

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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FAITHFULNESS IN DIVINE THINGS

Hebrews 3: 1-6; 2 Corinthians 1: 18-22

P.v.d.B. I thought we might consider the Lord Jesus as presented to us here as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession and His place as Son over God's house. The Apostle represents the authoritative side, the Lord Jesus coming out from God, presented as on God's side as we have in the beginning of Hebrews, God having spoken in Son, authoritatively; that is the Apostle. Then He is presented on our side as the High Priest of our confession; and finally the Lord's faithfulness in relation to God's house. In the assembly we meet Christ as Son over God's house and His authority is there as the Apostle. The setting up of the tabernacle was to be according to the pattern which Jehovah showed Moses on the mount - that is authoritative. Moses acted according as. Jehovah had commanded him and the glory filled the tabernacle. Then there is the priestly service that is related to it.

In Corinthians we have the ministry of the apostle Paul, and the truth he presented was not subject to change. There was what was laid down authoritatively at Corinth, and the preaching of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, by Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus did not become yea and nay. It is God that establishes: "he that establishes us with you in Christ", and the Spirit is the anointing, the seal and the earnest.

We have great resources, dear brethren, in the present time in spite of the outward smallness of things we are in.

J.R.B. It is interesting in the scriptures read how attention is drawn to faithfulness. In the beginning of the first epistle to the Corinthians we have the word that God is faithful, by whom we have been called. We can always fall back on that in a day of departure, can we not?

P.v.d.B. I am sure we can. "God is faithful, by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord", 1 Cor 1: 9. That fellowship is not subject to breakdown. Not that we claim to

be the fellowship of His Son, but faithfulness is needed on our part to be true to it.

W.A.M. In Haggai He says "The word that I covenanted with you... and my Spirit, remain among you; fear ye not", chap 2: 5.

P.v.d.B. That is very encouraging and strengthening to us in a day of return as we have it in those three post-captivity prophecies, that God had not given up His thoughts. That is firmly established in those prophecies. The responsible side comes into Hebrews because it says if: "whose house are we, if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end". There is what is conditional as well as what is unconditional.

W.A.M. So that "if" challenges us; it would keep us from making any claims, would it not?

P.v.d.B. We do not make any claims; we are in John's day where the official side has broken down, but the moral side is carried through, and the purpose of God has not changed although breakdown has come in. The purpose of God stands and every thought of God stands; the assembly is the assembly today as much as it was from the beginning, and there is one Spirit and one body. All these things stand. We need to be in the stability of divine purpose so that we shall not be moved.

G.H.B. So is this really direction: "opening and laying down", Acts 17: 3?

P.v.d.B. That is very interesting. In Paul's ministry the truth is opened up to us, and in the last hundred and fifty years there has been a great opening up of the truth; the laying down is authoritative. The ministry in that sense connects with the *Apostle*.

W.A.M. We are tested by false claims of apostleship and claims of authority that are not on a moral basis, and I think the Lord has brought us back to this.

P.v.d.B. That is important. In Mark's gospel we see the authoritative side of ministry stressed. The Lord Himself taught as one who had authority.

J.R.B. What would the bearing of that be upon us? Do you think it would be that as the truth comes to us it is not optional as to whether we answer to it or not? It requires an answer; is that the point?

P.v.d.B. That is right, and we find we are tested because of conditions of weakness on our part, but the Spirit of God is careful to present along with the authoritative side the priesthood of Christ as available on our side to answer to the truth as it is presented to us.

In chapter 4 the word of God is followed by the priesthood of Christ: "Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God; let us hold fast the confession. For we have not a high priest not able to sympathise with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart" (vv 14,15). What a comfort it is to have the grace of the priesthood of Christ to enable us to answer to the truth as it comes to us!

J.R.B. That is very wonderful because in our day, when things are so broken and so small outwardly, we feel our weakness. I think God is making us to feel our weakness and dependence. But then I was encouraged recently by a note that came into the city from a brother in which he pointed out that power flows out of obedience; that if from our side we answer to the divine requirement in obedience, power comes in. It is not of man, is it?

P.v.d.B. Exactly. That was the subject we had at Plainfield, the obedience of the Christ, and it was pointed out that we can only have the benefit of the priesthood of Christ on the basis of obedience.

The moment you begin to move in faithfulness to the truth you find that you have the priesthood of Christ to help you in your weakness. The exercise of His Priesthood is not in connection with sin, it is in relation to our infirmities, but there must be obedience on our part.

W.A.M. If we seek to answer to the truth we find that we are weak. It is then that we prove the Lord is there to help us, but if I am wilful I will not have His support.

P.v.d.B. No. Well, that is the great difference. Hebrews 1 is the Apostle. It is the Lord in His greatness and glory presented as the Son. "God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly

to the fathers in the prophets, at the end of these days has spoken to us in the person of the Son" brings in the authoritative side. The divine speaking is in the Person of the Son. As the Apostle the Lord is on God's side; as Priest He is on our side.

J.R.B. Yet, as Apostle, the authoritative side would not be hard or irksome because it is in the Son, it is in that relationship which sets out the greatest affections.

P.v.d.B. It is. How attractively John presents to us the Apostle: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father)", John 1: 14. It is in that attractive way the truth came into expression through the incarnation. "The Word became flesh", the whole mind of God was expressed in Him. As you proceed in John's gospel you can see the Minister of the sanctuary moving into the holiest in chapter 17, the presence of the Father - "Holy Father". He intercedes for us: "Always living to intercede for them", Heb 7: 25. The *Word* in John is also the *Priest*. Luke speaks of those who were "attendants on the Word", chap 1: 2. The truth is in Jesus, and Luke's gospel stresses the priestly side, the grace of the Lord Jesus in securing us in the light of God's thoughts without ever compromising these thoughts, and there is priestly grace that is able for any need; there is no case that is too difficult for the Lord.

W.A.M. Do you think we need to apprehend what we sung in our hymn: 'When His greatness fills our sight' (No 211). Is that not where we start? We come into orbit in our affections in relation to the greatness of this Person, the Lord Jesus.

P.v.d.B. That is right, and the faithfulness in which He maintained the truth for God. John presents Him as the suffering Lamb - suffering rather than surrendering the rights of God. The assembly is related to Him in that. Inwardly the assembly is related to Him as the Word become flesh. But administratively, on the suffering side, the assembly is with Him in the maintenance of the truth as the Lamb's wife; she is thus identified in the scene where He Himself maintained the truth for God (see John 18: 37).

W.A.M. So, as was said, when the authority is in a person that we love it is not arduous.

P.v.d.B. Authority may be insisted upon at the expense of love; on the other hand you may think you exercise love but are not subject to authority. Both are to be in balance. The universe is based on that principle of law and attraction. In Psalm 19 you have the sun, typifying Christ in all His attractiveness; but it goes on to "The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul" (v 7).

G.H.B. I was thinking of what you said as to Luke. It has been said that they were to learn how to be priestly so that they would be at home in relation to approach and entrance into great things.

P.v.d.B. It is very important to be priestly. A priest will never surrender the principles that govern the house of God. He considers for God first and then he feels for the person as he seeks to bring in help. We need to be close to the Lord and consider, as holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus. What a presentation! How perfect is the way things have come to us! and what a contemplation as we consider the glory of the Lord Jesus! There is everything to help us; the Spirit would help us in these holy feelings that are presented to us in the gospels. On the one hand the Lord Jesus exerted His authority - He could look round with anger - and at the same time it says He was distressed at the hardening of their heart. There is a perfect blending of love and authority in the presentation of the moral glory of the Lord Jesus; there was holy perfection in His anger, priestly sorrow. How He felt the unbelief that was there! It was so perfect in Jesus. We need to consider that.

G.H.B. So Peter shines when he said that "we have believed and known that thou art the holy one of God", John 6: 69.

P.v.d.B. Yes, he discerned that there was One who had words of life eternal. Later, in his epistle, he brings out the holy conditions that would be suited to Him. Peter speaks much of holiness.

A.N.T. So is not the way the apostle brings forward the Lord Jesus to attract the affections of the saints to Him where He is unique? I

suppose there has never been a more difficult time than this period of which we are reading; the saints were dispersed, and how much they had to meet. The answer is in Christ and the soul being occupied with Him and His glories and not with things around about us.

P.v.d.B. I think that is helpful. Those of the dispersion were addressed by Peter in connection with what he himself had learned in the presence of the Lord Jesus down here. In chapter 6 of John, as has been referred to he says "Lord to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal". In his epistle he says "to whom coming".

Think of the dispersion that has taken place! But the answer is in coming to Jesus - "to whom coming" - and to be built up as living stones in the spiritual house in view of the priesthood functioning. In Matthew's gospel Peter says "Lord, if it be thou", and he left the ship and walked upon the water to go to Jesus - a way that was impossible to nature. In considering the Lord Jesus he went out to Him. That experience had entered into Peter's constitution as he wrote his epistle. In Matthew 14 he comes to Jesus in the light of the assembly. In John he comes to Him in the light of the inheritance: "thou hast words of life eternal".

W.A.M. So what is in mind in the epistle to the Hebrews is to get us to leave the ship in that way and go out to Him.

P.v.d.B. Yes, it would result in our going forth to Him "without the camp, bearing his reproach", chap 13: 13. It is very interesting to see how Moses was identified with the reproach of Christ. He rather suffered affliction with the people of God and it was *the reproach of Christ* he identified himself with (see Heb 11: 26). Then at a critical juncture, when there was departure amongst the people of God, he pitched the tent far from the camp and there again you get the reproach of Christ. Moses as a servant was *faithful* in God's house and God said this of him at a time when he was spoken against.

God stood by Moses: "Not so my servant Moses: he is faithful in all my house. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him... and the form of Jehovah doth he behold", Num 12: 7,8.

W.A.M. The reproach is here but the glories are up there, and as we have to do with the glory we are made equal to the reproach, are we not?

P.v.d.B. I think that is right. When we are identified with Him outside the camp we learn our privileges with Him inside the veil, which is a great recompense; the two go together.

A.N.T. The word 'consider' is a measuring word, is it not? It is consider the Apostle and High Priest. It takes our eyes off what is horizontal to what is heavenly. Do we not find that as our hearts are occupied with Christ the difficulties round about us dissolve?

P.v.d.B. I am sure that is right. We need a fresh view of Christ. The Lord went a long way with the two in Luke 24, and who could have given them a better outline of the Scriptures than He Himself? But it was when He manifested Himself to them that they turned back to Jerusalem. So the Lord would give us a fresh manifestation of Himself in view of recovery. It may not be the way you expect the Lord to appear to you. It may be He appears, as in Mark, "in another form" (chap 16: 12), but it has in view the recovery of the persons.

He appears in another form in relation to the seven assemblies and John is as dead at the Lord's feet; he had not seen that presentation before. John identified himself with the current state of things; he is as dead at His feet and the Lord laid His right hand on him and said "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead, and behold I am living to the ages of ages", Rev 1: 17, 18. The Lord presents Himself as the One who is able for anything in virtue of what He is in His own Person - "and have the keys of death and of hades", forces that are operating against the assembly.

J.R.B. So as we consider Him "who is faithful to him that has constituted him", how attractive He becomes in a day when we have known so much unfaithfulness and departure from our side. But as was said just now, we need help to get our eyes lifted above the level of things here, because we tend to feel that it is impossible for the truth to be carried through if we keep our eye on the horizontal

side. But as we consider Him "who is faithful to him that has constituted him" we can see that, no matter what breakdown there is from our side, He is able to carry everything through in faithfulness to God.

P.v.d.B. I am sure that is right. Even "if we are unfaithful, *he* abides faithful, for he cannot deny himself", 2 Tim 2: 13. The Lord never gives us up; and it is important, as our brother said, that things need to be approached from the divine side. You may say there is so much that is discouraging on the horizontal side; but even in John 13 we get a beautiful picture in the inner circle. In spite of what there was current without, the Lord is seen binding something together that is going to be connected with the vertical side: "knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands, and that he came out from God and was going to God" (v 3); He descends in lowly service and washes the feet of the disciples and binds together a circle here that could be connected with the place He was going to. I think everything in that circle needs to be worked out from where He is.

As Son over God's house we do not meet the Lord on our own ground but on His ground. The assembly is not just a company of Christians that comes together to enjoy themselves; it consists of persons that answer to the truth and act according to the principles that govern the house of God; they recognise Christ as Son over God's house and find they are there on His terms. They cannot lay down any terms on which the Lord would be with them. The Lord would say 'this is My assembly and I want you to be there on My terms'; and you find that the priestly grace of Christ is available to sustain you in it.

G.H.B. So that those two who walked and were downcast in Luke 24 had to be pointed to the source.

P.v.d.B. That is right. They may have been discouraged but the Lord knows all about that. "What discourses are these?" He says.

He knew what they were thinking and He heard what they were saying and He knew far better than they did. They said to Him "Thou sojournest alone in Jerusalem, and dost not know what has taken place in it in these days?" - how ignorant they were! The Lord

has perfect knowledge as to what happens in Jerusalem. In the beginning of this gospel there is a man in Jerusalem who is a pattern man - Simeon - and when he received Christ in his arms he was ready to depart; he represents the priestly element that is ready to receive Christ. At the end of this gospel the Lord is carried up into heaven, and He would say to us 'that is your place; I am going to be there and I want you to be there with Me'; and that is greater than anything we might attach to things here. He is Son over God's house, the priestly family.

V.J.C. As to Simeon, it is not recorded that he ever gave up the Child. We know that he did give him back to his mother but it says that he "received him into his arms".

P.v.d.B. He was a true priest. The word 'consecration' in the Hebrew literally means 'filling of the hands', and the hands of Simeon were filled when he had Christ in his arms. It touches your heart as you think of it.

W.A.M. What an appreciation he had. It says "it was divinely communicated to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ", Luke 2: 26. Everything was there in that Babe; the assembly was there, the world to come was there, Israel was there.

P.v.d.B. Yes, and he came in the Spirit into the temple. It is a pattern for us as to how we come together, whether we are ready to receive the presentation of Christ in that way and also whether we are ready to depart.

W.A.M. And the timing is perfect. He just comes in at the right moment.

V.J.C. So many chapters are taken up with the priesthood; does it all have to do with the service of God?

P.v.d.B. I think that is important. There are two sides to the priesthood of Christ; one is that He is the Minister of the holy places, and the other is in relation to our infirmities, He gives us priestly grace and helps us. I think Luke has this in view; the Lord is able to

meet everything here and the throne of grace was here. In Hebrews 4 we are exhorted to draw near to the throne of grace. Mr Stoney said that that was because they had got away from it.

W.A.M. We get away from it too, and have to get back to it.

P.v.d.B. Well, that is experience. Much may be set out objectively as truth in ministry - and we need objective ministry because we could not be subjectively formed if we did not have the pattern presented to us - but we do need help on our side. And the Lord is just there to help us.

G.H.B. Even the apostle Paul says of his own countrymen that they had zeal for God but not according to knowledge. It always has to be according to the pattern, has it not?

P.v.d.B. That is right. So that the priest's lips should keep knowledge and at his mouth they seek the law.

A.N.T. So it is that line of things that disturbed the Hebrews - to be transferred from what was given of God to Christ. What a difficult thing for them to come to! The apostle credits them all with being holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, but what mixed conditions were there! There appear to have been drawers back to perdition and there was weakness, but the answer to it all is in Christ Jesus, to get our eyes on Him.

P.v.d.B. That is good. Paul maintains the divine standards and he presents Christ; and we always need that presentation because things will not move without Him. He is the head of the assembly. The Spirit of God will always bring Christ in. Then we need to be in the stability of divine purpose as partakers of the heavenly calling. It is because of the heavenly calling that we need the priesthood of Christ. How could we answer to it without His priesthood?

W.A.M. The heavenly calling is what the enemy is against. If we drop down to an earthly level he will not attack us.

P.v.d.B. No, he will leave you alone then. The moment you are set in relation to the heavenly calling you find the forces of the enemy rallied against you. As soon as there is any expression of the

assembly maintained here, the enemy brings everything to bear against that to disqualify it, but the gates of hades shall not prevail against the assembly.

W.A.M. I have often thought of Paul in Acts 20; he says "I have not shrunk from announcing to you all the counsel of God" (v 27). I used to wonder why he said he had not shrunk, but I think he would become a particular target of the enemy as he laid out all the counsel of God. If he had ministered on a lower level he would not have come in for such suffering.

P.v.d.B. That is just what the enemy is at, the topshoot as Mr Stoney said - where the heavenly line is maintained.

J.R.B. That is the exhortation to the assembly at Philadelphia. The Lord says "I come quickly; hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown", Rev 3: 11. Is not the crown the top note, the crowning glory?

P.v.d.B. Exactly. That is something very precious that has come out in the recovery and relates to what was departed from at Ephesus.

W.A.M. "The name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem... and my new name" (v 12).

P.v.d.B. That is something to be weighed over but you can see how distinctly the Spirit of God has brought out the light of the revelation of God in the history of the recovery; and not only that, but the features of the assembly that are related to it, the way the assembly is formed in the light of the revelation of God as the vessel of His praise so that there might be a full answer to that revelation in that vessel. You can see how much conflict has entered into the history of the recovery in the maintenance of the truth, but the Lord credits the overcomer in Philadelphia with the name of His God. "I will write upon him" - He will impress indelibly on the overcomer the name of His God, the name of the city of His God, new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven; and He also says "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God". The truth as we have received it has largely come out in the temple, particularly through Mr Taylor's ministry. "Him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he

shall go no more at all out". The temple is here. It is not the holding of things merely in a historical way; for that is what in the history of the recovery has happened to so many that have missed their way in current issues at the time and they cannot see that there has been a living continuation of ministry in the power of the Spirit where Christ is held as Head; that will go through to the end of the dispensation and light comes into the temple and governs the saints in a living way. It is a living line of things, not something that took place historically in Mr Darby's time or in Mr Raven's time; it is the living thing going through related to what has gone before and going on until the Lord comes.

A.N.T. Is that why the apostle brings in the last verse we read: "whose house are we, if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end".

P.v.d.B. That is very important. You have more in mind perhaps.

A.N.T. I was thinking that this is in relation to experience, what we touch on the earth - if we touch it - and the apostle is appealing to all the saints; but this is a simple word; "if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end". The boast of hope would mean that there is something more glorious ahead.

P.v.d.B. Yes, there surely is!

A.N.T. And yet we are to touch the glories of Christ in the assembly now.

P.v.d.B. That is it. So we have here the words "hold fast", and again, "hold fast what thou hast" in connection with Philadelphia; and further, "Wherefore, even as says the Holy Spirit, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts". That is the present speaking of the Holy Spirit and that is the test: "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies", Rev 3: 13. The Spirit is distinctly speaking and it is a question of hearing the voice because what the Spirit says to us is the present mind of Christ in relation to each local assembly.

J.R.B. It is inconceivable to think of the Spirit being here and not having something to say, and therefore I need to be in constant exercise in my own soul to be related to that.

P.v.d.B. That is it, because the enemy has been very active in stopping the wells, but thank God there has been an opening up of things and God is making way for the saints. When they came to Rehoboth they did not strive, for God had made room for His people (see Gen 26: 22). The Spirit of God has been hindered in many ways but there is an area where He is free to unfold the truth and it is where these conditions of faithfulness exist. There would not be any local expression of the assembly today if there had not been faithfulness in maintaining things, and the result is that the Lord has what He has.

W.A.M. Is it interesting that the scripture in Corinthians goes on to being established?

P.v.d.B. Yes, we should come to that. We need to be firmly established. Peter too brings in the need for being established. We spoke of the pillar in the temple of Christ's God. Solomon named the pillars Jachin and Boaz (see 2 Chron 3: 17); Jachin means 'he will establish' and Boaz 'in him is strength', and we need to be strengthened and established. In the book of Kings the two pillars are said to be eighteen cubits each, but when you come to Chronicles it says thirtyfive cubits and I think it is because in a day of recovery the pillars are referred to as one: "him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God".

W.A.M. I remember Mr Hibbert telling us that the idea of being established was a horticultural term, that when you put a plant in the soil and the roots get down and take hold of the soil, then you say it is established.

P.v.d.B. We need to be established in the truth. There is great need for being established so that we shall not be moved. There is no uncertainty as to what has come to us, but the enemy would divert us from that by what is related to breakdown and you will not get any help from that side. You need to come to God's side: "Now he that

establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God, who also has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts". The anointing is the spiritual dignity in which you are set up to function in the divine system under the Minister of the sanctuary.

The Spirit is the anointing and He is also the seal. God has sealed us off by giving us the Spirit and He has also given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. He wants us to know what He has given to us - the inheritance - and the Spirit is the earnest of it. You can see in Hebrews how departure would deprive us of the good of the inheritance. The people were strewed in the desert because they did not believe the report of the land and hence they perished in the wilderness. Our establishment is in the land, the realm of divine purpose.

G.H.B. Do you think it is a little like the selection in Acts: "Look out therefore, brethren, from among yourselves seven men, well reported of, full of the Holy Spirit", chap 6: 3? They were those who could be depended upon and be able to minister rightly.

P.v.d.B. I am sure that is right. You might be inclined to think that they would have to be pretty good in dealing with material things but they had to be spiritual persons. One of them was Philip, the evangelist, and another one we know of is Stephen. There was something very distinctive in those persons. It brings up the level on which even the smallest matters are to be cared for in the assembly. And so in the apostle's purpose to come to Corinth there was no lightness. It was not yea and nay; the truth in the way it comes to us is yea in Him. It is not 'yes' today and 'no' tomorrow.

J.R.B. That is that every thought of God is to be carried through in Him. The tendency is, alas, to accommodate the truth in our own level, but things are being carried through for God in Him. God has in mind that we should be brought up to that level: "he that establishes us with you in Christ".

P.v.d.B. Very good. It shows that the substantial answer to the moving back of things in Hebrews is in considering the Apostle and

High Priest; we are to be established in Him. The truth has its own authority and it carries its own credentials.

W.A.M. Would the 'amen' be priestly?

P.v.d.B. It would. There are seven 'amens' in the book of Revelation and there is no uncertainty as to what God is doing.

W.A.M. It is not only that things are affirmed but there is an answer to them.

P.v.d.B. There is; it is very important that there should be an answer to the truth. It is not to be held in a theoretical way, there is to be a practical answer in formation to it. It may be in two or three in a locality but the assembly is the assembly and it is to be respected. We are to have great regard for the assembly.

W.A.M. Paul did here, did he not? He establishes us with you, he says, not 'you with us'.

P.v.d.B. Very good. It shows how he was not independent. Great as his place was as an apostle (little as he was in his own estimation) he was never greater than the assembly, and no servant is greater than the assembly. The assembly is always greater than the servant and therefore we need to have great regard for the assembly and for the saints in their dignity as being anointed; we are not to dissociate ourselves in any way from our brethren.

G.H.B. Even in the Corinthian setting he says "for we are a sweet odour of Christ to God", 2 Cor 2: 15.

P.v.d.B. Yes, that shows how deep things went with the apostle. It was an odour of death in those that perish but there was something working in life and that is what we need to be concerned about today. There is much on the negative side and much has happened in a negative way amongst us, but as was said elsewhere, having a judgment of what is wrong, in itself, is no ground of gathering. We may have a full judgment of what is wrong but that in itself is never a gathering power; it is not establishing. So many that had a judgment of evil in 1970 have departed and have been dispersed. We need more than that. We need the divine pattern as it stands on the divine

side and answer to it and not allow any feelings of our own to deviate from it, because we tend to give way to feelings where principles should govern. The priest considers for God and is governed by the principles that govern God's house, and then he would serve the persons in relation to it.

V.J.C. Are two things linked - God moving on His terms and yet we have to learn something of the priestly grace that goes with them? Perhaps you could say something about that.

P.v.d.B. I think that the Lord is perfectly acquainted with what has been going on amongst us and He has the answer to it, but He does not start off with a rebuke, He takes account of things in a positive way. He would say, What is there that I can credit in each local assembly? "I know thy works and thy labour and thine endurance"; the Lord knows all that and He would credit the saints with anything He can credit them with in any locality. But then there are certain other things that He has to say too: "but I have against thee", and that raises the question of obedience, whether we submit to what the Lord has to say; and we can count on the grace of the Lord Jesus, His priestly grace, to help us to meet things. Much is happening but things are to be done according to divine principles. The Lord knows all that is current, as to that side He is not a stranger in Jerusalem, but He has everything under perfect control and as the High Priest He is trimming the lamps. He has the charge of the lamps and is dealing with assemblies in His own way, but the need for us is to submit to what He says to us.

A.N.T. So is grace the power and unity of gathering?

P.v.d.B. That is important and confirms what has been said earlier, that a judgment of evil, in itself, is no ground for gathering. The paper that Mr Darby wrote, 'Separation from evil, God's principle of unity', was supplemented by "Grace, the power of unity and of gathering", which indicates that you need more than a judgment of what is negative. Well, it is important that we should be diligent "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace". Eph 4: 3. There is no breakdown in the body and no breakdown in the Spirit

either. John's ministry was written when the breakdown had come in, things were broken up, but he gives touches such as in chapter 10 where you get the one flock, one shepherd, and in chapter 17: "that they may be one, as we are one", having that that is never given up. It is unaffected by the breakdown.

VANCOUVER

27 May 1978

Key to initials

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THE KEY OF KNOWLEDGE

A.B.Parker

Luke 11: 52

This verse has been read, not to pronounce woe, but because of the expression, "the key of knowledge". We have here the Lord's own words to the effect that there is a key of knowledge. My concern is that I may be helped of the Lord to say something that will enable the dear brethren to use the key of knowledge in searching the Scriptures. I do not claim to know much about it, but I seek help to impart certain impressions that I have concerning it. Peter, as about to put off his tabernacle, was concerned about leaving something with the saints so that after his departure they should have, at any time, in their power, to call to mind what he had ministered. And in my measure I would like to leave with you some impressions of how to use the key of knowledge.

The Lord Jesus said to the Jews: "Ye search the scriptures, for ye think that in them ye have life eternal and they it is which bear witness concerning me". That, probably, is one of the greatest impressions we can get of how to use the key of knowledge - that the Scriptures testify of Christ. Jesus referred to the Old Testament. Let us find where and how Christ is in mind in the Scriptures.

To proceed on simple lines with our subject, let us consider the Psalms, for instance. We do not get very far before we realise that, generally, the theme of the psalm is contained in the first few verses and the remainder flows out from that. That gives us a key to the understanding of the structure of the psalms. But let us consider more in detail the book from which we have read. How many of us know keys to the understanding of this gospel? It is a very affecting book which sets out, most remarkably, the operations of divine grace, as we know well. It is like the dew of heaven. It took seven years for the dew of heaven to soften down the proud heart and hardened, presumptuous spirit of Nebuchadnezzar (see Dan 5: 20). The grace of God set out in Luke's gospel is like the dew of heaven.

It was written to "most excellent Theophilus" that he may know the certainty of those things in which he had been instructed. When Luke wrote his second book (Acts of the Apostles) he addressed Theophilus simply, O Theophilus. His gospel had wrought something in Theophilus. What indication of spiritual affinity there is in that title, O Theophilus! The 'most excellent' was gone; the dew of heaven had done its work and Theophilus emerges a product of divine grace.

History tells us that Luke probably wrote his gospel at Philippi where, it seems, he remained for some time after Paul and Silas left that locality in Acts 16. No wonder that Philippi is spoken of as being the practical counterpart of the heavenly truth Paul ministered at Ephesus! What an advantage to a locality to be bathed with the dew of heaven! What an influence Luke would have - one who did not think it burdensome to write twenty-four chapters to one man to confirm him in the faith. Would you not like to find a key to the teaching in that book?

In chapter 2 of his gospel Luke tells us that "there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was just and pious, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it was divinely communicated to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and as the parents brought in the child Jesus ... he received him into his arms, and blessed God".

What would be his expectation as he waited to see the Lord's Christ? Would He be a matured Man? What must Simeon's thoughts have been? Whatever expectation there was, he discerned in that little Babe, probably less than two months old, the Lord's Christ. What spiritual perception! What priestly understanding! Where were the priests? No mention whatever is made of them.

Why? Because heaven is engaged with this man Simeon who morally is the priest - not a son of Aaron, not of the tribe of Levi, but nevertheless a true priest. I feel sure that heaven would not allow that Babe to be in hands other than priestly hands. This I believe is

a key to the understanding of one phase of the teaching of Luke's gospel - that the official priesthood which was in decline increased in its awfulness from the unbelief of Zacharias to the corrupt and murderous system which, later, demanded that Jesus be crucified.

But it was being replaced with a moral priesthood which corresponds morally to the priestly features set out so perfectly in Jesus.

What priestliness there was with Simeon! He came in the Spirit into the temple; he received the Babe into his arms; he blessed God. What priestly dignity, and we may say, reverently, what a heave offering! What a spiritual vision opened up as Simeon blessed God! "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation... a light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel". Two dispensations open up to him - the day of grace and the millennium. Do you want vision? If so, be concerned to be priestly; seek to discern in some outwardly small presentation of Jesus the greatness and glory of His Person. Let your heart expand as you speak to God about Him.

This is a key to the understanding of priesthood which is developed in Luke's gospel. Use this key to understand how it develops. Think of Jesus praying. Seven times Luke presents Him as praying. On one occasion the disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray. The priesthood was developing. And as we proceed through the gospel we see the terrible decline in the official priesthood but the development of true priestliness in the disciples, so that at the end of the gospel they are continually in the temple praising and blessing God. But before we leave Luke's gospel let us consider that scene at the cross. Luke tells us that two malefactors were crucified with Jesus, one on the right hand, the other on the left. That is a priestly touch. Mark tells us that the two robbers were crucified, one on *His* right hand and one on *His* left. That is a touch peculiar to Mark for, as a recovered person, everything relates to Christ, the One who did all things well. We are told, in the prophet Jonah, that in Nineveh there were a hundred and twenty thousand persons that could not discern between their right hand and their left hand. But we should know. Matthew tells us, as Luke does, that the malefactors were

one on the right hand and one on the left, but Matthew gives us an administrative touch in his gospel. He is particularly concerned with the right hand, whereas Luke has in mind both the right hand and the left hand, for he tells us that the Lord Jesus laid His *hands* on the woman in Luke 13: 13. That is priestly balance - the right hand of power and the left hand of support; the right hand which does things, but the left hand which supports us while He does them.

But I want to speak about the malefactor who said to his fellow "Dost *thou* too not fear God, thou that art under the same judgment? and we indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done; but this man has done nothing amiss". Think of those words; I believe we can say they were spoken by a converted man.

God had wrought in him; he feared God. That, according to Proverbs 1: 7, is the beginning of knowledge. In a sense it is like the key of knowledge. That man had it; he said "this man has done nothing amiss". Pilate, weak administratively, scourged Jesus and delivered Him up to be crucified. The priests, in their clamour, persuaded him to do it, crying "Crucify, crucify him". Satan, the once covering cherub, whose reason for being created was to cover the divine Presence, was doing all in his power to malign, uncover and destroy that blessed Man. There He was, the true Ark of the covenant, about to take that journey across the Jordan, but where is the priest who, according to Numbers 4: 4-6, will take the veil of separation and the badgers' skins and the cloth of blue and cover the Ark preparatory to that journey in which the waters of Jordan were about to be driven back beyond the city Adam? God had His priest; the malefactor in whom divine grace had wrought comes forward, as it were, with the veil of separation (we indeed justly, but this Man has done nothing amiss); then the badgers' skins, the protective covering (nothing amiss) and then the cloth of blue (thy kingdom). Surely, the kingdom of which the malefactor spoke would be a heavenly kingdom. Thus the Ark is covered and ready to take that stupendous journey which has made the 'dry land' available for every one whose trust is in the finished work of Christ. The ark remained in the bed of Jordan until all the people had passed over.

The priest, his work finished, is received into the holiest, in principle "with me in paradise".

We may now look at another very precious key of knowledge in Luke's gospel which has its very important application to our day, the day of small things. I refer to chapter 2 where the shepherds are referred to, persons who, when most of the world was asleep, were awake, with feelings of care for the flock. To them it was said "ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger". That Babe was the object of heaven's interest, and at the moment of His birth He became a sign, wrapped in swaddlingclothes, expressive of great human weakness, but also of the administration of protection and comfort provided by loving hands. That related to Christ personally but it is set out as a sign.

Does it not speak of Christ formed in the saints, outwardly weak yet protected by mother feelings which characterise the assembly? And where is this found? In the most unlikely place - a manger. Let us not look for outward recognition. Our life is hid with Christ in God.

We are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world. Let us be marked by features which this sign suggests. The Lord has rebuked the aspiration for large meeting rooms. The assembly in the house is better known today than it had been for some time. The thing most precious to heaven (Christ formed in the saints), found in the most unlikely surroundings, is not to be despised.

Let us now turn to Matthew's gospel to see what key we can discover there. Usually we do not use a key to get out of a place but to get into it. And this is what we should have in mind, for the desire is to get more fully into the understanding and expression of the truth. Matthew, as we all would know, deals with administration. It has been called 'the assembly gospel'; therefore we should look for a key to assembly administration. We would acknowledge that there are assembly issues amongst us which, through various means, have assumed abnormal proportions and are much in the minds and prayers of the brethren. How we all long for these matters to be adjusted righteously. I trust that the Lord will help us to get impressions at this time which will be of help to us all, for I feel sure

that it is the desire of all that matters be resolved according to God's mind.

First of all we may look at chapter 1: 18-21: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was thus: His mother, Mary, that is, having been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit". That is the truth of the matter, but this was not fully known to Joseph. He *assumed* that matters were not right, but he was a righteous man and unwilling to expose. The footnote says 'being a man unwilling'. I believe an alternative reading would be that Joseph was a righteous, unwilling-to-expose man. Such persons are qualified to have part in administrative matters. He was unwilling to expose; he pondered over the matter for it *seemed* to him that righteousness demanded that Mary should be put away. But as he pondered, light came in from heaven. An angel *of the Lord* appeared to him in a dream. The truth became fully known and the matter. was resolved. All this, I believe, is the key to right administration, for the next chapter opens with the words, "Now Jesus having been born in Bethlehem of Judaea". Bethlehem is an administrative city out of which the leader was to go forth who would shepherd God's people Israel. But this key can be carried forward to chapter 18 where administration in the assembly is specifically in mind. Persons who understand the bearing of verses 1 to 14 of that chapter become righteous, unwilling to expose people, knowing that it is not the will of your Father who is in the heavens that one of these little ones should perish. Every means is taken not needlessly to expose, to use every means to save, and finally to use the assembly to preserve, if possible, the erring persons.

But let us follow the lead given in the key and consider what Bethlehem administration implies. Mr Taylor said much about the importance of the numeral twelve in administrative matters, that it suggests the manipulative operation of love. It was when Jacob was a little way from Ephrath, or Bethlehem, that Benjamin, his twelfth son, was born. When Joseph was born Rachel said "Jehovah will add to me another son". We have been taught that Joseph represents Christ objectively whereas Benjamin represents Christ

formed subjectively in the saints. When Joseph was getting the brethren right he insisted that the matter could not be settled unless Benjamin was brought down to Egypt. There must be a subjective state in the saints which is equivalent to the objective standing "in Christ". The birth of Benjamin caused the death of Rachel, showing that nature must be displaced. She called him son of my sorrow but Benjamin means son of my right hand. The right hand is the administrative hand. Jacob could now proceed to Bethlehem.

Bethlehem administration is set forth in the book of Ruth when a very difficult matter had to be resolved. Boaz took it to the gate. In principle he took it to the care meeting. He recognised the numeral twelve. He told the near kinsman to sit down; then he told ten of the elders to sit down; thus there were eleven present and he made the twelfth. The case before them was that of a Moabitess, a case which the lawyers could have made very difficult, based on Deuteronomy 23: 3, but Ruth was already in the family. It was a love matter; the numeral twelve was working. The near kinsman was prepared to say what he could not do and Boaz was ready, not only to redeem, but to purchase Ruth. It all led to the great thought of worship, Obed, which should be the great result of right administration.

Many years later, when the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem, David longed for a drink of water from the well that was in the gate of Bethlehem. Think of the kind of administration which yields perpetual freshness! David longed for a taste of that kind of refreshment. He longed to establish it for all Israel but, as rejected, he longed for an anticipative taste of it. Three mighties broke through the Philistine ranks and drew water from the well and brought it to David. However David would not drink it but poured it out to Jehovah, saying "is it not the blood of the men that went at the risk of their lives?". How the Lord appreciates such preparedness to sacrifice in order that there may be the refreshment of right administration! But to get back to Matthew, there was established in chapter 18 an administrative principle which I believe we see carried out later on by the Lord Jesus in His dealings with Peter: "If thy

brother sin against thee, go, reprove him between thee and him alone. If he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother". Peter's failure in chapter 26 came home to him when the cock crew, and he went out and wept bitterly. What he must have gone through during the time that Jesus was before the governor, and on the cross, and in the grave, would be indescribable - the hopelessness of being unable to speak to Jesus, the thought that he never again would see Him on earth; but because Jesus had prayed for him that his faith would not fail he came through. He did not take his life like Judas did. But his sorrow must have been indescribable. One of the first things that Jesus did on the day of His arising was to appear to Simon. Jesus went to see Peter alone. What did He say to him? I do not think anyone knows what Jesus said to Peter at that time. He 'gained' Peter. We sometimes confuse this with John 21, but there the Lord clears the matter of what Peter said in the presence of the disciples in chapter 26: 33: "If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended". That was said before all, and in John 21 it is adjusted before his fellow disciples; "Lovest thou me more than these?" How perfect and effective is right administration!

I believe it is right to say that administration in matters involving moral issues is intended to maintain righteousness, surely, but grace is reigning through righteousness, and the protection, preservation and revival of the work of God in the saints should be its aim.

According to Matthew 18 only those who have been converted and have become as little children can enter into the kingdom of the heavens, and that would include having part in assembly administration. It is understood that there may be extreme cases such as the man in 1 Corinthians 5 with whom there was no repentance and whose state, "being such", the evil could only be separated from him by the extreme action of Satan. This is allowed for in verse 13 of Matthew 18 in that the man may not find the straying sheep, and also in verse 17 where the assembly must act judicially because it is not heard. But generally it is to be supposed that every effort will be made to fill out the will of our Father who is in the heavens that not one of the "little ones" may perish. Assembly

actions should be such that they can be ratified in heaven, which means, I believe, that they are ratified by the Father.

May we be set for the preservation of the work of God in the saints, and may we understand better the use of the key of knowledge.

Substance of an address at

COUNCIL BLUFFS

14 October 1978

DIVISIONS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

S.McCallum

John 7: 43, 44; 9; 13-16; 10: 16-19

It is very striking how divisions are referred to in John's gospel.

There are three divisions referred to in the passages which I have read. We do not find this in the synoptic gospels. John's gospel is generally thought of as bearing on these last days, and we know, dear brethren, that we have not been wanting in divisions - a very solemn matter! I want to point out where these three divisions lie. It is very striking when you consider contextually what they refer to.

The first stands related to the Lord and the wonderful character of His speaking and what He is saying; as the officers say, "Never man spoke thus, as this man speaks" (v 46). And what is He speaking about? What has He been speaking about in the conflict? He has been speaking about the Spirit, as we notice in verses 37-39; "this he said concerning the Spirit, which they that believed on him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified". Now this is very significant, especially as bearing on the time we are in, that the division among the Jews was in relation to the way the Lord spoke and was speaking: "Never man spoke thus, as this man speaks". I think we should see how this division took place. It says "There was a division therefore in the crowd on account of him". His Person is referred to and where He

comes from, and there is a challenge as to where He came from.

These are two things that come in here: the great thought of the Spirit as flowing out of the belly of the believer as rivers of living water, and then where Christ came from.

We shall see, if we think back and think things over, and think of things currently, how the enemy uses this to bring about a divided state. That is what the enemy is after all the time. If he can he will divide us again and divide us again and divide us again. But the only thing that will hold us is that which he seeks to divide us about - the importance of the Spirit in the Christian dispensation. Mr Raven referred to this chapter as introducing the new dispensation, and what characterises the new dispensation is the presence and power of the Spirit. Oh! let us value the Spirit more and more. Let us see what it is to have the Spirit and to make use of the Spirit and to get the gain of the Spirit in this character in which He is presented, and be a resource of power and refreshment to all around us. Let us see the importance of the Spirit as spoken of by Christ, and also the importance of some saying "This is the Christ" and the challenge to that: "does then the Christ come out of Galilee?" (v 41).

How the enemy works on the precious truths as to the Person, presence and power of the Spirit as given by Christ, and as to the Person of Christ. It says "there was a division therefore in the crowd on account of him"; that is, on account of Christ. How sorrowful to see a state of things that these persons represent; they are so indefinite and so twisted in their knowledge of the truth. We want to see the importance of not being caught up in a division like this and stand by what is proper to the Spirit and to what our attention has been drawn to in relation to the last feature of recovery which meant so much to us - speaking to the Spirit. I believe that what has come into the present hour is a definite move of the enemy to challenge *that* feature of the truth which has been recovered and to spoil it for the gain of the saints.

Now the next scripture I read is a great challenge to us. If ever a chapter regales our spirits, this one should. Here was a man who was able to stand his ground against the greatest forces of

opposition, the religious mind of the Pharisees. It says "They bring him who was before blind to the Pharisees. Now it was sabbath when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. The Pharisees therefore also again asked him how he received his sight. And he said to them, He put mud upon mine eyes, and I washed, and I see.

Some of the Pharisees therefore said, This man is not of God, for he does not keep the sabbath. Others said, How can a sinful man perform such signs? And there was a division among them". Think of persons getting divided over Christ in this light as bringing in healing in the way of sight for a blind man. And the man was such an expression of the works of God that they could not put him down; they could not overthrow what he testified to, and the very presence of the man occasioned this division. The work of God was so virile in the man, and they were so upset because they could not overturn or spoil the effect of Christ's service to the man, that it says "there was a division among them". I think we want to know some of these things in our meetings and appreciate the presence and power of the Spirit, and also Christ's Person and what we have here, the works of God in a man. It is more than the enemy can stand, and he creates divisions, if he can by any means overthrow the testimony - something he will never be able to do. Let us take comfort and courage in that, that the truth and testimony are going through whatever the devil may do. The great thing is that we should appreciate the works of God in a man, in ourselves, and see how it expresses itself in standing against the tide of all arguments that the Pharisees would bring forward even to discredit Christ.

Now the next division is occasioned by the Lord's word as to the flock and as to the authority He has from the Father. You notice that, in speaking of His life, He says "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again. I have received this commandment of my Father. There was a division again among the Jews on account of these words". He had been speaking earlier of the "other sheep which are not of this fold: those also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd". We know

how the enemy has assailed this from the outset, how he assailed it in 1848 and around that time, the one flock and one Shepherd, by Bethesda principles; and there has been a lot of Bethesda principles that have really assailed the truth of the one flock, one Shepherd.

That is the way the recovery began, the one Head in heaven and one body on earth, and the enemy has been out to destroy that on every hand, and also the very fact of the Lord speaking of authority to lay down His life and authority to take it again. He was a man who moved under the authority He received from the Father. We have noticed the attempt there has been on every hand to disregard authority and to think we have the privilege to do as we like. How sad that is! So, as the Lord is speaking these glorious words in this chapter as to the sheep that hear His voice and follow Him (they will not follow a stranger) I have to look into my heart and see if I am following. As the Lord is indicating here, what element is there that has disturbed my link with Christ as the true Shepherd and formed it with the stranger? What a solemn thing that is, to follow the stranger! It says "there was a division again among the Jews on account of these words".

Well, it was just these thoughts that are peculiar to this gospel, the truth as asserted by John, division among the Jews; we want, dear brethren, to be free from this dividing character of things and appreciate the Spirit, appreciate Christ, follow Him and enjoy the wonderful characteristics of the flock, the sheep who hear His voice and follow Him.

GLASGOW

2 November 1972

THE CHILDREN'S PLAY-TIME

The Creator has evidently given to the young ones of some of His creatures the desire to show their happiness by being playful. It is a common sight in Springtime to see the lambs and calves capering about. Even the skipping of rams, older members of the flock, is referred to in Scripture. Some sea-creatures also, such as dolphins, are said by deep-sea sailors to follow the ships playfully for long periods. I have even seen a killer whale in captivity sporting with apparent enjoyment in the water although it must be said that he had the prospect of a treat to look forward to at the end of the time!

One of the Prophets spoke of the time when God will give such prolonged peace and rest in Jerusalem that the boys and girls will be playing without danger in the streets of the city. Alongside them will be their grandfathers and grandmothers and even their great grandparents sitting staff in hand because they are so old. Probably the children will play the same kind of imitation games that the older folk played in their youth. Whether 'weddings and funerals' will be one of the games we cannot say, since funerals will not be common during the thousand years of the reign of the Lord Jesus.

This game was, however, played in the market-places in the days when Jesus was here on the earth. Little did the children at that time realise who it was that was watching them and noticing that sometimes they did not play fairly. When the pipes were sounded merrily they should have danced and when the music was mournful they should have cried and looked sad. But they did not always keep the rules but did the opposite instead, and the Teacher gave a lesson from what He observed with the children. The grown-ups too were not always answering as they should to God's call to them.

John the baptist had come and some religious persons thought him so severe that he must be a wicked man. But really he was the forerunner of Jesus, calling upon persons to repent. When the Saviour Himself came they refused Him and complained because He was a friend of sinners. But the sinners did not complain or refuse Him; they loved Him. Do you?

J.C.Evershed