

A
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THE FAMILY AND ASSEMBLY IN FUNCTION

CHILDREN AT PLAY

“OUR COMMONWEALTH” - IV

John 12: 1-3; 20: 17 Judges 13: 19,20; 2 Chronicles 5: 6; 9: 3,4

J.A.G. These scriptures bear upon the greatness of our associations as in the commonwealth with Christ and with God. Love discerns the Lord's movements in chapter 12 of John and is committed to them in a very wonderful way in affection. In one sense it facilitates the Lord's movements in ascension in chapter 20. We read the verses in Judges because I think it is very precious that we have that kind of thing in such a book, the Angel ascending in the flame of the altar and Manoah and his wife looking on, no doubt entranced by the greatness of what they were beholding. The scriptures in Chronicles are well known; the response has become so great in chapter 5 that the offerings cannot be counted, it says, nor numbered for multitude. Such is the greatness of the response in appreciation of the making known of the Father's name. The fact is that we are associated with Christ as His brethren before His Father and our Father, and His God and our God. I thought there might be a touch as to His own distinctiveness in the reference to Solomon's ascent, the ascent by which he went up to the house of Jehovah.

As to John 12 the glory of the Son of God has been manifested in power in the previous chapter. The sickness was not unto death but for the glory of God and that the Son of God should be glorified by it. I would think that Mary caught on to the trend and current of the Lord's movements; spirituality would do that as getting the gain of the exercise in the previous chapter.

L.McF. So Bethany would represent a sphere where the Lord is loved, where He is at home. Is it not our privilege to provide such conditions even at the present time?

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. It says, six days before the passover He came to Bethany. It suggests the secret side of things. It is a lodging place, not the final thought, but where the Lord is ministered to, where He can be at home and His movements discerned, and what is in His mind made known.

N.S.B. Did that type of thing happen also in the Acts? "As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said", Acts 13: 2.

J.A.G. It was a very beautiful situation at Antioch where the body was in function; the evidence of the commonwealth was there the care and concern for the poor at Jerusalem, and way was made for Paul and Barnabas. Testimony was there to the fact that Christianity was in function; they were first called Christians in Antioch - the days of the heavens which are above the earth. A day in Bethany would be like that, one of the days of the heavens. Jesus is held in supreme regard in heaven and in Bethany too.

J.A.P. Is there the side of the family in the commonwealth? Would you say something about the family. What does that mean as distinct from Paul's ministry?

J.A.G. I think it bears especially on the side of mutuality and affection. You can see how that side supports which is public and maybe official. Everybody here is in their place as they should be.

But that is not exactly the main thing; the main thing with them is their enjoyment of the presence of Christ as in the family, each showing his great love and concern for the family. Death had come in, the Lord was deeply moved; the previous chapter brings out the depth of feeling in the Lord Jesus with regard to His own as of the family of God - that marvellous verse where it says "Jesus wept", John 11: 35. That is answered to; there is a counterpart to these feelings here I think in chapter 12.

J.A.P. We need help as to the difference between the assembly personnel and enjoyment in the family, and what it is in the more ordered sense in which Paul takes account of it.

J.A.G. The family side underlies everything and bears secretly on our links with God and our links with one another. It underlies the public position. It sustains things as they appear externally. In the Colossian position Paul rejoiced at seeing their order and the firmness of their faith in Christ, yet he was concerned lest they should be moved away from the blessedness of their contact with Christ in headship. The family side would have to support that,

otherwise it would fall down. You can have the whole thing set out in an orderly fashion as far as can be seen, but the vitality of the thing is in the family of God in the Spirit. I do not know if that is clear, but the family side is the greater side.

C.S.E. Each person here is distinct; there is Martha serving, Lazarus one of those at table with Him and Mary taking a pound of ointment of pure nard and anointing the feet of Jesus. Each one in the family has a distinct and precious place in the heart of Christ; I believe it is something that we need to lay hold of, the cost of each one to Himself, each one is distinctive and precious in relation to Himself.

J.A.G. I think it is well to lay hold of that, especially shown, as we were saying, in the feelings that Jesus manifested for the family in the previous chapter. They are here in perfect liberty in their place and satisfied with their place. They are with Him. Lazarus was one of those at table with Him; that is very beautiful, to be with Him. That is probably the greatest place, to sit at table with Him, in the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

G.H. It says, "Jesus therefore, six days before the passover, came to Bethany, where was the dead man Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from among the dead". Would you say something further about that?

J.A.G. That is where Lazarus was, it is in that position, an over-Jordan position. It is a deathless company, in principle. It is what the assembly is, a deathless company, and that is a tremendous thing. They are living here in principle in the power of His life.

Lazarus would know what the power of resurrection was; he came forth bound feet and hands with grave clothes. What a power that was that brought him out! But the Lord did not take them off; He said to the brethren, Now you take them off, loose him and let him go.

And this is where He comes to, into normal family relations in Bethany. Bethany is situated on the slopes of the mount of Olives; it is a great realm of spirituality where the Lord's mind is known. He comes there and things begin to happen.

G.H. There seems to be something in this place of Bethany where was the dead man Lazarus whom Jesus raised from among the dead.

J.A.G. It did not happen in Jerusalem. The passover I suppose would be celebrated at Jerusalem which was still the place publicly, where the Lord had His name officially, but this is the secret side which love has provided and Jesus comes to that. It is not the Supper but it is this side of things where He finds comfort and solace and can, we say with all reverence, be relaxed and at home and make divine disclosures.

E.F.C. Would you say there was intense spirituality in silence? No one speaks except Judas who brings in a fleshly outcry. Could you help us as to spirituality being expressed in silence?

J.A.G. I need a lot of help about it myself, but you can see the power of it. They are at table with Him. He is there in power, the glory of the Son of God is there. Lazarus is there, he is raised from amongst the dead. He does not speak, as you say; nobody speaks. Martha serves at the level and in the character in which she should serve; everything here in that sense is perfect. And all that makes way for Mary. These 'therefores' have often been called attention to in the chapter - one thing is consequent upon another until the whole house is filled with the odour of the ointment. A great fragrance comes about in the situation when the body functions normally as it does here.

E.F.C. So the family side of the truth goes on into eternity, whereas the administrative side linked with the assembly does not.

J.A.G. Chapter 21 of Revelation begins with the new Jerusalem but, while the city is there, what is called attention to is the tabernacle of God. The tabernacle of God is with men. Somebody once said that God was merging all His great thoughts together and the final thing is the tabernacle. I suppose the idea is there too in 2 Chronicles 5, the priests were there without numbering the courses; the official side recedes; the family side is what we need to seek to develop amongst ourselves.

L.McF. They come under the Lord's headship. There seemed to be need of adjustment in the previous chapter with a view to the Lord having His rightful place in the family. Here they are all adjusted and serving rightly. We might need help as to that.

J.A.G. Well, one thing I can see in this chapter is that everybody in Bethany is near to Christ. Everybody is in their right place, the Lord is the object, and the whole position is capable of being filled and affected by the odour of the ointment.

K.A.O. The striking thing about this is the fact that the Lord comes to a dignified company. In 2 Chronicles 6 you have the impression of dignity being associated with Solomon's house. That is a wonderful thing to lay hold of in the family of God, that along with liberty and joy there is also the dignity associated with being with Christ in that position.

J.A.G. There is never any thought of lowering the divine level. The family of God maintains the dignity, as you suggest, of the position.

So the Lord is served here, served very beautifully. The spirituality in Mary, love in Mary, catches on to the trend of His movements because He is going on to the Father.

J.R.C. While there is nothing said here, the Lord says what is to be said in John 20: "I ascend".

J.A.G. My own impression in these meetings that we have had is that the Lord would impress us with the trend of His movements which are towards the fulness of God's service and towards eternity. He is thinking of the rapture, we may say, but we are all awaiting the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. We have touched everything and all we need now is this change of body. Spirituality is a tremendous quality.

S.E.H. Does the Lord Jesus going up from Bethany at the end of Luke's gospel link with what you are saying as to the Lord's movements towards the Father? It says, "he led them out as far as Bethany" and then He was carried up into heaven from there.

J.A.G. I think that helps, for it is a secret position. The public position in the Acts is the upper room but the secret position, the substantial position, the great realm of the Spirit, is Bethany, and the Lord comes and goes to that position and links with Him are developed and enlarged as in that position.

K-n.A.O. Does Bethany also stand over against the rejection of Christ? I was thinking of Mark's gospel where it says, "And he entered into Jerusalem and into the temple; and having looked round on all things, the hour being already late, he went out to Bethany", chap 11: 11. There was something there that was for the heart of Christ in the midst of His rejection.

J.A.G. He went out there where He spent the night. The word in the Song of Songs where there is mature affection for Him says, "He shall pass the night between my breasts", chap 1: 13. There is a great realm of affection in which the Lord can find comfort and solace in the midst of the public position of rejection and barrenness. The fig tree is cursed and the whole nation failed because the family side is completely disregarded.

T.E.D. Is the consideration of Bethany meant to enlarge our appreciation of the great value of the local setting?

J.A.G. I think it is very beautiful to see this secret side of things that should belong, and does belong, to the local meeting, and it needs to be developed and enlarged. Publicly it is the upper room - it is above the level of things in Jerusalem - but if that is all it is there is something lacking. The upper room is furnished and everything is very orderly and right and of God and according to the commandment, but what sustains the position is the secret side of things in the family which bears upon the position in Bethany.

R.N.H. Was Lazarus one who heard the Lord's voice - "Lazarus, come forth" It says in Revelation 3, "If any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me" (v 20).

J.A.G. He will bring us out of our circumstances into the divine circumstances - "he with me": how beautiful that is! He wants to do

that, He wants to develop this line of things, and we need tremendous help to find increasing strength and confirmation in spiritual links with Christ beyond death. That all bears on the realm of the Lord's supper.

G.H. Bethany was a place where the few there went through certain exercises and where they needed adjustment. Now in chapter 12 it says, "where was the dead man Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from among the dead". They arrived at wonderful conditions at Bethany as a result of all the exercise.

J.A.G. Lazarus would know something about the working of God. It refers to that in Colossians: "raised with him through faith of the working of God" (chap 2: 12), and Paul says earlier, "which works in me in power", chap 1: 29. That is all secret, "according to his working"; there is the power of Christ operating in the soul that causes it to be superior and brings it through secretly to His own circumstances that are beyond death.

G.H. Paul says, "Daily I die" (1 Cor 15: 31): what does he mean by that?

J.A.G. I could not say too much about it, but I suppose it was the force of self-judgment, that he was not allowing anything of Paul at all, because what he wanted to manifest publicly in his body (in this condition where sin had reigned, where Saul had been so manifested) was the life of Jesus, that the life of Jesus might be manifested in his mortal flesh.

C.F.D. You have more in your mind about finding our relationships with Christ beyond death.

J.A.G. I think it is the trend of things that the Lord is leading to. He wants to strengthen us in a knowledge of Himself and in our experience with Him collectively. Because when He leads up we are to go up with Him. It is not to be a strange experience, going up with Christ, leading up with the substance and the wealth that is amongst the brethren, because He is not going up into heaven empty-handed.

C.F.D. You related that to the Lord's supper having in mind what flows out of that.

J.A.G. That is why I thought that little touch in Judges was very beautiful. The Angel ascended in the flame, suggesting the affections of the brethren - he ascended in the flame off the altar.

C.F.D. At the time of the Supper the Lord would bring us over to His own side and that would be a realm which has never been touched by death, completely beyond its reach. Do you think we need help to understand what that realm is and to breathe the atmosphere of it and feel the affections of it so that our response to Christ is governed by that realm itself?

J.A.G. Yes I think so. To come back now to the remark about the power of silence, it is not a silence of weakness where we sit for a long time and nobody gives out a hymn and nobody takes part, or you wait for the same brothers to break the bread; it is the enjoyment, and being sustained in the enjoyment, of our links with Christ on the other side of death.

A.S.H. The public saw the Lord in Jerusalem but those of His own saw Him for the last time when He led them out as far as Bethany and from there He departed. So Bethany was the entrance into heaven.

J.A.G. I think that is the link. That is the point of contact between the Lord where He is and as He is now and the local assemblies. That is how He comes, He comes that way by the Spirit. It is a very real thing and we need much strengthening in the experience and appreciation of it.

J.A.P. That word 'His own' is a family word, is it not? It says "having loved his own" (John 13: 1), and Gideon said, "They were my brethren", Judg 8: 19. The Lord Jesus is owning His own and ready to stand by all of us; we are His brethren. That is of course testimonial - I know it is more enjoyment here but that is what it is: His own.

J.A.G. Yes, and He claims them and He guards them. "If ... ye seek me", He says, "let these go away", John 18: 8. "I am he", He says, if you want Me let them go. How wonderful that is! "Jesus ... having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end", John 13: 1. I think we could do with a great deal more appreciation of the intensity of the love of the Lord Jesus for us individually as His brethren and the love of the Lord Jesus for His own as the assembly. This is the secret realm where all these things are known and enjoyed and we are being strengthened in it.

J.A.P. By way of extension, one brother or sister might suffer for the family; you may be suffering for the family in your local meeting. "Let these go away": the Lord Jesus suffered for the family.

J.A.G. Yes, exactly. On the public side of things, as you say, somebody has to have a big enough heart to take on that responsibility; that somebody is getting more like Christ, and this is the side of things that would strengthen us in the public position.

A.R.S. Is the body in Paul's ministry related to the family in John? Paul speaks of the body and John speaks of the family: is that where Paul and John meet?

J.A.G. I suppose it is. They meet as we have in the teaching in chapter 10; there is the flock and there is the body, the same thing really. The Lord is going on to show them that they are associated with Him beyond death as His brethren. That is in His mind: He does not say that. There is no suggestion until John 20 that His Father is our Father; but I think Mary here gets into the trend of His movements.

G.D.P. Mary had to go through that in her own soul so as to come over to this side of what is living, beyond the side where the dead man Lazarus was.

J.A.G. She had the full gain, as they all did of course, of the previous chapter where she had that special touch with the Lord herself. She met Him where He was and walked with Him from that point to the grave of Lazarus. That was a very special support that

she proved and which helped her to appreciate the glory and greatness of Christ as the Son of God.

N.S.B. You raised the question yesterday as to how we might gain Christ. Would what we are speaking of now be related to that - "to know him", Paul says, "and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings ... if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead", Phil 3: 10,11?

J.A.G. Yes, I think he is discarding everything that would have been apparently of gain to him naturally and making way for Him in this holy and spiritual realm where the Lord Jesus makes Himself known to His own. We need to make way for Christ in our own hearts on this line.

N.S.B. Does all this underlie the Lord's closing comment in this gospel: "If I will that he abide until I come, what is that to thee?", John 21: 23? And would that perhaps underlie one of Mr Darby's final messages to the brethren when he exhorted them that in insisting on Paul not to forget John?

J.A.G. Yes. I think it is very wonderful that this gospel relates to the present day. It is written for days of breakdown such as we have. We have the fullness of the truth of the revelation of God in it; it is all available to us, it is all open to us. I think it is a very blessed thing.

J.McK. The way in which John in his epistle includes the family is affecting. He embraces every age and character in it - the little children, the young men and the fathers - and then he embraces in his affection the elect lady, as if to indicate that every member of the house as relating to John's family is cared for and loved.

J.A.G. I think all that flows out from the blessedness of the fact that he personally knew his place in the bosom of Jesus.

J.McK. He was learning what the family was to the Lord Himself and he was able to express and set out those features of affection for His family.

E.F.C. We have another Mary here in John 20. What would you say about the sisters being emphasised in these two passages and their

spirituality and affection?

J.A.G. I think we greatly value the sisters and what is in them because on that line they are equal to and maybe ahead, of the brothers. That all relates to the family and the spiritual substance that is there. In John 20 the brothers were not showing up too well but Mary was. The Lord is ready to give her some help, turn her around and show her how she is to be in relation to the whole realm of new creation. That goes back to Bethany; it is new creation. It is very interesting that before the Lord took Mr Taylor he called attention very definitely to what was there substantially in the sisterhood.

K.n.A.O. You made reference earlier to the Supper. Is there something in the fact that in John's gospel we do not get the Supper formally set out, but that we do have this reference in verse 19 to the Lord coming to them. It is the inward side in John's gospel; it is not the public testimony but the Lord in our relations with Him on the inside.

J.A.G. Yes, this is the expansion here, the enlargement of what we had in Bethany. Bethany is a local situation but here it is universal - it goes on to "the midst": "Jesus came and stood in the midst" - and the way into that is through the local position, through the substance that is there amongst the brethren spiritually. Now I think this is all part of the circulation in the commonwealth.

K.A.O. Would you say something more as to the sisters.

J.A.G. I think maybe we are inclined to overlook them at times and think that the meeting and the progress of it, and whether it is a good meeting or not, all depends on the brothers. I might even go so far as to think it all depends on me and the part that I take, whereas we are to embrace the local company and all that is there. We might perhaps need some help to make a little more room for the sisterhood in our affections.

K.A.O. In Indianapolis the Lord has seen fit to leave several sisters, and all of them care for the brethren and lay themselves out for them. I wondered if the Lord would not honour that as a way of

stabilising the position, which may be weak numerically, with a view to the continuance of the testimony in the place.

J.A.G. I am sure the Lord would. If we go back to Philippians, the sisters have a great place in Philippi; there is Lydia and then Paul recognises the women who had laboured along with him in the glad tidings. Two of them perhaps needed a little help. Then the sister in Judges is more spiritual than the brother; Manoah's wife is apparently more spiritual than he is. That means that her links on the line that we are speaking about were stronger inwardly and secretly than his were.

K-n.A.O. I have heard a local meeting described as being like a clock, that the brothers are the hands and the sisters are what is behind them - the movement assembled. Do you think if that is lacking that you will not get what is really needed in the local assembly?

J.A.G. Yes, as long as it keeps time though; some clocks go fast and others go slow and some have alarms on them. As long as the thing works out normally, exercised sisters, godly women, are a tremendous asset in a local meeting.

K-n.A.O. We do not see the movement of a clock except in the hands; we may think that sisters have a lesser place but actually it is a greater place, in that sense.

J.A.G. Take the simple matter of your household: kneel down and pray yourself and kneel down and pray with your wife, and you know that there is something more there; that is practical. Now increase that into the local meeting, then you find there is power there in the sisters. If some of them are not out there is a lack.

S.E.H. In a clock there is the hidden side of things as distinct from what can be seen.

J.A.G. And that is headship in the body. That is working here, from John 12 on to John 20; then we come to the whole universal position where the Lord can come and go in the midst.

J.A.P. Mr Taylor said sisters can help in the care meeting, in the administration of things in the local meeting, by accurate reports.

The scripture used was what came to Paul from Corinth which guided him in his writings (see 1 Cor 1: 11). The care meeting is more important than we think.

J.A.G. I think so. We may be inclined nowadays to think of the care meeting as just to determine the special collection and go home; but it is a meeting for care and concern. You can understand why Mr Taylor in wisdom put it on the Saturday before the first Lord's day. In a city where there were five hundred and fifty brethren as in New York, you would need to administer over that. Of course meetings are smaller now but the principle of the thing is maintained in the affections of the saints and it is the regulating power and character of divine love. It is love doing its very best in administration.

K-n.A.O. We have perhaps sometimes left the care part out of the care meeting. It is not only to regulate but it is an occasion to go over matters in care in a feeling way with one another.

J.A.G. Well, it is the meeting for the care of the Lord's interests; and if His interests are our interests, that is union.

E.F.C. There may have been a tendency to relegate it to a secondary position, but we do not want to do that, do we? I think the care meeting should begin with a hymn and prayer and end with a hymn and prayer if possible, and plenty of time should be devoted to the occasion whenever it is held.

J.A.G. I think what has been said about dignity should be applicable also to the care meeting. What you say is very good; it is a separate meeting that begins with a hymn and a prayer and ends with a hymn and a prayer. We are not being official about things - we might do that - but the family knows what to do and the family dignity maintains what is due to God in it. What underlies the function of that, like every other meeting, is the side of things that belongs to union with Christ.

K.A.O. It is very striking, is it not, that in Acts 16 the women had "assembled" (v 13), and Lydia comes to light as one who attended to

the things spoken by Paul. It is a great thing to maintain, especially in these days. We would be very thankful for a meeting room, not that it is wrong to meet in homes, but what we may lose sight of is the dignity that is associated with assembling together. That is to be maintained, is it not?

J.A.G. I think that is very important. In some places the dear brethren do not have a room; they meet in a brother's house. That is all very good, but every meeting is in the light and dignity of the assembly universally. It is not just that you are going through to another room for a prayer meeting and sitting down and praying; you assemble in the light and dignity of what is universal. The reference to Lydia is very good because it was her heart that the Lord opened - a remarkable thing. When the gospel came into Europe, Paul's ministry came in primarily through a sister whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul.

K.A.O. It is a great thing to see that in the working out of the truth in the house the sister or the mother takes account of details: she would see for instance that the children are dressed properly. These things are practical. I think we need to see that the sisters play a very important part in our gatherings together, and that the dignity belonging to assembling is seen largely in them as caring for the things spoken by Paul.

J.A.G. There is a record of Mr Taylor saying, We say such and such brothers were out tonight and a handful of sisters. He said that will not do, for the sisters are vital to the composition of the local meeting.

R.N.H. It also says in Acts 16 that Paul and Timotheus sat down and spoke with the women (v 13). I found help myself when I was younger to identify myself with the older sisters who have experience and to get the benefit of their experience in conversation.

Sometimes after a meeting you see the brothers speak with the brothers and the sisters with the sisters, but do you think it would help mutuality if we sought the gain of what was in the sisters more?

J.A.G. I think so. I try nowadays to make a habit after the meeting of going round and shaking hands with them - every one of the sisters, as far as I am able; You might say that is another thing that happens in the meeting, the brothers speak to each other. We are not laying down laws and regulations but the mutual side involves the brothers and sisters conversing together.

G.H. When it says in Acts 16, "whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul", is it not very important in these days, because of all the confusion around, to pay attention to what this remarkable servant ministered?

J.A.G. Lydia was very subject. She says to Paul, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there".

Domineering sisters are no help; Lydia was not like that.

S.E.MacC. I was thinking of David's appreciation of Abigail: "blessed be thy discernment, and blessed be thou", 1 Sam 25: 33. It changed the whole course of things.

J.A.G. Indeed it did.

K.A.O. Dignity would be seen in the sisters' silence and also in the sense of Amen. One thing we would have to say as to the sisters is that they have pretty good memories and are sensitive to things.

J.A.G. What we need to see is the secret side in the local meeting with which the Lord has contact; that involves the sisters and the brothers and is the body.

K.N. P. Is not the way in which Mary operates here beautiful? She is told to "go ... and say" and she "comes bringing word". She is not laying down the law or anything like that but she comes bringing word that she had seen the Lord.

J.A.G. That is spirituality. Mr Taylor said she did not go and say exactly the same words that the Lord told her but she conveyed the message in such a way that the brethren were able to move in relation to it . And what happens is that they get a tremendous impression of the universal position. It is not "their midst" here, it is not "Handle me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones" (Luke

24: 39). it is "Jesus came and stood in the midst, and says to them, Peace be to you". What a salutation that was to the assembly!

J.A.P. You spoke about John's ministry being for the end; it is John who makes much of the sisters and the women. There is a woman in chapter 4 preaching the gospel and then these other women about whom we are speaking as if to say that this is a very important matter in the community.

J.A.G. Yes, it is very important, especially, too, as John shows, that they outshine the brothers in affection as they are standing by the cross of Jesus. Then the fact that the Lord commits His mother to John; He is taking care of the sisterhood that she represents. Take on that responsibility, He would say, and you will enrich the local meeting.

J.R.C. I was thinking of Manoah's wife. He said, "We shall surely die" (Judg 13: 22) but she said we are not going to die, He has accepted the burnt-offering. She brought in a spiritual touch.

J.A.G. That is what I thought she is more spiritual than he is. "And he did wondrously, and Manoah and his wife looked on": that was a tremendous contemplation for them, to see how the Lord in principle moves up in ascension through the response of the assembly in a day like the book of Judges.

J.R.C. Is that not something for us to realise - our acceptance in relation to the burnt offering?

J.A.G. I think that is what the Supper is; it is not the sin-offering but Christ in burnt offering character here for the will and pleasure of God. In a way that is the Rock.

J.A.P. Manoah's wife says in verse 23, "If Jehovah were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering and an oblation at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would he at this time have told us such things as these". What intelligence!

J.A.G. Exactly. You see she is way ahead, she is in the understanding of the loaf and the cup. Manoah at the moment does

not understand the new covenant; he does not have very much penetration into what the cup conveys in the manifestation of divine love. "Perfect love casts out fear", 1 John 4: 18. He is not exactly made perfect in love here but the Lord is going on.

C.F.D. Do you have more in mind in your reference to the Supper bearing on the burnt offering?

J.A.G. I think it is that character; it is the devotion of Christ to the will of God and to the manifestation of the love of God. The loaf brings out how He was here entirely for the pleasure of God and the cup shows us how He made God's disposition known: 'Love's disposition now made known, Thy saints are filled with gladness' (Hymn 456).

C.F.D. I think that helps us because at the Supper we might get involved with the matter of sins and the cup of wrath and that kind of thing, but it is not that aspect of the death of Christ, it is more the burnt-offering aspect. It is really what He did out of affection.

J.A.G. I think as we appreciate and understand that more it gives us much scope in our thanksgivings for the loaf and the cup.

K-n.A.O. You also referred to the new covenant. Is that something that we need help on as we sit down for the Supper? Mr Raven helped the brethren to get beyond being occupied in relation to the cup with the efficacy of the blood in relation to our sins and pointed out that the cup spoke of the new covenant. He said that if we had the matter of the efficacy of the blood before us, we still had God as the Judge before us. But the new covenant would set us free.

J.A.G. I think that is what is in mind, that the fulness of God's love has been made known and the One who made that known was Jesus and He is God. Therefore the glory and wonder of that marvellous Person is before us immediately we touch the cup the Mediator of the covenant. If I am concerned about remission, well, that is all right and you go along with it because He brings that in in Matthew - "for remission of sins" chap 26: 28. If that is my state, grace would go along with that, but the full thought of the Supper comes in Corinthians and the local assembly is to be strengthened in its appreciation and care and concern for the maintenance of the

Lord's supper at that level. And this whole secret spiritual line of things that I believe the Lord is calling attention to in the meeting now is that we might be strengthened and built up in the enjoyment of our links with Him secretly. The trend is always towards the rapture. I think you can write over it that we come to a point where in vitality we would say, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus", Rev 22: 20 (A.V.)

K.A.K. Joseph said to his brethren, "God sent me before you to preserve life", Gen 45: 5.

J.A.G. That is exactly the thing. It stands related to divine purpose and the Supper does that, it stands directly related to the purpose of God, the gateway into eternity.

G.A. Would Genesis 22 have any link with this, where Abraham was about to offer up Isaac as a burnt-offering but God provided a ram caught in the thicket?

J.A.G. Well, it is all toward us. Mr Darby speaks very beautifully, and very reverently, as to the way the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane submitted to the Father's will: "not my will, but thine be done", Luke 22: 42. That was the burnt-offering; He offered Himself as a burnt-offering. The Lord Jesus says, I am Yours, whatever You want to do I am Yours. And God says, I will take that opportunity and I will deal with sin. He was made the sin-offering because He was the burnt-offering. It could not be otherwise, and the result is that we become God's righteousness in Him.

S.E.H. In Leviticus the blood comes into the burnt-offering as well as into the sin-offering. In Corinthians, when Paul speaks about the cup, he refers to the blood as well. Would you say something as to the appreciation of the blood in connection with the burnt-offering.

J.A.G. I think it depends upon our apprehension of it. The blood stands related to redemption and that is in the cup. And as we think of it we see the scope of the redeemed, ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands acknowledging the greatness of the Lamb because of His work. But then I think there is something further, there is who the Person is and the redemption, the actual work, which was the manifestation of the nature of God,

which is love. So with the cup you have your link immediately with eternity, that love - there it is. I learned that from Mr McCallum.

J.A.P. It is the cup of blessing.

J.A.G. "The cup of blessing which we bless" (1 Cor 10: 16) - perfect liberty and happiness and joy. 'No longer room for sadness'.

THE FAMILY AND ASSEMBLY IN FUNCTION

James Alex Gardiner

Zechariah 12: 5-10; Nehemiah 2: 11,12; 8: 16-18

It is a marvellous privilege in these days in which we are that we can touch the assembly in function and have access into the spiritual realm, the realm of the Spirit where the Lord has perfect liberty and His headship is known and His manifestations come freshly through the body. I believe the Lord would seek to encourage every one of us to go forward and grow in our experience in what is spiritual. The progress that we make depends upon ourselves, and upon the desire of our hearts, the extent of the desire which we may have to grow and advance in our spiritual experiences. In a way it is an individual day. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity" (2 Tim 2: 19) is individual. There are certain matters we have to follow and to pursue: righteousness, it says, faith, love and peace, with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. The path is individual; we are going on together with those that call upon the Lord, a priestly company and priestly attitude, out of a pure heart. They love the Lord and they are seeking to be pleasing to Him. Now we have the next verse which speaks about the bondman of the Lord. A bondman is one who loves. You might ask yourself - and I would do well to ask myself - How great, how deep, how extensive is my bondmanship, is my committal? The more earnest and true and sincere and genuine I may be in my committal to the truth, to these great principles of leadership which stand related to the kingdom, I am going to find enlargement in my soul and in my affections and I think bondmanship is going to increase with me. As we move on that line we will prove divine support and help. God makes way for us as we do that. We are still in the great house, in no way can we get out of it; our position would relate to the corner of the housetop. It is better to be there, it is better to accept the limitation of that position than to dwell with the contentious woman (see Prov 21: 9). There is liberty to work out the truth in that position. So it says about the bondman that he is gentle

towards all. He is in no way limited in his outlook or constricted in his affections despite the narrowness of the way and the smallness outwardly of the position. He is gentle towards all and he is apt to teach. He is not contentious, seeking to set right those who oppose. He is looking for recovery and revival, looking to see if God is giving anybody repentance; that is what he is looking for in the house, the great house. He is looking to see if God is working and whether He is giving anybody repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth. These are the great features of the kingdom, beloved.

I read the scripture in Zechariah because I think you could say that these qualities - righteousness, faith, love and peace - are like the leaders of Judah. Judah is the great realm of the kingdom and the sphere and area where the service of God is carried on and these features are maintained with s in family affection. I suppose the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be that: "And the leaders of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength through Jehovah of hosts their God". I believe as we maintain these things in our hearts we are going to come to the spiritual realm of things that is really the assembly. God is making way for it. I think the Lord would help us, as He has done in these meetings, to understand what the assembly is as a spiritual entity, and it needs to be cared for and protected. The kingdom is a great area of protection and care. It has often been referred to as the bulwark of the assembly. The force and power of the devil can come against it but it stands; "hades' gates shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16: 18), the kingdom stands, and Peter is the great kingdom man. So we have here these beautiful references to the leaders of Judah; they "shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength". These are persons - the bondmen of the Lord - who contend; they are gentle towards all but they maintain inviolate these holy principles that protect and govern and make way for the greatness of the spiritual realm. Because what is to happen, as we see in the next verse, is that if these principles are operative they make way for Jerusalem, make way for the assembly. "Jerusalem shall dwell again in her own place, in Jerusalem". How beautiful that

is, beloved! We may publicly be captive and we do not have everybody; only two tribes came back in the recovery under Ezra and Nehemiah, ten were lost, but then the Lord knows those that are His, they are taken care of. We are to maintain the principles of the truth inviolate on that line of things, in affection, in second Timothy 2 principles and in second Timothy 2 days and we will find that God will make "the leaders of Judah like a hearth of fire among wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; - and they shall devour all the peoples round about". We find we will prove the power of it as making way for the establishment in our souls of the greatness and glory of the assembly. All these alien features which would seek to intrude and impinge on the greatness of the holy commonwealth which has its existence in the heavens, these elements which would seek to divert us from the enjoyment of things, would fade away.

These principles maintained in our hearts, it says, "shall devour all the peoples round about, on the right hand and on the left; and Jerusalem shall dwell again in her own place, in Jerusalem". Oh, beloved, how beautiful that is! The local meeting, the assembly there, is the prime matter; everything then is regulated by it, Jerusalem, the assembly, is regulated by it. And the family side is a great support for it; love for the truth, love for the assembly is prominent in the family side of things.

So God comes in here and he says, "And Jehovah shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem be not magnified over Judah", God in that way, beloved, is making way for the family side. The official side is not to becloud it or be magnified over it. What is to be magnified is the great family side of the truth where we are together as the brethren of Christ. How wonderful and beautiful that is! He goes on then to say, "In that day will Jehovah defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that stumbleth among them at that day shall be as David". How glorious it is, how wonderful to find divine support like this, God coming in to support and to extend that line of things, upgrading things in a way. As it says here, "and he that stumbleth among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David

as God, as the Angel of Jehovah before them". Would you not like, beloved, to be as David, a man, a woman after God's own heart? His place was in Jerusalem. He that stumbleth among them, or tottereth among them, shall be as David; there is weakness and we are weak and feel it and we struggle along, we totter along you might say. I feel I am tottering along in this address, but the Lord is coming into it and we find that God supports it because His main concern is Christ and the assembly. I think the Lord has shown us without doubt in these days the truth in its fulness and its glory relating to Christ and the assembly, that it is practical and workable in these days of brokenness and public ruin.

It is very remarkable that we should have these precious touches in the book of Judges as we have them in the book of Joshua. That is to confirm us in our souls as to the greatness of divine things that in themselves are inviolate. The Lord would encourage our hearts, beloved, to set ourselves to have increasing entrance into that wonderful realm.

So he goes on to say, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem". All these attacks, all these suggestions that come up in your own heart and in your own mind that would seek to nullify the dominance of the glory and the workability of the truth of the assembly that you are being regulated by: God says He will come against them. The Spirit of God would help us to have judgment of them and make clearance in our souls that we are settled in our disposition about this glorious matter, the prime matter with God. "I speak", says Paul, "as to Christ, and as to the assembly", Eph 5: 32. So he goes on to say, "And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications". How we need that. How we need to be increasingly identified in our souls inwardly with the preciousness of the death of Christ: "and they shall look on me whom they pierced". It is looking on to the day to come, but to think of the wonder of it! The more we are occupied with the greatness of Christ's death who loved the

assembly and delivered Himself up for it, the more it will have its place in our hearts.

I just want to refer to Nehemiah because I think it is a great encouragement to every brother and sister, and to myself I would say especially, to seek to take up responsibility that relates to the furtherance of the bringing into more prominence the great matter of the assembly. It says here that he is an exercised man and he says he told no man what God had put into his heart to do for Jerusalem.

Have you ever had an exercise like that? Have you ever asked God to put something into your heart to do for Jerusalem, asked God to put something into your heart to work out to a result for your local meeting that there might be some greater evidence in expression of the humanity of Christ in the place? Because that is what it is. He had this exercise, he did not tell anybody, he was just himself. He might have thought, well, it is a pretty hopeless position, the whole thing is in ruins: you do not know where to start. You do not know my locality and you do not know the place where I come from: we would not even know where to start. Nehemiah's situation was something like that. He says, There was no place for the beast he was on to move, the whole thing was so much in ruin. You, as a bondman of the Lord and seeking to be a bondman of the Lord, follow this line of the truth, ask God to put something into your heart. He knows what you are capable of and He will help you to do it, put it into your heart to do something for Jerusalem and bring it through to fulfilment. The job he had to do was to build the wall - quite an extensive job - but he did it. He restored the great side of fellowship and the service of God proceeded on that basis and he sustained it.

I just read from chapter 8 because no doubt Nehemiah never expected things to turn out as well as they did. In the circumstances in which he was found (he comes out of the captivity) he comes up to Jerusalem and now he comes to this wonderful point where they celebrate the feast of booths, the great expression of the family side of the truth that runs right on into the eternal day. How beautiful that is! They have the whole of the family before them; there are persons not there, not available, but there is room for them. This beautiful

reference to the open space of the gate of Ephraim: Ephraim is not here, where is Ephraim? Who knows? The Lord knows where Ephraim is, but his place is here. And we hold Ephraim's place in our affections. The Lord therefore, as we move on that line, brings us out of our own circumstances and we come into divine circumstances right through to the eighth day. These are very beautiful and practical matters in the working out of the truth so that we have increasing access into the glory of the spiritual realm, the eighth day of the week - "eight days after, his disciples were again within", John 20: 26. So that the Lord's day, the first day of the week, is to be hallowed and cherished in our affections and all the other days are to be regulated by what is to happen on that day.

The maintenance of these wonderful principles that God has set out in the kingdom are to be cherished by us, we are to follow them, follow them with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. We will find we come to this position at the end of verse 17 where it says "And there was very great gladness". Have you that in your soul, beloved - "very great gladness"? It relates back to the days of Joshua the son of Nun. Something unique, something distinctive is going to happen in these days in which we are found that will equate to what was at the beginning. Joshua, as you know, is the spiritual link between Moses and David, between the side of authority in the Lord and the great reign of grace that comes in through David. It goes back to that day and it says "there was very great gladness".

The Lord would fill our hearts with gladness. He is concerned, beloved, that we increase in our practical working apprehension, you might say, of the function of the assembly in the local place, the function spiritually of the local assembly. We understand then what headship is. The service of God therefore, on the line of the Lord's ascent, is going up; there is an increase in the way that He moves.

His headship in function means that the company is being enriched as the service proceeds. Then as He goes on to the Father He brings all this wealth with Him. It is like that kid of Manoah's and the oblation; He is going up wealthily with this great company to present them to His Father and to His God. The answer then is equal to all that has come out in Himself. The offerings in 2 Chronicles could not

be numbered, "which could not be counted nor numbered for multitude", 2 Chron 5: 6. A great buoyant, affectionate response to God in sonship is going to fill His house for ever. Beloved, how great that is! Alas, for many of us, many a time it is something that I know, something that I have light about, that I read about in the books, that I enjoy singing about, but the power of the thing is to work in our souls. How blessed it is when it does, the power and leading of sonship so that we are consciously touching the greatness of God's rest. God rests in that, no more work to do, all the work was finished under Solomon. When we arrive at that we touch the rest of God.

May the Lord help us and encourage us. I feel how feebly I have been able to set out these things but I can see tremendous encouragement for us that, in days such as we are in, the function of the local assembly is possible at the level and at the quality and in the character morally and spiritually of what it has always been down through the dispensation. If we maintain the family side, that function is inviolate. May we be encouraged in it and helped in it for His Name's sake.

CHILDREN AT PLAY

From the book of Job we learn that "all the beasts of the field play" on the mountains, while one of the Psalms refers to animals of the whale tribe playing together "in the great and wide sea". We, in our own day, find great interest in the lambs and even young cattle gambolling in the fields, whilst creatures such as dolphins and even killer whales may be seen in many a seaside reserve, playing a game like 'hide and seek'.

The Lord Jesus evidently watched the children playing in the market-places of Palestine at games such as 'weddings and funerals'. It seems that the games were not always played properly and fairly - and Jesus observed that, too! Some of the children had

to complain against others for not doing as they should. "We have piped to you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you and ye have not wept" they said.

There was a great lesson to be learned by all this, and not only amongst the young ones. The grown-ups too were not doing as they should in matters infinitely more important than play. John the baptist had come in converting power, but some of the people said that he had a demon because he seemed so severe. In truth he was the herald making way for Jesus, the Saviour. Not only did they refuse John, however, but they refused also Jesus Himself, speaking in divine grace. They complained that He was "the friend of sinners". But the sinners did not refuse Him, they loved Him. Do you?

J.C.Evershed