and forget that spiritual experience is actually practical.

RFW It says, “having taken the cup and given thanks”. Could we

reverently say this was in His mind in giving thanks, this new area of fellowship that was to open up?

DAB I would be glad to hear a bit more about that because we might ask what it was He was giving thanks for. We know, do we not, that it was the Lord who introduced the custom of giving thanks for food? I do not think we read of that in the Old Testament anywhere, but the Lord gave thanks for His food. (It might help if the young people remember that, maybe at school as you take out your lunch box and you go to give thanks for your food, that the Lord did that first.) But here it is thanks for this occasion, and He speaks of His desire to be with His own. So if it is precious to Him, it ought to be precious to us, and we need to understand why it is precious to Him. I think anything that is precious to the Lord, for that reason alone, assumes a certain elevation which we ought to rise to.

RFW It is very touching, is it not? Think of the Lord giving thanks, and He was thinking about His death and what would flow out of it. He gave thanks.

DAB I am sometimes impressed with this. It is natural and understandable that our minds run to the oppressiveness of this time, what lay upon the spirit of the Lord in relation to what He entered into in Gethsemane, and what was before Him in relation to the article of death, but He does not introduce *them* into *that* at all. As we have been taught in relation to Gethsemane, He does not ask them to pray for Him: they must pray for themselves. The burden of that by which this great provision was established, He bore alone; but how wonderful it is that He should begin this occasion by giving thanks and end it with a hymn. It really is transcendently spiritual to see the Lord acting in that way. Every week, we put our hands to this; for myself, it sometimes becomes routine and I am ashamed it does.

RFW In the start of the Acts you get “the teaching and fellowship of the apostles”, chap 2: 42. Fellowship of that character was something that had never existed on earth before.

DAB I keep thinking about the scope of what God had in purpose in launching the Christian testimony, and the way that God went. He sent the apostles to the profanest cities in the known world, gathered out of them the members of the body of Christ, and gave them *this* as the expression of their fellowship together. What a magnificent thought! No other mind could have conceived something like this, but because it

is so simple, we are so in danger of underestimating it.

DMC So each Lord's day we break bread; it is not a repeat of the last one. In one sense, it is as if we had never broken bread before, because we are expectant as to what the Lord would bring in. I think what you are raising is very challenging. It is so easy for it to be just a routine with us.

DAB I remember my father used to say when I was young that we should take the Supper as if the crucifixion was last Friday, and as if the Lord was coming later in the day. That is what you have in mind, is it? Would we not find some greater urgency to have spiritual experience?

DCW Is it important that in this account we have, "until he come"? It brings it down to our time. Then "as often as" has the sense of regularity. It is a different word from "whenever" which is used later in this epistle.

DAB It is interesting that the Lord says "as often" without saying how often "often" should be. It is pleasing to the Lord that a custom to have it every week began. It is not a custom that is universally maintained among His own now, which I think is disappointing to Him, but His people concluded spontaneously and under spiritual guidance that "often" must mean every week. They had before them not His return *for them* but His coming for His own glory.

DCW So if we had only the accounts in the gospels, we might think that was a matter which applied only to those who were with Him. This brings it right down to our time, and it implies continuity, does it not?

DAB Yes; it is very gracious of the Lord to set on something that is so accessible. We include young people in this occasion. We do not require them to understand a lot, but they should get some impression of the nature of the Supper and, in doing that, the portal it is into spiritual things.

DMC What is the evidence, or the proof, that the Lord is in our midst, that He comes to us? How can we say that, because we often use the words as to the Lord's presence with us and I am sure it is often true, but it is not just a formal thing?

DAB The proof is that we sense that the hearts of His own are awakening, and the spiritual experience of them being awakened and opened by the same thing, that is the presence and the love of Jesus. It is a spiritual matter. Now I do not want anyone to think they have never

realised this happening, but in fact it is sensed that the company focuses on the Lord. You can sense from the way they sing, from the spirits and the atmosphere in the company. I remember a visitor remarking that they had been to a lot of churches, but they had come to the first place where the company spoke to the Lord as if they knew He was present. The way that brothers speak to the Lord, and the spirit in which the company sing hymns, expresses that they are singing as if the Person they are addressing is there.

DSB Can you say some more as to the spiritual experience of this?

DAB Well, it would be very easy to make it material. I remember Mr A J Gardiner used to say that the Lord has used the emblems to help our minds and give us something to think about, to provide a focus for our minds; but communion is a spiritual thing. It must be. Fellowship is not simply an alliance and it does not rest in the fact that I have sufficient views in common with someone else to be willing to walk with them. We can say that what God has provided in the present day has a spiritual character to it; that is to say, it is not natural. It is certainly not carnal. And yet this scripture in Matthew also reminds us - necessarily because of the condition that we are in - that any spiritual experience we have must have a moral aspect. If I touch what is spiritual, as we have been saying earlier, it is bound to raise the question with me whether I am suited to enter into it, and that is especially important when we talk about communion. If I have not faced that moral question, what I bring in unwashed will taint the communion, and even though other people present may not be able to attribute that problem to me, I have in fact diminished their spiritual experience. Now, I am not saying that to frighten anybody because provision exists, and the remission of sins is not that we let them drift away, or we agree for now that we will not think about the things that tempted us, and that kind of thing. The Lord Jesus disposed of the question of sin in power, and I think He would give us by the Spirit the same power to do that in our minds. Now, the difficulty we have is that these things drift back into our minds afterwards. The scapegoat is never intended to come back, but a lot of the things we get occupied with come back, and I think it is something we need to think about especially when we take the cup: the cup represents irrevocable giving. Something that is poured out cannot be put back. The Lord made an *irrevocable* committal, and I do not think it is morally right for us to take the cup if we are not in spirit ready for that. Of course, we do not have the natural ability to do it; we need the Spirit's

help to do it, and the repetition of the Supper is to keep us close to that exercise.

DSB Perhaps, in the past, I have taken it not on a spiritual level, but I wonder if we *have* the spiritual experience, that will carry us through the week; so we can then look forward to the next spiritual experience.

DAB I think so, and I think also we need to say, lest anyone should be discouraged, that while we have a responsibility to come to the Supper proved, the Lord is very gracious. Let us take the example of the two who were going to Emmaus. I am not saying they celebrated the Supper; I do not think that would be right because, for one thing, there was no cup, and they were not in fellowship with the company there; they were away from the company. Their state was awry, and yet they had a spiritual experience. The Lord's manifestation to them was spiritual. He disappeared; it was a spiritual experience. But to touch spiritual experience would generate some resolve to be clearer, so that future opportunities would be brighter. Is that what you were thinking?

DSB Yes.

EJP Philippians 2 gives us a list of things that are to mark us, but one of them is "joined in soul", v 2. That would involve communion.

DAB Exactly, "joined in soul, thinking one thing". Now, that is a great challenge, and I am not going to start giving any kind of recipes for that in relation to particular practical administrative matters that arise, but drinking out of one cup is being joined for sure. We drink into that, and it means that the Lord would have us to have a satisfying spiritual experience. It is a satisfied soul that becomes at rest about the questions and burdens of the way.

IEP Is one of the consequences of us drinking into this cup that distinctions between us are less before us?

DAB Exactly. I think that is very good that you should say that. We understand that at the Supper there is no place for gifts. Thus, the young people participate in just the same way as everybody else. If you in Warrenpoint have received someone to break bread tomorrow, they will break bread in just the same way as you do, will they not? There will not be a distinction. I think that is very interesting, and it is not a levelling down; the blood has a levelling up effect. Is that right?

IEP Yes, that is what I was just thinking. It is the same basis there for every one of us; but also the richness of God's thoughts and purpose

is the same for everyone that drinks into it.

DAB Absolutely. I was thinking in preparing of what is often said, that we see the love of Christ in the loaf, and we see the love of God in the cup. I do not like to present that as two sides of a coin because, although the love of God *is* seen in the cup because He has made available to us what was for Him, the love of God is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8: 39); and I think we get a sense of that in taking the cup. The result, which I think is very blessed, is that we can now enjoy fellowship with one another at the same level and with the same unity that we enjoy a relationship with God.

PAG Could you help us then as to why in 1 Corinthians 11, and in our practice, the loaf is first and then the cup, whereas in 1 Corinthians 10 the cup of blessing is first and then the loaf comes after?

DAB Well, the Supper is taken in the order in which it is because that is the order the Lord gave. I know that begs your question, but we take it up as we do because we would not dare to take it the other way round. He left what was to follow to His own, except for this suggestion of a hymn, but I believe it was in His mind that the Supper would provide a portal into what is spiritual. The cup is followed with a hymn here. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is speaking about a lot of natural things, so that when he turns to the Supper, he wants to place the emphasis on what is spiritual. But I would be glad if you would say something.

PAG That is helpful. I suppose 1 Corinthians 10 is more the public side, and the cup involves the blood, which is for God. Now, in 1 Corinthians 11 the Lord begins with the loaf, and says, "This is my body, which is for you". We could not be for Him if He were not first for us. But when it comes to the matter of our communion with one another, the rights of God must come first; so we cannot put ourselves ahead of the rights of God, and I think that may be one reason why the cup comes first in 1 Corinthians 10 because it emphasises what is for God.

DAB That goes back to the passage that I quoted from Deuteronomy, that the blood is for God. So exclusively was it for God, that they were not to eat it. We do not either. But God says, "I have given it to you". Now, that is not commonplace on any terms. We sometimes sing that we are brought -

Sharers of Thy joy to be (Hymn 277),

but to share a relationship with one another that has the same

foundation as that on which God Himself rests is a very great matter, and how could you contemplate taking that up on any other ground but that the rights of God took precedence?

DCW In that context, could you say something about eating and drinking “unworthily”?

DAB Well, that links with what you were saying earlier about proving. I know of cases when someone in fellowship has refrained from breaking bread because they had unresolved questions in their personal conduct which made them feel unworthy, and that is a very sober thing. It is of course true that “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son” is available, but something might exceptionally take time to work out. That is a very sober matter too. But the worth is not mine; it is not that I have burnished my reputation, or managed to tuck in all my loose ends so that the brethren cannot see them. This is worthiness in the sight of God and that must rest on what He has Himself accepted, and my repentance and faith in that.

DCW So that it emphasises for us the solemnity and the dignity of the occasion, does it not, that we do not come casually?

DAB It might happen that someone does come casually, and the solemnity and holiness of the occasion might overwhelm them. I find some encouragement in that because we gather in such felt weakness and reduction, and yet nothing has changed the power of the emblems. In fact I would say, in my experience, that the occasions on which I have felt the power of the emblems the most have been those on which the fewest were present. I have been to the Supper when there were only three or four people; and it is almost as if the emblems get bigger in those circumstances, if I could put it simply; and they speak in a powerful way because you are not distracted by what others are doing.

RDP-r I was thinking of the preparation side of coming to the Supper. We cannot come and then everything happens. Are we not really called upon to be dwelling on these things in our pathway, and in our personal devotions, to have something substantial when we come to the occasion?

DAB Yes, and one thing the brethren have been helped about is that practical fellowship colours our lives to a greater extent than it does for some other believers. For example, it is a custom for some believers, including ourselves, to have weeknight meetings. Maybe weeknight meetings have become unimportant to some people, which would be

very regrettable. But the object is that, by working out exercises with one another, the Lord would keep bringing us back to the basis and level on which we have anything to do with each other at all.

RDP-r So when we come together in the week, we view each other at the same level as we do when we come to the Supper.

DAB Of course we should, and then the Supper flows.

DMC I was going to ask a practical question: what would you do if a person came into the Supper, said they were a believer in the Lord Jesus and that they wanted to break bread? What would you do in a situation like that? We had that experience.

DAB Well, we have to put the rights of God first, and I think a subject person would be willing to submit to examination. I do not think the few minutes before the Supper are an occasion for an administrative meeting of any kind, even to decide to receive somebody - let alone to decide to withdraw from somebody. As we have just remarked, we come expecting to move straight into spiritual experience; so I think a subject person would understand that something so holy would be taken a little less impulsively.

CC You are linking fellowship and communion very closely. What is the difference between them?

DAB Well, it is the same word. I like the word "communion" because it helps me to understand or to remember that fellowship is not just a practical thing; it is a spiritual thing. I understand the idea of communion as spirit to spirit. You could say in relation to fellowship that it is hand to hand, as if there is something more practical and down to earth about it, but it must be underpinned by a union between souls and also spirits, as was quoted from Philippians 2. Does that help at all?

CC Yes, but fellowship and communion are not solely enjoyed by the Supper. Is that the highest level at which it can be enjoyed, and it can be enjoyed at many lower levels? You spoke about the friendships that the disciples had before the Lord instituted the Supper: would they not have been a form of fellowship?

DAB Yes, I understand what you are getting at. (I am leaving to one side for the moment about what John said about "our fellowship is indeed with the Father" (1 John 1: 3), which was a spiritual thing). The eleven indeed had fellowship because they were His companions. They went to the same places; they did the same things; not only did

they get to know the Lord but they became acquainted with each other as well and, although some of them were natural brothers, they developed something among themselves that transcended what they were as natural brothers. That was new and very special. But then the Lord says He is going above, and the Holy Spirit is coming. He wants to set on something *new*, “the new covenant in my blood”, and that was something into which they would all enter. As time went on, we can see how astonished they were when it became clear that God's thought included the Gentiles. Here was a barrier now being annulled, as Paul says in Ephesians, that they had thought was divinely instituted, and they began to see not only the newness of it, but the vastness of it. There were no natural common factors any longer spread right across Christian fellowship; but the blood of Jesus spanned Christian fellowship. The one Spirit spanned Christian fellowship. Faith in the Lord Jesus above, faith in His return, those things spanned the whole scope of Christian fellowship, where naturally they would have had nothing in common. What you are saying is important, and just to go back to your first comment, the Lord's supper is the *expression* of Christian fellowship. Of course, we have fellowship in measure with every believer through the Spirit, but there is a special privilege in being able to share the Lord's supper with somebody. That is a regular thing which helps us to remember that, if the Lord in His grace has given us those to walk with, we must hold our relations with them and our conduct towards them at the level at which the Supper is set.

DCW There is a very helpful little book entitled 'Fellowship' by Mr M W Biggs, which, I think, would be valuable to all of us and particularly to the younger brethren.

PRM I have been struck recently with early Acts where it says, “the Lord added to the assembly daily those that were to be saved”, chap 2: 47. “The Lord added”. It was the result of the apostle's preaching; but “the Lord added”, and that is how we are to view one another.

DAB That is very helpful and especially, in our present circumstances where practical fellowship as we know it comprises the members of a relatively small number of families. We must remember if someone asks to break bread, *the Lord* is adding them, and He is adding them at this level; He is putting them on something that is founded on His blood. These are very precious things. When any of us has the privilege of commending someone for fellowship, it should really move us that the Lord has moved us to have the communion of

His blood with someone, and we are going to drink the cup of blessing with them.

DMC He “added to the assembly”; they were not added to a congregation.

DAB Or a denomination. No! What would you say about the cup of blessing? Where did that expression come from?

PAG It seems that the blessing is reciprocal: so the cup is the cup of blessing, and we bless it. It seems to be something that Paul thought that the Corinthian brethren would understand. He did not say he was now going to introduce this idea of a cup of blessing and here is what it is about. When the Lord gave thanks in certain circumstances, it says “He blessed” (Luke 24: 30); what was He blessing? You have a thought about it?

DAB What you say reminds me of something I have often enjoyed about Abraham's encounter with Melchisidec. It says of Melchisidec, “And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God ... And blessed be the Most High God”, Gen 14: 19, 20. That is in both directions: Melchisidec blessing God and God blessing Abraham.

PAG So we are brought into a 'circle of affections' - the phrase is used in a hymn (207) - and blessing flows. It is a wonderful thing to be brought into a sphere by the blood of Jesus where we can bless God in response to the fact that He has blessed us.

DAB What you are drawing attention to shows something about the nature of early fellowship, that a certain vocabulary developed which is not explained in Scripture. As you say, Paul does not say what “the cup of blessing” means. The Corinthians would have understood it. The expressions “the Lord's day” and “the Lord's supper” also just crop up in Scripture without any explanation. Paul's expression in relation to marriage “in the Lord” is not explained in that Scripture. These were things that believers understood. Now, what is very wonderful about those examples is how focused on the Lord they are and how positive they are as well. This idea of the cup of blessing is an especially choice reference in that connection and it picks up what has already been referred to, that one of the things they would have remembered (although the Lord does not remind us of it in 1 Corinthians 11), was that He had given thanks for the loaf and the cup.

TCM Would “the cup of blessing” have a liberating effect, so that the

singing of the hymn in Matthew 26 would be a natural sequel? It is a liberating matter. The Lord had had a part in that along with His own.

DAB I think a hymn is a sung form of worship. My father used to say that he thought the Lord composed the hymn sung on this occasion. It may not have been something they had the words for before, but their spiritual experience was sufficiently real that they were able to join in the hymn He started even though they had not sung it before.

DCW Psalm 133 finishes with, "Jehovah commanded the blessing" (v 3) and the next Psalm 134 starts with "Behold, bless Jehovah".

DAB And we have "the hem of his garments" there, Ps 133: 2. There is a circle down here - but not rubbing in the dirt - which holds what has come down from the Head to be enjoyed.

RFW Many of us have broken bread for years. Have we experienced the blessing? Do I know in my own soul the blessing that has come from the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? As to the earlier enquiry, it does seem to me that 1 Corinthians 10 is like looking back on what we have done. We talked about why the cup does not come first. We look back and ask what we did; I took the cup last Lord's day, and that was the last thing I did. I broke bread before that. I took the bread first. Have I experienced in my soul the blessing? Do I look on others in the same spirit of blessing?

DAB Yes, and that blessing includes that I have someone to pass that cup to, and take it from. I often feel when I come to the Supper, even if there are not very many present, that we should thank the Lord for those who are there, because that is part of the blessing.

DMC It says in John 12, "and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment", v 3. Is that like a sense of blessing?

DAB Yes and the fragrance might have lingered for some time afterwards. I often think that anyone who went back into that house would wonder what has been going on there.

IEP I was wondering if you could explain what "bless" means in the context of blessing God, and blessing the cup.

DAB Well, Mr Joseph Evershed used to say it was to speak well of something. And that is the effect of being able to remit every taint, and the source of every taint. Maybe we think it is a kind of unachievable ideal to be free of the things that lower the level, but the cup reminds us

that it is possible.

IEP I was just thinking that we often think of blessing, the joy that it gives us, but it would be good to get some concept of the joy it gives divine Persons when we speak well of them.

DAB We often say that the Supper is not announced, by which we mean we do not have to be summoned to that occasion, but nor does the Lord need any summons. He comes where hearts are waiting for Him, does He not, and comes where He will find His own happy? It would be very sad if something administrative had arisen and the Lord in coming felt that the company was preoccupied with it.

DMC Would you say that, where there are suitable conditions, wherever they are, the Lord will come to answer that request?

DAB We cannot limit where the Lord goes; we have to limit where we go because Scripture tells us to. Rather than thinking too much about whether and where He is going, our exercise should be that the optimum conditions should be provided for Him when He comes where we may be gathered in a particular room.

PAG Just in following that, you have said, quite rightly, that what we enjoy through the cup we enjoy spiritually, and we can understand to a degree the actions of the Spirit and faith that would allow us to have a common bond together in something that we share, but you have also said that it affects us morally. Now, 'moral' is another word that we use, but I would just like you to say something about what it means for the cup to affect us morally.

DAB Well, again I learned from my father, when I asked what the word 'moral' meant, that it raises the question of whether something is right or wrong in the sight of God. That is what the word has in mind. So, if a moral question arises, the question is whether a matter is acceptable to God or not? Now, if we prove ourselves, we may identify things that are not acceptable for God. They may be corrupt things that are active in my heart; they may be feelings I have towards my brother. The law says, "Thou shalt not avenge thyself, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", Lev 19: 18. A grudge is *immoral* because it is not acceptable in the sight of God; that brother against whom I have a grudge is blood-bought. It is that kind of thought process which allows us to separate things in our minds, and having separated them, there is a whole class of things that has to be sent away. That is my thought as to remission:

God has done that from His side judicially, but I have the exercise of doing it practically.

PAG I think that is very helpful; so it says in Ephesians that God's thought for us is "that we should be holy and blameless before him in love", chap 1: 4. Now, as far as I am concerned, from my side, that is impossible because I am not holy and I am not blameless, but Paul explains it, "wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved: in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace", v 6, 7. So what you are describing to us today is not some impossible standard that only old people might eventually attain to; it is something that every believer in the Lord Jesus who has the Spirit comes to through the blood of Jesus.

DAB Exactly, and that is how you come to it. It is not true that spiritual experience is the preserve of the very old; the foundation does not rest on what I know but what I have by faith and by the Spirit.

TCM Could you say something about the new covenant, then, in relation to what you are saying?

DAB Well, the new covenant is about God's relations with us. There are a number of covenants in Scripture, and there is one yet to come with Israel. We tend to think about the law when we think about covenants. The law was different in a number of respects from all the others, for one thing it was written down. A second thing is that the people committed themselves to keep it, whereas God's thought in a covenant is that He has done all that is necessary, and He will do everything to sustain it. If we read about the new covenant with Israel in Jeremiah 31 or in Hebrews 10, we will see that God has moved the whole burden of the covenant on to Himself; so it is not now a question of what I will do but what God has done. Now, when we come to the Supper, we celebrate what has been done; and that is why it is very important to see that the emblems on the table are emblems of the fact that Jesus has died. They are not presented as if the death of Christ was in prospect. They speak of a point in the atoning work at which He had died, and that changes God's relationship with man. I have very much enjoyed in my own present circumstances that the death of Christ has changed the aspect of death for ever, and one of the things that follows from that is that the relationship that God now has with His people is new. It is founded on the blood of Jesus and, as we have been saying, that is something unique and extraordinarily wide-ranging in its practical effects. It might be that more souls have been brought to

gather on that ground than any other there ever will be.

Warrenpoint

9th April 2016

List of Initials:

D S Bodman, Dorking; D A Burr, London; C Crozier, Warrenpoint;
D Crozier, Warrenpoint; D M Crozier (snr), Warrenpoint; P A Gray,
Grangemouth; P R Mason, Warrenpoint; G McKay, Manchester;
T C Munro, Grangemouth; R D Painter, Yeovil; E J Purdy,
Warrenpoint; I E Purdy, Warrenpoint; D C White, Londonderry;
R F White, Londonderry

“IT IS CHRIST WHO HAS DIED”

D Andrew Burr

Romans 8: 33-39

I do appreciate that the message in the gospel is glad tidings, but it is a truth stated in Scripture that, whatever else we may expect in our lives, whatever other dates or appointments we hope to keep, there are two appointments which everyone has to keep. I do not think I could enter them on the kind of phone I have, but the smartest 'smartphone' will not help you either, because you do not know when they are; but you still have to keep them. The scripture says that “it is the portion of men once to die” - that is one appointment - “and after this judgment” - that is another appointment, Heb 9: 27. It is “the portion of men”; if you are a human being, this is your portion.

It may appear to the young people that death and anything beyond it is remote; some of us find it is not. And you cannot assume it is anyway; death has a way of intruding like some unwelcome visitor into lives and friendships in a very final way. If someone in this gathering here this afternoon were to die, we would all feel it, because our relationship with them, renewed over this weekend, would end. And, although we have a portion in Christ, no doubt, we would finish our journey here without them. How final it is! Death does not observe any other law of nature. You cannot say it will strike old people only; you cannot turn up the scripture (Ps 90: 10) and say that man's span is seventy years, as if you have some entitlement to seventy years. The fact that many people live well beyond that reminds us that not every one will even reach that age, or half of it. And even if it does not strike you directly, it will come close enough for you to feel it; it is one of the most real things there is. A lot of what we think about in life is a bit unreal - we have imagination, and we have dreams, and hopes; but death is real and final.

And so is judgment; in a way, more so. The scripture tells us, “We shall not all fall asleep”, 1 Cor 15: 51. That is to say that it may be in God's ways that that first appointment will pass us by; something else will intervene: the coming of the Lord. But *none* of us can avoid the second appointment - none of us. I wonder if everyone believes that. It says that “each of us shall give an account concerning himself to God” (Rom 14: 12): we all have to do that. It is not just the portion of the unsaved, although their place of accounting may be different; it is

something we *all* have to do. So that is very real as well. And I just point this out, that the order of the appointments is in God's hand and God's wisdom. It might be thought that it could be the other way round. Why is it not? The reason is simply this, that the evidence on which the judgment will be made is fixed by the time we get to the judgment. We read sometimes in the newspapers about very bad people who are remanded in custody, and they try and influence the evidence that the Crown is going to bring at the case. They try to threaten witnesses, or get their friends to destroy material. Dead people cannot do that; God will not allow it. We have the opportunity in life - and that opportunity is *now* - to see to the evidence.

I am sorry to start on such a sombre note, but I want to make a contrast from this scripture. It does not speak about you or me dying; it says, "It is **Christ** who has died". Now I am getting to the glad tidings! Beloved: do you believe that He died for you? Are you on that journey that I have been speaking about on your own? Can you afford to go on? That hymn we often sing a part of - '*I Could not do Without Thee*' - says,

He would not have you go
Another step without Him,
Because He loves you so.

Francis Ridley Havergal

He does not want you to step through that dark portal of death without Him, because He loves you. It is a dark portal, beloved; it is shadowed: you cannot afford to arrive there without Him. I am speaking about the Man of whom this scripture speaks: "It is Christ who has died".

Death has an important part in scripture teaching. It is a penalty that was a consequence of man becoming a sinner, and that is why we all have that appointment. It says that "death passed upon all men", and there is a reason: "for that **all** have sinned", Rom 5: 12. I remember a preacher saying that he did not have to speculate about the kinds of sins we have committed; if you want to question whether you are a sinner, you are up against the word of God, not the word of the preacher, for the scripture says, "for that **all** have sinned". And death is therefore a penalty which all of us have to face. And it has become an enemy as well, 1 Cor 15: 26. And the Scriptures also show us that, although the day of our death is in God's hands, Satan has seized the power of it. That may be a bit difficult to understand because it might be thought that he could not go against the will of God about the death of

any; but Satan has seized the power of death and he uses it to hold people in bondage, Heb 2: 14, 15. It helps to understand what that bondage is. The proposition he makes is this: if you do not know when you are going to die, you might as well live for the present. Mr Stoney shows that if you have not got a hope in heaven, all you have left is the earth (vol 3 p146); and if all you have left is the earth, the only kingdom you have part of is the devil's: he is the ruler of the world, John 14: 30. If you do not have a hope outside of death, a hope outside this world, a hope which you may only realise through death, you are in bondage. You are held captive in a prison. It may have plenty of forms of entertainment and fulfilment in life, and friendships and other things; but its ruler is to be feared because he seeks the destruction of your eternal soul. You cannot afford to be under his authority because death is where it will end.

Now the glad tidings, dear friend, is that that enemy - not just death but the enemy of your soul - has been annulled. Paul says of the Lord Jesus, "that through death he might annul him who has the might of death, that is, the devil", and it is that He "might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage". Beloved, what glad tidings are these; here is the Deliverer! How has He delivered us? "It is Christ who has died". If you go away with nothing else in your heart from this preaching, remember those six words: "It is Christ who has died". I have had a very powerful impression this week that the death of Christ has changed death forever. It is not the same since Christ died. You can put your faith in the One who annulled him who had the might of death, and rose triumphant from its domain: "but rather has been also raised up; who is also at the right hand of God". And He has not forgotten about you: "who also intercedes for us". What a Saviour He is! Why did He do it? He did it to satisfy God's righteous claims; He did it to establish God's righteousness; He did it to lay a righteous platform on which God could set the throne of grace. He did it so that God's heart could flow freely towards the sinner. Paul says in this letter, "God commends *his* love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us", Rom 5: 8. It is one of the most precious things you could ever speak of, that that penalty which lies inescapably upon you, from which no one could deliver you, has been borne when Christ died. You cannot postpone the date of your death: hospitals speak about saving lives; they can do nothing more, as God allows them, than prolong them. What a glorious contrast it is that the Lord Jesus has annulled him that had the might of

death, and He has set us free.

What a cost it was to Him, dear brethren; that that One who had the right to live, upon whom the shadow and claim of death had never passed, the One who was here for God's pleasure and God's glory, took upon Himself a penalty from which He alone was exempt. He did it for guilty, erring sinners like me. What a Saviour He is! Consider His love for you, that, given His compassion for you, and the certainty of the outcome of your sinful life, He has stepped in, and in a very timely way.

Scripture refers to another appointment in God's ways, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son", Gal 4: 4. He came to die: God's judgment cannot wait, the scene of judgment is set, the audience is packed with guilty, godless people, railing against His Son, demanding that the Son of God should be murdered unrighteously; a cross lifted up; God's judgment is about to be manifested. His unsparing wrath cannot wait, its stroke must fall and it cannot miss: it is poised, dear friend, over *your* place where you should be. And One who loved you took that place for you at the very moment when God's wrath and judgment fell; and He delivered the believer from its stroke.

I appeal to you: turn to Him, love Him, own Him - as we sang in our hymn:

As Lord and Master in thy heart enthrone Him, Hymn 409

- the Christ who has died. So that even now the greatest events and things that might enter into your life, however unwelcome they may be, however untimely they may seem, however unnatural even they may be, *nothing* can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is a love that has proved itself towards you in that while you were yet a sinner He died for you.

May He bless the word!

Warrenpoint

10th April 2016

TEARS FOR GOD'S BOTTLE

David J Wright

John 11: 32-35

Luke 22: 54-62

Acts 20: 28-31, 36-38

2 Timothy 1: 3-5

Nehemiah 1: 1-4 (to “of the heavens”)

There is a Psalm that speaks about tears that go into God's bottle: “put my tears into thy bottle”, Ps 56: 8. I have read these scriptures because I think they give us varying circumstances in which tears were shed which went into God's bottle. The present time is a time of tears. There is soon coming a day when they will not exist anymore. What a thing to look forward to. Tears belong to the present time. I am not speaking of sentimental tears, but of tears of true feeling as coming from the presence of God. We do not have to travel long along life's journey before we experience something of sorrow.

In John 11 you have the tears of Mary and the tears of the Jews, and Jesus being affected by them, His own tears. What a comfort it is that the Lord Jesus remains a Man with the feelings of a man.

For 'tis in grief that Thou dost draw so near;
Dost touch Thy people in Thine own sweet way,
And turn their night of weeping into day. (Hymn 264)

Our brethren recently bereaved are experiencing times of sorrow, because it is right to feel the breaking of nature's ties. What this chapter brings out is that, if a void comes in as it does in the time of breaking of nature's ties, the Lord intends to fill that void. He was One that loved Bethany and those in it, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. It was a place where He found refreshment. The psalm says, “He shall drink of the brook in the way”, (Ps 110: 7); that reflects something of His experiences at Bethany. The Lord did not find much sympathy in His pathway here. He was affected by the intrusion of death into a family that He loved. It says, “Jesus therefore, when he saw her weeping” - that is Mary - “and the Jews who came with her weeping, was deeply moved in spirit”, bringing out the reality of the manhood of Jesus. He says, “Where have you put him? They say to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept”. It is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it stands out in its distinction; and I am sure that there are very many persons in this room who have experienced the sympathies of the Lord Jesus in times of

sorrow. These are tears that went into God's bottle. He knows them; we might be affected by the sorrows that have come in in recent years, your own family might be affected, but the Lord Jesus knows, and He would feelingly enter into your sorrow. May every one of us prove what it is, so as to develop us and deepen us in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and to form us in features like Him.

In Luke 22 there are very different circumstances. I would draw attention to the tears of repentance in Peter. Peter was one who undoubtedly loved the Lord but he allowed himself to get into circumstances in which he could not stand. It is very solemn to think that he was in a company of persons who were showing hatred to the Lord Jesus. I do not know about you, but I would have to say that I have allowed myself to get into circumstances like these. Peter followed afar off; how we need to follow close to our Lord Jesus. Peter of course had to learn a lesson here, that he could not do things in his own strength or confidence. If you find yourself in company with persons who hate Christ, your only way out is to confess His Name. "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe", Prov 18: 10. He is able to deliver you and give you power to take the initiative in confessing the Name of the One you love. Peter denied the Lord three times. The Lord had said to him, "*I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not*", Luke 22: 32. Think of the intercessory service of Christ for each one of us. It was not that *Peter* would not fail, but that *his faith* would not fail. If your faith fails, you have no object for your affections and you are set adrift; and you just drift along. The Lord had confidence that Peter would be restored; He knew what was in Peter. He says, "when once thou hast been restored, confirm thy brethren". As soon as Peter denied Him three times, "the cock crew. And the Lord, turning round, looked at Peter". That was enough, just a look. Peter had a tender conscience.

We referred earlier in the day to the importance of keeping short accounts with God. We have not arrived at perfection and any of us are liable to give way to the flesh at any time; it just explodes. What I would desire for myself, beloved brethren - and maybe you are exercised too - is that, if it does happen, my conscience is tender enough to recognise it and judge it. That is what Peter did, grievous though his failure was. Peter remembered the word of the Lord, "the cock shall not crow to-day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me" (v 34); that is exactly what happened. "Peter going forth without wept bitterly"; they

were tears of repentance, and therefore went into God's bottle.

There is something very attractive about the recovery of a soul. I can remember when I was young, an assembly meeting was called for a brother and we all expected that he would need to be withdrawn from; but God worked, and he repented, and there was something morally attractive about it. That brother remained in fellowship to his dying day. After this experience Peter was given his commission. The Lord probes him about his love, but the Lord knew what love was there. He says to him, "Feed my lambs", "Shepherd my sheep" and "Feed my sheep" (John 21: 15, 16 and 17); that was his commission. Peter would have taken note of the fact of that little word "my" every time. He would have a very firm impression that these sheep and these lambs were not his; they were the Lord's. In his epistle he says, "For ye were going astray as sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls", 1 Pet 2: 25. The Lord did not change His mind about Peter after this experience; it was Peter who first preached in the dispensation which we are in, after the Spirit had come, Acts 2. The remarkable thing about that preaching is that it is the same gospel that is preached in 2016. He did not have a script to go by, but he spoke about repentance; that is essential to the gospel message. And he spoke about the One who is in heaven, "God has made him, this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ", Acts 2: 36. He was not ashamed of that Galilæan accent resounding through the streets of Jerusalem, in the very place where our Lord was crucified a few weeks earlier. He spoke boldly in the power of the Spirit as to the One he loved. That was the result of the tears of repentance going into God's bottle.

In Acts 20 we have another setting. We have Paul's tears and we have the Ephesians' tears at the end of the chapter. At the beginning of the chapter we have Paul's love towards those disciples: "Paul having called the disciples to him and embraced them", v 1. That represented the love of the Lord Jesus to them. At the end of the chapter, you get the affections of the Ephesians who embraced Paul. It shows the place Paul had in their affections and reflects the love of the brethren for the Lord. There was a climax reached in Acts 20. You get the practical expression of what we were speaking of in the reading; that is, first love. Paul also saw the dangers as he was about to pass off the scene and he felt them; dangers from outside, and dangers from within: "Wherefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears". No wonder

he had a place in their affections. He admonished, but he admonished with tears. We have been occupied with Joseph's tears. Who was it that detained Simeon in prison? It was a weeping Joseph. Paul felt for the saints: "from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them", and also, "For I know this, that there will come in amongst you after my departure grievous wolves, not sparing the flock". It is clear it was painful to Paul to think of the flock scattered. He would rally them to Christ; he would instil Christ in their affections. He could only commit them to the grace of God on his departure, but he could look upon what he had secured in Ephesus. We know that they fell from their first love. Do you think the Lord felt that fall from first love? I think He did. If your love for the Lord Jesus is not as strong as it was last year, He feels it. May we be maintained in affection for the Lord Jesus, the One who has shed His precious blood. At the end of the chapter "they all wept sore; and falling upon the neck of Paul they ardently kissed him, specially pained by the word which he had said, that they would no more see his face". What an expression of Christ must have been in the face of Paul, and how he had found a place in their affections by the way he served them for three years, night and day. What devotion that was, devotion to his Master and devotion to those in whom God had wrought; the flock. I think the tears in this chapter were again tears that went into God's bottle.

I come to Timothy; Paul says to him, "remembering thy tears". They obviously left an impression upon Paul to such an extent that he felt that he could commit to Timothy what he had laboured for in his ministry. Timothy is a man for the last days. In another scripture, Paul says, "I have no one likeminded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on", Phil 2: 20. Things were safe, therefore, in the hands of such a man as Timothy, of whom he says, "who shall put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ", 1 Cor 4: 17. It was not only Paul's doctrine, but what Paul was; Timothy was able to convey something of that to the saints. Now we know that at the present time the doctrine and teaching of Paul is under attack, and it has been largely departed from. It will involve tears to maintain it, beloved brethren. Paul felt that he could entrust things to Timothy. He says, "the things that thou hast heard of me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also", 2 Tim 2: 2. Timothy was faithful and he was beloved. In our natural minds we do not often put those two things together, but he was faithful and beloved; beloved by Paul. Timothy had a good mother and a good grandmother; the

unfeigned faith in them was seen in Timothy as well. Nothing is said about Timothy's natural father here, but his spiritual father was Paul. Everything he had learned he had from him, and he was a feeling man. He had picked up not only the doctrine of Paul, but also the feeling that lay behind his teaching; "remembering thy tears", they were tears that went into God's bottle. Timothy was one who could carry the responsibility of maintaining what came in through Paul. It must have broken Paul's heart to write in this epistle: "all who are in Asia ... have turned away from me", chap 1: 15. He does not say it was from Christianity, but from Paul. Timothy would have felt that. Paul would have felt it, but Paul went out as a true overcomer: "I have combated the good combat, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith", chap 4: 7. He went out in triumph even in spite of the public breakdown and ruin that has come to mark the profession, and the departure from what Paul had ministered. There were some such as Timothy that he could entrust things to because Timothy was a man of feeling.

In Nehemiah, there is another setting. We referred in the reading to the passage in the gospels where the Lord Jesus looked upon Jerusalem and said, "how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!", Matt 23: 37. He shed tears over it; Jerusalem speaks of God's chief interest on earth. Nehemiah was a man who was deeply affected by the state of things in Jerusalem. I wonder whether I feel the unfaithfulness publicly of what bears the name of Christ. Many divisions have come in since what we speak of as the time of recovery to the truth; how the Lord feels that! I wonder whether I feel it sufficiently. The more I feel things with God the more He has a basis to work. Nehemiah enquired of his brethren as to those "who were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, Those who remain, that are left of the captivity there in the province, are in great affliction and reproach; and the wall of Jerusalem is in ruins, and its gates are burned with fire". What was the reaction of Nehemiah to that? "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat and wept, and mourned for days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of the heavens". What depth of feeling! These were tears too that went into God's bottle. I plead that we may feel more with God in relation to the present state of things. It was an individual exercise with Nehemiah to start with; he carried the exercises, saying, "I consulted with myself" Neh 5: 7. What you see in Nehemiah is what God can do through one man. He brought in influence which raised exercise with others and he

oversaw things with such energy, spiritual energy, so that the persons stood shoulder to shoulder with a sword in one hand and worked with the other, chap 4: 17. Are you and I committed to that? You may point to the public breakdown and ruin. But remember that the Lord's word to Philadelphia in Revelation 3 looks forward to something being preserved, a remnant: things that marked the original have come through. Things will never return to the public pristine glory of the church; but is there a desire and a heart to re-build the wall? The gates, the valley gate, the dung gate, suggest lowliness and self-judgment whereby we can maintain in our measure what is due to the Lord. Nehemiah felt things; he wept. They were tears that went into God's bottle.

I just desire that these few words might be an encouragement to you in a day of sorrow, a day of tears. It will involve tears to maintain things according to the Lord's pleasure, but may these few thoughts be an encouragement to us all to have part in them, for His Name's sake.

Grimsby

9th July 2016