

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

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LOVING THE ASSEMBLY

J.Strachan

Ephesians 5: 25-27; Psalm 122

I should like to say something, dear brethren, about the assembly firstly as loved by Christ, and then as loved by believers. When you think of this scripture in Ephesians there can be no uncertainty about the love of Christ for the assembly, for He has delivered Himself up for it. That is how much He loves the assembly, and what He is doing now by the ministry of the word - what is referred to here as the sanctifying it and purifying it by the washing of water by the word - is I think the evidence that He loves it still. We are in a day when things are broken, when things are very fragmentary, but Christ still loves the assembly. Let us be assured of that, dear brethren: His love for the assembly remains. He is going to present it to Himself and in view of that presentation, so soon to take place, He is actively engaged in His personal service of love in making it in every way suitable to Himself. As you think of Christ and how He is going to have the assembly with Himself, you cannot but think of a vessel that is going to be suited to Him in every way. So, even when things publicly are broken, yet there is something that can be relied on in the love of Christ for the assembly. He has proved His love by giving Himself for it, and He is presently engaged in this wonderful service so that He might present the assembly to Himself, glorious. What a day of presentation that is going to be!

Think of such a glorious Person, a glorious Man, patiently waiting for His assembly at the moment, but actively serving it, and He is going to have it in every way suited to Himself. He is not going to have the fragmented condition of things that we see publicly. He is going to have something that is glorious, because He Himself is glorious and He is going to have the counterpart of Himself. He will be able to look at the assembly and say 'That is myself over again'.

Is that not wonderful? We are accustomed to days of brokenness and smallness, days of public humiliation, but, dear brethren, what Christ is working to secure is something that is glorious, something

that is compatible with Himself, compatible with His love. Oh! think of the love of the Christ, what a love it is, perfect in every way, perfect towards God, perfect towards men, perfect towards the assembly. That love is going to have an answer in every way suited to itself. So it says He is going to "present the assembly to Himself glorious, having no spot or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless." What a wonderful product the assembly is going to be, the product of the personal, devoted love of Christ.

Is it not a wonderful thing that we have been called to have part in such a vessel? Do not we value this day in which we are found!

We could not be found in any greater day than this day, when Christ personally is engaged in serving and securing vessel. What a vessel it is! Have you thought what a vessel the assembly is, a vessel the Lord would speak to us about? Have you ever stopped to think what a vessel she is, dear young people? The nearest thing there is to deity: not deity, of course, she will always remain a creature, but the nearest thing to deity. It says in this very epistle, "the fulness of him who fills all in all" (ch 1: 23). Oh, what a thing the assembly is! We are so accustomed to brokenness and smallness, sometimes we tend to lose sight of what the assembly is. In the millennial world, she is going to come down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. The holy city, Jerusalem, what she is going to be! Wonderful substantiality in that city! Its dimensions are extensive.

You can see in the end of Revelation how substantial, how glorious she is, coming down to influence the millennial world. It speaks of *her* shining: what shining in that vessel; "having the glory of God" but it speaks of her shining. Think of a vessel that will be able as of Christ to influence the world in the millennium, influence things on the earth from heaven. What a vessel she is going to be! That is what we have been called to have part in.

What she is going to be in eternity! A bride adorned for her husband. That is what she is for the heart of Christ, but then it says "The tabernacle of God is with men" (Rev 21: 3). Think of God having a dwelling place, the assembly the divine dwelling place

eternally. So there is going to be the day of presentation. Do not you look forward with joy in your heart to that? In the light of it and the sense of it, let us submit ourselves to what the Lord is doing, and what He is saying, and have our ears tuned, alert and attentive to what He would give, because of the effect it is having, this purifying effect. The tendency always with the world is to entangle believers and bring us into what is impure, but the Lord faithfully goes on with His service to bring about this purifying, the process by which He will have the assembly absolutely suited to His thoughts. Well, the Lord has not given that up. Some believers behave as if the Lord had given that up. He has not given it up, dear brethren. I would seek to encourage all our hearts this afternoon, that the Lord is continuing with this service. What comes to us by way of ministry is a proof of it. The way He has delivered Himself up is the proof of His love, and the way He serves us by ministry in freshness and power is the proof that He loves the assembly still, and He is going to have what is in every way presentable to Himself. Well, that is Christ's love for the assembly, and there is no doubt, no uncertainty, about that.

Now what was in my mind in reading this Psalm is that the Lord would bring us as believers to love what He loves. As the Lord takes us up for Himself, appeals to us, and acquires a place in our hearts, our minds, you might readily say "I love the Lord Jesus"; and He is worthy of our affection. Then I think He would say, 'There is something down here that I love. I love the assembly and I want you to love what I love'. Prosperity is connected with that according to this Psalm. If you would like to prosper in your soul, if you would like to get on spiritually, I would say 'Love the assembly'. Love Christ by all means, but also find that you can love what Christ loves.

It opens up a wonderful range of interests. There is a wonderful range of interests in the assembly. The Lord spoke to Saul of Tarsus as he was journeying to Damascus. He was going to persecute the saints there, but the Lord spoke to him and I think from that point he would love the Lord. The Lord directed him to go into the city and what did he find there? He found a company of disciples. I think that is how you begin to find that you can love the

assembly. You find there is a company of saints in a certain place, a company of disciples, a company of followers of the Lord Jesus, and you can find out how to be amongst them, how they become lovable to you.

I think these dear brethren in Damascus must have become very lovable to Paul as he was with them. It says "He was with the disciples who were in Damascus certain days" (Acts 9: 19). I think that is the beginning of how you come to love the assembly in your own local meeting, move in and out amongst them, and come to appreciate them as persons who love Christ and who love the assembly, and you will find yourself loving Christ and loving the assembly. It is the way to spiritual prosperity. You see what the Lord opened up to Paul, not only in service, but the things He opened up to him, wonderful things about Himself about the assembly, about the service of God, about sonship. But the beginning was that first of all he had a transaction with the Lord Jesus and then he came to love these disciples in Damascus.

After that beginning you can start to look farther afield. You find that the Lord has a company of believers in a certain place in the light of the assembly - Thank God there are those who want to walk in the light of the assembly today. Thank God they are available to us. Oh that persons who are sitting at home could come to that point that there are persons available who seek to work out the truth of the assembly. Then you can look around and see persons maybe in a nearby meeting who want to walk in the light of the assembly. Paul would find out persons in other places. It is a good thing to remember that there are brethren in nearby meetings who also love the assembly, and to make contact with them. There are dear brethren in some parts of the world who are so far from another meeting that it is not easy to go and see them, but here we are very privileged. We have brethren half-an-hour's run away, an hour's run. Well, what is that if you love the assembly. Let us go and see them, and make contact with them. You find that they get encouragement and you get encouragement: that is a wonderful thing, mutual encouragement. If you want to prosper in your soul, this is how to

prosper. Do not just be confined to the work of God in a place, start to think about the work of God in the places around you, and then you can think about the work of God universally. There are some parts of the earth where it does not look as if God is working. That is in God's own wise ways. He directs the course of the testimony in a certain direction; that is where the treasure is, dear brethren. So you keep in that field where the treasure is. The Lord has treasure. He regards the assembly as treasure. If there are persons walking in the light of the assembly, he regards that as His treasure, and if you love the assembly, you will have regard for where the treasure is. So you do not want to go and operate in areas where the Lord is not operating because the treasure is not there. Where the treasure is, there you can happily be engaged. There is a wonderful range of interests that you can be engaged in.

This Psalm is a song of degrees of David. These songs of degrees help us to understand how the remnant will come up from a position of captivity into the position of blessing, for Jerusalem in that day will be the centre of blessing for the remnant. I just want to apply it to our day, to our Jerusalem, Jerusalem above, the assembly, what the Lord loves, what we are to love. So it says, "I rejoiced when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of Jehovah". There is joy connected with it. It is not a doleful thing, loving the assembly. "I rejoiced", it says. "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem". It is a wonderful thing to stand within Jerusalem, not as a spectator outside, but within the gates. How often this word "within" is mentioned in this Psalm. So you stay within. Dear young people, stay within the compass of the assembly, stay amongst the local brethren, move amongst them. It is a wonderful situation to be in. What a privilege is ours! "Jerusalem, which art built as a city that is compact together". How God delights in persons being set closely together. That is the idea of a local assembly; it is not to be so large that you could not compass it, but the idea is of being compact together. "Whither the tribes go up". You have to go up to these things. You do not go down. Things in the world are going down, down, down. The call is to go up to the

assembly, Jerusalem above. You have to go up to the Jerusalem above. "To give thanks unto the name of Jehovah". Well, we are going to do that tomorrow morning, to go up to give thanks to the name of Jehovah. Believers in the light of the assembly are to be characteristically thankful. It is a special opportunity to be thankful when you can go up to the Lord's supper. What an opportunity to go up and give thanks. A brother stands up and gives thanks. In a world so marked by thanklessness, there are persons who are on this line of thanksgiving, "unto the name of Jehovah". It is not only that we are thankful for the mercies of God which we appreciate, but we are thankful for how God has made Himself known, how He has made Himself known in Jesus. God has made Himself known and we are thankful.

"There are set thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David". A place where decisions can be arrived at, where there is justice. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee". What a scope for our prayers. So you can look at your local meeting, or at the nearby meetings, you can look at the meetings you know where there are brethren we can walk with, and you can even look out beyond that. You can look out on believers everywhere. When the Lord speaks about the assembly He is going to present to Himself. He is thinking about all believers. In our prayers, dear brethren, we can take in something of what the feelings of the heart of Christ are. If He can love, we can love them and think about them in our prayers. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem". How the idea of peace comes in! We are thankful for the peace we have proved just recently and we want to make the most of it, that the truth should prosper amongst us. "They shall prosper that love thee". Would you not like to be the kind of person that prospers? Then just love the assembly. Daniel was the sort of person that prospered. It says of Daniel "This Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus" (Dan 6: 28). It would seem that Daniel prospered over a very long time because he was quite an old man at the end, but at the beginning of the history he was a young man. In that chapter where it says he prospered, it tells

us that his windows were open towards Jerusalem. That is the kind of outlook he had, He was a man with an assembly outlook and it says that three times a day he kneeled on his knees and prayed.

Can you imagine what Daniel would be praying about? Why do you think his windows were open towards Jerusalem? He was a man with an assembly outlook. Oh, to acquire an assembly outlook and to pray in the light of that. It is the line, I am sure, of spiritual prosperity.

"Peace be within thy bulwarks, prosperity within thy palaces". The bulwarks of the assembly. The assembly is a place of safety, a place of protection. We are going through a world where protection is needed. Dear young people, stay with your feet within Jerusalem, inside those bulwarks, and know something about those palaces where there is prosperity. There are palaces, not just ordinary dwelling places, but palaces, and there is prosperity there. "For my brethren and companions' sakes I will say, Peace be within thee! " How he is going over this matter of peace. Then he says "Because of the house of Jehovah our God I will seek thy good". It is interesting how this Psalm is constructed. He starts in the first verse with the house of Jehovah and he ends in the last verse with the house of Jehovah, and in between he is speaking about Jerusalem.

What that means to me is that you have a city and a wonderful range of activities goes on in the city, but there is a house within that city and it is the house of Jehovah, God's dwelling-place. It is the place where God is to be served. Think of that, "Because of the house of Jehovah". You are thinking of a place where God will dwell, where God will be served. So as you think about Jerusalem and you are active in relation to Jerusalem, and you are praying about Jerusalem, you are thinking all the time about the house of Jehovah that is within it. All the activities of the city would stand related to what is for the pleasure and service of God. So it is not only that you are prospering in your soul, prospering in yourself, but that divine interests are prospering. God is getting, more and more, His portion in His people. That is being enriched. It is a wonderful thing in our

day to be found as lovers of the assembly. "They shall prosper that love thee".

Let us be assured, dear brethren, of the continuing love of Christ for the assembly, and let us be prepared to commit ourselves to love what Christ loves, and find that there is prosperity connected with that, prosperity for our own souls and prosperity and enrichment of what is for God's pleasure. May the Lord bless the word.

GRANGEMOUTH

16 November 1974

AT TWO BURIALS - 1

i) SOWING

A.J.E.Welch

1 Corinthians 15: 37-44

The last weeks of our brother's growing weakness have left a singular impression of how real death is. I am impressed that the Spirit would meet that, as we are here gathered, by a fresh sense of what the power of resurrection is. Resurrection actually and finally is very close. If we face the reality of death, the Spirit would meet it with some sense of glory in the power that is greater. He gives us to realise how soon the failing, weakening condition is to find an answer. That answer will be according to God's pleasure, and for His pleasure, in a condition of things actually in which there will be no weakening and no deficiency of any kind. In this passage, the Spirit uses the idea of the seed and the sowing, and even comments "thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain", as if to remind us that what follows the sowing is peculiarly rich, even in comparison with what has been sown. We think of our brother's long and faithful, steady pathway; no part of that path, as God has wrought through it, shall be lost. We have had the impression often that the exercises of our brother have been deep - often to a large degree hidden, but they have been there. God has wrought, and wrought constantly and continually, in such an one, and not a single element of what God has wrought out is to be lost. This thought of sowing, and this brief comment on the bare grain reminds us that what shall follow is exceeding glorious. A condition is in view now in which everything will be carried through for God according to His pleasure; that point is pressed upon us, "God gives to it a body as he has pleased, and to each of the seeds its own body". Something is to come forth that is a fitting answer according to God in every matter gone through here, glorious in the condition to which that will belong.

And, beloved brethren, we are to think of this as imminent. Our brother has referred in prayer to the way the power of resurrection affects us in the assembly now; how real that is! We are brought into acquaintance with Christ as the glorified Man. We cannot but remind ourselves of the way He has overcome death, and of the witness there has been (and is) to the glorious fact that He is risen and glorified. It is not imminent for Christ, it is *actual*; there were witnesses of His resurrection. They did not see what took place in the grave; what a matter that was as between the Father and the Son! But they saw Him risen, living, active, glorious, among them. The Spirit, in our time, gives us appreciation of what we are to know, and to experience and enjoy in the power of it in an occasion like this, in the knowledge of a living, glorified Christ. Soon we shall be with Him and like Him, in a condition of things to which no frailty attaches, and something is to be carried through and brought to light which is according to God's own pleasure, wholly so, with no element of any weakness or deficiency or decline. This, I believe, is the comfort the blessed Spirit would give us in an occasion like this, that something is being sown, but something is to come forth that is wholly for God and His pleasure.

ii) GOD'S WORKMANSHIP

C.Hammond

Ephesians 2: 10; 2 Timothy 2: 2

Our brother has referred to the identity that will remain throughout eternity with what God is doing now. It does not say we 'shall be' His workmanship, but we are God's workmanship. It is a matter of increasing wonder that in the flesh and blood condition there should be something going on that can be attributed to God Himself, His workmanship. We have "been created in Christ Jesus for good works" it says. We need to enquire into what those good works are according to Ephesians. James speaks about works, but on a somewhat lower level, "faith without works is dead" (Jas 2: 20), which is perfectly true in its context. But these good works, as I understand it, are to be exhibited in those who have a conscious living link, not only with a risen Lord, but an exalted Head.

So that the works are said to be prepared by God "that we should walk in them". God is to have an expression here below of His highest thoughts; not merely what belongs to time and the recovery of man, which involves much that is moral, but the spiritual work that is proceeding that results in our walking in these good works, for which we have been created. I suppose this runs near to the thought in 2 Corinthians of new creation, but makes it a little more personal, in that we have been created in Christ Jesus. That is a characteristic title in this section, the One who is anointed over everything for God, for His present and eternal pleasure. It is a wonderful thing if we are brought into that, dear brethren, but it involves, I believe, that our identity with the new place into which God has placed us, in Christ Jesus, is understood. That involves not only His resurrection but His ascension, His exaltation. The work of God is seen in the latter part of the first chapter and the first part of this chapter in its various aspects, and the "working in the might of his strength" in doing certain things; but here there is just this terse statement which is so striking, "we are his workmanship". There can be no fault found with what is God's workmanship. It is evident if, as

our brother has rightly emphasised, God clothes it with a body that is pleasing to Him, then the work which can be attributed to God Himself and therefore is perfect and is proceeding now, is something that God is going to clothe with a body that is suitable to it. The identity will remain, the identity with those who here on earth have entered in some measure into the purpose of God, which involves sonship and the assembly, and devoted themselves to it, so that there is some expression somewhere in someone of what God's thoughts are in purpose in relation to an exalted Christ, the Head of the assembly. So these good works will find expression in support and activity in relation to what the assembly is in purpose, and the members of it as having their part in it.

Now I come to 2 Timothy, which supposes a day of breakdown publicly, but we have been reminded recently that what is of God remains. Much else may fail, persons are diverted, in considerable numbers at times, but what is of God remains. There is divine provision made for a continuance of what is of God and for God in this scene and that is connected with what it says about these faithful men. "And the things thou hast heard of me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men". Perhaps we think they are all gifted men, we may get a little out of focus the idea of gifted men. We used to speak of 'three-day-meeting men'. I think it is an erroneous view. Gift is additional, and if gift does anything it makes a man a servant, but what the man is as a spiritual personality is the thing that counts, and it is that that is going over.

Our brother did not move about greatly in service, but there is no question that he was a faithful man. You could rely on him, he was trustworthy, he had imbibed the truth, he had held it in his affections, as our brother has indicated. He was slow to speak, but he certainly was not slow to hear, for he had obviously imbibed the truth and it had had its effect upon him so that he could be regarded as a faithful man. How much has depended in times past on faithful men, not always men of outstanding gift. As you look at the ministry of the past, your spirit is affected by the number of men who were regarded as gifted who have gone astray. What was lacking, dear

brethren? Behind it is the question of spiritual personality; the workmanship of God is what stands the test.

Gifts are not to be despised at all, because they come down from an exalted Head, and we want to get the full gain of them; but things are continued on the basis of the presence of faithful men who are able to instruct others. It might be said, Does not that involve gift? It involves our being versed in the truth, to have a background of the truth and to be formed in it in some measure and faithful to it.

Now one outstanding feature of our brother was his faithfulness - a faithful man, and the evidence is here today of a continuance even in regard of his progeny. But not only so, but many of the younger men are indebted to the quiet, stable character of our departed brother, his quiet confidence. He knew something of what the scripture says, "in quietness and confidence shall be your strength", Isa 30: 15.

That was the character of the man, that was the feature of the workmanship that God wrought in our brother. It is not a time for posthumous eulogy; it is a question of appreciating the work of God and what is the effect of His workmanship. I think it would elevate our thoughts about one another if we saw things in that light.

Well, "these entrust to faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also". As I have said, it does not necessarily require outstanding gift to instruct others also. If we are versed in the truth, disciplined into it we can exemplify it in our life, as our brother did. He moved amongst the brethren, saying little, but knowing a good deal more than he said. We thank God for the workmanship that was displayed in it. Now he is with his Lord. The result of that will be that this body that is here has to suffer corruption because of the death penalty, but the identity will remain of what was wrought in his life in flesh and blood. It will remain and will have its place, not only in those eternal realms, but also according to the faithfulness that marked him, in the world to come; the Lord will see to that. What a thing it is, dear brethren, to be uplifted in our spirits from the variation in the mixed condition that we often see in one another, to recognise the stable character of what can be designated here, "we are his workmanship", and these works have been

prepared beforehand "that we should walk in them". He was an exemplar of the truth.

Now all we have to do is to commend this body to the Lord against that day when this change of which our brother has spoken has taken place and God will give it a body as it pleases Him. Thank God, there is something He can clothe! In the simplest saint in whom the work of God is, the workmanship of God is seen. What a wonderful thing to view the saints thus as God's workmanship in which there can be no failure, but it will come out in glorious display presently, when all shall have bodies suitable, clothed by God. Our brother's illness was terminated by the Lord; we almost prayed for that in view of the sickness of his body; the Lord granted that request, but the work was finished. At the termination of life the work is finished. We ourselves are facing that; the days go on in regard to an aged saint and you wonder why. But, when the work is finished the spirit will depart to be with Christ. We do not commit the real personality to the grave; we commit the body to the Lord, but the spirit is with Christ in an interim period waiting that body of glory with which God will clothe the workmanship of His own hand by the Spirit in our brother.

Let us be encouraged, dear brethren, with these things; let us lift our sights as to the present moment as to what is going on even in the mixed condition in which we are. We know here, in Eph 2, that Paul is presenting things at the level of God's thoughts, and God has a right to say a thing is, whether in our experience it may appear to be or not. Here God seeks an answer, and He has prepared these works that we should walk in them. May there be, dear brethren, an increasing testimony here on earth, not merely to the doctrines we hold, but to the truth as in Jesus (see Eph 4: 21, note b) That is the standard, the truth as in Jesus. What a de light to the Father to have the Son there in manhood perpetually before Him; and from that exalted sphere and our link with that Man there, in ascension, the Holy Spirit produces something of the reflection of that in the saints here. May it increasingly be so, dear brethren, by the Spirit, for His Name's sake!

iii) FATHERS

C.R.Byng

1 John 2: 13 (first clause)

We have been rightly reminded that the Lord would have regarded our beloved brother as one of the fathers amongst us. One of the great features of a father, which John brings out here as his reason for writing to them, is that they "have known him that is from the beginning". That would be the basis of the stability that marks a father, that he knows Him that is from the beginning. That is in particular as to the beginning of Christianity. When we think of the glory of the Person of Christ, we think of Him as in the beginning. "In the beginning was the Word", John 1: 1. But when we think of Christianity as set on in relation to the resurrection and ascension of Christ and the descent of the Spirit, we think of Him that is from the beginning, the One that has remained faithful from then until now and will to the end. We have been affected in our spirits at the growing weakness in body of our beloved brother, but the stability that has marked him was related to his knowledge of Him that is from the beginning. And that is the basis on which the testimony is going to be carried through to the end. The knowledge of divine Persons is the great source of strength to be preserved in the testimony. Our beloved fathers amongst us are persons who steady us and strengthen us, because their experience is related to Him that is from the beginning as in a spiritual order of things. Whilst we are still here in flesh and blood in literality, in our spirits as the "workmanship" of God we are moving in a great spiritual realm where divine Persons are known in all their glory. The transition from what is final is in the Lord's ordering, but it does not involve any essential change, because we go to be with divine Persons, that we have learned to know in a scene of testimony.

The Lord would encourage us to be marked by this feature of depth, for the word used here for "known" involves coming to know Him and continuing so to do. We are not to be moved about, but steady in the understanding that He that has set on this great period

of testimony is going to carry it forward in triumph until the end. The measure in which we are acquainted with Christ, is directly related to our understanding of the greatness of the Spirit who helps us to discern according to God. Steadiness in discernment is due to our knowledge of the Spirit. But the knowledge of Christ from the beginning would involve, too, a knowledge of the Father, the Father of glory. And so this would all bind us up in the great spiritual sphere in experience. Mr Stoney has recorded a conversation with Mr Darby: 'I remember once saying to JND, with reference to the Lord's words, "for their sakes I sanctify myself" - 'Then sanctification is immeasurable'. 'Yes', he replied, 'immeasurable'. (JBS Letters Vol 2, p. 59). That is the order of things we are called into, an immeasurable order of sanctification. We are bound up with a glorious, living Person who has gone into the presence of the Father to sanctify Himself for us, so that our part here in this scene is to be sanctified to God in relation to everything that is proceeding for His glory. There are those who are going to miss our beloved brother as a father by way of natural links. The Lord in His wisdom has brought those to an end. But all of us, including the family, have links with him as a spiritual father and those are never going to end. Our links with all the brethren are going to remain. He has gone on before, but we are all going to be found in the day of God according to the glory entrusted by God to each one. But the time remains, beloved brethren, until the rapturing call of Jesus is heard. The Lord would help us to be deepened in our understanding of the glory of divine Persons, and especially the glory of Him that is from the beginning, so the testimony will be carried forward, not with a lack, but with increased strength, as the homegoing of our beloved brother casts us more upon God, that there may be nothing lacking either in this city or in this area.

Well, let us be strengthened to have faith in God and to desire to be here as those who know Him that is from the beginning, so that the testimony is carried forward according to the divine will, for His Name's sake.

LONDON

13 November 1974

AT TWO BURIALS 2

READINESS

E.C.Burr

2 Corinthians 8: 12

This chapter is written by Paul with direct bearing on the collection or the giving of the saints; but Paul has that skill given by the Holy Spirit, manifested also in the service and ministry of the Lord Jesus Himself, to interweave in his consideration of, or setting out of, the truth bearing on very practical matters, something which is of universal and general application. He had spoken in the preceding verse of collective readiness in the saints, and comes in this verse to, "if the readiness be there, *a man...* ".

As we are here for this particular occasion, it is in connection with the burial of a man in whom there was readiness, the readiness was there. I think Paul looks for that in the local assembly collectively. Paul is addressing the whole Corinthian assembly in relation to readiness, but he brings it down specifically to readiness in a man - something that no doubt searches us.

There is very much to be done - in one sense there is hardly time to do all that needs to be done. Nobody need think that their hands need ever be idle if the readiness is there. If there is idleness or lack of occupation, it may be that the readiness is not there: but if the readiness is there, there never need be idle hands. In this chapter, as I say, Paul weaves not only the practical reality of what he was enjoining this local assembly in relation to in connection with their giving, but matters of distinct spiritual and moral import. He refers to persons who gave themselves first to the Lord (that is what underlies readiness, not giving themselves first to the apostles, "and to us by God 's will", but, "gave themselves first to the Lord") and the giving of oneself to the Lord involves that one is readily available to Him for any service or activity that He might require. Paul had said in the first epistle to this same company that his beloved brethren should "be firm, immovable, abounding always in the work of the

Lord", 1 Cor 15: 58; and it is in persons who have given themselves first to the Lord that that comes out. We are not here to speak especially about the dead - these occasions bear on the living - but we cannot be apart from the impressions of what we have gathered up in our beloved brother: one who, I think we could all say, had given himself first to the Lord; owing a great deal, as many of us here do, to parents who also were in the same way; having also, as some of us have the privilege of having, children who have given themselves to the Lord; and the consequence is that readiness is there.

Paul draws on other things too. He does not just speak about the collection and the giving in this chapter as if it is something dry or material, but he blends in with it grace, and faith, and word, and knowledge, and love, and as we look at a character in whom there has been readiness, we see that there has been faith, and the word, and grace, and knowledge, and diligence, and love. I think that when Paul contemplates that there will be a man in whom there is readiness, it is these moral qualities that he will find in a man. Just think of them. Think of faith. Think how it marks those who are ready as given first to the Lord; it marks them characteristically in their subsequent history and in all their activity. Faith, and grace, and diligence – readiness is not there if diligence is not there: and if diligence is there, readiness will always be there. Diligence is a thing in which we most easily fail, but if readiness is there, diligence is there. And the word is there. What use would readiness be if it were apart from the word, that is the word in its general sense and the current application of the word of God as it may come to us. And knowledge is there because it forms the framework within which that readiness is extended.

Then, not to go through the whole chapter, Paul comes to this very touching allusion to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Beloved, what readiness was *there*. If the readiness was there, then *that* Man was accepted according to what He had. Think of what He had: "for your sake he ... became poor", but think of what He had even in His poverty, One as poor as He. We used to be

reminded that Mr Darby, in the French, translated this as that 'He lived in poverty'. But even when He was poor, think how much he had. "If the readiness be there, a man is accepted according to what he may have", and think even in the poverty of the Lord Jesus, of what He *still* had, of which nobody could deprive Him. He might have nothing material, and had to ask for a penny if He needed one, but nobody could deprive Him of the excellence of the moral qualities which were what He had, and which were what He was accepted on account of. Think of His piety - He was "heard because of His piety" - all this entered into the readiness of that blessed Man. "If the readiness be there, a man is accepted according to what he may have" - think of it refined in Jesus, what was there in readiness: "not my will, but Thine be done"; "as the Father has commanded me, thus I do"; "I come..... to do, O God, Thy will". Think of the readiness of what was there, a Man accepted according to what He had. What blessedness He had, what He has achieved through what He had, but in this as in other things, He serves as a model that we should follow in His steps.

This is in no sense a deprecatory reference. Paul is not here saying, 'even if a man has only a little he will be accepted according to that'. What Paul is looking at is the substance that there is in a man who has readiness, grace given to each according to the measure of the gift of the Christ. How it comes out in individuals in distinctiveness, Paul elsewhere telling us that star differs from star in glory, the saints appearing according to what they may have. Think of the greatness and the blessedness, the fulness of the work of God, in a man. You wonder at it that God is able to take ordinary human vessels and make out of them that which draws on the continual appreciation even of their brethren. Think how we are able to esteem what God forms in a man 'according to what he may have'.

Not all have the same thing. Paul says "not according to what he has not". So a man is not esteemed, not accepted in readiness, say, as an apostle if he is an evangelist. He is not accepted as a prophet if he is a pastor and teacher. It is according to what he may

have, "but to each... has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ" (Eph 4: 7) and, beloved, we have seen these things formed in our brother, not just in store, not something that was a treasure to himself, kept in a secluded way or that would make what God had given him a private possession, but we have seen readiness with what the Lord had given him, and the man is accepted according to what he has.

The word for us I believe, beloved brethren, especially us in our own city, is whether the readiness will remain. Readiness is needed - how often we observe as we gather together that readiness is needed, and how often our beloved brother himself has contributed that readiness called for even as the saints have been together. How often he has contributed it, too, in service to one and another. Many of us can say, as Paul says of Phoebe, "and of myself", (Rom 16: 2); the readiness was there. And as our beloved brother has gone and his readiness with him, then the readiness needs to be filled up, and the Lord will accept those who seek to take on service in that same spirit of readiness according to what they may have. Not according to what they have not: the Lord does not look for things from persons greater than what He has already given them. But according to what He has given them, He looks for it to be fully developed and employed, used not for their glory, but for His.

The Lord would stimulate us, I believe, that the readiness might still be there, that it might not be diminished on account of the departure to be with Christ of our beloved brother, but rather as we commit ourselves in exercise the readiness may be increased, so that men may be accepted according to what they have.

ii) AN UNEXPECTED MOVEMENT

J.C.Evershed

Matthew 14: 22-33

I wanted to say a few words, dear brethren, about the unexpected movements of the Lord in the fourth watch of the night, that is, the time nearest to the morning.

It is not only in my mind that the Lord taking our brother was so unexpected to us. Maybe we have already some sense why the Lord has acted in this way, but it may be some time before we realise why the Lord has taken him. In any case, our prayers are for our beloved sister, that she should be sustained and the household and family learn the Lord's mind, it may be in recovery, or in furthering His work in one and another through the very departure of our brother. For ourselves in this place, I think we should look to the Lord to replace the mature moral and spiritual features that came out in him. We might wonder why the Lord should take him when he was in the prime of his usefulness to the Lord in the assembly, as we would say. However, the Lord has come in in this way, and I have read this scripture because it speaks of an unusual way in which the Lord came in, in the fourth watch of the night.

There had been a long night, as there has been already in the testimony, and I believe we are in the fourth watch when the Lord's coming to us is, imminent in the way in which we expect Him to come from heaven. We have heard the last trump but one, which is the one to get ready, and our brother, as I know from my long personal knowledge of him, has been one who has pre-eminently been ready for the Lord to come at any time. But here in this scripture there are these disciples together and I believe that is how we are now. A great feature is that they were compelled to go on board. To my mind that does not mean necessarily that they were unwilling to do so. It suggests to me that they would be able to say to themselves at all times, whatever storms might come – and they were for many hours toiling in the passage across the lake - that they

were not there at their own charges but were there at the Lord's charges and He would care for them. They may have been surprised at the way in which He did actually come in, but as the evangelist tells us, the Lord Jesus was up in the mountain praying whilst they were out in the ship together. I feel, therefore, that we need to take this lesson, too, from our brother, that he was one who felt the Lord had laid hold in a definite way upon him, and he was not a volunteer in the things of the Lord, and he never drew back in whatever the testimony might require.

I know there is a dispensational side to this scripture which I do not propose to speak of, but I think the Lord presenting Himself to His disciples in this way was calculated to touch their affections, and that is what He did with Peter. There is a certain amount of question with him, but as soon as Peter locates where the Lord is he says 'Lord I must be with Thee, command me to come to Thee'. So that Peter was under the Lord's command to come to Him out of the ship. We can say that if the Lord calls us out to Himself, then He will be responsible for us in doing so, and Peter was so attracted to the Lord that he set out after Him. I think that this, too, has marked our brother, and the desire that others should be likewise in the path of truth and affection for the Lord where He is.

There is the side in which Peter felt a measure of failure when the time came, but I am not speaking of our brother in that connection. I would rather speak to ourselves, that if we find there is a weakness of faith with us the Lord is so close at hand to us that a short call upon Him for salvation (as it says, "Lord save me") is answered at once. The Lord laid hold of him. That feature, the fact that the Lord would lay hold of us, is again present there. If faith may fail then the Lord's hand is stretched out and He takes hold of his disciple. He may have to rebuke him - it is remarkable that the first of the apostles should be spoken of as being weak in faith - nevertheless the whole of those in the boat got the benefit of this experience. And the main point was not so much that Peter was able to walk on the water, for the Lord would not have him to be in any way proud of what he had done. He said that he had little faith:

we might have said he had great faith. Peter does not bring this forward in his epistles relating to himself, but the result of it all is that there is a fresh appreciation of the greatness of the person of the Lord Jesus, and those who are in the boat say "Truly thou art God's Son".

Our beloved brother would have it, and we would all have it; that as a result of our consideration of the Lord's movements there should be a great accession of appreciation with us of the greatness of the Lord's person as God's Son.

In the Name of the Lord Jesus.

iii) "FEAR NOT

C.R.Byng

Revelation 1: 17-18

The Lord Jesus would cause every one of us to be conscious at this time of His own personal word of strengthening to us. As we have already rightly said, we are here as those that feel deeply the homegoing of our beloved brother, but it is at such a time as this the Lord would say "Fear not". The Lord's own touch was over our brother as to the manner and the time of his going. It does not take away from the reality of death, but it brings into it a glory which the Lord Jesus alone can bring in. The Lord personally, as putting our brother to sleep, had His own touch of glory in it, and I think He would connect our hearts with Himself in a fresh and deep way as a result of what He Himself has done.

So as we think of the reality of death, we think of the Lord Jesus saying "I became dead". No other man has ever been able to say that. Our beloved brother did not become dead, the Lord put him to sleep, but the Lord *became* dead. The infinite love of the Lord Jesus for each of us as entered into that, but also something of the mystery and glory of His own person, and yet the reality of His manhood, as it says "having bowed His head, he delivered up his spirit", (John 19: 30). Let us be strengthened in the very presence of the solemnity of death, by the Lord Jesus saying to us individually and yet together, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one".

How pre-eminent indeed He is, for He is the First, and how supremely He gathers up everything for God because He is the last, and yet through it all He remains the living One who "became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages. Perhaps we shall need the experience of the Lord as the living One more as the hours proceed than we yet know. Our beloved sister and the family can be comforted and strengthened as the Lord would say to each of them "Fear not; I am the... living one". We shall miss our brother in his

readiness of spirit as we have said, to be just available as the Lord directed him; but there is not to be any lack. There may be the element with us of wondering how things are going to proceed, but the Lord would say, "Fear not; I am the... living one". We would affectionately think of our brother's son as with this act of the Lord he has passed from one generation to another. The Lord is available to each of us as He says "I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead". What majestic dignity there is in that, beloved brethren, as we think of Jesus, in the reality of His manhood and yet with the mystery and the glory of His own person, going into death and coming out of death having the keys of death and of hades. We are among the vast living throng of those who live because He lives, those who are going to be with Him, near at hand in His glory because He has gone into death and has risen again.

Our brother has gone just a little ahead of us, and we are to follow so soon as the Lord calls us. May we be ready, and in the meantime be strengthened by the preciousness of the love of the Man who would say to us today, "Fear not; I am the ... living one". For His Name's sake.

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SOME FUNDAMENTALS - THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

All that we really need to know about the Christian faith has been written down for us in the Bible, which is a collection of books written by different people of different occupations over a period of many centuries, but wonderfully unified and combined in one volume. It differs from all other books because it is divinely inspired and carries the authority of the Holy Spirit, so its teachings are the word of God (2 Tim 3: 16). Unless we accept the inspiration of the scriptures we have no common basis for the working out of the truth of Christianity. They carry their own authority over the soul and are not to be disregarded or departed from. They are the standard by which all else must be judged.

The Lord Himself constantly quoted the Old Testament scriptures and on one occasion reminded His hearers that "the scripture cannot be broken " (John 10: 35). In facing Satan at the temptation He said three times, "It is written... " showing how the word of God is to be used by a dependent man in conflict with the enemy. The scriptures were fulfilled in Him, so in the gospels there are constant references such as "that the scripture might be fulfilled". There is a solemn warning at the end of the Bible against adding to the words written or taking from them.

Although we need the Holy Spirit for the proper understanding of scripture we have to accept it in simplicity as it is, without any attempt to twist it into moulds of our own. As the Psalmist wrote, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Ps 119: 105), so we shall find that God 's word from the scriptures will guide us in this world of difficulty. Moreover, whenever opposition comes, the faithful Christian will find that one of the most important weapons in his armoury is the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word. Hence we need to know the scriptures well.

From a child Timothy had known the sacred letters, which were able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Godly women today will wish to ensure that their children and grandchildren have a good grounding in the scriptures. The personal reading of the Bible is essential for spiritual prosperity, and daily household reading has proved to be a vital custom in pious houses for many years. The gathering together of brethren for reading the scriptures and enquiring into the truth has resulted in a constant flow of blessing during the recovery of the past 150 years or so.

The great theme of the scriptures is the way in which God has operated in Christ and by the Spirit to secure a universe for His own pleasure and the blessing of man eternally. As in each part of the Bible we look for references to Christ either typically or personally we have the key by the Spirit to unlock the great wealth which lies hidden, and other things fall into their place. May we value

increasingly the privilege of having the open Bible, read it constantly and be governed by its teaching.

W.E.Ellis

THE CHILDREN'S VALUE

There were doubtless many children amongst the Christians who received the epistles of Peter. One of the first things he wrote was that they had all been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, so this reminded them that each one had the same supreme value to God. They were therefore to value and love one another dearly, and not just pretend to do so. The gift of the Holy Spirit enables the obedient believer to do this.

The only verse in the Bible which mentions boys and girls together tells us that they will be playing in the streets of Jerusalem when the Lord Jesus is known as King there. This shows the loving interest that God has in the young ones and you may be sure that there will be no dangers there in those days. In fact there will also be very old men and women sitting in the streets and said to be 'full of days'. What good examples and interesting experiences such persons are able to give from their long lives! It is a good thing for children to ask aged saints how they came to know the Lord.

Everyone knows that a precious thing is not only prized because of what it is, but also because of its usefulness. Thus in many parts of Scripture we read of children whom God valued because they could serve Him. Even as a babe Moses was 'fair to God', which means that his great work was already foreseen by heaven. One thing that parents think of in faith at household baptisms is that their child may be converted and become useful in time to the Lord. It is something like Samuel being lent to Jehovah for service all his life. It was in his mother's heart to give him but, very tenderly, God allowed her to continue calling him her own.

Perhaps children are more used to *having* lessons than *being* lessons, but the Lord used a little child to teach the twelve apostles the important lesson of being humble. He set the child in the midst of them and then took it in His arms. Thus He was not only a wise Teacher but also an affectionate Shepherd. In one gospel account Jesus called the little child to Him. Have you heard and answered such a happy call as this?

J.C.Evershed