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"OUR COMMONWEALTH" – I

"BEAUTY INSTEAD OF ASHES..... "

CHILDREN WANTED

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"OUR COMMONWEALTH" – I

Philippians 3: 20,21; 4: 1; Romans 5: 1-11; 2 Peter 1: 12-15

J.A.G. We were thinking on the Lord's day about heaven and the blessedness of what is heavenly and what belongs to the heavenly realm, the heavenly system. In Exodus 24 we have what stands related to the world to come of which we speak, in Jeremiah 31 the recovery of Ephraim, and in Numbers 23 the finality of God's ways and the completion of His work. I thought perhaps we might get help in these meetings in thinking about our commonwealth. It is a very wonderful expression; we are to be ready for heaven. Our commonwealth has its existence, it says, in the heavens – 'associations of life': they are heavenly. We have in this epistle, as the brethren well know, heavenly persons upon earth manifesting the features of heaven; in that sense heaven will not be a strange place to us. It says in hymn 76 'There no stranger-God shall meet thee'; we are not to be strangers in the courts above. "We await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour"; that Person is known in the greatness of His glory dominically, I think, in the commonwealth. It is not exactly that we are waiting for the rapture, true as that is, but we are waiting for Him as Saviour who shall transform our bodies of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory, according to the power which He has even to subdue all things to Himself.

Romans 5 impresses us with the greatness of the favour; it says, "Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith... we have also access by faith into this favour"· and then with the greatness of the favour of the kingdom and wonderment of divine beneficence that comes out in the chapter.

In the scripture in Peter (not that I can say too much about it) I think we are touching the realm of divine communication in manifestation; it has been manifested to him it says, that he is to put off his tabernacle. I wondered if we could inquire on these lines. It is a very stimulating thing; there is great joy in this epistle to the Philippians.

L.McF. We would be challenged at the very outset as to whether we are awaiting the coming of our Lord Jesus.

J.A.G. It would be a challenge, I suppose, as to whether we are in the full gain of the commonwealth, and I trust the Lord will help us into it over these days, because it seems to be the normal position that we await Him from heaven. "From which also" I think, refers to "the heavens". "We await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory": what a change that is going to be! That is all the change that is needed; there is no need of moral adjustment or any doctrinal adjustment in this epistle; that is what the Philippians were waiting for. I think it belongs to the recovery of the truth.

J.A.P. You referred to three scriptures, Exodus 24, Jeremiah 31 and Numbers 23. I think we would like to know what you had in mind.

J.A.G. I thought in Exodus 24 you go out in the power of the blood, the new covenant in principle is there, the Mediator is there. God says "Go up to Jehovah" (v 1), and seventy of the elders of Israel went up and they are at home in the heavenly scene. I suppose in principle the liberty of sonship is there; and there is a change because the elders become the nobles. Then there is the distinctiveness of Christ's position as Mediator, for God says to Moses, "Come up to me into the mountain, and be there" (v 12).

Jeremiah 31, as you would know, is the great new covenant chapter. There is nothing like the new covenant for relaxing the brethren. There will come a day when the watchmen on mount Ephraim as recovered will say, "Arise, and let us go up to Zion, unto Jehovah our God" (v 6). The whole position stands related to what is universal, and I think the reference to the death of Christ in that chapter bears more upon the deep sleep of Genesis 2 than it does upon the side of suffering, so that the ultimate is that the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (see Hab 2: 14). In Numbers 23 it is the end of the wilderness journey, God's end is reached: "At this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" (v 23).

J.McK. Would you give us a touch as to the moral conditions that are manifest amongst the saints with regard to this commonwealth It is not public, as we know, but it is maintained and sustained in the saints by the power of the Spirit.

J.A.G. Yes. I trust that the Lord will help us to see how these things are brought about as we proceed through the meetings.

J.McK. We hear so much at the present day of various kingdoms, upheavals and all that relates to man's administration, but here we have a kingdom that is morally sustained and maintained by the Spirit's power in the saints to the glory of God.

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. This is a very beautiful epistle and we would like to be in the gain of it. There is nothing official about Paul and Timotheus; they are bondmen. I think love is ruling and reigning here. The Philippians were also of that character.

J.McK. You remarked about the moral state of the Philippian saints, how that brings out what is maintained inwardly; that should be an incentive to all of us who have tasted a little of the joy and the blessedness and the glory of that kingdom.

J.A.G. I think so. The great desire is to gain Christ. The ultimate is the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; that was Paul's desire (see chap 3: 8). Nothing is going to hinder him; he is not allowing anything to come in the way of that which is of Christ, as He is and where He is. So that as in the commonwealth in one sense there is the fulness of knowledge; all that it will require is the transformation of the condition.

G.H. The footnote reads, 'Commonwealth' does not satisfy me, but 'citizenship' gives a different idea. Would you say something about that.

J.A.G. I think it is the character of the thing. Mr Darby in that footnote uses the expression 'I am born an Englishman'. Englishmen are Englishmen wherever they go. So you carry the features of heaven. I think that is what is in mind. It brings out character and it brings out Christ in such a way that, instead of what

Paul was (as we take the context of the chapter and all the things that he had), he becomes so enthralled by the wonderment of Christ Jesus his Lord that he is letting everything go. It is not that he counted but that he counts, it is a current thing with him in his affections that he might gain Christ. I suppose we could profitably spend some time inquiring how we may gain Christ. I think it is through committal, committal to the truth, committal to the gospel in allowing the truth of the glad tidings to have its way with us: and we find that it is practical, it works, it is a real thing. The Spirit of God is here, a divine Person, and He is working these things out in the hearts of the saints.

L.McF. So that in two households at least in Philippi, those of Lydia and the jailor there would be this atmosphere household was, do you think? It says of him that he rejoiced household-wise. Are not these features related to the commonwealth and to be known in our dwellings?

J.A.G. I think so. The first thing the jailor did- the proof of the fact that he was converted – was that he took them the same hour of the night and washed them from their stripes. He had put these stripes on them, but the man was converted through the presentation of Christ and he showed repentance in the fact that he was sorry for what he had done and he washed them from their stripes. Now he is on the right road and he rejoices household-wise.

J.R.C. If you gain Christ other things will have to go.

J.A.G. That is the idea I think. We retain so many options, but to gain Christ means that you have one objective and whatever else may come in the way is secondary to that objective. Help us as to your impression.

J.R.C. According to this scripture it is 'I count', so that there is everything to be gained in Christ; other things then become secondary to that altogether. Would that be the idea?

J.A.G. I think so. You might say, Well, he had already given up all things which he had counted on account of Christ loss (v 7), but he goes on to count them to be filth. What ever he had of material

things or whatever else it might be, that was the attitude of Paul's mind and it is the force of the effect of Christ glorified. I think if once we saw the Lord Jesus in glory that would be the end of everything here.

N.S.B. With reference to Mr Darby's note about an Englishman, the expression is sometimes used, 'the quintessential Englishman', a person who is the ultimate expression of the thing. Paul had been the quintessential Hebrew and Pharisee, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, but he lost that in order to gain Christ. He is, you might say, the quintessential heavenly man.

J.A.G. I think so; that is what it is. The thing is there in the man's being. It is further on, in a way, than "Christ in you the hope of glory", Col 1: 27. You might say as you looked at Paul, There is the evidence of flesh and bones. Would you agree?

C.F.D. Therefore what Paul was in his person became expressed in his whole manner of life. Do you not think that the associations of life are tested in us by what we are every day, what we are in relation to the saints. If we are attached to Christ, that will show in these relationships.

J.A.G. I think that is the idea, that whatever it is it has to be related to Christ.

R.S. Would it also be the idea that we have all the rights of heaven? If we are citizens of a certain country we have the rights of that country. If you are an American you have the right to travel around the country and so on; so in this connection it would mean that we have the right to be in heaven.

J.A.G. Yes, you have the right to it, but not only have you the right to it, you express the characteristics of it. There is the evidence of what is heavenly; it comes from another sphere. That was Christ here, His clothing was always blue. I think that is the idea – there was spread upon the ark a cloth of blue – wherever the Lord Jesus moved He was not earthly, He was heavenly. This is over against those who mind earthly things. Of Paul and his company you can

say that is the fact, and that belongs to the revival; Paul and his company are characterised by what is heavenly.

C.F.D. Paul says as to himself, "for me to live is Christ" (Phil 1: 21), and he could appeal to them to be his imitators: "be my imitators, even as I also am of Christ", 1 Cor 11: 1. Is this the essence of the heavenly man coming into expression testimonially? .

J.A.G. That is exactly what it is. I think practically it is the expression of what the Lord said to Paul: "why persecutest thou me?" Acts 22: 7. There was what was heavenly in Damascus or wherever the saints were; it was the same thing, there was no difference. All that they will need is a little touch as to their bodies and the thing is perfect.

E.F.C. Verse 17 which precedes this section would indicate that. It says, "Be imitators all together of me, brethren, and fix your eyes on those walking thus as you have us for a model". Those are the kind of citizens we need to be.

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. These are what we speak of as 'over-Jordan' persons, circumcision is in evidence, the reproach of Egypt is rolled away, it has gone. How would you like to meet somebody like this who had come from heaven? That is Paul and that is his company and we should desire to carry these features with us.

J.A.P. The Lord's supper and the service of God give character thus to the Christians walk, in that we really come from a heavenly area of things as coming away from that occasion and these impressions stay with us.

J.A.G. I think that is one of the imports of the Lord's supper, that we go there and we are thinking about Him, we are considering for Him, we are concerned to express our affection for Him and remember Him, and from that we carry away the influence of His presence which is heavenly. There is a stamp upon you; you may go through New York but you will not find anybody who carries these features unless they have been in heaven. That is the import, the gain of the Lord's supper, that you are affected by it, and that is involved in being changed from glory to glory. It is not exactly the rapture, which

is wonderful, but you are awaiting Him, it is not the event, it is the Person.

K-n.A.O. Are our minds involved in this matter, too? It speaks at the end of verse 19 of those who mind earthly things; that was the bent of their minds. But the outlook that Paul had was heavenly and it characterised him.

J.A.G. Yes, exactly. I wondered if we should go to Abraham for the next reading; Lot was minding earthly things and the result is that he is carried away, he does not attain to the purpose of God. What God is going to display on that day, as we well know, is what He has had here in testimony. It is a tremendous thing if the Lord helps us to see it increasingly that what is here in heavenly worth amongst the brethren is equal to being displayed at any time.

K.A.K. Does the thought of masculine and feminine enter into this? Persons take character from their mother but they take their names from their father. It has been said that we derive our status from Christ. I was wondering about the commonwealth being more on the feminine side.

J.A.G. It involves brothers and sisters obviously. In this epistle there are two sisters mentioned, and also Epaphroditus, but the character, the quality of the thing, is heavenly.

K.A.K. I was wondering about the assembly in that regard.

J.A.G. Well, the assembly is the full expression of it. But here in this epistle it is Christians men and women, in their ordinary every day affairs and they are bearing the features of what is heavenly. They have come from another sphere, and that is a tremendous thing. As Paul has said in chapter 2, you are appearing among persons as lights; it is the antedating of the heavenly city. So that the light of the world to come is manifest in your office, or at your work-bench or wherever you are; you are carrying the stamp of heaven. When that happens the fragrance of it becomes evident because there is bound to be a diffusion of the Spirit of Christ.

K.A.K. I was thinking of the commonwealth as being an out-of-the-world thing and that these features are seen in the assembly. How much has that to do with it?

J.A.G. This is the commonwealth here in a way. The commonwealth is here, for it is our relationships of life, it is where we live as amongst the brethren, and there is the manifestation of it as the Lord comes into the meeting; there is the increase and development of what is heavenly. You get some touch in your heart from Christ, the Spirit makes it good to you and so you are regulated by that, your walk is just that little fraction more heavenly there is the commonwealth.

T.E.D. You referred to the first verse of the epistle, "Paul and Timotheus, bondmen". It goes on, "to all the saints... with the overseers and ministers". I wondered if "the overseers and ministers" is not a reference to the need of activity amongst us in our gatherings which would help the saints in view of the enjoyment of that commonwealth.

J.A.G. I think the older brothers and sisters – and that is how it would be in these days – are more responsible to see that these features of affection and care and consideration are maintained amongst the brethren. Timothy is the ideal in a way; it was a pity that Paul had to say that I have nobody else likeminded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on. And how you get on is in the development of what is heavenly, what you enjoy in your soul of Christ where He is and the truth of eternal life. There is a tremendous field of things opened up to us and shortly we are going to be ushered into that in its fulness.

A R.S. It has been said that the Philippians are practising Ephesians.

J.A.G. Exactly. Mr Lyon said about this epistle that it is a tree planted upside down, the roots are in heaven and all the fruits are on earth and you can go and pick them any time you like. They are drawing their sap, their resource, from another sphere. There has never been another tree like this on earth. It has been well called

normal Christian experience, not perhaps the normal experience of a Christian but it is normal Christian experience.

J.McK. It began to have its existence when Christ ascended to heaven and the Spirit came down. In this country we boast in a Constitution, in England they boast in the Magna Carta; we ought to boast in Christ Jesus from whom the law is maintained in spiritual power by the Spirit among us. There is a spiritual and moral result in the citizens of this commonwealth which has its existence in the heavens.

J.A.G. I think so. There is the full expression in them of what is set out in the epistle to the Romans; the gospel is expressed in them.

There are the boards of the tabernacle, they are standing up in their own responsibility, there is fulfilled responsibility in them.

J.McK. The kingdom of God is the basis of the truth of Romans. But when we come to this position it has its origin from heaven, as you have been remarking, and the effect of it is that we are all governed by the one influence and the one loaf.

J.A.G. Exactly. We are all concerned to acquire "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" and that is Christ where He is in glory. If we had seen a light above the brightness of the noonday sun what a change it would make in us, would it not? That comes to us in the gospel, and that is why I thought we should go to Romans because what you are impressed with is favour.

G.H. I would like to ask about the mind. Paul says "I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on", Phil 2: 20. Also it says in Colossians, "have your mind on the things that are above", chap 3: 2. Does that mean that by the help of the Spirit I control the mind?

J.A.G. I think it is the bent, the desire, of your mind. He says, "I have no one like minded... as a child a father, he has served with me in the work of the glad tidings". Now pardon my saying this – I have said it many times – there is a tremendous need here and in every place for the brethren to look into and follow up Mr Taylor's ministry. It is not that the brethren do not want the truth, it is not that

they are not pure, but to get the substance of the truth requires application to what has come out in that ministry. That is not asking much of a man at all, it is the Spirit's voice.

G.H. Do you have in mind that it brought out what was practical?

J.A.G. Yes. As far as I can see, there are two things about the ministry; there is what regulates and adjusts and there is what sets out the glory and grandeur of the truth. One of the things said about three-day meetings was that they were like the university of the assembly. It is the opening up of the truth. The local meeting should be able to work out the regulatory features. To talk about tokens and sisters' hair and that sort of thing does not belong to three-day meetings exactly. I think it is the opening up of the scope and width and grandeur of the truth so that the brethren can see the greatness of their inheritance. The application of it and the working out of it stands related to local assemblies, and that is Paul's ministry.

J.McK. What Mr Taylor had in mind was the teaching character of things to bring out the truth and develop it in a three-day meeting.

J.A.G. That is exactly how it should be. When we come to Romans 5 we get a fine delineation, you might say, of the commonwealth, what the land is. Man has been recovered to God in chapter 3 – righteousness in the blood – and he has answered to it. It was a tremendous thing that Abraham answered to the word of God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness and he comes into justification. Now in this chapter he is coming into the greatness and grandeur of the kingdom.

L.McF. I think we could develop the principle of faith a little.

J.A.G. Well, it is God's gift. The call has come to us and somebody has answered the call. It would go right down, I suppose, to the basics. He says "I called him when he was alone and blessed him" (Isa 51: 2) and he answered to the call. It is a tremendous thing that God is recovering man in Abraham.

K.N.P. I think that is good, because we have ever thing set out in this chapter, do we not, starting from the kingdom right through to the

new covenant, the kingdom, reconciliation and eternal life?

J.A.G. Exactly. That is the whole thing, it goes right through to eternal life. It may be objective. but there it is; there is the grandeur of the thing set out in this chapter. "We have through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom we have also access by faith into this favour in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God". All that God is in His heart, the fulness of His love, is toward us.

J.R.C. The record in Deuteronomy of Naphtali is that he was satisfied with favour (see chap 33: 23). I oftentimes wonder for myself whether I am really satisfied with what God has in mind for me.

J.A.G. We get a measure of trepidation may-be we begin to think of God acting as we would act ourselves. But we need to get the divine word and the divine standard, and there is the greatness of it here, the wonder of it all that God is and what God has done that. We should be brought into the power of the life of Christ and into the greatness and glory of the kingdom. The whole of this chapter stands related to the commonwealth.

J.A.P. As to three-day meetings, in God's mind it would be favour.

These meetings are favourable meetings, a time, generally speaking, for joy and the enjoyment of eternal life what divine Persons have secured for us. The brethren have given up a holiday weekend, that is a sacrifice, and God says, I have something that is very wonderful for you to come into. It is like the queen of Sheba, she enjoyed the favour of the king and rejoiced in it.

J.A.G. This is a great thing to enjoy, to sit back and drink it in and enjoy it. We have been justified on the principle of faith, and we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also access by faith into this favour in which we stand. We stand in the favour of the kingdom.

J.A.P. Even tribulation in this section it is to be favourable, working for the Christian by way of experience, so that he is growing in this favour, he is not overcome by the tribulation.

J.A.G.. That is right. This is going to work something and that is going to work something else, and hope does not make ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in your heart. Well, that is very wonderful. You would be a very warm person, would you not, if the love of God were shed abroad in your heart?

G.H. That expression "And not only that" occurs a couple of times in Romans. Does that bring out the glory and the wealth of the commonwealth?

J.A.G. Yes, I think it is bringing out the wealth of it: the wonder of it, that whatever happens it is going to work out something and that is going to work out something else, and that is going to work out something else. And the ultimate in the chapter is that you are coming through to the greatness of the position where grace reigns in your heart. Where sin reigned in the power of death, now grace is reigning. You have really reached something if you come to this, that grace reigns in your heart through righteousness to eternal life.

There is the kingdom, you are reigning in life, there is a dominance there.

E.F.C. Would the boasting that is referred to in this section three times be on positive lines? This is the kind of boasting that we are to be characterised by, is it not? – boasting in hope of the glory of God, then boasting in tribulations, and then making our boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

J.A.G. That is the greatest boast. I would like to be able to boast in tribulations. It is so easy to get depressed, but you know that tribulation works endurance, you are going to go through with it and you are not going to say, I am not coming back. That is the first thing that happens. Have you ever thought like that, I am not going back.

No! Tribulation works endurance, there is a touch of the acacia-wood now, there is a touch of the manhood of Christ coming out, a touch of what is heavenly; God is going to put the gold on the wood that grew up here in the wilderness. That is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts.

C.F.D. Endurance is a very much needed ingredient at the present time. Christ set on the idea of endurance Himself, He endured the cross, He endured everything. But then we are to endure; I suppose that the feature of a good kingdom man, which we get in the first short paragraph, would be that; the feature of endurance is in evidence and that is really the acacia-wood ready for dignity to be put on it.

J.A.G. I think that is where we prove divine support, the love of God is going to be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which He has given to us. Then Paul brings in this other reasoning as to the tremendous fact that God has been for us all the time and God is always for us. It is easy to say we should endure through tribulation, it is a different thing when you are in it. It is a different thing when things go against you and you think you have got through it and then you get another load and maybe get another load; you are going to endure. Behind all this is the priesthood of Christ.

A.S.H. Tribulation is not native to us; we all come under a cloud when we get it. It is only by calling upon the Spirit that we can endure.

J.A.G. And to be with God in it and find support. and succour secretly so that you endure. You see the thing through. It says of Moses that he endured as seeing Him who is invisible (see Heb 11: 27); he was in touch with God. So that you get a bit of experience now, you begin to know the way that the Lord operates, which is wonderful thing.

A.S.H. These things bring about enlargement David said, "In pressure thou hast enlarged me", Ps 4: 1.

J.A.G. You would think that in pressure you would get a bit compressed, but in pressure, he says, Thou hast enlarged me, because God has come into it and shown him the whole line of things that is superior to the world to Egypt and all that relates to it. Therefore as has been said, the saints are the ruling class.

J.McK. It shines out in a brilliant example in Caleb and Joshua enduring through to the very end, crossing the Jordan and coming

into the enjoyment of the purpose of God.

J.A.G. Yes, that is fine. They "lived still", Num 14: 38. God kept them alive – that is one side – but Caleb lived still, he maintained himself in life.

S.E.H. We were speaking about tribulation working endurance and how the Holy Spirit would help a person in that; and then it speaks of the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. Could you say something as to whether a person has the Holy Spirit in this chapter and as to the help He would give in coming into this favour and going through these exercises in verses 3, 4 and 5.

J.A.G. I think he obviously has the Holy Spirit in this chapter because the love of God could not be shed abroad in his heart if he did not have it, although you come into it through the other chapters. But we are in the realm of divine affection, God speaking about His Son – reconciled to God through the death of His Son. I think this is the whole opening up of the favour in which we stand; the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which He has given to us. God is so anxious to commend Himself to us. When we were still sinners – God commends His love. He is anxious to be made known that we should enjoy the favour.

S.E.H. Access is by faith, but then the Spirit would enter into our enjoyment of this commonwealth.

J.A.G. I think so, because in the situation of these circumstances you go back to the cross and take reckonings from the cross. There was the commendation of God's love. While we were still sinners there was the manifestation of it, Christ died for us. Now that currently is maintained in your soul, maintained in your heart. It is not easy, it is not meant to be easy, but it is meant to prove the superiority and greatness of the love of God and the love of Christ.

C.S.E. Speaking of favour, would the experiences of Mephibosheth help us? He had no right to the enjoyment of anything, having been on the line of Saul, but David brought him in and he sat at the king's table. Then in David's absence how well he comported himself. Is

the sense of mercy necessary in our hearts just to be in the enjoyment of this favour?

J.A.G. I think so. Mephibosheth is a very good example of a person who was an enemy, you might say, at least as far as his lineage was concerned as of the house of Saul (although David never reckoned Saul amongst his enemies, which is a marvellous thing) but Mephibosheth shows us what it is to be "saved in the power of his life". There was all the dominance of what was apostate and antichristian in Absalom, and Mephibosheth is not affected by it one bit. The love of God is shed abroad in his heart, in principle, by the Holy Spirit. He is committed to the reproach of Christ and he shows the power of that kingdom, that heavenly kingdom, in the presence of the anti-Christian rule and sway of Absalom who stole the hearts of the men of Israel (see 2 Sam 15: 6). Why? Because they were not in the gain of Romans 5. If the love of God is shed abroad in your heart, I do not think Absalom will have much chance with you.

G.D.P. Later on Mephibosheth could say, Let Ziba take all (see 2 Sam 19: 30). He was in such enjoyment of the favour of being at the king's table and of such things that were in his favour that he could say, Let Ziba take all. That is love, is it not?

J.A.G. That is right, exactly. He is reigning in life by the one Man Jesus Christ and that was the proof that the Absalom system was coming down, lock, stock and barrel, there was something superior to it that it could not overcome.

J.R.C. Sometimes we think of tribulation being what is exterior. What Caleb suffered was inward and he had to endure that.

J.A.G. It must have been a very sorrowful position for Caleb and Joshua. No doubt they had great links with these other princes. They had gone up with them and would have talked at night about what they saw and what they thought about the land. Joshua and Caleb would say, Well, I think we should go on, and the other ten of them would be saying some thing different. They probably grew up with them in the meeting from boyhood, as the brethren have done, but there came a time when their ways parted and then they had to

watch all the brethren dying in the wilderness through unbelief. How sorrowful that must have been! It did not in any sense dim in their hearts the force and attractiveness of the heavenly land; they never despised the pleasant land.

G.H. The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts. The wealth of it! The distance that has been covered! It is a beautiful expression.

J.A.G. That is the land; that is the inheritance. If you get a heart and the love of God is shed abroad in it, that is the inheritance, that is eternal life.

K.A.O. I was wondering about what Peter says as to the calling and election being made sure (see 2 Pet 1: 10). Would that link on with this matter? I think we are in a day when there may be some questions in the minds of the saints.

J.A.G. I think it is good to call attention to that. It brings me back in my own mind to what I said earlier (and I am sure it will bear repeating again and maybe again) that there is great need for the brethren to be established in the ministries of Mr Darby, Mr Raven and Mr Taylor. It is a build up, it is the Spirit's voice to the assemblies. Light came through those vessels.

K.A.O. What is accredited would come into mind, would it not, in relation to these matters. Mr Taylor said that we should know the legality of the position in which we stand and that would be involved in our calling and election being made sure.

J.A.G. I am sure it is, because you have been called and you have been elected. These are two tremendous things. Now you have to search out and understand the whole business of the calling and the election. Therefore you read the Scriptures and you look into the truth and you find out what the Lord has supported in relation to it.

There are other books abroad that are a waste of time looking at, religious books, other books too. But the Spirit of God has moved in that direction, it has obviously been of God, and as we follow it up we are bound to be established in the truth. What did Mr McCallum spend his life labouring at? The extension of that ministry.

C.F.D. I think what you are saying is very salutary because we can devote ourselves to reading various things which are made available to us. But Mr Taylor's one hundred volumes represent the accumulation of the recovery of the truth in our own dispensation.

Therefore it seems to me that the light that comes in through that ministry is something we want to concentrate on because he brings in the finishing touches on the service of God, the truth of the Supper and the truth of assembly administration.

J.A.G. Yes, I think the whole thing is there. Can anybody beat it? Could you bring out something better? Has anybody anything better? I do not know of anything.

J.McK. Mr Taylor referred to Daniel's knowledge of the books and he said that that no doubt referred to Scripture, and that he would advise all of us to read the ministry belonging to the truth of the establishment of the body here and Christ as the Head in heaven and what flowed out from that; that was the solid basis of the Spirit's light in relation to what the saints were to be, what the assembly was to be for Christ and what the sons were to be for God.

J.A.G. We were saying something about that in Toronto last Saturday. Daniel understood by the books and then in Daniel 9 he says, I have not been in keeping with the books, I have to start confessing my sins and the sins of my people and I must bear the iniquity of the sanctuary. I am not blaming the brethren, he says, I am going to take the whole load on myself. Now he is getting help, a man flies swiftly and touches him. How would you like a touch from Gabriel, a touch from the Lord, at the time of the evening oblation?

J.McK. I was thinking of what you said earlier about favour. When we think soberly of what it cost God to bring us into this favour it involves the pathway of the Lord's life here, His suffering and His death on the cross, His burial in the grave. But the glory of His resurrection and appearing to the saints gives us an insight into the fulness of this glory and this favour that God has for us.

J.A.G. I think that is very good. I am sure I need great grace and help to speak of these things in this chapter in the way that the Spirit

would speak of them because we are in the realm of divine affection in its fulness, where love sacrificially has been set out in Jesus. He is referred to as God's Son – "through the death of his Son" – how precious that is! It requires maturity to impart to one another divine feelings and affections in relation to the work of divine Persons in view of the establishment of the kingdom so that we should be in this favour.

K-n.A.O. I would like to ask about this reference in Romans 5 to the life of Christ – "saved in the power of his life". Is that not something that is necessary, to have to do with Christ in relation to His present life as a risen and glorified Man?

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. That is the relationship that exists in the commonwealth. You think of the forty days when the Lord was risen. There they were with Him. No doubt they had gone to their work and come home again, but the whole of the ardent bent of their being was another meeting, another manifestation. They were saved in the power of His life and nothing could intrude on it. It is the power of the Spirit to associate us with Christ and to maintain us in that association.

K-n.A.O. Is it only as we have to do with Him in that sphere that we can enjoy and know what our commonwealth is?

J.A.G. I think so, and we must be on our guard lest we touch it, or seek to touch it, in any legal way. We might think we can know it superficially, but it springs from affections, it springs from God's love shed abroad in our hearts. It is a tremendous thing that we have been reconciled; enemies are reconciled, sinners are justified. "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". Now we are entirely for God's pleasure.

K-n.A.O. We know quite a bit about the Lord's life here, how He moved and came in contact with men, but how much do we know about the Lord in relation to His present life in glory?

J.A.G. I think it goes back to what was said about the Supper. "'Tis thus we know Thee as Thou'rt known above, in heav'nly glory –

home of perfect love' (hymn 84). We need to follow up the touches that we get at the Supper or in the meetings, and if we follow them up in dependence on the Spirit we will find that that relates to Christ's present life which is the life which is in Christ Jesus.

J.McK. Would you say that the Supper is for the saints in view of what the loaf and the cup are, the strengthening by the loaf and stimulating by the cup in view not only of the service of God but our continuance in the wilderness the following week. So the Supper actually is for the saints, but Christ gets the affections of the saints as we move in relation to Him.

J.A.G. Exactly, I think that is what it is for. He instituted the Supper. The authority for it is in Corinthians: "I received from the Lord" (1 Cor 11: 23); that is authoritative, but it is in the deepest affection. In the night in which the Lord Jesus was delivered up He was thinking about us that we might think about Him.

J.McK. How long could I live spiritually in the enjoyment of this commonwealth if I do not continue in the Lord's supper?

J.A.G. I do not know that you could, unless you might be laid aside under God's hand. But in normal everyday circumstances through wonderful love and grace the Supper is available on the very first day of the week. Every week there is the Lord's day but then there is the first day of the week. In a way it is a different thing, is it not? It is to give character to the whole week. God's will, God's pleasure and the love of God maintained amongst the brethren: now there is the commonwealth.

G.D.P. We should not hold this in a legal manner. Was that the trouble with the Galatians? They were trying to get into these things without the real appreciation of God's love.

J.A.G. I think so; it is always a danger. Hence the importance of the teaching of the other three chapters – 6, 7 and 8 – where you come to the Spirit practically. Romans 7 is a necessity to find deliverance so that you come to the point of no condemnation. You know how to do things by the Spirit. The Spirit of God is here, a divine Person, right here now, just the same as Jesus was.

K.A.O. It says, "This is my body, which is for you", 1 Cor 11: 24.

Would it help our affections to be stimulated as we appropriate the great love which the Lord has demonstrated by delivering Himself up in death, giving His body? This would help us to be maintained in this area of things which the Supper affords. That is something for us to appropriate.

J.A.G. I think that "my body which is for you" is specially for the assembly. The cup is not exactly special for the assembly, we are the custodians of it. Whilst I know He does say in Luke, This is My blood which is poured out for you (see chap 22: 20), in Corinthians He does not add "for you". I think it has a tremendous scope, it involves all who are redeemed; but My body for you is especially for the assembly. That is the personal love of Christ for the assembly and for every one of us.

A.G.S. Does not every believer in Christ belong to the assembly?

J.A.G. Every believer in Christ who has the Spirit belongs to the assembly. They are all there in the loaf, every one of them. What do you say?

A.G.S. I agree with that. In my prayers I include every believer in Christ.

J.A.G. I think that is most important because, if we do not, we are in some measure sectional. He died for every one of them; He loves them the same as He loves you and me.

J.A.P. The word 'abroad' in verse 5 has been referred to in ministry as an Ephesian touch in Romans and therefore we need in our affections to go outside of the local position on the first day of the week. We start with what is local but we need to get beyond that and to understand what Paul says in Ephesians 3: "to apprehend with all the saints" (v 18); that is what 'abroad' would suggest. Have you not found it encouraging and stimulating to your heart to think of the thousands of the sons of God who are serving Him?

J.A.G. Yes, that is what happened in Jeremiah 31 when Ephraim gets recovered. In that day "the watchmen upon mount Ephraim

shall cry, Arise, and let us go up to Zion" (v 6). He has the whole scope of things before him.

J.A.P. What then does it mean when the Lord Jesus said Himself, "the Son of man who is in heaven", John 3: 13? He was here when He said that. How do you understand that when He comes in into these occasions?

J.A.G. What does it say? "And no one has gone up into heaven, save he who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven".

J.A.P. It would cause us to bow in the sense of who it is that comes in.

J.A.G. He does not say 'the Son of God who is in heaven' but "the Son of man who is in heaven".

J.A.P. Say more about that.

J.A.G. It all bears on what we are saying. As the Son of man He is on man's side and yet in His Person He is always God; He is in heaven, that is where He lived, was it not? It is mystery, but the Lord referring here to Himself as the Son of man is bringing forward the glory of His Person in the Trinity, in the Godhead, and that , while He was in heaven, as the Son of man He was on earth. He never left the status of deity as to His Person. He maintained it there with regard to this as in Philippians 2 where it says that He emptied Himself taking the form of a bondman.

N.S.B. In Plainfield, Mr Meek quoted a comment in a similar connection that has remained with us, that someone asked Mr Taylor, when the Lord was in the grave who was on the throne? The answer was that He never left it. Do you recall that remark at your meetings?

C.F.D. Yes, that is what was said. I think it helps us to see that He is omnipresent, for you cannot limit the Lord.

J.A.G. Yes, I think He is trying to help Nicodemus into heavenly things and He is having a tremendous job getting him to understand earthly things.

J.McK. It has also been said as to what God has not been pleased to reveal in the writings in Scripture, let us accept what is written by the Spirit and be restful in our spirits and our minds, and not inquire into what God has not been pleased to reveal.

J.A.G. I would say that. And yet I suppose the Lord expected Nicodemus as a teacher in Israel to know some of these things – The Son of Man who is in heaven, He said.

T.E.D. Is it not a strengthening point for me in my part of the commonwealth to realise He is there now and to be established in my links with Him? The One who is there was for me here.

J.A.G. That is why I referred to 2 Peter because I think we have touched freely the area of divine communications, it has been manifest to me. We were saying in another place -and I believe it is right – that Mr Stoney said he did not think the Lord would come in his lifetime because He had not told him. You can say , Oh well, Peter knew that from John 21, but I would think the Lord was confirming things to him in his soul. And that is life in the commonwealth. It is not a dead system, it is marked by power and vitality and love and life.

NEW YORK

4 September 1987

Key to initials (five meetings)

New York if not otherwise stated

G.Ashby; N.S.Brien, Toronto; E.F.Cary, Los Angeles; J.R.Cumming, Edinburgh; C.F.Dadd, Plainfield; T.E.Druckenmiller, Plainfield; C.S.Elliott; J.A.Gardiner, Aberdeen; A.S.Hinkson; G.Hesterman, Plainfield; R.N.Hesterman, Woodstock; S.E.Hesterman, Plainfield; K.A.Knauss, Indianapolis; S.E.MacCready, Cape May; J.McKillop, Chicago; L.McFarlane; K.A.Oberg, Villa Grove; Kevin A.Oberg, Villa

Grove; G.D.Pfingst, Plainfield; J.A.Petersen, Plainfield; K.N.Pye;
L.D.Phillips; A.G.Spooner; A.R.Stevens; A.Schubert, Cologne

"BEAUTY INSTEAD OF ASHES..... "

J.R.Cumming

Isaiah 61: End of 2 & 3; Luke 24: 50-53; John 20: 19-23

I desire, beloved brethren, to say a few words which are embraced in these verses in chapter 61. It makes all the difference when the Lord comes into an occasion. It makes all the difference, dear young brother and sister and little ones with us, when the Lord comes into your life. I would like to say a word about these things that are mentioned here – beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness. What a change! It tells us in Isaiah 53 that when we see Him there is no beauty in Him that we should desire Him. That is you and me apart from the work of God in our souls, but we trust that most here – and I put this out as a challenge to all of us, including the little ones – have come to see the glory of Jesus in relation to the divine system of things. I think this would link on with the King in Matthew's gospel, – the glory of the King. Chapter 33 of this book says, regarding the righteous, that they shall see the King in His beauty. Oh, what a matter that is, that we should have some apprehension of the glory of the One to whom all power has been given. He has taken that position, He has been given it – all power.

So what is there in our lives? Have we come from ashes, you might say, to an appreciation of the beauty in Christ? That would involve the great matter of repentance. I do not think we will get on very far in divine things unless we know consciously, have that inward knowledge in our lives, in our affections, that we have had to do with the Lord had to do with God.

There was a man called Job who was well set up and then disasters came into his life. It tells us in chapter 2 of Job that he sat among the ashes, and he sat among the ashes for another twenty eight chapters. Then the word of God came in through Elihu and then God spoke to him directly; then he says "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes", chap 42: 6. That is the effectiveness of

the word of God coming into our lives, so that instead of self-righteousness we come to see the righteousness of God in Christ, we see that that Person is the One to whom all power has been given in heaven and on earth. What a manifestation there will yet be as to that! The coming day will show it. Dear young friend, make sure you have had to do with the Lord and have come to this knowledge of the fact that He has secured everything for you.

Everything was lost, everything, you might say, was in the depth of despair, but Christ died for our sins, and the love of God was behind it all. So that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (see Rom 5: 8). There is something effective there so that Christ is magnified in your life. He becomes the essential object of your life. Are all of us here contributing on this line? It says at the end of Matthew's gospel, when the Lord came in, that some doubted (see Matt 28: 17). I think the work of God in us would bring us to the assurance and the stability of all that has been secured in Christ and that without any doubts.

In the next part here it says "the oil of joy instead of mourning". That would be the end of Mark's gospel. I just make that suggestion to the brethren. It tells us in that chapter of the resurrection of Christ. What a day that was, the glory of it, the One who was in death and the triumph of resurrection, and it tells us there that there were some with hardness of heart (see Mark 16: 14). Those were disciples, not people outside – unbelief! Oh, dear brother and sister, we have to move away from that kind of thing and get the confirmation and power into our souls as to what a risen Christ has effected for us. let us appreciate the vast, the immeasurable change it is when Christ comes into our lives, not only singly – which is so important – but in our gatherings. We have had a touch on that today; I think we can say we have heard the Lord's voice, the Lord coming into the occasion challenging us and yet helping us. The magnificence of the grace that is toward us and the Father's love upon us!

Now I want to associate what we read in Luke 24 with "the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness". We have been speaking about the commonwealth, our associations of life. What

we come through personally merges into the company; that is the association. I am not speaking of men's associations, I am speaking about the commonwealth which is based on the death and the resurrection of Christ, the blood-shedding there has been. The blood is the answer for everything, so that everything that is of the first man and mankind goes into the background. There was a company here to which the Lord appeared. For our encouragement, beloved brethren, I think the Lord shows us in this chapter the pattern of recovery. We are reminded of Abraham and what energized him in regard of his brother Lot. Let us get another touch into our souls. I think the Lord would impress upon us that this is the day when there is recovery. We all long for it and pray for it; we see evidences of it, some little here, some there. I trust there are some in this place and in all the places represented. We would long to see more of it, to see God's work in recovery. The Lord in this chapter shows how you and I have to commit ourselves to this. I think our brother said that things do not happen magically or that they are mystical. Christianity is intensely practical. That is what the brethren are to learn from this chapter.

These two disappointed ones are saying, We had thought... There used to be five hundred and fifty brethren with us in this large city; we had thought it would go on right to the end. But what is remaining? What is remaining is the character of things in which God finds pleasure. In the meantime there are persons in the line of recovery looking for some little touch to come into their lives that they might, we trust, retrace their steps. The Lord shows us here the way: "Jesus", it says, "himself drawing nigh". Oh, what a day that was for them! At the time their eyes were still holden, they did not know. Nonetheless it says, "Jesus himself drawing nigh, went with them". What a pattern that is for us as to how near we can get to persons to help them. We would desire to know the Lord's touch coming in in recovery, so that something of interest is presented to them. As to that woman in John 4, the Lord's interest in her is what aroused her affection. To think who she was, undeserving and all that kind of thing, but that blessed Man had time to speak to her.

Oh, we want to cultivate these intense links in affection with persons so that no matter the outcome they would always remember not only the truth that had been placed before them – how essential that is – but a spirit of Jesus that they can never forget. That might lead to recovery. It goes on here: "And they drew near to the village where they were going, and he made as though he would go farther". The brethren know these things well but I just want to underline what we have had in that last reading. How it should affect us! "He made as though he would go farther"· love will never keep Him back from anything: He went that way and He made as though He would go farther. How that stirred them in their affections and recovery was secured.

Then He comes in amongst the company, and there was food there, something for Christ. That is what we are recovered to, not to please ourselves. He says, "Have ye anything here to eat?" Well, we have had a good day eating, eating spiritually, being well looked after also in the physical side of things, the saints comfortable. So we are full. When something comes in of the Spirit it would bring home to us the glory of what we have entered upon. Oh, beloved brother and sister, let us see to it that we are contributing to that line of things. The honeycomb – working together – a broiled fish – self-judgment working amongst us. And that is for Christ "he took it" it says "and ate before them": Now here you have, as it says in Isaiah, "the heaviness". Oh, what an outcome: "he led them out as far as Bethany". What a touch that is to these brethren! They were secured for Christ and all they were concerned about was responsiveness to divine Persons. It is the temple here, but that is superseded in the beginning of the Acts as we know. It is the character here that I want to leave with the brethren, that we are taken up with what is due to divine Persons. The spirit of heaviness is dispelled as we accustom ourselves to this line of what is for God, what is for the Lord and what is for the Spirit.

It leads into John 20 because there would be a spiritual touch here as to the dignity of things. Here we walk as sons through grace. We should be maintained in the dignity of what sonship really

means. I go back to chapter 61 again: "that they might be called" – that is the product of what has preceded – "terebinths of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that he may be glorified". I think that would link with John 20 where we have read. The world is going on its way, there is fear of the Jews and all that is antagonistic, but in the inside position there are persons who have only one thought as to what is due to the Lord and what is due to God. "Terebinths of righteousness" would remind us of this touch we have had as to the oaks of Mamre. What is established in our lives? What garment of praise instead of the spirit of is there in the way of stability?

In the Scriptures there are references to the oaks and the terebinths. The terebinths, I think, bring in the idea of fragrance and that would bring in the brothers and sisters. We do not in any way want to make classes amongst us but we want to see that what is spiritual is in the sisters as well as the brothers. There is what is audible and that would be right in the way of order, but what we want to make room for is the spirituality which the sisters contribute to every gathering, maybe more than we think, especially at the prayer meeting. Fragrance: what fragrance there was personally in Christ at all times for God – the burnt offering, the fulness of things there, a sweet odour to God. That is how everything goes up to God. But what He finds amongst the saints, what there is for God, is brought through on this line, the line of exercise. May we be preserved from casualness in regard to divine things. Our brother has been reminding us of the heritage we have in the ministry and it is all there that we should imbibe it. Not that we are to be walking dictionaries or anything like that, but we have something in formation in our souls as a result of spiritual experience. "The planting of Jehovah": the detailed care that God has taken with every one of us wherever we are. Your place in your locality is the planting of Jehovah. Some are in small companies, none of us can say very much even in cities, but wherever it is, it is the planting of Jehovah. Let us appreciate the care that has come in in regard to that, let us respect the local companies. Let us see to it that we set ourselves for that so it is not

just a secondary matter in our lives, serving the Lord in all things, and having respect for the local company. So you find that you shape your circumstances always with that in view, that the Lord's interests come first, "that he may be glorified". Well, the Lord breathed into the disciples here. I think it has been said that for a few moments these men lived in the life of another Man, "breathed into them", and it means this with you and me. As having the Holy Spirit there is to be that in our lives of the character of Christ in testimony and that will have its own effect for the glory of God. May it be so for His Name's sake.

NEW YORK

4 September 1987

CHILDREN WANTED

We need, nowadays, to be very careful what we read on placards lest there be some evil hidden or otherwise, in them. However, one good thing I remember reading on a railway station many years ago was a large notice in just four short words of one syllable each and in capital letters. It read like this – 'You Must Have God'. My first thought on seeing it was, of course, that all people 'have' God, whether they like it or not. He is the One in whom we live and with whom we have to do. But I could understand that the desire of those who had the placard made was that persons reading it might have the knowledge of God as Saviour, made known in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again to make us acceptable to Him.

The jailor at Philippi saw a 'placard' – actually his own conscience – and said in his anxiety "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved? " You will remember how he came to believe on the Lord Jesus for salvation. Many hundreds of years before this the Israelites in the wilderness had to look for mercy to a serpent of brass lifted up so that all could see. Many anxious sinners were healed by looking eagerly upon it. The Lord Jesus was lifted up in this way to die on the cross that we who look up to Him in faith may receive life eternal.

On further thought about the placard on the railway platform I wished that I could put up beside it a similar one. It would have the same four short words but would read, 'God Must Have You'. It is a wonderful part of the Glad Tidings, and perhaps a more important one, that He who is our Creator should look for some response to Himself and should have an affectionate answer in giving His beloved Son for us. Jesus, when here on earth, was very interested in children. When some such were sent away by the disciples He was "indignant" and said, "suffer little children, and do not hinder them from coming to me; for the kingdom of the heavens is of such". Have you come to Him in your spirit and your prayers?

J.C.Evershed