

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 204

March 1990

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THE LORD'S INTEREST IN LOCALITIES

BURIAL OF A BROTHER

BURIAL OF A SISTER

"FOR YOUR SALES"

CHILDREN OF GOD

the original paper copy was incorrectly numbered No 205

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THE LORD'S INTEREST IN LOCALITIES

Revelation 1: 4-6; 3: 22; 22: 6,17; Hebrews 10: 23-25; Matthew 18: 20;

Malachi 3: 16

J.R. These scriptures give some idea of what it means to God that there should be persons in local settings and their comings together. The verses we have read in Revelation speak about the assemblies: "John to the seven assemblies which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is, and who was, and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ". It is to the seven assemblies. The verse we read in chapter 3 is "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies"; and in chapter 22: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies". These are persons in local settings. All believers are the subjects of interest to the Father, to the Lord Jesus and to the Holy Spirit, but there is something special about persons who are in local settings and who gather together. We need to see the advantage such persons are to heaven, to God. We take these things for granted, but we might be encouraged to continue and to be assured of the interest of heaven in these settings and the advantage to the Father; I suppose "him who is, and who was, and who is to come"; – I suppose the Father is in mind; to the seven Spirits, which would be the Holy Spirit related to these assemblies; and to "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness".

C.FD. Do you think it would help us to get a greater appreciation of what the Lord has been preparing to set in each place? Paul seems to catch the spirit of this; he writes to localities – to Corinth, to Philippi. These are local assemblies. I suppose we should have great regard for what the Lord has set in any given locality.

J.R. Paul addresses the Corinthians: "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", 1 Cor 1: 2. The recovery which began one hundred and sixty years ago

was to the economy of local assemblies, not to Pentecost with the spectacular gifts that were there. Let us appreciate not only what local meetings mean to us but the advantage that such settings are to the Father and to the Spirit and to the Lord Jesus and what They have in mind to produce.

J.A.P. That is reinforced by the Lord Jesus Himself. In Matthew 16 He says "my assembly" (v.18) – which I understand is a general thought – but in chapter 18 He refers to the locality, as to which He has given further help since He went to heaven.

J.R. That is right. "My assembly" must involve the assembly consisting of all who compose it from Pentecost to the rapture; it is still being built; but "the assembly" in chapter 18 (v 17), as you say, is the local setting. Let us be clear: we cannot say that we are the assembly. We gather together in localities, but do not let us think that we are the assembly, because the assembly in a place includes every believer in the place who has the Spirit. Assembly character is what the Lord would appreciate and what we would desire to have part in at the present time; assembly light, assembly character, assembly principles governing us.

J.A.P. That is very encouraging. Whether the numbers are few or many in a place, to hold the light of the assembly is a very great test; it is to me anyway.

J.R. Yes. What you raise is important because in Matthew 18 you have the word "tell it to the assembly"; that contemplates the early days before the public ruin, when all believers could be together.

Then the Lord said, "Again I say to you, that if two of you" (v 19), that is two assembly persons, two having assembly light, governed by assembly principles, of assembly character, and that is what the Lord looks for in the day in which we are – "two of you". Then He says "where two or three" – that is the local setting – "where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them". Such local gatherings are for our benefit but also of benefit to the Father and the Son and the Spirit. Those who are faithful in

localities provide a training ground for having part in administration in the world to come, which will be assembly administration.

G.H. When He says "Again I say to you", does that bring out how important it is in His mind?

J.R. Yes, the Lord graciously looking down through the centuries and having in mind conditions in which we are at the present time when the church publicly is in ruins. "Two of you" and "two or three gathered together unto my name" refer to conditions in which we are, really remnant conditions, but all the moral features of the original are to be found in remnant conditions for the pleasure of God and of advantage to Him to form what He has in mind. It is an advantage to us to have the privilege of gathering together and an advantage to divine Persons.

G.D.P. Even in the Old Testament, "Assemble the people, and I will give them water" (Num 21: 16): that was the advantage. But could you tell us a little more about assembly administration in the day to come?

J.R. What is your idea of administration in the world to come?

G.D.P. I am sure that is right but the individual must come into it when he is over ten cities:

J.R. Yes, but where did he learn administration?

G.D.P. I suppose at the present time.

J.R. Yes, and he learns it, I think, in taking responsibility locally.

G.D.P. Working together with the brethren locally.

J.R. Being an influence for good in the locality he becomes influential in the world to come. Is that right?

E.C.B. That is certainly what we have been taught. Is it not, strictly speaking, the local assembly in Jerusalem of which the Lord speaks as "me" in Acts 9? It is interesting that in Acts 8 it refers to Jerusalem and the assembly which was there, and in Acts 13 you have Antioch and the assembly which was there, showing how early the idea of assemblies in a place entered.

J.R. Exactly. Paul was used by the Lord to establish such local settings; he was specially used for that, the light from heaven and the truth of the body governing him. Also what is peculiar to Paul is the truth of the new man. The Lord said, "Why dost thou persecute me?". What Paul saw were features of the Lord Jesus formed in persons, and that is what he hated; he hated the Lord Himself, and he hated these features in testimony which is the new man. The body is the organism and the new man is the continuation of Christ in testimony which Paul saw and hated.

E.C.B. Does that not come into 1 Corinthians 1: "according as the testimony of the Christ has been confirmed in you" (v.6)?

J.R. Quite so.

W.McK. Would you say that if the Lord has set me in a place He intends me to learn administration in that place, not in some assembly where I am not local.

J.R. That is very important. Most of us have our hands full looking after ourselves, keeping ourselves right. If we are able to keep ourselves right, which is a full time job, maybe we are able to influence rightly what is in our locality.

W.McK. I would agree with that. What strikes me is that I can carry in intercession all the assemblies, but the Lord does not mean that I should be in every place administering.

J.R. Exactly. I do not think anybody today has the gift of government. I believe as the result of all the ministry we have received that government belongs to localities, and government in localities depends on the quality of the persons in the localities. I do not know whether you agree with that.

W.McK. Yes, I would agree with that fully. "The government shall be upon his shoulder", Isa 9: 6. I think it behoves us to remember that.

J.R. There were gifts of government that Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 12, and I have no doubt there were persons with the gift of government in those whose ministries we value which extended over one hundred and twenty years, but I do not know anybody now

who has. Hence the importance of the quality of persons in our localities.

J.McK. That is the principle which Paul gave to Titus in relation to Crete, to set elders in every city that they might set right what remained unordered.

J.R. Quite so. Paul established elders – "And having chosen them elders in each assembly, having prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord, on whom they had believed", Acts 14: 23. Overseership and eldership in localities are very important. The Lord addresses the angel of each assembly; all are responsible, but some are more responsible than others, and the Lord would hold some more responsible than others for conditions in our localities.

K.A.O. To confirm what you are saying, Paul told the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20 what they were to do; he says "shepherd" (v 28). You might have thought that they did not need that, because that was part of their responsibility, but he exhorts them to take up that matter in responsibility.

J.R. Exactly. He showed them his hands how he had served them. He said that for three years he had been amongst them publicly and in every house admonishing each one of them with tears. Is that not the service of overseer? They are not chosen today, they desire and qualify.

K.A.O. Too, he twice mentions his tears. I feel exercised myself – I wonder how much we really do care about our local brethren.

J.R. Yes. For instance the care of the young people; the feelings of Paul came out in his tears. He says, "each one of you".

J.McK. Spiritual and moral qualities are needed in the elders in a city, not simply the hoary head (which, if in the way of righteousness, is honoured, see Prov 16: 31), but experience with the Spirit especially and with the Lord's authority is required in elders in every city.

J.R. Elders show by example, not only by precept. That would have its place but example is very important.

J.McK. Also teaching, teaching the right way in which we should move and the things we should do, and our dependence upon divine Persons for our leadership and for our instruction, having an opened ear, the word going down into our hearts, so that we answer morally and spiritually to our place as elders in the city.

H.H. It is very interesting that in Mr Darby's day there were those who wanted him to go to a certain place to administer but he would not go for he wanted what was there to administer; he did not want to intervene himself.

J.R. That is what Paul did at Corinth, he did not go but he sent Timothy, and he desired Apollos to go. As far as I can see there is no locality in fellowship in such a poor state that we would not go to here. Things were bad enough at Corinth; Paul did not go because he was an apostle, but he sent Timotheus and he wanted Apollos to go, and apparently Titus must have gone because he brought back the report. I fail to see any reason for one not going to a locality which is in fellowship.

T.E.D. Would you say that our very inquiry as to our relations with God underlies how we act in the local assembly? It is an individual matter in my own relations with God, and then as we work things out in the local assembly it is as drawing upon the headship of Christ.

J.R. Quite so. We learn much by being in localities; we learn in our localities what is in our own hearts. If we are alone in our Christian pathway we will not have the tests we have in our localities. Peter writes, "Laying aside therefore all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings", 1 Pet 2: 1. Such things come out in company. If I were alone on a desert island I would have no reason to have malice or guile or hypocrisies; it is as we work together we find these things in our hearts; they have to be judged or else disaster will result.

T.E.D. When it comes down to just two in a locality it would be that much more exercising in working it out, but it can be worked out if there is the drawing from the headship of Christ and seeking to care in the light of the whole assembly in the place.

J.R. Exactly. The Lord comes down to "two of you", two assembly-minded persons, two persons with an assembly outlook; and then "two or three". Is it not gracious of the Lord that He should foresee conditions such as we are in now? I question if the great leaders whose ministry we value in the recovery foresaw the smallness of the conditions in which we find ourselves. But is not the Lord able?

He says "where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them". As we have been taught, it is not a promise, it is a consequence. As a consequence of two or three being gathered together unto His name He will be there, and if He is there I want to be there. We need to value our local gatherings.

E.C.B. Is not what you said earlier the whole substance of what is known as the Ryde division, when there were exercises there and a brother took it on himself to think the state of things there was weak and went down and intervened in local matters. Mr Darby says, There was an assembly there that was to be recognised. A brother took upon himself to intervene in that situation and division arose; there was sorrow enough already but the history of it remains. I think the history of Bethesda is better known than the history of the Ryde division and it is the latter division which bears on some current exercises.

J.R. That is right. The reason of it was a low state among the brethren.

E.C.B. Among the brethren generally, not just in one place.

J.R. Exactly. It was not a matter of the truth the truth was not at stake, it was a low state among the brethren. Maybe our state is not so good as we think it is. We need to see our selves as the Lord sees us. The Lord writing to the seven assemblies showed what He thought of them, not what they thought themselves.

E.C.B. One speaks humbly and carefully about these things, but I wonder if I go to a place and intervene in a local matter I do not regard myself as superior to what the Lord has there, and I ought to regard what the Lord has there as always superior to me.

J.R. Exactly. Even Paul had to recognize that what he was the means of forming under the Lord in localities was greater than himself. In Acts 20 and 21 in every assembly there was a lead which he could have followed.

J.A.P. I think it has been remarked that there was more evil stated by Paul in the two epistles to Corinth than could be said of almost any assembly in the recovery; that is not to legalize evil, as we know, but yet he called them the assembly of God which is in Corinth. The concern I have in moving around a little, as I know you have, is to strengthen what is right; feed the brethren.

J.R. That is very important.

C.F.D. Which can be done without projecting myself into the rights of that locality. There are certain things that belong there and I do not have to intrude into that. I can remember, as you can, a situation in the eastern part of this country, in which a brother intruded into the rights of the place; he was giving direction as to what should be done, and the brother of whom we thought so much at the time rebuked that, he would not accept it. I think we ought to remember these things and carry them forward with us and be affected accordingly.

J.R. I think one of the things that the Spirit is saying to the assemblies is, Leave local matters where they belong. I think He has said that for a long time, but it is a question whether we have ears to hear what He is saying.

E.F.C. Mr Taylor gave a wonderful example in 1937 in his approach to the situation in Newcastle. We can read the letters surrounding that incident. He went there and gave a word in a powerful way and left the matter with the local brethren to work out.

J.R. If there is concern there is plenty of room for prayer and, too, for positive ministry if occasion arises, but not going to a locality because they are not doing what I think they should do is not right. I do not know all the facts but those who are local do.

S.E.H. Would you say a word as to how the matter of overseers and ministers would work out. You mentioned the gift of government not being present amongst us, but both of those features are in 1 Timothy 3. Would you say something as to overseers and how that works out in contrast to, or along with, ministers.

J.R. Ministers are deacons, and sisters can be deacons, sisters are included in ministers in 1 Timothy 3. Overseers would be concerned about the spiritual welfare of the saints. Ministers would be brothers and sisters who care more for the practical needs of the saints. That is the way I understand it. Both these features are needed in our localities, but they are unofficial; they are not officially appointed, but the work has to be done. There has to be desire to have part in these very important services in the locality.

S.E.H. That is helpful. It speaks of one aspiring to exercise oversight, then the qualifications, and then the thought of taking care of the assembly of God. That seems to be an advance on the man in the gospel who took him to the inn and said, "Take care of him", Luke 10: 35. Should that not be the exercise in any service toward the saints, taking care of them, taking care of the assembly of God?

J.R. The blessed Spirit is the great Innkeeper, but then persons locally have to take on that service. It says in Acts 20, "wherein the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers" (v.28). So the innkeeper idea ought to be seen locally, the Spirit using persons.

J.G. In verse 5 of Revelation 1, is it the motives and the energy to carry things through rightly? "To him who loves us" is a current matter, and then "has washed us" and "made us". We are in the making now. Some of us have constantly to be adjusted but we are here to get help.

J.R. We are here to get help, that is right. Preparedness to be adjusted is a very fine feature. We may have ideas and thoughts and think we are right, but we need to be prepared to be adjusted by the Lord to come into line with His mind; that would make for unity. Lack of unity is largely caused by the lack of preparedness to be

adjusted. If we are all prepared to be adjusted according to the Lord we would all be of one mind.

T.E.D. We sang at the beginning of the meeting, 'We sit as learners at Thy feet' (Hymn 216). Mary chose that part. Is it not that element in a locality that leads to the needed correction and help coming in?

So in John 12 there is service and the house is filled and each is in his and her place in accord with the way we should be in our local assemblies.

M.W. Tell us about this touch in chapter 22. After all the judgments He says "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies". Is this His intense interest in us down here?

J.R. Yes. Why did He say "to you in the assemblies"? Why does the Lord say, "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies"? It shows divine interest in local settings. He could have said, I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you, but He says, "to you in the assemblies". It is an advantage to the Lord Jesus that we should be in local settings, advantage to us too, and of intense interest to the Lord.

E.C.B. In regard to what you were saying earlier about external influence brought to bear on places, I suppose it would be right for us to say at the same time that no locality would exclude the godly advice or help from elsewhere, but the person bringing in godly advice would be equally godly in leaving the matter to the locality.

J.R. Exactly. Godly exercise would be priestly exercise, considering for God, considering for persons.

E.C.B. I think that. But while we emphasise, and rightly – and I venture to say we cannot emphasise too much at the present time – that localities have the authority from the Lord to deal with their own matters, it would not be right to exclude godly counsel from others, but those who are capable of giving godly counsel will recognise that the authority resides in the place.

J.R. Very good. I am sure that is very important. Also if any action taken by a locality causes concern, that locality should have regard

to the concern because a locality acts on behalf of all.

Administration is local but local administration is action on behalf of all who are in fellowship. So if there is concern the matter should become a concern in the locality where the action has taken place.

E.C.B. That is right. But it needs also to be borne in mind that it is only those in the place who know the whole of the matter. It is just factually true that anyone outside receives reports of what is inside from a particular source, whoever it is – right, wrong or intermediate – but the only persons who know everything are local.

J.R. That is right. After all the fuss and all the anxiety and all the exercise and all the feeling, what has been done has to be accepted anyway.

E.C.B. It is perhaps that we do not trust the locality to deal with its own matters, and we do not then trust the Lord that, if they made a mistake, He will see that it is put right. We need confidence in one another, confidence in assemblies and above all confidence in Christ.

J.R. That is very important.

L.McF. So in Acts 9 we get Ananias and the adjustment needed in relation to Saul: that is what we should be ready for.

J.R. That is very good. I was impressed recently with that chapter. The Lord said to Saul of Tarsus, "Enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (v.6). The Lord knew when He said that that Ananias would have difficulty; He was the one He was going to send, but He had confidence that Ananias would accept the adjustment. In Acts 10 the angel sent by the Spirit told Cornelius to go to Joppa to fetch Simon, who is surnamed Peter. The Spirit knew well that Peter would have difficulties but He had confidence that Peter would accept the adjustment. I hope the Lord has confidence in every one of us here that we are prepared to accept adjustment.

L.B. So to Ananias it is no longer Saul the persecutor but "brother". He becomes a brother, which is very important.

J.R. "Saul, brother": that is fine. Ananias fully accepted the adjustment. He had no wrong motive, he thought he was protecting the saints because he had heard what kind of man Saul was. There was no ulterior motive but he had to be adjusted.

J.A.P. In Joshua, chapter 22, after a long period of silence, Phinehas comes to light. When the brethren were ready to go to war with Reuben and Gad over a matter, Phinehas went down to them and ascertained the facts, and he came back and really said, It is not exactly what the brethren thought. Thus unity was preserved. There was a man, it seems to me, held in reserve since the book of Numbers when he dealt with a serious matter. Newcastle has been referred to: there are elders amongst us who have seen things earlier who can help the brethren now in what you are saying.

J.R. What you say is true. We had that chapter in the local reading at Toronto. The people heard what the two and a half tribes had done and "the whole assembly of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh, to go up against them to war" (v 12). They faced them with wickedness before they inquired; they inquired afterwards. Before they inquired you find a whole section from verse 13 to verse 20. Just like ourselves – we hear something and we put the worst construction on it before we inquire. That is what they did, even Phinehas was in that. When they inquired and had the matter explained to them they were quite satisfied, in fact it says the thing was good in the sight of the children of Israel.

J.A.P. Phinehas finally says, "This day we perceive that Jehovah is among us" (v 31) – no need for the war.

J.R. That is right. But why did they gather themselves to go to war before they inquired? They spoke about wickedness, they compare the action with what happened at Baal Peor and Achan; they made all these accusations and then when they heard the explanation they were quite satisfied; it was good in their sight. It is good to make full inquiry first.

H.J.G. One thing we always need to bear in mind is the feature of lowliness. Paul said "I indeed myself thought that I ought to do much

against the name of Jesus the Nazaraean", Acts 26: 9. That really worked out in the local assemblies.

J.R.. It did. H said in Acts 20, I was among you in all lowliness (see v 19). That is a very fine feature – lowliness, humility – and we have every reason to keep lowly and humble not o be presumptuous but to be marked b; lowliness. "Keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace" (Eph 4: 3); what precedes that is "all lowliness".

L.McF. Is that not part of the discipline we go through in the local assembly which is intended to keep us small?

J.R. Exactly. We are obviously in remnant conditions. Think of the numbers we had in this are in our country, on the Continent, in Australia and New Zealand, South Africa: we are in remnant conditions. That is a humbling situation, but let all the moral features of the original be found in these conditions, not the public glory of it, but the moral features of it.

J.N.C. Lowliness is safe, it keeps the brethren safe. "Put thyself down in the last place", Luke 14: 10.

J.R. The Lord was invited to that Pharisee's house; where do you think we would have found Him? We would have found Him sitting in the lowest place. He observed how they all wanted the first place. "Put thyself down in the last place".

E.C.B. While administration is important, it is not the most important thing.

J.R. No, it is not. The persons who administer are far more important than administration. What is in your mind?

E.C.B. I sometimes wonder whether we get so occupied with administration because we are occupied so little with the more positive aspects of what Christianity is in practice. It is no doubt true that we learn administration here in view of the world to come – all these things we are familiar with – but we want to be a bit more in the world to come than administrators. We shall want to be enjoying Christ for ever; that is the thing to be promoted now.

J.R. Eternal life is what we ought to enjoy, especially in our gatherings together. How administration is carried out would be an expression of the quality of the persons who are in the locality. The verse we read in Hebrews was, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom is with some". We can get into the custom of not regarding the privilege of our assembling together on the level on which God Himself values and appreciates these occasions. Entering the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus is the new and living way involving our individual links with God, which would encourage us to find ourselves in our own company, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom is with some".

K.A.O. Is there some suggestion that this word "but encouraging one another" is connected with our assembling? I wondered if there is a link in some way with the verse we read in Revelation 3: "what the Spirit says to the assemblies", In a local company is where we get encouragement from one another.

J.R. That is right. 'One another' is a fine expression; it says, "let us consider one another for provoking to love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together".

H.H. Is this word "by so much the more as ye see the day drawing near" especially for us?

J.R. Exactly.

S.E.H. Is that the day of the Lord's appearing or the rapture?

J.R. I regard the Lord's coming as one thing in two parts. The rapture is the rapturing of believers from Abel (who was possibly the first to die) right on to when the Lord comes. Immediately a change takes place when the rapture takes place, and it is followed by the appearing.

S.E.H. That is helpful. Does "the day" therefore encompass both thoughts? We are looking for both matters.

J.R. Yes. The rapture, I understand, has been referred to as the hope of the church. From the time when the Lord left His own until

the present time it has sustained in hope the personnel of the assembly right through the centuries. The hope of the church is the rapture, and the appearing follows after. This dispensation in which we are has been said to be the longest there has ever been. Why should that be? The Father who has the allocation of time allocates one thousand years to the public vindication of the Lord Jesus. He allocates two thousand years to the formation of the assembly. It is because of the greatness of the capacity of the vessel, the assembly. You get some idea in Revelation – twelve thousand stadia, cubed (see chap 21: 16). I have tried to reckon the cubic miles; I think it is three thousand three hundred and seventy five million cubic miles by the measurements given, showing the capacity of the vessel that is being formed. It takes two thousand years, allocated for the purpose. There is something special about the time we are in now; there was the time of Pentecost, the time of Paul's ministry, then the ruin; there was the revival one hundred and sixty years ago, and our time, the time of the completion of this vast vessel. How tremendous the capacity of the holy city.

J.McK. I wonder if you see the filling out of what is said in Malachi as the pouring out of blessing (see chap 3: 10) – the saints in that day looking on to what we have now, and the wonderful privileges that we enjoy together. What could be greater than the giving of Christ and the Holy Spirit and giving us one another to walk together with!

J.R. Exactly. Inasmuch as we are reduced in number we need to appreciate one another more, just as these persons in Malachi. It is a very fine verse; it says, "Then" – that is the time when there was indifference as to the rights of God, the name of Jehovah neglected, His service neglected – "Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another", often. That is a remnant condition, not many, "one to another". It says "Jehovah observed it", that is sight, "and heard", He listened to what they were saying, "and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared Jehovah, and that thought upon his name".

W.McK. They were to be unto Him a peculiar treasure. I think we ought to regard the saints in that light. We sometimes regard them as mediocre in doing things and saying things, but what they are as a treasure to Jehovah means the highest quality that God can secure for Himself.

J.R. Yes, a peculiar treasure. The Lord has something very precious to Him in localities· let us have the same value of such persons

T.E.D. The fact that He hears and He sees makes our responsibility the more.

J.R. Exactly, He observes; "Jehovah observed it, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him"; somebody, I suppose, wrote that book of remembrance "for them that feared Jehovah", that is, pious persons in localities down here, "and that thought upon his name". The Lord does not make great demands upon us; I lay upon you no other burden, the Lord says to a certain assembly (see Rev 2: 24), just like those that feared Jehovah, and thought upon His name. Can we get into that category in remnant conditions in localities?

T.E.D. Those repeated words in Revelation, "I know thy works": the Lord knows and hence. our responsibility to maintain things in accord with His will and pleasure.

J.R. I am sure you are right. It is a question of maintaining things. The warfare in Ephesians 6 is defensive. In the book of the Acts we have as many chapters dealing with Paul in prison as we do with Paul in active service. Why should that be? Paul in chapters 13 to 20 is moving out, the Lord using him to establish local assemblies; from chapter 21 to 28 he is a prisoner and he is on the defensive. More than once he speaks in his defence. That is our position, defending in humbling circumstances. It is like the conditions in which we are.

G.H. I was going to ask you about the verse which says "Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another". It says about Cornelius, "fearing God with all his house" (Acts 10: 2) and in

Ecclesiastes, "Let us hear the end of the whole matter: Fear God" chap 12: 13. Did you say that fearing Jehovah was piety?

J.R. I am going by Hebrews 5: 7: "and having been heard because of his piety", and the note says, 'Or 'fear,' as some translate; and then well rendered, as in A.V., 'in that he feared.' Piety is the same idea. Fearing God is not being afraid of Him but being under His authority and considering for Him.

G.H. One of the malefactors said, "Dost thou too not fear God...?" Luke 23: 40. Did piety enter into that?

J.R. Exactly. There is a great need for piety at the present moment. One of the features that marks the apostasy is ungodliness. You find in Jude the words ungodly and ungodliness quite a number of times and that is what marks the general situation, ungodliness. "Piety with contentment is great gain" 1 Tim 6: 6. You have proved that?

G.H. It does promote contentment.

E.C.B. The verses you read in Hebrews 10 are an echo of what is in Malachi 3, are they not? Would you not think they were holding fast in Malachi – holding fast the confession without wavering, considering one another for provoking to love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together? The day to which they are looking in Malachi is a day of judgment but the day to which they are looking in Hebrews is a day of blessing.

J.R. Quite so. Also in Malachi 2 you have Levi, "My covenant with him was of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear; and he feared me, and trembled before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth" (vv 5,6). Where do you find that today? You find it in Malachi 3: "they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another; and Jehovah observed it, and heard". Do you think so?

E.C.B. Yes. It is interesting that in Malachi it is as if it is an individual; in the history it was a tribe, but it is written as if it is an individual, and now it must be in individuals.

J.R. Exactly. This remnant goes right through many years to the beginning of Luke's gospel. It speaks there about all these things

that were the subject of conversation in the hill country of Judaea (see chap 1: 65). It is this idea continued, and we are in these days now. It is a test: what is the subject of our conversation; but when we come together there is one subject of conversation. We can sustain for a whole hour, in a reading for instance, a conversation about the truth; it is a great privilege.

G.D.P. If we were more occupied with the positive side of things these other things would fall into their proper place.

J.McK. You can never exhaust that subject of conversation.

J.R. That is quite true. A brother who came amongst us recently told us that what impressed him most was the readings, the mutual conversation. Readings are testing unless there is subjection to the Lord, liberty for the Spirit and love for one another.

E.F.C. So should we not be concerned that as many as possible in the place be together, that we may not forsake the assembling of ourselves together? I wonder if the enemy is not out to try to bring in that little wedge at the present time. I mean there is so much in this modern age to engage the time of the brethren, particularly the younger brethren, in education and otherwise, and should we not just all set ourselves to be at as many meetings as possible?

J.R. That is right. A brother with us, now with the Lord, certainly came to every meeting and was very diligent in exhorting all who could possibly be at the meetings. Of course there are legitimate matters that have to be done, children to look after and such things, but we need to get the right view of what we have been considering, the local setting and local gatherings and what they mean to heaven, the advantage they are to God in completing His work; the gatherings have a great part in that.

K.A.O. Would you include even meetings like this in this matter of not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together? I do not think in any sense we want to neglect the local meetings – that is very important, probably our first responsibility – but we have many opportunities to be at meetings; I feel exercised that we should use the opportunities we have.

J.R. That is right, not neglecting the local position. There are a good number here; it is good to see interest in the truth. How much more precious it is to the Lord to see persons who are interested in the truth. It gives Him a great advantage.

R.J. Did not Thomas miss something by not being there?

J.R. He did.

N.B. What the Lord said to Peter, "Lovest thou me?" is like "why dost thou persecute me?". It is the extension of "me" in a sense.

J.R. Peter had quite an idea of his love for the Lord and maybe some of us would have that too, but John did not have that outlook, he regarded himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. John would say, I cannot say very much about my love for the Lord but I can say much about His love for me, and of course that produces responsive love. Our love for the Lord Jesus is response to His love for us. The more we are conscious of the love of Jesus for us the more we will love Him in response, because initiative in love belongs to the Lord Jesus.

N.B. Before the Lord actually comes and this formation period is completed would you think there might be an express word by the Spirit, the Spirit speaking expressly in the ministry meeting or whenever?

J.R. What we have in our meetings for ministry ought to be what the Spirit is saying to the assemblies.

J.McK. The Spirit would speak as the saints are assembled on every occasion; He is bringing out a certain exhortation in view of the saints being stimulated for the Lord's coming, so that the Spirit and the bride say, Come.

J.R. That is right. The question is, Have I an ear to hear, am I listening, am I coming in expectancy?

E.C.B. You were speaking about Peter in John 21 and love; is not what he says in his epistle very attractively humble, "whom, having not seen, ye love", 1 Pet 1: 8? That is, persons who have never

seen Jesus and yet they loved Him and he who claimed so much has to be adjusted.

J.R. Exactly. He comes in John 21 to "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I am attached to thee". That means Thou canst observe something, there is something that can be taken account of.

E.C.B. He admired the others who had never seen Him.

J.McK. I have seen paintings of Peter failing, walking on the water and beginning to sink, but I have never seen one where an artist showed the Lord's hands stretching out and causing Peter to walk with Him into the boat. We ought to have that in our minds instead of Peter's failures. Let us see the triumph in trusting the Lord for myself and for the brethren, that I am going to be safe with His hand of support.

J.R. That is it.

E.C.B. It has been pointed out that Peter could not have walked on the water even if it was smooth.

J.R. He walked on the water supported by the Priest. It is like finding our way in the present public confusion, to experience the grace of the Lord Jesus and His priesthood to support us.

PLAINFIELD

29 May 1989

Key to initials

E.C.Burr, London; L.Bernard, Ormond Beach; N.Beckwith, Los Angeles; E.F.Cary, Los Angeles; J.N.Castle, San Francisco; C.F.Dadd, Plainfield; T.E.Druckenmiller, Plainfield; H.J.Glass, Toronto; J.Greenhalgh, Preston; G.Hesterman, Plainfield; S.E.Hesterman, Plainfield; H.Holt, Chicago; R.Johnstone, Woodstock; L.McFarlane New York; J.McKillop, Chicago; W.McKillop, Ormond Beach; K.A.Oberg, Villa Grove; D.Pfingst, Plainfield; J.A.Petersen, Plainfield; J.Renton, Edinburgh; M.Wood, Dundee

BURIAL OF A BROTHER

(i) Jim Brown

Romans 8: 18; 2 Timothy 2: 3, 4

These are the words of the apostle Paul. He says "for I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us". This is an epistle in which he – the great evangelist of the present dispensation – goes over the truth of the glad tidings in a very full way. How wonderful these things are! He begins with his link with the Saviour, knowing that Christ has been set forth as a mercy-seat through faith in His blood; he knows Him as the One who was able to bring peace, able to justify him, able to be his deliverer and to set him here in liberty and in life as a son of God; and then he gives us this reckoning.

Elsewhere he delineates his sufferings. What sufferings he endured! But he does so, not to make much of himself or of the suffering but to make much of the One who was able to sustain him in the midst of them. So we are here to make much of Christ.

The body of our dear brother is with us. He is one who has known something about link with One Who is our Saviour, Shepherd and Friend. Our brother knew Him too as a Priest who was able to stand by him in a time of suffering. He also knew what it was to suffer for the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ: He was a man who had a heart for the gospel and for the truth. I remember getting touches from him when I was a boy, touches of the glory of the Saviour whom he knew and loved. Now he is with Him with Christ in glory, with his Saviour who sustained him through all his pathway.

For our brother the time of reckoning is over, for the apostle Paul the time of reckoning is over, but for those of us who are left the time of reckoning is now. I desire that everyone present, including myself, could reckon as the apostle did. What sustained Paul was the coming glory, and what sustained our brother was the coming glory; he had a sense of it in his own soul.

He finished in triumph, and I believe he did so on account of the fact that the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ was very much before him: Oh beloved, let us have a sense of the glory of Christ, of who He is in the greatness of His person, the glory of what He has done and the glory of where He now is. I believe if we have that it will sustain us in the short suffering, but through it all has shone out the unmistakable fact of his link with his blessed and glorious Saviour who was able to sustain him through it all. It is wonderful to have a time left to us; as the writer to the Hebrews says, "For yet a very little while he that comes will come, and will not delay", chap 10: 37. He is on His way: beloved; He is coming. We do not have much longer to wait, but in the meantime I believe He is looking for persons who can reckon as the apostle did.

Then to Timothy he says: "Take thy share in suffering". The present testimony is a time of suffering, of public departure and breakdown, but Paul would say "Take thy share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one going as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of life that he may please him who has enlisted him as a soldier". It may be that we have allowed ourselves to become entangled in things down here, but the apostle would say this to us. Scripture abounds with persons who took their share in suffering. Stephen comes to mind in a peculiar way, one who suffered on account of the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ, but he was sustained in the light of the glory of God, and of Jesus standing at His right hand.

Well, beloved, let us get a fresh glimpse of Christ where He is in glory and be found here in a fuller way in the path of devotion to His will, for His Name's sake.

(ii) Alex Brown

2 Corinthians 5: 6-8; 1 Thessalonians 4: 15-18

We have come together today, not because of an arrangement made by man but because the Lord Jesus has taken our brother to be with Himself. His work here is complete: the time had come for his release, and we are together now in the presence of death. The body of our brother is here but he is with the Lord.

I read this scripture in 2 Corinthians because the apostle Paul is writing with full assurance. He says, "Therefore we are always confident, and know that while present in the body we are absent from the Lord". Now that applies to all here who are lovers of Christ – present in the body, absent from the Lord. The time is near when every lover of Christ will know what it is, if the Lord does not come, to face death. However we do not think of death but of the One who is coming for us. So Paul says, "we are always confident": that is the confidence of faith. Every true believer lives on the principle of faith, not of sight. We are gathered to celebrate the victory of the One who has annulled death and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings. What glad tidings these are! How our brother loved them! Those who heard him preach know that he always presented Christ. We should all love the glad tidings because of the One who is the theme of them, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, the One whom we have come to know and love, as our brother did. Think of what it means to have a bond with Christ that will never be broken – for if our brother is absent from the body he is present with the Lord. He is at home there. I understand that the word 'absent' here means 'away from home', and 'present' means 'at home'. Elsewhere Paul speaks of his desire to be present with the Lord and he gives a reason for that – "for it is very much better", Phil 1: 23. The portion of our brother is very much better; he is with his Saviour.

We have heard of the last moments of our brother's life here. What a wonderful matter the transforming power of Christ is, the power of the One who has annulled death. As we read in 1

Thessalonians 4, the living who remain are in no way to anticipate those who have fallen asleep. The Lord Himself with an assembling shout, shall descend from heaven. Think of a shout that will assemble every lover of Christ, those who have fallen asleep and those who remain. We are waiting for the coming of our glorious Saviour, dear brethren and friends. It may be that there is someone here who does not have a link with the Saviour. What an opportunity this is for you to decide for Christ and have Him as your Saviour and Lord. It is very simple. You can have a link with the Saviour through repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who "shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord". That bond will never be severed. We shall be with Him. What glory, the glory of being with Him! Oh, the joy of it! We would have a sense of triumph as we think of the One who has overcome death, annulled its power, and is there at the right hand of God. What a place He fills! So we would encourage one another with these words, for encouragement is needed. We think of the family. Death is the final breaking of every natural link, but what a prospect we have of what is beyond death and its power.

So we can well encourage one another with these words.

(iii) Jim Munro

Genesis 50: 17 (from "And Joseph wept") – 21

I think this is one of the most excellent passages we can find in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are full of passages like this. Our brothers have spoken of our departed brother as suffering; this book gives us the sufferings of Joseph, a type of the Lord Jesus. Who suffered like the Lord Jesus – infinite sufferings, bearing our sins in His body on the tree? Joseph suffered at the hand of his brethren; it says "they hated him" (chap 37: 4), and they hated him yet the more because of his dreams. But his dreams came to pass. He was exalted later but the way to his exaltation was by way of suffering.

He was sold for a bondman and he suffered at the hands of the Egyptians too. He was put in prison – a type of death. The Lord Jesus actually went into death, He tasted death (see Heb 2: 9), tasted it in all its reality! There is no one who suffered like Jesus.

Where I have read, the sufferer is the one who is ministering comfort. That is very encouraging to my heart. The Lord Jesus how has suffered so much, and that for us, is on the line of comforting.

There is no comforter like the Lord Jesus. I think we have all proved that. Joseph had recovered his brethren and had already said he would maintain them, and here he is repeating the words because they did not know his heart. Thank God most of us here know the heart of the Lord Jesus; we have proved it and are experiencing it even now. The words we have heard are for comfort, encouragement and consolation. So Joseph says "Ye indeed meant evil against me: God meant it for good, in order that he might... save a great people alive'. There is no people like the people of God; they are despised in the world generally but they are a great people because God has taken them up and they have a wonderful prospect before them – to be with Christ for ever. Can anything match that? That has come to us by way of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. He bore them for us, He bore them for me'. But I have the assurance in my soul that I will be with Him.

So here the sufferer is on the line of comforting. The Lord Jesus was made sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him (see 2 Cor 5: 21). It involved intense suffering which we cannot measure. He was in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights, but God did not allow Him to remain there, He raised Him from the dead by His glory, and He is now at God's right hand, waiting for the time when He is going to be publicly recognised and acclaimed in a world which has despised and rejected Him. He came here in order that men might be blessed, and what did they say? "Away with this man", Luke 23: 18. But God has "highly exalted him, and granted him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow", Phil 2: 9,10. That is the one we have been speaking of; our brother would have delighted in Christ being well spoken of.

So it says that Joseph not only comforted them but spoke consolingly to them. I love that. I think it involves more than comfort. When the lord Jesus arose from the dead, according to Luke's gospel, and came amongst His brethren, they were not very easy in His presence, just like these brethren of Joseph. But Jesus spoke consolingly to them. May we all experience this in a fresh way, for His Name's sake.

Burial of John Munro

GRANGEMOUTH

5 January 1989

BURIAL OF A SISTER

"FOR YOUR SAKES"

David Hutson

Philippians 1: 6; 23,24

Our brother has referred to the time of our departure to be with Christ. He has also referred to our being put to sleep by Jesus, a matter which is in the hand of One who has loved us so much that He has given Himself for us. As we have been reminded, we are here to bury that which is His property, for which He has given Himself, and to commit this precious body to Him in view of that day when He will raise it in glory. There is an element of mystery as to the time of our departure. We might have wondered as to our beloved sister, why she was left here so long in the weakness in which she was, but I believe we can be confident that though there is the weakness which attaches to us as in these mortal conditions, yet the work of God remains. Not only does it remain but it proceeds in His own way, unknown to us, as to which we can be assured – as it says "having confidence of this very thing". We can be confident that right until the end that work was proceeding. We may not have had access to it, but the Holy Spirit of God indwelling that body right to the very end had access to the work of God there, and we can be assured that in relation to our beloved sister, that work has proceeded to completion. And, as has been said in reference to that coming day, it will come to light in glory in its own distinctiveness, every one of us bearing the image of the Heavenly One. We shall be like Him when we see Him as He is, but each in its own distinctiveness. The distinctiveness of what has been formed in our beloved sister through the experience of that long life will be seen in glory in that day. What a comfort that is, that if we are here it is in view of the work of God proceeding, the work of God which has begun. How wonderful the beginning is, His own sovereign work in new birth making way for the reception of the glad tidings, the reception of the Saviour, faith in His precious blood and in His

finished work, that we might have part in that day of glory to be with Him and like Him for ever. Now as to our sister it is complete. We would not be here if it were complete in ourselves. The very fact that we are here shows that the work is not complete but we know that having been begun it will be completed unto Jesus Christ's day.

That is one side of the matter as to why we are left here – in view of the completion of the work of God in us. But I would seek help just to apply what the beloved apostle says here as to his departure. He says "remaining in the flesh is more necessary for your sakes". Of course we know what came out from him in his latter years, all that we have gained and all that we value in his ministry on record for us in the holy writings, but I believe that it would apply to each of us that we are left here for the sake of one another. Our sister was left here in the condition in which she was in order that there might be those feelings of sympathy and affection coming to light for our beloved brother. Our prayers too for our beloved sister, our exercises in relation to the matter of her being left here in such conditions, all this would be not simply something now to be left behind, but through the experience of it there would be something formed in us, something that we can carry afterward. So in that sense she was left here for our sakes. What have we learnt through our sister being left? What have we learnt, indeed, in relation to each one being left here? We may think as to some of our aged brethren that it would surely be far better for them to be with Christ, some on beds of sickness, in infirmity and so on, but it is for our sakes. What is it that we learn through these experiences – experiences of ourselves, experiences of one another? I believe that we are all left here, in that sense, for one another's sake, for the working of the feelings of the body of Christ, in sympathy for one another and for formation to the divine nature. I believe, beloved, that we should consider these things. It is a time of gathering up.

Our beloved sister has been gathered up now by Christ to be with Him for ever, but for us it would be a time of gathering up that we might gather up something from our sister's life, that we might gather up something from the experience of her having been with us and

gather up something from this time which will be carried forward in view of the testimony of our Lord until He come.

Burial of Mrs H.J. Taylor

LONDON

18 December 1989

CHILDREN OF GOD

As an aged apostle, John was so full of affection for the Christians to whom he wrote his epistles that he called them "my children" and "little children". In his endearing way he could include the grown-ups and the young ones in his 'family'. The believers, on their part, would be helped by his ministry, so simple and yet so profound, and one of the things that they would learn was to have love amongst themselves. As you will remember, John wrote one of his shorter epistles to a lady believer with her children and the other to Gaius whom he loved in truth. In his first epistle he referred several times to the believers as being "children of God", or by some similar expression relating to the work of God in and among them.

It is in the love of the Father that we are called to such a place in His family. I expect that all of us can remember at some time being told that we are like a parent or some other relative – and this would extend to our bearing and behaviour. Thus it is with the believer, older and younger, that we can all show the contented fear of God in our thoughts and ways.

It has been pointed out that Scripture does not use the expression 'child of God', but views believers as all in the one great family who show forth the glories of Him who has called them to represent Him down here. It was prophesied of the Lord Jesus that he would "gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad". They, on their part, have the witness of the Holy Spirit that they are such, and on account of the death and resurrection of Jesus they inherit with Him the blessings which love has promised.

Have you taken up your right to be called with others the children of God?

J.C.Evershed