

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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CONTENTS

[TRANSACTION WITH CHRIST](#)

[THE WILDERNESS](#)

[EARNEST OF OUR INHERITANCE](#)

[THE CHILDREN'S SORROWS](#)

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TRANSACTION WITH CHRIST

Colossians 2: 16-19; Revelation 3: 14-22; Matthew 25: 1-13

A.C.C. All that has transpired in the latter times must come within the cognizance of the Lord's attitude that is depicted in the address to Laodicea, being a phase of things that covers the final stages of the testimony. I thought that we might first therefore get some impression as to the importance of the ministry that is given in the Colossian epistle as a sort of antidote to the conditions that have arisen, and also get help as to the position that the Lord would take up in respect of what has come in, whether it be an organised state of things with the rigidity and character of bondage, or looseness, the latitude that many seek. The Lord would take up a certain attitude and we would get help by seeing that and seeing what He would propose in view of things proceeding.

W.McK. I suppose we need to apprehend the Lord's attitude if we are going to be preserved. It is not simply a question of what is happening amongst men but what His mind about it is.

A.C.C. Yes. I think it is of all importance that we understand how the Lord is holding Himself and what His attitude is and what He proposes, the need to meet any condition that has arisen and to carry things forward to their completion. The Colossian ministry has in mind that, the need to apprehend Him and to hold fast the Head.

In the presence of conditions where an earthly head has been appointed we need to hold fast the Head and to get an impression of the living character of things that proceeds from Christ as above.

W.McK. There are two references to Laodicea at the end of this epistle to the Colossians. Do you think that, if the ministry that we have in Colossians had been paid heed to, the conditions that existed in Laodicea might not have arisen?

A.C.C. That is what I think; the Colossian ministry is intended to help us therefore in respect of the conditions that may exist. We are in the presence of conditions where an earthly head has been appointed. Of course we have been aware of that not for a long time

as to what has happened in the great public sense, that there has been one who has taken the place of Christ here; but I think it has been brought home to us too that Christ has been more or less displaced by the appointment of someone assuming the place of direction.

J.T-n. Paul had great combat for these Colossians. Do you think that it was a critical time and that it is still a critical time? The Lord has come in in deliverance but there is a tendency all the while to settle down in earthly things rather than to have our mind on the heavenly things.

A.C.C. Quite so. I think it would do us all good to get some fresh impression as to our exalted Head and His heavenly character. It would save us from the condition of things that exists here, no matter what they may be.

E.H.W. Is it important to see that the apostle draws attention to the greatness of the Person of Christ and who He is, and then what has been done for us - you has He quickened (see chap 2: 13) and so on?

A.C.C. I think so, and the way He begins the address to Laodicea is in full keeping with how He is presented in Colossians. It is the greatness of all that resides in Christ, He is "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God". Think of the wealth of that presentation: it is in full accord with what you say as to how He is presented in this epistle. I think it is wonderful how the Lord would present Himself, and the wealth and fulness that resides in Him.

E.C.B. Where the Christ is is critical in the testimony at any time, is it not?

A.C.C. It is; over against what may go on down here there is Christ above and the need to maintain our link with Him where He is so that the earthly side may be kept in its place.

E.C.B. I had wondered whether the word to Sardis, "I have not found thy works complete before my God" (Rev 3: 2) involves the

surrender of the heavenly side of the truth.

A.C.C. It does, and that is what gives rise to an organised system of things and, on the other hand, what Mr Taylor sen called latitudinarianism. We are faced with both things and the need is to maintain our links with Christ above, holding fast the Head.

E.C.B. The problem for brethren often is to get in spirit into the sphere where the Christ is, where questions of legality and looseness do not arise. There is a sphere in which there is not drink, feast, new moon, sabbaths, and so on, neither is there looseness. It is a question of our getting to where the Christ is, outside the current order of things, is it not?

A.C.C. I think it is.

W.McK. Do you think that in the way the Lord presents Himself to Laodicea - "the Amen", then "the beginning of the creation of God" - that God set out the whole standard of things at the beginning, and what would be in mind is that there is something at the end that corresponds with it?

A.C.C. I think that would be His intention, and the wealth of things that are residing in Christ is to be impressed upon us so that, as Mr Raven said, we need not go outside of Him for anything. The Lord takes up a very definite attitude (even though things have stood, and we have known the doctrine) in regard of any moment or anything that arises and He is proposing certain things here.

M.G.W. You raise the question as to how the Lord views things. Do you think we have to ask ourselves, where is the increase and is it the increase of God? Do you think that is what the Lord is concerned about ?

A.C.C. I am sure, all the time; and increase does not come unless we maintain our links with Him where He is. There is a tendency always of our lowering the character of things.

E.C.B. In both Laodicea and in the virgins in Matthew 25 is the point that the vitality has gone?

A.C.C. That is what I thought we might see. Of course there is what is proposed in the divine attitude that would recover us and maintain us in the vitality of what Philadelphia stands for. I think that in the Lord's proposals He is opening up something that would be available for us in the way of divine commodity to meet the existing conditions. So He is presenting Himself as a seller, and in Matthew 25, "Go ... to those that sell". It is not the principle of the free gift of grace (which we have experienced already), it is another principle, that of transaction.

W.McK. That involves vital exercise. Would it correspond with the conflict that has been referred to in Colossians? It is not the free gift, it is to be purchased, so that it involves conflict and exercise.

A.C.C. Quite so. Do we understand the Lord's attitude, therefore, in respect of all that is taking place ? It is not a question of God's disposition in the gospel, that always remains, but there is this other thing.

M.G.W. Is it the presentation of Himself - "I counsel thee to buy of me", and in Matthew 25, "Behold, the bridegroom" - that would move the heart and set it forward in these adjusting exercises?

A.C.C. That is what I thought. He sets Himself forward to Laodicea in this threefold way, as "the Amen" and all that that would mean, and then "the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God". We must be impressed with the fulness of things that resides in our Head. You will therefore have to do with Him in the presence of conditions that are intended to divert the saints.

T.B. Is it important to realise that the Head is always moving, and we need to be exercised in relation to that?

A.C.C. Very good. The Head is always active and the body is here, and the way that the body is maintained is by the increase from the Head, no other way. There is no intermediary, no earthly head; it is a question of our Head in heaven and the body here and the link maintained by the Spirit by which the increase comes.

E.C.B. Would holding fast the Head be some at equivalent to following the cloud and the fire in the wilderness? Those who did not were cut off.

A.C.C. Yes, and missed their way.

Ques. Is there something substantial about the body as over against these other things?

A.C.C. That is what we have here - "the body is of Christ". He alludes to "a shadow of things to come", but the body is of Christ; that is what Christianity brings you to, the substantial character of things.

Rem. I thought it set forth Christ too.

A.C.C. Yes, that is the intention.

J.McK. Is there a touch of finality in the allusion to "the Amen"? There is what God has reached conclusively in Christ where He is, but then the fact that He is resource for us indicates that there is the means of carrying everything through to a conclusion in testimony.

A.C.C. I think it is a fine touch that He should present Himself as "the Amen", as you said a suggestion of what is final, and then also "the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God". It brings out the wealth of the headship of Christ, for not only is He presented as the Head of the body in Colossians, but as Head in other aspects. It is the fulness; I think, of what His headship would involve.

E.C.B. What does the Lord speak about over supper in Laodicea? - "I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me".

A.C.C. It is a fine thing that we have experience of the Lord coming in to us, and then of going in with Him. "The ones that were ready went in with him". First of all He comes in but then we go in too. This is an interesting thought as to what they spoke over at supper.

E.C.B. We were looking locally at the mystery in Colossians 1 and 2, and I wondered whether the Lord does not engage Laodicea with

the mystery. In Colossians Christ and the mystery are sufficient, are they not? You do not need anything outside either.

A.C.C. That is very good. What an enriching thing it is, therefore, to have the Lord with us in such a way, in the presence of so much pretension and assumption, that we are aware that there can be such a wealth of things for our enjoyment.

W.McK. The Lord's position is so definitely defined in Laodicea, is it not? He says "Behold, I stand at the door"; the note to the word 'stand' is 'I have placed myself there and am standing'. His position is clearly defined and it is for us to find out where that is.

A.C.C. That is right. I think it establishes the fact that the Lord takes up a certain position and attitude. He must do it in respect of the things that exist in the sphere of profession, and we come into that.

H.H. Are there two kinds of completeness? In chapter 2 (v 9) "in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in him", and then in chapter 4 (v 12) "Epaphras... always combating... that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God".

A.C.C. Yes. Completeness is one of the things in Colossians, that things might not be left undone or loose, or incomplete like Sardis.

H.H. And the overcomer would not lower the standard.

A.C.C. Now I would like to rest for a bit on this principle of transaction that the Lord is setting forward here - "buy of me" - as distinct from the way we have been taken up initially and abundantly blessed, so unconditionally.

S.D.K.R. There is an indifference in Laodicea. What is diverting a number of young people today is an activity in Christendom which is not directed by the Head, as for example the conversion of souls, which is most important, but which omits the mystery. Could you say something that would help us on that?

A.C.C. I think what you raise is very important indeed, that we do not just accept things in half measure; there is a snare in not going on to God's full thought. The Colossian ministry brings up the whole

question as to whether or not we are prepared to settle here and just have things that may suit us instead of having exercise to have the full thing that lies in the mind of God for us, which the mystery proposes.

S.D.K.R. Would being subject and near to Christ, occupied with Him where He is, help us to put everything in balance? It would not omit the great evangelical work which is necessary in these last days but at the same time put first things first, the truth of what is next to the heart of Christ in assembly response.

A.C.C. God would encourage us to have and enjoy all that He would give. I have noticed that you must occupy yourself with a sort of feverish activity if you are not prepared for the demands that the full truth would make upon you, because it does not come easily. That is my point in 'buying of Him', it is not the side of free grace, it is the side of exercise and industry that you are prepared for in view of understanding the full truth in connection with the mystery.

E.W. Does the principle of buying bring out a valuation of what is secured? As an example, an older brother was disposing of his volumes of Mr Raven's ministry to a young man and he said, I am going to make a charge for these; it will not be too much but I think you will value the ministry more if you have to pay for it. Is that the principle of this?

A.C.C. That is the principle, and that is the way the Lord is proposing things in this address to Laodicea. You have to have some definite deliberate transaction with Christ Him self, and as you say, you value what you have as coming from Him.

E.C.M. The foolish virgins had no transaction with Him but the wise had a transaction in the buying of oil. It is where the vitality would come in in connection with the Spirit.

A.C.C. Quite so. The great need now is power in vitality and that lies in the divine commodities that the Lord is proposing to sell.

W.McK. The whole of Matthew's gospel is on that principle. It is the kingdom and the violent take it by force (see chap 11: 12), and it is

the assembly gospel, and persons are prepared to go in for it.

A.C.C. It is a question of taking things by violence; you mean business. That is what has been part of our snare, we have not been definite. The Lord would say to us all, 'I would like to do business with you', and we ought to be sure that we mean business.

J.T-n. "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love". We would not have taken the way that the Lord has taken with us. It has meant discipline, rebuke, repentance; but is it His love that has brought us this way?

A.C.C. That is very good; it goes with all that belongs to this phase of things. You get the sense of the Lord's hand, nevertheless His comfort. I think He would comfort us as the discipline proceeds.

E.C.B. The necessity for this transaction as over against the grace in which He presents Himself to us in the gospel is because He is speaking to people on the basis of their responsibility in the position that they have taken up, is it not? Mr Stoney has a powerful letter in which he says that the Lord will not allow us to lower our standard in order to evade the responsibilities of the standard which we first adopted. For instance he says that you could never speak to someone who has walked in the light of the assembly as if he was a member of a Baptist congregation.

S.D.K.R. I think that is helpful. We have to "Keep, by the Holy Spirit..... the good deposit entrusted", 2 Tim 1: 14. As having the light of the assembly we are particularly responsible in relation to it.

A.C.C. Yes, and that light you do not lose. There is light that may become darkness in you, but once you have had the knowledge of the truth and the service of God, it always carries with it responsibility to answer to it.

R.L. "I have set before thee" carries the thought of giving. That would be on the line of the mina for instance, and the responsibility in its use. He has given it to us, has He not?

A.C.C. Quite so. Therefore, as I said, it carries its responsibility. You cannot say that you did not know that you are responsible to act

according to it. The people who used to engage themselves in God's service and do not do it any more are a great concern to me.

They cannot evade their responsibility. Whatever they might say about things that have taken place, they do not do it now.

W.F.F. Is that the way the truth of the body is put: "ministered to and united together by the joints and bands", that is, each one is to be a source of supply? It is what comes from the Head.

A.C.C. Each one concerned about the wellbeing of the body?

W.F.F. Yes, contributing to it, it is something that increases. We ought to be conscious of the increase of God as we are together on each occasion. It is a very full thought, is it not? Would it touch the side of purpose?

A.C.C. Yes, it shows the character of things, it is the increase of God.

W.McK. You could not be a joint of supply without having a transaction with the Head.

A.C.C. That is what I thought. I would like to get brought out clearer what it means to have to do with Christ, He having taken up this attitude. It is a deliberate attitude and He has adopted it because of the existing condition of things where there is assumption, and pretension to riches and wealth which they did not get from Him.

W.McK. At the end of John's gospel the Lord takes up a position on the land, and the disciples who had moved off the track had to come to Him in that position. He is not moving towards them there, they have to come to Him. Is that the position today, that the Lord is not identifying Himself with just anything, persons have to move towards where He is?

A.C.C. I think it requires tremendous exercise, and the principles have to be honoured before you can get the gain of what is in Christ. A certain principle is being established by the Lord here and unless you honour it you are not in the gain of what is coming from Himself.

Ques. Would Mary taking up a definite attitude in Luke 10 show the gain that there is? The Lord stands by her in that. As to what has

been said as to evangelical activity apart from the truth of the mystery, Martha would call for the help of others; there is that sort of thing (not that we would want to be critical) but the Lord supports Mary in taking up the attitude she does in relation to Him at His feet.

A.C.C. Quite so: she is honouring the way in which what comes from Him is to be had; she is deliberate about it, she "has chosen the good part". It is not that she had it just as moving about, she has taken up this deliberate attitude. It is like the principle of buying from Him and being prepared to have to do with Him in this transaction.

J.McK. Does the reference to the ointment in John 12, that it was of great price, indicate that the transaction had taken place?

A.C.C. Very good, it was a real evaluation of what the thing was.

E.C.B. Therefore if you "buy of me", what price do you pay?

A.C.C. I think that is what the Lord would raise with us. What are you prepared to pay?

E.C.B. Is that Romans 12: "present your bodies a living sacrifice" ?

A.C.C. You mean that might be one of the early exercises, to have to do with Him in that way and come into things vitally?

E.C.B. Yes; often if we speak about buying things of Christ we speak, for instance, of giving up our time and convenience, and so on, but these are only symptoms or indications of whether you have paid the real price.

E.H.W. If the Lord has to speak severely to us, is it important that, as He says here, "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love". Does that not carry its own appeal in the midst of the discipline and severity?

A.C.C. I am sure it does, you are in the Lord's hand.

E.H.W. In the promise to the overcomer He says "to him will I give to sit with me in my throne". The Lord loves to have us with Him and if there is severity from His side it is all to this end.

M.G.W. How do we get started on transactions with Christ? The Lord says here "I know". and "thou knowest not"; He says "thou

sayest", but also "thou art", to bring about a realisation with them that they are saying certain things but their state is seriously wrong and they must get to Him about these transactions.

A.C.C. As far as I see the worst of the trouble was that they did not know. It is the insensibility of their condition. That is not unknown by us; but immediately you set yourself to have to do with Him the full gain of what He is proposing opens up to you. Here you need Him, He is indispensable; that is the Colossian ministry - the indispensability of Christ as the living Head in heaven.

E.C.M. Does the mind come in to it? For instance, "have your mind on the things that are above" (Col 3: 2) involves what you say as to being deliberate, we have to do it; and Mary sitting at His feet.

A.C.C. It comes back to what value you are placing upon what you may know to be there for your appropriation and what you are prepared to do to have it. There are so many places now with the supposed Lord's supper, and you can find a place to suit you without raising too much exercise. But the Lord is standing outside of all that and is saying, You come to Me; buy of Me, I have certain commodities, and I will come in and sup with you and you with Me. That is what the Lord is proposing outside the condition of things that is marked by this latitudinarian spirit where things are so easy and indifferent.

E.C.M. As Mr Raven said, the Lord is outside of everything here. Peter had to come to that when he said "Lord, if it be thou, command me to come to thee", Matt 14: 28.

A.C.C. We could do with a revival of that kind of ministry that presents Christ as outside of everything here.

R.L. In Moses' day it was "He that is for Jehovah, let him come to me", Exod 32: 26. That involved taking the sword. Is that a matter to be faced? Then the tent is outside the camp.

A.C.C. It is a constant exercise with me that I am ready for the obligations of the truth. We have to accept things, they are not optional; Christianity is not optional. We must come to it that there

are certain obligations attaching to the truth and the fellowship and we should be ready for them.

G.A.P. Is there a responsibility to hear His voice? He is ready to speak, am I ready to hear?

A.C.C. Yes, but "if any one hear my voice": I think the Lord speaks.

W.McK. We had a touch from Mr Walkinshaw at Croydon in regard to 2 Timothy: "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity", but later "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord", not 'the name of the Lord' but "call upon the Lord", that is you are getting to the Person in that; and that makes all the difference if you can get to the Person and find what is in His mind.

A.C.C. Very good; that is something like the principle of buying and you are ready for that, and it raises, as far as I see, the principles that are set out in 2 Timothy 2. I think it is the way for contact with Him. As I said, it is not the principle of grace exactly, it is a question of what are you ready for. I have noticed that in 2 Timothy 2 the principles are first, then you meet with the Lord. Hebrews 13 is the opposite way, going forth to Him without the camp; it is Him right enough, but in 2 Timothy the question is are you ready for what the principles would demand from you?

W.McK. On that line you get through with others to the Person Himself.

E.C.B. Do you think that there can be a danger of a Laodicean situation arising because of our emphasising what we do not claim? If you keep on saying what you do not claim, after a time you cease to hold what you do not claim.

A.C.C. That is right.

E.C.B. If we go on saying, 'Of course we do not claim to be the assembly', which of course we know we do not claim, we shall little by little surrender assembly truth. Do you not think so?

A.C.C. That has happened.

E.C.B. And if we say, 'Of course we do not insist on separation as we used to', in a little while we shall not insist on separation; and by emphasising what we do not claim we shall let everything slip.

J.T-n. Does all this emphasise the need for the revival of Paul's gospel? As was said earlier it suggests nothing less than the whole man secured as a living sacrifice. Is it because we have had a lower standard before us that many of us got astray?

A.C.C. Yes, you maintain our living link with Christ. The trend is always downwards, you give up; but I think what Mr Burr is saying about what the over-emphasising of what we do not claim leads to, is very important.

E.C.B. So that as a further illustration of that, "Do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim 4: 5) is not a kind of encouragement to weak preachers, is it? The man that is doing the work of a evangelist is imbued with the mystery of the Christ and he will not surrender anything even if he can only find one other person to walk with in the light of it.

A.C.C. Very good.

J.McK. I was struck with the reference "that thou mayest be rich"; even in days of smallness and outward insignificance the Lord has in mind that the assembly is to be an increasingly wealthy area where persons are not walking according to what might appear outwardly but according to the resource that is in Him.

A.C.C. Very good. In Colossians 1 it speaks about "growing by the true knowledge of God". That is the proper growth, and I think that what the Lord is proposing in these commodities might come under the heading of "the true knowledge of God". We know that according to the parable of Matthew 13, by the leaven hid in the three measures of meal - 'three' again - it has all been leavened. The knowledge of God now as in Christendom has all been humanised, whereas when you get things direct from Christ it is the true knowledge of God. What do you say?

E.C.B. Yes, I think that. We need to keep the substance of the mystery before us because in it "are hid all the treasure s of wisdom and of knowledge". Do you not think it is a remarkable thing and reflects our history that many of us are affected even in our emotions that 'through His poverty we might become rich, but a Laodicean situation arises and we have to be recalled to the thing that first convicted us?

A.C.C. Yes, quite so.

Ques. It is affecting to think of the Lord without. Mr Taylor sen spoke of the Lord taking up an outwardly foolish attitude of continually knocking and waiting. It seems to me that the Lord's voice is like the knocking.

A.C.C. Well, there are the two things: the knocking and the speaking; "if any one hear my voice and open the door". Certain things arise which would clearly indicate that the Lord is knocking; but I think His speaking is continuous. I think everybody is responsible to answer to the voice; He speaks.

M.G.W. Would the eyesight and the riches and the garments be one part of it, but the supping with Him a deep inward satisfying side of having to do with Himself and thus bringing about growth?

A.C.C. Yes, I think so: there must be some action on the part of the person to let Him in. The whole of the Laodicean challenge is that; if you want to have to do with Christ there is something to do on your side.

J.McK. Do the transactions referred to come before the opening of the door? I wondered if in "I will come in unto him and sup with him" the Lord wants to come into an area that is fully furnished and rich in what can not only be for our enjoyment but for His.

A.C.C. Yes, I think so.

W.McK. What would you say about the eye-salve? The language is the same kind as is used in John 9 when the Lord made mud of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes and told him to go and wash that he might see. That was a definite and clear transaction with Christ,

was it not? I wondered if eyesight is one of the main needs of the present time.

A.C.C. Very important; "that thou mayest see", clothed and enriched and able to see. What heavenly commodities! They are all intended to set us up here as different from the whole run of things that is going on; no matter what circle, you can be different as receiving these things from Christ.

H.M. We would regard the address to Laodicea as very negative I suppose, but do you get in these things which you can buy from Christ something that leads into the condition that we get in Philadelphia?

A.C.C. I think that is right: it is to meet the impoverished conditions and the insensibility. I think the Lord has it and He would have us in the gain of it.

W.F.F. Looking on to the full expression of it, would you link the thought of eyesight with Paul's two prayers in Ephesians, the eyes of their hearts being enlightened to the great scope of God's thoughts in purpose for them?

A.C.C. Quite so: think of what a vision that is. It was part of what Paul prayed about - that they might know the hope of their calling. Vision would come into that so that we might be alive to the fulness of the things that are available.

E.H.W. So we get clothing, seeing and hearing. Would that be progression; and then finally overcoming?

A.C.C. I think it is all intended to set us up as enriched by what is coming from Christ directly, not dependent upon the human side of things or what may proceed along the line as instituted by an earthly head. I want to make a point of that, that there has been that, and it is not unknown by us where things were directed not directly from Christ; but in the presence of such conditions the Lord would appeal to us to have to do with Him and have things that are fresh and enriching.

C.B. Why is the "I" emphatic - "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love"?

A.C.C. That brings you back again to the blessed Person of the Colossian ministry. I have often been impressed with how Paul goes over the greatness of Christ - the Son of the Father's love, image of the invisible God, all things being created by Him and for Him, and so on. Then he says "He is head of the body", such an One as that. So it is the same here, the One who presents Himself as the Amen, and so on, says, 'I am the One'. How wonderful that is!

C.B. The Lord's intervention is a very great encouragement: it preserves us against presumption.

A.C.C. Yes. I sat down here this morning with the feeling that the Lord would comfort and encourage His people. If ministry does not convey that now, in the conditions we are in, you wonder whether it is coming from the Head in heaven. I was once in a meeting where this scripture was being discussed and we had a tremendous sense of the thing taking place. Maybe we are having a slight feeling of it this morning, but it was wonderful just to get an experience of the very doctrine you were speaking about.

E.C.B. The becoming rich, wearing white garments, and seeing in Laodicea relate to us in a position of responsibility, do they not? In Sardis they are presented as future - "they shall walk with me in white" and "shall be clothed in white garments" - but in Laodicea it is a present experience.

A.C.C. It makes you different from all around and there is that distinguishing character about things. I think it is what the Lord intends. It is not a question of claiming at all, it is a question of what exists in a substantial character in contradistinction to all that is around.

E.C.B. Yes, I think it has a great deal to do with the vitality that there is, and ministry should have the effect of increasing the vitality among the brethren.

W.McK. Do you mean by that, that the Lord has something in mind which is morally superior at the end? Even the white garments are something that are to be in evidence currently, exceeding even what has been in the recovery before.

E.C.B. As a general principle I think that. We should hold to the fact that the latter glory of the house will be greater than the former.

Laodicea was one of the richest cities in Asia Minor, it made a fortune out of the wool trade and was a very great market; but what the Lord is saying to them is, 'Get your eye off the material things because I have them for you in a spiritual setting'. I think it is very important to see that the riches and the white garments and the seeing in Laodicea relate to the assembly in responsibility. The Lord's promise to Sardis prompted 'With thee in garments white, Lord Jesus, we shall walk' (Hymn 270). You will remember Mr Taylor sen's address on 'White garments' (N.S Vol. 13, p.245).

W.McK. I think that is very encouraging because it shows what is possible at the present time as having to do directly with the Head.

A.C.C. We had become just like the others. One thing I can see that has happened is that the Lord has taken away our image in Christendom. We had a certain image, we were reckoned among the other groups, brethren began to hold a place. I think the Lord has, so far as we are concerned, taken that away.

E.C.B. Yes, but last time you were down in these parts you spoke about the way in which the brethren were known amongst men for moral integrity and being a testimony to righteousness and the truth, and I think it is time that we were diligent to get that name back. Not that we seek a name but we should be diligent to be in such a testimony that merits it.

A.C.C. I think this is the way to it: "buy of me", and have white garments. Think of all that that would mean in the presence of men, in the presence of Christians with spotted garments; think of the Lord setting you down with white garments in the midst of others, and with riches that obviously are not material but spiritual. People can know that. Then too you are able to see, your vision is clear. I think the

Lord would help us to be these kind of people in the presence of others.

E.C.B. I wonder how many of the brethren have been stimulated by the plain public need for the demonstration of moral integrity in men and women. It is one of the greatest needs of the day, and there are a hundred people here this morning who could all take it on.

J.T-n. You spoke about the Head being continually in movement. What greater could we have than "I rebuke ... I love... I stand ... I will come"? If I have not arrived at this now, would it not be a very blessed thing to come to it?

A.C.C. It would be, He is always active, His voice is always to be heard. Other matters come up that come within the scope of His knocking but I think His voice in faithful love is always speaking.

T.B. It says, "Buy the truth, and sell it not", Prov 23: 23. I believe that the Spirit of God has spoken to us that we need to hold the ground for God in the truth.

A.C.C. I am glad you say that, hold the ground for God. I think that what was said has indicated that it could easily slip away from us.

We should set ourselves for the holding of the truth and all that it involves; because Christianity never was intended just to be too easy; there was always something that you had to hold as valuable, prize it, and be ready to meet the demands that it would involve.

W.F.F. The Colossian scripture seems to suggest that what we are and what we hold are brought into operation for the good of the body. It suggests that we have substance to minister. There is this uniting going on and the joints and bands, that is that what we have attained to is for the good of the body.

A.C.C. Yes, the body is maintained and supported by what comes from the Head and nothing else. When He was here Himself He drew nothing from the scene around. It is intended that we being here, the body of Christ, draw nothing from the scene around, all comes from our Head in heaven. That was the light that first dawned on Mr Darby: if there is a Head in heaven there must be a body here.

E.W. In Matthew they went away to buy, whereas the Lord would draw near, would He not, that we might buy of Him? It is all so available.

A.C.C. Quite so. I was interested in, "Go ... to those that sell ". That is how the oil is to be obtained, and I have the conviction that the solution to everything now lies in the recognition of the Spirit.

E.C.M. Those that were ready went in with Him to the wedding feast and then the door was shut. Would you say something about that?

A.C.C. I think those that were ready are those in the gain of the current service and activities of the Spirit.

W.McK. So what is in the Lord's mind is the moral excellence in the responsible sphere; but the last word He says to Laodicea in that section is "with me". Is not that the highest feature of our privilege?

A.C.C. Yes, association with Him in His own realm, but you never get there unless you open the door to Him here. You must be ready for all that that means, buying of Him and opening the door to Him.

You do not have the experience of going with Him into His own realm unless that is so. People should not deceive themselves. The Lord is outside Laodicea, but then others are outside here.

E.C.B. Would ministering the Spirit, which we get in both Galatians and Corinthians, bear on this?

A.C.C. Yes. What do you think about those that sell?

E.C.B. I was wondering if "He therefore who ministers to you the Spirit" (Gal 3: 5) did not bear on it. No doubt it refers in its origin to Christ, but Christ was not there in Galatia working miracles among them. It was done no doubt by the apostles in the gift that they had; and while there is not what is apostolic now, yet there should be the capacity to minister the Spirit which would provide opportunity for persons to buy oil.

A.C.C. Very good; you mean that there is something here that is the reflex of the economy that has been set in motion. Divine Persons alone can minister the Spirit, but then there is something here that is

amongst the saints that is operating that would minister the Spirit in a way that the saints come into the good of it.

E.C.B. Yes, 1 Corinthians 2 and 2 Corinthians 3 are really offering oil for persons who will buy it.

R.L. Is not that the way in which the final thing will work; "The Spirit and the bride say, Come", Rev 22: 17?

A.C.C. I think so, the vitality is in that.

W.McK. So that spiritual transactions ought to be going on in a meeting like this. The Lord cast out one form of trading from the temple but there is a form of trading going on in the temple all the time in this purchase of oil and the ministering of the Spirit.

A.C.C. I think that is right; the five prudent had already been to those that were selling the oil. "Go... to those that sell"; they had been. The foolish thought they could get it from the wise but they say, No, you go to those that sell.

E.C.M. What you brought up about transaction is very important. Mr Taylor sen said that the Spirit is not given automatically, it involves a transaction with divine Persons.

A.C.C. My great fear is that we might settle down to a sort of indifferent and insensible condition of things where we are quite content to go on complacently without any vital exercise as to what is proceeding from Christ at the moment.

W.F.F. The oil with them would seem to be in view of the shining of the torches. Would that suggest that as the Spirit is free the whole scene is illuminated?

A.C.C. I think so, it is to prepare the way for Christ. In those days the lights were to show the way for the bridegroom. That is what is intended, that our light might be bright.

J.McK. It seems that the oil is very closely identified with the persons who possess it. These foolish say to the prudent "Give us of your oil", it quite clearly belonged to them; and is it not clear that

certain areas of assembly truth belong to those who are walking in the light of it?

A.C.C. Very good.

R.L. The word to Philadelphia is "I come quickly".

E.H.W. So here in Matthew 25 it is in view of sharing with the Lord His joy in His being the Bridegroom and this being the wedding feast? It is all to the end that divine Persons might have their portion, is it not?

A.C.C. I think that would be true.

E.C.B. In regard to the question of transactions to which you have referred, it is not without significance that the Lord immediately goes on to speak the parable of the talents, "thou oughtest then to have put my money to the money-changers".

A.C.C. Yes, showing that He would have us in industry here and carrying on transactions during His absence.

Sunbury

27 July 1974

KEY TO INITIALS

C.B. C.Brodie Ealing; E.C.B. E.C.Burr London; T.B. T.Broughton Richmond;

A.C.C. A.C.Craig Airdrie; W.F.F. W.F.Flowerdew London; H.H. H.Hatcher Kingston upon Thames; R.L. R.Lawrence Maidstone; E.C.M. E.C.Muggleton Croydon; H.M. H.Meek Sunbury; J,McK. J.McKay Sunbury; W.McK. W.McKay Sunbury; G.A.P. G.A.Palmer London; S.D.K.R. Dr.S.D.K.Roberts Croydon; J.T-n. J.I.Thomson Croydon;

E.W. E.Woodford Dorking; E.H.W. E.H.Wakefield Sunbury; M.G.W. M.G.Wood Dundee

THE WILDERNESS

J.C.Evershed

Jeremiah 2: 1-3 (first clause)

I want to speak a little, dear brethren, about the wilderness as it is spoken of in these verses in Jeremiah, because it says that God's people went after Him in the wilderness. I do not intend to speak of the wilderness exactly as a howling desert, or as a grim path, but rather as a pilgrim path and a way in which, although we get to know what is in our own hearts, primarily we get to know what is in God's own heart and the provision that He has made for us at every turn in the testimony. So it says of Israel that "thou wentest after me in the wilderness". That obviously means that God had been in the wilderness before the children of Israel got there. I hope to be able to prove that from Scripture as we go on.

Since, however, this scripture has come before me, I would like just to dwell on this fact that God remembered on account of His people their brightest day. It seems to me a very wonderful thing that, although God had said that He would remember sins and iniquities no more, yet it says here that what He would remember was the brightest day that Israel had, the day of their espousals and the day when they went after Him in the wilderness. It should not have been like that. Actually this was, I suppose, one of the worst times in the history of God's people; the ten tribes had gone into captivity, two were about to go, but God said, I remember your best day. I would say to each believer that God will not remember your iniquities and your sins any more and He, true to His nature, will remember your best day; but you and I should not have to tax His memory to remember when our best day was; our brightest day should be today. He should not have to remember it as a thing in the past. So I would like to lay this upon ourselves that we are concerned that this day should be our brightest day, and if this little word of ministry will help to that end with one and another we shall have reached a good conclusion.

There are one or two very interesting things about the wilderness. One of the most remarkable is that of all the Israelites their clothes and their sandals never wore out. Little did they know on the passover night, when in haste they put on their sandals and girded on their clothes, that those garments would remain new for forty years. And this is not only an interesting fact as being God's miraculous intervention so that whenever clothes were passed down the family, each time the child said, 'I have an entirely new garment, an entirely new pair of shoes'; there is something far, far deeper than that in it. The fact that their garments never wore out means that God's purpose for those people never changed; He ever had before Him that He was to take them through the wilderness into the land.

You say, there were only one or two that actually went through. I say He took His people out of Egypt and He took them into the land of promise and He never had to change His purposes on account of what came out in them. And their sandals? That means that the power for walk through the wilderness never diminishes, never becomes old, it is always new and fresh because it resides in the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is possible and normal for the believer to walk through the wilderness in accordance with the light of the purpose of God.

Another interesting thing about the wilderness is that it is not a wilderness, but several wildernesses, at least four. That does not mean to say that it is so much the worse, it means that there are diverse ways in which we learn God's thoughts and intents for us.

These wildernesses can be identified in the scriptures and it is one way in which God comes, as it were, to our level and opens up the truth to us - divides it up so that we can distinguish one thing from another. Just the same as there were a number of different classes of persons going through the wilderness, four of them, and a number of different persons besides children who went right through from Egypt to the land, four of them, showing that there are distinctive features to be seen in believers and in the believer as going through the wilderness. There were the priests, the family of the priests (and every believer partakes of that feature), there were the Levites who

bore the burdens of the testimony; every believer partakes of that. There were the common persons, as we call them; every believer partakes of that. Thus Paul speaks of the simple Christian, and not only so but of him "who fills the place of the simple Christian", 1 Cor 14: 16. So that if you and I can do nothing else, we can fill the place of the simple Christian and say "Amen" at the giving of thanks. In other words we can be responsive to what goes on in God's service. And then, fourthly there were the strangers who went with the people, not exactly the mixed multitude, but the strangers who would find that "One law shall be for him that is home-born and for the sojourner", Exod 12: 49. Think of God's mercy in taking us up as strangers and at a distance from Him, and saying, as it were 'One law shall be for all. Even if you are a stranger you shall come into the very best that there is and it shall belong to you and no one can take it from you'. The believer is all these four kinds of person in himself.

One person who went through was Joshua who represents one in the gain of the lordship of Christ, because he was so often mentioned as being with Moses. In fact he says "My lord Moses" (Num 11: 28) in one case. That is an absolute essential in going through our daily path, that we fully acknowledge the Lord and are found in His company. There was also Caleb, of whom it distinctively says that "he hath another spirit" (Num 14: 24) which stresses to us the importance of being such persons; not those who doubt whether God can take us through and can give us the enjoyment even now of the holy privileges; not those who murmur or complain; but those who are of another spirit as having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit here. Then, of course, Moses, though in the government of God he was hindered at one time from going into the land and accepted it, nevertheless represents one who reached there in glory. He represents the believer as going through as a glorified person. Moses appeared in company with Elias and with the Lord Jesus on the mount, and it says they appeared "in glory", Luke 9: 31. So as we go through our pilgrimage we take account of

one another as being those whom, by the indwelling of the Spirit, God has already glorified.

Fourthly there was Joseph; he went right through too. It is a very remarkable and interesting thing. He represents what I call long-term faith because he spoke of the going forth of the children of Israel and of their coming into the land (although it was a couple of hundred years before it took place) and he said 'I am going through as well'; and he went through. You say it was just his bones. Yes, that is just the mysterious side of things. There is that which is mysterious about the believer, that which is unseen, and yet structural within him that goes right through. One might think that when they went in haste out of Egypt they would not have wanted to be encumbered with an ark containing the bones of Joseph, but it distinctly says (as I read it) that Moses himself "took the bones of Joseph with him" (Exod 13: 19) on leaving Egypt. And at every encampment, every movement, every step they took, they took the bones of Joseph with them. So after the first year they had two arks with them; one, of course, outstandingly was the ark of the testimony and the ark of the covenant, and that is essential for believers in the wilderness and cannot be too much stressed; it represents the leadership of the Lord Jesus here, the perfection of His person and His being a rallying point and a centre of divine service. But then they had another ark with them as well and that just contained the bones of Joseph and it went right through into the land and he was buried there. So with the believer there is that which he may have to wait a long time to realise; the results of his desires, of his prayers, of his longings, or of whatever it might be, and it demonstrates long-term faith. And I ask myself and my brethren, that as we are tested in things about which we have an underlying faith, let us remember that the bones of Joseph went right through into the land and what he had set before him in faith was realised.

I now dwell on the fact that God had been in the wilderness before the people reached there; before ever a single Israelite got across the Red Sea and up the bank, God had been there before him. I used, as a boy, to think of the Israelites scrambling through

the Red Sea and up the other side on to the bank. But you did not scramble through the Red Sea, did you? You did not, nor did I. It would be a slight on the work of Christ if we thought we did. And in any case the scripture says that there was not one feeble among their tribes (Ps 105: 37) and that they had no fear in going through (Ps 78: 53), which is a very remarkable thing seeing that they had a great wall of water on either side of them. They went through in rank and triumphantly because they sang redemption's song when they reached the shore. One of the leaders in the singing and the dancing was a person of about ninety-two years of age, Miriam. So let the old sisters realise that they have a very essential part in connection with this matter of rejoicing in redemption's work, and there is something that they can set on amongst us as a fruit of their experience and knowledge of God. He has seen to it that we have been taken through the Red Sea with a high hand, according to the power and majesty of His own thoughts. As believers we have been powerfully taken out of Egypt where we had been under the domination of the enemy of God and have been brought to a place where God Himself is. Although, as believers, we have been brought, in effect, really in purpose, into the land, God has something for us to learn of Himself in the pilgrimage time.

So those people were taken through the Red Sea which means the death of Christ as making a way through death for us and separating us completely from the world which is dominated by Satan. God Himself has taken us and He has taken us to Himself, as He says: I have "brought you to myself", Exod 19: 14. But when they got into the first wilderness they found the water was bitter to drink, and that must have been a great disappointment to them, having been rejoicing so much in their deliverance. I would like the young ones to listen carefully to this, because the children also would have found the water bitter. It may be that as you grow up and realise that you have been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, to the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, you will find that owning the Lord brings a certain bitterness of circumstance to you, something that you will not like - and those of

us who are older find it just the same, that the waters of Marah are bitter. Some have said that they were the backwaters, the brackish waters of the Red Sea itself that they had to taste; in other words, what the Lord Jesus Himself so *fully* tasted in going into death. But then this is one way I am going to prove that God had been there first, because He showed Moses wood. Now God had put that wood there. It was not just any wood, it was not 'go and find some wood and cast it in'; God "shewed him wood, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters became sweet", Exod 15: 25. That means that God has made perfect provision for all our needs and that the Lord Jesus has endured and passed through the fulness of temptations and testings which we pass through, sin apart, in His Person. That did not diminish the bearing of those testings upon Him but rather did it make them the more solemn to Him on account of the perfection of His Person. The wood being cast into the waters therefore demonstrates to us that God has gone before and He has made a means whereby the waters of Marah can be made sweet. I suppose God could have said, 'Take them on another few hundred yards and they will find sweet water', but He did not do that. He did not take them out of their circumstances but left them there, and He made the waters sweet. He did not chide them for complaining, and that is a feature of this early stage of wilderness history. Those of us who are older, if we complain, God is severe with us, but in the early days of the path of faith God would pass over the murmurings of His people and would meet them in His grace.

Then He led them to Elim where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees. God had been there many years before. But here were two million people and twelve wells and seventy palm trees, which did not seem to me when a child to be enough. But then they speak of the sufficiency of God's ministration in the power of the Spirit, I believe through ministry, so that He is able to convey refreshment to however many persons there may be, in fact to whosoever will. Just as the Lord sent out twelve apostles and then sent the other seventy also, just so it is that there are those who are particularly gifted, not apostles now, but those specially

fitted to minister to us; and then we have those who can in a way supplement that and bring in something further that adds to the comfort, the refreshment and the building up of the saints.

Well, they moved on from that wilderness and came into another one and then they had not anything to eat. That meant that they proved God in a fresh way altogether because God had also been there first; He said 'When you go out of your tents you will find the manna there'. Think of God providing the manna! And that was sufficient to last them right through the forty years. Perhaps you say they got tired of it. We have to say they did; but manna was their food and I do not believe Joshua and Caleb ever got tired of eating it. In any case it is "the bread of the mighty", Ps 78: 25. They would never be able to feed on the giants in the land as they foretold "they shall be our food", Num 14: 9 - unless they fed on the manna. You and I will never have any power for progress unless we are feeding on Christ known to us as God's daily provision. I do not think we can stress that too much, the daily feeding on Christ as the manna.

Those who went after God in the wilderness, in a land not sown, who would not have had any crops or anything like that, were just entirely dependent upon God and what He would supply. And then for their thirst there was the smitten rock. Who put the rock there?

God had been first, to that very spot, and that rock was there; that rock was Christ. Think of the refreshing that came from Christ as being smitten, for it required that He should die. Do we realise that these spiritual refreshments and enjoyments that we have are dependent upon the work and suffering of the Lord Jesus? The rock had to be smitten and the waters flowed. And another scripture says that the rock followed them. In other words God went behind them as well, so that all they had to do if they wanted refreshment and water was to turn round and get it. In Christianity that means that the Holy Spirit is always available to us because Christ died.

Then there was another thing that shewed that God had been there first. The Amalekites were there. 'O', you would say, 'I should think if God had been there first He would have cleared them all out'; but He did not do that, He left them there. God said about the

Amalekites that He was going to have war with them throughout all generations. Why did He leave it like that? Ah, you see, He left it thus so that they should have some taste of conflict and that they should learn something about the way in which to deal with evil. I would like to mention one or two points as to the matter. The first would be, of course, to pray not to be led into temptation. You say 'Surely God will not tempt us'. Well, the Lord said "Pray that ye enter not into temptation", Luke 22: 40. The very fact of praying puts us into communion with God and although He may test us, allow temptation to come to us, it is not that we seek it, or put ourselves in the way of it, but rather the reverse. Another thing would be to abide in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. A weakly plant is the first to be attacked by any kind of virus, or whatever it might be, so that it is essential that we keep ourselves strong, as the scripture says, "in the grace which is in Christ Jesus". 2 Tim 2: 1.

Another thing is to learn the song or use of the bow. That means to deal with evil while it is as far off as possible and not let it get near. If king Saul had done that instead of letting temptation get nearer and nearer to him, cherishing it and living on it, he might have been saved. And so David in his lament taught the people the song of the bow, which means that while things are as far away as possible you deal with them. I ask the young people and the old people, do we do that, or do we sometimes cherish little temptations? Well, it was in the form of a song in any case and I think that is because it always helps us to be tuneful in our souls - to be responsive and not to view things as being too difficult and troublesome. Saul was put to grief by the very thing that he should have been able to use; the archers shot at him, they confused him, the enemy turned things round upon him and that is a very sad situation to get into.

But then there is more than that, because the scripture as to the Amalekites indicates close combat and they had to be strong for that; Joshua had to engage in close combat with evil. That is so oftentimes with us and God has provided for that too. It does not say what armour He provided for Joshua and the others, but they were

able to overcome by virtue of the intercessory service of one who was above them, who represents in a certain aspect the service of Christ. With Him there was and is no failure nor ever could be, yet Moses represents the intercessory system which is supported by waiting upon God in order that persons might be victorious in the field of conflict with evil. It is no good under-estimating the power of the enemy; I do not think Joshua ever did that and I am quite sure that God never intends us to. One might say, 'Why does not God remove the evil condition from me so that I am not harassed by it?' But according to His own wisdom He has left that condition with us, but with power to be maintained in the overcoming of it. As has been often said, the presence of the flesh in us is not in itself defiling, but allowing it to act not only does us harm but detaches us from communion with God in our spirits.

Then they came into the wilderness of Sinai. I do not propose to dwell on the matter of the law but I would like to say just this about Sinai, that although it sounds very solemn and serious to us, and rightly so, because of the majesty of God and His moral requirements, yet the first thing He says when they get there is "Ye have seen... how I have borne you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself ", Exod 19: 4. In other words He had been there first.

So that we can take account of God's pleasure in bringing us as quickly as possible to Himself where He is and to do it with power.

And He says now, the proposal I have is that I will make you "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation", Exod 19: 6. I would just like to leave that with us, too, that God would have us as brought to Himself, knowing Him intelligently and having the declaration, as they had at Sinai, of what He was morally, having too the light and construction of the tabernacle and all the detail of it with the fact that He would dwell there, the proposal is that we should be "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation". So that God looks to us, as having come after Him in the wilderness, to serve Him even there as priests and to be holy persons. So that the fact that you and I are encompassed by infirmities, and that there is breakdown with us and with others, does not alter the fact that it is God's present proposal

and intention that we should be a kingdom of priests to Him and a holy people entirely separate for His pleasure. When the children of Israel came into yet another wilderness they sent out spies into the land some of whom came back with an evil report, but two of them came back with a true report. The people began to murmur and complain but God did not then say that everything was finished if they did not want to go; He began to speak to them of what would happen when they would go in, about burnt offerings and the like.

So you see that God has gone before at every point and He draws us to Himself where He is. There is progress through the wilderness, but each time we learn God in a fresh way. I would just press this upon us in closing, that we set ourselves in a definite way to learn more of God Himself and what communion with Him is during what we speak of as our wilderness path. In the Name of the Lord Jesus.

London

20 July 1974

EARNEST OF OUR INHERITANCE

C.G.Hitchcock

Ephesians 1: 3-14

I have read the whole of this passage for the sake of the connection and because of what the apostle sets out in this paragraph, each part of which is so dependent on the others. It would seem that the early part contains a principal thought - that there is an ascription to God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as being the One "who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ". The passage closes with a reference to saints who have pre-trusted in the Christ, and to the great and blessed fact that "we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance to the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of his glory". Well now, brethren, we have had before us the thought of the greatness of the position which God has accorded in His counsel, "the counsel of his own will", to Christ and to the saints of this present time, and it seemed to me (following upon our brother's reference to the Holy Spirit's service in taking of the things of Christ, and in giving us entrance into the mind of God according to the expression of God as it is found in Christ, and in His teaching and that of the apostles) that we might be encouraged to see what is the character of our blessing and the way in which we are supported by certain divine thoughts concerning Christ and what is in Him, and the fact that the service of the Holy Spirit is operative at the present time to bring the saints into the gain of our inheritance, which is a spiritual one.

Now we need, I feel sure, to distinguish between what our inheritance is, what our blessing is, and what we find in the way of support in our responsible pathway here, because as here we are responsible in relation to the things of this life that we may be approved children of God in the course of that responsible pathway.

But then, over and above our course here is what belongs to us as given to us of God in Christ, our spiritual inheritance, which we shall come into in the coming time; and we shall enjoy it under conditions that are proper to it, having bodies as the outcome of the redemption of the acquired possession, we being thus clothed with a house from heaven, having bodies of glory.

All that lies before us; but then the Holy Spirit is earnest of our inheritance now. The word 'earnest' is a well-known one and relates to ideas that were in the Old Testament; it is a transliteration of a Hebrew word into Greek, and the idea is a pledge. So what is before us and will be entered into in actuality is now made good to us in a kind of moral way so that our minds and our spirits are affected, and we are enabled in the Spirit's power to enter upon what will ultimately be our fully-enjoyed appreciation of what our portion is with Christ during the time of His reign over the earth and then in eternity when God dwells with men, tabernacles with them in that wonderful vessel where there is no need of the light of the sun, for the Lamb is the lamp. The blessedness of dwelling thus with God from our side of it will be unspeakable. We can hardly conceive it, but we do have some impression of it now, especially in moments of privilege when we are abstracted from what belongs to our responsible course here, of which I have already spoken, and we are thus given an entrance, as led by Christ, into this wonderful spiritual sphere where God is satisfied and joys in those whom Christ has brought to Him in sonship. So it is that as having believed we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Now, the idea of promise is that God has made certain statements as to what He is going to bring in, and the way in which He is going to bless His people, and it is therefore future, it is what He is *going* to do. But then it goes on to say, "Sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is ... earnest"; now that is, He is the pledge of it now. The thing is, are we going to avail ourselves of that service of the Holy Spirit, to be led so far as we are able at this present time into this wonderful sphere which God has in mind for us to be enjoyed in actuality, but which can be appreciated now and is a wonderful background of support as we pass through a scene of trial and pressure and difficulty. There may be discipline and chastening but we know the Father, and it is all in view of our being conformed to the image of His Son.

May we be encouraged by these thoughts that God has in mind for us, and what He has given to enable us to enter into them.

London

6 August 1974

THE CHILDREN'S SORROWS

In God's ways, some boys and girls learn when quite young what sorrow is - perhaps through illness, disappointment or the death of a loved one. At such times comfort is always to be found where love is; especially, for the believer, in the Lord Jesus. He knew indeed what it was to be "very sorrowful even unto death". These are His own words recorded in the gospel account which speaks of Him as the great King, yet His resource was in dependent prayer to the Father.

You will know that the shortest verse in the Bible tells us very simply that "Jesus wept". This was from deep personal grief although His divine power was about to change the circumstances completely. It is of interest, too, that three great apostles also wept, great men as they were. In Peter's case the tears were those of sorrow for failure to confess his Master; with Paul it was because of the enemies of the cross of Christ; John wept much until he understood that the Lord, seen by him as the Lamb, is able to settle every problem to the glory of God.

A very tender scripture records about a sorrowing boy, that God heard his voice "there where he is". In fact, his name itself meant 'God hears'! This should encourage the young people to carry every trouble to God, although He sees and knows all things. By the habit of prayer they would then grow up to be reliant on Him, rather than self-reliant as Ishmael unhappily became.

Sometimes sorrow is suddenly changed to joy. I expect that the maiden, Rhoda, was as anxious as the older brethren at the meeting for prayer when Peter was in prison. But when she heard his voice at the door she forgot to open it at once to him for sheer joyful surprise! No doubt her faith in God's power was much strengthened by this experience.

In the gracious ways of God a boy who had become a cripple at the age of five was given in later years a happy place at the table of his king every day. Also, through his sorrows he must have learnt

much about God's care for him because he called his son by a name which means 'who is like God'. He remained faithful to David when very many others were unfaithful. Do you long to be faithful to the Lord in the time of His rejection?

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