

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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PHILEMON

Acts 28: 16-end; Philemon

J.D.G. Paul wrote four letters from the prison, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians and Philippians. I thought we might take them in the order Philemon, Philippians, Colossians and then Ephesians. I thought we should begin in Acts 28 to see the background of the prison. Paul had been in Caesarea on the coast of Judea for about two years, held a prisoner there under Felix and Festus, and then because of the Jewish jealousy and hatred, he had to appeal to Caesar. Paul was in prison because he preached the gospel to the Gentiles, the Jews resisted that. He was cast into the prison on account of that. It was in God's ways. Before the passage we read (v 15) he seemed to be depressed by the outcome. He had come as a prisoner to Rome. He had wanted to come as a free man, but he arrived as a prisoner in Rome, but when he saw the brethren he took courage, "thence the brethren, having heard about us, came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Tres Tabernae, whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage". There was a work of God in the place before he arrived. Paul was allowed to remain by himself with the soldier who kept him. He was not able to go out and preach the gospel, he was not able to evangelise by going about, but he could receive persons. He had a certain liberty but he was chained to the soldier who kept him. He received the Jews and this is the last word to the Jews as far as scripture recalls, "he expounded ... from early morning to evening ... And he remained two whole years in his own hired lodging, and received all who came to him". That word "received", according to the note, conveys a thought of welcome and it is used only by Luke. That is the background to his prisonership, persons could visit him, they could seek him out. Rome at this time was a city of one and a half million people of whom half were slaves. He remained two years in his own lodging, he must have been able to finance it himself and with help from the brethren. He could receive all and speak freely but he was not allowed to go outside the house. I suppose he was, as we call it, under house arrest.

Then we come to Philemon. This is an incident about a slave, Onesimus, who had run away from his master and stolen money and other goods and went to Rome because everybody went to Rome in those days – it was the centre of the empire. Paul was engaged in writing other letters besides the one to Philemon – it is thought that he wrote Colossians and Ephesians about this time. He writes this letter about a slave who was converted. The slave belonged to a rich man – Philemon was a rich man, but a converted man. It seems that he was converted through Paul. It seems also that he was connected with Colosse. In the Colossian letter it speaks about the same persons, the same brethren. This is not entirely a personal letter, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” – all Paul’s personal letters bring in the thought of mercy. This one does not because it is addressed to, “the assembly which is in thine house” as well. He brings in the whole assembly to take account of the return of a slave who had been converted and was going back to his master to submit to the conditions of slavery, as far as he was concerned, but a converted man. It is a simple book but I thought we would get some impressions of Christian love and Paul’s ability to speak with persons. Paul could not have found Onesimus: Onesimus must have found Paul.

G.B. I am sure it will hold our interest and instruction as well. The Lord’s hand was over His servant all the time. All the circumstances Paul was in were allowed by the Lord that the testimony might be expanded and indeed the light that comes in in these other epistles to which you have referred is very full as to the assembly.

J.D.G. In 2 Timothy 2 there was a different situation. Scripture does not exactly say he was liberated, but it seems from what he writes in the Philippian epistle and Philemon that he was anticipating his release, and it is thought that he was released, whereas in 2 Timothy he was taken a prisoner by Nero on account of being a Christian, not on account of the jealousy of the Jews. That is what is called the second imprisonment, to clarify it from this situation where he was in his own hired house. Under God’s hand he was allowed that liberty, although he was restricted. Under God’s hand he was restricted in

his ways, but on account of that he wrote letters which he may not otherwise have done. This slave must have come into his lodging one day – whether he knew Paul through him visiting Philemon's house we do not know – he must have had some acquaintance with him to have found him in a city of one and a half million people.

D.M. The word compassion is not mentioned here but it runs through the chapter. It says of the Good Samaritan, "moved with compassion", Luke 10: 33. You have some feeling here that runs through this letter in particular, of a very compassionate appeal that he makes on behalf of the slave.

J.D.G. He does not seek to set aside slavery, Paul does not do that. It says, "having much boldness in Christ to enjoin thee what is fitting, for love's sake". He could have commanded, as an apostle, to Philemon to release this man, but he does not do that; he goes about it in another way and brings the whole assembly into it in the tenderness of compassion.

D.M. There is some thought that he wanted to carry Philemon in this matter. Although slavery was quite legal then he could have made comment about it but did not, but he wanted to carry the assembly with him in his feelings, which is quite a touching thought as well.

J.D.G. I think that is the whole import of this section. He recognised that slavery was there, recognised that Onesimus had run away from his master who owned him, according to the rights of the day. He could have commanded him, as an apostle, to release him because he was converted, but he does not do that, he sends him back to his master. He tries to carry all with him in the affectionate bonds of Christianity so that Onesimus was received as a brother and possibly liberated from being in slavery. Paul's letter is beseeching for that, that he might be released. It begins in a very fine way, "Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timotheus the brother, to Philemon the beloved and our fellow-workman, and to the sister Apphia" (who is thought to be Philemon's wife), "Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the assembly which is in thine house. Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ".

That would touch the heart of Philemon and also the others. I think it shows how liberation from slavery came about in this instance through the Christian circle in receiving such a man, and seeing the incongruity that he should continue as a slave. Philemon would have had other slaves, they would have continued with him. Paul was a prisoner – I want to keep that in our thoughts – he was not free to go out, but he was free to receive persons, who came to him.

G.A.B. He was also free to pray, do you think. “Always making mention of thee at my prayers” – is that not a feature of these prison epistles, prayer?

J.D.G. Yes, it is a feature of all the epistles, I think there is reference to it in every one of them. He was free to pray, even though he was chained to a soldier. You wonder what the soldier heard and felt. It must have been a most remarkable situation for a soldier chained to a man, listening to him or seeing him praying and listening to him speaking of another world altogether, not overwhelmed in his spirit by the prison conditions but using them for liberty and access into another realm.

G.A.B. His prayers were not for his own release, they were for the welfare of the saints.

J.D.G. Yes, and also when you come to Colossians, he speaks of Epaphras praying too, praying for the saints, not exactly praying for his own release. It seems that some of those who visited Paul must have been apprehended too, Epaphras is a fellow-captive in the Colossian epistle, and Aristarchus. Some of those who visited Paul must have been apprehended by the Roman authorities for whatever reason, we do not know, but it must have had to do with the glad tidings. Paul was in prison because he preached to the Gentiles.

Rem. There is a relationship between persons which rises above all the circumstances in which they are found. Of one of the brethren that goes to Paul, it says, “has not been ashamed of my chain ... sought me out very diligently, and found me”, 2 Tim 1: 16,17. There was a relationship with Paul which rises above all the circumstances.

J.D.G. That was Onesiphorus, He had been in Rome – it may have been at this time too – “sought me out very diligently”. I like what you said, there is tenderness and affection which rises above the circumstances. Persons who are in the goodness of the grace of God, the riches of His grace – I was thinking of that this morning. In Ephesians 1 it says, “he has taken us into favour in the Beloved: in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace” (vv 6,7). Here is a man who has come into redemption through Christ’s blood, “forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace”. Here was the runaway slave – how was he going to be received in the local place when he had run away and wronged the master who might well have been bitter about it? Paul is appealing to Philemon in his affections; things have changed now.

T.L. Paul may be restricted by the Imperial power but he preaches about another kingdom under the Lord Jesus Christ.

J.D.G. It says, “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, with all freedom unhinderedly”, Acts 28: 31. There used to be a brother who called this Paul’s currency – that is what his currency was in prison – “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ”. That was what went on in the prison. The soldier was there all the time with his chain, but Paul was liberated in his spirit and in his prayers. He says, “I thank my God, always making mention of thee at my prayers”. Personalities are spoken of here – Philemon and his wife, as appreciating her too, then “Archippus our fellow-soldier”, I suppose that is a fellow-soldier in the work of the gospel. It says in the Colossian epistle “and say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, to the end that thou fulfil it”, Col 4: 17. Archippus must have needed a little bit of stimulation.

T.D.E. Can you say something about, “the assembly which is in thine house”? The prison epistles give us some of the greatest and most exalted thoughts of the assembly, but here it is, “the assembly which is in thine house”.

J.D.G. I suppose they met in his house, he provided for them, he was a rich man, he had the wherewithal to do that and provided for the assembly which was in his house. Paul takes it out of the personal side only. It has been pointed out in the teaching that he does not add the thought of mercy because he brings in the thought of the assembly. He is elevating it. What struck me was that it was good to see that Paul was speaking to Philemon personally about a slave who had run away, who is coming back, he is anticipating him being received by Philemon, but not only by Philemon but by the local assembly, so he addresses the assembly in his house which dignifies it. He is really making it a wider issue than just Philemon and the slave.

T.D.E. That is helpful, and, "if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and if one member be glorified, all the members rejoice with it", 1 Cor 12: 26. There is a sense in which anything that we do individually has a collective bearing as well.

J.D.G. You can understand the situation at the time – there were many persons who were slaves. Some slaves were in fellowship and they were still slaves, they might have been in their meeting in Colosse. Here is one whom Paul is sending back because he had run away. You might say the last man who should have got his liberation. The slaves would work for persons other than Christian masters. Paul teaches that in his epistles, they had to serve their masters. We do not understand the situation as it was at that time, but here is one that was converted and Paul sends him back and commends him to Philemon to liberate him and also to receive him as a brother. He brings the assembly in too, as much as to say, I want you all to take account of this, to get the gain "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace", Eph 1: 7. Here is an example of the riches of God's grace.

G.B. The assembly in the house would not just be a gathering of saints, it would carry a certain dignity. I wondered if there was some correspondence with the Ark when it was in the house of Obed-Edom? Before that there had been a long time in another house,

and I think it has been suggested that it might have been covered up and kept there as an artefact, but the Ark meant something in the house of Obed-Edom; it was valued and resulted in the household blessing (see 2 Sam 6).

J.D.G. I am glad of what is coming out. It is the anointed vessel according to Corinthians 12 (see v 12). Here is the dignity of the anointing associated with the gathering in the home, it is more than just a gathering of Christians. It was that, but you are elevating it to the dignity of the assembly which the truth of the body underlies. I think it is helpful bringing out the truth of the body because Onesimus is coming back as a member of the body of Christ.

G.A.B. It is a very current matter, the assembly in the house, because I do not suppose since the early days of the recovery there have been so many gatherings of the saints held in houses. In the beginning in the Pentecostal time the breaking of bread was in the house but Paul really put it in the assembly. I think we want to maintain that distinction, even if it is literally in a house, that is only the building, but the dignity of the assembly stands whether it is a room like this or whether it is in someone's drawing room.

J.D.G. I am glad you are bringing that out. There were some persons meeting in a house and someone said to them, are you a house meeting? They said no, we are in fellowship with the saints universally, "Paul a called apostle of Jesus Christ, by God's will, and Sosthenes the brother, to the assembly of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours", 1 Cor 1: 1,2. That sets the dignity of it whether it is in a house or a hall. I am glad of that distinction, because in certain parts of the world there are quite a number of independent household meetings or churches but this is different.

G.A.B. I remember a brother and sister in the midlands who were left on their own in a locality and when it came to the time for the meeting they had the chairs set in two circles in the room, the sister put her coat and hat on and came and sat in the second row and the

brother sat on the front row and they had their meeting, and she said, When I come and sit down there I feel that I am in the assembly. That makes a distinction; that room might have been used for something else at other times of the day, there it was, “the assembly which is in thine house”.

J.D.G. With the saints in other places, that is involving fellowship, the fellowship of God’s Son. I think too it is an expression of the body of Christ. So Onesimus coming back was coming as one who belonged to that body. The letter to Philemon suggests that it is more than to Philemon, but “to the assembly which is in thine house”. That is greater than to Philemon. It is very interesting because it shows that in leaving out the thought of mercy he is regarding it as a prison epistle and the dignity of an assembly letter. I had not seen that before.

T.L. Unity underlies this too. He says, “in such sort that thy participation in the faith”; it is the faith that is common to all. Would that be right?

J.D.G. That is right, “in the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in us towards Christ Jesus. For we have great thankfulness and encouragement through thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother”. Although Paul was in prison he was in contact by letter and by persons; he speaks in one of the epistles about the brethren locally and all that concerned them in the prison in Rome. Here he knows about Philemon, he has an appreciation of him, he must have proved his kindnesses, “hearing of thy love and the faith which thou hast towards the Lord Jesus, and towards all the saints, in such sort that thy participation in the faith”, so it is in active power which can be commended.

D.M. Practically speaking, in days of smallness – there are many localities that are small – where some of these conditions might exist, what is personal can sometimes create difficulty, but he seeks to go above that. It is quite a lesson, because although he writes to the brother where there may have been naturally some personal

offence, he clearly shows that the responsibility of brotherhood in the assembly goes beyond that.

J.D.G. That is an attraction for us all. This would be an occasion of quite a serious matter at that time, the slave had run away and gone to Rome to see the sights: whether he ran out of money we do not know, but he found Paul. Paul did not find him, *he* found Paul. He must have gone there under God's hand, and the work of God has been wrought in him through Paul's preaching the gospel to him at that time. Now he is coming back to meet his master whom he has wronged, and what was the reception going to be? But Paul puts in a letter of appeal, above the level of what is natural, above the level of business too.

D.M. Could you say something about anticipation, Paul takes it for granted that Philemon will do all of this. It is quite a nice touch, he puts him in that corner of correctness and ensures that he will behave in such a way, but then credits him that he will do that and do more.

J.D.G. It is a very fine way to appeal. He acknowledges that Onesimus had been wrong, and he says, if he owes anything I will repay it, but then he appeals to him to receive him as a brother, possibly liberate him and give him his freedom. Paul was desirous of keeping him, "I exhort thee for *my* child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus". The meaning of his name, is 'profitable' or 'useful'. But he says, "Wherefore having much boldness in Christ to enjoin thee what is fitting, for love's sake I rather exhort". He did not want to command, he wanted it to come from Philemon himself. He gave him the liberty to retain him as a slave, to receive him as a brother, but to go further than that, liberate him. He could retain him as a slave and he could be received into fellowship.

D.M. It rises above debate and argument, really things are resolved in the assembly another way. It says of the wise men that they, "departed into their own country another way", Matt 2: 12. Paul chose another way here.

J.D.G. It says of Onesimus, “once unserviceable to thee, but now serviceable to thee and to me”. He is saying he was unserviceable to Philemon, he ran away, but he is coming back of his own volition.

You could not have forced him to go back, he could have gone out of Paul’s prison and disappeared into the streets of Rome.

G.B. There were obligations on Onesimus as well; he had a believing master, so along with the obligations on Philemon, there are obligations on Onesimus and so there are on all of us.

J.D.G. There were obligations on Onesimus, he had run away, ‘absent without leave’, run away without permission and stolen, but he has gone back willingly and gone back as a converted man. Will he be received as a brother? That is the test for Philemon and those who are in the assembly which is in his house.

G.A.B. He had come into a family relationship with Paul. He says, “I exhort thee for *my* child, whom I have begotten”, Paul has other children. John speaks of his children as well. There is the family of God, it is one thing that they are all begotten of God, but it is possible for believers with influence to beget children.

J.D.G. Paul had here, he says, “I exhort thee for *my* child, whom I have begotten in my bonds”.

C.E. There seems to be complacency through the chapter, everything seems to revolve round trust. You mentioned military terms of being ‘absent without leave’, but there is a duty. Each one of us has to do our duty before the Lord, as to the working of the body that is seen here quite distinctly.

J.D.G. He fulfils his duty; Onesimus was going back, he was carrying the letter, but he was going back. He was being accompanied by Tychicus. He goes back to his master and gives him his letter and submits to whatever he would do, but he was a believer, a converted brother. Here is an appeal, “I have wished to do nothing without thy mind, that thy good might not be as of necessity but of willingness”, an appeal to the work of God in us. How difficulties can be resolved.

T.L. Is there subjection and affection here?

J.D.G. I do not think there is any will working in anybody in the chapter.

T.L. I was wondering that because Paul was not using apostolic authority here, but he is writing to him as a person who is subject to being a prisoner as being part of the government of God. He was pleased to speak in relation to another in relation to grace that he be set free. The person he is speaking about is subject enough to go back in with the possibility of being a slave again, but subject to that in affection for Christ.

J.D.G. Onesimus is a changed man. It is, "Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timotheus the brother, to Philemon the beloved". This does not bring in apostolic authority at all. He is really writing a letter of commendation for this dear slave, acknowledging his history but pointing out that he has been the subject of the work of God in being a converted man. Now he was entitled to be received as a brother, appealing to the affections of the saints in the place to do that.

G.A.B. It has been a feature of servants whom the Lord has honoured, some of us can remember, that they avoided interfering with matters in other localities than their own. They operated rather by influence. That is really what Paul is doing here.

J.D.G. He is appealing as a member of the body of Christ, as a Christian, who is bound up in the circle of the saints, bound up in the one body, bound up in the family of God. He is appealing along those lines that matters may be set right. The person he is commending is converted, there is no will working in the man, he is going back to submit to slavery if that be his lot. I was interested in the fact that he addressed it to the assembly as if it is a greater matter than a mere household matter and bringing in the affections of the saints in a dignified way to influence one another, to influence Philemon, and the carrying forward of Paul's wishes.

G.A.B. Mr Darby says that he rather hints to Philemon that Onesimus should be released, there is no commandment.

J.D.G. He is exhorting him to receive him as a brother and no doubt that could be done because if Onesimus sought his place to remember the Lord Jesus you could not refuse him because he was a slave. He had come back a converted man, he had received the forgiveness of his sins, the blood of redemption had been shed for him. As you say Paul hints that perhaps the Lord had in mind to use him in a wider way which involves his liberation. It is not just his liberation to go into society and do as he will; it is his liberation with a view to the work of God.

A.M. There is a time when we have all been recovered to this. When you first have to do with Christ you find that at some point there is more room made in your heart for Him than there was before, and there are different things in your life that you may have been accustomed to that take on a very different value. I wondered if that was in line with what you are speaking of.

J.D.G. I think so. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1: 7) has affected me and you. We have all had a sinful history, a history of fallen man, whatever it has been it has been there, and then we have been forgiven, received the gift of the Holy Spirit so that the man that comes back is coming back in Christ, the man who went away was the man in Adam. Onesimus ran away wilfully, but he comes back as in Christ. He really comes back like the younger son.

E.J. Mr Stoney has a book 'Who is in the Testimony?' What is vital, as I understand it, in the testimony is what is here. There were houses and there were halls, churches, gatherings of people who speak about Jesus. God is wanting all men to be saved, but then the vital question is, Am I in the testimony? That would be involved in the Spirit, Christ in the assembly.

J.D.G. We possess one another, "that thou mightest possess him fully for ever; not any longer as a bondman, but above a bondman, a beloved brother, specially to me, and how much rather to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord? If therefore thou holdest me to be a

partner with thee, receive him as me”, it is a partnership. We are all in a partnership, a common fellowship from that point of view, but, “possess him fully for ever”.

Ques. With regard to possessing fully, does it suggest with Onesimus coming back there is nothing between these two brothers? They will be able to enjoy fully communion with Christ.

J.D.G. It involves kindredship with Christ, “but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God”, John 20: 17. It is on a level of kindredship with Christ, “possess him fully for ever ... a beloved brother”.

T.D.E. One of the things that marks Paul’s prison epistles is Paul’s unselfishness. He wanted to keep Onesimus for himself to support and serve him, but there is more work for him to be done back in the place that he had come from. Is that one of the things that comes out in these epistles?

J.D.G. Paul would have kept him and used him in the glad tidings, and he could have used his authority over Philemon but he did not want to do that. He wanted to send him back and bring out this spirit of affection, of love and brotherliness, that would liberate the brethren in the place where he was.

T.D.E. I was wondering about the expression, “bonds of the glad tidings”, it seems to me to be significant.

J.D.G. Paul was in chains on account of the glad tidings; it would include that, but I thought it was more than that. This expression, “I have begotten in my bonds”, and in “the bonds of the glad tidings”. I thought it was more his bringing Onesimus into the work of the glad tidings, bound up with Paul, even though he was a prisoner. He was going to be in the bonds of the glad tidings and serviceable to the master.

T.D.E. So, even if Paul is in chains the glad tidings is not bound at all, it is able to proceed in vigour to ones like Onesimus.

J.D.G. If you had a link with Paul you would be liberated to serve in the glad tidings. He sends him back to his master, and then he says,

“prepare me also a lodging; for I hope that I shall be granted to you through your prayers”. He speaks of these other persons, “Epaphras salutes thee, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow-workmen. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit”. It is a very rich letter – personalities that they would know something about in the assembly in Philemon’s house and Colosse.

D.M. Do you think he was given a real foretaste as to how profitable Christianity could be despite restriction? I was thinking of Acts 16, he was in extremely limited circumstances but what a result came out of that. Do you think that, in some way, sets the context for a lot of this?

J.D.G. He did not have to await the formal emancipation of slaves? He was liberated in the circle of the family of God in a dignified way. It shows you how Christianity was greater than the systems of men around at that time.

G.A.B. There is rather an interesting point in verse 19. It is almost a principle that the fellowship involves that we are prepared to undertake responsibility for one another, “I Paul have written it with mine own hand; I will repay it”. There was an obligation there, this debt, whatever it was, had to be repaid. Onesimus probably could not repay it, but Paul says, I will do it, so that there might be no impediment to the free working of love and restoration.

J.D.G. Paul was prepared to meet righteousness on behalf of a brother who probably could not meet it financially. It does not say that Paul gave him the money to pay it back, he just says to Philemon that he would repay it when they met. The moral obligation has to be met too in practical matters so that righteousness is maintained.

G.A.B. Besides the practical aspect of it, there is a moral side to it as well. Cain said, “am I my brother’s keeper?”, Gen 4: 9. He should have been, we are our brothers’ keepers in that sense. We have to accept responsibility for one another as well as for ourselves.

EDINBURGH (*local reading*)

4 June 2006

Key to initials

G.Bailey; G.A.Brown; C.English, Glasgow; T.D.Ellis; J.D.Gray;
E.Johnson;
T.Lock; A. Marshall; D.Marshall

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

James Alex Gardiner

Revelation 3: 20; Acts 16: 23, 24

It is a wonderful time in which God is concerned for the blessing of persons. Persons are being blessed by coming to know God as a saviour God and that the distance between them and God has been removed in the death of Christ. He is able to bring you into perfect nearness to Himself to enjoy the blessedness of His heart of love.

This is available for all who are here this afternoon to hear the word of God, and my responsibility is to present it to you in such a way that you might believe it and be affected by it.

I read this scripture in Revelation 3. The persons written to were indifferent: they were neither cold nor hot (see v 15). How do you feel about God? Do you have anything to do with God? Would you like to have to do with God? You can have to do with God right here and now, He is so available, He is not at a distance, He is right near you. It says, "The word is near thee", Rom 10: 8. Think of the blessed way that God has made Himself so available to persons; it really draws out the believer's heart to consider how near He has come in Jesus. The persons here were indifferent, they were neither cold nor hot. Why should that be? They thought that they had no need of God, they had had a letter read to them that brought out the greatness of Christ – the epistle to the Colossians brings out the glory of the greatness of Christ, God's Son. They were persons who gave thanks to the Father, "who has delivered us from the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love", Col 1: 13. Then Paul went on to tell them about the greatness of the Son of the Father's love. Beloved, are you in the kingdom of darkness, are you under that domination, that rule; that will make you indifferent – a sad matter to be indifferent. How foolish can people be? That is the present day, the present world, persons are indifferent: they are not hostile, they just cannot care. This letter here is written for the present time, the last days when we are waiting for the Lord to come to take us to be with Himself in heaven.

Are you going to be in heaven? Would you like to go to heaven? I am not speaking about the other places, I am speaking about heaven. The day is going to close very shortly and these persons are indifferent although professing to be Christians. It is not Thyatira, it is not the time when Rome was dominant, it is after what is called the Reformation, when the Church of England and the Church of Scotland came into being. This letter is written after there had been the recovery in the assembly prior to Philadelphia. These are persons who would have known the greatest things and enjoyed them, and they had declined, fallen away, and were in this situation where they were neither cold nor hot, they were unaffected by it.

They were overcome by materialism; they say, we have become rich and we are in need of nothing, no need at all. We have all we need. The Lord Jesus has words to say to them, He says you had better have a transaction with me, we will find out how rich you are. I will show you how rich you are, you are really poor, you having nothing, you are poor, naked, blind. I have all you need. Think of Jesus, beloved, presenting Himself to you like that this afternoon, telling you, 'Have to do with Me, I am ready to transact with you, I am ready to do business with you'. You can do business with Christ right here. Are you prepared for that, have a consultation with Him? What does He want? He wants your heart: that is what He wants, that is the currency. Are you prepared for that, to give your heart to Christ to be revived? This is revival, to be ardent in your affections; how awful to be indifferent, neither cold nor hot.

What happens? We find as we go on through this letter that He is outside: He is not in the place, He is knocking, "I stand at the door and am knocking". Have you ever had a knock on your door to waken you up? Go and open it, somebody is there and He is knocking. Have you ever heard this knock, has He knocked in your life? It happens providentially; the jailor found the knock in the earthquake; that was the knock that woke him up! What is going to waken you up? Think of the Lord's knocking. Why do persons remain indifferent? Do not be indifferent, open the door for Him. We used to sing:

Swing your hearts door widely open,
Bid Him enter while you may.

Make room for Him and He will come into your circumstances and He will sup with you. What does that mean? He will identify with you, where you are, He will sup with you. Look at Luke 24, He supped with them. He took part of a broiled fish and a honeycomb (v 42). He will revive your affections and will bring you into circumstances in which you will sup with Him. How great that is!

This is for you and He is speaking to you. Have you had a knock like this in your life, have you had an earthquake? It does not have to be an earthquake, something that knocks and wakens your conscience, and He knocks again and again and keeps on knocking. Why? Because He loves you, because He has paid the same price for you as He has paid for everybody else in this room. Every single one, every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has cost God the very same. Peter did not cost Him more than I cost Him, He did not cost Him more than you cost Him. The cost was the precious blood of Christ. He wants you back into the enjoyment of that love of His. He was thinking about you when He was on the cross – do you ever think of that? What happened in these three hours of darkness we do not know, but in those three hours He was making atonement for my sins, He was making atonement for your sins. You say, how could that be? He paid the price and made atonement for sins – sins are forgiven, sin is never forgiven, it is condemned, God has condemned sin in the flesh in the Person of His Son. Jesus has borne the judgment of God against sins and sin and His blood has been shed, the price has been paid and redemption has been accomplished and He wants you.

Are you going to go on in indifference in the presence of the knock and the appeal of His love? To continue indifferently is a very sad position because eventually He is going to dissociate Himself from you. What do you mean by that? He says here, “I am about to spue thee out of my mouth”, Rev 3: 16. In plain language he says you make me sick; that is what it means. Meanwhile He carries on knocking: the gospel still goes out as it is now. When the Lord Jesus

comes at the rapture, profession will be going on as it always has gone on. What a solemn consideration that is, it hardly bears thinking about. But beloved, He is knocking and He is asking for you. Are you going to swing your heart's door widely open, not just a crack to peep out to see who is there, you will know it is Him. Open up your heart and let Him in.

In Acts 16 there is the jailor. You may be like these people, you may lock up the preachers, lock up the word of God, you do not want to hear it. They are not indifferent in Acts 16, they are hostile – the gospel is going to affect our living, in fact it has affected our living – lay stripes on them, put them in jail and make sure that they do not get out. That is the attitude to the word of God. There were Paul and Silas in their preaching, they are representing Christ, representing God, representing the glad tidings and persons are listening to them, but the devil is in opposition to them. Here they are put in prison, stripes are laid on them, innocent people being whipped. What a miscarriage of justice, but what more can we expect, because the greatest miscarriage of justice has been on the cross of Christ. Think of the awfulness of it, Pilate washing his hands. What a pretence! The poet speaks of it as 'the pride of careless greatness' – I am rich and need of nothing but he was poor, naked, blind. There was the Saviour, the Son of God before him. Think of it, the judge of all the earth. Pilate washes his hands. Mr Darby says:

The pride of careless greatness,
Could wash its hands of thee,
Priests that should plead for weakness
Must thine accusers be.

What a miscarriage of justice. Beloved, are you on Pilate's side or are you on the priest's side? Surely that is not society to keep. The society that you need to keep is the society of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ and have come under the shelter of His blood.

That is good society, they stand by the cross. We read in Revelation that, "without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that

loves and makes a lie", Rev 22: 15. That is awful society. Wash your robes and get into the city as fast as you possibly can because without there is awful society. Every city, every town, every village abounds with it and God in His wonderful grace invades the place, He has invaded Edinburgh, Aberdeen, He has invaded the earth, the universe, in the glad tidings. It is as if they are going forward and nothing can stand against them. Beloved, He wants you to open up your heart and let Him in.

Here is the jailor. They had been looking for a man. Paul had a vision, a Macedonian man in his vision says, "Pass over into Macedonia and help us" (v 9). He was not sure what he could do as the Holy Spirit forbade him to go to Phrygia and the Galatian country (v 6), and they moved tentatively into Macedonia. They come to Philippi and find certain things. They found some women praying, they identified with them, and the Lord had opened the heart of one of these women, to attend to the things spoken by Paul. Would you like that to happen to you? It can happen to you. He is quite willing and quite available and able to open persons' hearts to attend to the things spoken by Paul. Your affections are drawn out to the wonderful truth of Christ glorified and His body here and you are a part of it. But he was looking for a man and he cannot find him.

Then the devil is active trying to help the work forward and that is part of his craft. Paul passes a judgment on it and consequently they take him and Silas and put them in prison, and they fasten their feet in stocks. That is what man naturally wants to do with the word of God, 'shut it up, we do not want to hear it, keep it out of the way, in fact put it in the inner prison'. Is that effective? Think of them in suffering as they are but praying, counting on God, waiting for this man. Silas does not say to Paul, Are you sure about the vision, maybe it was not too clear. He does not say that, he has faith in the things spoken by Paul. How blessed that is! He is not going to undermine his faith. They are together in this and "in praying, were praising God with singing", the like was never heard of in this jail before. It was not drugs or drink, it was nothing like that; it was persons who were in the enjoyment in their souls of the wonderful

glad tidings of God and nothing was going to stop their enjoyment of it. What wonderful persons they are!

Now the knock comes – the jailor is fast asleep, quite happy that the prisoners are secured, nothing to worry him. The Lord knocks – what happens? An earthquake. Can man cope with that?

That is no person, however great, however able they are, that can cope with creatorial upheavals. Think of the tsunami that happened, earthquakes that happen, floods that happen, man cannot cope with it, but God can. Here is this earthquake, the foundations of the prison shake, the prisoners are all loosed – that is what God does.

He wants men to be free, to be liberated. He does not want them to be held in prison. They do not run away. Why do they not run away? They are held there by what they find in Paul and Silas.

What personalities these men were! You can see what God can do, He will make you somebody, not only does He want to save your soul and take you to heaven, but He is going to make you somebody like Christ, so that you are an influence for good. Think of the wonderful influence of Paul and Silas here. The jailor rushes in, the prisoners are loose, he has drawn a sword, he is going to commit suicide. Do not become suicidal, listen to the word of God. That is the first thing that Paul says; he does not say, you will have to pray, he says, “Do thyself no harm”. That was the immediate need, do not be suicidal, we are all here. There is no need to be upset, we have not run away we are all here. He is thinking, Is this the Macedonian man that I was looking for? “Do thyself no harm, for we are all here. And having asked for lights, he rushed in, and trembling, fell down before Paul and Silas. And leading them out said, Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?” Beloved, would to God that that was the question on every lip in this city today, “what must I do that I may be saved?” What does he say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house”. Can you get anything better than that? Not only will you be saved but your whole house will be saved. A marvellous proposal that he makes, you will be saved and your whole house will be saved. Think of that, the house saved and completed for Christ. God has the wherewithal to effect that, to

cause it to happen. Nothing is impossible with God, He can make things happen and He will make things happen. It happens here – “thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house”. The knock has been effective, He is coming in and He is going to sup with them. Think of the wonder of that, the blessedness of that, the immensity of that.

What turmoil went on in this man’s soul and now he is relieved.

Instead of feeling suicidal now and shutting them up in prison, he cannot do enough for them. Is that you? Are you going to be like that? That is conversion, that is change. He has taken on change because he has seen the glory of the Lord, he has seen moral greatness in these men, seen how they can cope with the situation.

Think of the greatness of that, an earthquake, the foundations of the prison shaken, the prisoners loosed, the jailor running in about to commit suicide, and these two men are able to handle the situation.

What a calming influence in these words, “Do thyself no harm”.

What influence Paul had on all these people in prison. The man wants lights, which he gets. “Sirs, what must I do?” He is respectful now, no more locking their feet in the stocks, “what must I do that I may be saved?” He does not go into all the details of the gospel; all he says is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved”. He meets the need immediately and adds “thou and thy house. And they spoke to him the word of the Lord, with all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed them from their stripes; and was baptised, he and all his straightway”. See the wonder of that – “I will come in unto him and sup with him”, marvellous display of the spirit of Christ. That is the Lord Jesus coming into this man’s house and he was baptised straight away. “And having brought them into his house he laid the table for them, and rejoiced with all his house, having believed in God”. Is that not marvellous? This is your opportunity to believe on God, to have your house as it ought to be in the sight of God, “thou and thy house”.

Think of the household secured for God in Philippi. Philippi is a wonderful place. The gospel is now in Europe. Have a look round the meeting there, Lydia was a fine lady who sold purple. She had

her own business; then there is the jailor, a rather different sort of person who was in the prison service, and then there was Paul's fellow labourer who was unnamed, and a brother called Epaphroditus and some others who had attended to the things spoken by Paul. It is not a wealthy meeting, it is not a Laodecian meeting. It would seem they are mainly poor people but they are large-hearted who give according to their means and beyond their means. Why? Because Christ is in their hearts. See the change that comes about through the glad tidings. A knock has affected something and caused the door to be opened so that Christ has His way. Do this and your life will be different altogether. See this man now, he is saved in the power of the life of Christ, reconciled to God, "For if, being enemies, we have been reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much rather, having been reconciled, we shall be saved in the power of his life", Rom. 5: 10. How practical that is, how real! That is the glad tidings. I think it is a very wonderful thing and I would appeal to anyone here who has shut out Christ to open the door and let him in, to open up widely and let Him in, and He will come into your circumstances and attend to them. He will sup with you and will take you into His circumstances and you will sup with Him. How wonderful that is! May the Lord bless the word.

EDINBURGH

23 April 2006

THE LIFE OF THE LORD JESUS

Paul Martin

Romans 6: 8-14; Hebrews 7: 17-25; Ephesians 5: 22-33

I desire to say a word as to the life of the Lord Jesus. I am not thinking so much of that precious life on earth of which we would delight to speak that was given up in death; that life that was so delightful to heaven and upon which heaven was opened and the Father proclaimed His delight in Him. I was impressed recently with the reference to the voice from the excellent glory. What a voice! I do not think anyone had heard a voice from the excellent glory before, but it spoke in relation to the Lord Jesus.

My thought is not to speak of that precious life on earth, but to speak of His present life. His present life is of infinite interest to those that love Him. The young people might well ask the question, 'If the Lord Jesus is alive today what is He doing? What is the character of that life?' When we were younger, those of my age, we often used to hear it said that He took my place in death in order that His life, His present life, might become my life. That really is the burden of my message tonight, that we might be freshly stirred as to His life and be exercised that that life might become ours.

How wonderful that life is! The Lord Jesus is living tonight! There is a Man living in glory tonight! I had an impression at the Lord's Supper that He is currently sitting upon His Father's throne. There is a Man sitting upon His Father's throne. The Lord Jesus presented that to the overcomer in Laodicea. You might say it is one of the choicest statements that the Lord Jesus makes to those seven assemblies, and He presents it to the overcomer in Laodicea. He says "He that overcomes, to him will I give to sit with me in my throne; as I also have overcome, and sat down with my Father in his throne", Rev 3: 21. What a moment of intimate enjoyment between the Father and the Son. I believe one who has helped us made reference to the fact that the Father found delight in making room for Christ to sit upon His throne. What joy was in the Father's heart!

What delight in the heart of Christ, to have a place along with the Father upon His throne.

Soon of course, He will take up His own throne and He will reign. I do not want to speak of that, but it is about to happen. He will have His own throne. He has the right and title to it now, but He will take it up in a day yet to come. When I think of the Lord Jesus living, I am thinking of it not only as a statement of doctrine: my desire is that it might be presented as a fact, to be known in the heart of every believer – the Lord Jesus is living. He is not inactive tonight. Indeed, He is very active and lying behind all that He is doing is His love. The same love that led Him to the cross, the same love that was manifested in giving His life when He was here in a flesh and blood condition is the love that pervades His present activity in relation to His own and in relation to His God.

I read in Romans because, Paul says “...in that He lives, he lives to God”. That is a profound statement in itself – “he lives to God”. You might say He lived to God when He was here! How blessedly true that was. He moved through circumstances like our own, sin apart of course. He worked. It would appear from the scripture that he took over the business when Joseph died. At one point, He was the carpenter’s son and then they say, “Is not this the carpenter?”, Mark 6: 3. It would appear that He knew what it was to work in the everyday responsibilities that we have in life. How wonderful that the One we are speaking of has come into such a condition in flesh and blood to take up and to move in the very circumstances in which you and I move, and is able to understand what you and I are going through in our day-to-day circumstances. How wonderful that is!

The One who came was no less than the Creator of the universe, but coming into such lowly circumstances and into the scene in which sin had dominion. That is Romans 6. The very world through which we are passing is a world in which sin has dominion.

It is subject to the prince of this world, it is under his domination.

Sin is not reigning for the believer, but it is reigning in the scene through which we are passing – what a world it is! The more we are

kept in nearness to the Lord Jesus, the more we shall feel the inroad, darkness, and depravity of sin that is made way for and legitimised in the world around us.

Paul, in writing to the dear saints at Rome says, "...if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him, knowing that Christ having been raised up from among the dead dies no more: death has dominion over him no more". It could not, could it?

Death could not have dominion over the Lord Jesus. He went into death and broke its power. What a public testimony there was when the Lord Jesus went into death. When he uttered that loud cry upon the cross and expired – what a public testimony that He was going into death victoriously! He went in victoriously! No one else has entered into death victoriously, but He did! He went into death and broke its power and He came out of it. He was raised from among the dead by the glory of the Father. There was a public testimony that death had dominion no longer. It could not have! He also condemned the sin that brought death into this world in His going into death. He has to say to it no more. He has died to sin once for all – it is finished from the divine side.

It is a good thing to take our bearings from the divine side and from Christ, from His death and from His present life. If we take our bearings from what is around us we shall end in corruption, but if we take our bearings from Christ, we shall know what it is to be brought into life. The apostle then goes on to say, "...in that he lives, he lives to God" Wonderful statement! He is there living for the pleasure of God. He came into a world in which man lived for his own pleasure. He suffered in His obedience and devotion to the will of God. He suffered in His spirit and in going into death, He suffered in His body, but now He lives and He lives to God. All that could ever be for the divine pleasure is there in that blessed Man, a Man out of death. The vastness of the fruit of His death has been established in Him, a Man out of death and living to God.

One might say carefully, and I trust the brethren will understand what I mean, that in His present life, His God remains His object. All that He does, He does for the pleasure of God. That

will yet be seen publicly when He comes out and gathers up the kingdom and presents it to God. God remains His object in all that He does! What a man! The One who has title to every dominion, will soon take it up, and yet in the devotion of His love is living to God.

Now Paul says, “So also ye reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God”, that is the believer’s portion. I am to ‘reckon myself’. Reckoning comes into Romans, even God reckons in this epistle. He reckons persons as righteous. But the reckoning also comes in from the believer’s point of view. It seems to me, having been affected by the way the Lord Jesus has been and having a heart moved by the greatness of the love that is flowing from Him where He is, the believer says, I want to reckon myself dead that I might have part with Him. You remember the eunuch travelling back from where he had been was reading in Isaiah 53, and he came to the point where it says, “for his life is taken from the earth”, Acts 8: 33. Not that He died, but His life was taken from the earth, that is – it was taken to where it belonged. The eunuch says ‘I want to be with Him where He is’. He says, “Behold water; what hinders my being baptised?”, Acts 9: 36. I think he is an example of a believer who reckoned himself dead to sin. He said ‘let me go into the water of baptism, let me take my part alongside of Christ’. The eunuch identified himself with Christ in the likeness of His death. Mr Darby’s footnote (see note ‘c’ to Romans 6 verse 5 – Darby Translation), says it means as we have grown together with Christ in the likeness of His death – “so also we shall be of his resurrection”. The eunuch really was one who laid hold of the light of it. The appreciation of His person so filled his soul that he said I want to be with Him where He is.

So Paul says, “so also ye reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”. How wonderful to be in Christ Jesus, in that heavenly Man, the centre of everything for God’s pleasure – the One who was anointed of God. Paul says reckon yourselves alive to God in that blessed Man. Not in the Adam in which we have died – in the Adam all have died. I am no longer viewing myself as

in Adam, but I view myself as in Christ Jesus. Paul says, "...alive to God in Christ Jesus." If that Man is living for the pleasure of God and all God's delight is centred in Him, Paul says you see yourself in that blessed Person and reckon that is where your life is – "reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

In Hebrews, we have the Lord Jesus as our great high priest. The writer says, "For such a high priest" (7: 26). He is beyond compare. If I had written it, I would have said having a high priest but the writer says, "For such a high priest". How distinctive He is in everything that He does and in all that He is. He stands in His own distinctiveness. The writer goes over in these verses the distinctiveness of the system of which Christ is the centre as over against Judaism. Hebrews is a very interesting book. It is a book of better things. One thing that is mentioned in relation to the priesthood of Christ in this chapter is what is perfected. The law could never make perfect. It showed up the imperfections of man.

The result of this section, in which the writer is speaking, is a Son perfected forever. There was never anything perfected in the system in relation to men, but here is a Man who is fit for the office that God has given Him and is sustaining people like you and me in relation to the will of God. That is what is in view in His priesthood, that while we are here we might be sustained in relation to the will of God.

How wonderful that service is! As living, He is fulfilling that priestly function before God. You will remember that in the old dispensation when the priest went in to serve before God, he had bells on the bottom of His garments and the children of Israel as standing outside would know that he was active and that he was still alive – he was there serving in the Holy place (see Exod. 28: 33).

What a service! But the Lord Jesus needs no bells, if one might speak reverently. The witness of His living and interceding lies in the affections and strength that the believer proves as flowing from Himself. There is the witness that He is interceding. I ask myself and maybe others, am I conscious of the intercession of Christ? I am conscious of the fact He has been into death for me. I am conscious that He has laid down His life and that He has taken it

again and that He has been received up in glory, but have I the witness in myself of His present intercession? I would just leave that question with myself, because the witness of His intercessory service lies in the strength and the support that persons have to be here in fidelity to the will of God. The strength for the testimony lies not in ourselves. It lies in a Man glorified and in the presence here of the Holy Spirit. What strength there is in divine persons and that strength is available to us.

The writer says as to this glorious Person that He lives in the power of an indissoluble life. How wonderful that is! The priesthood of old had no power of indissoluble life. They took up their service because another had died and they knew that they would die and another would take it on in their stead. However, the Person of whom we are speaking lives in the power of an indissoluble life.

Dear brother and sister, He is living for you – always living to intercede for us. I think that is of immense encouragement in the moment in which we are. Publicly there seems to be so much weakness and breakdown on every hand and yet the One who lives in the power of an indissoluble life has never ceased in His intercessory service.

Now I would just raise the question with myself, as to how much I have taken on the service of intercession? If His life is mine, what He is doing will be the very things that interest me and I will take them on. Paul says to Timothy that he desires that “prayers, intercessions, thanksgiving be made for all men”, 1 Tim 2: 1. There is an interesting footnote to that section. Intercession is the ‘personal and confiding intercourse with God on the part of one able to approach Him’ (note ‘g’ – Darby Translation). How wonderful! How much do I know of it?

The day in which we are is a sobering one. There is everything to rejoice in, Paul says “Rejoice in the Lord always”, Phil 4: 4. That is on the one side, but we are in a day that is sobering and it calls for the character of the intercessor. He is able, in this verse, to save completely – that is not, as we know, our eternal salvation – but He is saving completely. That is, while we are

moving through this very scene, we are proving the saving power of Christ in relation to every circumstance through which we are passing. He is able to hold us in relation to the will of God but His service is proved by those who desire to know it – those who desire to know what the will of God is, who desire to reckon themselves dead to sin and alive to God, and that that will should be supreme in their life. As it is so, the present service of Christ comes in immediately to strengthen and to support us in the very scene through which we are passing. What a service it is, dear brethren!

All the power of the throne is available to us through the One who is there interceding before it. Am I putting myself in the way of that intercessory service?

So the writer goes on here and says, “For such a high priest became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and become higher than the heavens” (v 26). You can understand in the light of that priestly intercessory service of Christ, why the writer says “such a high priest became us”, that we as moving through this scene belong to that order of life in which He has His part. We belong to it and He is sustaining us here in the scene of His rejection.

I come now to Ephesians. In Colossians, we have the power of the life of Christ; in Ephesians, we have the strength of the love of the Christ. Ephesians gives us the power of the Spirit to enjoy it, Colossians gives the power of that life. In Colossians, Paul says, “If therefore ye have been raised with the Christ, seek the things which are above, where the Christ is”, Col 3: 1. “When the Christ is manifested who is our life, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory”, Col 3: 4. Everything in Colossians is there resident in that blessed Man, but in Ephesians through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are proving currently the strength of the love of Christ. How wonderful are the resources available to us. We are not here only because One has been here in perfection and died. What testimony would there be if that were the only hope and experience of the believer? We are here because One is living before God and the Holy Spirit is here and indwelling those that love our Lord Jesus.

I read this section in Ephesians because I wanted to touch on His service in relation to the assembly. He is living and if one might say carefully, His chief occupation at the present time is serving in relation to the assembly. It has been said it is His chief joy. Is it mine? If His life is mine, is the assembly my chief joy? I believe, dear brethren, as we prove what it is increasingly to be united to Him we shall know in greater measure that His joy becomes ours. Paul speaks of "Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it, in order that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word". This is a profound reference in Ephesians 5, "has delivered himself up for it, in order that he might sanctify it".

One might ask, does the assembly need sanctifying? Paul in writing to the saints here has in view what she is here as the wife in the absence of Christ. She is taking up responsibilities. She is moving here through a scene of evil and as moving through it, she maintains his judgment as to it in every detail. That is what the assembly is doing as His wife and the Lord's present service is that she might be untarnished by that which she has to pass through and which she may even at times have to handle. He sanctifies and purifies her. It has been said often that it is preventative and I am sure that is right. It is not exactly that the assembly has become spotted and tarnished by the things of the world. The thought rather is that whilst she is acting in her wifely duty of upholding His rights in a scene of evil and corruption, He is serving her that she might be held at the true level in which she will come out in bridal beauty towards Himself in a day yet to come.

He delivered himself up in view of this service. There are certain things in this epistle to the Ephesians that have in view the dispensation in which we are and do not go beyond it; this is one of those things. It has in view Christ going into death in view of His service in this dispensation. It will not be a service that will be rendered beyond this dispensation; the assembly will be presented to Himself glorious. He is serving her now in view of the day of her presentation to Himself. You get a similar reference in Ephesians 3, that the all-various wisdom of God is manifested now to the

principalities and authorities according to the purpose of the ages (see vv 10,11). Think of divine purpose from before time that there should be in this dispensation the manifestation in the assembly, of the all-various wisdom of God. Does it not give some impression of the greatness and glory of the moment in which we are? That God purposed for this moment. The death of Christ had this moment in view. Of course an eternal result was in view, but He delivered Himself up for it in order that His present service might proceed in this dispensation. I say to my own soul, we are living in the greatest moment that there has ever been. You say, there is breakdown and confusion on every hand. I say, take your bearings from where Christ is and what He has done. Take your bearings from the scripture here, presenting to us what is entirely for the pleasure of God and for which Christ has not given up His service. He lives and serves! What a service it is, sanctifying it, purifying it by the washing of the word. You say how do I know that service is proceeding? We know that it is proceeding through the word that He gives. I am not speaking of just this occasion, but through the present living ministry of Christ, we are conscious that His service is proceeding, proceeding in men and women like ourselves who form part of this great vessel, the assembly, drawing us apart from the world. I read a remark of Mr Coates the other day; he said if ministry does not help to put greater distance between my soul and the world it is of no value at all. One has to stop and think when reading a statement like that, but that is the present service of Christ, that He is serving each one of us. As He served His own when He was here, so He is serving now in view of the features that mark the world never having a part in the lives of those who form part of the assembly. As to the assembly, He serves that in all that she is doing for Him she might be kept in her beauty, attractiveness and perfection for His heart and satisfaction.

Then it goes on to say, "For no one has hated His own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as also the Christ the assembly" that is another aspect of His service. Not only is He sanctifying it, but He is also nourishing and cherishing. He is bringing in the

resources of His love. What is the power of the assembly's life?

The power of the assembly's life is in His life; she finds her life in His. John does not give us the teaching of the assembly, but he gives us the experience of it. He says in his gospel "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14: 20), and He says, "because I live ye also shall live", John 14: 19. That is the assembly's life. John is not putting labels on things. We have often been told that John gives us the substance without the labels, but Paul puts the labels on. The Lord says, "because I live ye also shall live" – that is the present life of the assembly, sustained here in the power of the Spirit, living in the life of Christ. She needs nothing outside of Him and in the resources of His love He is bringing all that would nourish and cherish, satisfying her heart, maintaining that constitution that radiates in His presence in the appreciation of His glory. What resources He is bringing in. He does it in our local companies. He does it through ministry of the word and He does it as he comes in at the Supper; bringing in impressions of Himself and leaving them in the company, in order that He might nourish and cherish that vessel and that it might be held in all its beauty for Him. Oh, may He be increasingly the object of my heart, great as He is, glorious as He is! One whose love is great enough to hold this vessel and to hold it eternally and cause that it is responsive for the pleasure of God and from which the glory of God will shine forth. What a vessel He is sustaining. He is sustaining it with the strength of His love.

Now that is His service, where do I come in? What is my chief joy? Is the assembly my chief joy? We are in a day in which largely the light as to the assembly has been turned away from and in many places given up. I am not speaking of those with whom we walk, although we would be kept in exercise that the glory and lustre of this vessel might be kept in our appreciation. But, is His chief joy my chief joy? We are living in difficult times, times that need overcoming. What lies at the root of the overcomer's movement is love for Christ. I ask my soul, is He not worthy of some overcoming? Is He not worthy of it or would I rather have an easier path and

cause that what is His chief joy becomes secondary in my life? In this scripture, He gave Himself up for it in order that He might serve in all the faithfulness and fidelity of His love that which so delights His heart even now. He is maintaining her in love for Him. That is the result of the nourishing and cherishing. She is responsive to Him – to those affections that He bestows upon her. He finds an answer. His affections are not received in a vessel that is stoical. His affections are received in a vessel that loves Him and that can respond to them and moves in such a way that satisfies His own heart even in the present time. What a time we are in.

Well, is His chief joy mine? If He is my life, dear brother, dear sister, what is so delightful to Him will become increasingly delightful to me? I must arrive at it through the acceptance of death. I could have no part with Him in the life in which He was here in flesh and blood conditions. That life had to be laid down and if I am to take up His life as mine, I have to come to it that it is through the acceptance of His death for myself. All that belonged to the first order of man had to be removed. The Lord says in John 6, “Unless ye shall have eaten the flesh of the Son of man, and drunk his blood, ye have no life in yourselves” (v 53). He goes on to say “*he* also who eats me shall live also on account of me” (v 57). How wondrous to be living in that life, the life that is in Christ Jesus. May it be so increasingly for His Name’s sake.

TWICKENHAM

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