

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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GOD'S PRIMARY THOUGHTS

Genesis 2

Revelation 21: 1-4

GAB What was in mind was to look at some of these great primary thoughts of God. The word primary, as far as I know, does not occur in scripture, but I think it has come into currency in the time of the recovery so we can use it. It might be worthwhile to enquire as to what it really means. I gather from what I have gained through teaching from others, what is in mind is that there are certain great things, great thoughts which have originated with God Himself *apart from the instrumentality of man, or any other creature*. By way of contrast certain other things have come in which began with man, fallen man, which God has taken up, for instance, the ideas of a city or a kingdom. The first person to build a city was Cain and the first person to establish a kingdom was Nimrod. Then there is the idea of nations coming in after the flood because of man's lawlessness. All these things God has taken up in His wise ways. The city - God has developed the thought in Jerusalem, mountains round about her (Ps 125: 2), "Beautiful in elevation, joy of the whole earth ... the city of the great king" (PS 48: 2) and, of course, "the new Jerusalem" eventually. God has used that. Likewise the kingdom; we are all familiar with the idea of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the heavens and so on. Even nations God has used and the saints are said to be "a holy nation", Exod 19: 6 and 1 Pet 2: 9. All these things are going to be wound up eventually when they have served their purpose. In the eternal setting, the idea of the city recedes and what we find is, "as a bride adorned for her husband"; and the kingdom is given up, "to him who is God and Father", 1 Cor 24. Likewise nations, prominent in the millennial setting, give way to the idea of families in eternity. These things all finish - God has used them in His wisdom, but His primary thoughts remain.

What I am exercised about is to get over to see the greatness of God's primary and original thoughts because they go right through into eternity. The first two chapters of Genesis are very rich in this respect. I have been impressed recently with the fact that the first figurative reference we have to Christ and the assembly is in chapter 1 of Genesis where the sun is set in the expanse of the heavens and the moon (v 16, 17). That is an allusion to Christ glorified with His heavenly consort. It seems to me of great significance that you get that, Christ glorified, presented before you have any suggestion of Christ stooping and being

found in the pathway of humiliation and suffering.

Coming back to God's original thoughts, what God has in mind for man is man glorified. That is the pattern. As we go through the chapter we have the swarms of living souls: God will fill His eternity with living souls. God has instituted this great matter of life and He will have it. Then man is brought in, "male and female created he them", v 27. I do not think that is exactly an allusion to Christ and the assembly, although you might apply it that way, but they are said to be created, it is a creature thought "male and female created he them". But they are given dominion which would relate to the idea of the sun and the moon, they rule. It is man patterned after Christ, that is what God has before Him. All this is related before sin came in.

In chapter 2 God is forming things. In chapter 1 man was created, but in chapter 2 he "formed Man, dust of the ground". Again it is not Christ so much, it is man as a creature and Christ cannot be said to be formed in that way, He was perfect. Here it is man as a result of God's handiwork, skilful handiwork in producing something which is patterned after Christ. Then God provides an environment; He planted a garden. That is another primary thought. This was the first garden ever, and Jehovah Elohim planted it Himself and there He put man whom He had formed, and the tree of life flourishing in the midst, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We might enquire into why that should be.

I think the section where we have the rivers divided into the four main heads is very interesting and relates to the Acts where God is introducing something completely new according to His own original and primary thoughts in the assembly.

Perhaps the greatest thing of all is the mystery, the woman taken out of the man, "built" into a woman. Paul says, "This mystery is great, but I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly", Eph 5: 32.

I read the passage in Revelation to show how God comes back and secures for the eternal day what He began with.

PJH I was thinking of what you said about His prime thought; it is really that man may seek after God. We get that in Acts, God "determined ordained times and the boundaries of their dwelling", chap 17: 26. This cannot proceed unless God has given them the place that He has. Man's enjoyment is not realised unless God is brought in.

GAB That is right, and if we could for the moment dismiss from our minds all the failure that has come in, we can see what God has in mind for man. Someone might say, 'What has this to do with our current exercises; we have difficulties, and so on?'. I think it would have a lot to do with them if we can get over and see things from God's side, I think it would help us in the working out of practical matters.

SH Could you say something about the difference between creation and forming?

GAB Creation is a matter of the power of God: "He spoke and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast", Ps 33: 9. That is creation, but formation is a more intimate thing. God is working in divine skill. The hymn we sang at the beginning sits perfectly with my thought,

Relationship sublime for creature man (Hymn 242)

What God has in mind is man glorified. That is God's view of things.

RDP-r It is wonderful to lay hold of what God had in mind from the outset of what He will secure eternally, and nothing will stop Him.

GAB Surely that must be the greatest of encouragement to us. It is so easy to get discouraged when you see failure and breakdown and you find it in yourself as well all around, but if we can just lift our sights to see that God has nothing less in mind than a universe patterned after Christ, and that is what He is working at. That is the idea of formation at the present time.

RDP-r So of that Man it says, "He shall not fail", Isa 42: 4 A.V.

GAB "Thou canst be hindered in no thought of thine", Job 42: 2.

DJW Can you say something as to the seventh day? That seems to follow through the whole of the scriptures. It says, "and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made"; it seems to be that God's rest is one of the prime thoughts that you had in mind.

GAB He rests in His love, because love is what lies behind His power. Power is an attribute of God, but love is His nature. What lies behind all God's operations is His love. Then, when everything has been completed, there is the whole work of redemption that was necessary to secure man from what he had fallen into; what God has at the end is not man in innocence it is man glorified, man like Christ.

DJW His rest was for enjoyment; man is full of activity, but God rests in what He has secured for His own pleasure.

GR The statement in John is that “he came out from God and was going to God”, John 13: 3. He did many, many things, but I was thinking of the way that the disciples would have pondered that expression when the Spirit came and would have explored something of what was involved in that wonderful thing.

GAB That is a very interesting scripture to bring up. “Knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands, and that he came out from God and was going to God”. We speak about a future eternity and a past eternity, and I suppose that is all right because we are here in time and human language scarcely is sufficient to express what we mean; eternity has no beginning and will have no end, but that dip into time involved the Lord Jesus, a divine Person, taking His place in manhood, taking on the relationship of Son to work out all God's thoughts. But that relationship continues, goes into eternity.

BWB So, “from eternity to eternity thou art God” (Ps 90: 2), but the dip into time has brought the knowledge of God to us in a wonderful way, and the response that was in the first hymn flows out of that does it not?

GAB That is right. How much has been worked out in time. We may think that time is long, and I suppose in one sense it is, we do not know how long it is - the scripture records six thousand years, but there may be a lot more. However long that time may have been it is a platform on which God has worked out His great thoughts.

BWB So time is very valuable - “So teach us to number our days” (Ps 90: 12); each day should yield something. It did in the life of Jesus; “it came to pass on one of the days”, as Luke says, chap 8: 22. Each day was precious and full.

GAB “Morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ears to hear as the instructed” (Isa 50: 4), and then it also says, “to His beloved one He giveth sleep”, Ps 127: 2. The Father woke the Lord Jesus in the morning and put Him to sleep. Sometimes He did not sleep; sometimes He spent the whole night in prayer. What a pathway it was! You just feel rather like John at the end of his gospel, “there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they were written one by one, I suppose that not even the world itself would contain the books written”, chap 21: 25.

JAT Mr Darby wrote in “The Man of Sorrows”:

Oh, suited now in nature
For Love's divinest ways,
To make the fallen creature
The vessel of Thy praise!

I had the sense on Lord's day that we were engaged in eternal praise, it was praise that will never, never end. That links with eternity.

GAB Exactly. It is a very precious privilege to be gathered in assembly because, apart from the discipline meeting, which is thankfully very rare, the Lord's supper is the only occasion when we are gathered *in* assembly. That is actual, as I understand it. We do not claim to be *the* assembly, but the character of our gathering to break bread is in assembly. That takes you into eternity. We break bread in time, we break bread in the wilderness, but when the Lord comes in He takes us over onto His side and can touch what is eternal in character.

JAT We have assembly experience with Christ. We are conscious of what we are in His eyes and what we are then before the Father.

GAB It is something that should elevate our thoughts of one another too. I may think of what I am, what my history has been, just total failure, but what God has in mind for me, what God is making me, is patterned after Christ. Nothing less than that will satisfy the heart of God than a whole universe patterned after Christ.

MJW Whilst you speak of certain things being used in the ways of God like the kingdom and then given up, the remarkable thing, which chapter 1 and chapter 2 highlight, is that the greatness of God is made known throughout all those different activities which are in His way. In the first chapter you get power in creation; regarding the second chapter Mr James Taylor speaks of “Jehovah Elohim” being a softening down of that great Name (Vol 73 p215-216), and you get the formation there. Whilst certain things are given up, the greatness of God remains, and a development of light regarding who He is and what He is remains. I would have thought that that was primary as well.

GAB I think it is primary, what God does. I am just making the distinction between what has originated with man, such as Cain building a city; God takes that up, and shows that He can make a better city than Cain could. Although even in Jerusalem, which has a very precious background to it, failure does come into it. All these things

which began with fallen man, even though God takes them up, are still subject to man's failures. The kingdom, another thing, the kingdom of the heavens, is presented as like leaven, the birds of the air come and roost in the branches and so on (Matt 13: 31-33), but God's prime thoughts are above all that.

MJW In the midst of all the things that He takes up of man's He makes known Himself and that remains along with the primary thoughts which He brings out.

GAB We sometimes used to sing:

Evil's challenge, long permitted -
Met by Thy supremacy -
In Thy ways was wisely fitted
To display the Trinity.

God makes Himself known even through our failures. That is true. But is there not something bigger than that? Something that surpasses anything that has ever come in relating to failure.

MJW I am sure that is right.

GR So primary really means first - "In the beginning God" (Gen 1: 1); that is an absolute statement, before man was ever created.

GAB Before anything was created God was there.

GR God has brought the whole universe into existence to provide a platform on which He could display the glories of Christ.

DJW I was thinking as to the reference to Jehovah Elohim, does that anticipate the revelation, the fact that it is plural?

GAB I think so. In Chapter 1 it is God, but now God has a Name by which He is known. Man has a name as well - "but as for Adam, he found no helpmate his like", v 20. So in chapter 2 names are coming into play, both Jehovah Himself and the man have a name. Do you think that there is an increased intimacy between God and His creature?

DJW Were you thinking of 1 Corinthians 15 the "last Adam", v 45?

GAB I was not actually, but that is interesting. I was just commenting on the fact that God is speaking to His creature as a known person. It is not simply a creation, he is a person, he has a name. It is quite true

what you say, the Lord Jesus is the last Adam and a life- giving spirit.

AS In chapter 5 it says “God ... called their name Adam” (v 2); every other creature man named, but God named man Adam. I like the thought of intimacy that you have brought in.

GAB God did it Himself. These are the things we are trying to get at, things that God did Himself without any intervention of the creature. There are references in the epistles such as, “he that has wrought us for this very thing is God”, 2 Cor 5: 5. It is something to take account of, God's own work.

AEM I was thinking of God's own work. That is something that goes right through; He continues to work. It says in Genesis, “he rested from all his work which God had created in making it”. We read that the Father worked, and then the Son worked, “My Father worketh hitherto and I work”, John 5: 17. That is His work, and we look for the work of God in each other. I was just impressed with the contrast between what you have spoken of as the work of man; God's work continues unabated.

GAB That is good. It is a remarkable thought, “he rested from all his work which God had created in making it” - God created work for Himself. You might say God did not need to do that, God being who He is is all sufficient, but I think His heart of love required that there should be a man, a whole race of man, likened after Christ on whom that love could rest.

AEM It makes a great impression when we finally realise that, other than the work of One who came in to take a place as a man, all other men's work will end. This is the only work that will go through.

GAB So anything which we do which is going to remain is what is wrought of God.

DJW Does He anticipate what is final too in the reference to the rain? Might that speak of judgment do you think? What is referred to is the mist which would speak of the Spirit's activities, but you are speaking of what He takes up of man to which failure attaches, but it seems to indicate here that even that is met.

GAB I would like to enquire in that connection as to the garden - the tree of life is there in the midst and we can understand that in the context of what we are saying, but why is the tree of the knowledge of good and

evil here in this stage?

MJW Before you go into that, you said the garden was a primary thought. Can you help us first as to why that is primary and what it represents then perhaps we will understand how the tree is there?

GAB It is primary in the sense that it is God who did it. There never was a garden before; it is one of God's original thoughts to provide an environment in which man can prosper and flourish. I think that garden takes shape in the book of the Acts. I think that is the idea of the garden. God has provided an environment. He formed man, but man needs somewhere to live and this is the environment which God has provided. Now, when you come to the book of the Acts you see the river flowing and you find the land there, the gold of that land is good (Acts 2: 1-4), the assembly is there for the first time, a vessel indwelt by the Spirit of God, the work of God in its aggregate gathered there - the gold.

BB When you move forward into the Song of Songs the garden is a place where the man can restfully enjoy relationships with his spouse, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse", chap 5: 1. So this is planted by God but it is an area where man can relax with his wife, and taking that forward, Christ with the assembly, would you say?

GAB That is right. "Awake, north wind, and come, thou south; Blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow forth", chap 4: 16. There is something for the pleasure of Christ and for the pleasure of the assembly as well. We are talking typically now, but that is what it means, that there is enjoyment in the garden in a condition where the tree of life is central. We are coming back to the great matter of what is primary, what is prime in the mind of God, Christ who is the pattern for everything: "The tree of life, in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" which is not said to be in the midst.

DJW Does the tree of the knowledge of good and evil involve that God is going to be with man on a moral basis?

GAB That answers the question. Although sin has not yet come in in this setting we are looking at, nevertheless God has in mind that man is going to be developed on moral lines. Further down we have the warning, "for in the day that thou eatest of it thou shalt certainly die". 'Evil's challenge long permitted' - God has allowed certain things to go on, but in it all He is forming something which is going through into eternity which is formed after Christ and compatible with His own

original thoughts for man.

BWB Is it not so that the earth was really formed for man, and it looked on to Christ coming in to fill it out, and the knowledge of His glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, Hab 2: 14? Do you think that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was all part of God's primary thought that the whole issue of evil should be settled and dealt with?

GAB The provision was there right from the beginning, before man fell into sin. I think that the foreknowledge of God comes into this. Foreknowledge is not the portion of the creature; we can maybe foresee certain things if we are shrewd enough, but we cannot foreknow. God can foreknow, and He knew that sin would come in and provision is made for that. But, the great point I see here is that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not the central tree; it is the tree of life that is said to be "in the midst of the garden". Christ is central to all God's thoughts for man.

JAT God had glorified Himself in the meeting of evil. Is it not true that by nature we do not appreciate things on a continuing basis; we are always looking for the next thing? God is glorified; the cross was a tremendous point at which that matter was met by God, but in a Man. God was glorified in that, that was a divine glory, and then we come to appreciate things in an eternal way because everything around us is passing.

GAB As we have been taught, these two trees are conciliated on the cross in Christ. As He has met the question of our responsibility and removed the judgment that lay upon us, we get the conciliation of these two trees, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, with which responsibility was connected, and the tree of life, FER vol 8 p35-37. You have the whole moral question met and it is met in Christ. No other could have undertaken to deal with the matter of good and evil but One who was on the one hand divine in His Person, yet perfect in His Manhood, the sin-offering meet for God.

DJW So in Revelation 21, heaven and earth are in conciliation, the sea exists no more, there are no more divisions left.

GAB It is a very beautiful thing, that the sea exists no more. Think of how much sorrow has come about through the sea, how many shipwrecks there have been, how many people have died, how many

partings there have been too - think of partings when the ships sail off with loved ones aboard. None of that is going to happen any more when you get through to the glory of the eternal day.

RCT I wondered whether realisation that we are “vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory” (Rom 9: 23) would enter into this.

GAB That is good. That brings us back to the idea of the foreknowledge of God.

RCT It links with Revelation, “coming down out of the heaven from God, having the glory of God”, 21: 10. It is the aggregate of those vessels of mercy.

GAB It says, “before prepared for glory” so that God had great things in mind for us before we were born.

PH You said earlier that the knowledge of these primary thoughts will help us in our practical exercises. How does that come about?

GAB To get God's viewpoint about things would help us. If you view things from ground level you only see what is around you and there is much failure around. We cannot disguise that fact, we know it in ourselves apart from anything else, but we can look from above - like Balaam, although he was a bad man, who was forced to see and say good things. “From the top of the rocks I see him” (Num 23: 9); he saw people, I would say reverently, from God's point of view. God does have a point of view: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”, Isa 55: 9. If we could just get a grip of what God has had in mind from the very start, and has never changed and never will, and will achieve His great and glorious end, I think that many of these problems that arise would very soon dissolve.

PH Do you think that if we can see what is in another, as a subject of the work of God, in the difficulties that come up, for example in the care meeting, we will show more respect, more patience for one another, as we can see one another as God sees us.

GAB That is exactly right. There was one point in the epistles where Paul speaks of those “who are little esteemed in the assembly”, 1 Cor 6: 4. He might be the one who has the wisdom, he might just have a glimpse of the saints from the top of the rocks, he might see something

shining there in the work of God in a person in whom maybe you did not.

PB I was interested in your thought of the garden especially. Is there any link, or is there any significance, in the fact that John speaks of Gethsemane as a garden? I know there is the side of what the Lord Jesus took on, but in it there is the proving of the perfection of a man before His God, “not my will, but thine be done”, Luke 22: 42.

GAB That is beautiful. The name Gethsemane is not in John's Gospel; it is a garden, a place where Jesus was often with His disciples. But the fact that it is called a garden seems to indicate that the pleasure of God was involved in what the Lord was about to undertake in going into death. He does not ask to have the cup taken away in John, but He says, “the cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?”, chap 18: 11. It is the pleasure of God that is in view. So that ultimately God will be able to find His rest in His love.

Perhaps we should consider what is in this garden - the four main streams. You have the first one set out in the beginning of the Acts where there is a company where the gold is, the Spirit has taken up His abode and that river “which surrounds the whole land of Havilah”. The second river is Gihon “which surrounds the whole land of Cush” and brings in the eunuch, brings in Simeon called Niger in Acts 13, probably an African. Then there is the one which flows forward towards Asshur, that is where the violent opposition of the Jew personified in Saul of Tarsus is, “breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the disciples of the Lord” Acts 9: 1; then the Euphrates. Nothing is said about it but it is the one which we often say divides East from West, but I think in the context of it here it is a mighty river flowing through and fructifying both, it is a universal view of the assembly here.

BWB It says in the Acts, “the word of the Lord increased and prevailed”, chap 19: 20. Is that like these rivers going forward, the river of the testimony and linking it too with the Spirit?

GAB It is one river but divided into four main heads; the source is the same. It is the Holy Spirit that is in view, but diverse in His activities.

SH Is it important that this river in four streams flows out from Eden, it does not flow through, but its source is Eden.

GAB I think that links with the Acts; it flows out in a universal way. The Lord said to His own before He left them to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”, Matt 28: 19. That is the view of it. I know

there are other contexts, we can think of the fact that the testimony moved into Europe, but in the setting we are looking at the assembly is seen as universal.

RDP-r Is there something defining about these first two that surround a certain area? Do we need to be aware of the area where God is working?

GAB I think that is very helpful because there are other areas which have an official mark upon them as belonging to Christendom and bearing the name of Christ, but the Lord is not in them.

RDP-r The assembly is where God is working at the present time?

GAB That is a big statement to make. How do you define that? We always have to be very careful that we do not claim anything. I think what has been said is very wise, that you claim nothing but enjoy everything. God is working where His work is proceeding, and I would not care to define it any more definitely than that. As you say, that stream goes round it and the Lord knows those that are His.

RDP-r The defining thing is the Spirit of God's activity?

GAB I think that would be a real guideline for any soul who is seeking to find where the Lord is - where is the Spirit operating?

PJH The thief on the cross was concerned about the kingdom of His Lord (Luke 23: 42) and I think paradise is where the owner has sway, and where those in it enjoy it to the maximum.

GAB The thief was there that very same day on the cross, but the question of good and evil was resolved in him very quickly, it was instant. When persons are converted they are fit for heaven immediately, but generally the Lord does not take us to be with Himself immediately. Sometimes He does, and the thief was one such; but usually He leaves us here so that this matter of formation might go on. The Spirit's work in us would develop so that something is achieved on moral lines which would not have been if we had just gone straight to heaven. Mr Stoney said that he knew some people who were fit for heaven, but not fit for earth, vol 1 p294.

PJH The thief was occupied about his Lord as Paul was, "Who art thou, Lord?", Acts 9: 5

GAB That is my burden in what we have been considering, that God

has Christ as His pattern. The whole universe will be patterned after Christ; anything outside of that will perish.

DJW Does the fact that there are four rivers remind us of Ephesians 3? God has a universal outlook, breadth and length, and depth and height.

GAB I am sure of that because what we are saying as to Acts was the initiating of the thing, but you cannot stop short of Ephesians where the full glorious light as to Christ and the assembly comes in.

JAT Is that a particular factor that God is working out in us? As said earlier, we go into the heights, but do you think the Spirit had to do with the deep things of God? We might skim over the surface but I wondered whether that was a very necessary thing for the present time.

GAB In the millennial view of the city it is breadth, length and height. You have to go to Ephesians to get the fourth dimension. It is only when you come to what is spiritual that you have the fourth dimension because all material things are three dimensional, but depth brings in what is spiritual.

JAT That helps. Paul speaks affectingly about the One who descended, the same who has also ascended, but he goes into it in his appreciation of Christ, and that is the only way that God's primary thoughts are being completed, by Christ, but in the saints too.

GAB Christ is the great pattern. It seems that the deep sleep is one of God's primary thoughts, Christ and the assembly, but now the assembly is taken out of Christ. We have other presentations where we have the assembly standing by Christ, head over all things to the assembly which is His body, the queen standing in gold of Ophir beside the King might suggest it, that is the public side of things; but this is more of what she is as taken out of Him, and therefore essentially of himself.

MJM Is it remarkable that we get the Lord's tomb as in the garden in John, connecting to what we have in type here as to His death?

GAB It goes on there to the Lord Jesus coming in and presenting Himself, showing them His hands and His side.

MJM Just prior to that His first words as out of death were to the woman; that was in the garden.

GAB There is a good deal of scope for enquiry into the garden. What a wonderful realm it is and it leads on to the idea of the woman which is what we have in this last section of Genesis 2.

It seems to me to connect with the idea of being formed. It is more than creation; it is how Jehovah lovingly took the rib and worked with it until He had something that was equal to the man. I want to be careful in saying that but she was equal in status. The assembly can never be equal as to the Lord in His Person, but in heavenly status she is able to fill out a place which only she can fill out in the whole universe because she is the only vessel said to be taken out of his side.

DJW It shows divine skill. I was thinking of your reference as to how these things affect our practical experiences. We look round and see divine skill in the way He sets us together. The finger of God is in that.

GAB What you see here is a perfect complement to the man. How soon it was spoiled, alas, but here we have perfection.

BWB So this time it is in distinction from all that has gone before. Is it not linked with your idea as to the start of the primary thought? The primary thought of God is going through into eternity.

GAB It is as though God is saying 'This is what I want, this is what I have purposed and now I have it', and it is going through into eternity as a bride adorned for her husband.

The deep sleep is a reference to the death of the Lord. It is about the only typical reference I know to the death of Christ that does not involve the moral question, because sin had not arisen here, but it involves that what is to be produced is to be of the same character as the man and death had to come in because the Lord was here in flesh and blood, but the assembly was not possible until after His death.

AEM Do you think one of the results of the deep sleep was that man appreciated what God had done, for the first time? He may have appreciated it before but it does not say so. Beforehand God had looked at it and seen that what He had done was good, but here it is Man who says, "This time".

GAB He had named all the other creatures already. You can see that one by one they had come to him and he would say, 'That is a magnificent creature, I will call it this', and others beautiful creatures, but none of them answered to himself until he says, "This time" - 'Here is

the one I need'.

MJM Is it worth noting that the Holy Spirit refers to a “deep sleep”? Is there extreme reverence, awe and divine mystery in the fact that it was a deep sleep?

GAB We have referred to the depth in Ephesians 3; there may be some connection there with the depth. The depth is the dimension which is spiritual; it takes you beyond the literal.

MR Would it be right to say that this is the top stone of God's work?

GAB That is what I thought; it is the divine end. In the next chapter you find that things are quite different. God has in principle reached His end here in Christ and the assembly, what can be better than that.

In Revelation, the passage speaks for itself to a great extent. I understand the reference to the holy city in verse 2 is simply to show that it is the same vessel as is referred to in the millennial account. There it is very much a city, it has a wall and gates, all these city features, it is the same vessel but now this is “coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”. That would link with “This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”. Entering into the glorious eternal day, “a bride adorned for her husband”, God is coming back to His original thought.

BWB There could not be a closer link. Genesis 2 speaks of “one flesh”, is that what we are talking of here?

GAB Yes, that is right. It is the very original thought which God began with is secured now in finality.

BWB “Prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” - is that preparation in view of filling out eternity?

GAB I think so. It would perhaps relate to the matter of formation we have been speaking about, but all has now been completed. There is no growth in eternity; the preparation is all done: this is the finished product.

BWB So it is one aspect of the Spirit's work at the present moment.

GAB That is what is going on. There is no more sea and God Himself “shall tabernacle with them”. That is another primary thought of God, the tabernacle. The first reference to a tabernacle is in Exodus 25

where God gave Moses the pattern of the tabernacle. There had been tents before, an individual idea, but the tabernacle was something which originated in the mind of God and so He comes back to it here, “he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God. And he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes ...the former things have passed away”. God has achieved what He set out to do.

RDP-r The word tabernacle would be “dwell amongst”. This might be a difficult word for the younger ones, but it means God is dwelling, or living, amongst His people.

GAB The tabernacle is where God dwelt between the cherubim, the holy ark of the covenant was there, the centre of the divine system; God dwelt there. In John 1 it says, “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1: 14), and the word is 'tabernacled' among us. That blessed Man was always the pattern for what God will secure eternally.

GR The temple is more official and glorious, but this is intimate, God's dwelling?

GAB The temple has a glorious meaning in its place in the day to come but God comes back to His original thoughts.

Newport

28th March 2009

Key to initials -

GA Brown, Edinburgh; B Bodman, Bristol; B W Burton, Taunton;
P Burton, Taunton; P Hazell, Bristol; P J Herbert, Newport;
S Herbert, Newport; M J Matthews, Birmingham; AE Mutton, Witney;
R D Painter, Yeovil; G Richards, Malvern; M Richards, Malvern;
A Spiers, Grangemouth; R C Trotter, Edinburgh; J A Turner, Malvern;
M J Welch, Newport; D J Willetts, Birmingham

TITLES OF JESUS

G Allan Brown

Isaiah 9: 6

I just seek help to say a word as to these great titles of the Lord Jesus. They belong to Him undoubtedly. Of that there can be no dispute. One of them Mighty God refers clearly to deity. Then on the other hand it says, “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given”; that is humanity. There is only one person in the whole of God's universe who is God in His Person and yet truly Man in the place He has taken; one Person, that is our Lord Jesus Christ. These titles are His beyond dispute.

It occurred to me in thinking about it that perhaps the best person that could be enlisted to open this up to us would be the apostle John, because He presents in His gospel the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, which surely involves His deity, albeit displayed in manhood, yet He is God. But, who knew the humanity of Jesus like one who was in His bosom and who leaned at supper on His breast, John 13: 23-25? How closely John, you might say with reverence, felt the very heartbeat of the Lord Jesus.

I wanted to refer to some of the things that John tells us. If we begin at the very beginning of his gospel it says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... All things received being through him, and without him not one thing received being which has received being”, John 1: 1,3. How wonderful a Person He is. There is a spirit of worship which runs through John's gospel in the way he writes. Then he says, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”, v 14. Is that not wonderful?

God manifest in flesh, O wonder of His universe!

(Hymn 400)

Think of it! A blessed divine Person taking His place in manhood.

Some things are better contemplated than spoken about. I feel how little I can say, how poorly I can speak or any could of such wonders. It is better to contemplate. John says that, “we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father, full of grace and truth”, v 14. No doubt John and the other disciples contemplated the Lord Jesus here in the time He sojourned with them,

and they had a unique, privileged place, a fellowship indeed. I do not think that John ceased contemplating, and when the Spirit came, I believe John would be able to look back, along with these other disciples, and go over some of the things that Jesus did and said, and as having the Holy Spirit it would all mean so much more to them. John was characteristically a contemplator.

It has been said that as John wrote these words, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us", you can just imagine him laying down his pen, and saying, 'and he washed my feet'. Does that not touch your heart? What a Person, "his name is called Wonderful".

When you come to John chapter 4 we find a woman who was sorely in need of a counsellor and she found one in Jesus. Her life had become very tangled; she was a moral wreck. She had many problems, and I think they all found their source in one, that was the quest for satisfaction. She tried so hard. She had had five husbands, and that may have been legitimate, but evidently none of them filled and satisfied her heart. She tried one after another; then she tried something which was not legitimate, and instead of improving the situation it only made it worse because she would have the burden of a guilty conscience as well. She had dabbled in religion too because she speaks about her fathers, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where one must worship", v 20. She had tried everything and here she comes at this hour, an hour when no-one else was likely to be around. She had a bad reputation, so she came when nobody else would be there. But, that day she met the Counsellor who had the answer to all her problems. She came and there was Jesus sitting at the well; "being wearied with the way he had come, sat just as he was at the fountain", v 6. This is the divine Counsellor, the One who has the answer. He positioned Himself in such a way that she could not avoid Him. I do not know if you ever find that; sometimes you try every expedient, but eventually you have to come to it that the Lord has to be your Counsellor. He alone has the answer.

The woman arrives and sees Him sitting there and I suppose she thought, 'Well, I have come at this time because I thought nobody else would be around because they all know my history, but this stranger does not know anything about me'. Little did she realise that He knew more about her than anybody else did. I find most interesting the divine skill with which the Lord approaches this woman. I suppose

most of us would have said straight away, 'Before we talk about anything else, you have moral matters to look into and that has to be settled first., Later on we might talk about something spiritual, but your moral issues need sorting out first'. No, the Lord does not say that at all; He says, "Give me to drink", v 7. He touched immediately the matter of satisfaction. She does not respond immediately; she says, "How dost thou, being a Jew, ask to drink of me who am a Samaritan woman? for Jews have no intercourse with Samaritans", and then, "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep", v 9, 11. The woman talks about the well; the Spirit of God speaks of it as a "fountain". There was potential there because it was a fountain of Jacob's, but she only regarded it as stagnant and could have got no satisfaction from it. You can come to the meetings sometimes and get nothing, and others are drinking at the fountain of living water and you are left out. She says to Him that He has nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Then Jesus speaks to her about living water. That is a very precious thought, that instead of raising the moral issue first He simply talks to her about satisfaction. He says to her that He could give her living water, and she responds that that is just what she wants. Now she is interested. He first of all enlists her interest and her desire for something that would fill and satisfy her heart. He still does not raise the moral question with her directly; He says, "Go, call thy husband", v 16. What is she going to say? She answered with what you would call a 'half truth'. She says, "I have not a husband", v 17, and that was true, but it was not the whole truth. The Lord then says, "Thou hast well said, I have not a husband; for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom now thou hast is not thy husband: this thou hast spoken truly", v 18. She must have thought, 'He knows all about me; how extraordinary! He is a stranger!' He knows all about me, and beloved brother and sister, He knows all about you too. He knows all about your sorrows, difficulties and trials, and, if there is anything that needs to be attended to, He knows about that as well, but He has the answer. This is the One whose Name is not only Wonderful, but Counsellor as well. He has the answer. He leads her on so beautifully. We cannot go into all the detail of the chapter, but evidently she realises very soon that this was no ordinary person, and she has the privilege of being one of the very few persons, perhaps only two, to whom the Lord directly disclosed who He was. She says, "I know that Messiah is coming who is called Christ; when *he* comes he will tell us all things. Jesus says to her, I who speak to thee am he", v 25, 26. What a disclosure! She becomes an evangelist. It is as if she

says:

I've found a Friend, O such a Friend,
So kind, and true and tender!
So wise a Counsellor and Guide. (Hymn 187)

He has an answer to my every problem, "is not he the Christ?", v 29. What a moment to dawn upon a thirsty, hungry soul to know that she had found the Christ and what a blessing it must have been. She found in Him the source of supply and satisfaction. No doubt the living water and the fountain of water that the Lord speaks of would refer to the Holy Spirit, but at this point the Holy Spirit had not yet come. I think she found it in Christ. As the hymn says,

O Christ, He is the fountain,
The deep, sweet well of love!
The streams of earth I've tasted
More deep I'll drink above:
There to an ocean fullness
His mercy doth expand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Emmanuel's land.

I think her heart was filled and she had to go and tell somebody else. She went to the men of the city, what she had to do with them in the past might be very doubtful, but she says, "Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done: is not he the Christ?", v 29. She becomes an evangelist.

There are so many things in John's gospel that we can go over, but we must, for the present, leap on to chapter 18 where we find the Lord Jesus going forward into death majestically. This is the true ark of the covenant going forward to turn back the waters of the Jordan. As we were remarking earlier, in this gospel the Lord does not say, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me" (Matt 26: 39); these words were uttered in the gospels where the precious perfection of His manhood showed that He recoiled from the awfulness of having been made sin, but not in John. He is going forward here with a power that death cannot withstand, because the waters of Jordan had flowed down unchallenged. It is interesting that we are told that when they turned back they went right back to the city of Adam. It is a city, but it is more than a co-incidence that it is called Adam, because Adam was where death began. I know he was not the first one to die, but it was on

Adam that that sentence was pronounced, “for in the day that thou eatest of it thou shalt certainly die”, Gen 2: 17. He partook of it and did die, and from that point onwards, that river of Jordan went unchallenged; not a man was able to stand before it until Jesus, the great anti-type of the ark of the covenant went in there. It says, “when they that bore the ark were come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water ... the waters ... stood and rose up in a heap”, Josh 3: 15, 16. The Psalmist says, “The sea saw it and fled, the Jordan turned back”, Ps 114: 3. The Authorised Version says they were driven back which has its own meaning, but I like the thought of turning back. It was as though this great river flowed on unchallenged, not a man was able to stand before it, until Jesus approached and it stopped, stopped in its tracks, and turned round and went right back to Adam. That I think suggests retrospectively that the power of death is broken, because all those saints of the Old Testament, lying their in their graves, dead in Christ, will be raised when the Lord comes with that assembling shout; “the dead in Christ shall rise first”, 1 Thess 4: 16. What a triumph!

The Lord comes forward here in power. It is an unstoppable force that is going forward, and man in his puny attempts to take the Lord comes with lanterns, sticks and swords and so on, these flickering lights to try to open up the darkness of man's unbelief. But the Lord Jesus has the initiative; He does not wait on them to come and take Him. He says, “Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus the Nazaraean. Jesus says to them, I am he. ... they went away backward and fell to the ground”, John 18: 4, 5, 6. This was the mighty God. Who could stand in the presence of such a One? But, not only that, it says, “if therefore ye seek me, let these go away”, v 8. The will of God required that He should go into death; so He allowed Himself to be taken. The scripture says, “And gave his strength into captivity”, Ps 78: 61. He allowed Himself to be taken, but He says, “Whom seek ye?”. How precious! Even when facing so much Himself He was thinking of His own. He says, “If therefore ye seek me, let these go away”.

So wise a Counsellor and Guide,
So mighty a Defender!

(Hymn 187)

If you have the Lord Jesus as your Counsellor and your Guide, and your Defender, you are safe. Men may do their worst, but you are safe.

We go on now to chapter 21. The Lord has been into death here

and come out of it, and these disciples in this chapter are bewildered, unsure what to do; so some of them get together and go on this fishing expedition which was not blessed of God. It is not just that they had a poor catch. It says, "that night took nothing" (John 21: 3), but "early morn already breaking, Jesus stood on the shore", v 4. That is a very wonderful stance. It takes my mind to the great angel we read of in Revelation, which is undoubtedly an allusion to the Lord Jesus Himself, who "set his right foot on the sea, and the left upon the earth", Rev 10: 2. How great a Person He is, Lord of the earth and the sea! "Jesus stood on the shore". What does He say to them? "Children", v 5. You might say that these are fully grown, hard fishermen, but He says, "Children"; what a Father He is! He had looked after these disciples in the time that He sojourned with them. They knew Him as a father; He was a house father; He cared for them in every way: they were His children. And how this must have resonated with them as the truth began to dawn on them, "It is the Lord", v 7. There was one who knew that at least; John knew that it was the Lord with His children. He says, "Children, have ye anything to eat?". They do not disguise the situation; they say, "No". They were absolutely without resource. He takes them in hand. He says, "Cast the net at the right side of the ship and ye will find", v 6. Peter had experience already when the Lord told him to go and get one fish and he would find the coin in it. He knew that this One who had one foot on the sea as well as in the land was Master of the seas as well as the earth; He could command the fish. So we have "great fishes, a hundred and fifty-three", v 11. What a wonderful result! When you submit yourself to the Lord, to His authority, how great the results are. Not only that, He says, "Come and dine", v 12. That was not the fishes that they had taken; that was what He Himself provided. He had command of the land and the sea, fish out of the sea, a fire with coals out of the land. How great He is! This is our mighty Defender, but He is also the "Father of eternity" - or "Father of the age". Such a great One is interested in you and me in the tiniest details of our lives.

We all know that chapter 21 has been described as an appendix to John's gospel; the gospel finishes properly with chapter 20. Here the disciples are not bewildered. The Lord has just come out of death and conveyed this wonderful message to Mary, "go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God. Mary of Magdala comes bringing word to the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had said these things to her. When therefore it was evening on that day, which was the first day of the week,

and the doors shut where the disciples were, through fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and says to them, Peace be to you", John 20: 17-21. This is none other than the Prince of Peace I know it is a millennial title, but everything that will come out into glorious display ere long is enjoyed in the assembly now.

If you love the Lord Jesus you come to an apprehension of how great He is, how wonderful He is, how wise a Counsellor and Guide, how mighty a God He is, how mighty a Defender, Father of eternity, but then He is the Prince of Peace. When we break bread we announce His death, until He come. That is the day of display that we are anticipating; as in assembly, we can welcome in the glorious Prince of Peace, the One who dominates everything, "Peace be to you". Then He sends them out again saying, "Peace", v 26. How wonderful! What a Person He is! May our hearts be freshly filled with Him. I trust that what has been said leads to that end that, Christ is more glorious to us. May the Lord bless the word.

Newport

28th March 2009

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

John A Brown

Ephesians 1: 15-19

2 Peter 1: 1-11

I read this passage in Peter this afternoon and was tested by the two references in it to the knowledge of divine Persons. The first one is in verse 2 of 2 Peter 1, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord", and the second one is in verse 8, "as regards the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ". Now, if you look at the note to knowledge, you will see what made me feel tested, 'full knowledge', 'personal recognition'. How is it possible to have that 'full knowledge', 'personal recognition' "of God and of Jesus our Lord", "the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"? I believe that that is what God has in mind for every one of us, dear brethren. It is testing. The word of God, which this is, always comes to us in love which is what makes it so attractive, but it always addresses the conscience. We sometimes read the scripture and it is either so familiar to us, or we are not paying enough attention to it, but if it does not touch the conscience at some point, then we are not allowing it to work. Yet it is always in love. God speaks in tones of faithful love and He would do so tonight.

I read first of all in Ephesians because Peter describes the way to that knowledge, but Paul in Ephesians speaks of the same idea, and he gives it a fullness in verse 17, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints". We are to know these things. That is not theoretical knowledge, and neither is it merely the knowledge that comes of paying attention to what others say, although that is a very important way to learn. But I think that Paul, in speaking to the Ephesians here, and Peter, in addressing his epistle "to them that have received like precious faith with us", were pointing to the importance of this. It has raised the question with me, as maybe it does with you, how do we get this knowledge? The knowledge of Scripture itself is a wonderful thing and yet it is not enough. I often say in the preaching, and maybe I have said it here, but I once had to work very closely and intensively with a lawyer in Glasgow who had been brought up as a son of the manse, as we say in Scotland. That upbringing had embedded itself so much in his habits than when he brought up his family, he read the Scriptures with them every morning, and yet he was not a believer. This was his practice and habit. I said to him, 'What do you make of them?' 'Oh', he said, 'I find them riddled with logical

inconsistencies. I want to pick up my pen and score out this verse because it is inconsistent with this one'. That man knew the Scriptures but he did not know them as the Word of God speaking to him. I felt very tested about that, and maybe you do too. Because of our upbringing, which is something we should be very, very thankful for, we **do** know the Scriptures, but do we know them as the living Word of God? Do we know them as a means to arriving at this knowledge of God, this 'full knowledge', this 'personal recognition'? How great a part speaking plays in personal recognition. We know it from our own everyday experience. Listening to someone's voice, hearing someone speak to us, is a very great part of 'personal recognition'. So that when God speaks to us, we may not always listen, but He would speak to us anyway. He does so through the page of Scripture, or it may be something that is said to us, it may be an impression that comes to us in the night. All of these things God uses to speak to us, and the knowledge of God comes from experience.

Really that is what Peter is saying to us, but Paul here sets it out. He thanks God for the love which these Ephesian saints have towards all the saints. He prays for them that God would give them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him", and that they might be enlightened in the eyes of their heart. That is a wonderful thing, "being enlightened in the eyes of your heart", to see something in a different light. I think the Holy Spirit is part of that process of enlightening the eyes of the heart. The "full knowledge of him" brings in the affections of the believer, because God in His nature - we will come to that in Peter - is love, and that love is shining out and that affects us. It must do. If we are not affected by the revelation of the nature of God, then we cannot really say that we know God at all. We may know about Him, but we do not know Him. Here Paul is thanking God for the knowledge that these Ephesian saints had and praying that it might increase, that they might be given the "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart".

Then he goes on to speak about "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints". Well, what a wonderful thing that is too! Here we are tonight, just a few of us in this city of half a million souls or so. There are just a few of us gathered, but what this represents is God's inheritance in the saints, and what a wonderful thing it is. He goes on to speak of other very wonderful things. Paul, if you like, is setting out the divine standard. He goes on in chapter 3 to speak of "the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge", v 18-19. That is something that my lawyer acquaintance would have put his pen through right away. How can you know something that "surpasses knowledge"? Well, in divine things

you can do that. The love of God surpasses human knowledge. What reason was there for God to love us? But He loved us. As that quotation has it, 'We were saints in purpose before we were sinners in practice'. Why was that? Because of the love of God. The ways of God with each one of us in experience, in tribulation, whatever it might be, are to the end that there might be more for Him, and that comes through a greater and deeper knowledge of Him. And so in chapter 3 of Ephesians it speaks of being "fully able to apprehend ... the breadth and length and depth and height". What a wonderful sphere that is, and we would be lost in it apart from the love of God.

Well, Peter is speaking "to them that have received like precious faith". He broadens out from his first epistle. His first epistle is addressed to those of the dispersion - that is the Jews who were thrown out of Palestine by the Romans and ended up all over the then known world, in little communities. You think what that would mean. You might suddenly be told by the authorities that you and your family have to go to Lithuania or something like that, a place you have never heard of and never been to, and you cannot come back again. That is what literally happened to these Jewish believers, and to all of the Jews in fact. The believers were not excepted from the harshness of what Rome did: these persons were dispersed. Nowadays we speak about ethnic cleansing, and really that is what happened to these people. But Peter here is broadening out now. He had written his first letter to these saints who had been the subjects of that awful dispersion, and now he is broadening out. He is writing "to them that have received like precious faith with us through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ". Well, we owe it all to Him. He then brings in these references that I have already touched on. I read the whole section to get the context of it, but one thing that often strikes me is the end of verse 4, that God "has given to us the greatest and precious promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature".

What a wonderful thing that is, divine love expressed in persons like you and me! What a wonderful thing it is, dear brethren, that you and I can know in ourselves the love of God. That is how God is served. That word shines out and the divine nature has been expressed in Jesus. It was expressed at the cross. Every preacher has this in principle in his heart as he preaches, and we all do when we come together. Why do we come here night after night, the same people to talk about what, you might say, are the same things? It is because there is something here that cannot be got anywhere else. It is sharing this wonderful thing that we have; "partakers of the divine nature,

having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust". Well, I do not want to speak about that, but we see it all around us, the horrible darkness that is encroaching in every country of the world, "the corruption that is in the world through lust. But for this very reason also ...". Then Peter brings in this sequence of things. They are all important, because he says in verse 8, "for these things existing and abounding in you make you to be neither idle nor unfruitful as regards the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ". How do we get that knowledge? How do we enjoy it? How do we "become partakers of the divine nature"? We begin with faith. Everyone here, I am sure, has faith. But then it goes on, and it is very testing; virtue, knowledge, temperance - the note tells us that that is self control. You see men all around us given up to what is intemperate, the wholesale giving of themselves to things that they should not be giving themselves to. But by the Holy Spirit self control can be exercised. Some of these things here are spiritual things, like godliness and faith, and some of them are practical things, and they are all woven together; so that temperance comes into the list along with faith and godliness, endurance, and then brotherly love. How sweet are these bonds that bind us together, and yet there is something greater than that; "in brotherly love, love". That is the divine nature.

Well these are just a few thoughts. I felt the edge of it. How well do I know the heart of God? It was expressed fully at the cross. It was expressed in the writings of these dear apostles that have been preserved to us. How we should value them. "For these things existing and abounding in you make you to be neither idle nor unfruitful". What there is to go in for! How much there is to commit ourselves to "as regards the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ". And then Peter speaks again of diligence, "for thus shall the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be richly furnished unto you".

May the Lord just use these few words for our encouragement, to see that the outshining of the divine nature is to have an answer in the hearts of those like you and like me who have been affected by it. We learn God through His love, and through these things, endurance, all of these things in that list, which lead to the knowledge of God and to a greater and fuller response to Him from hearts that have been brought to know Him.

May the Lord bless the word.

Edinburgh

14th October 2008

CONTINUANCE

Allan Wilson

Ruth 2: 1-7

Luke 2: 25-32

I have a simple thought about this matter of continuance, how we continue and why we continue. Someone has said that continuance is the proof of reality. I think that is very testing. Things are real. This young woman we read about, Ruth, had quite a testing time until this moment. Her history had not been an easy one but there is this said about her, "And she ... has continued from the morning until now". Well, this is the "now". We have continued until now. It is the way that she continued. Think of the testings in this particular day in which she was. She continued in dependence. She knew what dependence was. We have been reminded a good deal about it in this place, these past months and years; she knew what it was to be a suffering, devoted woman, but she "continued ... until now; her sitting in the house has been little as yet". Her conditions did not alter her attitude and characteristic feature which was that she was continuing in relation to what she had committed herself to at the outset, "thy people shall be my people ... where thou diest will I die", chap 1: 16. She had commenced from that position and continued. She continued before she had a link with Boaz, because she knew about him. Naomi spoke about Boaz, the kind of person he was, and this, I think, was what caused Ruth to continue until now. I think that is how most of us are. We have known something from our parents, older brethren who have spoken about Jesus and what He means, what is going to be for His pleasure in this dispensation, this time, and we have continued until now. I feel the need of this being a genuine exercise, beloved, that we continue in this way, we continue as she continued in relation to the food line and what was going to be secured as a result. You think of all that she went through in the heat of the day, and she was only gathering a small amount of corn as she went along, but she had in mind in her devotion an inner dependence. These things are meant to test us. We are living in a very affluent time and many of us do not know very much even about material dependence, I think we would have to say that, but Ruth was one who was altogether dependent. She had no resources of her own. She was gleaning in the fields. In one sense we have no resource of our own. That is why we need one another. That is why we need the company of the saints. That is why we have these gatherings

that we might just glean something, but she needed her own committal. She continued because she understood and realised that if she was going to survive it required that she was kept in this position, in this field. She had found favour, and here was a field of Boaz, I think all indicating what was foremost, what was to come to light further on in the book, all that was to be secured was going to be in relation typically to Christ. What comes out as a result, beloved, what there is as fruit from these exercises that she had, is that we get the worshipper (chap 4: 17 footnote), we get something that answers to the heart of God, that answers in our day to the heart of Christ. "She ... continued ... until now". I feel that as we are going through these exercises at the moment. Look at the older sisters we have had amongst us and how they have continued in the testimony, gone on in faithfulness and in the simplicity of their links with and their love for Christ. That is to mark every one of us from the youngest to the oldest. We have to pass that on. We have a responsibility. Naomi passed it on to the young; she fulfilled that responsibility. She had been wrong but she got right and she passed it on. She was a recovered person. That is how I want to apply it that she was a recovered person and she brings the young woman into this same line, "she ... continued ... until now". That is an exercise, I think we should all feel, that we have so many young people in this place and we are glad to see them when they come out. Seeing children, you think of the vitality of what is there potentially for the testimony and for Christ. It is not for our aggrandisement, but it is for the aggrandisement of what is here for our Lord Jesus Christ in the assembly. I think Ruth had some appreciation of that, and she continued.

I read about Simeon because he was at the end of his life. He had continued. He was a just and pious man, "awaiting the consolation of Israel", but he had some insight as to how God was operating and what was going to come to pass, and he was continuing in that in dependence. I feel burdened about that tonight, beloved, how independent my history is, but God would draw us to the need for being dependent. He "was just and pious, awaiting the consolation of Israel". He was obviously a very heavenly, devoted man, and it says, "and the Holy Spirit was upon him". The Holy Spirit had not come at this juncture, but the Holy Spirit had come upon him, marked him out in that sense. "And it was divinely communicated to him" - think of these communications in one who continues in this area of dependence - "by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple". Think of how

he came to the meetings. What an influence he had. He must have brought something very special with him. Like John who was in the island Patmos and he "became in the Spirit on the Lord's day", Rev 1: 10. Sometimes you get a touch of that when some brethren come in and they just bring an influence like this into the meeting. I am not saying anything against any: but I feel a need for a touch of this, to come in like this, to gather like this, and I think it comes from the way that Ruth committed herself, the way that she continued, and "her sitting in the house has been little as yet". She did not sit at home; she did not think, 'Oh, I am tired tonight, I am late tonight'. I have known these things and I am not saying anything against anybody else. I have known these things, but Ruth did not, she continued and she brought something. Think of what she took home, think of what she brought into the local meeting, and I think Simeon was like that too. "And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and as the parents brought in the child Jesus that they might do for him according to the custom of the law", but this man was able and it says, "*he* received him into his arms". Think of holding that precious Babe, all that was embodied in that Baby. This man was able to do that, and he understood something of what was involved in it, what Jesus meant to him and what He would mean to the whole world. "*He* received him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now thou lettest thy bondman go, according to thy word, in peace". He continued until he came to this point where he was able to receive the Child Jesus. The whole embodiment of all that was in God's heart was set before him in this Child. You are frightened to say too much about it, careful as to how you speak about the Lord Jesus in these circumstances, but what was in this Child was going to set forth the fulness of the love of God, and here was a man that was able to receive Him. He did not just hold Him. There is something more precious than that in it, "*he* received him". There was a reception, a place where He could be held and could be appreciated. He continued until this moment.

Well, beloved, I just feel the simplicity of what I have said but I feel the need of being in that condition. You get a sister later on in that chapter who continued until she was very aged. Think of the sisterhood in this place and how they have continued. Many have been many years in the testimony. Long lives have been devoted to Christ. I think it would be an example, be an encouragement, be a stimulation to us that we might continue in living relationship to what is here for Christ, to what is here for His pleasure. It is not for our pleasure although we get

benefits from that, but the main thing is that the assembly is here for Christ and I can come into the benefits of that, I can bring something in of this character as I continue until now.

Kirkcaldy

4th November 2008