

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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DIVINE LEADING

Luke 24: 36-53; Acts 1: 10 -14

B.M.D. Maybe we could enquire a little as to how the Lord leads - "he led them out as far as Bethany". He leads them, whereas after He is taken up there seems a pointer to the leading of the Spirit in that it says they "returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the mount of Olives". While the Spirit had not yet come (it was prior to Pentecost), there is an indication that in the absence of the Lord there is to be another kind of leading, that of the Spirit. I wondered if there could be something we could get help about in that those He leads are an adjusted company, or adjusted persons, and He leads them to the place to which He is very attached and that He loves - Bethany. It seems to point to something now, that the Lord would have that which He loves. He often resorted there, and the persons were each the subject of His own ministration and service, resulting in a place where love was at home, because He was at home there. From that point it says "he blessed them. And... was separated from them and was carried up into heaven". It just seems to me, dear brethren, in the remarkable time in which we are at the end, that we need to get more and more accustomed to spiritual change.

The imminence and the actuality of things is at our doors. How the Lord comes and is among us - a constant experience - is a kind of mystery and requires exercise to discern it; and when He is amongst us it seems that He leads; in His absence it would seem that the Spirit leads, and He leads to Christ.

E.C.B. Has the Lord operated in Luke 24 so that He has already become the focus of their attention before He leads them out? He is recognised, and perhaps handled, and fed.

B.M.D. It would seem that way, that His own service had endeared Himself to them, so that He becomes the centre. He comes into the midst; they provided it and it belongs to no other than Him. So in each of our assemblings in the light of the assembly, the midst is for no other than Jesus. Do we not need to think constantly of what His

presence among us means and bring it to the immediacy of this meeting and every meeting, and see what potential for experience can enter into an assembly occasion?

A.J.E.W. In referring to Bethany, as you do, is it in mind that the scene is by no means abandoned but rather that a spot is marked off where the presence of Jesus was a well-known feature, where He could secure, so to say, a nucleus which would later be linked on through the Spirit with Himself on high?

B.M.D. It seems almost like an out-of-the-world position that leads into the enjoyment of eternal life. I have sometimes wondered whether the Lord may yet have something to say to us as to eternal life. I do not know whether you would agree, but it is really an out-of-the-world condition. It is not that things have always been that way, because each of the persons loved by Him was the peculiar subject of His service. Think of Martha and all of them; think of what Lazarus went through, leading to a deathless scene out of the world; it is where He often resorted and it is surely what we would love to furnish.

W.J.W. So that in John's gospel it says "There therefore they made him a supper", chap 12: 1. He became the centre of attraction for them.

B.M.D. That is good. So in every meeting we think of His glory, do we not? This is not the Lord's supper. That is what He furnishes because in His love for us He knew what it would mean for His lovers to be left in this world where He died. He has furnished that; but there is something we can furnish, as they did at Bethany.

D.A.B. The two men in white clothing say that the Lord would come "in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven".

While that has a particular bearing in relation to the appearing, do you think that there is some suggestion of what the Lord went up from in that scene of things in Bethany, and which He would look to find among the saints as He comes amongst us according to His promise?

B.M.D. That is just what is in mind. So how frequently and carefully they would go over the detail of how He was received up, how He was carried up, how He went up. There would not be one detail that would not be constantly reviewed. And do we not need to do the same? Because His coming is in like manner. Do you not think it is to quicken desire and affection for Him to come?

D.A.B. He says as to His coming that we look for: "When the Son of man comes, shall he indeed find faith on the earth?", Luke 18: 8.

Would you also raise the question with us - would He find what Bethany represents when He comes amongst us?

B.M.D. Surely; and will He find faith on the earth? It is now faith. It was said in the Acts: "why do ye stand looking into heaven?". There was really a change from sight, from when they had actually seen the Lord and been with Him. Now it was a question of faith. And we are still in this remarkable - I suppose the greatest of the - dispensations, the time of faith and the Spirit.

E.C.B. It was suggested recently in ministry near here that in John 21, where the Lord says "Children, have ye anything to eat?", He was considering for them and He provided a meal for them. In Luke 24, "Have ye anything here to eat?" it is a question of considering for Him. "And they gave him... and he... ate before them". Do you think that that should be in all occasions, that we are specifically considering for Him?

B.M.D. I do; I think every assembling in the light of the truth should minister for no other but Him. Therefore we think firstly of His glory and He will surely not fail to furnish a portion for each. John 21 shows us the skill with which He meets a somewhat difficult situation. We could learn the skill from Him, how to meet things positively. Maybe the mountains might not look so big, do you think?

E.C.B. Yes I do. But it seems to me that the suggestion both in Luke and in John is that the Lord is looking for something - "Give me to drink", He says in John 4: 7. And "Have ye anything to eat?" - as if He really tests us as to whether we can provide something for Him,

because we are apt to become, if I could use the word, selfish in our occasions.

B.M.D. I would have to agree with that. The wonderful thing is that He accepts what they furnish. He came into their midst. It is the midst they provided and it was somewhat abnormal. There was a certain element of confusion which He has to rebuke, but the skill with which He does it should affect us.

B.W.W. I was thinking of the Lord's words in anticipation of the Spirit's coming: "He shall glorify me", John 16: 14. Would that fit into what you suggested in Acts 1 and also into our own occasions?

B.M.D. That very much helps. So the Spirit of God is among us now, God is here in the Spirit, the divine presence is in this meeting. It is not too much to say that. And it is His mind to glorify Christ, and then to bring by way of formation in us an answer in responsive affection. That would be what answers to Bethany. Does it not become attractive?

B.W.W. Yes, because it is what the Lord is looking for, and the time in which it can be provided may be quite short.

B.M.D. I believe what you say is so and it should quicken our desire to be more fully committed to the Spirit. He has not failed in His mission despite the shameful breakdown as to which we hang our heads and will do so publicly until the appearing, until He comes. But inwardly and secretly the divine system has not broken down.

C.R.B. What are we to understand by His showing them His hands and His feet?

B.M.D. We have been over this probably many times, but what would be in it now for us, His hands and His feet? "Handle me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see me having". It seems to me that the Lord would get us more and more acquainted with the spiritual side of things, to get us away from the material, and especially earthliness. It is all around us; you cannot come along the streets but that there it is face to face. But are we ready for the

spiritual change? If we are here at the rapture, it is the Spirit who will have to do directly with our mortal bodies.

C.R.B. Would one of the gains of the gospel of Luke be to bring us into a deeper understanding of how He does things? His hands would involve not just that He does things but how He does them, and would His feet be connected with the leading that you were referring to?

B.M.D. I think so. I thought the feet would be a pointer to how the Lord leads. In the assembly the Lord leads, does He not? At the Supper He comes to us, and as He is amongst us it is the Lord who leads. But then His hands would show us how He did things. "Learn from me" (Matt 11: 29), He says.

C.R.B. The Spirit helps us to discern His leading, but the Lord leads.

B.M.D. It is a very delicate matter. Do you not think we would look forward to any assembly occasion as an experience: what is going to happen in this meeting? In a way we cannot anticipate it, but we come in a spirit of expectation. For me it is wonderful to sit with you beloved brethren here because we are very small in number in Australasia, but it is the same thing.

H.A.H. Would "behold my hands and my feet" be to assure them and perhaps link with the way they had known Him before? But then it goes on to say "he shewed them his hands and his feet". Would that be leading them into what is spiritual and a new condition?

B.M.D. I think so, and to impress them with a substantial situation. It is not mystical; it is a risen Man and He is in life, and if our experience is not in life, what is it?

E.C.B. It is of some interest that in the end of Psalm 78 it says of David that he "led them by the skilfulness of his hands" (v 72). We might not have expected the reference to the hands there. Does it imply that in the process of His leading the Lord is forming something?

B.M.D. That strengthens what our brother is saying as to the hands. I think it is how He does things. And we know the skill of David's

hands; in fact, his whole bearing, whether in meeting the lion and the bear, or the uncircumcised Philistine, involved the skilfulness of his hands. Also, as to the harp, it says that he "played with his hand", 1 Sam 16: 23. David was the sweet psalmist of Israel. His leading was constructive.

E.P. Does the fact of the Lord leading indicate on our side that we are amenable to His leading? And might it even be that, though we may have some firm thoughts about the truth, He might lead us a bit further on?

B.M.D. Well, He would have gone further, earlier in this chapter, when He went with those two to Emmaus. It may be a question how far we are prepared to go, and who could say what the limit is? "The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God", 1 Cor 2: 10.

E.P. In this particular case it was from Jerusalem to somewhere else, and that somewhere else was Bethany, was it not?

B.M.D. Yes. But the skill of His hands is a very interesting reference, that He is lifting them out of perplexity; "Why are ye troubled? and why are thoughts rising in your hearts?"; He is lifting them out of that and He proclaims peace to them. You would have a restful atmosphere, with composure and affection. Bethany is affection, is it not? He loved each of them and they loved Him unquestionably.

A.J.E.W. Would His hands suggest activity under perfect control? Is that not needed in regard of spiritual things, that the sense of rush and of hasty activity in the scene of things around us is not to disturb us from what is spiritually composed and in accord with the peace and joy which belong to Him?

B.M.D. Well, it cannot be too easy in these large cities. The turmoil and the way men live, in a way detract from assembly life. I think we should not let ourselves get accustomed to the way of life of the world. In fact many things we see should shock us every time we see them.

C.B. I was thinking of the hymn (No.199):

"But in Thy manhood's glorious state
Our thankful hearts rejoice".

Is there something of that in it?

B.M.D. There surely would be. That is the humanity we love, is it not? That is the humanity that is going through and in which we are being formed, and it is in the strength of that that we can stand against the tide.

C.B. He was a real Man because He ate before them.

B.M.D. Yes, yet in resurrection; He was not yet glorified, He was in a body of resurrection. It is wonderful to contemplate. You can think of how the beloved disciples would have constantly gone over the detail given in this chapter and what we have in the other gospels. And so should we, particularly now.

C.B. Little wonder that they stood there gazing; but activity is required, is it not?

B.M.D. Yes. Why do you think He enquired if they had anything to eat?

C.B. Well, it is a dignified favour, is it not, to be able to respond to the divine needs in that way? He, supplies us with much, but to reciprocate is a very high standard, is it not?

B.M.D. They would be very searched by His question. What did they have? They would feel humbled that they were not ready for His coming among them, for His standing in their midst. They would say, Why were we troubled? why did thoughts arise in our hearts? No one else may know them, but God knows them and I know them.

And often in the presence of greatest privilege all kinds of thoughts flood in. I do not know whether you find it that way but I do. And we need His service to get free of it so that we come His way. So what is there for Him to participate in? They might have said afterwards, It was not much, it was only part of a fish and part of a honeycomb. It was not much, but He accepted it. It is wonderful grace in keeping with this gospel.

P.S.W. That He took it would be like the song: "I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk", Song of Sol 5: 1. It is what is for Him.

B.M.D. Yes, He does not complain. We have a wonderful Master, have we not? He just accepts what love is prepared to provide. On our side we would love it to be a little richer, a little sweeter, a little more mature maybe. But you can see His entering feelingly and affectionately, particularly into the mutual side suggested in the honeycomb. I believe it is a feature that is emerging more and more in this remarkable time we are in, the mutuality of love among ourselves. Would you agree?

P.S.W. The two that returned would have found that this was there, so that it was available when the Lord came in. So that as we return we rejoice to find the spirit of the honeycomb working amongst the brethren.

B.M.D. They would have entered into it, in fact they would have added to the honeycomb, I suppose: "they related what had happened". They had gone a sabbath day's journey; it appears they returned in an hour. They must have broken all records! Love will do that. And it is just that quality of devotion the Lord is looking for.

R.T. There would be a touch of what He says to the overcomer; "I will... sup with him, and he with me", Rev 3: 20.

B.M.D. Yes, I think so. It would be an appeal to the overcomer; it is mutuality both ways.

J.C.E. Do you think there would be a word to them in that the Lord, in a way, raised the point as to what they were going to feed on? It seems to lead to His disclosures as to all that there was of Himself. I wondered if His asking them that question, and His feeding, set them at rest. Then whether He thought, well, there is something to be sustained; and this is the way in which it will be sustained, by feeding on Him.

B.M.D. That is very helpful. You are thinking of the way He opened up things to them: "all that is written concerning me in the law of Moses and prophets and psalms". What a tremendous scope of things was opened up! It could never be exhausted, never will be.

J.C.E. And He puts the promise of the Father in the present tense: "I send". It was very prominent in His mind, although in actual fact they had to wait for the Spirit, and wait for the power from on high.

B.M.D. Yes, I have no doubt He was anticipating that. Then when it says "Then he opened their understanding", that was a very direct act. It was an act of Himself; in a way the glory of His person shone in the act. He opened their understanding, but no doubt it anticipated the incoming of the Spirit.

A.J.E.W. Do these pointed references to scripture help us in the sense that an immense amount of detail would enter into the scriptures to which the Lord refers in a general sense but that His remarks bring everything into focus upon Himself? The general bearing of these scriptures, apart from the detail, seems to be what is in the Lord's mind. Everything is pointing forward to Him and what He would introduce. Do we learn things that way?

B.M.D. I am sure that is very helpful. So Moses would represent the principles set out in authority. What you had here in the meetings in April, to persevere in the apostles' doctrine, would be like that. We do not have apostles now but we have their doctrine. Then the prophets would bring in the current application of the word. It is so essential that what has been laid down is maintained among us in the power of life, leading, of course, into the psalms of experience.

G.A.P. Would the understanding of the Scriptures enable us to provide just what suits the Lord's taste?

B.M.D. I am sure; they are His inspired word. He is the Word. How close it is! It is not just something merely written, if you will understand me, it is so near, it is the Person, He is the Word. This gospel begins with "attendants on the Word", chap 1: 2.

C.R.B. It is really an opening up of what He says, "it is I myself". In an occasion of enquiry in the temple we would seek to get a real experience of the Lord leading. We believe that He should, but it tests us as to whether we really do discern it. But if we do, apart from the detail, the impression left upon the saints would be that it was Jesus Himself, would it not?

B.M.D. Very affecting: "it is I myself". How that would quicken them, alert them! There would not be one that was not ready for movement. "I myself". How would we face the corporeal appearing? What would we do?

C.R.B. It would not be really very different from what we experience in the Spirit, would it?

B.M.D. That is exactly what I am trying to get at. We need to accustom ourselves to what is spiritual, because the actual change is near. If it happened, what would we do? Would we be like this, or would we prostrate ourselves at His feet?

E.C.M. It says "he presented himself living, after he had suffered". During the forty days it was the same Jesus but in another condition.

B.M.D. That is right. So He is looking on to the incoming of the Spirit, although this, of course, is in the next chapter. But He is instructing them. Why did He stay forty days? They had to learn Him in another way, in resurrection. Then to Mary He said, Do not touch me, I am not yet ascended. The whole centre of Christianity is being transferred from earth to heaven. There is only one Leader; it is Christ up there. Down here, there are leaders, and we need to respect them and remember them. Mr Darby never accepted a distinctive place. He had it, but it was on moral grounds. What I find searches me very much is, how did the clerical idea interweave itself again, not in outward terms but surreptitiously? How did it do it? Is that understandable?

E.C.M. Yes, it is very helpful. I was thinking of the forty days; that wonderful period would be a test to their spirituality. It was an out-of-

the-world condition of things, and is not that where we come into the gain or enjoyment of eternal life?

B.M.D. That is exactly what we need to get into, if we can. These persons named as in the upper room: could you have interested them in the things going on in Jerusalem? Their whole interest was centred on the Man they had seen going up. So here they do not come back to the temple, as we get in Luke, which had not then been formally set aside; they come back to the upper chamber. Why is that?

E.C.M. I have wondered why the change. It would appear here in the Acts that the Lord went up from the mount of Olives. I wondered whether there was some connection with the Spirit in that.

B.M.D. When the Lord was here, everything was here. When He was taken up, He is our Head up there and the Spirit here. In a way it is an advantageous position. He said, It is better that I should go away, you should rejoice that I go to the Father. It is a better position, the Head in heaven and the Spirit here.

T.J.B. Is it interesting to refer in this connection to Acts 13? It is as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting that the Spirit said "Separate me now Barnabas and Saul" (v.2). I wondered if there was something of what Bethany would suggest in that, ministering to the Lord.

B.M.D. I believe there were Bethany conditions in that local meeting, the way those beloved brethren were set together, and Paul would be so thankful to be the last on the list, would he not? He would bring out the mutual side of how love works, and the Spirit evidently was free to speak. It would have been through someone, I suppose, because He is not here corporeally, and yet it was clear that what was said was by the Spirit.

C.R.B. What conclusion have you arrived at as to your own question as to how clericalism came in again?

B.M.D. I am still pondering it, but let us be resolved that it does not happen again.

C.R.B. I think it is a very important question, because we are always subject to the danger of it.

E.C.B. Has it to do with our recognition of the place that Christ Himself has, that as soon as His place is in any way qualified, not to say lost, something else will take its place?

B.M.D. And we drop back into a formality that leads just to a legal position which leads to corruption. I did not want to speak of these things, but let us learn the lessons of the conflicts and see that there is a living order of things proceeding to which you could not attach breakdown. I am the breakdown, we are the breakdown, but there is no breakdown in what comes from the right hand of God.

E.C.B. So that if we speak of the Spirit leading, we always keep in our mind His preferred service, that is to glorify Christ.

B.M.D. I believe so.

R.T. If the aspect of the assembly as being heavenly in origin and character was remaining with us, only Christ could be the Leader, could He not? No earthly man could be the leader.

B.M.D. I think we need to be clear as to that.

D.A.B. So as soon as rights are claimed for any other person in the assembly than the Lord, the way is beginning to be open to what is clerical, is it not? Is it not the place where He is sovereign and our place one of subjection to His own dominance in that place?

B.M.D. So most of us had to come to it that the point of departure really was that I got away from Christ. Why did I not know it?

D.A.B. Do you think that the leadership of the Lord and of the Spirit can be discerned by the objective that is set out in what is being said and in the ministry, that they have in view the conducting of the saints into this order of things, and if the tendency was to divert them or lead them elsewhere, the character of that could be discerned if we were following the Lord.

B.M.D. Oh, I think so. I think it gives us our bond morally. Then what is it? There is no ecclesiastical position as such. What is the

bond that holds us? Was it not said recently, maybe it is in one of the books, that there is no stronger bond between human hearts than our attachment to Christ.

E.C.B. Mr Darby said, 'Absolute consecration to Jesus is the strongest bond between human hearts', (Synopsis Vol.3, p.402).

B.M.D. Now that is what our brother is saying and it is something we need to get firmly in our affections, that the position as we see it today is on a moral basis, so that in a way I am responsible to walk with any Christian anywhere who is walking in the truth. Is that too broad?

D.A.B. I do not think it is. Is it a question in all these things of being subject to the Lord? That believer is His just as much as the assembly is His: is that what you are thinking?

B.M.D. If we are less broad than that we become sectarian. That is how I see it. I am responsible to walk with any Christian anywhere who in practice is walking in the truth.

J.C.E. Clericalism would be quite a different thing from a spiritual lead. I was thinking of what emerged in Peter here, that he stood up amongst them and spoke of the scriptures that the Holy Spirit had spoken before. He gave a lead in this matter and we are very thankful for that, are we not?

B.M.D. It was seen early in the recovery, that these things were much more prominently before the brethren. From the tract that Mr Darby wrote (actually I read it on the plane coming over and it arrested me) the danger must have been very prominent at that time. That is what raised the question in my mind, how was it that the enemy was able again to interweave that principle which dispensationally, as he said, is a sin against the Spirit? How the Spirit must have felt being grieved and quenched by the allowance of what was official!

E.C.B. Do you think we also have had exposed to us the possibility of making position a substitute for Christ? And many of our brethren are held by that very thing.

B.M.D. So we have to be careful about a position or a Christian circle. Did not Mr Raven say, Where is it? We can only in humility walk in the light of the truth of the assembly; and let us do it. But to claim it, even using 'we' and 'us', you have just to know what you mean.

E.C.B. Mr Darby somewhere in his letters eventually says, I come back to my old saying, Feet in the narrow path and heart as wide as God's.

B.M.D. Yes, that is fine.

E.P. Do you think that the sign of a personal sense of responsibility as assembling is that we come to bring something? I think it was Mr Raven who said that if we did anything other than that, all we would need would be a clergyman and he would supply everything. But we come to bring something. That would apply to brothers and sisters alike, do you think?

B.M.D. Yes. It brings up what a wonderful vessel that the body of Christ is and it would be normal that it operates in a meeting like this, in every meeting, that we should have some experience of the organism, do you think?

E.P. I do think that. And I have always been impressed, and I want to be increasingly impressed, that responsibility does not rest with a few.

B.M.D. No, it is upon each of us.

E.P. I remember it being said once to a young brother that the acceptance of responsibility is the way to spiritual prosperity.

B.M.D. Yes, very fine. Well, these persons that are mentioned here - their names are given - would be persons of spiritual quality, merging into a vessel that was soon to be formed by the actual coming of the Spirit. Here were the personnel, the direct product of the Lord's own hands, the skill of His own hands; here they were, above the level of Jerusalem which was cut off from them because of the cross. And so is the world from us if we love Him. Here they

are merging perfectly in affection for Him, to provide what answers to His heart.

E.C.B. Had you any further impression as to what the Lord might yet help us in as to eternal life? I was thinking of what you said as to our going through the world and how much in it should really be repulsive to us. But the Lord leads the sheep "and I give them life eternal" (John 10: 28), as if there is another sphere than the world in which we are and it makes it much more present, does it not?

B.M.D. I think it makes it very present. I do not know that I could say anything; I would like to think about it and pray about it, and let us see that the experience of it more and more comes into our assemblings. I just feel that the Spirit would belonging to lead us more and more, as we approach the close of the dispensation, into a realm of things as apart from all else, and there provide an answer to the love of Christ.

D.J.H. In Luke 24 it does not say He led them to Bethany but "he led them out as far as", as though there was One who would be leading them farther. Is that what you had in mind?

B.M.D. Yes exactly. So it leaves room for us to come in. It is an appeal, is it not?

D.J.H. Yes. As to responsibility that was referred to, the emphatic 'ye', "ye are witnesses", puts responsibility on us, does it not, as to what we can give account of as to these experiences and carry them forward?

B.M.D. We should feel the sense of responsibility, particularly in the face of what has happened. It has fallen on the shoulders of a few; are we equal now to furnish what is answering to full responsibility as to the assembly? He can clothe the whole with what may be found in the twos and threes, and no doubt He will do it.

C.R.B. Spiritually these persons did not leave the upper chamber, did they? They stayed there. Is that somewhat of an answer to what should be our normal experience, to live in the upper chamber?

B.M.D. You regulate your life around the assembly - your home, your business, everything is regulated by the precious heavenly light that divine grace has given to us.

C.R.B. It is related very closely to the mount of Olives, is it not? It is not a long way off; so that it is intended to enter into the moral fibre of everything we do and where we go, and whatever we are linked with; it is to be coloured by both the mount of Olives and the upper chamber, is it not?

B.M.D. Yes. So as you read through these names you get the impression of how near these persons would have been to each other, and their bond was in the One they had seen taken up. I do not think the position is any different today; do you?

C.R.B. It cannot be, because divine Persons have not changed.

W.J.W. In the beginning of the gospel they sought Jesus among the company, the friends and relations, but they had to go back to Jerusalem because He was there. Do you think that is a word for us as to keeping our links with Christ in a responsible way rather than going along with a crowd, just linking on with a system? It is Jesus Himself that is to lead and govern all the time.

B.M.D. We would need to value one another, we are not left to walk alone. According to John it could be that the position vitally would be in one, but there will be a collective position in the light of what is universal maintained at the end. But maybe I am not answering your question.

W.J.W. I was getting back to the thought that links in a responsible way are to be maintained as to where the Lord is. He has to have the central place, rather than any system of teaching about Him or anything that may come in on a social line; there is nothing that can replace the Person Himself.

B.M.D. No doubt Mary the mother of Jesus mentioned here, the last name mentioned, would have got the full gain of what happened in Luke that you refer to. "Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?", Luke 2: 49. And then He went down and

was subject to them. What that beloved sister would have learned! She knew that humanity from a babe. What wealth she would furnish in this out-of-the-world company in the upper chamber! And what you say would enter vitally into this side, that He was about His Father's business.

E.C.B. In regard to what was said about this company and their spiritually not having left the upper room, is there a suggestion for us as to lingering in the atmosphere of what unfolds after the Supper?

B.M.D. I believe that. It is so easy to lose it and get snatched away. If the experience is more real to us we will linger there. You are loath to have it interrupted.

LONDON

15 July 1981

Key to initials

(all local unless otherwise stated)

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COMMUNICATIONS

Richard Hesterman

1 Corinthians 2: 13 (from "not in words"); John 11: 4,5, 27-29, 33-35; 40;

Philippians 2: 1-4

The thought of how spiritual means enter into communication has been impressed upon one's mind lately. We can see how Satan is set against the saints communicating on right lines, particularly on a spiritual level. I think it would come home to us in a very definite way through the recent strikes by the postal service and the controllers' unions, how Satan would desire to use various powers to hamper right communications between the saints. But one is not leaning heavily upon that. One is thinking of the great need at the present time that the saints should all think one thing. We have been indeed gifted and also set up and provided with the spiritual means by which God desires that the saints should grow and learn and come up to His full thoughts for us.

We can see in Philippians that God has an objective for the saints primarily. But there is an objective too to be reached among men. We can see the spiritual means which God applied in relation to meeting man where he was. Think of God coming down in the cool of the day in Genesis 3, meeting man on His own terms, as it were, in favourable conditions. Think too of the Lord Jesus moving about in His own meekness and lowliness, coming within the range of man, meeting their hopeless conditions. But when we have to do with the assembly we have to do with spiritual things. We can learn from John's gospel because it is through a spiritual line of things that the Lord moves and on which He communicates with His own.

One read in Corinthians primarily to bring out one's desire, akin to Paul's own desire, that, while there were various divisions among the saints in Corinth - each party had its own leader, or one naturally esteemed, or set up as an object - Paul very early in the epistle sets this aside and brings in the great need for things to be

communicated spiritually. One has pondered how this might be undertaken, how we might avail of spiritual means to communicate spiritual things in view of helping each other on, in view of learning from one another to the best advantage. We assemble together collectively, and this affords us a time to learn, in a temple setting, to learn from one another. One could speak as to helpers of one another. Indeed those who have gone before us in the testimony have spoken of the learning time in which we are. One desires that I may make myself available, in a receptive way, to learn from my brethren. May we all learn from our local brethren.

But then, I think that the communications are to stretch out, as it were, to go out between localities, so that there is evidence of the saints coming to things in relation to one mind. We think of Paul speaking to the Corinthians and telling them that they had the mind of Christ - that thinking faculty - the ability to receive the things of Christ, to be communicated to from the Head, in order that the body would be in relation to the Head, so that there would be a correspondence between Christ and His own.

I thought that John would set out the way that the Lord communicates spiritually. The objective was that God should be glorified, and that the Son of God should be glorified, and that God should be glorified in Christ, in the Son of God: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it". So I think that the Lord circumstantially brings in conditions which necessitate the need for communicating. A difficult situation arises where Mary and Martha's faith is tested in relation to the word of the Lord. In this way the Lord would have to do with Mary and Martha. And then it says that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus". I think that is one of the links with Philippians where we read: "if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit". Consolation of love! I think John 11 is a setting where the consolation of love is evident. The Lord Jesus is feelingly entering into the circumstances which were brought about indeed by the activity of divine Persons in order that person may believe and may be able to see the glory of God, may be able to see

this objective. I think that the Lord Jesus, in loving Martha and her sister and Lazarus, would suggest to us that, in order that things may be communicated spiritually, love must be the motivating factor in communicating with one another. Love must be operating. I was thinking of the spiritual means. Think of the spiritual means that the Lord availed of. We can surely learn from Christ when we think of spiritual means, the way that Jesus was moved in His spirit, the way that Jesus wept. I think that, as we desire to communicate spiritually, we need to have our feelings moved. We do not need to be afraid of right feelings. We do not need to be afraid of weeping, or of conveying something in the same spirit, with the same feelings, that Jesus manifested.

I desire that we should be exercised to communicate spiritually, and I think that Philippians sets on the way that this can work out. It says "if... any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love" - we have touched on that - and then "if any fellowship of the Spirit". It is a wonderful matter to contemplate the fellowship of the Spirit because it involves that those who are communicating are availing of the Spirit, partaking of the wealth of that divine Person - fellow partakers. Think, simply, of two persons having to do with each other in relation to the truth, even privately. As both persons are drawing on the Spirit, the same Vessel, how could it be that the same mind would not be reached in a matter? But how much greater if the fellowship of the Spirit could be known in our locality and broaden out to the whole assembly.

So Paul desired that his joy would be fulfilled in "that ye may think the same thing, having the same love, joined in soul, thinking one thing". Then, just in passing, one would touch on the next verse, and how this may enter into our spiritual communications: "let nothing be in the spirit of strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves, regarding not each his own qualities, but each those of others also". One has felt that if we are to be of help to one another we must esteem one another, draw out the qualities in one another, draw out the Spirit of Christ in one another, not arouse the flesh. Well, how

can we regard the qualities in one another? One has thought, do I do that, contemplate the saints, think of them in regard to their qualities, whether I really do? We sometimes get a general view of the saints but I think the Lord would have us single out the saints, as it were, and devote our attention to one another's qualities. I believe that, as the Person of Christ and the features of Christ in one another are reflected upon and magnified, the communications can be brought up to the right level. As we see the Spirit's operations in one another in the formative work of God we see the way that God has operated in one another and brought to light certain qualities.

We do not all have the same qualities or the same make up, but the desire is one, that we should build each other up and learn from each other. It is not one or another only, but the least of us can be learned from, and there are qualities that the Spirit of God has had to do with in one another, in relation to our souls, that we may be joined in soul, joined in relation to feeling matters, having the same love.

Paul could say, "holding the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ ", Eph 4: 15. May we all grow up to Christ, who is our Head. May we avail of the mind which is in Christ Jesus. May we experience that thinking faculty in its operation in the assembly, and that we need one another. We need the saints collectively in order for this to work out, and the Lord would help us in relation to the spiritual means whereby we can communicate, and whereby we can build each other up, and see the progress of God's work in one another's souls, for the glory of God.

We might well think of the day of display, when every knee shall bow to Jesus. Christ will come out, every knee shall bow to Him to God the Father's glory. Men will see the glory of God when Christ comes on to public view, and the assembly will come out, having the glory of God. Then things will come into display, but now it is the time of what is secret. In John 11 Martha called her sister Mary secretly, saying, "The teacher is come and calls thee". I think that it is for us now to see the glory of God. Stephen, in the Acts, looking into heaven, saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing there.

How beautifully Stephen would have set out these features in relation to spiritual communication!

Well, may we be helped to be of this same mind in relation to communicating with one another, that Satan may be defeated in his efforts to hamper us and to thwart and to dampen the spiritual level of things which proceeds under the hand of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. May we be helped in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

PLAINFIELD

4 August 1981

ASSOCIATIONS

J.A.Petersen

Philippians 3: 20, 21

While our brother was speaking about communications I thought it right to add a word as to associations. There is a link between associations and communications. The brethren will remember the notes of meetings in London in October 1978 in which Mr Hibbert spoke of 'communicative associations', pointing out that John's gospel is peculiarly one of communications between divine Persons. As to John 1: 1, "the Word was with God", he said that Mr Darby had said that the word 'with' involved 'communicative associations' between divine Persons (see Notes and Comments, Vol.7, p.1) and this gave colour to John's gospel, especially in what the Lord said to His own.

The expression in the verses read refers to our commonwealth, and Mr Darby's note says 'commonwealth does not satisfy me, but citizenship gives a different idea. Conversation is wrong, though it be a practical consequence. It is 'associations of life' as I am born an Englishman'. You can see that he speaks of communications but as proceeding from a heavenly association. It is the associations of life. I think it is helpful for all of us to lift our sights to what is heavenly. Our brother remarked that we touch things in the gatherings of the saints and I would say that that should be something of heaven. Our commonwealth, it says, has its existence in the heavens (plural).

I think Abraham and Isaac already referred to are the older and younger ones in the local meeting able to maintain a spiritual conversation. The world speaks of the generation gap and in that connection it is not always easy to maintain conversation between the young and old. But Abraham and Isaac did enter into a good conversation which has been recorded by the Spirit, and it would seem that Abraham impressed Isaac with what was heavenly. I need not say that Isaac especially is a type of the heavenly Man.

And where did he learn that? He would have learned that in his father's house and in the local meeting, so to speak. We certainly have to get through this present world and need to be helped as to the many practical matters facing us; the epistles are full of guidance and wisdom in that regard. I was reading tonight some comments by Mr Taylor on the epistle to the Colossians and he said it was a 'tightening up' epistle in our relations with God and one another and in the various relationships in which we find ourselves. Then there is the heavenly land and I think it was in Abraham's house that Isaac learned about that position. One's desire is that all of us might be encouraged to relate ourselves more to what is heavenly, because that is where Christ is.

It says here in Philippians "from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour". It is not as Lord, in that sense, but as Saviour because of the great weakness and humiliation attaching to the human condition. The very fact that we have sickness amongst us and falls and the like is only to help us to see the frailty of the condition that we are in. Young people do not often think of that as much as older ones, but we have an older sister staying with us in our house who is suffering, and we are made to feel the frailty of the human condition. So we are waiting for our "Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory". The Lord Jesus is in that body now - the body of glory. At the same time, we would say too, that the Lord Jesus being a divine Person may take any form at the present time. He is a real Man in heaven but He may manifest Himself in other ways, because He can do that. The scripture tells us that he manifested Himself to two in *another* form. We cannot place any restrictions or constraints on Him in glory; that is where He is and we are waiting for Him from the heavens. In the meantime that is where our life and associations are by faith. What preserved Isaac was his associations; his associations with his father were maintained in full confidence, and this is so needed between brethren, the older with the younger ones. When the test came as to Isaac's marriage there is no evidence of any difficulty on Isaac's part in taking a wife that

was of a heavenly order. He submitted to Abraham's arrangement as to his wife Rebecca. What a great result for the furtherance of heavenly associations in the family! Abraham and Isaac refer to heavenly associations in life, and as applied to us in our localities (although it may be difficult to work out) the blessing is there for the old and the younger ones in this association.

Paul was converted from heaven and every difficulty was removed by the Lord in His direct service to the apostle. I have noticed that brethren about to depart to be with Christ give no trouble to the brethren. They are not the ones giving trouble but rather troubles come in from those that are earth dwellers or seeking something of self, and that has always been a cause of disruption in the assembly. Heavenly-minded persons have Christ before them, and the apostle is calling upon the brethren in Philippi to see that: "fix your eyes on those walking thus as you have us for a model".

The apostle was going on to glory; although in prison he had the glory before him. Nor was he complaining; it is a wonderful thing when the *spirit* of complaint is removed from among us because we are going on to glory and trusting in the promise that God will change this body of humiliation in which you and I are travelling home. God Himself will change it through our Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour into conformity to His body of glory, according to the power which He has even to subdue all things to Himself. We will be in full association with Him then; and this we now anticipate by the Spirit. I think beloved, the more we are in the company of Christ, the less we will want the company of the world. That is how it works out. We may rightly say to the brethren, Walk in separation. And where there is obedience, God will honour that. But oh, what attractiveness is in Christ, that I want His company and I am prepared to leave every other company to be with Him in His affairs. That is just what Mary and Martha did in John 11 and 12; they wanted the company of Jesus in the hour of bereavement

So also in the book of Malachi: they spoke often one to another - communications - and they wanted His company. God took account of it. The Lord Jesus comes into our gatherings and we

experienced that here on Lord's day in all three meetings; He brings in heavenly circumstances. In the meantime we are awaiting Him for He has the power to subdue these frail conditions in which we are walking. He will come and subdue and change us that we might come into the glory which we have already enjoyed here by faith and the Spirit. Much could be said as to the matter of associations but association is this: that Christ is the centre of the company; otherwise there is no association for the Christian. The power for association in life is the Holy Spirit. What maintains the association is love, held in the truth. Any other association we have to leave, as the associations of men do not flow from the headship of Christ. We had occasion to say to some brethren the other day that if the Lord Jesus is not head of any particular body we cannot be in that body. We have been baptised into the body of Christ by the Spirit and our association with Christ is in His power. Our brother earlier said that you look for what is good in the brethren, and that is what we are in association with; it is His glorious work. Our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens; that is, it is our country and associations. The Lord has left us here in testimony in faith and in the Spirit but the outlook is our Saviour's coming from the heavens.

PLAINFIELD

4 August 1981

THE CHILDREN'S PATIENCE

This sounds like a tiresome lesson of childhood but you will find that it is in fact one that lasts a whole lifetime! What is called 'the patience of Job' is proverbial. It is a phrase from the older translation of the Bible but the correct word is "endurance". Through it Job kept is uprightness, but I do not think that in looking back over his very acute troubles he would feel that he had been patient. The distinction between the two moral qualities may not be very great but patience, in Scripture especially, has a known end in view. Job had no thought that the compassion of the Lord in the trials that came upon him was training him to be acceptable in His sight. Abraham having had long patience obtained the promises made to him; we must have patience in view of the coming of the Lord. What a very affecting expression is the patience of the Christ"! Even He is awaiting the full fruits of His mighty work.

One of the parables that Jesus gave about the kingdom of the heavens concerned a king one of whose servants owed him a myriad, that is ten thousand talents. The servant asked his lord and master to be patient with him until he should pay all. It is not often realised that the money involved would now be as much as three million pounds. It would perhaps represent the revenue of a whole province of the kingdom. However the king, out of compassion, forgave the whole debt, and this shows how pardoning grace is in the heart of our heavenly Father - and righteously towards us who are unable to pay. The warning in the parable then is that we should forgive from our hearts everyone who, we may think, is indebted to us. This cannot in any case be much in comparison, like the hundred 'pence' of the parable!

Greenland is a vast, barren country visited by very few people, although some will have a recollection of seeing its icy wastes from the air. Its connection with patience and the work of the Lord is in an interesting story related by Mr Darby. Well over a hundred years ago a company of Christians went out to Greenland to spread the good news of the gospel. For thirteen years they laboured there

without winning a soul for the Lord. In fact they were arranging to come away but thought they would try one year more. Then as they were reading aloud the account of the sufferings of Christ, someone came in and listened and said 'Read those words again'. This resulted in his conversion, the truth burst out and numbers were brought in.

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see... my sorrow".

J.C.Evershed