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Edited and Published by:

E.C.Burr

50 Red Post Hill London SE24 9JQ

THE FAMILY

Andrew Burr

John 11: 1-5; 17-44; 12: 1-3

D.A.B. It is commonly said as to John's ministry that he promotes the spirit and principle of the family. Some of these things are commonly said and not much enquired into, but that particular suggestion is related to the relative lateness of John's ministry.

Breakdown was already manifesting itself especially in relation to what was official and, as we know, John sets aside what is official in favour of the family principle. He is not alone among the apostles in looking forward to the last days in which we are. He is distinguishable by his reference to our being already in the last hour (see 1 John 2: 18). So he writes with that in mind. But he also writes about what was in the beginning and what was from the beginning. I suggest that his objective is to set out how what was in the beginning is to go right through to the last hour, that is "until I come" (John 21: 23), as the Lord says. John is concerned with what will abide and remain constant, which sheds an interesting light on what he sets out. He has a thought of permanence and endurance in his mind. One can imagine someone putting to John that he had ministered with that objective in mind and asking how he knew that what he was ministering would serve to establish things to abide "until I come": how could he be sure that it would not be necessary to maintain what is official? As we know his gospel was perhaps the last book to be added to the canon of scripture. I have reflected on the way in which he introduces the idea of the family into it. Brethren may see more examples of that than I do immediately. The first part of the gospel is taken up with a series of cases and it strikes me that the natural family comes into all of them. The beginning of signs is in relation to a wedding, where the family begins naturally speaking.

Then there is the courtier's son in chapter 4. The man in John 5 says, "I have not a man" (v.7). In chapter 8, there is a breakdown in the marriage relationship with the woman taken in adultery. In chapter 9, the blind man is failed by his parents. You can see in

each of those cases that the natural family line fails. The marriage of Cana as an example did not even get to first base on natural lines. If things are going to fail even on the wedding day, what will abide?

But here in the middle of his gospel we have this story of which we have read in which the family is made to triumph. It triumphs in the face of extreme adversity, and death itself is overcome. John would say, if the family principle can be tested to that extreme and triumph, then whatever may arise through the last hour will be overcome also. If this family was able to overcome such extremity, then whatever might lie in store for the people of God in the times that would follow after John himself had passed on could be overcome in the same power and principle.

I wondered if we might see if that is so, and see how we ourselves might be strengthened by that idea. I emphasise that the other families mentioned in this gospel are natural families, as indeed this one is. The natural family has a place in relation to the assembly, and certainly the household does. We know on the other hand that the natural family can be a cause of difficulty and also that difficulties of that kind tend to intrude among the people of God, but what John portrays in this chapter is more than a natural family. It is a family in which the Lord Himself has gained, and advances in, the principal place so that the key to its endurance is that the Lord Himself should have His place. His own should be held together in ties that relate them to Himself. For example, He refers to "Lazarus, our friend" (v.11), which shows that He is drawing His own together with Him in the family idea.

I read the verses in chapter 12 because they portray the outcome of the extreme experience through which the family had passed and they illustrate what the family really comprises in the Lord's mind. He was its centre and they had fellowship together by making Him the centre. As a result they came to know the power of His resurrection, and that was the principle upon which they had fellowship with one another.

P.L.J. We know that this great line that John was on was his life and I think that is a very practical thing, “I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly”, John 10: 10. That really is what we have in John.

D.A.B. It is, and life involves associations of life. It is not just existence or my living for myself. Paul says, we do not live to ourselves, but to Him who died for us and has been raised (see 2 Cor 5: 15). That provides a basis on which this family had relationships together, and the disciples were part of that. I like that reference “our friend”, it was not just Jesus’ friend but he was the disciples’ friend as well. So there was a kind of friendship that needed to be established fully in the gain of Christ as its centre as the resurrection and the life. Then there was something there that could be set to abide whatever extremities and whatever adversity might come.

P.L.J. Life is more than just existence.

D.A.B. Absolutely, and chapter 12 shows something of the fulness of what life is. There was a supper, they were feeding; and there was a spirit of worship, a sense of communication and fellowship together in which the Lord took a happy central part that gave vitality and focus to the life that they were enjoying.

P.L.J. Smyrna had a name to live but was dead.

D.A.B. Yes, because she had lost Christ as her centre, and that system continues, but you could not say it abides until I come. It is not on that line.

D.M.W. Do you think the Lord’s interest in the family would involve their being together, with Himself becoming the head of it?

D.A.B. There is a difference between this family and the others I have mentioned. They do not start as far back as some of the others do. They already had a link with the Lord and they were assured of His interest, so that when this emergency, this extremity, arose, they knew where to find Him. There was no confusion among themselves as to what to do. This matter had to be taken to the Lord wherever

He might be and it was on that kind of sensitive drawing of the Lord into their sorrow that He could build. He does not just want to be available to be drawn into sorrows; He wants to be invited when there is something to celebrate, as we have in chapter 12.

D.M.W. I think it is fine to see how they came through circumstances, even the experience of death. We may be occupied with our circumstances, but the sovereign working of God would produce a felt need of Him.

D.A.B. He uses circumstances – the last hour is a circumstantial idea – but we are tested then as to how we bring the Lord in. We tend to hesitate and wait and see what we can do, but the family cannot work like that. If the Lord is regarded as its centre then the instinctive first recourse is to the Lord. It does not even say they prayed. There is a prayer in this chapter, but it was not theirs, it was His. They seemed so ready to defer to Him and in their simple trust that He could do what was best. They seem to be not only learning but exhibiting the strength that would carry things through until He returns.

T.v.d.H. You referred to the family circle in John and the failure of the natural family, then you made a statement that this family was made to succeed. John 12 brings that out, but say some more as to how that comes in after death and resurrection, and at the same time what you have just been emphasising as to their instinctive appeal to the Lord prior to the resurrection.

D.A.B. If we view this just as a natural family, two sisters and their brother, it fails like the others. Death broke it up and if it had been simply a natural arrangement that was the end of it. Lazarus was consigned to the grave and to corruption. That is the end of what is natural however refined it might be, it has to end that way. What was different about this family, if I can speak very simply, is that the Lord is treated as a member of it. The Lord has a place, these three have their place distinctively and others have their place, although less intelligent than the three. This family has a different basis and it therefore appears as a contrast to the natural families that I referred

to. What help was his family to the man in John 9? There was no cohesion in that family, nothing that would abide. That family broke up under the reproach permanently, as far as we can tell, but here is a family where the Lord is given His place and something is established that will abide. The experience they had corresponds to the truth of baptism, which is often spoken about in a rather negative way. Romans 6 speaks of death and burial and resurrection. That is one of the differences between circumcision and baptism: there is nothing in circumcision about resurrection, but baptism goes on to resurrection. We speak about being true to our baptism and learning what baptism means and coming into the good of it, but it was a real deep experience here; perhaps deeper than we reckon on, but it had an outcome, an issue in resurrection. "He is the resurrection and life", that was the ground to which they came. It set it apart from what nature itself may enjoy. John shows that there is something that does not need anything official to preserve it. If the people of God would maintain what this household arrived at with the Lord, there is something there that will abide "until I come". We might ask how much the people of God put that to the test, but it is open to us to do so. The key to it is giving the Lord His place.

T.v.d.H. It seems that we are touching a very important thing. We often use the expression on the other 'side of death'? The crossing of the Jordan would be a type for us. We have relationships on the other side of death.

D.A.B. If you use that expression to Martha, 'the other side of death', she would say, my brother lay in the grave and stank; this was a real thing for us. They did not just go through this doctrinally, they went through this by experience. They found that the Lord was the resurrection and the life, that was something they knew because it entered into their experience.

P.L.J. The Lord would teach us that if it is to be our present experience, then He has to be the head and centre of the family, and our being attached to Him as the resurrection and life, we do not have to wait for literal resurrection, do we?

D.A.B. We cannot speak of experience and then be abstract about the place the Lord has. What is the value of the experience unless first we make sure that as a matter of experience the Lord really does have this place?

P.L.J. Mary said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died", but if he had not died there would be no resurrection. In other words she had not gone into the truth of resurrection. I was thinking resurrection has to be known first.

D.A.B. The sisters both say that, as if they had spoken about it, and they had come to it that the Lord should have been there; but the Lord has gone away. What would abide 'until I come' mean on the basis Mary and Martha propose? There has to be something that put the matter beyond death.

P.L.J. He had the hold in resurrection, He had the hold in death, He had resurrection in view.

D.A.B. They had the last day in view. Resurrection in the last day would have satisfied their hopes and expectations. That resurrection could be a present thing was what they had to come to.

P.L.J. That is what we have to come to.

D.A.B. Believers speak about the happy day, but they are not all maintained in view of it because resurrection is not a present thing to them.

T.v.d.H. Would you say that experience holds that instinct that you refer to? Instinctively they went to the Lord?

D.A.B. That is what I find so attractive about John's gospel: experiences are described for us. We sometimes analyse this family and discuss who is further on than who, and so on, but the family were very simple. Mary's comment might seem out of order: Martha had already been corrected for saying that, but Mary just expresses how she felt because Jesus was their Friend. There was not as much intelligence as there should have been, but the Lord was there and there was something that He could develop.

P.L.J. What impresses me too on this is that you cannot have resurrection without death, so that many of us believers have never been in contact with resurrection because we have not accepted death.

D.A.B. We talk so freely about baptism and yet it is not a matter of experience with us. You have experience in relation to members of your family and so in a certain sense has everybody else, but death comes in. God speaks to believers when death touches them about the finality of it. If things are going to continue in life after that then it must be on a wholly new basis.

S.S. This particular portion is interesting and I am really enjoying what you are bringing before us, because we often speak of individual formation, but this really has to do with the family, there is the need for the family to experience formation.

D.A.B. What is individual or personal is clearly important, but the Lord uses the family to teach us together; these sisters came along together. They had come so far, and it says of the Lord that He was still in the place where Martha was. Martha had detained Him. He had already waited and now Martha seems to be holding Him up. But He comes where they are and He meets them where they are. If they are not ready for certain things, He takes them at their speed. It is all part of the friendship that marks this family relationship: He wanted to gather them all into this.

S.S. The one thing that I was impressed with was that this experience really resulted in forming them so that they were more in accord with what He would desire to have for Himself amongst them. Then this experience ended up characterising it, because in chapter 12 it refers to, "where was the dead man Lazarus", it was something that characterised, it was very real and formation had its effect.

D.A.B. Lazarus sat at table with them, a dead man: that is resurrection.

P.L.J. But it says, "the dead man". I think that is important, we are on the other side of death in resurrection but we still recognise that we are dead.

D.A.B. We also recognise that sin is not touched on in this chapter.

Chapter 9 is about sin and the consequences of it. This in chapter 11 is not exactly presented as an outcome of the wages of sin, but they cannot go back where they were before the Lord's intervention in this matter.

P.L.J. Resurrection is not a going back.

D.A.B. No, because you would simply be back where death is at the door. If you had to go back then Lazarus would go back into the tomb.

D.M.W. Ultimately, of course, he did, but the teaching of the family setting is that Jesus is to be the head and the centre of it. Therefore as abiding in the family we can enjoy what is beyond death even though there may be those of us in the room who die. He says, "he that believes on me, though he have died, shall live; and every one who lives and believes on me shall never die". That is a remarkable thing.

D.A.B. If we go forward to chapter 21 there was the same kind of confusion about John himself, the word went out that he does not die; John says, "Jesus did not say to him, He does not die" (v.23).

He is not setting aside the limitations of our natural condition, death will take all of us; but what He is bringing out is that certain features will abide "until I come". Lazarus's death is not discussed after this; nor indeed is the death of the sisters – they are presented as abiding. That could hardly be if the question of death had not been faced. John would say, I faced it with them; I was there. I was at the tomb, I saw what happened; and I am a witness to that resurrection. He is a witness to the death of Christ and so he is a witness, not only to the resurrection of the Lord, but to a resurrection in the family. So he could see that element which was to characterise what was going to continue.

D.M.W. I wonder whether it links with the further thought in Colossians 2 where it brings in the burial of Christ? It brings in our faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead so that it would have a present application (see Col 2: 5).

D.A.B. That is really the lesson of the first part of chapter 12. The Lord speaks of Mary having His burial in view, but you cannot imagine Mary thinking that the Lord was simply going to be buried after all she had experienced in the resurrection of her brother by One who said He was the resurrection and the life. She must be seen to be handling His burial in the light and faith of the working of God.

T.v.d.H. That was a result of her experience was it not?

D.A.B. Yes, what we gain from among the dead is, "Jesus our Lord". Mary is in the gain of that. She was able to see Him as the One who could be a centre around which something living and abiding could be established.

P.L.J. Did she see Him on the other side of death?

D.A.B. Yes. You cannot really handle the death of Jesus unless you see it that way. That is what Paul brings out in the Corinthians, if you do not take up the death of Christ in the light of His resurrection, where are you?

D.M.W. I was wondering whether we would get help in the Supper in this regard. It is not just remembering the Lord in His death, but it is remembering the Person and the way He went to secure everything on the other side of death. So, we remember One who is living and then there should be some experience of meeting the One who is the resurrection and the life.

D.A.B. If you remember someone who is dead, you remember things about them when they were alive, which get more and more historical; but if you remember someone who is living but absent, your mind goes to what they are doing now. Is that not our experience in relation to the Lord, that He is living but absent? Therefore He becomes present to your mind because you occupy it with what He is doing now, and what He says He is doing now is – "I am coming to you".

D.M.W. That is a very wonderful matter.

D.A.B. I do not set aside the historical side, and of course the fact that He died is essential, because we would not know Him as a living

and glorified Man if He had not died.

D.M.W. It is interesting that the way that the family, which is a generative thought, is drawn here, for we are abiding even during the last hour. I wonder if there is something of that that is really beyond sin. We consider One who is absent but who cannot stay away.

D.A.B. I was thinking of what a long span John covers. He starts with what was in the beginning, and he presents this changeless character in the opening of chapter 1; someone who could never change. In his epistle he speaks about what was from the beginning and then he says, “we know that it is the last hour”, 1 John 2: 18.

You might say that he has the whole span of things in his mind. In the last hour what arises is anti-Christian, it displaces Christ from the position He should have. We might speak in a moment about the contrary elements that there are in this chapter, the Jewish element is here, but John is thinking about what will continue? What will go through? He does not speculate about that, he looks into his experience with the Lord for evidence of the things that the Lord has demonstrated in His work here that would abide. He chooses to highlight this family’s story in the centre of his gospel – here is the secret of what will abide. It abides in the power of resurrection, but it abides through the successful passage of extreme experience which demonstrates its resilience. John would put his confidence in this until the Lord returns.

P.L.J. Would the various ways in which Martha, Lazarus and Mary serve here bring before us features that would continue?

D.A.B. Yes, and there is no competition here, no difficulty about who should be doing what.

P.L.J. Each had their own place.

D.A.B. And the family acts as a unit. These three things had to be done, and there is the capacity in the family to do them. No doubt each did what they were best at, that is what families do, they get the person who is best at something to do what they are good at. The response to the Lord was a family one, only the disciples were not up to it.

P.L.J. Each of us individually should fulfil these three features. We should not say, I am going to be a Lazarus, you do a Martha: each should characterise us.

D.A.B. We need to keep what is personal in its place because if we do not we will think about specialising which is not the family idea.

The disciples could have found things to do as well. They could have expressed family features too, but they chose to start getting into a difficulty about where all this response was coming from and what else they might have done with it. They missed an opportunity and I think John is very frank about that. There were these three functioning in a way that death and nature have nothing to say to, and he could have been part of it. He would say, I just sat there and wondered about how much all this cost. He would have reproached himself for the feebleness of his own response to it at the time. It was only when he reflected on it that he saw what was enduring about the way this family expressed itself.

T.v.d.H. If you go back to the family, these three different characteristics and what they produce, would you link the family unit with the house being filled with the odour of the ointment? That was Mary, herself, who did that, and yet the house being filled was the full outflow of that family operating together as a unit to the Lord.

D.A.B. John would remember that they left after this meal and went on; the Lord had other things before Him, but their clothes smelt of that experience, they carried it with them. It was six days before the Passover – the Passover is a household matter, it is a family matter – and whoever came to celebrate the Passover in this house would have come and smelt the fragrance. They would have known that something special had happened. The Lord had been there. That should link with our experience at the Supper, what we have enjoyed through the week and worked out testimonially should accumulate a certain fragrance that gets things started again at the Supper.

D.M.W. It is not necessarily conscious, but it does accumulate because of the Spirit. The Spirit is introduced in later chapters and how He would bring to remembrance. In John 20, it says of Peter

and John, “Then entered in therefore the other disciple also who came first to the tomb, and he saw and believed; for they had not yet known the scripture, that he must rise from among the dead”, John 20: 8,9. The Lord not only talked to him with regard to this family, but about his literal resurrection. It would be for their education; and then as we see in the scripture the whole experience would be confirmed to them. That is the purpose of the scripture; to confirm our experiences.

D.A.B. We have abundant points of reference. There is what the Lord Himself has passed through, the testimony to His death and resurrection is a point of certainty. What comes out here is that the family may also possess this, not as something they have been taught only, or read, but something that they have experienced and passed through. I remember a brother who did not get out to meetings for a long time and when he was able to get out, he gave a word on the way that no one can take your experience away from you. You might forget things, and people might call in question what you think you have been taught, but no one can take your experience away from you.

Mary brought the pound of ointment and John forbears to speculate now as to what it was actually worth. Judas makes a guess which was almost certainly wrong because a thief has a bad sense of value. Naturally, this was an asset to the family, this pound of ointment, and you cannot imagine that Mary used it without the others’ full consent. Mary was the instrument of something that expressed what was in the whole family. The disciples could have been part of it, they could have consented as well and been part of the answer to what the Lord had passed these people through. They had been witnesses of it, but they had not entered into it in the way that the sisters had and that shows.

S.S. Do you think that relates to what accrues during the week and comes out in the Supper in praise to God? It is not that you are occupied with the thing itself, it is the consequential outflow of what is accrued in the family, an asset, something that has built up.

D.A.B. John brings in extremity. If it is true for an extremity, it is true for less. Our circumstances may not involve this kind of extremity, there are other circumstances. A household here are passing through something. The Lord says, this is not unto death, but it is for the glory of God.

D.M.W. I am glad you bring out the things that we do go through. It is all to have a similar effect in our felt need of the Lord, so that there can be experience with the Lord of His coming into our circumstances, helping and taking control. It is in view of Him having something on the other side of death so that we can enjoy Him as He is and where He is.

D.A.B. It says, "Bethany was near Jerusalem, about fifteen stadia off", it was just away from the centre. The sisters do not tell Him to come where they sought to kill Him. They do not place Him at that risk. He is publicly under reproach and out of sight but they knew where to find Him. They did not send someone out to see if they can find Him, they sent to Him where He is. That is a comfort. The world is a place where ordinarily speaking the Lord is hard to find, but not for the family: the family know where to find Him. They might have thought that a message would come back, but the Lord does not come. It says, "he remained two days then in the place where he was" (v.6). We say that is a delay, but you could look at it the other way: He stayed only two days, and then He faces up to this reproach. The family was under reproach too. At the end of this chapter, the Pharisees have given orders that anyone who knows where Jesus is is to say. These people knew where He was, and they had not said, so they were under a cloud as far as the Jewish system was concerned. We might have said there was a nice crowd at the burial, but not sympathetic really. In a natural way the crowd would have reclaimed the sisters into the Jewish system, so to the extent that this family was true to Christ, there was reproach and the threat of persecution. You can see their hesitation to draw the Lord back into those circumstances, and they let Him decide that He would come into the reproach. Then it becomes an expression of His own love to them. The Lord has gone away because of the

danger, but His lovers need Him. He is their friend and He has got to go. Thomas says, this is ridiculous, but the Lord says, it is a friend, we have got to go; He prevails on them to go. I think we get impressions even in the reproach we pass through of how bound up with us the Lord wishes to be.

D.M.W. As we go through these experiences that draw us near to the Lord, finding that He can be near to us so that we can be with Him, the background becomes the foreground for us because at the end of it, in chapter 12 it says, "A great crowd therefore of the Jews knew that he was there; and they came, not because of Jesus only, but also that they might see Lazarus whom he raised from among the dead. But the chief priests took counsel that they might kill Lazarus also" (v.9,10). The law cannot stand the character of another order.

D.A.B. I think John would say, that is what the last hour is going to be, the religious official element will set itself against what the Lord has established in resurrection.

T.v.d.H. Resurrection is the key there is it not?

D.A.B. It is, but John would say, orthodoxy cannot touch it, it is fifteen stadia away, it is out of reach. God has established another centre that the religious system would try and lay its hand over but cannot actually encompass. We are a testimony to the triumph of that. In spite of the prevalence of religious activity there is to be something that is pure and real and not part of that at all. It has its own centre and own spring of life and power.

P.L.J. And it will be there when He comes!

D.A.B. Exactly. The Lord is looking for what abides "until I come".

D.M.W. I think that is extremely helpful, that in going through this with the Lord, these experiences are abiding because the glory of the Son of God is involved. Resurrection is necessary because we have no part with the Lord in flesh and blood condition, but the religious world does not really want resurrection. It would like to

make the world better and to make man morally more upright, where resurrection takes you out of all that.

D.A.B. Yes.

T.v.d.H. Experience has to be gone through with the Lord in the family setting to get the gain of it. It is to be seen and worked with, people going through all kinds of circumstances, gaining experience on their own, so the experience is with the Lord.

D.A.B. The other stories in John's gospel are a bit like that. He goes to the wedding, He touches the courtier's son and so on, but the outcome of those cases is not gone into. The Lord says to the woman in chapter 8, "go, and sin no more" (v.11), but whether she did and what she did, we do not know. This family is different because it starts with a link with the Lord. It was not that this experience created a link with the Lord, it transformed a link they already had. John makes this his centrepiece because he is able to describe an outcome which you do not get with some of the other stories.

D.M.W. Would you think the Lord's teaching through, in these individual cases, John's gospel looks ahead to this day? The moral element that might be formed, even in Nicodemus, a religious man who was identified with the public profession of the day, but he was certainly a man who became fit for fellowship?

D.A.B. It is in this gospel that he is presented in fellowship with Joseph. That is a comfort too. We have been speaking about what is individual, and we might find the prospect of extreme experience rather daunting. John does not present people going through extreme experience on their own. The Lord finds the man in John 9. The Lord comes to Bethany and the family have each other even at the grave. Nicodemus would know what it was to stand, and I expect he felt very lonely. Joseph must have felt very lonely too, dissenting from their counsel and deed. But when it actually came to being associated with the death of the Christ they have fellowship in it.

D.M.W. They were persons who had fellowship in His death. Joseph claimed the body of Jesus and Nicodemus joined with him; they were men who were ready for fellowship.

T.v.d.H. They made Him a supper so the exercise was there in a family way. I suppose you might even say, Nicodemus and Joseph were of that character, that they would make Him a supper.

D.A.B. We might say there was a lack of intelligence in all these spices, and so on, but they did what expressed their fellowship together and their association with Christ. We could perhaps spare the question of intelligence for a moment; but what they did was driven by that motive to act for Christ and to put what they had at His disposal.

P.L.J. We have the same. We may not have intelligence today.

D.A.B. John does not say intelligence is what we use to abide, it is love for Christ; love that gives Him the central place and makes Him a supper. That is what will abide. Matthew says, "the love of the most shall grow cold" (Matt 24: 12), but you cannot imagine this family's love for Christ growing cold.

D.M.W. The love of Christ in the last hour is over against the love of the many growing cold.

D.A.B. Mr A.J.Gardiner said that there are many anti-christs but there is only one Christ. Jesus Christ is the Man whom God is pleased to distinguish. The family distinguishes Him as well, they are in sympathy with God about the place they give to Christ. There is something there that will not be tainted or corrupted by what has actually overrun what is official in the public position.

P.L.J. So you are saying there are many ways in which one might be outside?

D.A.B. These elements are very near. There is this discussion in the council and it appears to be so far so good, but it was opposed.

These Jews come and are very sympathetic with the bereaved, but they have no sympathy with them as regards to Christ. If Mary and Martha had said, we are waiting for the Lord to come, the crowd

would have shown they were not in sympathy with what was really motivating and relieving these two sisters.

T.v.d.H. The Lord never forces Himself on anyone. You see that many times, but where there is exercise and desire He is available and you might say the family gets the gain of it.

D.A.B. You judge people by their friendship. I might say, I am sorry he did not tell me that, I thought he was a friend, I would have liked to help him or sympathise with him. The sisters' first reaction to Lazarus falling ill is to tell the Lord. He was their friend and He needed to know. It was an expression to the Lord that they counted Him as part of their plan.

P.L.J. They were seeking help.

D.A.B. In whatever way He chose to bring it in.

D.M.W. It is interesting and helpful that they counted Him as part of the family, but He was going to show them that He would be the centre of the family.

D.A.B. If you had asked them if He was the centre of the family, they would probably have said yes, but He claims the place through an experience that allowed no denial: He must be the centre of the family because it had no other basis for its continuance. It is a danger with us, even in our assembly experience, when something arises, that we say, who can we turn to, let us ask someone, how shall we deal with us. No, they just put things in the Lord's hands.

D.M.W. I think it is instructive for the day in which we are. There was a time, even in the recovery, when there were certain persons who gave a distinctive lead, but we are not left those anymore.

D.A.B. That is not the last hour. What is the Lord going to do? The Lord prays. We might think we just need an act of divine power here, but the Lord expresses His own dependence. Would it not be a fine experience in any matter that might arise among the brethren, that nothing had been done to make it more complicated; and then to have a sense that the Lord Himself was bringing God's wisdom into the matter, with an outcome to God's glory.

D.M.W. I think we have to learn that sometimes the hard way. We think we might be able to do something, but we find that we cannot.

D.A.B. The brethren must have wondered as John was the last one left, how are things going to continue? John would say that the Lord has already shown you how things will continue. We have to trust Him like these sisters. Here is a recipe for continuance. We do not know how much the people of God have really put this to the test over the centuries, but I like to feel it would pass if we did.

T.v.d.H. Do you think taking this pound of ointment of pure nard and anointing His feet, is the line of continuance? It makes Him the centre of the family in such a way, not just the one who they go to for help, but giving Him the proper place in worship and adoration?

D.A.B. It is something very rich, there is nothing nominal about this. It is an expression of endearment. The Lord says it had been kept; Mary wanted not only a worthy object, but a worthy occasion.

P.L.J. They were not making an effort to be what they were supposed to. It came forth from them.

D.A.B. It was a celebration.

P.L.J. It came forth from them. They were clearly what the Lord looked for in His people, not just what you feel should be done.

D.A.B. There was no suggestion on His side that He sought or expected it.

D.M.W. Verse 2 of chapter 11 says, "Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick". It seems to draw attention to her. In chapter 12 it says, "Mary therefore, having taken a pound of ointment of pure nard of great price, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair".

D.A.B. Why stop to say that in chapter 11, because on the next page we are going to read why she did that? John identifies her like this because the Lord is pleased to draw attention to features by which people are characterised. John himself is an example, "the disciple whom Jesus loved", and he refers in chapter 21 to, "the

disciple whom Jesus loved following" (v.20). This has become characteristic in just the same way as he refers to the dead man Lazarus. These were family features and Mary had distinguished herself by the place she had given to Christ. That was a personal thing, but it expressed something that the whole family had arrived at. Individuality is not lost in the family; the Lord is pleased to distinguish the individuals, while at the same time promoting the bonds they have together with Himself.

T.v.d.H. It is interesting that it is what they were characteristically for Christ. With John it is his love, and now with Mary, what she had done for the Lord. It marked them out personally – this is what they had done for the Lord and how they worked for the Lord.

D.A.B. It has been said as to John that when he was not up to it he just calls himself the other disciple, but in other contexts he refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved, "who also leaned at supper on his breast", John 21: 20. It is very fine the way he describes himself in chapter 21, "the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also leaned at supper on his breast", we have those thoughts together, and John loved to be identified in that way as someone who fastened on the Lord, and Mary in the same way.

P.L.J. I like to think of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. They were individuals, but I wondered if it would be the three ways that you could look at the believer in his response to Christ?

D.A.B. I think that is right. I was thinking of Philippians 3, "to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead", Phil. 3: 10. You might say, there are all those features and Paul was trying to work them all out in himself. He did not say he was the personification of them, but that was his aspiration, to stand in the good of all these features.

D.M.W. Christ was available as the centre and head of the family, and a spiritual personality is developed. The woman in John 4 and Nicodemus, had to do with the Lord; it was the same person but a different life, everything was different. The Lord wants development

in spiritual personality. We do not hear anything of the background of Lazarus, but he brings in a spiritual personality.

D.A.B. I am glad you say that because from one point of view it is only the Lord who can take things through, but there must be substance among those who are taken through and the substance is developed by experience in the company of Jesus. It is not simply that we can say, Yes I have had that experience, but it is to form you. We need to stand. The last hour requires people to stand and they stand in the gain of what their experience has wrought in them, “he that has wrought us for this very thing is God”, 2 Cor. 5: 5.

P.L.J. I think that is important, “has wrought us”, because sometimes there is a tendency to put things on the line of scriptural intelligence.

D.A.B. Paul says in Ephesians, “For we are his workmanship ... which God has before prepared that we should walk in them”, Eph 2: 10. Everything that God introduces into our experience is intended to establish something on that foundation.

DENTON

9th August 2003

Key to initials

D.A. Burr, London; P.L. Johnson, Denton; S. Selman, Denton; D.M. Welch, Denton; T.v.d. Hoek, Denton

SANCTIFICATION

Andrew Burr

Daniel 1: 3-9, 17-21; 6: 4, 5, 10, 25-28; 12: 8-13

It has struck me that there is a parallel lesson in the history of Daniel to the one that we have been speaking about in the reading; and there is a parallel between this prophecy and John's writings because they both look on to the completion of the mystery of God and of His ways in relation to the world. I do not profess to be an expert on the book of Daniel, or indeed on prophecy generally, but before I come to what I have in mind about Daniel I would like just to say a word or two about the way that God raised up prophets, not just to speak to His people, but to prophecy in a way that has entered into the canon of scripture for us. I would be out of my depth if I attempted to go into some of the minor prophets, but there are some simple things that might be said about the first four prophets whose works we have and they bear on the way that God worked out in the life of the prophets the truths that He was giving them to teach in their prophecies.

The prophet Isaiah is, I think, distinctive. The Lord Himself says that, "he saw his glory and spoke of him", John 12: 41. The focus of the prophet Isaiah is very much, therefore, on the personal glory of Christ so that there is less in that prophet about the life experiences of Isaiah; we do not know much about him and what he himself passed through. He prophesied before the captivity, and was given the task of drawing attention especially to the idolatry of the people of Israel and the certainty that that idolatry would lead to captivity. No doubt he suffered for prophesying like that but we do not get the detail of what he himself passed through. What we do get, especially in the latter part of his prophecy, is a wonderful display, prophetically, of the glory of Christ and the wonderful message which the nation of Israel has still to grasp, that their Messiah would suffer and be rejected in reproach and would enter thus into His glory. We have chapters like chapter 53 of Isaiah in which the remnant acknowledge that the nation had taken the

position that Jesus was suffering on His own account, and that His sufferings were inflicted on Him by God; “we did regard him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted”. But, they say, “he was wounded for our transgressions” (Isa 53: 4,5): they come to it that God had presented to them a suffering Saviour who would enter into His glory through sufferings.

Jeremiah lived in the days in which the city of Jerusalem fell to the enemy and to him fell the painful task of telling the people that resistance to this enemy would be futile. In God’s ways their blessing lay in submitting to the judgment of which Isaiah had spoken. It was too late to avert God’s judgment on the city and their salvation would lie, not in seeking help from Egypt or in their own strength, but in submitting themselves to the government of God.

What a very painful lesson it was and Jeremiah suffered terribly for giving it. For a large part of his prophecy he was kept in prison, and there was a time when he was dropped into a dungeon which was full of muck up to his waist. There were one or two people who were prepared to help him and there were occasions when things appeared to get a little bit better, but he suffered terribly. On top of all his sufferings there was no sympathy with what he had to say in the nation, and he had the painful experience of seeing his prophecy come to pass; the city of Jerusalem, which no doubt he loved according to God, burned before his eyes.

Ezekiel was one of the captives and he describes the way in which God’s glory had had to be withdrawn from the nation of Israel, so that the captivity was a righteous thing on God’s part. But he looks forward to the day when that glory would return. What a wonderful message Ezekiel has, the Man he saw at the beginning is coming back in his glory. Ezekiel suffered terribly too, he went through deep personal experiences, such as the food he was given to eat and so on. His wife died suddenly and various other things he passed through were intended to portray the intensity of what he had to say. These are things that the brethren can look into.

I come to the prophet Daniel from whom we have read. I trust that we agree that there was help in the reading to see that God has

been able, and the Lord has been able, to prove in advance the characteristics and the principles upon which things will endure to the end. As we saw, the experience that the household in Bethany passed through is of that character. Daniel shows us the same lesson. The book is in two parts: one is very easy to understand and the other is beyond me to understand, but the children are familiar with the early part of the book of Daniel, and it contains some of the best-known Bible stories. There is the story of the three men who were thrown into the fire and the story of Daniel and the lion's den.

The history in the first part of the prophecy is quite straightforward. The second part of the book which is taken up with the history of the successive empires that have been established or allowed to succeed one another by God in the history, and that will continue in a way until the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Himself is established, is quite difficult to understand. But what I would like to draw out is that the first part of the book shows to us that there are principles that should mark us that God has been pleased to put to the test in extreme circumstances in the history of Daniel and his friends, and that have been shown to endure. We might see that those principles apply to the history in Daniel's prophecy which continues right down past the day in which we are to complete ourselves in a day still to come. They convey the lesson that we have already looked at that those principles will preserve the people of God through all that history. So, God has shown, before the history started, and He has been pleased to work out in the lives of His servants, the principles that would carry the people of God through until that history is completed.

The sections I read in Daniel are those that speak of his continuing. The last one is the promise to Daniel, "and stand in thy lot at the end of the days"; he would have his inheritance when all that history was completed. God is free to make Daniel a promise in the certainty that Daniel would endure so that when the day came for that promise to be honoured by God, Daniel would be fit and there to receive it. That is a wonderful way to present the work of God. I am very changeable and I feel more in the good of things sometimes

than others, but what God would say to us, as he says to Daniel, is that He is doing a work in us, and our experiences will test the value of that work. Since it is God's work, He is free to promise before the work is done that the outcome for us is assured. He says, go your way Daniel, and in the end you will have what I have promised, I will give it to you. These things are a matter of present experience without setting aside the blessedness of what is before us in the day still to come.

I would like to speak in relation to Daniel about the preserving power of sanctification. I suggest that that was what came to light in Daniel's exercise, and it was in the power of that principle that he was able to go through. I only go over the history simply, because the history in itself is quite simple. Daniel was among the captives.

He belonged to the royal family of Israel and they were taken into captivity, the king himself was taken away and apparently so were the members of the court, including Daniel and his friends. He was found in the court of Nebuchadnezzar who was proposing to make him a worthy member of his court. So he offered Daniel a place in this world's system which would have provided some relief from the burden of the captivity. The first principle we have established with Daniel is that he is going to be separate from that system.

Separation is essential but it is not a complete thought in itself; it does not encompass all that the idea of sanctification presents. The thing Daniel resolved was that he must do what is right. I remember when I was young and I began to read in the ministry, being stuck by a suggestion that, God will always help you if you do what is right. I might calculate and think, well that is going to have certain consequences. I do not have to think about consequences, I simply identify what is right and do it. That is what Daniel proposed to do.

He said, I cannot pollute myself with things that would make me a Babylonian. I cannot do it, so I am not going to do it. It was not exactly that he asked for the strength to stand, he simply did the right thing to do. The favour that preserved him in the working out of that exercise followed his resolution. We are not simply talking about abstractions but principles that have a substantial expression among

the people of God. There was royalty with Daniel; one of the prophets says, "But the noble deviseth noble things; and to noble things doth he stand", Isa 32: 8. That is Daniel, he was going to be royal according to God, so he made a stand. God blessed him in a spiritual way. The king had a certain list of things that he wanted these young men to learn; he wanted to discover if they had certain abilities that are still admired in the world – skill in wisdom and good countenance and understanding science. Science is the study of things that can be observed. That is not a principle of faith as we read in Hebrews, "so that that which is seen should not take its origin from things which appear", Heb 11: 3. That truth confounds the whole scientific principle; for example if you take a scientific discussion of the way the world was made, it is based on how things appear and conclusions are drawn from that about how they began.

Scripture says quite clearly that you will not work out how things began from how they appear. It confounds science that the worlds were framed by the word of God (see Heb 11: 3), that is not a scientific idea. But the world values science and that is what was looked for in these men, an ability to reason things out in the way that the world reasons things out. Verse 17 shows that the qualities that God gave to Daniel were different from those that Nebuchadnezzar was looking for and even Nebuchadnezzar had to admit that they were better than the qualities that he was looking for. The particular gift that Daniel was given was in the understanding of visions and dreams. He was not given the gift to make deductions from how things appeared, but he was divinely given the spiritual insight to see and understand things that did not even appear at all.

So when the kings had dreams, the king put his scientists to the test; he says, you tell me what my dream was, and I will not believe you know the answer until you can tell me the dream. They said, that is impossible, it is extraordinary to talk like that, how can anybody possibly know what your dream was? But Daniel had the spiritual insight, by faith, to see what could not be seen, and he had the insight to explain what science had no purchase on, because there was nothing that could be seen. If the others had been given an account of the dream then they might have been able to work out

some conclusions, although the dream would have confounded them even so. The king says they would simply have predicted that all this was going to happen so far in the future he would never find out if they were wrong, but Daniel is given insight, by the Spirit to see. It is not the kind of natural gift that the king was looking for. Daniel was given that simply because he sought and stood for a resolution that he would do what is right. Immediately one commits oneself to what is right, it is to be separate from this system which has these values and this approach to the things of God.

The other thing Daniel was shown, as part of this, was not simply the king's dreams but a wonderful impression of the kingdom that God is going to establish in Christ. What are the rewards of separation? There seems to be just a long list of things I cannot do and cannot associate myself with, but look at the things that Daniel had out of that committal. One of the things was this wonderful impression of the kingdom that God is going to establish in Christ.

He saw this stone cut out without hands: "And the days of these kings shall the God of the heavens set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the sovereignty thereof shall not be left to another people", Dan 2: 44. Think of that! Daniel's faith, the faith that had led him to commit himself to what was due to God, was rewarded with this wonderfully sustaining impression of what God is about to establish in Christ. It was established already for Daniel.

The king had to acknowledge this, he had to acknowledge that this kingdom is coming and Daniel is already in the good of it.

So the king then attacks his friends. It is interesting that Daniel is not party to this particular experience; the king picks on his friends and they are cast into the fire. What they find in the fire is that the One whose kingdom is about to be established forever is with them in the pressure and extremity through which they pass. I suggest that these are lessons that we learn from committing ourselves to the claim that God makes that has led us into the path of separation. It is something one takes up because of a conviction of what is due to God and, as taking that path up, God would reward us with the impression over against the powers against which we have to stand,

not only that there is a coming kingdom going to be established in Christ, but the power of that One in whom that kingdom is going to be established can be felt in the extremity through which the path of separation and faithfulness to God may lead us. Is that not wonderful! On the one hand we have Daniel's vision of the stone cut out without hands and the kingdom that is going to be established in Christ, the sovereignty of which will never pass to another nation.

You say, what a wonderful prospect, I hope I am there in that day.

Daniel's three friends would say, we have a different experience of the stone cut out without hands; we had a friend who walked with us in the fiery furnace. He is the same Person, the One whose kingdom is going to be established, and He was pleased to walk in the intensity of reproach and suffering with those who have committed themselves to the path of God's will. Where would a believer's feet have to go that was more dangerous and exposed to more suffering than these three men who were bound hand and foot, and who walked in the fire? The fire itself, the fire that consumed the men who threw them in, was a bitter and extreme experience beyond what we could ever contemplate. I cannot imagine how these three men faced what they passed through, and yet there they were in the furnace walking with the Son of God. How wonderful that the One to whose kingdom we make a commitment in stepping in to the path of obedience to God's will walks with us in the things we pass through in consequence of making that commitment.

I go on to look at the tests that Daniel went through. His was not the fiery furnace, but the lions. I want to bring out now in chapter 6 that we see the other side of sanctification. Separation is not quite as wide a thought as sanctification. We had a brother in our meeting who had a gift for setting things out simply to us, and what he said as to sanctification was that it was setting aside from common use for a sacred purpose. You can see that that is further than separation; separation might be involved in the first part of that, the setting aside from common use, but it is setting aside for a sacred purpose. That is seen in the Lord Jesus Himself. He speaks of Himself in service here as "sanctified and sent into the world", John 10: 36. He was in

the world but apart from it: not just separate from it, but separated to a sacred purpose. John's gospel especially shows what that sacred purpose was. The sacred purpose was the revelation of the Father and the declaration of His glory and of His will. In order to be able faithfully to fulfil that purpose He was separated from sinners and He was separated from common things. The Lord appeared to be fully involved in the circumstances in which He was, but at the same time He was apart from them, separated from sinners. There was a certain distance that He had to maintain because the things that were common to those among whom He mixed were not His things.

He was concerned with His Father's business and that separated Him from the common things for a sacred purpose. So we see the principle of it in the life of Jesus. We see it also in His present position, He says, "I sanctify myself for them" (John 17: 19), He separates Himself from the world, even physically: "I leave the world and go to the Father" (John 16: 18), but He has gone for a sacred purpose, "I sanctify myself for them". The Lord has made our interests and our inheritance His sacred purpose, and in order to fulfil that He has left the world and prepared a place for us in the world into which He has entered. So again, we can see the principle of it beautifully portrayed in the life of Jesus.

Here, Daniel seeks to work it out. He had faith in the issue of separation because that was the way in which the question first presented itself, but now he is promoted in Darius's kingdom and people make a set against him and discuss how they are going to overthrow Daniel. They do not seek to compromise his separation, although the world will do that all the time, as we know; but they sense that there is something else about Daniel and they seek to undermine his sacred purpose. They say, we will not find any pretext against this Daniel unless we find it against him touching the law of his God. I love to see what they had taken account of in Daniel; here was a man who was not just separate for separation's sake, who did not just take a path because he could appear self-righteous or better than others, or not mixed up with things that were rather excessive and self-indulgent. There was a purpose to Daniel,

he had a purpose sure and he was not afraid to make it known, and his purpose was to set himself apart for God. He was fully aware of the circumstances in which he was, he was not in Jerusalem. He never saw Jerusalem again, as far as we know; he was not one of those who returned with Nehemiah or Ezra. He saw out his time in Babylon, but his heart was elsewhere. They knew this and, when he opened his window, everyone could see what Daniel was about, nothing came between him and his sacred purpose – even a pane of glass or a lattice in a window. He opened his window towards Jerusalem which lay in ruins burning with fire and, kneeling on his knees three times a day, he prayed towards it as the place where God had set his Name. God had withdrawn His glory from the city for the time being; nevertheless he honoured it as the place where he had last known the glory of God to be. We might say it was out of regard for God and His glory and he was prepared to put his life at risk to make the centre and purpose of his daily life the honour of the God against whom his people had sinned. That marks him out, and not just as a separate person. Separation by itself is always going to be a struggle, but sanctification gives it a sacred purpose which is the key to its endurance. It is the key to its abiding that it has God as its object. Daniel's object was not himself, or the maintenance of his own self-righteousness or anything of that sort; his object was God himself, three times a day. It says he "gave thanks before his God". That was his object and I believe that was the reason why he continued. He is then arrested and tried for failing to honour the king's commandment and he makes no reply. Nothing is said in Daniel's defence, Daniel does not seek to explain what he is doing, he does not hold himself accountable to this system although he had a place in it. He does not seek to defend the place he had in it, he does not explain that there was nothing amiss intended in what he was doing. He lets God be his judge. He can leave his circumstances to the God he serves and he will hold God and not himself as his object. He is preserved. At the end of chapter 6 the king has to acknowledge, "That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel", that is a very fine expression. I love that expression in Hebrews, "God is not ashamed

of them, to be called their God”, Heb 11: 16. You can make a list of such people. Think of Jacob – what an unreliable person Jacob appeared to be – and yet God says, “I am the God of ... Jacob” (Matt 22: 32). This king owns the God of Daniel. The king cannot just say he is my God, there is a sense of God that Darius has to acknowledge, but he also acknowledges that here was a person whom God Himself would acknowledge and that in this wonderful way. There is a glorious panoply of God’s names – how many names there are of the God that we have to do with, the God of the heavens; but He is also the God of Daniel. God was God to Daniel, but God is also pleased to call Himself the God of Daniel. Then it says, “And this Daniel prospered”, it is not just a question of surviving, it is a question of prospering. His prosperity lay, not in his advancement in the kingdom about which nothing more is said, but in the sense he had of what God was to be to him. When the next king offers him further advancement he says that he is not interested. That kingdom is going to be overthrown and there is no value to Daniel in having its honours or any of its glory. He refuses it and attaches no value to it at all, but he is prospering. The world would not understand that. They would say, take the honour, if you want to prosper. But Daniel says, I will prosper without the honour, I have a God in whom my prosperity lies.

All those things involved very intense experience. None of us has been cast to the lions, none of us has walked through the fire. God had taken these men who were captives under His government and demonstrated that people can prosper through extremity and now He shows Daniel what will happen next. God goes over the various kingdoms that are going to arise and how antagonistic they become to the people of God. The world goes on in a violent and corrupt way and the kingdoms exceed each other. I was interested to read in Mr Darby as to the iron mixed with clay, that it is the mixture of military power and popular power. You can see that: governments whip up popular feeling in support of military activity. That is a feature of the world and it is a dangerous principle. It is not of God. Government wields the sword under God, but now they

say that they wield it in a popular cause. We have governments speaking about the value of fighting wars to establish democracy, and it is a dangerous principle. Ultimately, as this book shows, it will turn against the people of God and establish something anti-Christian in the place that Christ should have; and how difficult things will become for the people of God. Daniel is not describing the day in which we are but he looks forward to the day in which Israel is recovered and he speaks about the remnant and the trials they pass through when the religious system of that nation is given up to what is anti-Christian. He says that even some of those who appear to be right will fall. There will be tests and trials of every kind – what is called Jacob's trial. As the Lord Himself says, there have never been days like them, nor will there be. But the people of God have already passed through days like that, they have walked through the fire, they have spent a night with the lions, and their God has shown how, out of intense experience of that kind, prosperity arises, and continuance and abiding.

So, at the end of this book he says, "Many shall be purified, and be made white and be refined". God will bring out something pure from all this darkness, from all this suffering, from all this conflict, from the mystery of His ways in which evil is allowed to rise up. It appears for a whole era to have the ascendancy and it will intrude and seek to corrupt even what is sacred, as we have here, "from the time that the continual sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate". How strong this language is in relation to what Satan will do to try and defile what is for God. What arises out of that is not tainted or something residual, something that just survives; it is not a few stragglers or refugees, "Many shall be purified ... and be refined". What a triumph God will secure out of all His way, and in all that Satan is trying to do; something will come out of that which can stand at the end of the days, and something that God loves. Daniel is very humble about the history as he reads in the books that the time that Jeremiah has spoken of is about to expire. Daniel does not say, that is good, all this is going to be over soon, things are going to start looking up, things are going to get

better. The fact that that period of trial is about to be completed drives Daniel into the presence of God to own the rightness of it all and the sin that had caused it; and how everything now depended on God, on His mercy and on His goodness. What a spirit to express in the presence of God. God says, "for thou art one greatly beloved" (9: 23). These humble features that come out in the presence of all this history are things that God loves, things that He identifies Himself with, things that He will preserve and refine. He has made a wonderful commitment that when all this history is passed, when all is gone by, Daniel will stand in his lot. God has made him a promise and it will all come true.

I simply speak of these things because they seem to me to bring out the value of sanctification. The need is not only to be separate, but to have a sacred purpose, to have God before us, not just because it is a right thing to do, but because God has shown that in whatever adversity may arise and whatever the people of God may pass through it is those who commit themselves in that way who will prosper and who will be loved; to whom God will assure the promises that He has made. May we be encouraged by these things. They have been worked out in the lives of men of like passions to ourselves. These were not things in a vision, they were not things that were worked out by angels; no, these men's feet actually stood on the coals and Daniel actually passed the night in the presence of the lions. These things are very real, and our experience is real too. It is intended to be refining. We can enter upon experience with the assurance that there are principles that will see us through it and bring us into the prosperity of its outcome. May He be glorified by us all, and may He bless the word.

DENTON

9 August, 2003