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WORD
IN ITS
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BEHAVIOUR IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

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1 Timothy 3: 14,15; Psalm 122: 1

I desire to say a word about behaviour in the house of God, having in mind first that our hearts should be impressed with the delight that God has in the assembling together of His people. One of the most touching reflections is to recall the many occasions in the Old Testament upon which God expressed His delight in the gathering together of His people. If it were a question of need He would say "Assemble the people, and I will give them water" (Num 21: 16); and if it were a question of definite response to His own movements in descending grace He would say, "Gather unto me my godly ones, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Ps 50: 5), as if to indicate that each one thus gathered had moved as from their own side on the principle of surrender - sacrifice. From the very earliest time God has indicated His pleasure in the gathering together of His people.

It is marvellous, indeed, to all our hearts that the blessed God should take a delight in the gathering together of such a people. He is not only prepared for the approach of one man, as it is said in Leviticus: "When any man of you presenteth an offering" (chap 1: 2), but He makes provision, indeed He lays down commandment, for the whole assembly. You will remember how He gives definite instruction in Deuteronomy 16 that all the males were to appear three times in the year before Him, and then there is this most solemn condition - a divine stipulation - "they shall not appear before Jehovah empty", (v 16). I think one of the most grievous things in the sight of God is to have any one appear before Him in His house empty - bound it may be as to his right hand - failure to appear before God in the appreciation of what the Spirit of God calls a feast - the feast of unleavened bread.

The feast of unleavened bread is no feast for the natural man for it is calculated to, and indeed does, bring about reduction,

causing the fading away before one's heart and mind of the man that was and the bringing to light by the work and power of the Spirit, who is constantly concerned about this question of displacement, the man that is under God's eye. As the males in Israel appeared before God at this great feast of unleavened bread, no one was to appear empty. How that challenges one's heart as to the number of times one has appeared before God empty - a most grievous thing - as if there is to be no response to all the grace of God, His long-suffering, to the path of His leading, to the daily provision that He has given - as if none of these things had moved one's heart to an affectionate response.

Then there is the feast of weeks, meaning that I not only appear in the presence of God with others as having a sense of mercy, but I have begun to appreciate what is spiritual, that vast region which stands in relation to the ministrations and operations of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing stated as to the length of time the children of Israel remained there. As God viewed that vast assembly, each one bringing up the product of the dealings of God with him - his own appreciation - in a path of responsibility, who can say how long they remained there?

Then, finally, there is the feast of tabernacles, when the men who lived, it may be, in ceiled houses and those who lived in the poorer houses came together, bringing branches of thick trees, myrtle branches, and so on, and they dwelt in booths seven days before the Lord, reminding each other, as brethren dwelling together in unity, of how God led them through the great and terrible wilderness and suffered them not to hunger. In like manner all His dealings with us are calculated on the one hand to humble and to remind us how tiny, helpless and defenceless we were, and on the other to remind us of the great love wherewith He loved us; as Moses says; "Not because ye were more in number than all the peoples... for ye are the fewest of all the peoples; but because Jehovah loved you", Deut 7: 7.

As we contemplate these things - the holy possibilities contained typically in these three feasts and the assembling together

- how our hearts are moved at the prospect of affording the blessed God the praise and glory He has ever sought, and has now secured through the Spirit's activities among His people.

And so we find, in the Songs of degrees, there is one who says "I rejoiced when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of Jehovah". I desire to speak simply as to our appearing before God - the kind of attitude, spirit or deportment that is to mark every believer coming into the place where God is greatly to be feared - as the word says: "God is greatly to be feared in the council of the saints, and terrible for all that are round about him", Ps 89: 7. How the recognition of that would exclude from one's mind every fleshly and human element! How blessed, beloved, in any measure that we have known it, to surround God like that!

And so Paul says to Timothy, "These things I write to thee, hoping to come to thee more quickly; but if I delay, in order that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house". We are now, so to speak, in the time of delay. We have not the apostle Paul personally; his oral word has ceased. He passed out in triumph, not only continuing his speech to the disciples until midnight, but in his own hired lodging "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all freedom unhinderedly", Acts 28: 31. But we have written directions: "These things write I to thee". Thank God for such writings - writings which enable us to maintain proper behaviour in the house of God!

Beloved brethren, there is great need that I should behave myself - "that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth". Can I go up lightly? Can I go in, so to speak, from a world in which I have been engrossed and appear instantly, maintaining the attitude that is proper to the house of God? In Hebrews 10 we are warned not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and the word reads as if the apostle, inspired by the Spirit of God, had it in mind that as the saints come together they should come direct from the holiest. How often is that the case with

us? It is not a matter of custom but of spiritual inclination and affection; it is a matter in which one is not only prepared for displacement but in which one is displaced. We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and yet how lightly some regard this holy privilege. Think of our dear brethren in Russia and other places! Think of those who met in dens and caves of the earth! Could I lightly afford to miss a prayer meeting? Could I neglect, on account of some natural tie, the reading of the holy Scriptures together? How the very remembrance of the delight of God in seeing His people assemble should cause delight in my own heart and give impetus to gather together with others in a deportment consistent with the house of God - "that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house".

I believe the Songs of degrees help very much on this question of behaviour. The first thing is that you have one crying in his distress (Ps 120). Woe to the person who dares to move in the things of God, to stand up in the house of God and minister the word of God, who has never known soul distress! This is, so to speak, the beginning from my side, ere I can realise what the blessed God has in mind for all His people. Is there any one here who has never known the distress preceding repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ?

Passing on we find the Psalmist praying that he might be delivered from "the lying lip, from the deceitful tongue". Alas! the spirit of falsehood is abroad today. I used to wonder as a lad why that solemn exhortation should appear in Colossians: "Do not lie to one another", chap 3: 9. It is not addressed to unbelievers but to brethren described as "holy and faithful". Here is a man who has received the most precious sense of sovereign mercy, who prays to be delivered from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue. It is sad to have to admit that there is much current among the professing people of God which is of this character.

Then the Psalmist passes, as I gather, through the most intense soul exercise, and he says "I rejoiced". Spiritual emotions have now come to light: "I rejoiced when they said unto me, Let us

go into the house of Jehovah". The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews would free those Hebrew believers from being self-centred; he brings in mutuality; he says "Let us". The Psalmist is beginning to get light upon the collective position which will secure divine approval "Let us go into the house of Jehovah". He is like Hezekiah, delivered through discipline and saying, We "will play upon my stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of Jehovah", Isa 38: 20. It is not only that he has the fruits of discipline but he has come to a sphere where God is owned and where others also may sing on stringed instruments; they too will share in the product of Hezekiah's discipline so that God Himself is praised. He is worthy to be praised.

And then the exercise goes on. The moment the Psalmist's face is set for the collective position, where God is owned, and in which He has delight, he begins to suffer the most bitter persecution, as you will too. Then he is concerned about the building; it says in Psalm 127: "Unless Jehovah build the house, in vain do its builders labour in it". You may sit up all night and eat the bread of sorrows, but is that going into God's building? Think of the Lord's activities as seen in Luke's gospel - dispensing with the wood, hay and stubble, passing it by, and bringing to light gold, silver and precious stones for the house of God.

In Psalm 128 he draws attention to a model household. Would that there were more such! The husband fears the Lord. The wife is like a fruitful vine in the inner part of the house - not the outer side, that is no place for wives, but the inner side. She is there in subjection. You could never have a model house with an insubject wife. You could never have a household which is going to be a stay and an asset in the locality as supporting divine principles there if the husband is not the head. If the wife assumes priority over her husband, whatever her spirituality may be, it is a dangerous position.

I want to speak too of the children. "Thy children like olive-plants round about thy table": I like that expression. There is not a disobedient child in the house, each one is looked at potentially according to the Spirit. Think of the Corinthian children. In spite of

the defection of the elders, Paul refers to their children as being holy. They are not olive trees like the Psalmist in Psalm 52; "But as for me, I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God" (v 8). No; but under a right influence at home they will grow up to that. They are like the cuttings - olive-plants - and they are round about the table. Is there a disobedient child in this room? a young man or a young woman who does not honour father and mother? God will honour the sons and daughters who honour their parents in their young days; they will live long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth. "Children like olive-plants round about thy table". Why should he bring in a household were it not to support the idea of a household standing not only for the interests of God but prepared for movement. That is how the testimony is sustained and passed on; nothing surrendered - things held there for the pleasure of God, and another generation coming forward to take up the holy charge.

The Psalmist retains his sense of mercy. In Psalm 130 he says, "If thou, Jah, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?" I do commend with all my heart that word to each one of us tonight. I want you to view it in its context. I am not now preaching the gospel. This is the kind of spirit and attitude that is to mark the believer. "Had I regarded iniquity in my heart" - not my tongue but my heart - "the Lord would not hear", Ps 66: 18. You may pray for twenty minutes in the prayer meeting, but if you regard iniquity in your heart the Lord will not hear, and it will be apparent to all in the company that your right hand is withered. I am not speaking harshly; I want to encourage each one of us to be prepared for the searching out and uprooting of things that are destructive to proper behaviour in the house of God.

Psalm 131 opens with the word "Jehovah, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, and in things too wonderful for me. Surely I have restrained and composed my soul, like a weaned child with its mother". What profitable care meetings we should have if we came together in that spirit - as a weaned child; what bounty would be shed abroad! How perfect the administration if those who were engaged in it were not

haughty but behaved themselves like weaned children, weaned from every resource of nature and free to devote themselves without reserve to the interests of Christ.

Then in Psalm 132 he says "Jehovah, remember for David all his affliction": not remember David but remember for David. He is not obsessed with his circumstances; he has known pressure and sorrow; he has gone forth sowing in tears and he comes forward in the morning of joy bringing his sheaves. Remember for David! You can well afford, beloved, to leave the recapitulation of your exercises and sorrows. There is no reason why I should repeat all that I have passed through in the way of church sorrows. What is his concern? That there should be a place for the ark.

We are coming now to the central feature of the whole system of divine blessing - the ark. David says, I want a place for the ark. He had heard of it at Ephratah. Jesse when instructing his sons had probably spoken to them of the ark. It says of Jesse, "and the man was old in the days of Saul, advanced in years among men" (1 Sam 17: 12), indicating that men revered Jesse and that his grey hairs were like a crown of glory. He had a family of eight sons and probably he spoke to those sons about the ark. David says "we heard of it at Ephratah". David was the youngest, and little might have been expected of him, but remember how he vowed. Perhaps, dear brother or sister, at your family Bible reading there may not be great interest apparent with the children, but one can never tell how God is working. Evidently He worked with David; he wanted a place for the ark. Was that his sole concern? Not only did he want a place for the ark but he wanted those surrounding the ark to be clothed with salvation - priests - and he wanted saints who would shout aloud for joy. How delightful that is! How ashamed we should be, beloved, of any attempt to cover up spiritual emotions! How cold and formal we are content to be in the presence of the most holy things! "Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness, and let thy saints shout for joy". "I will satisfy her needy ones with bread". The poor will be all right in the locality if God has His place; there will be abundance of bread.

Now what is the outcome? "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" The Spirit of God says "Behold", as if to secure our attention and focus it upon this marvellous sight. And then he goes on to describe what it is like, lest we should not apprehend the full value and beauty of this wonderful situation: "Like the precious oil upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, upon Aaron's beard, that ran down to the hem of his garments". And yet one holds a grudge against the brethren in the locality! You hold a complaint against a sister. You will mar this precious unity by the fostering of a grudge that has lasted for years. Could I in any sense mar this precious unity? I cannot see it universally but, thank God, I can arrive at it with a few in the locality! "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Is that the end? No; as the outcome there are those who stand by night or, as it should read, 'in the nights' in the house of Jehovah. What resources we have in divine Persons to enable us to stand! In close proximity to the hostility of this present evil world there is the mount of Olives also, as John 11 speaks of it - that village, near the desert, very near to the scene of hostility, but in the realm of the power of the Spirit where this beautiful fruitfulness is seen under the eye of God. You do not need to go out of the world, save in spirit; it is found here 'in the nights'. "Jehovah... bless thee out of Zion".

And so Paul says "if I delay, in order that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house". I would just remind you in simple language of how Peter, John and Paul were concerned about my deportment and your deportment. I believe all three would be emphatic as to the necessity of right behaviour in the house of God. I think Peter would stand, so to speak, at the very threshold - at the door, if you like, of the meeting - and he would insist upon your having a sense of mercy, for without it you will get nowhere in the things of God; neither shall I. He would insist upon mercy. Listen to what he says: "But ye are a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession" (1 Pet 2: 9); that is, I belong to people who are God's possession. Some young

person may say, I do not see them like that, I have seen their faults and failings. But God sees them like that, "a people for a possession... who once were not a people, but now God's people; who were not enjoying mercy, but now have found mercy". How humiliating to think of one's past - shame and sorrow in the sight of God - but we have obtained mercy.

Peter is like a skilful physician who has one thing supremely before him, and that is the health of our souls; he says "Beloved" (how that ought to appeal to us), "I exhort you, as strangers and sojourners, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul". Peter is concerned to produce in my soul a sense of sovereign mercy. As I approach the threshold of the house of God I remember I came in on the basis of sovereign mercy. I look at a rich brother and I see he came in on the same basis; he, so to speak, in response to God recognises the need of mercy - the atonement money -- the half shekel. The rich man could not give more, though he might like to, and the poor man must not give less. There they are, "The rich and poor meet together; Jehovah is the maker of them all", Prov 22: 2. One half shekel for the rich brother, and it, so to speak, puts him out of court; and if he comes in in the way James speaks of, he rejoices in his humiliation; then the poor brother comes in with his half shekel, with no radical feelings or tendencies but rejoicing in his exaltation, and there they are on the same level - and a very precious level.

I want to raise the question with each one as to whether you have that sense of mercy. As I appear with the brethren, have I that sense of mercy? I believe the eating of unleavened bread - that precious feast would enable one to be maintained in this, as Paul could say that he was "an insolent overbearing man; but mercy was shewn me", 1 Tim 1: 13. John would insist upon our having love. He reminds us that there is no fear in love, and he also speaks of our obligations one to another. I like the "oughts" of John. He says "we... ought to love one another" (1 John 4: 11) it is not left as a matter of choice. And he also says "we ought for the brethren to lay down our lives" (chap 3: 16); it is an obligation that John would press

upon us. Then he comes down to a very searching matter, and I would speak of it with much affection. He says "If any one say, I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar", chap 4: 20. He does not say 'If any brother' but "if any one". Further, he would encourage; he says "let us love one another; because love is of God", chap 4: 20.

And so I am challenged as I come up to the house of God as to whether I love. These three door-keepers, if you will allow that simile, Peter, John and Paul, stand athwart the threshold and they are concerned about these things. John would be concerned as to whether I have love; not in this instance love to all the saints but love which finds expression in one's locality. Do you love the brethren locally? Do I? How searching it is! I am challenged in the presence of God. Do I cast an envious eye upon a brother, like Saul when he eyed David "from that day forward", because he is advancing spiritually in the locality? Is that the kind of eye I have? I see the Lord prospering him; I see him standing up, a green olive-tree, marked by all the fatness and wealth of God's house. Am I to be radical? or am I to regard him as part of the commonwealth of the whole assembly in which I have my share? He is graced with a special gift from the ascended Christ and I embrace him; I get the value of him in the locality. I am reminded that "all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things coming, all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's", 1 Cor 4: 21, 22. Do I love? I beg of you each one to ask yourself that question. If a brother or sister is not exercising love to the brethren locally, it is impossible for responsive affection towards God to be in exercise with such an one. I beg of you to ponder this.

Passing on to Paul, I think he would insist on spirituality - spiritual intelligence. It is not only the sense of mercy, though Paul would impress that; it is not now love only, though Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 would take up John's line and say, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal". Whatever your ability or mine, if we have not love we are nothing. "And if I shall dole out all

my goods in food, and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned, but have not love, I profit nothing" (v 3). But as I come up amongst the brethren, as I gather together with those who have made a covenant by sacrifice, Paul would impress me with the need for spiritual intelligence. He says "we have all been baptised into one body... and have all been given to drink of one Spirit". 1 Cor 12: 13. Then why should there be the difference in our spirits? Why should I shew a bad spirit? Why should I shew a critical spirit? Why should I not be sympathetic with what the Lord is saying? "We... have all been given to drink of one Spirit". Why does not this Spirit pervade and animate the whole?

Paul says "whenever ye come together, each of you has a psalm", 1 Cor 14: 26. He is a poor brother who has not a psalm each day. Alas, so many beloved saints limit the psalms to one hundred and fifty! There ought to be a psalm each day; and who that knows God and His dealings in holy intimacy but would be furnished, after the most difficult and trying circumstances of the day, with a most blessed psalm? There are spiritual instincts and spiritual intelligence with the psalm. You are governed now as in the region of the Spirit, and you are not concerned now about your favourite hymn! You are not going to give out the hymn that you have used for years but you come to a place where the Holy Spirit impresses you and gives impulse to everything. Oh, how I ought to behave myself so that my spiritual instincts and sensibilities find their expression in the presence of the others who "judge"! I would not like to say that I had the Lord with me if what I might be saying cut across the spiritual sensibilities of the saints, for the word is definite - "let the others judge", 1 Cor 14: 29.

So I believe Paul would impress us with the need for spiritual intelligence, John with the need of our having love, and Peter with the need for a definite and ever increasing sense of mercy. Having these things, I humbly suggest beloved, that during this time of "delay", whilst we are waiting, not for Paul but for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, we shall know how one ought to behave oneself in

the house of God. Presently there will be that great and final gathering for which we all wait - the gathering together unto Him!

WOOLWICH

8 November 1930

SPIRITUAL MATERIAL

E.M.Walkinshaw

Acts 3: 4-9; 1 Corinthians 15: 46-50; Galatians 4: 8-1

These passages impressed me, dear brethren, I think consequent upon what our brother has already said, because I feel sure that in a day when most people are seeking material advantage God would direct our thoughts to what is spiritual and eternal. The world is rapidly pursuing what is material and the persons in it aiming for some place; but as has already been said, in that there is nothing for God. As the world has gone on I believe what is material has gradually laid hold of the minds of men, and alas it has laid hold of the minds of many believers, and none of us could claim to be exempt from the possibility of having what is material as an objective. So the Spirit of God, I believe, would direct our attention to what is spiritual and substantial; the most precious thing that any of us possesses is the knowledge of God and that alone will go through. Each of us, dear brethren, is growing older day by day, we have often been told that we are growing older at the same rate although some are older than others, but as we grow old I think the Spirit of God would impress upon us the necessity of redeeming the time because the days are evil - not necessarily evil in the sense in which men think of it, although that would be included, but I believe evil in the sense that there is a turning away from God - men are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God: lovers, as we have already said, of what is material. And how many materialists you meet day by day, so that what is spiritual is gradually receding in so far as this world is concerned.

Now I read from the first passage because, as with Stephen, we find a wonderful example of a man that had spiritual substance. It has been rightly said that we are not told what Stephen had; I have no doubt at all that he had sufficient, for as Jesus said, your Father knows that ye have need of these things whatever they may be. What Stephen had we are not told, but Peter says "Silver and gold I

have not". He was a fisherman, and again I suppose we could say that the Father cared for him. Be not anxious, the Lord says, about tomorrow, be not anxious about what you will eat or what you will put on. I do not think these men were unduly careful about it; at the same time they would not be careless, Scripture never justifies that. But Peter says "Silver and gold I have not": I do not think there is anybody here that could say that. In God's ways we are very well provided for and so are men generally, and men generally are indulging in the mercies which God has provided and failing to recognise the One who has provided them. I suppose God is speaking to men in this drought, and I suppose many true believers are calling upon God that it might end for the sake of mankind. You wonder what the conditions will be when there is nobody here that is praying, when I say here I mean in the world, when the saints have gone; but at the present moment there are those who are praying and I am sure God's hand is over all. But in the catastrophes, the earthquakes, the floods, the famines, the droughts, God is speaking very loudly to mankind. Now whatever comes of that character we can rest assured, those of us that love Christ, that He would point us to what is spiritual. So that while Peter had not silver and gold he had something, and one thing he had was power. If there is one thing we need above another it is power, dear brethren, and power to be vessels for the bringing in of light and blessing. I am not suggesting that we can do to a person physically what Peter did, that is not of course given to us; it was given to him but it is not given to us; but I think the suggestion is that in the name of Jesus Christ Peter had something that was worth more than all the silver and gold. It belongs to God anyway - the silver and the gold and the cattle upon a thousand hills, God says, are all Mine. One old brother once said, many years ago, My very wealthy Father owns all the silver and the gold and all the cattle, but he only gives me a little at the time because he loves to see my face and hear my voice every morning and evening; if He gave me too much I might well forget Him. That is what has happened in the world. Peter was not like that, but he had the power to communicate to this man something

that enabled him to rise up, and not only to rise up but to walk and to leap and to praise God.

Now in the next passage it says "But that which is spiritual was not first, but that which is natural". That means of course that we would give place to what is natural; but sometimes we use this scripture as a justification for putting the natural first, that is morally, or giving it the pre-eminence in our minds and lives, but the force of the passage I think is this, while that which is natural is first what is spiritual is to take precedence over what is natural. That is what the apostle is teaching I think, so that our minds, our thoughts, dear brethren, are to be directed to what is spiritual and eternal, durable wealth and riches that last. Oh that the Holy Spirit of God would give each of us an impression that very shortly we shall enter upon our eternal portion and leave behind everything material which in itself will eventually be burnt up.

Then simply the apostle says in Galatians "how do ye turn again to the weak and beggarly principles to which ye desire to be again anew in bondage?" You notice just before this he has spoken about sonship: "God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba Father", (v 6). If you are a son then you are an heir. Which are you in the gain of? That you *are* a son and an heir nobody will question, but do you act like a son and heir or like a beggar? - "the weak and beggarly principles to which ye desire to be again anew in bondage?" What was that, dear brethren? In some form or another it was what was material they were being turned aside to, a material system. How easily that happens to us, governed by sight, that is by seen things and not by faith. Now this spiritual substance and what is eternal is available to all of us to go in for. May the Lord help us to set our minds towards what is spiritual and eternal. I know we are all tested, every one of us, because the love of silver and gold rests in the heart of every person, the love of money is somewhere in the heart of every person in a lesser or greater degree. The Lord would help us to judge it in the light of what is spiritual and eternal and thus we shall become more like these men at the beginning of the dispensation, marked by

spiritual power and benefit to those with whom we come into contact. May the Lord greatly help and encourage us, dear brethren, to go in for what is lasting, what is durable: truly that is wisdom, and to turn in any other direction is utter folly. May the Lord help us to do what is right and pursue these things for His glory.

GILLINGHAM

24 August 1976

THE USE OF WATER

E.C.Burr

John 13: 3-5, 10-15; 2 Kings 3: 11, 12; 1 Corinthians 3: 6-8

I suppose that there are few things spoken of as extensively in the Scriptures as is water with so many different applications. It is referred to right at the beginning of the Scriptures in the sense of the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the deep; and then as Genesis 1 proceeds we have the waters specifically identified. And at the end of Revelation, I suppose we might say in the last column of the Bible, we have the water of life. Through the Scriptures the bearing of water can be very different; it can speak to us of the application of death when we think of water in relation to baptism for instance, it can speak to us too of the Holy Spirit as we think of other types of what water would suggest to us. It comes in in a variety of circumstances, it comes in in relation to the needs of individuals, it comes in with a bearing that is doctrinal, it comes in with bearings that are severe and bearings that are refreshing. I suppose as I say there are few things referred to more constantly in the Bible than water that have so many different applications.

I would like this evening in this opportunity of the saints being together to make a few remarks from the scriptures which we have read about the use of water. The thought perhaps came to me somewhat as we were here last night for the prayer meeting: a brother in the course of his prayer referring to the meeting proposed for tonight desired of the Lord that the saints might be refreshed by being together. We spend a fairly busy time, our minds get occupied; but not for the first time, and indeed I am not the first brother to have found the journey on the New York subway quite profitable for impressions. And these scriptures came to my mind as bearing on the use of water in relation to refreshment, refreshment for the saints, refreshment for their souls, refreshment in relation to the needs of the testimony, refreshment in relation to in some way lifting the sense of burden that might from time to time be on the

spirit, refreshment in the sense of promoting what God is doing, refreshment in the sense of uplifting out of whatever distress or sorrow or care we might be in and giving us the experience of something having come in to change things for us, to make things different, to bring in some fresh approach, some fresh intimate touch, especially an intimate touch in our case from the Lord, but perhaps from one another that has this refreshing character for us.

The scripture in John 13 is very familiar to the saints. I suppose that others and myself would be exercised from time to time as to the degree to which the way in which scriptures are taken up and put into effect is sometimes in inverse ratio to their familiarity, and the most familiar scriptures are often the least practised. We are tested as we approach them and we are tested as we approach John 13. In one sense I suppose Jesus Himself meant to test the disciples by it. I think that is clear from what He says at the end of where we read, that He was not content in Himself just to have washed their feet and to have anticipated that they would see that this had been an example for them, and that they would have, if one may put it that way, taken the point that it was something they were themselves to do in relation to one another; but He explicitly points the lesson for them that "as I have done to you, ye should do also". And I think beloved that the Lord would bring home to us the necessity of serving one another in the character of washing one another's feet. I had wondered in thinking over these scriptures whether it would be possible to say that they all had a positive bearing, but I suppose one would have to admit in relation to the washing of feet that it necessarily has something of a negative bearing in that it has to do with the removal of the soil and the effects of contact as we go through the day with a different order of things from that in which Christ is. That we might from one point of view regard as a negative product, but the intention of the Lord's action in John 13 is "Unless I wash thee, thou hast not part with me". The purpose therefore of the activity of Jesus in washing the feet of the disciples is that they might themselves enter into "part with me". What could be more positive than that? Part with Him, as we often

remind ourselves, not only in the sphere of privilege, in the sphere of life where He Himself is, where He is glorified having triumphed over death, having triumphed over the situation in which all God's waves and billows went over Him, having come out of death and left those waves and billows for ever, and now glorious and triumphant over death, alive to the ages of ages - not only part with Him in that sphere where He is alive for ever more but part with Him in the testimony where He still delights to go with His beloved saints in the testimonial sphere. As He says in Matthew's gospel: "I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age", chap 28: 20. That is to say He commits Himself to us in relation to the sphere of the testimony. But beloved, the purpose of His washing our feet, and therefore the purpose of our washing one another's feet, is that we might have part with Him in the testimony. It is not so much from the point of view that He would have part with us - how blessed that is that He graciously comes into our service and our weakness in the testimony, He comes into that just as He promises in the end of Matthew's gospel and in the end of Mark's gospel - but that we might have part with Him in the testimony, because He is Himself still characteristically in the testimonial situation, there is still His name here, He Himself not here as to His position corporeally but His name here, and He Himself therefore here testimonially. And the objective of His washing our feet and of our washing the feet of one another is that we might have part with Him in the testimony. This is a very elevated level of the testimony. Most of us approach what is testimonial on the basis of making the best effort that we can, being sure that somehow through the support of the Lord and of the Spirit we shall get through. But let us look at the testimony from the point of view that He is in it characteristically, and the point for us is to have part with Him in that testimony. I have often thought, and I commend the thought to the brethren again for their affection, that the Father is concerned that He should not have lost anything in the earth by having Jesus in heaven. He once had in Jesus here everything that delighted Him as Man and now He is in heaven. Mr Darby says so affectingly, There has but one object been seen upon the earth that might redeem the place but now it is gone, Jesus is

with the Father. Although Jesus is with the Father the Father intends to have here in testimony something equivalent to what He had in His beloved Son. And the purpose of His washing our feet, and therefore the purpose of washing one another's feet is that we might be in the testimony with Him, consider that He is here and that we are to walk alongside Him in the testimony: not Him coming into our poor and feeble efforts testimonially but recognising that He is in the testimonial position here and that we are capacitated by the service of His washing our feet to walk alongside Him in His movements in the testimony.

These things, beloved, are very attractive. How elevating it is to think that although publicly the testimony may be reduced to very small dimensions collectively, and it is reduced we might say in a sense to the weakness of our own capacity individually, yet Christ is here testimonially still and the objective of the saints should be to be in such a condition all the time that they could walk with Christ testimonially all through the day. And He serves us to that end. If He sees anything on us that soils us He Himself would serve us by washing our feet. He would descend in the graciousness of His own humiliation and take the wash-hand basin and put water in it and take the towel with which He was girded and He would wash the disciples' feet in order that everything that was unsuitable to Him might be removed from them. And this, beloved, is the service that we are intended to render to one another, to keep one another suitable for the company of Jesus. Often we think of it as keeping one another suitable for instance for fellowship, keeping one another consistent with what belongs to the fellowship of God's Son here; but the great thing we should have in our minds is that this service of washing one another's feet is to keep us fit for the company of Jesus in testimony - fit for Him where He is, as we say in privilege or in glory: that as well - but the area where we need refreshment and comfort is the area of the testimony. And we are to serve one another by washing one another's feet in that regard. Therefore it becomes a matter of tender concern to us if any of our beloved brethren with whom we have contact should to our own discernment

become soiled by anything that is unsuitable for the company of Christ. We could refer to things that would make us unsuitable. I suppose one thing that we tend to regard not very seriously as making us unsuitable for His company is the neglect of His interests. How can we say to the Lord, as one of the scribes did, "I will follow thee whithersoever thou mayest go" (Matt 8: 19) unless we commit ourselves to His interests? He will have to say, I see little evidence of your desire for My company, I am afraid I see the tendency to neglect My interests, to neglect what part with Me involves and requires. We are very negligent, beloved, about the interests of Christ. And we could serve one another in that regard, not in admonition, not in correction, not as it were with a rule or with severity, but encouraging one another with the refreshment that it would be to be delivered from neglect of His interests, to find part with Him in the sphere where His own interests lie. Beloved, there is nothing like the company of the Lord's people for refreshing the soul when one has been in the world.

Then there are other things that we might contract, there are sins which easily beset each one of us. We all know - Solomon says every one knows the plague of his own heart (see 1 Kings 8: 38) - we all know the sins which so easily beset us. Sometimes we can discern the sins which easily beset others, and while being careful as to what the Lord says about the beam that is in our own eye before we attend to the mote that is in the eye of our brother (see Matt 7: 3), what service could we better render than that protective service of refreshingly washing someone else's feet in order that they might be delivered from what is characterising them as sinful which makes them unsuitable for the company of Christ either here or where He is? How many failures might have been nipped in the bud if there had been the readiness and the ability to draw near, and in the gentle service of washing one another's feet to bring in some experience of deliverance from things which were beginning to get a hold, and the deliverance is much easier before things have really got a hold. You could think of the sin that came in at Corinth - the man who had his brother's wife. Suppose as soon as a brother or a

sister noticed that that brother was taking too much interest in someone else's wife there had been the ability to put water in a wash-hand basin and take a linen towel (not a scourge of small cords) and by means of its application to rescue somebody from what was going to be disastrous in a local assembly. Suppose in Galatia, when somebody began to reintroduce the law and make out that you were saved according to the law, what would we have done beloved? O, you say, Paul was militant about that, he withstood Peter to the face, he would not stand for it. O yes, we can take up scriptures like that, they are often very useful in our hands and become something that we think we can be really skilful with. But, beloved, the way to have helped Galatia was to have taken the wash-hand basin and the water and to have taken off the linen towel with which one was girded and washed the feet of the brethren there in the same way that the Son of God had come in and washed the feet of His disciples. The solution to things in Galatia was the establishment of sonship according to the Son of God, and the Son of God had left an example that "as I have done to you, ye should do also".

Therefore, beloved, let us consider for the refreshment of one another in the delivering operations that we can bring in, so that one and another are helped to be free from things which otherwise will hinder our having part with Christ. Let us think of the brethren just as they are, think of them in their weakness, think of them among the ignorant and erring. How easy it is to get out the rule book for the ignorant and erring, how easy it is to make allowance for the strong and the able, but how little we actually reflect the attitude of Jesus in things that we do! Yet He has given us this example that we should wash one another's feet. Beloved, let not the familiarity of the scripture turn us aside from considering whether we could not the more aptly take up this service in relation to anything which is hindering the enjoyment of part with Christ among His people at the present day. One thing that should impress us continually, it should impress us every time we come together because there it must impress us, is how few saints there are available today for the

testimony of God according to the truth. Would you like any of them to be lost? Would you like any of them to go away? Would you not, if it was the means of saving any one, take the water and wash their feet and dry them with a linen towel like that with which Christ was girded? It would be done in righteousness surely, but righteousness brought in in such a way that it is healing and comforting and supporting and refreshing, rather than righteousness as it has been used in the past as if it were some arbitrary dictum to use, as was once said, as a stick with which to beat the brethren. O, righteousness was never intended for that; the law uses righteousness as a means of comfort and support, a means of establishing things according to God. Beloved, when the Sun of righteousness arises does He have a stick to beat the brethren? He has healing in His wings (see Mal 4: 2). Therefore let us learn things from Christ in the way He has done things Himself and let us refresh one another by taking these things on.

Now I refer to Elisha because what comes in in his case is not related to failure, as far as I can see, it is not related to departure, or falling short. I know that when Elisha was first laid hold of Elijah was in a depressed state. Did not Mr Taylor say that he had just resigned his commission? He was about as low in his spirit as he could get, although I suppose if we trace his history after that we find times of revival. But what is Elisha remembered for? Is he remembered as the man that saw Elijah go to heaven? He had done that, he had seen Elijah go to heaven. Is he remembered for his own great exploits in support of the truth? Is he remembered for powerfully standing by the truth when other people were departing from it? No. They say, Is there a prophet? And they say, Yes, there is Elisha. And what is his qualification? He poured water on the hands of Elijah; that is the only thing that the king of Israel's servant said about him. I would think that would be quite a good thing to be remembered for beloved. One would just as soon be remembered for having poured water on the hands of the brethren as to have been remembered as some distinctive servant, or someone able in the truth, or someone good at administration, or something like that.

I think it would be a fine thing to be remembered as one who had poured water, as it were, on the hands of Elijah. I suppose Elijah was fairly old. We are not, as far as I recall, told how old he was, but you get the impression that he was an old man, that he had served God faithfully and had come to the close of his period of service as far as divine disclosures to him were concerned. And another man is brought along. Is he brought along as one who will as it were elbow Elijah out of the way? O no, he poured water on his hands. You see he knew that here was someone serving God. We may relate Elijah to those having a distinctive part and activity in the testimony, and that would be right in its setting. But let us think of Elijah as representing any one else of the brethren. Now what Elisha did was to pour water on his hands; and you get the impression of Elisha, evidently a younger man, taking account of an older man, one about to depart as it were to be with Christ which is very much better, but there was a little while in which they lived together. And what did Elisha do? Characteristically he refreshed the other brother. Beloved, none of us has the status and position of Elijah, none of us is the single prophet of God in his day; even if God had to remind him that he had many, many others who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Whatever may be said about them they were known to God; but evidently in some measure they were secret disciples because you would have expected that Elijah would have known of them. But there is Elijah, as I say, none of us like him, none of us having that prominent place, but there is, you might say, one of the saints. Start with the elderly saints, start with those who have already passed what we speak of as the allotted span. And here is Elisha: he has his own service - what a blessed service he has, what grace and favour is to enter into Elisha's service! The service of Elisha has many parallels with the service of Jesus in Luke's gospel in the activity of grace. But what did he do? Did he say, O well, I am serving at so-and-so. O no, he poured water on the hands of Elijah. And beloved, this service of refreshing one another is open to every one of us. Every one of us can refresh another of the brethren. We can start with refreshing one other of the brethren, we can go on to refreshing one or two of the brethren, one or two of

the sisters, one or two of those on whom God's hand in discipline or in sorrow may appear to have come unexpectedly. We in our country bear the actings of the Lord in the way He has left amongst us three young widows with two small children each. One thing that they need all the time is to have water poured on their hands, because things get oppressive and difficult for widows. They have no husbands, their husbands are with Christ, and they have in that sense no one to depend on here. But beloved, there must be someone, as long as there are two or three in a place, who could pour water on the hands of the rest of the brethren. If there were only two, one could do it to the other and the other to the one. In a large meeting it is a service that any one can take up. It is not a service taken up formally like responsibility for the preaching of the gospel or counting the money. It is a service that is informal, unofficial; it springs from spontaneity in the heart, it springs from discerning that there is a need for refreshment in the meeting, and being the person who brings it in. Sometimes you can change the whole character, especially of a weeknight meeting, by coming into the meeting as if you are happy to be there. You do not have to have actual water, you do not have to have actual hands, what you can do is to change the atmosphere by your own attitude to the things of God and to His people. It is a service that I commend to the brethren it is a refreshing service. Think of what Paul say about Onesiphorous: "he often refreshed me, and has not been ashamed of my chain" (2 Tim 1: 16). Think of what he says about Phoebe: "she also has been a helper of many, and of myself" (Rom 16: 2), and he would as it were be able to say of Phoebe that she had poured water on his hands. In these times of stress and anxiety, sorrow and care, there are things, as Paul says, that come upon us daily (see 2 Cor 11: 28). I suppose there are some of the brethren who every morning when they wake up are again burdened, freshly burdened with exercises, perhaps local exercises, whatever they may be, as soon as they wake up it seems as if all the sorrows and the exercises come back again. What they need early in the day, beloved, is not a tranquiliser or something like that but someone to pour water on their hands. Husbands can do it very easily as they

pray with their wives in the morning, bringing in enough water in the prayer so that the house feels watered all day, and wives and children are restful in the sense that somehow the stream that flows from Lebanon has come in and has refreshed, quietly refreshed every one that is there. Beloved, like washing one another's feet, this service is open to us all. You do not have to be nominated by God to be the next distinctive prophet, you do not have to have been nominated by God to replace the man that has gone up to heaven, you just have to have a discerning eye for where refreshment in a meeting is needed and then be ready to bring it in. I was speaking in Plainfield on Saturday about healing and God saying that He would apply a healing ointment (see Jer 33: 6), encouraging the brethren that as they move around, wherever we may go, we may take with us a healing ointment. Beloved, let us take water for hands as well so that the brethren are refreshed, so that they feel better because we have been there. It is not that we can go around, any of us, and solve every problem - the Lord, as Corinthians shows us, is able to solve problems in the assembly by using the brother that is the least esteemed - but what any of us can do is to go around to refresh the brethren in the spirit of pouring water on their hands.

I commend this service to the brethren. It is a time even now when refreshment amongst the saints is still needed. Now I just add a word in regard to the water in Corinthians. The service of Apollos there is not exactly the same as in John 13, it is not exactly the same as Elisha's service to Elijah, it is not a question there of helping one another with refreshment in relation to the defilement or the burdens of the way, but it is the sense of an ability to work along with God in what He may be doing in a place. The brethren will recall beloved Mr Taylor's remark that the movements of the Lord are discerned by the character of the ministry He gives and by the grace that it produces in the brethren, (see Vol.20, p.251). What is needed in that connection, beloved, is that first of all there is the ministry. Just as we do not have Elijah we do not have Paul, we have not that distinctive apostolic character of ministry; we have ministry however, let there be no doubt about that, we have ministry and the truth in the

ministry. And the Lord is giving ministry at the present time which is quite distinctively powerful. Looking at the ministry that the Lord is giving characteristically and widely we have ministry at the present day of a power that has rarely been experienced amongst us. I say that without any hesitation. I am fully aware of the way in which the great expanses of the truth were opened up by the distinctive men who have gone before us and are now with Christ, but there is an experience of the participation and sharing of the brethren in what the Lord is giving at the present day that makes it quite distinctive. Have you never noticed - you must have noticed in New York itself - how brothers that some years ago you would have been surprised to hear say anything, and then you might have said if they did say anything they might not say much, and now you listen to them because you know that if they speak they will have something from God. That is an aspect of the way in which the Lord is serving in sowing or in planting at the present time. There is ministry at the present day of which I venture to say that nobody need be ashamed. But what is needed, beloved, as that ministry comes is not only that it be planted but that it be watered. Just as there is not Paul, I suppose there is not Apollos. Apollos was a very distinctive man; he had a good knowledge of the Scriptures, a thing that not everybody has; he was shown the way of God more exactly; he developed his own spiritual personality so that he was never, if I may use the word, intimidated by the distinctive gift that Paul had. If Paul said, Apollos will you go to Corinth? Apollos would say, No, I do not think so, the Lord has not sent me there. He was not minded to go (see 1 Cor 16: 12) and Paul accepted that. You can see the way in which a spiritual personality was built up in Apollos. I trust that spiritual personality is being built up in us all, a personality with full respect for one another which is not in any sense dependent on what there is in another servant or another brother or sister. But Apollos watered; he would go to meetings with Paul, he would hear Paul planting things, he would hear Paul planting a bit more about the kingdom of God, a bit more about the things concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, a bit more about the assembly and about the world to come and about the glory of Christ. And what would Apollos do? Apollos watered it. He

discerned what the Lord was giving through Paul; he discerned what the character of the ministry in which the Lord was moving was and he watered it; that is to say, everything that Apollos could do to make the truth flourish Apollos did. He just helped the truth to flourish in the place where he was. I suppose sometimes he did it more widely, but Apollos had a very distinct connection with Corinth and, as the truth came amongst the brethren, he set to work that the truth might flourish. Now again, beloved, that is a service that is open to us all. We can all water like that. We may think - and sometimes the brethren by their actions imply it - that the responsibility for developing the truth can well rest with one or two particular brothers; but there is scope for the service of Apollos, the promotion of the truth among the saints. That is what Apollos did. I suppose he would be waiting on the Lord and, because there is one Spirit, he would easily discern the character of the ministry that the Lord was giving. And Apollos watered it, he promoted what the Lord was giving among the saints. You might say that was an insignificant service. I suppose in Corinth they might say, Well, when Paul is away Apollos is quite a help to us. But the general service of Apollos was to promote the truth among the brethren, to see that the ministry prospered and flourished. This is not difficult in these days, beloved, when, as I have said and as is generally accepted among the brethren, we have not what is of the distinctive quality that we have in the Lord's goodness had in the past; but we still have the Spirit. I think if I could put it in a simple way, one text which governs us greatly in London where there are brothers with gift, brothers who the saints will readily go to hear and whose ability in the truth is well known (and how thankful we are to have them amongst us), what the saints in London cling to is the scripture that we turned to in the first reading in 1970 after the division, that "one is your instructor, and all ye are brethren", Matt 23: 8. That scripture often referred to remains amongst us in London, and it may have something to do with - if I may speak well of my own place - the general prosperity of the work of God there, that the spirit of the brethren is that one is your Master and all ye are brethren. So that someone might have the word one night and give a lead in the meeting (there has to be a lead given in

meetings; readings which are described as mutual do not usually get very far) but it is open to anybody to water; nobody need think that the service is too small for them or that they are too great for it. Apollos readily took it on, recognising that God was the giver of the increase. Paul says "neither the planter is anything, nor the waterer" - neither is anything. Think of that! Paul, you are the planter: but neither the planter nor the waterer is anything, that is he is nothing at all, God gives the increase. But there would be no increase if the service was not taken up in responsibility of someone planting and someone watering. And Paul goes on in the closing verses that we read: "But the planter and the waterer are one; but each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour". It may be that in the day to come that reward will actually be known. Paul says himself "Henceforth the crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will render to me in that day; but not only to me, but also to all who love his appearing", 2 Tim 4: 8. But there is a reward now for watering; that is, to see the prosperity of the brethren as a result of some small service that you have done amongst them in making the truth prosper. And the Lord, beloved, would lead us in these things. I think the Lord would lift from us something of the burden of current exercises. The brethren need delivering from occupation with the failure of the past: the time past suffices for that. There are lessons to be drawn from it, beloved; let us draw them inwardly but let us give the brethren the positive results of our examination of our own past history. Let us not as it were carry out inquests in public so that the brethren are turned aside from what they might have been enjoying in planting and watering. Let us go in for that kind of service. We hear often a desire and an appreciation of what is spoken of as positive ministry: let us be set for it, beloved. There is nothing to set the brethren forward like the truth on the highest level. I think anyone who serves is obliged to serve in relation to the highest truths that he knows. As the brethren are served on the level on which Christ Himself is, that is, Jesus is with the Father, let every planting of that kind be diligently watered in order that its fruit may be seen. The Lord will be pleased with it and the brethren will flourish on account of it. The

exercises of John 13 will give discernment as to every issue that might arise, and we can refresh one another, and we can promote the truth, and we can thus secure things in our localities and among our beloved brethren in such a way that the Lord will be pleased with it. And the Lord Himself will be refreshed as He Himself comes amongst us: we all recall the occasion on which He was refreshed beyond measure when somebody washed His feet.

Well, beloved, may the Lord just use these impressions for the comfort and refreshment and setting forward of the brethren, for His Name's sake.

BROOKLYN NY

29 June 1976

THE CHILDREN'S HEALING

Quite early in life we learn in ourselves or in others what illness is. It may even be that some young person reading these words is in need of healing. The loving care shown at such times and the remedies given are all a token of God's power to restore according to His perfect will and purpose. Through the prophets He spoke of "healing medicines" and "dressings" for cure and comfort. To a people wounded not only in their bodies but also in their souls through their sins He said with tender feeling "I will apply a bandage unto thee". In order to receive such fond attention we should need to be very near to Him! And this is just what He seeks from us even through troubles which may be our own fault.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth He healed every kind of disease, sometimes by a touch, at others by a word or even through the virtue of His own Person to one who but touched the hem of His garment. The fact too that He healed a child at a distance, and unseen, is a precious reminder to us that He knows perfectly all our need and is able to meet it. Sometimes He told persons that their faith had healed them, which meant that they had brought their troubles to Him knowing that He could help. All these ills were in some way the effects of sin in its working: they are also signs of much deeper diseases of the soul which, if not attended to, would lead to eternal loss. Do not be like the Indian prince who sought to hide signs of leprosy by wearing over his forehead a large and priceless jewel, but come in spirit to the Saviour and make known all your need to Him. A prize was once offered for the biggest fool who could be found in a certain village. After careful search they found someone who was very ill but refused to tell the doctor the truth about his condition. The judges all agreed in giving him the prize. But a worse folly would be for someone to refuse to own to his God the need of soul 'healing'. Oh, heed the simple and clear scripture that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins" - faithful in keeping His promise and righteous because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ His Son.

Are you one of the many who through salvation have a "joyful heart" which the Proverb says "promoteth healing"?

J.C.Evershed