

A
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CONTENTS

[RISEN WITH CHRIST](#)

[HOPE](#)

[FROM THE BOOKSHELF:](#)

[DIVINE WORKMANSHIP](#)

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RISEN WITH CHRIST

Richard Brown

Colossians 2: 6-15

I would like to say a few words as to being risen with Christ. What does that mean, and how do we come into the good of it through our soul exercises? Before I comment on the detail of the passage we have read I would like to give a brief outline of the first three chapters of the epistle, to show how this teaching fits into its wider context. I would also like to encourage more prayerful study of the word, and with that in mind I thought it might be helpful if, in passing, I made a few suggestions, perhaps especially for the benefit of those of us who are younger, as to how we might usefully approach the epistles. For example, it has been said by those who have helped us in the truth, that Christ is presented in a particular light in each epistle. You will find that if you look at them.

I wanted to suggest, as far as our epistle is concerned, that we find the key to the way Christ is presented in it in chapter 1, "He is the head of the body" (v.18). I believe that expression is unique to this epistle. You will not find it anywhere else in the Scriptures. I would like to suggest that it gives character to the whole epistle. We shall say more about that in a moment.

Another thing to look for when taking up the epistles is to see how the saints are presented in them. I think you will find that, generally speaking, the saints are presented in one of two lights. On the one hand, they can be presented as here upon the earth, making their way through the wilderness, as we speak of it, afflicted by weakness within and confronted by enemies without, liable to fail, and needing God's help and support. A typical example of an epistle which presents the saints in this light would be the Epistle to the Romans; which is why much is said in that epistle about sins and sin, about the flesh and the need for deliverance; and why the Holy Spirit is presented as helping us in our weakness.

But there is another view of the saints. As those who have helped us used to say, We were saints in purpose before we were sinners in practice. There is another view of the saints, and that is as they are according to the purpose of God. The best example of an epistle which presents the saints in this light is the Epistle to the Ephesians. In Ephesians the saints are not viewed as here upon the earth, but they are viewed as seated in the heavenlies (see Eph 2: 6). The blessings are also presented as in the heavenlies, and even the conflict is presented as being there.

How then are the saints presented in the Epistle to the Colossians? In Colossians the saints are presented as having their heart and mind above, but their bodies here upon the earth. If you look at chapter 3, it says, "have your mind on the things that are above" (v.2); and in the next verse it says, "your life is hid with the Christ in God". Then in verse 5 it says, "Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth." In Colossians the saints are viewed as having their hearts and minds, having their interests and their life, above, and their bodies here upon the earth. You can see from that why it is that the Epistle to the Colossians has been referred to as an "on the way" epistle. It fits in between Romans and Ephesians. In Romans we are taught the necessity for the saints having died with Christ. In Colossians we are taught that the saints have not only died with Him, but they have been raised with Him. Then in Ephesians we see that we have not only been raised, but we have been seated in the heavenlies. How glorious that is!

I only say these things to show you that the saints are presented in a particular light in each of the epistles. So as we approach the epistles the first thing to ask ourselves is, What is the particular aspect in which Christ is presented? The next thing to ask is, What is the particular view of the saints in an epistle? Then there is a third point, and that is, what was the particular purpose in writing? Now what I am about to say particularly applies to Paul's epistles. We have to remember that while we are familiar with finding them in the Scriptures, in the first place these epistles were letters: letters to local assemblies or letters to individuals. If we think

of the epistles that Paul wrote to local assemblies it is important to bear in mind that, apart from the Epistle to the Romans and the Epistle to the Ephesians, all of them, to greater or lesser degree, are in some way corrective. Romans and Ephesians are purely instructive. That does not mean that there is not what is corrective in them, but it was not the purpose in writing. But every other epistle that Paul wrote to a local assembly is in some way corrective. It seems to me that if we are to understand the way that the truth is presented in an epistle, we need to understand what the error was that Paul was seeking to correct, or the tendency that he was seeking to check. As we know, it was bad practice at Corinth. It was wrong doctrine in Galatia. It gives a colour to the way that the truth is presented. For example, we cannot help but notice that the coming of the Lord is very prominent in the Epistles to the Thessalonians. It comes into just about every chapter. Yet it is not mentioned at all in the Epistle to the Galatians or the Epistle to the Ephesians. These things are full of instruction for us as to the particular way the apostle was presenting the truth, the particular burden in his mind in writing to the saints.

Well, why did the apostle write to the saints at Colosse? There is no record in the Scriptures that he ever went to Colosse. It seems from chapter 2 verse 1 that he includes the Colossians with those who had not seen his face in flesh. We know that at the time of writing he was, in fact, imprisoned at Rome. It would seem that somebody had come from Colosse to Rome, to tell him about the Colossian saints. It may be that that someone was Epaphras. And it may be that much of what Paul learnt of the Colossians was gathered from hearing Epaphras pray for his local brethren (see Col 4: 12). There is something perhaps for us to consider in that.

At any rate, what Paul learnt about the Colossians was mixed. On the one hand, he heard that, fundamentally, they were going on well. He refers to them in chapter 1 as “holy and faithful brethren”, (v.2). But alongside of that Paul discerned they were in great danger. Paul heard that they were becoming religious, in the worldly sense of the word. They were developing a certain religious exterior.

They were adopting certain religious habits and customs. He refers to “philosophy and vain deceit” in chapter 2, and their being judged “in meat or in drink, or in matter of feast, or new moon, or Sabbaths”. He refers to worshipping angels and, lower down, to not handling, not tasting, not touching – they were becoming religious. Paul discerned that the underlying cause was that the saints in Colosse were losing sight of their heavenly association with Christ. I wonder if that is a danger, dear brethren, in our own time? Maybe, with the passing of the years, we carry on doing what we have always done, what we might speak of as the weekly routine of Christian duty. But what about living attachment to Christ? The saints at Colosse were in danger of losing sight of that. It is so easy. I speak from my own little experience. It is easy just to go on week after week. But what about living attachment to our glorified Head? You can see why it is, I trust, that the apostle should write to these Colossian saints, and present Jesus as “the head of the body”.

So he brings before them the glory of the Head, in chapter 1. I do not suppose there is anywhere in Scripture that we get a more complete unfolding of the personal glories of our Lord Jesus Christ. He does not elaborate on any one of them in great detail. But he brings them forward one after another, like a man bringing forth precious gems out of his treasure. We have “the Son of his love”, we have the One “who is image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation”, and the One by whom and for whom all things were created. And you notice those emphatic “*he*”s in verses 17 and 18. “*He*”, he says, “is before all, and all things subsist together by him.” Paul would say, You dear Colossians, you were going elsewhere for your resource, but *He is before all*. Let us ponder that for a moment. It says a little earlier, “All things have been created by him and for him.” That is tremendous! To think of this blessed Person as responsible for creating the whole universe: the sun, the moon, the stars, and the earth with all its varied forms of life. But “all things subsist together by him” means that, not only has He created it all, but at this point in time, at this very moment, He sustains it all in life. How great He is! Then Paul says, “And *he* is the head of the body.”

He would say to these Colossians, He is *your* Head! To go anywhere else for your resource is a very poor second best in the light of this glorious Person who is *the* Head of *the* body. I think the apostle is appealing to the affections of these Colossian saints. He is appealing to their hearts. Dear brethren, he would say to them, why did you go elsewhere? He, and only *He*, could be the Head of the body. I trust that the Spirit of God might work the glory of this blessed Man into our affections.

You can imagine that these Colossian saints would say to Paul, That is very wonderful Paul, but how can we be associated with One so great? So Paul comes to chapter 2, and brings in this precious truth as to the saints' place as raised with Christ. He would say, In God's sight you already are associated with Him. And then Paul would say that if you have this glorious Head, and if you have persons who are raised with Him, then you must have a circle where He is supreme. So in chapter 3 the apostle comes to this circle. In chapter 3: 11 we have what has been described as the Christian circle, "Wherein there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondmen, freeman; but Christ is everything, and in all." It must be so.

Can you see how Paul brings forward this teaching? In chapter 1 you have the glory of the Head. In chapter 3 you have the circle where He is supreme. But in chapter 2 you have this precious truth as to the saints as raised with Christ, the truth that connects these two thoughts together. You can see the importance, I trust, of this truth as to being risen with Christ. What I would like to submit to the judgment of the brethren is this: it is only one who is true to his place as raised with Christ who will experience the Headship of Christ. It is only one who is true to his place as raised with Christ who will find his place rightly in the Christian circle. I just want to submit that to the consideration of the brethren, but I think if you follow the way that Paul develops the teaching in this epistle you will see the force of it.

I bring before you this glorious truth as to being risen with Christ. The first thing about it is that 'raised with Christ' is God's view of the saints. I want to lodge that in each of our hearts. We

want to be preserved in our minds from anything mystical or fanciful. It is very evident that none of us are literally raised with Christ, otherwise we would not be sitting here in this room. But it is God's view of you, dear brother or sister. And it is as much His mind about you that you are raised with Christ as it is that you should be forgiven your sins and justified. In fact it is *more* His mind about you. For God has other families who will also be forgiven and justified, but there is no other family, there is no other company of persons like the saints of the assembly, who will be raised with Christ in the way in which Paul speaks of it here. It seems to me that if in any way we miss it, then we miss the particular light, the particular privilege, that is ours.

Now how is it that God can see us as raised with Christ? The reason is that the work that was necessary to put us in that place has already been accomplished, and the proof of it is that God has raised Jesus. I would draw your attention to verse 12, it says, "in which ye have been also raised with him through faith of the working of God who raised him from among the dead." The fact that God has raised Jesus is the proof that every question as to my guilty past has been resolved. The fact that God has raised Jesus is the proof that every question as to my fallen state has been resolved. If that is the case, then now it is only a matter of time before God raises me. Is that not glorious? The fact that God has raised Jesus means that every moral question in the universe has been resolved to His complete satisfaction. All that remains is the act of His mighty power to translate the saints into their new place actually. I think this is very glorious. All the work has been done. All that is left now is the act of God's mighty power. I trust you will understand what I mean when I say it is a greater moral victory that Jesus should be at the right hand of God, than that one day the saints will be there too – because that is simply the exercise of His power. That is the reason why God can already view us as raised with Christ.

God loves to associate the saints with Christ. I think He really does. So much so, that it is something He is going to display to the world. You notice it says in chapter 3: 4, "When the Christ is

manifested who is our life, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory." What a moment that will be "when the Christ is manifested." What a moment when, as it were, God draws back the veil and reveals Christ to a wondering universe. Now think of the glory of this, that not only will Christ be revealed, but also the saints will "be manifested with him in glory." I believe this connects with what the Lord prayed for in John 17 (v.23). You remember He prayed "that the world may know. . . that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me." He said that in relation to the saints. This refers to a future day. It will not be a question of faith then. And how is it that the world will know that the saints have been loved with the same character of love that the Father had for Christ? Because in a day to come they will look up, and they will not only see Christ in all His glory, but there, in the same position as Christ, they will see the saints. Is that not blessed? The world will understand then, in way it has never understood before, that saints who perhaps in their lifetime down here were under reproach and greatly despised, were in fact loved by the Father with the same character of love that He had for Christ. I think it gives God great pleasure to associate the saints with Christ.

What I want to lodge in your affections is that the place of being raised with Christ is God's view of you. It is just as much for the acceptance of your faith as it is that your sins should be forgiven or that you should be justified in His sight. If we do not recall anything else from this occasion let us remember this, that raised with Christ is God's view of the saints.

Now the question is, how do we arrive at this? How can we be brought into the good of it? What I want to suggest to you is that in verses 11 to 13 the apostle outlines for us a moral road. I think that for us to be brought into the good of our place as raised with Christ involves that we undertake a journey, a spiritual journey. It is a journey which, I have to say, involves deep and painful exercises.

What we are about to touch on involves exercises which, in their practical working out, are often accompanied by great frustration and despair. And yet it seems to me, dear brethren, that face them we must. If I have come to anything in my own experience it is that

there is no substitute for soul exercise. I would like to make the simple appeal for a deeper facing of the moral exercises.

In these verses Paul outlines a moral journey for us. As those who have gone before have taught us, the way to view it is like this, that the pathway that Jesus went actually is the road that you and I must follow in heart and mind. In effect what Paul says is, I have outlined the road for you, and I have marked on it the four great milestones. The four great milestones on the road from earth to heaven are circumcision, baptism, resurrection and quickening.

Circumcision, I would like to suggest, connects with the cross of Christ; baptism connects with His grave; resurrection with new ground; quickening with new life.

These exercises are deep ones if they are taken up by us rightly. And, as I have said, they are often painful in their practical working out. What I am about to touch on involves that, but face them we must. I would just sound a word of caution, in passing, as to the danger of presenting the heavenly side of the truth, without also addressing the moral and spiritual demands that that truth will make on us if we are to take it up rightly. I believe, if I could be permitted to say it, that it leads to great superficiality. It leaves persons holding things in their terms without the corresponding spiritual substance. Think of what a disservice it would have been to the children of Israel to have presented them with the possibility of occupying the promised land without first having to dispossess the enemies who dwelt there. I think I would be failing you just as much if I tried to present the truth as less rigorous than the way it is presented in the Scriptures. I want to make this appeal to us all and, if I may be permitted, especially to the younger men in this area, that we might be more set for the facing of our soul exercises, the moral exercises. As I say, I can think of no substitute for them if we are to make any progress on this heavenly road.

So the first milestone that Paul speaks of is circumcision. He speaks of "the circumcision of the Christ." I take it that that refers to the complete removal, from the sight of God, of the first order of man in the cross of Christ. You will no doubt have noticed that the

Scriptures distinguish between our sins, that is the things that we have done, and our sinful nature, which is often referred to as “the flesh”. We need to understand, and I trust that the younger ones may be able to lay hold of this, that in the work of Jesus God has not only dealt with our sins, but He has dealt with our sinful state just as effectively. It helps to bear in mind, as a simple matter of teaching, that when it was a question of our sins Scripture emphasises the blood of Jesus, but when it was a question of dealing with our sinful state Scripture emphasises the cross of Christ. I think the reason for that is that when it was a question of dealing with my sins Jesus took my place, He bore the penalty that was due to me, and His blood becomes the great eternal witness that His life was taken instead of mine. When it was a question of dealing with my sinful state, it was not a question now of Jesus bearing the penalty for what I have done, but something which is perhaps more difficult to understand, a deeper matter, it involved that He should bear the condemnation of God against me for what I am. When it was a question of dealing with my sinful state, it was not a question of Jesus taking my place, but of God placing me or, in the words of Scripture, “our old man”, on the cross *with* Christ. The apostle says, “Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with him”, Rom 6: 6. I understand that God took me, all that I am as in the flesh, all that I am as a child of Adam, and He placed it on the cross *with Christ*. And there on the cross He condemned in Jesus everything that was so offensive to Him in me.

May we just ponder these things, dear brethren. It is less easy perhaps for us to grasp. We can understand Jesus bearing the penalty for what we have done, but may we seek the Spirit’s help to understand what was involved in Him bearing the condemnation of God against me for what I am. For there on the cross it was crucified with Him, and it was removed for ever from the sight of God. This is a very fundamental truth.

That is the position as it is from God’s side. The question that is now raised with you and me is, am I going to be committed to it?

The exercises in relation to that are gone into in more detail in the Epistle to the Romans. There we see the tremendous struggles that

we go through in our souls, the crying for deliverance, the yearning to be free from the wretched man that I am. But there is this difference between the way the truth is presented in Romans, and the challenge of Colossians. The man in Romans is glad to be free of the flesh. We can think of the flesh, and all the bad things about it. We can think of pride, jealousy, lust, as things that I just want to get free of. That is Romans. The man there says, "O wretched man that I am!", Rom 7: 24. Colossians is subtler than that. What I come to is that there are actually features of the flesh that I quite admire.

This is a remarkable thing. You know, the flesh can be cultivated, the flesh can be made to look very Christian sometimes. When we come to Colossians, what I discover is that there are things about myself that I actually quite admire. One man might admire his amiable outgoing personality, another man might admire his ability to make clever or amusing remarks, another might secretly appreciate his incisive mind, or his eloquence, for example. But to which order of man do those things belong? What I have to come to is that, not only the worst of me, but the best of me, as men might speak, has been crucified with Christ, it has been *cut off* at the cross. What a tremendous thing that is to come to! A most severe matter to face.

The working out of it involves deep painful exercises known, I suppose, only between the soul and God. What it means to be committed to that truth in the working out of it in our lives. How easily the flesh intrudes! I might be preaching the gospel, and to all appearances I might be presenting Christ, yet in my mind I might be thinking how clever I am at being able to put out such great thoughts. I might be standing up in the service of God, and to all appearances I am worshipping God, yet in my mind I am thinking of the wonderful impressions I am giving expression to. How subtle the flesh is! If I am to make any progress on this heavenly road, I have to accept, and seek to be committed to in the power of the Holy Spirit, the complete cutting off "in the circumcision of the Christ". How hard that is! To accept that the best of a man, all that I thought was good and noble about him, has been removed forever from the sight of God. Paul speaks of "the putting off of the body of the flesh." It is the whole person. The very best of me, as men might speak, as well as

the worst, has been forever removed from the sight of God. As I say, there is no progress on this spiritual road until I seek with God's help, and especially the help of the Holy Spirit, to be true to the position in which God sees me.

The next step is baptism. If circumcision deals with what I am, baptism, I would like to suggest, deals with the place where I live.

Circumcision deals with the order of man that has sinned. Baptism deals with the environment in which that man exercises his will. As we know, baptism is a figure of death to the world. The great Old Testament type of baptism is the passage of the Red Sea by the children of Israel. We know that it was through the Red Sea that the children of Israel escaped from Egypt, and were brought into the wilderness. Egypt speaks to us of the world as governed by the will of man. The wilderness represents what the world becomes for a believer. It becomes a desert to him. The Israelites escaped out of the one, and were brought into the other, by crossing the Red Sea, which is for us a figure of baptism. The reference to baptism in Colossians 2 (v.12) goes on to the Old Testament type of the Jordan, speaking, as it does, of our death with Christ, but I am sure that every enlightened believer would recognise that the world is a bad place. I am sure that every enlightened believer would accept the need to be separate from it. In fact, I would go as far as to say that you could hardly regard somebody as on Christian ground who did not accept the place of death to the world. But, again, the test in Colossians is more subtle. We all know the world is bad, we all know that it is a corrupt and violent place. I am glad to be separate from *that*. But what I discover too, is that the world is a place that ministers to my lusts. It is a place that ministers to my vanity, and that becomes more of a test, does it not? If I might give a simple example of what I mean, you think of a successful businessman, his office, or workplace, becomes an environment that ministers to his lusts. You think of him there sitting behind his desk, he is a man of reputation, he is a man who commands respect, people value his business acumen, they will seek his advice, they will court him. In that sense his workplace becomes an environment which caters for

his fleshly lusts. If you were to strip that man of all those things, and put him in a place where those things count for nothing, if you were to put him into heaven, where reputation and wealth count for nothing, where business acumen counts for nothing, where the approbation of men counts for nothing, if you were to put that man into heaven he would discover his true moral standing in the sight of God. Now, you see, my place *is* in heaven, according to this scripture, and if am to be true to that place then I must accept a grave here. How solemn that is! How hard! Naturally I cannot bear the thought of having to be buried. All those things that I once enjoyed doing, all my plans, all my ambitions, buried. I cannot bear the thought of me being placed in a grave, and not being able to be reached by the bright sounds and bright lights of the world any more. And yet, if I am to make any progress on this heavenly road I have to accept the place of being “buried with him”.

I accept, in principle, that I should be separate from the world. Yet what I have discovered is that it is the small things that find me out. I accept that I am to be separate from the world, yet I have only to go out to the shops to discover what an influence it exercises over my mind. But if I am to make any progress on this heavenly road, I must seek with God’s help to be committed to the place of being “buried with him”.

These are hard exercises. And, in a way, I am almost ashamed to bring them before you, for I know what is in my own heart. It seems to me that these are exercises which no power on earth could induce a man to face unless he has before him the great divine objective that God would have us with Christ. So the next thing is that we have been raised: “In which ye have been also raised with him.” Ah! now there is light at the end of the tunnel. Now there is hope. This is a precious truth. Can you understand that just as God could not leave Jesus in the grave, so there would be nothing for God’s heart to leave the saints there either? Let us understand that when Christ was crucified, I was crucified with Him. When He went into the grave I was buried with Him. Now God has raised Him, and where am I? I must be raised with Him too, in the sight of God. Is

that not blessed, that God now sees me as raised with Christ? Why? Because Jesus is there. And the fact that Jesus is there is the divine guarantee that He will raise the saints too. “Raised with him”. A new place. A new standing before God on the other side of death. How blessed that is!

Then we come to quickening in verse 13: “And you, being dead in offences and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he has quickened together with him.” Resurrection is the new place. Quickenings is the new life to enjoy that place. If God is going to put me into heaven, He needs to give me the life that is lived in heaven if I am to enjoy it rightly. If you want a simple illustration of this point you can think of a fish. It is very happy to live under water. But if I were to give it a new place on the land I would have to give it new life too, for it would not last long without it. If God is going to put me into heaven, if He is going to raise me with Christ, I must have new life to enjoy that place. There is something very precious about this, because although I have to wait for the resurrection of my body, although I have to wait for my body to be quickened, the glory of this scripture is the God gives me this new life even now. How precious that is!

I want to present to you, on the basis of this and other scriptures, the possibility that even now we can know what it is, in spirit, to be with Jesus where He is. I would like us all to ponder that for a moment, and let the blessedness of it seep into our souls.

Quickened means, I believe, that even now, in spirit, we can know what it is to be with Jesus where He is. You say, I am not up to that, I do not feel equal to that. Well, I do not ask if you are up to it, dear friend, for it is quite true that the enjoyment of these things is not without reference to our spiritual state. But here is a question that will reveal the true state of your soul: knowing that the Scripture presents us with such a possibility – are you happy to go on without knowing anything about it? Knowing that Jesus spoke of “part with me”, how long are you prepared to go on, dear brother or sister, without knowing anything about it? What I am pleading for, with myself as much as with any, is that there might be purpose of heart, definite resolve with us, as to a deeper facing of these moral

exercises, so that we might truly arrive at our place as risen with Christ, and that we might touch in our spirits, even now, what it is to be with Him where He is.

You have a right to ask me to give you some account of it. What is it like? Well, I have to say that my experience is small. In fact, I am conscious that there is a whole region of spiritual experience that I have not yet touched. But I have experienced times when, looking back, I was conscious of being occupied with Him, and I was not conscious of anything else. Maybe passing moments, but there they were. I wish I knew it more. What I can tell you is that once you have tasted it you will know that nothing else will satisfy your heart again. It is not that you are always in the good of it. Far from it. But once you have tasted it, though you may subsequently turn to other things, you will know in your heart of hearts that nothing will satisfy you again like the experience of being with Him. And that is my simple appeal, that we might be more set for these things, because it calls for definiteness on our part. These exercises as to circumcision and baptism are unpleasant to us.

They are severe on us. But can we keep the divine objective before us, and seek with God's help to enter into these things more fully?

And if you are set for this, be prepared to find that your dearest objects on earth fade in comparison. Be prepared for that. The more you experience these precious things, the more you touch in spirit what it is to be with Him, be prepared to find that your most cherished possessions on earth become so very dull.

Well, dear brethren, I leave it with you. A simple word. I trust that we might be very much encouraged, but also that we might be stimulated and searched. May the Lord in His grace be pleased to bless this word, for His Name's sake.

BEXLEY

14 May 2003

HOPE

Garth McKay

**1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Revelation 19: 11-16; Isaiah 11: 1-10;
Revelation 22: 20**

Paul says a lot in his ministry about faith, hope and love. He says that these three things abide (see 1 Cor 13: 13). He speaks to the Thessalonians, whom we have read of, about their “work of faith, and labour of love, and enduring constancy of hope”, 1 Thess 1: 3. I have been thinking about hope. How do we understand what he means by hope? The scripture we read in Thessalonians speaks of those who have no hope. It is a sad situation to have no hope, but Christians have hope, they are full of hope. Paul says specifically “these three things”, so hope must be an important thing to understand. What is it that you are hoping for? Scripture uses hope, not as something that suggests you have no idea about what is going to happen, but something that is sure and living in your heart.

It is not like – ‘I hope it does not rain tomorrow; you have no idea whether it is going to rain tomorrow, that is not how it is used. You speak about hope as something sure – the hope of the Christian surely is that the Lord is going to come! That is what I want to speak about.

Is that your hope? We live in a day of faith, Christians have to use faith every day; to speak to Jesus you use faith. When you get down on your knees you are using faith to speak to God, and we get used to the idea of needing faith. I want just for a short time to tell you about a day when you will not need faith any more. It is a great gift that has come from God, but you will not need it for ever. The Lord is coming – what a message! What does it mean to you that the Lord is coming? This is going to test us because this is not just a doctrine; we do not just hold it as truth, we do that, but what I want to say to you tonight is that the Lord is coming. Jesus is coming back and the Man is coming! That is not ministry books or any of these things, but the Man is coming. This is going to test us about our links with Him. How well do you know Him? Because the Man who

is coming is Jesus. This is not complicated; this is not complex teaching – Jesus is coming. There are lots of young ones in the audience, sometimes maybe you go to a meeting and find it hard to understand some things, but Jesus is coming. We sang at the beginning:

The night is far spent, and the day is at hand

(Hymn 194)

We are on the brink of something new. Why? Because Jesus is coming back. What does it mean to you? How long have you known Him? Maybe a few years, maybe five years, ten, twenty, people here I can confidently say more than fifty years, they have known Jesus – and they have never seen Him. You are going to see Him, He is coming back. What a time! It could be tomorrow. This, I think, is hope. This is the hope and I want you to get interested, not just interested, but I want you to get thrilled by it because He is your Lord and He is mine. You know this that every one in this room has a special appreciation, something special about Jesus. Who is He to you? That is the thing. It is interesting here in Thessalonians, Paul does not give a lot of detail, different titles of His, He just says, “the Lord”. This is the great thing, “the Lord *himself*”, he adds that word to give emphasis to it, “himself” - “the Lord himself”, and the question is what does that mean to you? Who is He to you? Perhaps your appreciation of Him is a bit different from mine, maybe the great thing that you think about when you think of Jesus is a bit different from what I think, but the Lord is coming. This is for you to enjoy.

This is yours, this hope is all yours. Maybe He is the Man on the mount of transfiguration who shone with the glory of heaven (see Matt 17: 2): maybe that is who the Lord is to you. Maybe it is Jesus of Nazareth, the Man who lived here so humbly, who served others in such a loving way. Maybe He is the good Shepherd, the One who gathers the sheep, or maybe He is the Man who hung on the cross for you. This Man whom you have never seen, you have given your life to Him, you have spoken to Him every day, you have trusted Him, maybe sometimes when you could trust nobody else; you trusted Him, you trusted Jesus and He is the One who is coming and

you are going to see Him. He will not send an angel for this. For many other important things God sends His servants, sends angels; for this He sends no angel, the Lord Himself – “the Lord himself ... shall descend from heaven”. We are on the brink of this, and what does it mean to you? You are going to see Him. You will not need faith any more. You are going to be set free from so much. You speak to people who are suffering in their bodies, speak to people who are old and advanced in years about this. They are going to be set free from all that, in an instant given a body of glory like unto His body of glory. What it means to them! How will it be to be set free from that, from the pain and suffering? How will it be to be set free from the struggle that we have every day against ourselves, against the flesh, against those things that God hates? How will it be to be set free from reproach in the world? The Lord is coming to set you free from all of that, but the great thing is that the Lord, Jesus, is coming. The youngest here can understand it, Jesus the Man to whom you gave your heart, your Saviour, the One who loved you and gave Himself for you, He is the One who is coming, the Lord Himself. The day of faith for you will be over. I think it is a wonderful thing – I get the feeling sometimes that my faith becomes a bit tired.

Naturally, it is not easy for us to use faith, but we have to use it every day, it is a gift of God, but you will not need it forever. You should be thrilled with it, the fact that the Lord is coming and you are going to see Him – “the Lord himself ... shall descend from heaven”.

When He comes, what is He going to do? It says, “with an assembling shout” -I feel very measured standing here talking about this because this event is so glorious I feel almost unable to speak of it because I will not do it justice. I have spoken about three words so far, “the Lord himself”, and then it says, “with an assembling shout”.

We have often read this, there will be a shout, of course there will be a shout, a shout of glory when the Lord Himself descends from heaven. What a movement of a Man of such glory and greatness.

When He descends from heaven surely there will be a shout. It speaks also of the “archangel’s voice and with trump of God”, but there is an assembling shout. What is the assembling? What does

He assemble? The Church, all of it complete in a moment. What we are thinking about is glorious. Think about all these divisions, differences, things that we cannot reconcile. If you go down the High Street of any town you can see the divisions, I am not talking about different religions, I am talking about Christianity, professing Christendom, and how it is all divided up, because we cannot agree. Are you able to put the differences right? There is a big movement – it is the called the ecumenical movement – to bring all the churches together, and we must be careful about making a tirade against that, because its motive is right, but they are not able to do it, and you are not able, and I am not able. I can tell you that I have tried to help, and I am not able for it. The Lord Himself with an assembling shout will do it in an instant, and there will be none left out. He will not work in a corner, not in one little small part of the church, it is all assembled in a moment, “an assembling shout”. His church is ready and complete and ready to go to Him. How glorious! What a day to hope for! There are many who have friends and family who are not available to them because of these difficulties. Jesus will resolve them in a moment, He will do it for you. The key is the coming of the Lord. How much He will do! That assembling, we hardly know the power of that. When you try and do a little bit yourself, try and resolve some of these differences and find how difficult it is, you will realise the power of the assembling shout. He will gather the church to Himself; no one else can do it, the Head of the church, Himself will come and He will do it. Are you thrilled about the hope that we have? This assembling shout – the church could be complete and together tomorrow if the Lord comes. We are not talking about any interval of time here, it could be tonight, He has the power to do it. The key is in the Man, the key is not just truth that we hold as doctrine, all of these things have their place; the key is the Man and the youngest here can understand that and get hold of it. This is not complex. We are talking about the Man, Jesus, the Lord, and when He comes what He will do in His wondrous power.

“Shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first”. Where does the glory of this event stop? The dead in Christ

arise, the tombs are opened – see the power of it. I sometimes shake my head at myself that I just go on in such an apathetic way, I get up in the morning and I give no thought to this but we are on the brink of it. The tombs are going to be opened, more than we can imagine, because He will not leave the dead. It says, “the dead in Christ shall rise first”, the glory of what Christ will do when He comes. “Then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air”. The Lord does not come to the earth, He comes into the air at this time to gather the church to Himself. So you are going to go up – I just want to try and get hold of the reality of this. I want you to believe that this is going to happen. You are going to be there. If you have put your trust in Jesus, trusted in His blood, you are going to be there and you are going to be caught up. “We the living who remain” – that is how Paul spoke because he expected it every day and we should be like that.

We should class ourselves as “we the living who remain”, because we should be expecting Him to come. We expect it to happen any moment and we are going to be caught up together “with them”, that is those who have died. Death is no hindrance to the Lord, He has taken care of that. We are going to be caught up with them, with our bodies of glory, all the fleshly side is going to be left behind. Paul says, “For this corruptible must needs put on incorruptibility, and this mortal put on immortality”, 1 Cor 15: 53. Death will have no more influence over that condition and we are going to be caught up. We are going up together. This is the great message; it should make us joyful. Just think, you are going to be there; this is going to happen, the Lord is coming and you are going to go up. If you go out in the night, in the dark and look into the sky, look at the stars, you get drawn into it and you forget your surroundings and you are looking at the glory of creation – but when you do that, think, the Lord is coming – do it, try it, because somehow when you are there it becomes more real to you. I am going up because the Lord is coming. It is a great thing, what does it mean to you? This is our hope. It says, “So encourage one another with these words”, how encouraging! I always think the word seems a bit of an understatement, “encourage one another”, let us get the thrill of it in

our hearts that we are going up, the Lord is coming and He is coming to take us. That is the reason He is coming. If it was something else He might send an angel, but it is *you*, and the Lord Himself is going to come.

I want to speak about Revelation 19 because I want to fill this out by saying that when He comes for us, when He comes for His church, when the assembling shout is heard, He will appear to His own only. But He will come again after that and He will come publicly. The reason I am going on to this is that I feel for myself that this is something that I have not given enough thought to, because Christians should rejoice in this too. What the young ones can take account of mostly is that He is coming for them, and that is a wonderful thing and we should take that as the first thing, the greatest thing, that He is coming for me and we shall be forever with the Lord and in one sense that is all you need to know. You cannot ask for more, you cannot ask for better, there is no better place than to be for ever with Him.

I just go on to this because I believe that Christians who have a place for Christ in their hearts should rejoice in the day of His vindication on the earth, because He comes back to the earth – at this point He will come back to the earth, the place where He was rejected, the place where He was slandered and cast out, crucified, the Lord will come back to that. This is the same Person, but here it does not say, the Lord. I think it is different. This is not an appearing only to His own, this is an appearing to the whole earth, to the world and He comes in, “he judges and makes war in righteousness. And his eyes are a flame of fire”. This is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. I ask you, if you are a Christian should you not rejoice in this, this majestic appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, the same Man whom I have just spoken about, the same glorious Man? But this is the coming of which Peter says, “the great and gloriously appearing day of the Lord” (Acts 2: 20). This is what this is and it is a thing to rejoice in. I think this should be part of our hope that Jesus is coming back here. It is not a case of vengeance, we are not looking for vengeance, but we are looking for our Lord to be justified here on

the earth where He was cast out, and He will do that. He is coming back to take up His rights. He said Himself when He was here, “they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”, Matt 24: 30. This is God’s great Administrator coming to take up His rights and to set things right on the earth. If He can take care of all the things in the church as He will do when He comes the first time, He will take care of all those differences, all the problems; this time He will set right everything in the world’s system, everything on the earth, He will do that too. The glory of Jesus has no end because He is able for everything in the church and He is able for everything outside of it. The first time He comes He takes care of everything in the church and He takes what is true to Him to Himself, and the second time He will take care of everything else.

You might say that is an easy thing to say, but just think of it, think of the glory of it, the problems that there are in the world. I was thinking of the Government and all the different secretaries they have, a Home Secretary, a Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary, Education, Health, all these things, every one of them has their hands absolutely full with problems they cannot solve. What does it await? It awaits the coming of Jesus. See how the glory of the coming of Jesus just unfolds as you think of it. He is the “King of kings and Lord of lords”. This is the glorious return of God’s King, the Man of God’s choice, to take up His rights on the earth, to get the acknowledgement of all. The scripture we often quote, “every knee should bow” (Phil 2: 10), every knee will bow before Him – God will see to it. Think of the things that men did to Jesus that have gone unanswered. In a way they have, for so many years, but it will not always be so, God will have to say to it. That is my Lord getting His vindication. That is when my Lord is justified on the earth and I rejoice in that. When He comes this time what does He do? It says, “he judges and makes war in righteousness”, that is the key, righteousness. He will bring in a reign of righteousness such as has never been seen on the earth before. The key to it is Himself, He is “the King of kings and Lord of lords”. No one else can do this. I

suppose the world's history is full of leaders, full of men who have assumed offices and in so many cases they have been shown not to be equal for the office, and the weakness of kingdoms has come through that, come through the weakness of the ones who have been appointed to lead them.

It has always interested me that here in this section in Revelation it says, "And he has upon his garment, and upon his thigh, a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords". I think the fact that it is on His garment is the office that He has been given.

Who gave Him the office? God did. God has chosen Him "to head up all things in the Christ" (Eph 1: 10), He is the Man of God's choice, God has chosen Him above any other, He is worthy of the office. He has given Him the office, so the garment has on it, "King of kings and Lord of lords", but the name is also on His thigh and I think it means that He is suited for it. He is through and through *the* King of kings and Lord of lords and this is His glorious return when He appears to the world and He will take things up and He will set things right. Just as a small note, I want to point out, "the armies which are in the heaven followed him upon white horses, clad in white, pure, fine linen", when He said we will be forever with Him, that was a real promise because here you are. The armies which are in the heaven, they are the saints, because once He has taken you to be with Him you will be always with Him, so when He comes you will be with Him. You will share in His glory and rejoice in it. I think this is part of our hope.

I want to refer to Isaiah because this chapter in Isaiah is prophecy but it speaks about this reign of righteousness, "a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots". He is talking about Jesus. He is talking about the Man who is going to reign on the earth, because that is what He will do, He will reign here for a thousand years. A reign of perfect righteousness and Jesus is the One who will reign, He is God's great Administrator, the Man of His choice. It says, "with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity the meek of the earth". There will be no flaw in His judgments in that time. Never any flaw – think of that; think of

these leaders and how some of them have been exposed. With Jesus there will be no flaw, a reign of perfect righteousness for a thousand years. What a demonstration of God's glory in a Man. I want to go on to, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatted beast together, and a little child shall lead them".

Things are going to be very different. It says "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain". That is what it says about this time on the earth. It goes into illustrations about the creation itself, it says, "the lion shall eat straw". I find this a wonderful thing. I think it is fascinating to think of it that during this reign the very rules of creation that we speak about as nature will be changed. The world is going to be a different place, "They shall not hurt nor destroy". It speaks about the little child, "the sucking child shall play on the hole of the adder, and the weaned child shall put forth it hand to the viper's den" – children doing these things with no worry about harm.

What do we want in the world today, those of us who are parents particularly, what do we want? We want our children to be safe.

Under the reign of Jesus things will be so different, no harm will come to these children. It is wonderful to think of it, what that wonderful reign will be. A reign with a power for good that has never been known before, a reign of righteousness, of benign influence upon the earth, it is like the tree of life in Revelation producing its fruits and the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations (see Rev 22: 2). This is what the reign of Christ will be like. It is like Joseph in Egypt; if anyone had a problem, if anyone needed something, the word was "Go to Joseph", Gen 41: 55. I wanted to say a word about that, that this is the reign that the coming of Jesus will usher in and the key to it is in verse 10, "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, standing as a banner of the peoples: the nations shall seek it; and his resting-place shall be glory". The key to all of this is the presence of Jesus, the source for the power of everything that I have spoken of tonight, is the presence of Jesus.

Any problem, any situation that cannot be overcome Jesus can give you grace for it for a time, but He will resolve it finally by His coming. Everything that the world faces now, every problem, every threat,

every danger, the Lord can give grace for it to go through for a time, but He will resolve it finally with His coming. This is our hope and He is coming.

I just wanted somehow to help us to feel the thrill of it in our hearts that He is coming and to see something, just a little, of the power and the glory of the things that He will do when He comes.

Go back to the time when He will first come, the dead in Christ shall rise first. Just read the words and then think, *the dead in Christ, the tombs opened*, the power of these things has affected me.

I finished at the end of Revelation where He says, "Yea, I come quickly", and I trust you would all join with me in just saying, "Amen, come, Lord Jesus",. May He bless the word.

DORKING

8 March 2003

FROM THE BOOKSHELF:

DIVINE WORKMANSHIP

The most complex creature in the universe of God is a saint. As the subject of God's handiwork, he is made up of diverse moral qualities. Each quality is to find its place in each of us, though in varying measure it may be. Let me enumerate some of these qualities, though no doubt others could be added; yet what a list! Let us read them and pray over them, that they may find their place in us. All these precious features have been given living expression to in Christ, and so become most attractive. It is the moral worth as well as the glory of the Person that endears Christ to the heart:

Read this list:

faith	hope	love
obedience	dependence	confidence
meekness	lowliness	gentleness
patience	kindness	goodness
intelligence	righteousness	piety
holiness	purity	harmlessness
endurance	longsuffering	wisdom
knowledge	boldness	purpose
faithfulness	peace	truth
joy	worship	discernment
light	compassion	mercy
comfort	consolation	courage
thanksgiving	subjection	suffering

What an amazing production! Is there any one of these we would care to be deficient in? The marvel is that all these could be crowded so to speak into one tiny vessel like you and me. Yet these and others too are being brought to light through God's patient ways

with us. There must be the practical setting aside of the flesh in us to make room for these holy emotions to sway us.

One begins to desire and pray for enlargement, like Jabez of old, that there might be more room for the Spirit to operate in us. How pleasing to God when such desires prompt our petitions.

Let us go over this list and judge whether we have been marked by these. Pick out any one and say whether we would not wish to be characterised in greater measure by it; then add another, and yet another, and still another, and so on.

In the description of Satan, in Ezekiel 28, we read that he sealed up the measure of perfection, “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty”. Yet the believer, as conformed to the image of God’s Son, will yet shine in features of moral beauty and glory that Satan never knew. Features produced in love’s suffering path once trodden by the Son of God.

Think of the grand result secured, a universe filled by features that once were seen in a lowly Man there.

May this moral transformation be carried on in each of us, as the result of contemplating Christ, who presents before God the sum of divine perfection in manhood.

E.L.Moore

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