

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

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A.J.E.W. These letters as we know give us rich teaching concerning the order of things in the assembly locally. This is the character that the assembly of God takes in the time of testimony; that is, the testimony is found and the service of our God proceeds in local assemblies. It is a remarkable thing that in the cities of men there should be something which answers to Christ and sets out in testimony what is due to God for His pleasure. It is good to see how the enemy's territory has in that sense been invaded; how the Spirit of God has thus points on earth where the truth is held, where Christ is loved and glorified, and it is wonderful grace that gives us any part in this precious matter. We were speaking last night of the way in which the Lord would draw us to the high level from which He is working. Our relations stand to a glorified Christ operating from heaven and through the Spirit down here. The thought is to see how, in this remarkable locality where much of the activity of Satan had to be met, the apostle goes forward with his ministry cherishing the fullest and richest of divine thoughts - a practical matter for us.

So after he has largely unburdened himself to the saints in the two epistles he gives us an impression of what was working in his heart as to his service: "I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ" - a fine disclosure of the way in which the dear writer had held the saints in Corinth in relation to God's greatest thoughts and laboured that they might be established in the gain of those same thoughts. Paul had spent a year and a half at least among the brethren in Corinth - quite a substantial part of his total service - and it was clear that they had a very distinct place in his affections; so he laboured and laboured still to present them, as he says, "a chaste virgin to Christ". This would lift our minds to the proper level of what is to appear in a local assembly. It would give us in love a great incentive to sustain the kind of service that the beloved apostle rendered: not that any one of us is an apostle but I

am thinking of the kind of service that he rendered among the brethren.

J.S. The apostle moved with the purest motives in relation to the assembly in Corinth. He brings out what his motives were so that his activities in relation to Corinth could not be gainsaid in any way that they were other than what was commendable, so that the force of what he was ministering would be received by the brethren; because Satan was active, was he not?

A.J.E.W. Our motives therefore are to be searched out as we seek to move together. His motives were pure, as you say, and they stood related to God's thoughts in the mystery. It is just a point for us what our motives are because there was no admixture of personal interest with Paul.

J.S. It is obvious that his thoughts would be no less than the Lord's thoughts. It was not for himself that he laboured.

A.J.E.W. His labour was sacrificial. You get many evidences of that. This is a searching point as we continue together.

W.A.M. This is a very interesting section in that the apostle goes into a lot that was secret that he had never told anyone before; this would be his secret relations with the Lord. The espousal with which he had charged himself, and what he says later about knowing a man in Christ and so on, were all matters that would have been secret but he brings them out for the help of the saints.

A.J.E.W. So what are our secret relations? Although they are secret the Lord knows them, the Spirit knows them, and the Lord will delight to use a man whose secret relations are so pleasing to Himself. It brings in power and it was power that was needed at Corinth to meet the subtleties of the enemy's activities spoken of even in this scripture.

W.A.M. Would you think that this is the most difficult part? He had helped the saints so far but it required great spirituality to meet these pockets of resistance where the enemy was moving subtly.

A.J.E.W. You feel the need of that: yet at the same time we realise that the Lord is quick to help us to acquire the spirituality that is needed. We have come into this matter finding everything from God's side in our favour. We might have stopped short in taking up service related to something so exalted and so precious before God.

W.A.M. Some of us might have been satisfied with what had been accomplished already but Paul was not; he recognised that there was still a danger of the enemy getting their affections.

A.J.E.W. It would be a great matter to cherish the finishing up of this period of testimony with something which answers in wealth and depth to the thoughts of God. Nothing less than that should govern us as we continue in regard of our local assemblies: nothing less than this will content one who loves Christ. The genuineness of our love for Christ is often tested in these days - just what depth those affections have. Genuine love for Christ would not stop short of anything of what His thoughts are in respect of His own heart and this is, as he says, "a chaste virgin to Christ". It is what is directed to Christ and for Him.

W.A.M. You get two things: the one Man and the chaste virgin to Christ.

A.J.E.W. That is it. The chaste virgin is the answer to the affections of the one Man and this touches the inward secret side that you spoke of which must be the strength of the saints. There will be a tendency to shallowness and lack of power unless the secret side is lined up with the prime thoughts of God, and the Spirit is here to help us that that may constantly be so that nothing less than what is in the divine counsels is governing us as we go on.

W.A.M.. So that there seems to be an answer here. To Ephesus he said he had not shrunk from announcing to them all the counsels of God (see Acts 20: 27). The enemy would be against that but this would be the answer to it in our day.

A.J.E.W. It would indeed. So there is a sense in which the local assembly appears in its true features through the labour that God uses of those that are committed to His thoughts. We each need to

be found in our local relationships with such objectives as this in our hearts. As Mr Soukoreff says, the purity of motive with Paul is very fine to see and our motives are being searched in these days that what is lacking in genuineness may be done with.

J.S. I suppose that the apostle would bring out the glory of the truth and the enemy did not exactly attack that; he attacked the person of Paul to discredit the apostle personally. It seems to be a characteristic of the flesh that if the truth is brought out it is not a question of the truth that is discussed but an attack on persons is made to divert from the issue. The apostle brings out his own motives to answer even that in grace. So the Lord seems to be moving in grace to secure the affections of the saints in attachment to Christ.

A.J.E.W. Very much so, though securing those affections to set the saints together with one heart as to what is precious to Himself. You feel the need of the life springs, so to say, of this time of reviving. What was it that so affected the early servants in the revival? It was the great truth of Christ and the assembly, the union of the assembly to Christ and the holy answer there is in the assembly for His heart, the unique answer which He finds nowhere else. The uniqueness of the assembly's place in union with Christ is the life spring of this revival into which God, in His wonderful mercy, has called us, in a certain reviving of it in our time. Let us not get far from this line of truth which is so characteristic of the whole course of things in this time of the Spirit - Christ and the assembly.

J.S. What you are speaking of is distinctive to those in the recovery: assembly truth being worked out, and the service of God.

A.J.E.W. It would help us to be watchful as we realise how vigorously Satan is set against this side of the truth, the way in which he relentlessly attacks the assembly. The Lord said, and we often turn thankfully to it, "hades' gates shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16: 18) ; that is, the assembly; but there is no question that hades' gates operate. They will not prevail but they have to be contended with in the course of things in our local assemblies. One of the prime

intents of the foe at the present time is to disunite - to bring in something which is not in "the unity of the Spirit", Eph 4: 3. It is the great effort of Satan which we need to watch for in a vigilant sense in love for Christ. The enemy is seeking in our time to disunite, whether it be within a locality or between localities, and invalidate the preciousness of what is established for Christ's heart in local assemblies by an attack against the characteristic unity of it. This needs to be in our minds and in our prayers.

W.A.M. So that Satan transforming himself into an angel of light and his ministers as ministers of righteousness is a very subtle line (see 2 Cor 11: 14,15).

A.J.E.W. It is indeed! The question is how is that to be met? It says earlier in this epistle, "For walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the arms of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful according to God to the overthrow of strongholds; overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God", chap 10: 3-5. That is a very comforting scripture. We are made to feel sometimes the rigorousness of the conflict, the intensity of it, that it is too much for us, but the Spirit of God in epistles such as these would strengthen us in that the power of God is involved and, as we make way for that to operate, what belongs to Christ and to the assembly will go through.

W.A.M. You get that in Hezekiah's day; he spread the letter before Jehovah and made it His matter (see 2 Kings 19: 4).

A.J.E.W. Pointing to great simplicity in his links with God - a fine thing, the simplicity of such a man! When a time of crisis or unexpected development comes up he flies to God about it in the most simple and positive way. You feel that simple spontaneity in our relations with God is a wonderful way into profiting from the full extent of divine resources.

A.N.T. The apostle was wonderfully formed in regard to what was for the pleasure of the heart of Christ, so that conditions in Corinth weighed heavily with him. In the first chapter he desired to bring them up to the level of the truth and addresses them as to what they

are in the purpose of God. He does not start with their failures but would build them up. He sets it on himself and would encourage the saints into it.

A.J.E.W. The vital thing for us to notice is that, while he holds in his heart the choicest thoughts of God for the saints, he gets to work to establish the saints in the gain of those thoughts. There are the two sides to the matter you are speaking about. On the one hand we see the objective; secondly, we commit ourselves to the objective and labour with what is necessary to reach it. There are many ways in which that labour can come into expression, by which we can help one another and local companies to come into the height and blessedness of what is their true position; but it does call for unceasing labour such as Paul had sustained in Corinth and which he was still sustaining while away from Corinth in writing to them such letters as these. The scope of these letters is remarkable, and the measure of power that comes in through the exalted aspects of the truth being asserted from time to time as the teaching goes on gives a kind of heavenly colour to what is proceeding under the apostle's hand. I believe that is to mark our affairs in the assembly; the heavenly colour is always to be there.

J.R.B. Would you say something as to his fear that their thoughts should be corrupted from simplicity as to the Christ.

A.J.E.W. Is anything of man creeping in or our thoughts being governed by mere human conceptions instead of the great divine thoughts which he is presenting? How easily our minds are diverted into channels which are not of God. How easily we may bring in methods and lines of activity which are not distinctively of God, not related to Christ and the assembly at all. It is the enemy's subtle effort to divert in some way from the full level of what is due to the heart of Christ.

J.R.B. I wondered as to the fact that the apostle says, "so your thoughts should be corrupted", as though divergent lines begin in our thoughts. He does not say 'your affections' but "your thoughts".

A.J.E.W. The Spirit would help us in our minds so that our thoughts are in positive channels. We need that especially perhaps when we are quiet and alone, as we may be in the waking hours of the night and at other times too. What is engaging our thoughts? There is much that righteously must occupy them in reference to our callings and so forth. Full room would be made for that but to what do we have recourse when the time of release comes when our thoughts can be engaged for the moment with what is dearest in our hearts? What is most precious to us?

J.R.B. "Simplicity as to the Christ" would involve the singleness of motive that was referred to, would it not?

A.J.E.W. Precisely so! It is in that simplicity that Christ is the real objective, not just the professed objective. The man is governed by Christ; that was true in a singular way with the beloved apostle. Christ filled that man's heart and governed him in everything. And you feel that that is the kind of spirit that the Lord is looking for; in simplicity, as it says here, but in genuineness amongst us in the present time. The young can come into this in a very full way - they love Christ! That is the prime thing.

W.A.M. The enemy would seek to bring in Christ and something else; that is not simplicity.

A.J.E.W. It is not. It is the subtlety - "as the serpent deceived Eve by his craft". We have a crafty foe to deal with who exploits what we could speak of as our weak points, so we need to be with God about them. Maybe we should recognise what they are and be with God about them so that the enemy does not exploit them to the damage of what is precious to Christ in the local company.

G.H.B. So the enemy's tactic before was, and still is, to question. "Is it even so, that God has said", Gen 3: 1? That is the way things start, is it not?

A.J.E.W. Sowing doubts and questions. It is exactly that that is contemplated here: "as the serpent deceived Eve by his craft". Not in any sense to overlook the power of the foe but we know a power

which is greater and we need to be in the expression of it in our localities that the saints may be protected from the enemy's attack.

G.H.B. So we are exhorted to gird up the loins of our minds, to be strengthened there (see 1 Pet 1: 13).

A.J.E.W. That is a very good point to bring in; our minds are to be under control. The matter comes up in Romans 7; as the mind is under the Spirit's control we can ensure that it moves in channels which are of God. There is power in the Spirit to have to say to our minds - a very great comfort! Why should we be diverted by things that are of no consequence whatever?

W.A.M. So if our minds are governed rightly we will make straight paths for our feet.

A.J.E.W. That is the concern. The way is a straight way, an upright way, a simple way.

W.A.M. So none would be diverted, the lame will not be turned out of the way. I feel that in these days the enemy is very subtly trying to get the 'open' principle in again, along the line of being gracious or in largeness of heart and so on.

A.J.E.W. This would perhaps emphasise what I think was quoted last night: "If ye love me, keep my commandments", John 14:15. The 'open' principle involves an extensive setting aside of principles which are of God, the setting aside really of divine commandments.

W.A.M. It has been the most successful weapon that the enemy has had in relation to the recovery.

A.J.E.W. And it has had its place in almost every prominent conflict since the recovery began. Hence the need for watchfulness in what we speak of as 'open' in character.

G.H.B. The apostle Paul says "I have shewed you all things", Acts 20: 15. It is in relation to the weak there, helping one another. So if there is an 'open' element creeping in, if we take on what the apostle had received and have the Spirit's help to give a demonstration of being those that have the Spirit of Christ, we should be able to help one another to keep things right.

A.J.E.W. That is fine! The beloved apostle is speaking there to men who have in principle accepted responsibility. Whilst the idea of elderhood is a distinct one by itself, we should be in our local assemblies as accepting responsibility. That is the only right way we can function there. Those men are addressed that they may be aroused to use their responsible place for the benefit of the saints. It is a responsibility to be one of a local company because that commits me to serve the brethren and to strengthen them in what is precious to Christ. You feel the need of the responsible acceptance in love for the Lord of that committal.

G.H.B. So that the answer with us is to be that we are to build one another up in love.

A.J.E.W. That is it, and of course this can operate at the level we were speaking of last night. We have such expressions as in Ephesians: "speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (chap 5: 19) - the power of stimulation spiritually. Just a simple word as to the Lord and His glory or some fresh touch of the truth that has come in can stimulate a person and enliven him so to speak, in what is peculiarly precious to Christ. There is much that goes on that is practical and needs to be done but let us see it in relation to the greatness of this chaste vessel, this chaste virgin to Christ.

A.N.T. As to this subtlety of the operations of Satan, we would have to see to our own personal links with divine Persons because we can deceive ourselves. Samson roused himself up; he wist not the Spirit of God had left him: he thought he could go forward as he had before. Does not that have a bearing on us? It is a very sensitive matter to be near to the Lord in communion so that we go forth in the Spirit's power.

A.J.E.W. We all realise that our links of communion with Christ were very sadly entrenched upon at certain points in time. It is good to bring up, the simple point of communion with the Lord that we may all be in the gain of it - kept near to Christ personally and impressionable by Him as to what His thought is as to any matter.

This is very necessary with us in our local assemblies that the Lord may have full access to what is there, have His way with every person and access to what is increasingly weathy under His hand in the local companies of the saints. The truth in its grandeur stands related to the assebly, the glorious vessel that answeres to the heart of Christ, but he is not speaking just of that here; he is speaking of the expression of that in a particular locality - Corinth. It is in our own locality that we labour, and if some of us are away from our localities the labour is going on in another locality. The conflict is maintained and the upbuilding of the saints goes on in the local assembly. This is the great sphere of activity and growth in which what is for Christ is being secured. I think your point is particularly covered, Mr Thomson, in what we read in 1 Corinthians 11. After setting out the detail concerning the Lord 's supper we have the word, "let a man prove himself, and thus eat of the bread, and drink of the cup". So that the Supper as partaken of week by week becomes a ground of challenge of an inward kind tending to the purifying of our motives and thoughts and brings us suitably into the assembly for that which peculiarly relates to the pleasure of our Lord. So "let a man prove himself" is what you spoke of as a sensitive matter and concerns each of us. It concerns what Mr Moseley spoke of as our secret history: "let a man prove himself". But the intent is not that the man should come to it that he is an abject failure and refrain from eating and drinking. The point is that as having proved himself, having his links in communion with Christ established and right, he comes to the Supper and partakes rightly of the emblems.

A.N.T. So there is greater spoil for divine Persons.

A.J.E.W. Think of the Lord's supper being ministered to the saints in Corinth in the first letter. Think of the disorder that there was among them, the incestuous person that apparently had liberty among them, the divided condition that existed. How real those conditions were and how real in the mind and heart of the apostle! But he is opening up the truth from the viewpoint of which we have been speaking. He has heaven's thoughts and he is proceeding from those to get right

down to the situation as it is in the local assembly. The Spirit helps as to that.

J.S. It has been said that Paul did not shut the locality up. He laboured with what was there and kept the channels open. Corinth was not shut up.

A.J.E.W. No, quite so. You feel that that enters into the enemy's efforts at the present time. But we come back to the prime truths of the first and second letters to the Corinthians and see that in spite of those conditions at Corinth the apostle is labouring on there still and labouring in relation to the objective which he tells us in the first scripture we read. He is not allowing the level of his labour or the level of his objective to be diminished one whit, although he is up against, you might say, the toughest problems in this local assembly. What a comfort for us!

J.S. It almost seems impossible that he could get that situation cleaned up and yet the spiritual level of his ministry, his faithfulness and his affections are very strong to bring them around.

A.J.E.W. The secret of it surely is the way in which he addresses them at the first. He dwells on the abstract side; that is, what the saints are in God's thoughts for them. If we keep that in our minds it helps us to move on and to labour: so that the first nine verses of the first chapter of first Corinthians are largely concerned with the abstract side of what the saints are in the mind of God and he clings to that. Then he comes to the practical situation that there is disunity among them. But as he approaches that situation he has in his mind that there is a house of Chloe in Corinth that had shown him the conditions that were there - not told him only but shown him - and you feel how often he would come back in his mind to the house of Chloe and that there is something in Corinth. Therefore he is not allowing Corinth in his mind to be degraded below the proper thought of a local assembly - the assembly of God in Corinth.

W.A.M. He does not proceed to deal with the man himself; he exercises the saints. He is prepared to be with them - "ye and my

spirit being gathered together" - but nevertheless it would be an assembly judgment arrived at in Corinth.

A.J.E.W. That is a very important point because, as you say, he does not deal with the man himself in his apostolic authority. He does link himself with the judgment of the saints in chapters five and six and in that sense the matter goes forward; but it is, as you say, something reached in the place by those who are there.

W.A.M. The idea of an assembly judgment would carry great dignity.

A.J.E.W. Dignity is the word and the local assembly involves dignities. Things are there as God would have them to be and not just on the level of man's affairs.

W.A.M. That is what came to light at Glanton; we did not understand the dignity of the local assembly and Christ's absolute rights in each local assembly.

A.J.E.W. That is something which the enemy, I believe, is challenging. We have to cling to what is right in that connection at the present time.

A.N.T. The assembly in any place is not infallible, yet authority is there. So a judgment is accepted. Adjustment in the Lord's time will come in; He will see to that in His assembly, do you not think?

A.J.E.W. There may be failure in our working out of what belongs to the assembly and yet the assembly characteristically is trustworthy in respect of matters of discipline. The Lord indicated that in John 20. The main thought there is not retention of sins but remission, that the grace of the dispensation is brought into evidence by what the assembly may do or determine. That is a fine thing.

W.A.M. So even if it comes down to one or two, as it did with the house of Chloe, if there is anything that represents the assembly, that is trustworthy.

A.J.E.W. That has to be reckoned with. We have to speak very tenderly of administration in a day of brokenness and yet the administrative thought is a right one.

W.A.M. We have to stay by what is abstract - abstractly true in a broken day. The principles never change.

A.J.E.W. May we stay by that; it is the salvation practically of the brethren going on together to stay by the principles and to resist especially what you have named as the 'open' principle coming in. You feel the dignity of what is in a place where there is something which is in the light of God's assembly. He regards that very highly. It is under the eye of heaven as bearing a dignity all its own. You feel that God is very pleased with the maintenance of that and of standards that He has Himself established and for which He provides every necessary resource. It may seem that the assembly involves the demanding side - that is, everything is to be right - and it may tax us to maintain that side; but the answer to that is in the divine provision, especially in the Spirit, that everything that is due to Christ should find its answer in the local assembly. The provision from the divine side is wonderful.

A.N.T. Where there is weakness it is met through ministry, is it not? So that the apostle holds the Corinthians in such a way that he can minister to them, he can get access, just as we are together now. We get help through ministry but if we stay isolated we do not have access to the ministry that we need to bring in help and adjustment.

A.J.E.W. Ministry is a Pauline thought in a special way; he stayed a year and a half in Corinth and laboured among them. How did he labour? By ministry: of course involving not only the word passed on but the exemplification of what he ministered in himself. That would be a very vital side of it. That would be distinctive in Paul that he would exemplify what he ministered.

A.N.T. Do you think we see the outshining of the result of the Damascus road in what you are saying?

A.J.E.W. That is right.

W.A.M. Do you think the evidence where the Lord is found is if there is prophetic ministry? That is what governed me - that is what I found and then I thought, well the Lord must be there.

A.J.E.W. So we might inquire about Ephesus. We know how Ephesus represented the wealthiest features of the truth not only in what was set out in teaching but in a substantial answer to it in the saints. What brought that about? Think of the apostle's time in Ephesus, his labouring publicly and in every house to bring the brethren into the gain of the counsels of God. Where did that condition of things in Ephesus arise? The Spirit brought it about but it arose very largely through the course of ministry which Paul carried through.

W.A.M. He insists on the basis of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

A.J.E.W. Quite so. So the ministry, as we have said, is very important. It is good that in our local companies we have ministry not only from visitors but that the truth is maintained and that there is a course of teaching going on in the local readings, for example, that will help forward the young people with the basic elements of the truth and keep us all fresh as to the structure of the truth itself. It is of all importance that ministry is proceeding.

A.N.T. You feel that the Lord is raising these matters with us that we be exercised that it will be so as, judging our past, we press on; but we want to carry the gain of that with us and, in dependence on Christ and in the power of the Spirit, there might be that which would in power come into the souls of the youngest.

A.J.E.W. The word impart is a good word because it has to be on that line. I cannot bring anyone else into something which I am not in the gain of myself, in some degree anyway. It is a question of impartation. It is good for us in our several local companies to be sure for example that there is right food for the young believers there; something for them, not by special occasion, but that there be handfuls of purpose which will nourish and strengthen the young hearts that happily have their place amongst us. But to come back to the Supper, what an affecting thing it is that in the midst of the Corinthian teaching the apostle brings in the truth of the Supper - the only place in his written canon of scripture that it appears in such a

definite way. He gives the instructions as to the Supper to the saints at Corinth to keep them at the real level of divine thoughts; because it is wonderful how the Supper does that, bringing us back to the person of Christ, to the love of Christ, to the work of Christ, to the efficacy of that work, to the glorifying of Christ. All these things become prominent in the Supper and they keep our minds on the stable level of what God has established for Himself.

D.F.H. Would you say that he brings in the thought of one body? There is nothing less than that or anything partial to be in our minds, is there?

A.J.E.W. You mean that the body is a complete thought. It is a full thought and that is to be in expression. We need to be together bodywise; that is, our relations together are governed by the truth of the body. They are not just casual relations, far less social relations, but we are together as of the body of Christ. That is important, I think.

Now that last passage was read to bring in the due sense of victory, the grandeur of what the beloved apostle's mind was rightly engaged with. This great resurrection chapter is one of the most stimulating to read when things press heavily upon us. The truth of resurrection is asserted in a way so glorious and we get this parenthesis which leads on to the ultimate triumph of God Himself over everything that has stood in His way. To get something of that into the soul is of the greatest comfort when we are faced maybe with local pressures and matters that would tend to stand in the way of what is for the heart of Christ being secured. What a sense of victory this chapter brings Christ is the Victor!

W.A.M. There is a sort of spring in the heart as the result: "be firm, immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord" (v 58).

A.J.E.W. It is a special touch of the Spirit that gives us this parenthesis. We discern a certain coming into the matter by the Spirit of God to assert the final glory of everything when God shall be all in all, the great ultimate point of divine triumph. Having this in the heart we can go forward with fresh vigour and fresh devotion and

fresh dependence, which is what we need in view of what is precious to Christ being maintained in our own place.

W.A.M. The enemy would try to discourage us by smallness and failure and what we see around publicly.

A.J.E.W. Oh, indeed! especially perhaps when there are particular features of conflict in view. Unless we are careful he would use our minds to build up situations which are unreal, by which we become discouraged. But the idea of discouragement is foreign to the Pauline course of ministry. He would maintain the level of things so that the saints are always encouraged. There is a need for self-judgment, there is a need to face the issues that are raised by the enemy's attack in different respects but Paul would never allow us to fall below the proper level of the truth of God which I think is a most comforting thing.

VANCOUVER

3 April 1976

Key to initials

G.H.B. G.H.Ballard; J.R.B. J. R.Bellamy; D.F.H. D.F.Hugill; W.A.M. W.A.Moseley;

J.S. J.Soukoreff; A.N.T. A.N.Thomson; A.J.E.W. A.J.E.Welch (London, England).

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

A.J.E.Welch

Romans 16: 2 5-27; Ephesians 3: 20,21

The spirit of praise which appears in these scriptures and a number of others is most attractive. The thought of God is that we offer the sacrifice of praise to Him continually. Along with that we have the word that the Father seeks worshippers and we are not to allow ourselves the thought that these choice matters of response to God are to be limited to the prime occasion in which He is served. To serve God in praise is the greatest portion for man: there is no greater engagement for man. We have what we speak of as the service of God following the Lord's supper, an occasion of deep and increasing richness, an occasion which God delights in as He loves to intimate to us, an occasion for which we rightly prepare ourselves in the light of the scripture we read this afternoon, a very great occasion but related to a way in which the service of God proceeds in the assembly. It comes under the touch of Christ as Minister of the sanctuary. It is regulated by the Lord Jesus and sustained in the power of the Spirit, but it is assembly service - peculiarly glorious, commanding, I believe, the deepest interest of heaven - that is, persons united together with one thought, moving under the impulse of Christ and in the Spirit, expressing themselves in praise and in song that God might be glorified amongst His people and have His portion in response that is delightful to Himself. That beloved brethren is very great. I trust we value it at the true level at which it is to be valued and understand the point that to serve God in the assembly is our peculiarly privileged portion in these days, increasingly few remaining, in which the assembly is here in testimony yet sustaining the service of praise in the midst of the testimonial conditions that arise. Let us value these things.

But what I am engaged with now is not so much the service of praise in the assembly as the spirit of praise working amongst us all the time, as if what reaches us in such an abundance of blessing from God is quickly turned into praise in the hearts of His saints. So

we have these two scriptures which are two of many so called doxologies in Scripture. The spirit of doxology is a very fine thing, the soul breaking out in the joy of receiving from God, the joy of standing in relation to God, breaking out in His praise and addressing something to Himself. I covet that we may know more of it and it is with that intent that these scriptures are read.

That at the end of the epistle to Romans is of very deep significance because that epistle brings man back into right relations with God and it is therefore basic to what we are saying. It brings man before God and into His presence in a way which is entirely right according to Himself. The epistle sets out for us the great basis of the glad tidings. Think of standing in right relations with God for His praise. What a triumph it is! We think of the maladjustment of everything in the world of men, we think how everything is adrift from what God has appointed for man in His presence and secured for Himself and think of that being set right and persons brought - and thank God they are still being brought - into right relations with God Himself. The greatness of that is to affect us increasingly - that there is a basis in the work of Christ and in the gift of the Spirit for man to stand and to stay and be sustained in right relations with God. So the question of sins is resolved, the question of righteousness is touched and is settled, God's righteousness for man is brought in. I say this to encourage the dear younger ones here. The question of righteousness is established on a right basis: "righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all, and upon all those who believe", chap 3: 22. In one way, how simple God has made it for men to be in right relations with Himself. These are the terms of the glad tidings but it is wonderful to reflect how simple God has made it from His side that men, myriads of men, might stand in just and right relations with Himself that He might have the praise that is the due portion of His own heart.

Then we have justification; that is, the whole question of man's guilt is settled and resolved, not only that the man has sinned and has a history in sin and therefore has the guilt of sins upon him, not only that the sins are atoned for; but the guilt is discharged that men

may not come before God in the sense of guilt, tending as that would to lack of liberty in God's presence. So Christ "has been delivered for our offences and has been raised for our justification, chap 4: 25. How fine it is to go over these great fundamental points of the gospel because they promote praise in our hearts. We say, How great God is! How marvellous is the way He has come out toward us to bless us! How marvellous is the ground of blessing in the atoning work of Christ, the sacrifice of Himself! How marvellous is this precious gift of the Holy Spirit to link us with Christ where He is and to give us the experience in our hearts of the love of God "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us", chap 5: 5. How great these things are! Is it not fitting that we be employed in praise? Sometimes how coldly - I say it for myself - we go over these great elements of the truth of the glad tidings when God would have an echo of praise from every heart as they are gone over.

Then we are established in peace, peace towards God - nothing to disturb the peace of those relations, settled relations with God Himself so that you know Him and speak to Him and have some consciousness that He is speaking to you. What did we do that peace might be established? We have to come to it that God has effected it all from His side and in His own love. Does this not call forth praise from the hearts of His saints? Does this not stimulate us with 'hallelujahs', not in any mere sentimental religious sense but the reality of what lies behind that simple expression of praise often repeated in the Psalms - Hallelujah! It is simple and spontaneous, yet yielding something for God Himself. We might well use it a bit more, not, as I said, in a sentimental way but in that the heart is affected by what God has effected, and of Christ as before us in the wondrous efficacy of all that He has effected for God and for us.

Then there is the power in which we enter into deliverance; deliverance from the law, deliverance from the practical workings of flesh in the power of the Spirit. What provision God has made for you dear young people and for all of us that we might be entirely free of the power and workings of sin and from all that would hold us in bondage. God has moved out toward us in grace to set us entirely

free. Is that not an occasion of praise? Indeed it is! So we have the fulness of chapter eight of this epistle where the gift of the Spirit is the great point and where we are brought through the gift of the Spirit to cry "Abba, Father" (v 15); that is, our relation with God now is one supremely of love. We are brought into the place where we are loved with the Father's love and given power to answer to that love. It is the Spirit who cries in Galatians: it is the person who cries in Romans 8; and that is what God is bringing us to - entrance into the full relationships into which God has brought us by way of adoption into sonship. Do we know the Spirit of sonship, the enjoyment of sonship, the liberty of sonship? What an occasion of praise! What an occasion of outflow Godward from every heart true to Him and true to Christ when the liberty of sonship is experienced! And it is to be experienced, to be before God conscious that He loves us and that we stand in a settled relationship to Him in which He loves to receive the responses of our affections towards Himself. That, dear brethren, is most blessed - God bringing us near to Himself to know what He is in His blessed nature. What is the answer in us? Is there an answer in us? It enters into what I am seeking to speak of - the spirit of praise in our hearts that something goes back to God by way of response. The cry "Abba, Father" is itself a very deep and expressive one. It springs from the depths of the heart as it rightly is uttered: "Abba, Father". Our relation with God known as Father is real. Christianity, beloved brethren, older and younger brethren, is a matter of real settled relationships of love, not a passing matter, not a shallow matter, but a deep matter of settled relationships with God in love.

Then we get, in chapters 9, 10 and 11, the wonderful wisdom in which God has related His activities among the gentiles to His activities in Israel. Then we have the presenting of the body a living sacrifice in chapter 12, God securing us even as to our bodies for His own satisfaction. Then we get touches as to the ruling powers in chapter 13, that God has established us in right relations with rulers, with authorities, with kings, with governments.

All these things come into the course of this epistle and now at the end of it the apostle refers to God as "him that is able to establish you". God is able to establish us, to settle us, to bring us into a fullygrounded situation in relation to Himself without elements of uncertainty or doubt but we are free with God as established before Him on the ground of all that has been effected by Christ and secured for His pleasure. The securing of our hearts, the securing of ourselves for the pleasure of God, is not just a question of what we are as we find our part in the Supper and the service that follows it; it is a matter which extends over our whole course, that we stand secured for God's pleasure. That is what He has in mind, that is what is to govern us. Now comes this choice utterance, this choice doxology: "to him that is able to establish you". Paul goes on, he has more to say about God, as if in the very course of his utterances of praise he would remind us how great God is. How God delights in that - that we have some increasing sense of His glory, His greatness, His power, - His majesty, His wisdom, His love. What a God He is!

Then we have "according to the revelation of the mystery"; that is to say that God has a certain great line of truth, if I may call it that, which is peculiarly intimate in relation to Himself, presenting the excellence of thoughts which are peculiarly His in regard of Christ and the assembly. God has disclosed the elements of the mystery. The scripture reminds us that silence was kept as to them in the times of the ages - they were not disclosed. The time has come for God to disclose, so to speak, His best. And in the truth of the mystery His best is disclosed to the hearts of those who love Him. The great place that the assembly is to have with Christ, even in universal dominion, is embraced in the mystery, the mystery of God in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge - a marvellous region of the truth which God has disclosed to His saints, peculiarly related to His own affections, the affections of Christ, the great realm of glory in which Christ has His place of pre-eminence and in which the assembly has her place with Him, great truth as to the mystery that God has caused to be disclosed. He

disclosed it by revelation to Paul who has embraced it in his ministry to the saints and has committed it to us in a certain sense under the touch of the Spirit and the Spirit is able to sustain us in these relationships with Christ which properly belong to the mystery.

God has disclosed His very best! Does this not stimulate praise? Have our hearts been affected by the deep things of God? There is so much in this letter relating to our own personal histories and the way that God has come in to set us free, the way in which He has moved to establish us for His pleasure, the way in which He has moved now to disclose the finest elements of the truth to us that we may enter into them and enjoy them and be responsive in them. How great God is! That is the impression that is left and is intended to be left - how great God is! What can we do but praise Him? What can we do but respond to Him? What can our hearts do but respond to the love so rich, so full, so outflowing from that heart of His save to be found in praise?

So the last word is, "through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen". It is a doxology, it is an expression of praise; it conveys much about God Himself, that to which the heart responds, to which the heart springs up in response - a great matter, the spontaneous springing up in response as we get some realisation of how glorious God is in His greatness, His wisdom, His love, His power, all the attributes that are His; and there is a response from our hearts and we say "through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen". This is not, as I said at the beginning, just an expression of assembly response; it is something which the heart of the believer is brought into as he traverses the course that the truth has set out and as he enters into it in experience and proves in his own soul how great God is: not a question of receiving an assurance or of being told something in some word by someone but something that the heart has come into in the reality of soul experience producing an answer in directness and simplicity and spontaneity of praise to God.

Now when we come to Ephesians we have much more what is collective and I suppose these verses do find a special answer as

God is served in the assembly in what we speak of as the service of praise to God. But I am concerned just to touch briefly the wealth of this utterance: "to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think, according to the power which works in us, to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen". The first thing to notice is that there is a vessel in which such praise fitly has its place and that that vessel is the assembly - the assembly in Christ Jesus. The assembly is presented to us as the vessel of praise. How do we come into the assembly? Are we conscious of our part in it? Does the word 'assembly' mean anything to us in a vital sense? Does God assure us that it means a great deal to Him in what is pleasing to His heart? Have we really grasped God's thoughts concerning the assembly, the way in which He has set us together in relation with Christ and with one another, the way in which He has given us the Spirit, binding us in the gift of the Spirit into one great bundle of life and securing from us in that relation what answers to His own heart? How God loves to see us together; how God loves to affect us together; how He loves to see among us the kind of bonds of mutual affection and respect which rightly exist in the assembly - to see those bonds working so that the sensitiveness of what is due to Himself affects us one and all. How great the assembly is, the rich depository of every divine thought in purpose of grace to be entered into by us as we prove what it is to be known there, what is to be opened out there in the sense that the great things of God are opened out by the Spirit.

There is something due to God in respect of all this and it comes into expression in this scripture, "to him that is able". It is a question of what He is able to do; and what He is able to do is not limited by what we may conceive ourselves to be able to do, but "far exceedingly above all which we ask or think". God is before us in His own sufficiency to sustain the response that His heart delights in. What a glorious view of God this gives us, beloved brethren! How it stimulates us in the service of love which is to go on before Him that He is able to sustain us "far exceedingly above all which we ask or

think, according to the power which works in us"; that is to say, as together we prove the Spirit in a singular sense "which works in us", the company is in mind, the way the Spirit affects the company, the way that the Spirit becomes resource to the company; a power works in us that there may be the excellence of what is due to God Himself in the company of His own, stimulated by the glory opened out to our hearts in Christ and in the Father's affections bringing about a response to God that is infinite blessedness and love and power.

Well, dear brethren, we, through grace, prove what it is to enter into this; we prove "the power that works in us" and it is of God that we should. He has secured us and called us into His great thoughts with this great end in mind. I long to develop a greater measure of responsiveness with us all the time to the greatness of divine things. Sometimes we seem very cold persons in relation to the warmth of the heart of God as His own thoughts are disclosed to us and He would warm our hearts and stimulate our response to Himself in reference not only to what He has effected in us (which is Romans) but in relation to the extent and glory and blessedness of His own thoughts in love. So the word is "to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages". It goes on to eternity - wonderful thing that what is stimulated now and springing up in the hearts of those who love God is going to carry through into the eternal echoing response that shall fill the eternal scenes for His glory.

May we be helped of God to a greater measure of responsiveness to Himself. May it be characteristic of us not only at specific times - a responsiveness to God, the extent of His thoughts welling up in our hearts towards Him, for His Name's sake.

VANCOUVER

3 April 1976

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

A.J.E.Welch

1 Corinthians 15: 1-10

Wonderful matters as to Christ are set forth in this passage. Its intention is to direct our hearts to Him in the greatness of His Person and work. The glory of the Person of Jesus has, I verily believe, left a certain mark upon this day together. In what grace He has warmed our hearts as to Himself! How He has reached into our affections and attached them freshly, and in the touch of His own power, to Himself! This is just what He would do as we speak together of the wonderful matters that have been accomplished by Him. How small and puny the accomplishments of men become when we range them alongside what is said of Jesus in this passage! "The glad tidings", the writer says, "which I announced to you". These are truly glad tidings which are sounded out tonight as this glorious Person is presented to men - something which has nothing but the blessing of men in mind; something which brings abiding satisfaction to the heart by engaging that heart with a settled glorious object in Jesus. We long that He may be magnified by a time like this, that this same Person may have a greater place in every heart, in every life, in consequence of what the Spirit would say to us about Him.

So the substance of the glad tidings which Paul had delivered to them is firstly "that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures". How richly the Scriptures present the work of Jesus! I was reading last night the fifty-third chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah - full of the glory of Christ, full of the amazing grace of His work in suffering and despising by man. I wonder if we realise what we owe to Him as this passage brings it out. "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures"; that is, the scriptures looked on to it; the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and other chapters in that evangelical prophet's writings pointed on to something which was to come in ; but as we speak to you this afternoon not only is this pointed on to by the scriptures but it is accomplished. The work is done; the

matter is settled, settled and final in what Christ has effected. Marvellous thing! We are not presenting something which is yet to be improved upon. Far be the thought! What is said as to Christ here is final in respect of God's dealings with men but the intent is to reach into your soul for blessing, that you may find and establish in your own experience what the heart of God is toward you. Oh, the blessedness of it! How blessed for souls to find in their experience, particularly through the gift of the Holy Spirit, that God loves them - that they have a place in the love of God. Are you conscious of this - conscious of a place in the love of God and of Christ? He longs for a place in your heart assuring you that you have a place in His heart. But it stands related to this work of His, that "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures". How brief the statement is and yet how much in actual accomplishment it involved! We had a hymn this morning that turned our thoughts to His sufferings. Oh, the reality of those sufferings! and He alone could sustain them. There were His sufferings at the hand of men - despised, smitten, spat upon, crucified; once on the cross, scorned and rejected, the object of men's taunts as He suffered there. What a sufferer Jesus was! and it was on your account and mine. Let none of us be cold or unfeeling as to the sufferings of Jesus. I know of nothing that so plunges into the affections of persons true to Christ than to reflect over His sufferings, to read of them and allow the Spirit to speak to us as to the depths of those sufferings without which we could know no peace, no blessing; without which the love of God could never be known in the way in which, blessed be His Name, it is to be known as the word is preached today.

But beyond all those sufferings, the scorn of men, the violence of men, the way in which men with their evil minds worked against Him, He suffered under the mighty hand of God. He suffered as it says: "Christ died for our sins". But as He was on that cross, placed there by men to die, He suffered abandonment.. Think of the awfulness of it! One who had been so near to God in that pathway that He trod down here, one who was in such perfection of communing with God, being forsaken and that by God Himself;

"made sin" as the scripture says, 2 Cor 5: 21. Do we realise what we owe to the Lord Jesus? Do the facts of the gospel leave our affections cold? Surely not. We can always come back to these precious facts, setting forth as they do how God is toward men for blessing and we can find our souls nourished by them and by the holy love that enters into the whole matter.

Christ was forsaken on the cross, such a cry was brought from His lips as the scripture records: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", (Matt 27: 46); a question which receives no immediate answer but one which would come home to every person in whom the light of God has shone that He was there for me. He was there on my account, He suffered untold suffering which I could never sustain because for me it would mean divine judgment and banishment for ever from the presence of God. He went into that banishment in the sense that He was forsaken. I say it in all reverent feeling, I trust, but that was *intensely* real! He actually bore it for me and for you that the question of our sins might be settled; but having thus suffered He delivered up His spirit, He laid down His life and His precious body was laid in the grave. He laid down His life. Think of such a life reaching a point where in that sense it came to an end, the perfection of the life of Jesus; a perfection which exposes what is in every one of our lives in sin. But He Himself knew no sin - "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth", 1 Pet 2: 22. The path, the way of Jesus, was perfect but it came in that sense to a finish. He laid down His life and He laid it down on our account; the word is plain here: "Christ died for our sins". It does not exactly say that He suffered for our sins in the verse that I read but that He died for our sins, embracing the uttermost point so to speak of the work that He accomplished. He went right into death to take our place because death was my place. Death was my due as a lost guilty sinner - death and judgment. The Lord Jesus went that way on my account: as you come believing, on your account. It is what He has done uniquely for you. There is that which He has accomplished for God, glorifying God at every point of His dealings with men. There are the amazing extensive eternal results of what Christ has effected

in the widest sense but He has done something for you, just you yourself, which is set out in these verses. Does it not affect you?

The efficacy of the work of Christ is stupendous - the matters that it will have a bearing upon as God comes in to set everything right and secure the universe responsive to Himself - but He has done something for you which no other person could undertake. He has carried the whole matter related to your case through to a settled finish - completion, that the burden of your sins might be done away, that the burden of your guilt might be forever put away, that you might know the blessedness of being at peace with God, justified and at peace towards God. Peace! What a lovely word. How little the world knows of it! How little any one of us would know of it were we going along in the current of all that is around us: but God has in view for men peace towards Himself. Oh, the reality of that peace! And, oh, that in our relations with God all is finally settled, nothing is left to be settled. Everything is settled by Jesus: "Christ died for our sins" - a statement so brief, the blessedness of it so rich in its extent and bearing upon us.

Then it says, "and that he was buried". How brief again; the very brevity of these statements is calculated to penetrate the more deeply into our hearts. The pungent brevity of these statements is of the Spirit to reach right deep into us and it says "he was buried". Think of Jesus buried - going down into the grave. That was our due place and portion that one order of man might be put right out of sight in view of a new order of man coming into view. That comes in in a moment but the first thing is that "he was buried". He went in that sense right out of sight as if to bring us an impression of the total finish of one line of things in sin which has affected men. God is not looking to that man any more; God has put that order of man away from before Him in the sufferings and death and burying of His Son that God might bring into view, and that for the blessing of men, a new order of man in a risen and glorified Jesus.

So it quickly moves on to that - "and that he was raised the third day". What a day that third day was when the Lord Jesus came out of the grave, His work thus far complete, and He was presented

living to those who had known Him and loved Him! Think of Christ out of death, a living person, who lives still, who lives today and would engage you in life with Himself. "Was raised the third day, according to the scriptures": we are reminded again that it was 'according to the scriptures'; that is, it was God carrying through His grand proposal for the blessing of men. But it is not now just a proposal, it is an accomplished matter. That is what I want to bring home especially - a final accomplishment of everything by Jesus. It is not looked on to as the prophets looked on to it (we learn much as to the work of Christ by the way the prophets looked on to it and the expressions that the prophets under the Spirit's touch used about it) but what the prophets looked on to is now actual and consummated and effectual.

And so the word is preached that it might take effect in companies of persons such as this and bring them into settled peace and the enjoyment of what the heart of God is towards them. So "He was raised the third day". Oh, what a moment when He came out of the grave, never again to be held in death's power, a glorious Man out of death, having really died and coming out of death; I say that in all reverence as to Jesus, He really died and came out of death. The power of resurrection is a reality. It is not something which is merely in the range of possibility; the power of resurrection is a glorious reality and we can point to Jesus, the glorious risen Man. What an object for your heart! "Delivered for our offences... raised for our justification" (Rom 4: 25) that we might see the whole burden of guilt gone. Jesus went into death bearing our guilt but came out of death, our guilt gone. The whole matter is settled, no question of guilt remains; so I can stand before God, not in the sense of guilt but in the sense of peace that Christ has accomplished everything. Does this not fill your heart with joy? It is peculiarly fitting on the first day of the week to refer to the resurrection of Christ; the first day of the week was the resurrection day, a day of peculiar exultation in the whole power of death overcome and a risen Christ brought into view, soon (as He was) to be taken up into heaven to be set in the place of glory and power: and He is there tonight, as to His settled position, to

shine into your heart the blessedness of all that is accomplished in Himself. What place has He in our hearts, this same Jesus? Are our affections not wrought upon and freshly claimed as we read such a scripture, presenting the facts so tersely and yet with such deep penetration? This is what He has done for us, it is what Jesus has done, it is what no other person but Jesus could do; but in grace and in the expression of all that God is toward man He has done it and has completed at every point what was necessary to be done that you may know justification, clearance from guilt; that you may know peace towards God with nothing to disturb your relations with God as known to your soul.

But then this is not all, for it says "that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the most remain until now.... Then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to an abortion, he appeared to *me* also". This wonderful list of appearances is as if the Lord would impress upon persons the greatness of His present condition or position, as if He would reach into our hearts to engage us with Himself *as He is*. As He was, was glorious - morally glorious, morally perfect. How moral perfection shone in Jesus! There was a marvellous presentation under the eye of God and under the eye of man of moral perfection; but now, as beyond death, He engages us with Himself glorified, a glorious Man presented in His glory and perfection for our apprehension, for our faith to seize upon, for our affections to be engaged with Himself. These appearances are wonderful. They are a special mark of this passage (which is one reason why I say that this whole passage is intended to reach into our affections and engage them with the Person of Christ and His glory) that He appeared to this one and to that one, to one company and to another company, even above five hundred brethren at once. It does not say what transpired but the fact is He appeared to them. He presented Himself to them and there is some sense in which He would do that even in a company like this, He would present Himself to us, risen, glorified, just to engage our affections with Himself; just to assure our hearts that all is done that

was necessary to be done and that the heart of God is toward us in the most blessed and abiding way. God having from His side intervened with His Son to resolve everything that would keep us away from Him, everything that would bring in distance between God Himself and man, Christ has acted to put away. He would have us near. He would have us in the enjoyment of what fills His heart and we come into this as our eye rests upon Jesus as He presents Himself in grace to these hearts of ours even by the witness of the Spirit that would enter into such an occasion as this.

Beloved friends, my purpose in speaking to you is just to engage you with Christ and with all that is effected in Him, with all that is to be known in living present power in that Person. He is to fill your hearts with satisfaction in that your hearts have found an abundantly satisfying object and your eye is held by Jesus; and as you realise now the way He has been for you, He having died for you, His love is towards you to secure your heart with Himself as its object. Oh, the blessedness of a pathway of which Christ is the object! And so the writer of this scripture brings himself in: "last of all... he appeared to me also". That is the voice of experience; and what is to be known is the voice of experience. We speak of these things - God would have us to speak from experience - and here is one, under the touch of the Spirit, writing in the realm of experience involving the gift of the Holy Spirit. Do you know the blessedness of that gift? Do you young people here know the gift of the Spirit? Have you received the Spirit? God's thought is that you should, having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His characteristic gift; He loves to give it but it is His gift ; and the Spirit would fill your heart with a view of the Christ. Here is one who speaks, as I remarked, with the voice of immediate experience: "last of all... to *me* also". The Lord had presented Himself to Saul of Tarsus, as he then was, in the glorious light that came from heaven. He was brought into touch with Christ in glory and that is the end in view in the preaching going forth today - to bring you into touch with that Christ in glory, beyond death and all its power, that He should engage and affect and hold that heart of yours. May this be the issue as these

scriptures are read, as Christ is in our minds and hearts, that we are engaged with Himself in glory, tasting in that sense the service of the blessed Spirit, known by way of gift from God, to keep us in our full relations with that glorious Man and make Him the object of our hearts, yea, of the lives in which we t read the rest of our course here below. May God bless the word, for His Name's sake.

VANCOUVER

4 April 1976

THE CHILDREN'S OBSERVING

If you think for a while about the words of Jesus you will realise how much He taught from nature. It is called 'moral' teaching because it has to do with learning what is good and refusing what is evil. For one thing He drew attention to the lilies by the wayside, beautiful but fading: yet we read that Susanna, whose name means 'lily' had the lasting beauty of one who served the Lord with all that she had. Another lesson was that those who could tell the meaning of a red sky at night and a red sky in the morning ought to know the difference between blessing for receiving the Saviour and judgment for refusing Him. Again, tiny things like pieces of fluff, called 'motes', with which the little birds make their nests so cosy, can upset our eyesight. Thus a small thing can hinder our telling truth from error.

Scripture tells us that God is the "Observer of men" so that everyone young and old has to do with Him. Does the botany student know that His word searches more deeply within him than the strongest microscope into a flower? Does the little girl gazing at the planet Venus, a very brilliant evening star in the west this winter, realise that the Creator of them both is looking into her conscience and heart? Job, an old and good man, thought that he was being observed merely to find fault and to condemn, but his Maker really sought to justify him. A young but unwise man, called Ephraim so as to represent Israel, repented of his sins and God observed him bring forth the fruits of repentance. The shed blood and atoning work of Jesus, then future, gave a perfect cover for all their sins as for ours now who believe on Him.

One of the books in heaven's library is about some persons, over four centuries before the birth of Christ, who honoured God when most people turned away from Him. Doubtless there were many children amongst those who spoke together about His name, or renown. I expect that God's first words by the prophet Malachi - "I have loved you" - started the conversations and kept them alive! Those persons were a special treasure to Him and His observations of them are all in the "book of remembrance". I believe that there

are now very many volumes of this book, especially since the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Is your name in the volume now being written?

J.C.Evershed