

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE OBJECT OF ADJUSTMENT

Luke 24: 13-53

DAB What I have in mind is to see how the Lord brings in adjustment in order that the service of God might proceed in a living, fresh and vital way. The first verse of the section we began with speaks of two going to Emmaüs, and at the end of the section, it speaks of persons “continually in the temple praising and blessing God”. I wondered if we could consider the moral journey (which has been likened to a navigation chart) that was taken between these two verses, a safe passage. So the Lord in His grace in this chapter brings in the necessary guidance and adjustment which would set persons at liberty in His presence. There is currently much to concern and keep us in prayerful exercise but one thing that does exercise me is the need to be here rightly in the testimony, flowing then into what is for God's pleasure which I thought we might see in the thought of Jerusalem. We often speak of this section, the two on the way to Emmaüs. I would rather speak of two who were recovered by the Lord and desirous of going back to Jerusalem. We are all recovered persons, and I trust we are all open to adjustment by the Lord Himself, because it is the Lord Himself who brought in the adjustment here in His grace.

These persons were disappointed; they were going away. I appeal to all the dear brethren: let none of us depart from the sphere of divine operations! Let none of us be, as it says here, “downcast”. The Spirit of God is here and with us; so there is no need to be downcast. I seek to bring in encouragement in that way.

The other matter which I had in mind is the truth of the death of Christ. The persons referred to in this chapter were in one sense unbelieving, as they thought the Messiah could bring in blessing for Israel without His death. The death of Christ at the cross has been referred to as the centre of the history of God's universe, JND Synopsis on Matthew p 361. How great it is! The reference in verse 30 is not to the Lord's supper, but we might apply it later to how the breaking of bread facilitated the Lord coming into the midst. Then finally we see conditions brought about in Jerusalem that are really for the pleasure of God. I thought we could converse over these matters.

PJW I think these matters are vital at the present time. I was wondering if you could say a little more as to the specific references to adjustment? It speaks of “Jesus himself” (v 15) and “he himself” (v 36).

Say a little more as to the importance of what He does Himself.

DAB It is a question of how we identify the Lord Himself in the Scriptures; their unbelief was met by the opening out of the Scriptures by the Lord Himself. The first reference to “himself” is in verse 15, and then the second reference to “himself” is in verse 36. So it says “he himself stood in their midst”. The Lord came into something of His glory as coming into the midst Himself, do you think?

PJW We need to be together in these things. Although there were these two who went away but were recovered, it says of others in the previous section that “their words appeared in their eyes as an idle tale” (v11), so there was no difference really between anyone of the company; they all needed adjustment. Is that something we have to come to, that we cannot point the finger, but we all need to be subject to the Lord in view of adjustment?

DAB I wondered if the eleven, although a broken number, represented the authority of Christ, and these persons really came under the Lord's adjustment and authority, do you think? It is a fine thing when our wills go and what is paramount is the divine will in our lives.

DJR What really laid hold of the disciples was when they said, “The Lord is indeed risen”; beforehand they were dubious. Even these two had heard the report and gone off to the village, unbelieving; but when they came back they said, “The Lord is indeed risen”: they turned the corner after that.

DAB Yes; there was a lot of unclear speaking beforehand with these persons, possibly some confusion as well in their minds, but what you refer to in verse 34, “The Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon”, is definite speaking. We need definite speaking as to Christ, and “The Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon” was definite speaking by these persons gathered in Jerusalem. The Lord immediately links Himself on with that. We need to be clear as to the Lord's present position and how He is maintaining the testimony in faithfulness to the end, do you think?

DJR One of the things that seemed to be confusing them was the time when the kingdom was to be established, and certainly that line of thinking still continues with many in Christendom.

DAB I think we need the kingdom established in our hearts. The

kingdom leads into the assembly, and if we do not maintain the truth of the kingdom in our hearts, I do not think what is precious for the heart of Christ will be really treasured.

DJR So what is important for us is the King.

DAB Exactly, the King in His glory.

RMB I was wondering about what that expression means, to have the kingdom established in our hearts.

DAB I think it is really to seek to be here as subject to the King because it is His kingdom and the King desires that His rule might be honoured. I was thinking a little in that regard as to the sceptre that comes in in Judah, Gen 49: 10. If Christ is in our hearts and He rules in our hearts, then we will be set rightly in the kingdom.

JRW Could you say a little more as to the importance of the Scriptures? I noticed, as it was read, that the first reference is, “he interpreted to them in all the scriptures”. We have had the blessing of much interpretation of the Scriptures, but then it seems that, in verse 45, He goes further: “he opened their understanding”. For that we need the help of the Spirit in our day, do we? I wondered if the Scriptures were important in view of adjustment.

DAB I think we need to know the Scriptures by the Spirit in a greater and deeper way. The Lord “interpreted to them in all the scriptures” and then “he opened their understanding to understand the scriptures”. In our day the Spirit would open up the Scriptures to us, but I think it is important that we do not take Scripture out of context through the interpretation of the Scriptures. The Scriptures are one whole, the truth is one whole; so we need to see how the Spirit operates in that way as bringing the Scriptures before us and then being able to be adjusted ourselves by the understanding of the Scriptures.

JRW As you say, we need to be careful not to take the Scriptures out of context, and the truth is one whole. I just wondered whether the understanding along with the interpretation is where we will be preserved.

DAB I think the understanding of the Scriptures really is to be able to apply the Scriptures to ourselves first of all and to see how the truth affects me as an individual, and then we are able to merge with one another in the body and in the assembly. I think that was the reason

why they were all in Jerusalem, “continually in the temple praising and blessing God”. They were governed by the Scriptures. They were governed by the Lord's grace and His authority but they were governed by the Scriptures too, because they spoke of Him.

PJW It has often been said that the wonderful discourse (and no doubt it was), the interpretation of the Scriptures, really did not effect anything in them. It was when the Lord took the bread and blessed and broke it that it says “their eyes were opened”. So we might have an understanding or knowledge of all the ministry and all the Scriptures, but without the touch of Christ and the help of the Spirit, it will not do anything in us. Is that right?

DAB It will not have a living application. We need to see that the Scriptures speak of Him in a living way. We need to see the full blessedness of what there is in Christ and see that that shines on the page of Scripture for us. I was thinking of the difference between this discourse and what happened with Paul in Acts 20 and his discourse. The discourses of Paul must have been wonderful to listen to. In Acts 20 the discourse that Paul carried on was with a view to adjustment so that the breaking of bread, the Supper, could be taken rightly.

DH It says that they “reasoned”, “conversed and reasoned”, would that be the natural mind?

DAB Yes, exactly. “And it came to pass as they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus himself drawing nigh went with them”. I was wondering as to that. They were really reasoning in unbelief, and that can easily come into our hearts, unbelief. I think there is great danger when the enemy brings in doubts and sows discord in my own heart so that I then start to reason in a natural way. That is the Philistine mind, the natural mind in the things of God. It is a very dangerous thing. The answer is “Jesus himself drawing nigh”. In His grace, He did not write these persons off, as He had them in His mind and heart and He wished them to return to Jerusalem. I just wondered if we could get a fresh touch of the greatness of divine grace that is seen in the Lord in this passage, that recovery was in mind.

DJW These two established a living link with a living Man which they had not had before. For the Lord Jesus, “the time of singing” had come, Song of Songs 2: 12. It became “the time of singing” for these two and they were able to carry that to the Christian circle.

DAB I thought that, but there needed to be the adjustment first. “O senseless and slow of heart”: how would you or I feel if the Lord said that to us? But in His gracious touch, it brought about the adjustment and, as you say, it was as a result of that that they had the Lord come to them in His personal glory. I think there was also a touch, as well as Him coming into the midst in verse 36, just an indication of the Lord's glory, coming in at Emmaüs when He broke the bread and manifested Himself to them.

DJW That is right. It is His own personal touch in that way. It is only He that can quicken the hearts and souls and affections of the saints.

DAB The Lord Jesus Christ gives a distinctive touch which cannot be imitated. It is the Lord's own touch in these persons' souls, as it says, “their eyes were opened, and they recognised him”. We need to recognise what the Lord is doing in each one of us.

DJR So they are not offended. They know it is done in love. The Lord spoke quite severely to them in this verse. They could easily have been offended, but they realised it was said in love.

DAB I feel the need personally to be open to adjustment by the Lord Himself, and if I am going on a self-willed pathway that is leading away from Jerusalem, I need to be turned around in my affections and in my footsteps. It has been said that the Lord relieves the spirit and brings in, through His divine grace, something of His own fulness to the soul, and that is what He did in this situation. I have this in mind, dear brethren, that adjustment to these persons through divine grace was made so that His glory might be appreciated.

RHB I like to think that the Lord's ministry here, and elsewhere too, is directed to the state that actually exists. They say afterwards, “Was not our heart burning in us?” It was not simply a detached interpretation of the Scriptures but it was directed to the state of confusion or unbelief that existed in the hearts of those ministered to.

DAB I was thinking of that very thing, which the Lord brought in in His interpretation. It says here, “Ought not the Christ ... And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”. The confusion surrounded whether the Lord had redeemed Israel or not and, clearly, they had some of their own thoughts as to this, but what the Lord can bring in is of Himself. I wondered if the Lord brought in something of Isaiah chapter

9 and Isaiah chapter 53, because it would be the Old Testament Scriptures that the Lord would bring in. You think of those Old Testament Scriptures that spoke of Himself. Do you think that was something in the Lord's mind in order to make this adjustment known because His desire for *them* was that they would return to Jerusalem and brought back to the Christian circle?

RHB The Psalms were included later (v 44) as providing a rich field to speak of the sufferings of Christ and to stimulate their hearts to have part in the service of praise. I wonder whether, as we come even to occasions like these, that is what we are seeking? Is it just a happy time amongst the saints or are we prepared for our hearts to be made to burn and our souls to be searched by the word of God?

DAB If I can quote, and I forget who it was that said it, there is something in every believer that is combustible. There is something inflammable that the Lord can touch, and I just trust that in every soul in this room there is something in your heart and in my heart that can burn for Christ because, that is what the Lord is looking for. He is looking for ardent affection for Himself in a world where there is a dulling of desire and committal to the Lord Jesus - even in Christendom, and I speak not as to the persons but as to the system. I think what you say is a word for me, that there is that in these two which the Lord really sparked, brought to light, and He made into a flame for Him. They are then able to move as a result of that, do you think?

RAS Could you say a little more as to the way the Lord draws near to them? He seems to do that in both these references. In the first one, it says He drew nigh (v 15), and then it says He is "in their midst", v 36. A little earlier in the chapter they get a message from the angels: "Why seek ye the living one among the dead?" (v 5), but in relation to what you are saying as to the Lord Himself; how do we experience this nearness?

DAB Clearly in verse 15 the Lord's desire was that He might go with them. They were moving away from Jerusalem, but the Lord in His gracious touch was willing to go so far with them: "*he made as though he would go farther*", and that was a test. He was testing these persons to see whether they would settle down in their own circumstances, but the Lord was "drawing nigh"; you cannot help persons if you are at a distance from them. I think that would be the first point, and that would be why He drew near in verse 15. The other point you make as to

nearness that “he himself stood in their midst” is really a fresh manifestation of the Lord's glory so that they might appreciate who He was in His risen life. This is not the Lord in flesh and blood. This is the Lord in a risen condition and, we need to see and appreciate the Lord as He is in the Father's affections as a glorious and risen Man. He is not yet ascended here, but let us focus our minds on Christ as One who is risen.

MRC This is not the ultimate experience of the Lord's supper, but “how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread”. I have been very exercised this week: I may be at the Supper but do I know the presence of the Lord? If I am not conscious of that, I could miss some touch as to Him in the midst, or what He means to the Father's heart. This is the key, is it not? How are we sustained, how are we helped to know His manifestation at the breaking of bread?

DAB I think we need to have personal experiences with the Lord Himself in our own individual and private communion, and I cannot lay enough stress on that; and the Spirit would help us to overcome any difficulties in that way. We had recently the matter of the passover as preparation for the partaking of the Lord's supper, and I think it bears on what you are saying that, as we know what the passover means and partake of the passover, eating the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5: 8), these matters all impact on our state so that we come up rightly to the Supper. And, as we are often reminded locally, the preparation for the Supper does not begin on Lord's day morning either. I would say that in a faithful way so that we are therefore rightly exercised as we come together because the turning-point for these persons was in the breaking of bread. The turning-point in this chapter for these persons was the Lord breaking bread with them. I would also say it is a serious matter to absent ourselves from the breaking of bread. We obviously understand brethren who are laid aside and unable to get there, but if we are able to be there, we should be there.

AB Are you suggesting that the Lord's objective is in the last two verses here, that all these activities we have been speaking of had in view to leave here a company that were “praising and blessing God”?

DAB Yes, that is my exercise. Can you help us as to that?

AB Mr Bellett and others have drawn attention to the things the Lord did not do on the resurrection day. He did not vindicate Himself to the Jews, for example, or manifest Himself publicly, or prepare for the

kingdom, as we have been saying. I have enjoyed the thought that, in grace, He worked to recover these two and I have been satisfied with that thought, but if He had an objective beyond that, to leave a company that was “praising and blessing God”, that takes my thought further, which, I think, is very good.

DAB You have encapsulated my simple exercise. We might have been content just to stop at verse 35, these persons being adjusted, and also maybe verse 36, the Lord coming in and standing in their midst, but my exercise was really what was left. The forty days are not mentioned in Luke, but what He does in the activities of divine grace and through His priestly service is to leave a company in His testimony praising and blessing God

AB So if we are concerned to understand the Scriptures and have our understanding opened, if we are exercised to be rightly at the Supper and other things that have been said this morning, we need to remember that the Lord is serving us so that we in turn should praise and bless God.

DAB Exactly. That is my exercise that we might experience the Lord's service to us individually. This is not just limited to these two; it is not just limited to the apostles; it is not just limited to persons we speak of or read of in the Bible; it is you and me. The Lord is able to bring in this service of grace, whatever that might be. Your exercises might be different from my exercises. For these two, they were disappointed and were going away, and the Lord was recovering them, but they were intended to be part of this praising company at the end of the chapter which goes on into the beginning of the Acts, the upper room and the persons who were really the nucleus of the assembly. You can see how the Lord is preparing these steps of grace so that what is for His heart might be maintained here.

AB What I feel about the present time is that fresh energy is needed among the brethren, which I think would be inspired by a purpose of heart to have a greater measure in the divine service.

DAB I feel that very much. There are things that I as a young man did not need to wrestle with, but for you young people, there are all sorts of temptations, which we need to be very aware of and very clear in our judgment as to, so that what is vital and fresh and living for the heart of Christ is maintained amongst us. Otherwise what happens is that spiritual dullness sets in, and the next thing you find is a lack of vitality in

the service of God. These are my exercises to bring before the dear brethren. I am not accusing anyone. I am not pointing any fingers because I feel the need of it in my own heart, but the Lord's own touch in what little adjustment or great adjustment that I need is all in view of what is for the pleasure of God in the service of God, and that continues to the very end.

RDP Does the second part of what the Lord says - not only that He should suffer but that He should "enter into his glory" bear on that? I was thinking that when we have a touch with the Lord, we do not have a touch with Him as He was when He was here. We have a touch with Him as He is glorified. I think that is a great stimulus for us to serve Him and to have part in the service of God because we are having to do with a glorified Man.

DAB Exactly. He is not an ascended Man exactly in the passage we are considering, until the point where He is carried up in Luke, but I just wondered if we really got a sense of His glory coming in as He came into the midst and said, "Peace be unto you". Now, that is what the Lord does on Lord's day morning; He comes in and He says, "Peace be unto you". I think we get a sense of the Lord's glory every Lord's day morning as our eyes are open for it and we are attuned, you might say, to His presence.

RDP If we do not get a sense of the Lord's glory, we will not be stimulated in relation to these things. I was just thinking what it really brings us on to is a glorified system of things. We will not get into these things if we are just in the doldrums in earthly things here. We are in relation to another Man in another world. We need to get that sense of His glory. The devil has always been very active to try to deflect the saints from the glory of Christ. I think what you are bringing before us is very helpful for the present day.

DAB The Lord sought to bring before them a glorified Man but a Man also who had to suffer. We had the question raised recently what it means to apply the death of Christ; how does each one of us do it? Quite simply, I judge myself with the help of the Holy Spirit and keep the life of the Lord Jesus before me in all His glory. That is how we will also be maintained in nearness to the death of Christ - it has not only met my sins but it has completely removed the whole root cause and the issue, and that is sin in all its awfulness and what I am. Now, if that is gone, and it is gone for you, there is nothing but wonderful enjoyment of

Christ's life and glory.

RDP I think the understanding of the Scriptures comes from a sense of Christ glorified. Everything looked on, not just to His death, but to His resurrection and His glorification. If we see the Scriptures in that light, we will get a greater understanding of what God had in mind in them.

DAB That is helpful because I think otherwise it just becomes historical to us and even the ministry could become historical. We need to apply the truth to our souls and then our affections so that we are living by the good of these things, not just having a mental appreciation of it.

GCB Do you think that as well as being diverted from the glory of Christ above, we might also be diverted from what is due to Him here in His assembly?

DAB I feel the maintenance of that amongst us, that there should be nothing coming in, through divergence of thought or divergence of walk, that would militate against what is for God's pleasure. If we absent ourselves from the service of God or if we fail in our desire to remember Him, then we are selfish, and we are reducing what there is for the blessed God Himself in the assembly. I view that as a very serious matter and I think we need to be encouraged in our mind to see that what is for God is of paramount importance with us. That is what I have in mind, what is for the pleasure of God and "praising and blessing God". These persons continued in that during the ten days until the Spirit came, and then there was a fresh manifestation of life and light as the Spirit came in. There was that which was maintained in these persons which was in the good and blessing of what we have in this passage.

AM The company here was gathered together already but what made the way for the Lord to come and manifest Himself, it appears in this account, was the testimony of those who had had to do with a living Christ. That changed the whole situation, did it not?

DAB Go on then, just help us as to that.

AM Well, the company was there: "they found the eleven, and those with them". There was outward order and that sort of thing, but they needed the touch from One who had come out of death, a living Man, and that not only stimulates the company, but it is "as they were saying these things" that Jesus came and "stood in their midst". There was a

basis there for Him to come.

DAB That is helpful. I was wondering that. "They found the eleven, and those with them, gathered together, saying, The Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon". Now, I take it that it was the company that were saying these things. "And they related what had happened on the way," - that is the two now that had been "on the way" - "and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread". We might say they were fresh from that experience, because they did not wait until the next day or the next day after to come back, did they? They came back "the same hour" when "their eyes were opened"; and "they said to one another, Was not our heart burning in us as he spoke to us on the way, and as he opened the scriptures to us?". That was the immediate turning point in their experience, and they returned to this company; and brought something of the glory and blessedness of that Man out of death to them. Does that stimulate my heart, the glory of that blessed truth?

DJW Is it significant, do you think, that He said, "Have ye anything here to eat? And they gave him part of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb". The honeycomb would speak to us of what is mutual, do you think? The service of God is a mutual occasion; one after another can give some expression to what their impression of Christ is.

DAB It is a question of what each one of us has. Have I anything at all for Christ? Have I any impression that I have gathered up? In one sense the Lord's supper is a fresh occasion every week; in another sense we gather up from the previous week through our exercises and our impressions of the Lord, and we bring them into that occasion. But, just to touch on that point, there is progression here; there is a way in here; and you have mentioned these persons and what they had, and my exercise also is, what would we have that we could share with the Lord? "And they gave him part of a broiled fish", not 'a broiled fish' but "part of a broiled fish". There was something that was shared with the Lord Himself that these persons had enjoyed, and the Lord appreciated that and it says, "he took it and ate before them". And, as you say, "of a honeycomb" which suggests the mutuality of the saints so that when Christ comes in, His desire is to enjoy what we have, do you think?

AW In a practical way, how am I easily adjusted? Naturally I like to carry on as I am because I think I am better than everybody else, but I was thinking of John the baptist. He was one that said, "He must

increase, but I must decrease", John 3: 30.

DAB Well, how these persons were adjusted was by the Lord taking the bread, blessing it, "and having broken it, gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognised him". I was just thinking that for us by application the point of adjustment and recovery is the Lord's supper, and seeing that the Lord's rights are to be acknowledged. As we come together, it is not our will; it is the Lord's will. I wondered too as to "rising up the same hour, they returned to Jerusalem": no one told them to do that; that was a spiritual instinct. So what we are finding now with these persons is that, instead of going away and conversing about what they thought about matters, they are coming under the Lord's direction and they are coming under another will altogether, the Lord's will. As we are doing that, I think our spiritual instincts become attuned to what is right and what is wrong and we then begin to move in a pathway that is pleasing to the Lord, that leads to the enjoyment of the service of God.

AB I have heard it suggested that the way the Lord did this 'rang a bell': they had seen Him do this before. I was thinking maybe the answer to our brother's question is simplicity - we should not let our experiences with the Lord pass away from us because we may need them again. The Lord acts very simply; He just does something that they could remember, and it brings home to them the reality that this was Someone they did have a link with and, He was there a living Man among them.

DAB I think that is good; so is it a question then of keeping short accounts and being simple in our links with divine Persons? We live in a complex world with all sorts of views as to different matters and we can easily become affected by these things. But simplicity in our affections for the Lord, and seeking to be governed by His will, and His authority too, because authority embraced one alongside each other, means that we will come under the divine will.

AB One of the problems about keeping short accounts is that we turn the page and maybe we forget what the Lord gave us before. I also remember being at a reading once when a brother said, 'The Lord is entitled to ask us here this morning, "Have ye anything here to eat?"' That is something I remember from the past and something I think about when I come to the meetings; that the Lord has not just come, as was said, to entertain us, but He has come to share something with us.

He must go away as satisfied as we are.

DAB I feel that exactly. While there is that for the divine pleasure, the Lord is seeking something for Himself as amongst the saints, do you think? It is a question of what we have. Through our exercises, or through any priestly adjustment that the Lord might bring in, we are ready for Him. We have something; we have some spiritual substance. It is what is gathered up, and what was there was readily available because really what the Lord was expressing here was the reality of His humanity. There is no difference in His grace as He was here as a Man who healed persons from their diseases as He is now. There is no difference to the extent of grace, is there? He was in a different condition, but the same manhood.

TJH These persons had been adjusted by His long-suffering, “*he made as though he would go farther*”, but then He is found here “in their midst”. In John's gospel, He is “in the midst”, John 20: 26, and “in the midst of them” in Matthew's gospel (chap 18: 20). Here He is “in their midst”? I wonder if, as we find our place at the Lord's supper, we find that priestly confirmation of the Lord placing Himself “in their midst”, in the midst of those who have had adjustment, would you say?

DAB He appreciated what there was in Jerusalem at this point. He appreciated what there was in these persons. That is why, I think, it says, “*he himself stood in their midst*”. You have rightly said what is in Matthew and what is in John, but in Luke it is priestly grace, and standing “in their midst” is the Lord appreciating what these persons were and what there was in subjection to Him, and, coming under His authority, they were ready for this appearing. And that is a question for us: are we ready for the Lord to manifest Himself to us in this way? “Peace be unto you”. In Luke they are confounded. There is still this element of confusion. They were “frightened, supposed they beheld a spirit”. “Why are ye troubled?” What I thought is in this passage is the blessedness and preciousness of the Lord's own humanity that comes out in asking these persons, “Have ye anything here to eat?”. Why did the Lord need anything to eat? He was in a raised condition. But it is to demonstrate that although He was in a different condition, He was still the same blessed Person to them as He was before, do you think?

TJH Not only is He interpreting in verse 27, but He is demonstrating His long-suffering to make “as though he would go farther”, but He is making a further demonstration of it. I share your exercise as to the

Lord's supper. No one would want to miss the Lord placing Himself "in their midst", and more so He Himself being "in the midst".

DH Peter needed adjustment in Matthew 17. He had some questions and propositions, but it says in the end, "they saw no one but Jesus alone", v 8. That was the blessed result of Him coming in.

DAB Very good, and what was the fruit of the adjustment? Peter's epistles. He grew in his appreciation of the divine glory and, dear brethren, are we growing in our appreciation of Christ and His glory? You read Matthew 17 and then you read Peter's epistle and you see the difference, and in that period there was a long journey that Peter traversed and he came to it as to the greatness of what Christ was in all His glory.

RHB I was thinking that this gospel begins with "a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men", chap 2: 13, 14. I wondered whether what is secured at the end here is really a heavenly company on earth. Their thoughts had been connected with the setting up of the kingdom on earth, but the result of the Lord's activities is He is able to bless them. I wondered if that indicated the greatness of what was secured in this company, that they were really apart from the whole system of things around them.

DAB That is exactly what I thought. They were separate from what was there in Jerusalem. Had they really reached "the Jerusalem above" which "is free", Gal 4: 26? They were really in liberty of spirit now as opposed to what would mark Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was where the Lord was crucified, where He met his death, and yet here were persons maintained in Jerusalem, quite apart from everything. I was thinking when you were speaking as to blessing: the priest's activities in Numbers 6, where Aaron blesses the people, prefigure the Lord lifting up His hands and blessing these persons. So what does it mean to have the blessing of the Lord?

RHB You could say what your thought is as to that, but it is presented as an abiding impression: "having lifted up his hands, he blessed them. And it came to pass as he was blessing them, he was separated from them". It conveys that it was the one great impression that the Lord would leave with this company. Peter speaks of it in his epistle: "ye have been called to this, that ye should inherit blessing", 1 Pet 3: 9. We may need to be reminded of that sometimes.

DAB Well, it is not exactly the side of power here. I wonder as to this matter of the Lord being “carried up”: “he was separated from them and was carried up into heaven”. “And it came to pass”, it says, “as he was blessing them”. It is really priestly grace in all its blessed activity towards these persons, and they were really full of that and, as being full of it, do you think, we are able to continue in this way?

RHB It is the activity of divine love, is it not?

DAB Well, love and grace go on together, do they not?

PJW Do you think it is a certain pattern for the dispensation?

DAB What do you mean by that?

PJW Well, the Lord's blessing continues, and so, I trust, does being “continually in the temple praising and blessing God”. Somewhere that will be carried on until the Lord comes. Your exercise is that we should be in that company conscious of the Lord's blessing and responding to it in this way, do you think?

DAB Well, I feel that we should be rightly there, whatever adjustment needs to come in, and as seeking and experiencing the Lord's own touch in whatever circumstances, we are then ready to be brought together; because really the Lord in this section was gathering His people. He was not seeking any dispersion. He was seeking not to lose any. He was gathering these persons; the eleven gathered at Jerusalem. The Lord wanted these two persons to return there into the enjoyment of that Christian circle, and then, we might say, it widens out into the matter of “continually in the temple praising and blessing God”. Then it moves into the beginning of the Acts, and we can see the whole thing widening out into the assembly position.

PJW Yes, I noticed as it was read it speaks of “the eleven, and those with them, gathered together”. That was no doubt the fruit of the Lord's work, do you think? Then, as you say, He could come to that company, and it speaks in Acts of the time the Lord Jesus came in and “being assembled with them, commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem”, chap 1: 4.

DAB Does that give a dignity to the gathering of the saints? We are not just a motley gathering of individual persons, but we are gathered together with this in mind, and the Lord having adjusted us, we are there together having these wonderful relationships together in divine grace.

AB As to the blessing of Abraham, Melchisedec said, “Blessed be

Abram of the Most High God ... And blessed be the Most High God", Gen 14: 19, 20. There are these two sides.

DAB Go on. Just expand on it.

AB Well, I am going back to the question at the beginning about the kingdom, about the kingdom being in our hearts. There is a great river of blessing coming down from God, which is for the benefit of those who subject themselves to His grace and to His rights, and a return from those people to gratify the heart of God. My impression is that you need all that to get a right idea of the kingdom. The kingdom is not just administration. The kingdom is realised where there is an answer from our hearts to the outshining of God.

DAB I feel that. This whole section, and particularly towards the end, is the blessedness of the administration of divine grace, and that is not just administration of practical matters; the administration of divine grace is really what is flowing from heaven and is supporting and helping forward what is here for the heart of God in testimony. Luke stresses the matter of grace, but he also stresses the public position - Luke does not tell us that He came through closed doors. I wondered as to what there is here maintained for the pleasure of God in a broken day but yet in a real and vital way. As I said at the very beginning, my exercise is that through the adjustment of these persons, what the Lord was driving at was the maintenance of what was pleasurable for God and the continuance of the service of God.

AB And those who took up the preaching of the gospel in the beginning of the Acts were people who characteristically praised and blessed God.

DAB Exactly. It is interesting that that comes in here "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things". The Lord was charging them: 'That is what you have to do; you have to go out there'. So the gospel and the assembly and the service of God are all very much interlinked, are they not?

JRW Can you say something as to what He says as to being "clothed with power from on high"? Is that an important feature in what we are saying? We have spoken as to His death and we have spoken as to His resurrection and we have spoken as to His ascension. It seems to be a result of His ascension that they are "clothed with power from on high". They are furnished with the power and strength that is necessary for

this “praising and blessing God” to be maintained.

DAB The Lord does not refer explicitly to the Spirit: “till ye be clothed with power from on high”. But it is clearly a reference to the Spirit. When the Lord went on high there was a period of ten days before the Spirit came. Now these persons were to be maintained. I have often thought, and the brethren will help me if I am wrong, that these persons were maintained before the Spirit came by something of the Lord's ministry to them which particularly comes in in John 14-17. When the Spirit came there was this additional power that came from the Father Himself.

JRW I think it helps to see that side of it because of what we get at the start of the section and the end of the section. At the start of the section they are “downcast”; they are conversing and reasoning. I wondered whether precious things are available in our day. There is the Lord Jesus Christ “always living to intercede for them”, Heb 7: 25. That is where He is at the present time. And we are “clothed with power from on high” in that we have received the Holy Spirit. There is divine resource to maintain us in vitality and livingly in relation to the service of God.

DAB That is exactly what my exercise is, that we might be maintained but not in our own strength. We need this blessed power and that power was sent from the Father's own presence, the Father's Spirit, and He is the One who indwells each one of us. He indwells you and He indwells me if we have received the Holy Spirit, and therefore He would maintain us. I was thinking how also we have spoken about the interpretation and the understanding, and I think you mentioned that it is the Spirit who would guide us into the blessings of these things now, the truth opened out in the power of the Holy Spirit. So, just before we close, I referred at the very beginning to this being like a navigation chart and, dear brethren, where do we get our bearings from? Do we get our spiritual bearings from Christendom, because if we do, then things will become chaotic? Do we get our bearings from the brethren? Sometimes *that* can cause some difficulties. We need to get our bearings from Christ Himself and to see that everything is in that blessed Man. I think these persons came to understand that if they have their bearings from Christ, they will be maintained in right relations with these other brethren and then what proceeds in the service of God would be rightly taken up and enjoyed.

JRW I think that is helpful because I remember my father used to say that the ten days were a witness and a tribute to the work of Christ Himself in their hearts as able to stand in such adverse conditions without the Spirit.

DAB I feel that. There must have been something there that had been truly wrought in their souls that was maintained in faithfulness until the Spirit would come, because they knew they were going to receive another power from on high. Meanwhile, how were they being maintained? What a wonderful privilege we have in our own day because of what the Lord said in John's gospel: "In that day" (chap 14: 20), that is the Spirit's day, and that is the day we are in now, dear brethren. It is a wonderful day. Let us be encouraged as to these things!

GCB Where you began reading, they brought their thoughts into the Lord's presence, but the rest of the chapter He brings His thoughts to them. We tend to take our thoughts into the Lord's presence.

DAB Sometimes we take them into the Lord's presence, and it is almost like we believe that we know better than the Lord, but the Lord bringing His thoughts into our hearts, these are heavenly thoughts; they are not earthly thoughts; He appreciates how we feel as to these matters. If we leave ourselves open for divine manifestation the Lord will give us fresh impressions of Himself, and that will help and sustain the service of God while we are left here.

Strood

4th October 2014

List of Initials:

DABrown, Grangemouth; R H Brown, East Finchley; R M Brown, East Finchley; A Burr, London; G C Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; M R Cook, Folkestone; T J Harvey, East Finchley; D Hawgood, Bexley; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; R D Painter, Yeovil; D J Roberts, Strood; R A Smith, Strood; J R Walkinshaw, Maidstone; P J Walkinshaw, Strood; A Wraighte, Strood; D J Wright, Havering

THE FEAR OF GOD

Norman J Henry

Hebrews 12: 28-29

1 John 3: 19-20

1 Samuel 1: 9-11, 24-28

2 Samuel 7: 1-7, 12-15, 18-19

Exodus 33: 10-11

Acts 27: 18-24

I want to speak of the fear of God. It is something that there is not much of in the world now. In my lifetime there used to be a measure of godliness, and that is disappearing. I believe that God would raise the matter with us, at the end of this day. I think there is a need for the fear of God in every one of our hearts. I speak for myself; in what we say, what we think, what we do we need to be governed by respectful fear of God. We have been speaking about the Spirit; "he will bring demonstration to the world" (John 16: 8), and in 1 Timothy 4 the Spirit of God is speaking distinctly and clearly, and is expressive towards the saints as to the appalling conditions that exist in the world which we must be apart from. I think the fear of God will keep us on a separate path. You will remember that when the nations were brought in with Cornelius, the testimony of his pious servants was that he was God-fearing, Acts 10: 22. Peter comes to it that those that fear God and work righteousness are acceptable to God, v 35; that is how those of the nations came in. They came in on the basis that they were God-fearing. Do you not think that is a real challenge to our hearts as to whether we are respectfully fearing God? We are having to do with God; He is supreme. We love the family relations that we have with God, and we are His sons, we are in the family of God; but most of our time we are moving amongst men, we are in the kingdom in that sense, and are we God-fearing persons? We need to be here suitable and acceptable to God.

Now when you come to Hebrews, it says, "Wherefore let us, receiving a kingdom not to be shaken". The writer has already said that everything created is going to be shaken! He says that God is going to shake the heavens and the earth, and then in verse 27, "But this, Yet once, signifies the removing of what is shaken, as being made, that what is not shaken may remain". Well, I want to tell you, dear brother and sister, we have touched on things that God is working in your soul

that cannot be shaken: is that not wonderful! There is something given of God in the soul of a believer that will never be shaken! In other words, new creation cannot be changed, it cannot be shaken; it stands inviolate in a changing world, a corrupting world, because you have a nature given of God that cannot sin. But we are still in conditions where we know the first order of man. God has operated through redemption, and what is new is formed by the Spirit of God. You cannot link the Spirit of God with what I am after the flesh; He is working according to the principle of redemption that God has worked out through Christ. So it says here, "Wherefore let us, receiving a kingdom not to be shaken", that is that you will stand, dear brother and dear sister, in an evil world. You will not be overcome by it, that is the great point of the kingdom, and it says, "have grace, by which let us serve God acceptably with reverence and fear". I think every one of us should be searched in our personal relations with God.

So we come to John's epistle. It says, "that if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things". Fear of God is normal in persons in relationship with God. So when matters come up we must remember that God is greater than our hearts. You work out everything with God. I think that is beautiful: how assuring! I have read about these four persons, and these persons feared God. They were God-fearing. We have Hannah, David, Joshua and Paul; persons that met difficult circumstances in their lives. We have to meet difficult circumstances in our lives. God knows all things; "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart", that is wonderful! And He is dealing with us, and He is dealing with these persons, and I just wanted to bring out what they stand for.

If we come to 1 Samuel, Hannah is going through very grave experience. She is barren, she has no child, and Peninnah provoked her. It was rather remarkable that it was when they went up to serve, to sacrifice, that she provoked her and Hannah got no pleasure there. She was being pushed down by it. And then it says that Elkanah her husband says, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?". That is a poor remark, is it not? The woman was barren; she wanted a child; she did not request from God that Peninnah would be removed, or that the provocation would be less. The position was that she had God's thoughts, thoughts put in her soul by God. She not only had God's thoughts, but she adhered to them; and I want to tell you, dear young brother and sister, if you get something in your soul from God, adhere to

it! It is something pure and solid in your life that you can rely on. She did not get any sympathy from Eli the priest: he says, 'You have been drinking'. She was praying, there was movement of her lips, it was not audible, but God heard it, and God answered that prayer. I think it is lovely to see that, and when she brings the boy up to the temple, Eli "worshipped Jehovah there". There was an influence in this woman by her adherence to what God had put in her heart, and that is a very great thing. While she did not have the sympathy of Eli she certainly found strength in her link with God and her request is met. That is blessed!

Now when you come to David you might say you have got a man whose heart condemned him. He had disappointment. You might have disappointments in your life, certain things you cannot do. He wanted to build a house for God. and God says, 'I have never asked for it'. God put it into David's soul because David supplied the material for it, but he was not the man to build the house; he had shed blood. It is the son who builds God's house and the son is a man of peace. Is that not beautiful! And what happens; does David say, 'Well, I am giving up'? Persons say that, 'I am disappointed, I am going to walk off', but I do not know where they are going, because the best thing is to come into the presence of God. David goes in, and he sits down restful there; I think he accepts it and he gets an impression of Christ. He says, "And is this the manner of man, Lord Jehovah?": he gets something of Christ in his soul. Each one of these persons gets something in their soul. Hannah got something in her soul, and David got it. There is something very special when you accept the will of God and respect Him. You find something gets into your soul that can never be got anywhere else.

When you come to Exodus 33, here is the young man Joshua. I have been thinking of this young man; he remained in the tent. The pillar of cloud is introduced in Exodus 13, and God is leading the people out by it, and when it comes to the Red Sea the pillar of cloud and fire stands between the army of the Egyptians and the Israelites and it lights up the night, chap 14: 19, 20. Is that not beautiful, the night is lit up? God is protecting His people. No person went between the army of the Egyptians and the people of Israel, no one, because the pillar of cloud and fire stood as a protector. Remember that, friend: the first thing to come into your soul and your spiritual history is that there is a Protector there. You are not left to your own devices, but there is a Protector there; He stands there. The Spirit in type stands as Protector. Is that not blessed! And then the cloud appeared in Exodus 16: 10. But where

we read it says that the pillar of cloud stood at the entrance of the tent. It is the evidence of the presence of God known here. You hear persons saying, 'Well, I will try and find a suitable church to go to'. If the rights of God and the love of God are expressed in the company, and the word of God is there, and the judgment of evil there, that is where God is. We want to provide conditions to experience His presence. And when we go out to the meeting we want to know the Lord's presence. The Lord has rights; He spoke to all the assemblies at the beginning of Revelation. Moses goes back into the camp; what does Joshua do? Does he do the same? No, Joshua remained in the tent. Now that is a big lesson book for us. He would have to pass the pillar of cloud if he went out of the tent because that was at the entrance; that will hold you. I want to tell you something that struck me this past week. The enemy will always attack the service of God; that is what I believe. The very fundamental intention and motive of the enemy is to spoil the service of God, and the scripture that came to me was that of Judah. His name means 'praise' and Judah is the law giver, Ps 60: 7. I think the service of God is protected by divine rights, and I just say the enemy wants to spoil what is in the company of the Lord's people. I look at the potential here; our hearts just love to see potential. Two weeks ago, in the service to God, three young brothers gave out hymns to God and one was on his feet and I thanked God for that. We want to hold all the young brothers and sisters; we know what the world is like. We once were young, you may never be old; the Lord may come and you might not reach old age; but one thing is that we know what the world is like and its intent and the world wants the young. Pharaoh proposed that the little ones should remain in Egypt "go now, ye that are men, and serve Jehovah", Exod 10: 10. Moses says, "We will go with our young and with our old" (v 9): everyone is going to come with us. And I say to you, the desire of Christ is to hold every one here for the testimony; that is what *He* wants.

Now when you come to the Acts of the Apostles; what a dark day that was, what an exercise for Paul. God supported Paul in going to Rome to witness before Cæsar and here he is, and it looks hopeless. Was his link with God broken? Oh no! There will be tests that come up in your life, and you say, 'Am I going to keep near to God in this matter?'. Young brethren, there will be exercises that arise; are you going to be with God about it? How could Paul stand up in a boat that was wallowing about in the ocean ready to sink? He stands up and he addresses them; this is not an easy matter. He did that because an angel of God had stood by Him. "For an angel of the God, whose I am

and whom I serve, stood by me this night”; that is how you meet that difficulty. You will come to some difficulty and you will find how you are going to overcome; the blessed Spirit of God will support you. Paul could stand up in that company and say, “partake of food”! Think of that. He gave thanks for it. Those poor bewildered mariners! They went for days and despite all their training and expertise in maritime life they were helpless, defenceless, aimless; that is what the world is like! The world is going on aimlessly. It does not know where it are going; it is going on to judgment and that is why we need to be separate from it. Here it says that he stood up and he says, “Wherefore be of good courage”. What a word! Who gave him the word? God gave him the word - “God is greater than our heart”. He gave him it and in such a circumstance he says, “partake of food, for this has to do with your safety”. Do we not find that in these two days there has been food for our safety? The blessed privileges are tomorrow, the Lord's day, and then we may have to go back next week to school or work or retirement. You have always got to overcome as long as you are here, and you have to prove God in it, and that is why we need the element of the fear of God; you have to be respectful to God. Thank God He has opened His heart to us and we are with Christ before the Father; that is glorious. What a wonderful privilege! But we are still here. The thief on the cross died on the day he was converted but Saul of Tarsus did not; he was meant to live a life of committal to Christ, and that is what we are called to do. And I just say to keep that thought before you, that with reverence and fear we are to serve God. It is acceptable to God for that spirit to mark us, because the god of this world makes his claim on us. Finally the devil will be cast out, but at the moment we are going through this world and I trust we will be marked soberly as we are amongst men with the fear and respect of the blessed God.

May the Lord bless the word.

Aberdeen ID

5th July 2014

COMPANIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

John A BROWN

Psalm 45: 6, 7

Colossians 2: 11-14

1 Samuel 25: 29 (to “God”)

Hebrews 3: 14

Philemon 17-19, 1-6

These verses from Psalm 45 were read last Lord's day afternoon, and they confirmed the impression that I had for this meeting, dear brethren. I want to speak about companionship and partnership, and “the bundle of the living”. What a privilege it is to know that, as believers, we are companions of Christ, but it is even better to experience it and to enjoy it. This verse in Psalm 45 brings it before us very attractively. We often speak about it in the service of God; we speak to the Lord Jesus, and about how He is exalted in His place of supremacy, “anointed ... with the oil of gladness above thy companions”. In everything that we say and think about the Lord Jesus, we always guard His supremacy; it is *above His companions*. That, dear young brethren, is why I do not call the Lord Jesus my brother. There are many believers who do that, and I would not criticise them if they do not know any better. We are His brethren, but He is anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions. We guard the supremacy, the uniqueness and the glory of Jesus. Every time we speak to Him, every time we speak about Him, we remember who He is; but, nevertheless, what a wonderful thing it is to know that we are recognised by Him as His companions.

I would like to convey the immense privilege of being acknowledged by the Lord Jesus as His companions. He *needs* companions. That is why He came to this world. He came to save sinners - blessed be His Name! - but He came to obtain companions. He came, of course, to win His assembly. He came to fulfil the Father's will. There are so many things we could speak about which the Lord Jesus came to do and to secure, but He came to secure companions for His pleasure and for the pleasure of our God and Father. We often refer to how He sings in the assembly (Heb 2: 12); He sings with those whom He has secured for the pleasure of God. It is a wonderful thing to remember that when you are at work, or when you are walking down the street; you are one of the Lord's companions. That will change the way you think about your behaviour, the way that you act. There is a dignity about being a companion of Christ, although of course it is always spoken of in the collective, as is sonship. I remember being told

about a brother who who spent an hour telling a visitor what a wonderful privilege it was that *he*, one of the believers among the millions of people in the city where he lived, had been marked out by God as one of His sons. The dignity and the distinctiveness of sonship was in that man's heart. He lived in a shack with an earth floor, but what absorbed him was the privilege of what it was to be one of the sons of God.

I have been thinking of the dignity and the privilege of being companions of the Lord Jesus. But there is a moral basis for that privilege, and in these verses that we have read in Psalm 45 it says,

... a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom;
Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness;
therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with
the oil of gladness above thy companions.

We can say that there is a moral reason for everything that God does. Think of the basis that the Lord Jesus has given God: "a sceptre of uprightness". The kingdom of God is marked by that; it is marked by what is right. The Lord Jesus came here in all the blessedness of His holy Person and He exemplified that:

... a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom;
Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness.

And so God has done this, "anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy companions". How glad the Lord Jesus is, speaking very carefully and reverently, to have companions who can appreciate Him, who can appreciate His glory, who can appreciate what He has done for them, but more than that, who can appreciate *something* of what God the Father finds in Him.

There is a moral way for us into the enjoyment of companionship, and that moral way is set out in Colossians. You may have noticed the three references to "with him". First of all, it speaks of circumcision "in the putting off of the body of the flesh". That refers to the death of Christ. Then in the last verse we read, it speaks of how the Lord Jesus, has "effaced the handwriting in ordinances which stood out against us". What was against us, Jesus has taken away. What "was contrary to us, he has taken it also out of the way, having nailed it to the cross". I trust, dear brethren, that everyone here has experienced coming to Christ. Maybe in wretchedness, in despair, in need, but coming in faith; putting your faith in that blessed One, the Son of God, who has loved you and given Himself for you (Gal 2: 20), coming in repentance but knowing that He has taken away all that stood against you. This is not a gospel preaching, but there is never a time when we

cannot preach the gospel. I trust that you are in the experience of what I am speaking about, knowing that the Lord Jesus has died for you to take away what stood out against you. There is only one way for you to have that handwriting removed and that is through faith in the work of Jesus, the One who took it away and nailed it to the cross. What a Saviour He is. Once it is away, it never can come back again. I have forgotten most of the sins I ever committed, but when I come into the presence of my God on my knees, I can speak to Him without a cloud. That handwriting has been taken away. What a wonderful thing that is otherwise, how could we be free in the presence of God? That is what Jesus has done.

But there is something else: not only has He died for me, but then I have to come to it that I have died too. I have died with Him; but I have to put to death the deeds of the body and that is a hard thing to do. I have to see that all that I am according to nature, the good things and the bad things, have to be put to death, and they have been put away in the death of Christ. That is true of me as a believer, but I have to come to it in my experience. So there is a sequence of moral steps, which are sometimes difficult for us to understand and accept, but we have them here. First of all "buried with him in baptism". I think that everyone here has been baptised. You probably cannot remember it although there will be a few dear believers here who have been baptised in adulthood. It is what baptism involves that matters, "buried with him in baptism". That means that what we are after the flesh, the amiable things as well as the disreputable things, have all been put away in the burial of the Lord Jesus. That forms the moral basis of the way we must come into the blessed experience of being "companions of the Christ". Nothing of that first order of man is any use to God, and it is all gone in the death of Jesus. If I have myself before me, I cannot enjoy the companionship of Christ, although others around me may. You may have had the experience, as I have had, of sitting in a meeting and seeing others around me enjoying it and knowing that I am not in the good of it myself. Well, if you have had that experience, or if you are having it at this very moment, then the Lord Jesus would reach out to you in His grace and draw you. He would say, 'I want you; I need you close to me'. The closer we get to God, Mr Stoney said, the closer we get to Christ, and the closer we get to one another, vol 4 p288. Christianity is a wonderful system of relationships. It is a sphere, a realm of relationships. I desire that everyone here has accepted that what we are has gone in the death and burial of the Lord Jesus. This is the truth of baptism.

Then we have been "raised with him". What a wonderful thing that is! The fact that Jesus has been raised is the foundation of my

faith. People were making a fool of a young man, saying, 'You are a Christian, but God is dead.' He said, 'He cannot be dead; I was speaking to Him this morning'. He is a living Saviour, alive, real, and we are "raised with him". This is the essence of Christianity; not words, not even the Scriptures, although we need the word of God, and, of course, it is living, Heb 4: 12. But the essence of Christianity is a living relationship with a Man who is risen and we are risen with Him. When you are risen with Christ, it gives you a different view of the things of this world. They may still attract the flesh. I find that things which I thought would have fallen away by now are still there and I have to judge them, but it is worth it, because "raised with him" brings you into a realm of life which cannot be got into any other way. There are no shortcuts into "raised with him"; there are no shortcuts into companionship with Christ or into the enjoyment of the Christian circle. There is a moral road that we all have to travel and sometimes it takes us a long time to learn that. Sometimes we take diversions off it; we try something else, maybe we go back as the man on the Jericho road (Luke 10: 30) had done. Perhaps he had been in Jerusalem, and maybe he had enjoyed something of what Jerusalem spoke of, but then he was going away from it. If there is anyone like that in this room today, I trust that you will hear the voice of the Lord Jesus saying, 'I want you to be one of my companions'.

The third "with him" is, "And you, being dead in offences and in the uncircumcision of your flesh he has quickened together with him". What a wonderful thing it is to be "quickened together with" the Lord Jesus. Quickening is not a doctrine. It does not happen by faith. It is not something about which you can say, 'I know I am quickened because I have faith for it'. It happens. It is the power of the Holy Spirit of life in you as a believer, giving you an experience of something happening, something welling up in your heart in responsiveness to God. Quickening is real and Paul wrote to these believers "you ... he has quickened together with him". As we sang:

Quickened with Him in life divine,
Raised with Him from the dead (Hymn 40).

So companions of the Christ are those who have been "quickened together with him". "Buried with him" is association with Him in His death, and that does make a difference. The things that I used to like to do are part of what Christ has died to draw me away from, by the blessed attractiveness of who He is as the One who seeks our companionship. But "quickened together with him" means that we are made to live in His life. We enjoy something of that heavenly order of things that we were speaking about in the reading.

And so we come into what Abigail so beautifully speaks of in this verse in Samuel, “the bundle of the living”. That phrase has always laid hold of me. She speaks to David. She is correcting him; she is helping him; she is morally greater than David at this point. David with his men were bent on murder and Abigail turned it all round. What a wonderful person she was! She knew the heart of God better than David did at this point, but she says something to him that is most attractive: “And if a man is risen up to pursue thee and to seek thy life, the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with Jehovah thy God”. It is not just “bound in the bundle of the living” but it is “with Jehovah thy God!” It suggests nearness to Christ; it is nearness to divine Persons. That is what Mr Stoney had in mind when he said that the nearer we get to God, the nearer we get to Christ, and the nearer we get to one another. It is “in the bundle of the living”; it is a most attractive thought. It is like the Christian circle; it is where we can enjoy the companionship that I have been speaking about.

We often enjoy the privilege of being “companions of the Christ” on Lord’s day morning, the nearness and the praise that flows when He sings “in the midst of the assembly”, Heb 2: 12. But like everything else in Christianity, there is a moral basis for our enjoyment of it, and here it is in Hebrews 3: “For we are become companions of the Christ if indeed we hold the beginning of the assurance firm to the end”. Now, “the beginning of the assurance” would be our faith in the risen Christ. That is where we all begin in terms of faith and belief, “the beginning of the assurance”; faith in the risen Man. That is the basis of my faith. Everything else is built on that. Someone once memorably said that faith in the resurrection is the keystone of the arch of Christianity, CAC vol 31 p378. In architecture, you have an arch, and right at the top there is a wedge shaped piece of stone, the keystone, and if you take that out, the whole arch collapses. The risen Christ, faith in His resurrection, is the basis of everything else that we believe in. Here it is: “if indeed we hold the beginning of the assurance firm to the end”. This is conditional; if we do that, then “we are become companions of the Christ”, and we enjoy it. We are in the good of it, we are in the life of it “if indeed we hold the beginning of the assurance firm to the end”. I am tested by that. It needs perseverance. The enemy will seek to attack our faith. He does. He will bring in doubts. We see it happening around us, but what a joy it is to “hold the beginning of the assurance firm to the end” and know the blessedness of the continuing companionship. So in the enjoyment of it, dear brethren, we hold on to what we have; we hold on to our links with the Lord Jesus; we hold on to our links with one another. Remember what Mr Stoney said: the nearer we get to God, the nearer we come to Christ, and the nearer we come to

Christ, the nearer we are to one another. That is important because we are not just individual units with our links with Christ; we are brought into this companionship, into the Christian circle that we were speaking of earlier.

Paul's letter to Philemon is most important and unique. The object of the letter is not teaching; it is just for exhortation in love. Paul was writing to a man whom he loved, and the love and the concern that Paul had for this runaway slave, Onesimus, shines out in it. I did not want to speak about Onesimus; rather I wanted to speak about the bond that there was between Paul and Philemon and how Paul expressed that. He says in verse 17, "If therefore thou holdest me to be a partner with thee". If you go to the footnotes in Hebrews, you will see that there are two Greek words: one means 'companion' and the other means 'partner'. The note 'q' in chapter 2: 14 tells us that the word for companion 'refers always to something outside myself, but which I take, or take a part in'. That is the thought of companionship: the Lord Jesus is there in His supremacy, and we can be companions of His. But the other Greek word means 'a common equal sharing' and that is the meaning of partner. So Paul and Philemon had a bond that was partnership; it is another word for fellowship. So Paul wrote, "If therefore thou holdest me to be a partner with thee, receive him as me". Philemon would answer to this because Paul was appealing to what he knew was there in Philemon. I will not go into all the detail of how Onesimus was a slave of Philemon's who had perhaps stolen something and run away, and Philemon would have been annoyed about that, and now Paul is sending him back asking Philemon to forgive him. There is a lot in this short letter, which is one of the finest letters that has ever been written. What I wanted to stress is what it meant for Paul and Philemon to be partners. That is what we are. We have a partnership that was forged in the death of Christ. As you are in the fellowship of God's Son and as I am in it, there is a partnership between us that was forged there in His death and that makes it very, very important. It is the responsible side of what we were speaking about this afternoon as to the Christian circle.

So this partnership has obligations. For instance, this partnership, this fellowship that we enjoy with each other as believers in the Lord Jesus, is something that has to be protected. That is why some Christians have refused directorships or partnerships in companies, because that partnership includes unbelievers, 2 Cor 6: 14-16. The apostle asks the Corinthians how they could be in partnership with an unbeliever. That is why some of our young brethren who started university last week are now taking action. In going to university, they are automatically made members of the students'

union, but these young people choose to opt out of that membership. It involves reproach. One of them found that the secretary was also a Christian, and he could not understand. He said, 'I am a Christian. I am in it. Why do you not want to be in it?'. It involves reproach. Such matters were gone through in this city forty-two years ago at great cost. You cannot just say, 'It does not matter, it is not very important. There is nothing much to the students' union'. These things *are* important because the dignity and the glory of the partnership that we have together on the basis of the death of the Lord Jesus cannot be broken. Paul makes that clear when he speaks in his letters: "what fellowship of light with darkness?". Our partnership as believers is important. If you are in it, you cannot also be in others with unbelievers; it cannot be. That is why persons gave up their livelihoods in the last century. They lost their jobs because they understood the meaning of this partnership that Paul wrote to Philemon about. They understood that to be in a trade union or similar association was not compatible with the glory and dignity and the distinctiveness of this partnership that we have together as knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as our Head in heaven and as being part of the Christian circle.

So there are responsibilities in partnership, but then there are privileges too, and that is why I read at the beginning of the epistle. That comes through in the way that Paul writes to "Philemon the beloved and our fellow-workman". It is a wonderful thing to know that if you have a job to do, you have someone else who will do it with you and you can be fellow-workmen. There are distinguished people who are Fellows of The Royal Society of Edinburgh. That is a partnership that is very distinguished in the world's view, but "our fellow-workman" is a different kind of link; it is much deeper than that. It is in Christ; this is a partnership in the Lord Jesus. Then Paul wrote about Archippus, "our fellow-soldier, and to the assembly which is in thine house". It is good to have fellow-believers. We enjoy the company of each other, but it is deeper than that. The fellowship is an expression of what we have as fellows of each other, fellow-workmen, fellow-soldiers, fellow-believers. These things, dear brethren, are important; they are dignified and special, and are to be protected, but they are to be enjoyed, and we can appreciate them in each other's company.

I read on from verse 4. How Paul rejoiced in Philemon, "hearing of thy love and the faith which thou hast towards the Lord Jesus, and towards all the saints". Paul is giving Philemon credit for his faith and love towards Christ; I trust that everyone in this room knows something about that. But then there was Philemon's faith and love "towards all the saints". That is what binds us together. We come to these fellowship meetings because we get something that we cannot get

anywhere else, food that the Lord Jesus brings before us, and we are bound together as a result of His death for us. As a result of our death with Him and being quickened together with Him, we are bound into an organic entity that we appreciate and value, as Philemon clearly did.

Then Paul wrote, “in such sort that thy participation in the faith should become operative”. What does that mean? What is your faith? You say, ‘My faith is in my Saviour. I believe that He died for me’. Yes, that is the foundation of it, but is it “operative”? I ask myself that: does my faith make me do things, because that is what “operative” means? “For the word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword”, Heb 4: 12. So Paul wrote to Philemon here that he was; “always making mention of thee at my prayers ... that thy participation in the faith should become operative in the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in us”. I think that when Paul said “us”, he meant all the Christians that Philemon knew.

So if faith is operative towards God, towards the Lord Jesus, it is also operative “in the acknowledgment of every good thing”. Our participation in the faith becomes operative in the recognition of all that is good in our fellow-believers, in those with whom we enjoy these links. We value them and appreciate them, and we see why the Lord Jesus needs us as His companions.

One final impression is that this kind of companionship is eternal. When the Lord Jesus said in John 14, “I go to prepare you a place; and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be” (v 2, 3), He was speaking to His disciples, those on earth who were His companions, and the thought of companions of Christ goes into eternity. These links that we have with Him are eternal. These links that we have with each other are eternal. There is no other set of relationships like that. What we have been enjoying today, speaking about from these scriptures, is something that never ends; it goes into eternity.

May we all be blessed and encouraged in thinking about what it is to be companions of Christ; the dignity of it, the blessedness of it, the responsibilities that it brings, but the reward that there is as knowing that nearness to Him, for His Name's sake!

Edinburgh

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