

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

DIVINE COUNSEL

VESSELS

WITH GOD IN THE HOUSEHOLD

"OUR LITTLE ONES"

THE CHILDREN'S SHEPHERD

DIVINE COUNSEL

P.H.Buchan

John 17: 1,4-11,20-23; John 20: 15-23; Acts 7: 55-60; 8: 1 (first sentence); 9: 3-5;

Revelation 22: 16, 17, 20

One has ventured to refer to these scriptures, beloved, not in any sense as feeling qualified to enlarge on them for I am well aware that we are treading on holy ground; and if there is to be any impression conveyed, one is very sensible to the fact that we need the Spirit's help. As we approach this first scripture it is in the recognition that we are brought very near to the presence of God, one glorious divine Person speaking to Another. How marvellous that is! It says "Jesus ... lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee; as thou hast given him authority over all flesh, that as to all that thou hast given to him, he should give them life eternal. And this is the eternal life, that they should know thee, the only true God". How marvellous to think of the way God has been pleased to open up the greatness of this matter in this mediatorial setting: "that they should know thee, the only true God". As we think of God abstractly we are reminded that He dwells in light unapproachable (see 1 Tim. 6: 16). Think for a moment of the glory that attaches to deity; God will ever remain in that inscrutable realm of deity into which no mind of man can ever penetrate. But as we have been reminded in the ministry the link between what is absolute and what is relative is what God is in His own blessed nature, for God is love. How great that is - the way God has made Himself known, necessitating of course the incoming of one divine Person into manhood, coming into this mediatorial position to open out the blessedness of the economy of divine love.

Is that not wonderful? While we ever bear in mind that God will remain eternally the "incorruptible, invisible, only God" (1 Tim 1: 17) "whom no man has seen, nor is able to see", (for God, in one sense, will ever be outside of our range in inscrutability); it raises the question as to how far we can go in spiritual apprehension, and that

necessitates formation in love. It is wonderful to think that if God is really to be apprehended it is just as He has come within our range in this glorious, blessed Man.

One has been affected reflecting today on the way the Lord here speaks so freely to the Father. He says "I have glorified *thee* on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it; and now glorify *me*, *thou* Father, along with thyself, with the glory which I had along with thee before the world was". Oh what a Person is Jesus! I feel we need constantly to reflect on the glory of the One who has come so near to us as Man. What an occupation as we think of the Person of Jesus coming so near!

Think of the perfection of manhood, as seen in Jesus, coming into manhood just to set out what God has in mind in relation to men.

That is wonderful to my mind. Yet here in manhood He just requests the Father to be reinstated (for want of a better word) in the glory that was His, what was personal to Himself before the ages of time. How marvellous to think of who Jesus is! Think of Him "who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself, taking a bondman's form, taking his place in the likeness of men" Phil 2: 6, 7. He laid by, shall we say, for the moment that glory that attaches to deity to come into this mediatorial position to set out in manhood the greatness of what God had in mind in relation to men, setting out that wondrous feature of divine glory. It says "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father)", John 1: 14. Think of the choiceness of what God had in mind in those eternal counsels of divine love! How marvellous they are! You will recall wisdom speaking in Proverbs 8 (and when I refer to this I delight to think of how all God's operations have been in infinite wisdom): "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from eternity, from the beginning, before the earth was.... When he prepared the heavens I was there; when he ordained the circle upon the face of the deep; ... when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him ... rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in

the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men" (vv 22-31). Wisdom is not a person, it is that quality in God by which means He secures the answer to His own eternal purposes.

How wonderful to contemplate, dear brethren, that God has in mind to surround Himself eternally with men just like Jesus! I can understand then why the Lord, in speaking to His Father here, saying to His Father here, says "I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world. They were thine, and thou gavest them me". Then He says "Now they have known that all things that thou has given me are of thee; for the words which thou hast given me I have given them, and they have received them, and have known truly. that I came out from thee, and have believed that thou sentest me. I demand concerning them, I do not demand concerning the world, but concerning those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine, (and all that is mine is thine, and all that is thine mine,) and I am glorified in them". Think of what the Lord had in mind in relation to these men that the Father had given Him, because what is coming on to view is an order of humanity morally like Himself. It is marvellous to contemplate the wonderful fact that He has nothing less in mind than that we as men should be fully conversant and intelligent as to the mind of God. They have received Thy word, He says - a wonderful fact! Then He says "I am no longer in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one as we". Think of the wonder of this, beloved brethren, that what the Lord has in mind is that there should be that seen among His own that reflects this glory of unity. "Keep them in thy name" He says "which thou hast given me". I believe it refers to the opening up of the blessedness of this economy of love in which God is known to us as Father, and in which Christ sets out the character of manhood that is so pleasurable to the Father's heart. I can understand then the importance and bearing of this because we have been taken into favour in the Beloved (see Eph 1: 6). Think of the wonderful thoughts of divine love, the purposes of God having in view that man should be brought into the liberty and joy of sonship, "marked ... out beforehand for adoption through Jesus

Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved". Could there be anything more delightful than that we are to be brought in in holiness and love as taken into favour in the Beloved? I love to reflect on the infinite delight the Father has in Christ as Man. Think of *the Beloved*, how the Father found in divine perfection in Jesus all that He ever set His heart on in relation to man. And O the wonder! to think that God is going to have others morally like Jesus in the liberty and joy of sonship.

Jesus goes on to say "I do not demand for these only, but also for those who believe on me through their word". Think of the Lord Jesus taking account of our very selves - "those who believe on me through their word". How the Spirit is operating now to secure the same character of thing that was witnessed in these men continued in those that believe through their word that they may be all one "as we are one". Is that not something to covet, dear brethren, that in the recognition of the privilege that is ours as taken into favour in the Beloved we should be marked by this unity that reflects what God is morally? I believe that God has infinite pleasure in this. Then in verse 22: "And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me". Could there be anything greater than the conscious sense of what we are in the liberty of sonship? This glory, I believe, refers to our association with Christ in sonship - a wonderful thing! And then the Lord says "I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory". Think of the glory that attaches to Jesus personally as Man. I love to reflect on His glory as the only One that was capable of making God known. I believe it refers to His mediatorial glory: "For God is one, and the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus", 1 Tim 2: 5. And then the blessedness of knowing the Father's love! He says "I have made known to them thy name, and will make it known; that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them". God is

going to have an answer responsively in those who are formed by the Spirit in this order of manhood seen in Jesus and who know consciously the liberty and joy of sonship. I believe it has primarily in view here what is for the pleasure of God Himself, finally seen when "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall tabernacle with them ... and God himself shall be with them, their God", Rev 21: 3. It is marvellous to contemplate that.

But collateral with this there is another side to the truth and that is that it is not good for man to be alone. That is God's own thought and purpose as to Christ: "Jehovah Elohim said, It is not good that Man should be alone; I will make him a helpmate, his like", Gen 2: 18. That is, collateral with the great matter of sonship, there is to be an answer supremely for the heart of Christ in the assembly. The first words uttered by the Lord in resurrection, according to John's gospel, are "Woman, why dost thou weep? Who seekest thou?" I believe that typically we have this great idea of what the woman is as the answer to the Man; how the Lord must have valued that as He says "Mary"! Think of what entered into His mind as securing that treasure, that pearl! How much the Lord set His heart in relation to that pearl of great price, having found one pearl, the product of suffering. I think those tears really reflected what she had gone through morally, but as a result of these exercises we see coming on to view this entity in which the Lord finds a perfect answer to His own heart. So He says, "Mary", the subject of suffering indeed. "Jesus says to her, Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God". Oh the marvel! There is now coming on to view this answer in kindred relationship to Himself - "my brethren". Could there be anything more intimate than association with Christ as His brethren? He says "go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God. Mary of Magdala comes bringing word to the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had said these things to her. When therefore it was evening on that day, which was the first day of the week, and the doors shut where the disciples

were ... Jesus came and stood in the midst, and says to them, Peace". Oh the tranquillity! Oh the joy, dear brethren, that flows from the consciousness of our part in association with Christ! He says "Peace be to you. And having said this, he shewed to them his hands and his side". Is that not calculated to move our hearts as we think of the service of Jesus? Think of the lowly grace that has come in to serve us as having this great answer to Himself in view. In chapter 13 it says "Jesus, knowing that he came out from God and was going to God ... lays aside his garments, and having taken a linen towel he girded himself". Think of the service of love, dear brethren! There is nothing more calculated to affect our hearts than the consideration of such love. Then "his side" reminds us of God's original thought: "It is not good that Man should be alone; I will make him a helpmate, his like". I have no doubt that as He looked at Mary on that morning He virtually said, This is just Myself. You will recall that it says "Jehovah Elohim caused a deep sleep to fall upon Man; and he slept. And he took one of his ribs". I believe that is just what the Lord is calling attention to here. It is not the death of Christ in its penal character but as absolutely essential in view of this answer to His own heart coming to light; "Except the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, it abides alone", John 12: 24. There is this answer seen in feminine affection. How much that is to the heart of Christ! I can understand how the disciples were glad as they saw the Lord. He says "Peace be to you: as the Father sent me forth, I also send you. And having said this, he breathed into them, and says to them, Receive the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted to them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained". I believe the Lord is indicating how administration has to be taken on in the grace and Spirit of that heavenly Man. How precious that is! I can understand how insistent He is in chapter 17: "that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one" (vv 22, 23). I believe administration according to God will never lose sight of that, dear brethren.

I refer to the passage in the Acts to show how this works out in the presence of murmuring. You will recall that the apostles said,

Choose you men, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and it says that they chose Stephen, "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit", chap 6: 5. That is remarkable, as though God is bringing forward the kind of man that is qualified to take up administration at the level of what is in His own mind. It says, "And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought wonders and great signs among the people" (v 8) and you can understand how ready the enemy is to attack that. "And there arose up certain of those of the synagogue called of freedmen ... And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke". They brought him to the council and "all who sat in the council, looking fixedly on him, saw his face as the face of an angel". It was a reflex of glory working out in a man that was substantially formed in the grace and Spirit of Jesus, that heavenly Man; and it says that they "gnashed their teeth against him". They closed their ears and rushed upon him as he brings to bear on them the guilt of the nation in the crucifixion of Jesus. But Stephen, having fixed his eyes on heaven, saw the glory of God and Jesus. Think of the glory of God in the face of a Man, and that Man, beloved brethren, is the One we know, the One who is still there, whom having not seen we love. Then Stephen says "Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. And they cried out with a loud voice, and held their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord; and having cast him out of the city, they stoned him. And the witnesses laid aside their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul. And they stoned Stephen, praying, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit". Think of the delight the Lord had in that man! How delightful to think of a man's spirit so like Jesus that He has peculiar delight in receiving it to Himself. And that is our portion, dear brethren; "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints", Ps 116 : 15. I can understand, as the work in one and another is complete, how precious it is to the Lord to receive that to Himself . It says that "Saul was consenting to his being killed"; the Spirit of God just refers to that.

Then chapter 9 opens with "Saul, still breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, came to

the high priest and asked of him letters to Damascus ... so that if he found any who were of the way ... he might bring them bound to Jerusalem". And just as he neared Damascus, suddenly there shone round about him this light out of heaven. Oh, what a light, dear brethren! Think of that light streaming now, coming down to us this very day, opening up the wonderful fact that there is a glorified Man in heaven. Think of the Lord speaking thus to Saul, in his opposition and murderous activity; He just says "Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?" And Saul said "Who art thou, Lord?" Immediately he recognises the supremacy of that Man. And the Lord said "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest". That must have gone home to Saul's conscience for he had just witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen, he had seen a man reflecting the very character of Jesus, and the Lord virtually says, That is just the reproduction morally of Myself. That enters into the very constitution of the assembly. I feel the importance of what I am calling attention to, although very conscious of how far short one comes in apprehension, but I see this working out in Paul's ministry, the very one that was so much opposed. Think of the Lord selecting that man as an elect vessel. I believe he got the germ of his ministry in that manifestation. I refer to this only in passing, because we come to our own day, days of departure and ruin, when things outwardly are so small. John lived to see the complete breakdown of all that was established publicly by Paul. In the prophetic vision he looks on toward the end, and what does he see? The recovery of the saints to the truth of the assembly - an answer to Paul's ministry in our day. You say, Look at the breakdown, the ruin. It does not affect one iota what is proceeding under the hand of Christ on high and the Spirit here. So the Lord presents Himself in this way; and I am assured the Lord is presenting Himself today in a way we have never experienced. The Lord says "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies. I am the root and offspring of David". Think of the glory of this Person, Jesus; how remarkable that He asserts His deity. I believe there was never a moment when the deity of Christ is more precious to the hearts of the saints than today. He says, I am the root and offspring of David", ever

reminding us that He has come into manhood to set out in Himself the character of man that is so pleasurable to God, the Man after God's own heart. Then He says "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come". Do you believe, dear brethren, that this call is proceeding now? I feel there is an urge among the brethren, we are so near to the end: "the Spirit and the bride say, Come". Can you conceive of anything greater than that? a divine Person and a creature vessel here in unison, with one object. The Spirit is here in view of one thing, to secure an answer subjectively to the heart of Christ. Will He fail in His service? Do you think the Spirit could fail in this mission? "The Spirit and the bride say, Come", and immediately we have this answer: "He that testifies these things says, Yea I come quickly". Oh, dear brethren, what an objective we have! How near the Lord's coming is! I believe that one word sums up the desire of the Spirit and the bride: "Amen; come, Lord Jesus". May it be so for His Name's sake.

BROOKLYN NY

12 June 1976

VESSELS

E.Palmer

Proverbs 25: 1, 4; Romans 9: 22-24; 2 Timothy 2: 20, 21

There is a word in the Old Testament where a woman says "Bring me yet a vessel", 2 Kings 4: 6. It is this impression, beloved, that I would seek to convey, as to how such may be brought and become available to the blessed God at the present time. "Bring me yet a vessel". We might say, What are we to understand by this? We are the vessels. Indeed, our bodies are spoken of as vessels, and the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4: 4 exhorts us that they are to be held in sanctification; that is, to be held in a holy way for God in what is essentially practical.

I thought that this section in Proverbs has peculiar application to our own day, because Hezekiah's time is analogous to the time in which we are, in that it was a day of recovery. There were certain men who were evidently governed by the desire of the king to have things right according to God, who diligently set to work to transcribe some of these proverbs of Solomon. We may be sure that the Spirit of God was selective and directed what was transcribed, and moreover has put them on record for us. I select one because it touches the matter that is in mind; "Bring me yet a vessel". The word is "Take away the dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the refiner". 'Vain things of earth', we sung (hymn 172); 'Vain things of earth but dross'. It is not exactly wicked things (of course, those are too) but the kind of things that are not compatible with the work of God that He has secured for Himself on the basis of redemption - the silver. The Refiner is at work, and I believe that He might even be at work at this hour so that we might understand that He is operating in relation to persons in whom His own work is, that we might become the more available to Him in a way that suits Him. So it says "Take away the dross from the silver". There is no affinity between them. But the result is not to discover what the dross is. I suppose we all know what hinders us most; "the heart knoweth its

own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy", Prov 14: 10. Yes, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness" but the Refiner is not at work to discover the dross but to bring to light a vessel for Himself. So this would greatly encourage us, beloved.

There is not a saint who is brought to God save in relation to exercise of heart and soul, and the thing is to take full account of it and to get the greatest gain from it, because there is a vessel that is required, another vessel required that shall be suitable for the Refiner. "And there cometh forth a vessel for the refiner". I believe the Spirit would help us to answer to this word in the Scriptures and to see the immense honour that it is to be available to the One to whom the silver belongs. It has been powerfully pointed out in past ministry that redemption is for God; He has in mind to have for Himself, set free from every encumbrance, that which is the result of His own work, and to have it not only for His pleasure, He desires that, but for His service. I just leave this scripture with us because it has a positive end in mind, a vessel for the Refiner.

When we come to Romans a matter is touched on that, I suppose, reaches into the moral beings of us all, that is God's mercy. The setting in this chapter is that God can do what He will with whom He will and how He will and move in His own sovereignty because He is God. The wonder is, beloved brethren, that you and I are vessels of His mercy. Why should He have moved in relation to me? Why should He have moved in relation to you and exercised His mercy? That matter belongs to Him. How thankful we are that He has done it! The alternative is vessels of wrath. I would not like to attempt to describe, even if I had any real knowledge of what it was, what the wrath of God is. All I know is that there was one Man who underwent it; in the marvel of divine grace He endured the wrath of God when God made Him to be sin for us. Who can tell what it meant for Him? It brought out the cry that reaches into the heart every time we read it or speak of it; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt 27: 46. A real Man endured the wrath of God and on that account we, beloved, are vessels of mercy. The passage in Romans says, "that he might make known the riches of

his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory, us". "Us". I cannot but think that this glory stands related to the glory of sonship . I believe that there is a distinction about the glory of sonship that is brought to us in the words of Jesus Himself when speaking to the Father; He says "the glory which thou hast given me I have given them", John 17: 22. I believe that to be the glory of sonship. "The riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory, us, whom he has also called, not only from amongst the Jews, but also from amongst the nations". I suppose everybody here says, Yes, that is us. That is us. These things are brought very near to us, beloved. It is not a question of teaching, or of the fact that it is in the Bible; it is in the Bible but the power of it is in the hearts and the moral beings of the saints who have had to do with God and have proved His mercy and understand something of the great end He has in exercising it. It is very interesting that in chapter 2 of the epistle to the Ephesians it says that we "were children, by nature, of wrath" (v 3), but immediately it says "But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us". O, I say, What a wonder it is! What glory it is! What a privilege to be here to link on with one another on this fundamental basis of God's mercy and to understand something of the glory that is in mind in His taking us up in this way! Would it not give impetus to our being faithful in relation to the condition of things publicly at the present time? I believe it would create in our souls a desire to honour God and honour the Lord Jesus at all costs.

What I read in 2 Timothy is a kind of counterpart to the word in Hezekiah's day; there is the need for practical purification from every vessel that is dishonouring to the Lord. This is a word to every believer. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord"; that is, for everybody that says, I am a believer in the Lord Jesus, there is a word - for all of us - "withdraw from iniquity" . The putting of that into practice is not only because it is a moral necessity but because it is a practical one too. Separating himself from vessels to dishonour is a requirement in order that "he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified", set apart in a holy way, "serviceable to the Master, prepared for

every good work". I believe it means that such persons are available; not that they are doing the Master's work in any specific manner all the time but they are available to do it all the time. O, to be available to be taken up by the Master at any time and at any place and in any situation! But such who desire to be available must of necessity be marked by what is practically separate, not only from a world that has no place for Christ, but from a religious order of things that takes His name and identifies it with what is really dishonouring. These are solemn things, they are wonderful things, they are proved things and we want to prove them still, beloved.

And the word is, Is there yet a vessel? I would like to respond to that, I expect everybody here would, and I trust these scriptures may encourage us to do so, for Christ's sake.

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17 August 1976

WITH GOD IN THE HOUSEHOLD

J.S.Gray

Genesis 5: 21-24; Judges 1: 12-15

It is to be noticed as to Enoch that the fact that he walked with God is specifically connected with the period after the birth of his son; and it is connected also with his begetting sons and daughters. I think, beloved, that we should consider our families in this connection, that there is no reason why walking with God should cease when we begin to have children in the house. Indeed, there is all the more reason that we should walk with God, because it is God who gives children and they are to be held in relation to His interests and testimony. I feel the challenge for myself and would seek that the brethren would share it, particularly as to our households with children that there should be walking with God and that in relation to the bringing up of our children. We have noticed before that the *days* of Enoch are referred to and every father and mother knows what days involve in the bringing up of children. I trust that I have the interest of all the brethren in this without seeking to exclude those who have not families; God knows about that and He knows the interest of those who have not families in those who have and in all the children of the saints. But from what I observe beloved, I feel that there is a need of deeper exercise as to the care of our children in relation to what is pleasing to God.

Enoch rather than Noah represents the saints of the present dispensation. Noah, perhaps, links with the remnant in the day to come as going through the midst of a period of judgment, but Enoch is connected more with the saints of the present time, I believe, as going through apart from the evil and being taken out of it. So our course, for ourselves and our families, beloved, is to be walking with God. What Enoch would be occupied with as he walked is a great source of interest. For us it would involve, no doubt, being able to enter into God's thoughts as to Christ, His pleasure in Him, as He grew up through boyhood in perfection. Think of the growing up of

Jesus, how beautiful and perfect it is! And then what a source of interest it is to apprehend features of sonship coming to light in our children. Nothing is said about the mother in the household, but Enoch walked with God and it says "he was not, for God took him".

So far as the world was concerned he was out of sight and he just, as it were, disappears. I think that, in readiness for our translation, we should be disappearing from the public eye, out of sight from the world, not taking on its habits or practices, but seeking to share, may I say reverently, with God His thoughts as to things publicly and as to the conditions suitable in the assembly for the maintenance of His service.

We have in Othniel and Achsah a husband and a wife, and what precedes it is the smiting and taking the city of the book. I feel I should say something about that, that we should examine, each of us, what we are reading. How much valuable ministry of the word there is, both present and past, as well as the Scriptures to occupy us full time. It may be however that we have not fully overcome the literature that is really of this world and I just leave a word as to this, that we should each examine whether we have personally overcome, smitten and overcome, the city of the book. Walking with God day by day involves, dear brethren, that He sees how we conduct ourselves each day. Then Achsah is given to Othniel who took the city: "he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife". She brings in this valuable urging in relation to the inheritance and I submit to the beloved brethren the great value of this in a household, that there should be not only the checking of what is not suitable but the urging of one another into the actual possession of the things of God. We may be able to say that we have been preserved in the testimony so far - thank God for that! What an inheritance we have!

We may be able in some degree to say what we know as to the truth of the inheritance, and thank God for that! But let us urge one another into the actual possession of things in freshness, in liberty and in conscious enjoyment. She says "thou hast given me a southern land; give me also springs of water". O, for increase of liberty with the Spirit to give us enjoyment of the things of God, so

that we should be more at home in the spiritual realm, that it should not be strange to us, that there should not be a great transfer needed as we assemble, but that we should be ready for the things of God and for entrance into the spiritual realm. It says that "Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs". There is sufficient to satisfy the measure of our desires, beloved brethren, sufficient with God, sufficient with the blessed Spirit. One feels exercised as to the measure of liberty and freshness one has in spiritual things. We may have a good deal of conversation as to arrangements among the brethren and general conversation perhaps in our houses, but how much are we able to urge one another as to the spiritual things which are bound up with Christ, the One in whom all is for our enjoyment? May the Spirit use these thoughts, dear brethren, for our encouragement and stimulation to go in for the things which involve what is really life.

LONDON

17 August 1976

"OUR LITTLE ONES"

B.W.Ward

2 Chronicles 22: 10-12; 23: 1,2; 24: 1,2; Mark 5: 40-43; 2 Timothy 3: 14-17

There are references in these passages to a child, and I draw attention to them because of the great value which what is youthful has to the Lord and accordingly the great value which it should have to us. I suppose ten years ago we had many more young people and little ones than we have now in this city, but we rejoice in relation to those whom we have and our desires are for their blessing and protection and building up, so that if the testimony is to continue a while there may be those who are available to take up their part in it pleasingly to the Lord .

In this passage in Chronicles the situation was very grievous. This wicked woman Athaliah "exterminated all the royal seed of the house of Judah". This child Joash was not much more than a babe when he was rescued by Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, wife of a priest. Such a person would have a valuation according to God of what was royal and which needed at this juncture particular care and preservation. It was a time when something needed to be done and this woman, this sister as we can rightly call her, was prepared to do something and did it. She hid this babe. It says she took him and his nurse and hid him. And there he was protected in the house of God for six years. During that time Athaliah reigned over the land but this little one was preserved in that environment.

What a precious environment, protective indeed, is found in the households of the saints where our little ones can be cared for and instructed and protected. Not exclusively in the households, of course; they come here or elsewhere, where they have opportunity for learning, for appreciating, as our brother has already said, something of the great privilege which is ours, and may learn to love the brethren, to value the company in which they are brought up, where they themselves are conscious of being loved and cared for.

So for this time this little one was protected in the house of God, a remarkable place for him to be, but it was a most suitable place, and those who cared for him cared for him well and faithfully.

In the seventh year there was this covenant and the little boy at the age of seven was made king. He had a peculiar place to fill. Our little ones have each his and her own peculiar place to fill. What a privilege! and they should realise it, each of them. No one can fill the place of another; we have each been given his and her own place.

Our brother has reminded us of the differences that there are and yet the way we are set together - challenging, but God's way. These little ones should grow up in the appreciation of the place in which in God's very great goodness they have been set, for it is very great mercy to have been set where there is love and protection, care and interest, on the part of their parents in a particular way and on the part of the saints in a more general way. It is significant that it says in verse 2 of chapter 24 that "Joash did what was right in the sight of Jehovah all the days of Jehoiada the priest". He did what was right while there was the influence of this man Jehoiada the priest - a good influence. That would be a challenge therefore to those of us who may be older. What is our influence on the younger ones? It says "Jehoiada grew old and was full of days, and he died; he was a hundred and thirty years old when he died" (v 15). How God saw fit to extend the life of that man who had such a part in the protection of what was royal! of what was to be for the service of God and the pleasure of God. Some of us were reminded recently how Joash made a chest with a hole in it for the giving of the people.

The story of Jairus is well-known to us. The interruption in the Lord's journey to his house must have been a great test, but it is very interesting that the Lord says in verse 36 "Fear not; only believe".

What an encouraging word that is to us! In Luke it adds "and she shall be made well", Luke 8: 50. But Mark is brief in his wording here. Then there are these five whom the Lord takes into the room where the child was lying dead and He speaks to her and Mark gives us the original language. I suppose those parents would have carried those words for the rest of their lives: "Talitha koumi, which is

interpreted, Damsel, I say to thee, Arise". What an impression those parents would have received as to the grace and power of Jesus! We have sung together of the touches of His love (hymn 97) which the Spirit would afford to us. These two would have carried a sense of His love and His power in those mighty words that brought that child back to them. She "arose and walked, for she was twelve years old". Then "he charged them much that no one should know this; and he desired that something should be given her to eat".

There were just these five persons there and Jesus and the child, seven in all. What a company! What an environment in which to be brought out of death into life! What a child she would be! How those parents would have cared for her (how those of us who are parents would care), would see the growth, would provide according to the Lord's word that something be given to her to eat. As parents they would consider what was appropriate, whether at home or in the meeting "for she was twelve years old". She arose and walked.

There was movement. We delight to see and hear of movement in our young people. God is working to this end; the Lord is working, He has His relations with each of us personally, and so He would have with these little ones whom He has given to be among us.

Timothy at the time at which this letter was written was no longer a child but a man of God, so that he was viewed, especially in this second letter, as one who was to carry on. We often speak of what, at the beginning of chapter 2, he was enjoined to do, and here he is to "abide in those things which thou hast learned, and of which thou hast been fully persuaded, knowing of whom thou hast learned them". I suppose that would be Paul particularly, maybe others.

Then this reference back "that from a child thou hast known the sacred letters". It is in this second epistle that reference is made to his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice and in which the allusion to his childhood comes. So there is this anticipation of what those who are left among us as children, if we are together left here, are to grow up to be. "Thou, abide in those things". And then "Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for

conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work".

Well, beloved, how we thank the Lord for every one of our dear children. Some are still very young, others are growing up, and we can thank Him for every one. May those in most immediate touch with them be helped in their bringing them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and in the sense too of the privilege which is theirs to have been born into the households in which they have been. They might have come into many other environments, environments of outward material wealth, but of no comparison at all with the environment of a Christian household where the truth is appreciated, and from which they may be brought where, in the light of the assembly, they can be built up and strengthened. So may there be blessing amongst our young people and encouragement for us all and may those of us who are older seek help to fill out whatever may be our part in relation to them as well as our part generally, for the pleasure of the Lord Jesus.

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THE CHILDREN'S SHEPHERD

Tending sheep is one of the two oldest occupations in the world.

Especially in Bible countries younger members of families have always helped in it even if only by day; the nights in those lands are too cold for them and often frosty too. The shepherd must care for the sheep and lambs in all weathers, lead them to green pastures and good waterings, heal them in sickness and keep them safe from danger. When we, as children, used to see sheep on the commons and in the parks of London the question was always, 'Where is the shepherd?' Usually he was hidden but he always appeared at once if his flock needed anything.

You will easily understand why the Lord Jesus spoke of Himself as a shepherd because we who believe are precious to Him and our souls need just the things that sheep and lambs need for their well-being. He is the *good* Shepherd even laying down His life for the sheep, knowing them all and known of them by His voice. Christians thus form one single flock, some of them Jewish believers, others from the various nations of the world but all belonging to *one* Shepherd. We know Jesus, raised from the dead by the God of peace, as the *great* Shepherd, wise and strong enough for every need we have - even if we should stray! Then at His coming again the *chief* Shepherd will honour everyone who has cared for the sheep during His absence.

By the time Joseph was seventeen he was tending his father's sheep and also seeing after the welfare of his brethren. From him we learn to be devoted to the care of one another even if it is not appreciated. David at about the same age had protected the flock from a lion and from a bear and no doubt from many lesser dangers. He teaches us to have secret experiences with God. The shepherd's bag with a pocket in it which he had, is something that we all ought to possess as a hidden source of power. To David it was greater than sword and armour, and what he had in it was more than enough to deliver God's people from danger. You will remember that he used only one stone out of five to slay Goliath.

Perhaps the other stones represent the resource that his servants had in freeing Israel from the giant's four brothers, one of whom had fingers and toes twenty four in number! It has been said that David's five stones are like the letters of the English word 'faith'. Do you use your faith for the benefit of others?

J.C.Evershed