

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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SPIRITUAL REFINEMENT - 1

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DJW I wondered, beloved brethren, whether in these two readings we might be occupied with the matter of spiritual refinement, and how it is brought about. In this reading, what is in mind is largely what is individual, but in the next reading, God willing, we may see how it bears upon a company, a locality. I think it is clear from Hebrews 12 that one thing that God uses to reach His end in us, and to bring about spiritual refinement, is discipline and chastisement, and it is as well to note at the beginning that He uses those things because of love for us. His love lies behind it. I have been thinking somewhat of this verse 11 in Hebrews 12: "But no chastening at the time seems to be matter of joy, but of grief; but afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it". I desire for myself, beloved brethren, to be among "those exercised by it", and therefore bring forth "the peaceful fruit of righteousness"; so we might enquire what that may be. This chapter refers to "the Father of spirits", and as relating ourselves to the Lord what He allows brings about a change in our spirits, producing the spirit of Christ. Now, we have been through a good deal of exercise, beloved brethren, and God has allowed it, and it is clear that He has disciplined us and chastised us, and I think there is good in getting the gain of that. These things generally draw us to Himself when they are rightly taken account of, and thus there is the production of "the peaceful fruit of righteousness".

Now chastening at the time, as it says here, is not a "matter of joy, but of grief", and to that end there is reason why I read the beginning of the chapter as to "looking stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith". Apart from that, we would be overcome, but our eye needs to be on the Man in the glory, but that Man has been here and He has suffered as no-one else did. "For consider well him who endured so great contradiction from sinners against himself, that ye be not weary, fainting in your minds". It is as looking to Jesus that we become overcomers and gain in the knowledge of Himself and are maintained in this race, this race from earth to heaven. It is maybe a marathon. You are on the last lap of this race when you may be feeling tired and jaded and under pressure; yet in that last lap you can look to "Jesus the leader and completer of faith".

I read in John 15; the Lord Jesus is spoken of as “the true vine” there, and also you get the Father spoken of as “the husbandman”. There again the thought of discipline enters into this scripture, that there is the taking away of “every branch in me not bearing fruit”, but what I would particularly like to draw attention to is the fact that “every one bearing fruit, he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit”. It is not that there is no fruit, but the Father in His love, in His chastening and discipline, has in view to remove anything that would hinder our growth, hinder spiritual progress, and bring about spiritual refinement. Without Christ we “can do nothing”, but, as Job comes to it, “I know that thou canst do everything”. Job is a remarkable person, one who came under the discipline of God in a real way. Satan said to God, “Hast not thou made a hedge about him”; He could not touch him. But God said, ‘Well, you can touch him, but you cannot take his life’, chap 1. God had a perfect understanding of the work of God that was in him. I do not think Satan can understand the work of God in us. He can take account of our weaknesses in the flesh and exploit them, but he cannot understand the work of God. Therefore, Job did not curse God. You might say he was a man that was exemplary; yet God allowed him to pass through this discipline in a severe way, and God reached His end in Job through it. One thing he comes to is “that thou canst do everything, and that thou canst be hindered in no thought of thine”. He has twice as much as he had before. Another thing he says is, “I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee”. Upright man he may have been, but he had come into a fresh, close relationship with God: “now mine eye seeth thee”, and it brought an end to himself: “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”. And then the verses 10 and 11 bring out how he could enter into fellowship in a real way with those who had been his acquaintances and they “condoled with him, and comforted him concerning all the evil that Jehovah had brought upon him; and every one gave him a piece of money, and every one a golden ring”. I think that is an expression of fellowship. A “golden ring” means they are bound together in links that are really eternal. I trust that will be acceptable to the brethren.

JB I am sure it will. I was going to ask what it means to be “exercised” by chastening. It is easy to be stoical and to say, ‘Well, I put up with whatever happened’, but to be “exercised” by it is a positive thing.

DJW It is, yes. Men who have no knowledge of God, if they enter into bitter circumstances, generally turn against God and say, ‘Why me?’;

but with the believer it generally has the opposite effect, that it turns us to God, turns us to the Lord. Rebecca had a struggle within her. She said, “why am I thus?”, Gen 25: 22. Speaking for myself, there is a need to have to do with the Lord in this way in relation to present circumstances, present exercises, that there is a positive end in view. God has allowed things for a reason. He has in view that “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” might be seen, and that would establish us together in the truth and underlie links of affection in the truth.

DJW-s Does the reference at the end of verse 2 to “the throne of God” show that everything is under perfect control, and measured?

DJW Yes, I think that is right. He “is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”. There is a Man there who has completed everything to God's full satisfaction and He is in the position of power, and He can “be hindered in no thought of” His. That is what Job came to. I think that is a good thing to hold to at any time, that things are in His hands, and we are in His hands, therefore we are in the best hands.

GMcK In verse 3 it says, “consider well”. We are to take time over that consideration. The note 'g' says, 'Weigh so as to judge its value'. “Looking stedfastly” on Him is not a fleeting thing. It is deep contemplation, is it, of the One who endured?

DJW I am sure that is right. There is a note ('d') that is often referred to, 'looking away from other things and fixing the eye exclusively on one'. Well, that One knew what it was to endure “so great contradiction from sinners”. When He brought near the love of God, it was rejected, and His pathway ended in rejection, going out of this scene by way of the cross. Who else could have endured that? But the contemplation of “him who endured so great contradiction from sinners against himself” has in view that we are “not weary, fainting in your minds”.

AEM The thought of spiritual refinement assumes that a spiritual work has begun. I wondered if the words “for whom the Lord loves he chastens” has that in mind that a spiritual work should continue.

DJW Yes, I think that is right, and He has His own way of bringing about circumstances to reach that end as He did with Job. I think that is with us, too, whether it be individually or collectively, but nothing happens without Him having in view a positive end and working towards that great cry, “the Spirit and the bride say, Come”, Rev 22: 17.

RDP I was just wondering about the expression the “completer of faith”, “the leader and completer of faith”. What is meant by the idea of

completing faith?

DJW Well, that is something that could not be said of any other. In the previous chapter you have a long list of persons of faith, but none of them could be said to be “the leader and completer” of it. It is something that was introduced, do you think, in the Lord Himself coming into manhood, and it was seen triumphantly in His outgoing as One that had completed what was given Him to do, and He is now triumphantly seated at God's right hand? That is the setting of it, is it not? You could help us more.

RDP There are various views of the believer's pathway. One is that it is a waiting time, for instance, but this gives us rather a different view, does it not? It is a running time, and the “completer of faith” seems to involve that faith is not a one-off experience, exactly, but a continuing exercise. It continues; it develops; it opens out. Faith involves light, for instance, does it not? I was just thinking of this aspect of the believer's life, running as over against waiting, for instance. Perhaps it is something that may exercise us at the present time.

DJW Well, this race is a continuing thing. It will continue until the Lord comes, and I shall be in that race unless the Lord takes me to be with Himself, but the present time is a time of education. There is the side of God's purpose, and we must cling to that, but these verses bring in the side of education. Each one of us is in the school of God, and that will last until the end of the dispensation.

DMC In a marathon, you would think that your body would faint, but it is the *mind* that is stressed. Why is that, do you think, “fainting in your minds”?

DJW Well, it would point to what we are occupied with. Peter left the boat in Matthew 14, did he not, v 29? He was all right while he kept his eye on the Lord, but his mind was diverted to other things like the waves and the storms, and he began to sink. The Lord outstretched His arms to save him, but his mind had not been “stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith”. Do you have some thought?

DMC I think that is right. Do you think the believer's mind is a very important part of him? His mind would control his body and what he does; so it speaks about having a renewed mind, Rom 12: 2.

DJW I think that is right, and it is an exercise how much my mind is controlled by the Holy Spirit to channel me into this spiritual line of things because now is the time of growth; now is the time of education.

When we are with Christ in glory, this opportunity will be over, but the present time is for education and growth and increase in the knowledge of God, as we see in Job.

RDP Of the Galatians it is said, “Ye ran well”, and then Paul says, “who has stopped you ...?” chap 5: 7. I was thinking of what our brother said as to the mind and the fact that it seems to involve a person, or persons. As we get in Revelation, “that no one take thy crown”, chap 3: 11. It speaks here of “sin which so **easily** entangles us”. I was thinking of the Galatians: they “ran well” and they are credited for that.

DJW It is an exercise with us how we end, whether our last days will be the brightest days. They were with Jacob; his days went on and brightened, as the hymn-writer puts it in hymn 403. He increased in the knowledge of God as he went through this race, increased right to the end. He was morally a great person. I think you might say typically “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” was seen in him.

IMcK You chose the word 'refinement' deliberately. Can you say some more as to that?

DJW I think it relates to what is morally beautiful in the eyes of God. To me it means the development in features like Christ, that you are formed after that order of manhood. It is only that order of manhood that God finds delight in, and the Spirit, as free in us, would form us in that order of manhood. The present time and the circumstances and exercise and pressure we are in are to that end, do you think?

JB1 Could you say more as to our spirits? Our spirits would be refined. Is it the way that something is expressed in a man or in a woman that is pleasurable to God that He is looking for?

DJW I am sure that is right. It is really the Spirit of Christ, which is alien to us in the flesh. I have been exercised myself: what about my spirit? How is it developing? How has it been formed under the influence of Christ? How has it been formed under the influence of the Spirit? I believe there is moral power seen in spiritual refinement. There is a dignity attached to it.

JB1 Was that seen in Naomi? She says, “the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1: 20), but at the end of that book you see that she is restored. Do you think it is as she goes back, as she finds her life in the land, that her spirit is refined?

DJW I think that is a good illustration of it; she went back to the point of

departure. She says, "I went out full, and Jehovah has brought me home again empty", v 21. But it brought her back to the Lord, brought her back to God, the God that she knew beforehand, and she was used in order to bring another one, Ruth, into the knowledge of the man of wealth, Boaz. It shows that there is a spiritual influence through a person that has this kind of spirit and has to do with God in the bitter circumstances in which she was found.

HTF In the first verse you read, there is an emphatic word, "Let *us* also therefore"; I just wonder if that is inclusive. We may tend, as a first reaction, to opt out in our minds, but there is a compulsion about this. I was thinking of the reference to Naomi as well because that family tried opting out and it did not work for them: it was ruinous. But God had His end anyway. It was the cry of Job's wife, "Dost thou still remain firm in thine integrity? curse God and die" (Job 2: 9); but it was not God's way.

DJW I think that is good. We are not in this race alone, are we? "Let *us*". Previous to that you have the reference to "so great a cloud of witnesses". Well, I believe they are here today, the "cloud of witnesses". It is a sympathetic atmosphere whereby we can encourage one another to run this race with Him in view, do you think?

DCB I was wondering if this refinement was related to sonship, and sonship not as something abstract, but sonship as something forming a person.

DJW I think that is right. Normally a father takes great delight in seeing his son having the same interests as himself and if you transfer that thought, the Father has great delight in us as sons having the same interests as He has. So if discipline comes along, it comes from One who has affection for us. It is illustrated naturally; there is no-one like your father that has affection for you as a son, and the Father in divine things has affection for us, and it is in view of us being brought into the liberty of sonship. You have some thought yourself?

DCB Well, it is very attractive when it says, "God conducts himself towards you as towards sons". That is, from His side, He has taken it upon Himself to act in that way as a father acts with the desire that there is not simply a title to sonship, which we blessedly have, but something that answers to His affections.

DJW I am sure that is right; so it is not only the advantages for ourselves, but there is what is for the Father and that is in view, is it not?

GMcK How does the chastening come about? Is it a direct action of

God and the Father? They speak to Job about the evil that Jehovah had brought upon him. Or is it more along the lines of what God might allow? Help us about it.

DJW My own impression is that it is more the latter, what He allows, but there is nothing negative in His mind in allowing it. As we see in John 15, the husbandman brings in the pruning in order that there might be more fruit. There may be things in me that need to be judged and done away with because they may be hindering my spiritual progress, may be hindering this spiritual refinement that is taking place. What it has in mind is the removal of all that would hinder that in order that we might be more pleasing to Him and “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” might be seen.

GMcK I suppose the “contradiction from sinners against himself” was something that was allowed. The Lord said to Pilate, “Thou hadst no authority whatever against me if it were not given to thee from above”, John 19: 11. Do we see in the Lord's life in a unique way what was allowed to come against Him?

DJW I believe that is right, but it was all borne “in view of the joy lying before him”. He never lost sight of that. He never lost sight of what would be secured for the heart of God. It meant much suffering for Himself, but He came here specifically to do the will of God “in view of the joy lying before him”. Think of the joy that He had in seeing a seed sown: “Except the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, it abides alone; but if it die, it bears much fruit”, John 12: 24. It is the same order as Himself: “such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones”, 1 Cor 15: 48. Think of the joy He has in an assembly answer to Himself! All these things helped Him to go through, do you think? The joy that lay before Him entered into that.

DMC Could you help us to understand verse 8, please?

DJW “But if ye are without chastening, of which all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons”. Well, I think that underlies that chastening is an avenue that He uses to bring about His own end in us.

DMC It says, “and not sons”, so that it is really God seeking to establish His full relationship with us in sonship because a bastard is not a true son.

DJW No, that is right, but there is also the work of God that can be appealed to, and the chastening has in view to bring that to light, the

work of God; so there is a positive end in view, a near, close relationship established with God in liberty which sonship would speak of.

SDP For Jonah in the belly of the great fish, the circumstances were not in his control. His prayer entered into the holy temple of God, and there was a voice of thanksgiving in the terrible circumstances, chap 2: 7. Is that an example of it?

DJW I think it is. God puts us in circumstances sometimes which are beyond our control, but He has allowed them. He has allowed them in order that we might prove His delivering power as Jonah did. He proved the delivering power of God in being brought out of the belly of that fish, v 10.

DJW-s Is fruit always for God? Sometimes discipline makes us introspective, but if we grasped the fact that the fruit was for God, it might help us to look outside of ourselves.

DJW I think that is right. Romans 7 is a great chapter of fruit-bearing, is it not? That chapter teaches us we have to look outside of ourselves to another: "who shall deliver me out of this body of death?", the extremity of exercise; "who shall deliver me out of this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord", v 24, 25. Sometimes, do you think, we are allowed to go to the extremity in order to have a greater appreciation of the way God has brought us into a fresh knowledge of Himself?

RDP You have used the word God 'allows'. Do you think this chapter brings out that you can also say that He orders, because it says, "for whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives"? That is not just an allowing; we may say there is something deliberate in that. The whole book of Judges, for instance, is very much the same as Joshua, but He brings them a certain way in Judges that they might learn war (Jud 3: 2), for instance. It was necessary, something that they needed to do. If you read the beginning of Judges, it specifically says that: conflict was something they were to know. We might think we just have to go through that, but we need to see that it is part of the way that God uses.

DJW I think that is right, and it is important, do you think, to understand that God knows what He is doing? We may not understand it at the time. At the time of going through chastening we may not understand it, but He knows what He has set out to do and He uses it in order to reach that end.

AEM Is it attractive that the end is “peaceful fruit of righteousness”? It is a very attractive word that there is what is “peaceful”. Chastening seems anything but peaceful, and what our brother has referred to may be full of strife, but the end is “peaceful”.

DJW Is it like being “a son of peace”, Luke 10: 6? We need “a son of peace” in our localities, do we not? I think “a son of peace” helps towards His end in a locality. The collective side of things perhaps will be before us this afternoon, but it is something to bear in mind.

JB Can you help us with what it means to partake of His holiness? It seems to precede this fruit coming to light.

DJW Well, God Himself is holy. I wonder whether the chastening and the purging is in view of bringing that element to the fore in me, so that I am more sensitive to what is pleasing to Him and what is not pleasing to Him. But I would be glad of your help.

JB It must involve coming into the presence of God and being influenced by Him, His holiness.

DJW Yes, indeed. I think this creates a certain atmosphere, holiness, which you carry away with you from the presence of God.

DJW-s Can you say something to help us as to this word “exercised”?

DJW Well, I think exercise involves that you turn to God. You are not stoical. You are not saying, 'It does not involve me', but you are exercised, maybe as to your own individual state, but also in relation to what is collective, like Rebecca, “why am I thus?”, Gen 25: 22. I think when anybody draws near to God in this kind of genuine exercise, there is an answer to God, something is worked out morally in the soul, so there is “the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it”. I am not just to coast along, but if I am to get the gain of the present time; it involves that I am “exercised by it”, and that draws me closer to God. What would you say yourself?

DJW-s Sometimes we try to run away from the difficulty, but it only follows you. I think what you say as to prayer is helpful, and often you find that answer in the company of the saints: “Let *us* also therefore ...”. Do you find that yourself?

DJW Yes, I think so. I thought the “cloud of witnesses” provides an atmosphere. It is not entirely individual; it is a sympathetic atmosphere, “the cloud of witnesses”, which helps us forward so that we encourage one another along the last lap of this race.

RDP If you take a longer look at the chapter, you come to what is in view: “but ye have come to mount Zion; and to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem” (v 22) and so on, a tremendous scope of things that is outside this world altogether. I just wondered if in the setting of this book, this matter of chastening and so on is in view of moving in relation to another scene; not just a scene or a Person, but there is a whole variety here: there is Zion; there is “heavenly Jerusalem”; there is “myriads of angels”; “the assembly of the firstborn”; “God, judge of all”; “the spirits of just men made perfect”, and so on. Mr James Taylor has some fine ministry on this, as the brethren know, vol 78 p116-205. I just wondered if what is in view here is that somehow the view of the saints had dropped in Hebrews. I think Mr Stoney says that what the Hebrews had fallen into was to try to make the earth a religious place (vol 3 p304), but what the writer is drawing attention to is a whole new sphere of things, outside of this scene and centred in that Man.

DJW I think that helps; so those individuals in the previous chapter, like Abraham, for example, did not have the experience of what is spoken of at the end of chapter 12. He saw them “from afar off and embraced them”, chap 11: 13. He did not actually possess it, but he embraced it in faith. Our position is so much more blessed in that we have *come* to these things. Let us enjoy them!

DJW-s Sometimes in an exercise we may look for an answer straight away, but He does not always give it, does He? Sometimes you learn in retrospect. You say, 'Why did God pass me that way?'. You look back and say, 'Now I can see why'.

DJW I think that is right. God is the One who created time. He can do things quickly as “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor 15: 52), but He can also allow things to be prolonged. We need to understand that in view of working out fully what He has in mind in the exercise.

DMC Sometimes we do not like the answers we get. Sometimes we may resist the answers we get.

DJW Well, I think one thing spiritual refinement does is that it subdues our wills to His; so that would help us to accept what comes from God.

GJR The mind often goes to God's governmental ways when we think of chastening or discipline, but you are directing us as to what is refined. Do God's governmental ways have any bearing on this, or is this a different level altogether?

DJW It has a bearing on it. God's governmental ways become favourable, do they, as accepted from God?

GJR Thank you for reminding us of that. I just wonder if this is actually quite a wide scope that is embraced. In your next scripture you have the Father's work in relation to fruit bearing, but are we to take this as having quite a wide embrace?

DJW I think so. There is the individual side, and there may be things in my circumstances and pressures which do not exactly affect anybody else, but I have, in a positive way, to be exercised in relation to the Lord about that, that there is some fruit to Himself. On the other hand there are assembly exercises and, in a certain sense, there is nothing like assembly exercises because it involves others. It involves how we work things out together, whether there is a certain dignity attached to us. If there is, this spiritual refinement comes to the fore.

GJR Well, in that connection, I would not want to be without the exercise of the present time. I think the Lord is instructing me, and I would not want to be apart from that. I think He is instructing us all.

DJW I think so. I think it is important for us to keep that in mind. There is a positive end in view in any exercise as we relate ourselves to God in it.

RDP We often speak of sonship. Is sonship for God? I was thinking of what was said earlier. It comes in in Romans 8: "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these* are sons of God", v 14. That is perhaps the first view of sonship, but it is for God. That is refinement when the believer's thoughts, objectives and actions begin more and more to move away from what is for himself and what is for here, but what is for God. Would that be a fore fruit of sonship?

DJW I think so. The gospel meets our needs, but sonship, speaking reverently, meets God's need; it is what is for Him, the delight He has in persons who are after the order of the Man in whom He found His delight; so it is for God.

RDP It speaks in this chapter of those who are sons and those who are not sons. They may appear to be; there may be a certain link after the flesh and so on; but he speaks about the distinctiveness of sonship and the emotions and the relations that are peculiar to that particular relationship. As the believer goes on, that begins to become pronounced and affects the believer's life. It affects our lives here, but the object of it is for God.

DJW And God is satisfied with nothing less. The prodigal son would have settled for something less, 'some lone place within the door', but God's mind was sonship, that he should have the liberty of the house, Luke 15: 19. In a certain sense it is the top stone, and that is what He is working through to.

DJW-s We can also carry one another's exercise, to profit.

DJW Well, I think that is another reference to the "cloud of witnesses". It does not substitute for you having to do with the Lord and with God directly, but it does help sometimes to go over an exercise with a sympathetic person. That is "a cloud of witnesses". You have something more in mind.

DJW-s There is a good deal of bodily discipline, for instance, amongst the saints at the present time. I was thinking of Romans 8: "all things work together ...", v 28. The exercises that you are going through and the exercises I am going through all "work together". They are not against one another; they are working to a common end.

DJW I am sure that is right, and we need to bear that in mind in exercises so that we seek to carry our brethren with us.

DCB Would the Book of Psalms show some of this working out? There is discipline, and David in particular goes through it, but there is something that is out of it that is serviceable for the people of God.

DJW I believe that is right, and another aspect, do you think, therefore, of spiritual refinement would be seen in the enrichment of the service of God? There is a certain tone about a person that has had to do morally with God, do you think?

DMC In Samuel's day, when Jesse brought the sons, the most important one was left out. Samuel had to say, "Are these all the young men?", 1 Sam 16: 11. There was one left out.

DJW Well, we do not want to leave the Lord out, do we? Nothing happens unless the Lord is brought in. Nothing happened in that meeting until the Lord came in, typically in David, and when he did come in, "he was ruddy, and besides of a lovely countenance and beautiful appearance", and spontaneously there was, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he", v 12.

DMC That made all the difference.

DJW It makes all the difference, the place that Christ has in our

hearts, firstly individually and then collectively.

DJW-s You referred in your opening remarks to the Father as the husbandman. Do you have more in mind?

DJW I was just going on to the operations of the Father as the husbandman in John 15. "As to every branch in me not bearing fruit, he takes it away; and as to every one bearing fruit, he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit". There is that which is dead, morally dead, and it has no place in the things of God, but what I particularly want to draw attention to is the purging. There is some fruit in that branch but there is also something hindering and that needs to be removed, and the Father in His love would bring that feature to bear upon us in order that we might judge it so that there is more fruit. It would be included in "the peaceful fruit of righteousness".

DJW-s It is a strong word "purge". I thought that perhaps linked with the previous scriptures. It is not a "matter of joy". The purging is a severe exercise.

DJW Yes; it is a complete clearance, complete cleansing; there is no vestige allowed or remains.

PWB It is a skilful activity as well, is it not? Because there is fruit there. It is very easy to damage the fruit by the purging, but the Father would never do that. He would value the fruit, and He would work that there might be more fruit. There is skill in that, is there not?

DJW There is. The Father knows everything about us. Therefore, He knows how to bring in the purging and the pruning because He has perfect knowledge of what is there of Himself, and He has perfect knowledge of what is hindering the development of that. So we are having to do with One who knows all about us. He is skilful in a way that no-one else can be.

PWB There is a huge difference between being punished and discipline. The judicial consequences of what I am and what I have done were borne by Christ, and therefore discipline is not punishment. Sometimes perhaps if we get down in our souls we think God is punishing us, but God does not do that to His own. The discipline that you are bringing before us has a very positive end that there might be things removed, but He is not punishing me for something, but it is to bring out the preciousness of what the work of God is and to develop it and grow it.

DJW I am sure that is right. Sometimes when I have got a bit low, I have felt that way, as if I was being punished, but we are having to do with One who knows all about us and His love is behind it.

HTF There is another word in John 6 which the Lord uses: “But this he said **trying** him”, v 6. I was thinking of what you said earlier that God knows what He is doing: “for he knew what he was going to do”. There was food; I wondered if it linked with this chapter where it is fruit that is in mind.

DJW And Job came to it that God could “be hindered in no thought of” His. He knew what He was going to do, and He could not be hindered in it. Let us cling to that, beloved brethren! “Without me ye can do nothing”, it says here. In contrast to that Job says, “thou canst do everything”. We are in His hands.

RDP I notice it is, “Abide in me”. One of the hymns commonly sung around is ‘Abide with Me’, but this is “in me”. What do you make of that? I was just thinking verse 3 is unusual in a way. It says, “Ye are already clean by reason of the word”. Cleanliness is introduced there as if there is something that has been cleared away by reason of the word, but “abide in me” seems to be a progression in our experience.

DJW Yes, I think that is right. It conveys to me that there is a peaceful, settled relationship, and it is not just a visit: it is characteristic of the Lord as the Vine that he speaks of abiding in Him. There is a moral state in which this can be known and enjoyed and it is a settled relationship.

RDP And abiding in Him must involve that there is an inward drawing of resource from Him. It is more than an external clearance of things; it involves that the source of life is in Him.

DJW-s I recall a comment of Mr Stoney's that wine can only be obtained by bruising or beating, a severe process; and that you can never store grapes unless you dry them, but you can store wine, vol 12 p124-5. We are never really outside the area of God's discipline in order that there might be more refinement for Himself.

DJW Where the fruit is crushed involves discipline for us. “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” means I have completely come to the end of myself, and then there is nothing to hinder progress in the knowledge of Himself.

DJW-s That applies not only to the grape but to the olive. When the

olive is pressed, that is more discipline in view of oil which is for the light.

DJW I am sure that is right, but the fruit of the vine brings in joy. There again it is what is positive. You are not left feeling downhearted or browbeaten at all, but the fruit of the vine brings in joy, joy in the heart of man and of God.

GJR I do not know whether it helps or not, but if I could just say that , “as to every one bearing fruit, he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit”, refers to summer pruning and generally involves restricting growth and reducing the leaves, taking away what is evil. It is the refinement that you speak of. The other branch “not bearing fruit” is dealt with in the wintertime. This is a vine growing well and if it is left alone, it will just carry on but these shoots are shortened back and some of the leaves are taken off; that is the purging “that it may bring forth more fruit”.

DJW I think that what you say is helpful; so certain things happen in the wintertime and others in the summertime. Wintertime may be a time of trial and pressure, but when things appear to be going well in the summertime, you are suggesting there is still this need of pruning. That is an interesting thing because naturally I am more drawn to the Lord in exercise, in pressure, in wintertime, but we are to draw near to Him “for seasonable help”, Heb 4: 16. So whatever season is prevailing, we take account of that, exercise it. That is a very exercising thing in itself so we are characterised by it whatever season may prevail.

GJR I might appear to the brethren to be going on very well, a lot of growth, lot of leaves, but there is the Father's skill operating.

DJW Am I abiding in the vine? That is an inward thing, is it not? When Ephesus fell from their first love, outwardly things seemed to be just the same, but the departure was inward. Individually persons had ceased to abide in the vine and to draw resources from the vine.

JB Would abiding in Him bring about the result we see in Job as seeing Him as over against what he had heard? Do you think we may be satisfied with hearing about Christ, but seeing Him for ourselves would be the result of this purging.

DJW I wondered that. It is “the peaceful fruit of righteousness”. That was really seen in Job. One thing I will draw attention to is in verse 10: “And Jehovah turned the captivity of Job, when he had prayed for his friends”. Now that was the spirit of Christ; I think that was spiritual refinement, and God came in for him and turned his captivity at that

point. Now his friends were not much help to him: they condemned him without convicting him. They said right things and applied them in the wrong way; they were no help. But then Job prayed for them; he overcame evil with good: there was spiritual refinement there.

JB Do you see that in his spirit, in the way that he prayed for his friends as not being vindictive or remembering things against them but in praying for them?

DJW That is exactly what I was thinking. It is the spirit of Christ, really.

DJW-s And it led to what is attractive. It says his friends “came to him”. There was something that drew them to him.

DJW I think there was something morally beautiful in Job. He was an upright man before, but there was something that was morally beautiful in Job that was not there before so that persons were attracted to him and he had influence, but then he was also in a state in which he could enter into fellowship and enjoy it.

RDP Can you explain your references to the money and the rings?

DJW Well, the money was not to meet any need exactly, was it? It was a gesture, you might say, of fellowship that is to be known and enjoyed in a sympathetic atmosphere. And the golden ring binds us together, do you think? But you have some thought.

RDP No, you mentioned it at the beginning, and I think it is very interesting: “and every one gave him a piece of money, and every one a golden ring”. If you think of it and apply it, that is a very precious thing that we prove amongst the saints that we know.

DJW As a result of discipline; therefore, fellowship was known and enjoyed in a way it had never been known before.

TI I was wondering, just going back to the purging, we do not want to go back exactly to yesterday's fruit or last season's fruit, but God is looking for what is fresh. Is that why this goes on?

DJW I think that is right so we will be in that race while we are here. It is an ongoing thing but there is something positive being arrived at in that time. The time of education and growth is now, not for when we are eternally with the Lord. That time will be over then, but it is now.

Manchester

22nd November 2015

SPIRITUAL REFINEMENT - 2

John 11: 1-44

John 12: 1-3

DJW We considered earlier the matter of spiritual refinement, and how it is arrived at. We looked in Hebrews 12 at those who were exercised by chastisement and discipline that “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (v 11), might be known. We saw how that was worked out in John 15 with the Lord as the Vine, and the need to abide in the Vine. What may hinder has to be removed, as illustrated in Job. He went through much discipline, but he had twice as much as he had before; there were certain features seen in him which spoke of spiritual refinement, which were largely, although not wholly, individual.

In this reading, we might see spiritual refinement in a company, a locality, such as Bethany. The chapter starts, “Now there was a certain man sick, Lazarus of Bethany”; that was the locality. It was a locality that the Lord had frequented and indeed in which He found refreshment. The psalmist says, “He shall drink of the brook in the way”, Ps 110: 7: something of that would enter into the Lord going to Bethany. Death comes into the family - John emphasises the side of the family, as we know. Mr Darby said, ‘let not John’s ministry be forgotten in insisting on Paul’s’, JND Letters vol 3 p223. That would mean that the family side provides the atmosphere in which Paul’s ministry can be worked out and enjoyed. The Lord knew what He was going to do; He always does; and this comes to the fore here because verse 2 of chapter 11 says, “It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick”. That refers to what happens in the next chapter, but that is the positive result, and IT is what the Lord knew was going to be in view.

The remarkable thing in this chapter is that death was allowed to come in, in all its awfulness, in that Lazarus was “four days already in the tomb”. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, “he remained two days then in the place where he was”; He did not immediately go to Bethany. He had in view that there were things to be worked out and brought through to fruition in the waiting time. His being glorified as the Son of God required that death should come in in all its completeness. The Son of God was the One who had the power over death, the One who is “the resurrection and the life”. Therefore, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it”. You have something very positive worked out; and not only in

those in Bethany. The Lord says to the disciples, "I rejoice on your account that I was not there, in order that ye may believe"; it entered into the education of the disciples. The Lord might work out more than one thing at a time; He is great enough for that.

Martha meets Him coming. In Luke 10, Martha does not come out in a very good light. She was rather complaining about Mary leaving her to do the serving and indeed complaining to the Lord, "dost thou not care", v 40. Here, there is no reference to that side of things in Martha; the conversation that she has with the Lord brings out the work of God that is in her, and what was arrived at. She says, "Yea, Lord; I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God". This was light that dawned in her soul; and it is remarkable that the Lord remains in the place where she met Him. He stayed there until Mary came, as if a certain point had been reached that would have to be gone over with Mary. The feelings of the Lord Jesus come out in a distinct way too, brought out by seeing Mary weeping and the Jews weeping; and very affectingly it says, "Jesus wept". He entered very feelingly into their exercise, and they no doubt learned Him in a way that they had not done before. They could never have learned Him this way without death coming in. He becomes everything to them. it is not just a question of meeting their needs; He becomes everything to them. The result is seen in chapter 12; each one had their part, and "Lazarus was one of those at table". There were others also at table, but a certain dignity attached to Lazarus. Martha served without any complaint, but then Mary had this "pound of ointment of pure nard of great price". She had it as a result of exercise. I think it is another illustration of "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" that she "anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment". The house was filled with the odour of the ointment when it was placed upon the feet of the Lord Jesus and it filled the house.

This is not the Supper as we know, because the Supper is what the Lord provides for us: this was a supper that they provided for Him. You can see that there was something very rich and very real in Mary's service in anointing His feet. She was intelligent as to His going into death, and the odour of that filled the house; something of that character, I think, as coming into the Lord's supper, would be "the peaceful fruit of righteousness".

JB Would it be right to say that the family made Him the supper? I was thinking of your exercise that this was discipline gained from by the

whole company. In chapter 12, He is the centre of that company.

DJW Yes, they acted together; He now becomes everything to them. That is the result of exercises that the God allows, maybe over a protracted period; things are wrought out in each one of our souls with a view to something being released in appreciation of Christ.

DJW-s At the end of verse 3 it says, "The sisters therefore sent to him", in the plural. Is it in your mind that the Lord may be working something out subjectively in the saints, more than just in individuals?

DJW I think that is right. It is in "the sisters"; suggesting an assembly exercise. They felt that something had come in that they could not meet themselves. They appeal to the Lord; their knowledge of Him would show that He was the only One that they could appeal to, the only One that could resolve it.

GMcK Did you have in mind that sometimes the exercises needed to be severe in order for the Lord's end to be reached?

DJW Yes, I was thinking of that. Thus He waited two days before He went. Why was that? It was because it was necessary for the thing to be worked out in that waiting time. He could have gone straight away but He did not. Let us wait on the Lord to see what He is working out, but let us be exercised in our locality as to what He is working out at the present time so that there is a response for Him in a way that there has never been before.

GMcK We do sometimes question, "Why does it have to be so difficult? Why is it so severe?". The reason is to secure real dependence on Him and He alone is the fruit of that, is He?

DJW I am sure that is so. Mary had this "pound of ointment of pure nard". Where did she get it from? Maybe Luke 10 would give us an idea. She "having sat down at the feet of Jesus was listening to his word", v 39. There was substance formed in her and that became available to the company. What we rightly enter into individually then becomes available to the family here so that they were helped to work through the exercise and come to the same fruitful conclusion. "**They** made him a supper".

RDP They seem to appreciate and know His power. They knew what He could do; there was no doubt. They knew the Scriptures; they knew what was to happen. It seems that what you get in chapter 12 is something beyond that. There is an appreciation of the One who had

the power. Is that something on the line you are thinking?

DJW Yes, it is. Those in Bethany went through the thing together and arrived at the same positive end. Each of them had their part: “Martha served”, “Lazarus was one of those at table”, and Mary brought this ointment of pure nard and bestowed it upon Him. We need each other for the completion of exercises.

RDP They arrived at it three different ways, but they arrived at the same end. Their experiences were different.

HTF There is no record that there had been any fault on Lazarus's part. The Lord used this sickness to work something out with all of them. In chapter 12 they are all further ahead than they were before.

DJW Lazarus was the one who died; Martha and Mary did not. They were affected in different ways. As that is worked out - each of us having to do with the Lord in that way - there is some result company-wise. That is really the burden in this reading.

AEM Is there something more in the reference “The sisters”. They placed the Lord's own relationship with Lazarus above their own: “he whom thou lovest is sick”; not ‘our brother is sick’.

DJW “He whom thou lovest is sick”; each one of them would be conscious of His love. It does not say simply that the Lord loved the three of them at Bethany, but each one is singled out as loved individually. It was even in His love for them that He remained away for two days.

AEM That is something for us to arrive at. They each knew His love for them as we do, but they knew of His love for their brother too. That drew them together and set aside what was natural for them, and allowed the Lord's claim to have its way.

DJW If there is a common bond of affection it draws us together, and that provides a foundation. The family atmosphere is a basis on which exercises can be worked out to a positive conclusion.

DJW-s Does verse 15 indicate that there was no other way the Lord could have used to bring this end? It says, “I rejoice on your account that I was not there, in order that ye may believe”. Sometimes in exercises we wonder if the Lord could not have worked some other way to accomplish His end. There was only this way.

DJW Only this way, that is right; and He was working out more than

one thing at a time. He was working in order that there might be a deeper sense of belief in the disciples than there was before. They are seeing Him in His glory and power as the Son of God who was able to break the power of death. They had not witnessed that before. It was all part of their education.

RDP The natural man might be quite upset by that verse that you have just quoted, "I rejoice on your account that I was not there". Someone might say on a natural basis that that sounds quite hard-hearted. Perhaps we sometimes draw back at what comes in without seeing that there is a deeper, a spiritual, matter to be worked out.

DJW I think that; it is the burden of my exercise.

DMC In the case of Eutychus, it was Paul himself that descended and enfolded him in his arms. It says, "they brought away the boy alive, and were no little comforted", Acts 20: 12. All gained from it.

DJW Yes, that is right. They came into the benefit of the power of affection that there was seen in the apostle. It had a benign effect on the whole company. Acts 20 is a scripture where there are great heights reached. I think it has been said that first love is seen in Acts 20. We know that is where Ephesus fell from. The apostle reached great heights in Ephesus, as his epistle brings out, in straitened circumstances. He wrote that epistle from the prison.

DMC He did not take personal credit for the recovery of Eutychus but they all shared in it.

DJW That is part of assembly exercise. We are not just separate individuals in a company; there is the organism working. We are bound up together in affection. Therefore we can enter exercises together in a very real, affectionate way.

JB At the end of John 10, the Lord Jesus went away, "departed again beyond the Jordan", v 40. To this company who loved Him there was a real revelation, a wonderful revelation of God's glory.

DJW Yes, and that was the positive thing in view. He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it". The exercise had to run to its full result, death coming in; how else could the glory of the Son of God be known except through the power that He had? "Lazarus, come forth".

RDP In chapter 12, having part with Him is an even greater thought than the knowledge of His power, even in this matter of death. What

comes to light in chapter 12 is that He has in mind part with Him. We might know what He is in His power and appreciate Him; we praise and thank Him for His power, for His glory, and we appreciate what it is that He is to be in a coming day. Martha says, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day"; there is something greater than that at the present time and that is to have part with Him.

DJW Part with Him in His own realm.

RDP It is a very blessed and wonderful thing because it is now touching His heart.

DJW It is in His own realm the other side of death. He is the Son and Centre of another order of things the other side of death. That involves passing over from what our circumstances may be into His, where He is everything. We come into accord with the feeling of heaven in relation to Him.

ASP There is no mention of an alabaster flask here. Mary has the ointment in herself. There was something that had to be worked out and it was made available for the whole company. Psalm 51 says,

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart,
O God, thou wilt not despise, v 17.

Do you think that is what was worked out in the company?

DJW I think it was. It is what she had. It was in her vessel. She poured that out; there was no reserve. She poured out from her heart an appreciation of the One that had raised Lazarus from among the dead, and restored him to the family. She recognised that what He had in view was to be the Centre; He became the One that was everything to them. If we hold on to that at the present time, and in present exercises, I am sure there will be a result to God's glory.

DCB Is it important that it is the Lord who is the One you are bringing before us on this occasion, as distinct from the Father, who might deal with us individually. I am thinking of His service to the assembly: "nourishes and cherishes it, even as also Christ the assembly", Eph 5: 29. It is what He has in mind, as having set Himself exclusively for the benefit of the assembly. That is worked out in an example in a local company here.

DJW I think that is right; what you say as to nourishing and cherishing also refers to "the washing of water by the word, that *he* might present the assembly to himself glorious, having no spot or wrinkle, or any of

such things; but that it might be holy and blameless", v 26, 27. John 12 represents an assembly response. In the exercises the word has been "the washing of water"; it removes anything that would hinder that there might be an assembly response to the heart of Christ.

DJW-s Is there some connection between the "ointment of pure nard of great price" and the "pearl", Matt 13: 46. The Lord speaks of it as being "of great value". The pearl may be the fruit of His sufferings.

DJW I am sure that is right; this "ointment of pure nard" was the product of very deep exercise in Mary. There was pressure there; the pressure of death came in upon her. The result of that pressure was really an assembly response.

DJW-s I was thinking of the pearl as representing the whole that collectively was for the Lord.

DJW Yes; we must keep in mind what is for the Lord in everything. It involves what is for us too; primarily it is what is for the Lord.

DJW-s Had you something in mind as to the two days; it is measured.

DJW Yes; everything is measured. "A thousand years are as one day" with Him, 2 Pet 3: 8. He created time, and this was the time that was needed in order that His glory might be known, and that God might be glorified. He is able to bring about circumstances which prolong things. Why does He do it? It is in order that there might be a completion of exercise arrived at in the company. Everything is in His hands; it is not in our hands. We just need to submit ourselves to Him.

DJW-s The whole chapter shows that the third day is in view of resurrection.

DJW Yes, that is right. "I am the resurrection and the life". It opens up another vista of things not known before by these persons, relating to another Man in another world the other side of death; a sphere of things where eternal life is known and enjoyed.

SDP Do exercises worked out in this way in localities bring a certain colour? The glory of the Lord is reflected in a slightly different way in each place.

DJW I think that is right. We all come different ways but related to the same exercise resulting in an impression of Christ which is distinctly our own, and that is for the company. Somebody else may have a distinct impression through the way he has come and that is for the company. It

enriches the company and it enriches what is for the heart of Christ.

MTBM In relation to that, it says that she “wiped his feet with her hair”; it was what she did personally; but “the odour of the ointment” filled the whole house.

DJW Yes; everyone got the benefit of that.

MTBM It was not just the pouring of the ointment, there was the wiping of His feet with her hair. The hair of a sister would speak of her glory. It is a very personal and intimate thing.

DJW In assembly exercises, there may also be many tears which go into God's bottle, Ps 56: 8. Paul took account of the tears of Timothy; “For I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on”, Phil 2: 20. This is another thing in spiritual refinement.

MTBM When a brother takes part in prayer or other ways, you do not always know what exercise is behind what has been said. What comes out is formed.

DJW Yes, indeed; that brings out the value of what a company is; it may be small. What we have in Bethany here suggests just a family, rather than a big locality, but it brings out the value of a company and the spiritual refinement that marks each one in that company.

DMC Paul's exercise in relation to the Corinthians was, “I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ”, 2 Cor 11: 2. The next verse says, “But I fear lest by any means ...”. There is always a danger.

DJW But our eye is to be exclusively for Christ. The assembly has eyes only for Christ.

DMC Chastening would go along with what we had this morning. There is a process in affection.

DJW That is right, and the individual therefore merges into the company.

JWP We spoke earlier as to Jesus being “the leader and completer of faith” (Heb 12: 2); would this be an example of it here? Mary and Martha had the confidence that the Lord could raise their brother, but it is the Lord who completed it.

DJW You see something here that only the Lord Himself could do. Death had come in. The position seemed hopeless. Only the Lord Himself could resolve this. The only thing in this chapter in which we

can have our part is when Lazarus “came forth, bound feet and hands with graveclothes”, when the word is, “Loose him and let him go”. We can serve one another in that way to remove the grave clothes, to remove any sense of bondage and set persons free.

GMcK It is interesting how Jesus says, “Lazarus, our friend, is fallen asleep”. I was wondering if in that way He calls all of them into the exercise. This is somebody who should be precious to us all. There seems to be a reminder in that, “Lazarus, our friend”. Something terrible has happened, and it is ours; we all have an interest, have a motivation, to be called into the exercise and feel it.

DJW I think that is right and the assembly experience is special in that way. The body is an organism, not just a question of so many individuals. We are bound up together in affection. “Lazarus, our friend”; he was friend to all of them and therefore they were affected in the same way. Let us enter into these things with real feeling.

DJW-s There is an interesting expression in the chapter; “Mary therefore”; she came to where Jesus was. Is that the exercise when going through the difficulty to get where Jesus is in it?

DJW I think that is right. It was where He was, where He had worked out something with Martha, so that she believed that Jesus was the Son of God; fresh light came into her soul. Mary came to Him there; the thing was to be worked out with Mary. Mary was a sister who had spiritual influence. When she moved, other persons moved with her. Nobody else moved when Martha moved, but it brought out the spiritual influence that such a person as Mary had, and she comes to where He is. We need to locate the Lord. He appeared to them in a boat in John 6 and they were prepared to let Him into the ship, v 21. The exercise is whether I prepared to let Him in when He appears. That involves that my will is subject to His.

RDP It is interesting what the two sisters do. “Martha then, when she heard Jesus is coming, went to meet him; but Mary sat in the house”. When they met the Lord they both said the same thing, “if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died”, but one goes to meet Him almost as if she was going to confront Him, and the other stays in the house. I was just thinking how different the spirit is in the next chapter where they all take their various parts, all with Him as the Centre.

DJW We are all different. Martha seems to be the more impulsive, but Mary just sat in the house. She had a more restful spirit. They are

altogether with one common object in chapter 12, and that is what we should aim for.

DCB The Lord was prepared to wait two days. Mary was taking on that feature of being prepared to wait.

DJW That is good; in that sense she commits things into the hand of the Lord. She knew that He was the One who was able to meet this exercise. She could not; nobody else could; but she recognised the One who could meet it.

IMcK It says the Lord “was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled”. What is your impression of what is from the divine side as the company goes through exercise? We have spoken of God's love and using chastisement. We could not speak of the Lord going through exercise exactly, could we?

DJW No; from a natural point of view there is nothing that draws out compassion more than the breaking of nature's ties, and it is right that that should be felt. The Lord Himself in manhood here felt it. He was affected by the tears of Mary. He wept Himself. He entered feelingly into what she was passing through. That would be an added thing for Mary to experience, the feelings of a Man. Beloved brethren, we have a Man in heaven; He remains a Man and He has the feelings of a man.

JB1 I think you mentioned earlier that assembly exercises are deeper than individual ones, but when we are going through deep exercises; the Lord would enter into that feelingly with us. He has the answer to it all; they knew He had the answer to it all, but He wept here. He entered into it feelingly with them.

DJW Therefore it was another fresh experience for them. You might say we have not been this way before, but what is in view is that we should learn the Lord in a way we have never learnt Him before.

DJW-s Have you something to say to help us as to what the Lord says, “Take away the stone”?

DJW Martha still needed full assurance. She says, “he stinks already, for he is four days there”. The Lord adjusts her: “Did I not say to thee, that if thou shouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”. It is to bring home the reality of death; Lazarus was there in that tomb; he had been there four days corruption was setting in. There were the crowds around and the Lord “lifted up his eyes on high and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me; but I knew that thou

always hearest me; but on account of the crowd who stand around I have said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me". There is another factor, that the crowds around might believe that the Father had sent Him. All that was involved in taking the stone away and the power of the voice, "Lazarus, come forth".

DJW-s I was thinking that when they buried him he was dead; now after four days he had gone to corruption. The glory of what the Lord did was enhanced in that way. The exercise had gone another step beyond his dying.

DJW I think that is right. Ephesians finishes by speaking about "all them who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption", 6: 24. This is what was unveiled here, another scene the other side of death, where no corruption has ever entered. They were to enter into that; what a wonderful thing that was.

DMC It brings out beautifully:

Disease, and death, and demon,

All fled before thy word, (Hymn 189)

Death could not stand before the Lord Jesus.

DJW He is a wonderful Person to know. Oh, that we might give more room to Him in our hearts, individually and assembly-wise! The result is that there is an ascription of praise and appreciation that was not there before.

JB1 In Romans 1, it is "according to the spirit of holiness" that the Lord Jesus was distinguished as raising dead persons such as Lazarus. Is that something that we come into; as in these assembly exercises a sanctified company comes to light?

DJW It links with being partakers of His holiness that we had this morning.

MTBM I would like to enquire as to the Lord's commandment, "Lazarus, come forth"; John says here, "the dead came forth". I wondered if you could say something as to this title "the dead".

DJW It is to emphasise that Lazarus was dead. The Lord had to be plain with the disciples earlier in the chapter. He says, "Lazarus has died"; they thought He spoke about the rest of sleep. Death in all its awfulness was there, and there is only One who could meet that.

PWB Could you say some more about the Lord's commandment, that

they, "Loose him"? It is quite striking; it says of the Lord, "having loosed the pains of death" (Acts 2: 24), He left the domain of death. What a mighty act of power that was! Of course He could have loosed these graveclothes, but He did not. It was a command - it was not a request exactly - and they had to do it. I wondered if that linked in with your thought of assembly exercise. They had to enter into it; could you open that up a little in practical terms?

DJW There were things that only He could do. Only the Lord could raise Lazarus from among the dead. As you say, He could have taken the grave clothes off as well, but do you think He wanted them to enter into the exercise themselves, that there should be a certain end reached in them too? There may be somebody still hindered by grave clothes; in the service of love we can come in to remove any sense of bondage that may remain. He is set free so that he is an integral part of the answer in chapter 12.

PWB I think that is good. We sometimes say the Lord has to work, and there are some things only the Lord can do, but I cannot leave it all to the Lord either: I have to have exercise. It would seem that this would not otherwise have been completed; you could not have imagined Lazarus at the table bound with the graveclothes. The Lord is not going to do it; Mary and Martha did not go into the grave but they did have to have to do with elements that had known that domain. They would have felt that in releasing him from them.

DJW Yes, indeed; it comes back and links with what we began with in Hebrews 12 as to "the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it". In taking the graveclothes off Lazarus they had their part in being exercised by what was proceeding.

PWB Yes, and so in true assembly exercise, I cannot just point the finger and say that was what he did and that was his fault. Every one of us must feel it, and I think every one of them would have felt it as they undid the grave clothes. They would all feel the freedom of being set free from the domain and effects of what death would speak of.

DJW I am sure that is right. The whole concept of fellowship really means that we cannot detach ourselves. We are bound up together, in the cloud of witnesses that we had in Hebrews 12. There is a sympathetic circle in which these things can be worked out. Let us foster these things.

SDP How that brother would have valued his local sisters!

Afterwards they were set together in a way that was far beyond natural ties.

DJW They could take account of the fruit of the exercises in each of them. You could say you see that a brother is different. There is a certain thing about his spirit that was not there before, and that is what we are trying to drive at.

DMC Martha said, “he stinks already”; that would have gone as well. Sometimes a stigma remains, but there should not be any stigma; all trace of death should go.

DJW That is the way we can serve one another in removing the graveclothes, remove the stigma.

AEM In chapter 12, he is referred to as “the dead man Lazarus”. That was because of the way he had come, not what was still attached to him; it was the way the Lord had brought him.

DJW Lazarus is not said to have said anything. It is what he was; he was a man that had been raised from the dead, and has a certain dignity attached to him. Is there a certain dignity attached to me as a result of exercises with the Lord?

GMcK This idea of loosing him is interesting. Do you think that there is a particular sweetness at the supper in chapter 12? What they did in comparison to what He had done might seem minuscule. I am interested in the effect in the way of fellowship, that they all could sit there and say, 'I had my part in that'. It is the Lord's wisdom in that. It seems to give you a very attractive view of what the result was that they could feel they had a part.

DJW Yes, I think that is right, and that made them more intelligent in relation to the path on which the Lord was going. It says, “Jesus therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany”. Mary might have thought this was the last opportunity she would have of bestowing this upon Him before He went into death. He had become everything to them, but Mary seems to have been given intelligence in relation to where He was going. As we come up tomorrow morning to the Lord's supper, is there a renewed appreciation of the way that the Lord went in suffering love? The emblems speak to us of that.

GMcK You spoke in the earlier reading about our spirits; do you think softening is something that the Lord is working out with us?

DJW I wondered that. I feel for myself that I need to watch my spirit.

A hard-hearted spirit would easily mark us naturally. There is a certain maturity, a certain refinement, spiritual refinement, that is manifest to all as a result of the fruit of exercises.

DJW-s Could you say something as to the word “therefore” in verse 3? What does that refer to?

DJW That was taking the opportunity; “Mary therefore” took the opportunity of bringing this ointment of pure nard in appreciation of the way those feet were going to go. She anointed them, and when that ointment was put upon Him that was when the odour filled the house. Everybody had the gain of that, and there was room for nothing else.

HTF Is there a consistency about the place that Mary frequented and appreciated? You said earlier as to Luke 10, it was “the feet of Jesus” and then in John 11: 32, “Mary therefore, when she came where Jesus was, seeing him, fell at his feet”; that is where she was. In chapter 12 all her appreciation is poured out there, the same place.

DJW That is interesting; they were the feet that trod the way from the manger to the cross in order that the will of God might be secured and that our blessing might be ensured.

RDP In chapter 12 we have the expression “where was the dead man Lazarus, whom Jesus raised”. It could have just said, ‘where was Lazarus’; but it is “the dead man”. Chapter 12 is a spiritual view of the company. There is this reminder of “the dead man, Lazarus”. Perhaps where we read in 11 it is more like the organisational side of assembly life, but this is like a spiritual view; “where was the dead man Lazarus”. Everything is proceeding harmoniously together, and the Lord is the object.

DJW It almost seems as if what was natural had been shut out once and for all. He was still a dead man to all that order of things, and he was alive in relation to another order of things where Jesus was the Centre.

DCB Colossians brings in that “ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God”, chap 3: 3. Is that suggested by Lazarus?

DJW I think it is; I have just been thinking of that. This is a Colossian scene; “where the Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God: have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth; for ye have died”, that is Lazarus, “and your life is hid with the Christ in God”, v 1-3. That was the order of things to which he was now

alive. He was dead to one order of things and alive to another. We spoke of Job this morning, and really that was taking away the first that He might establish the second. Mr James Taylor had three day meetings on that in Vancouver (vol 51 p 220-407); "He takes away the first that he may establish the second", Heb 10: 9. It goes right through the book of Job.

PWB The quantity may well have been gathered in the setting of Luke 10, that is, at His feet; it is a sphere of favour, sitting at His feet. The fragrance was produced by John 11, only that which could be suitable for His burial. That could only be secured by going through the exercise of burial itself and we need both sides. There is the favour; we accumulate substance through privilege and favourable circumstances; but we need the side that you are bringing before us of the discipline and exercise to produce the savour of this ointment that fills the house.

DJW That is what I was thinking. Chapter 12 is the result of the exercises gone into very deeply in chapter 11. My burden is that something of that character should be produced at the present time and the object of it is Christ Himself.

Manchester

22nd November 2014

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