

A
WORD
IN ITS
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Contents

PARADISE

GOD'S THOUGHTS AND MY EXPERIENCE

OBSERVANT CHILDREN

PARADISE

2 Corinthians 12: 1-5 ; Luke 23: 42-49; Colossians 2: 9-15

B.M.D. As we are able we should hold in our minds and affections the prospect of being with Christ; finally it will involve paradise. Paul was caught up there, whether in the body or out of it he could not say, but what he heard were unspeakable things said. That is something to contemplate. It must have given a certain character and substance and fulness to his ministry. Man lost his place in paradise, or rather was driven from the garden on account of sin; the Lord Jesus came to meet the whole question of sin, and of good and evil, and cleared the way for man recovered to enter into paradise. He has gone to prepare us a place as having accomplished redemption. He says to this man in Luke 23: "To-day shalt thou be with me" - notice the '*with me*' - "in paradise". Then the teaching in Colossians would help us: "buried with him in baptism, in which ye have been also raised with him through faith of the working of God", and then "quickened together with him" - notice "with him" three times - "having forgiven us all the offences".

C.F.D. I suppose Paul presents this as a focal point of his personal experience with the Lord. Is there something open to us as we assemble, particularly on the Lord's day morning, as to being caught up. Paul was caught up - he knew such an one - but is there something open to us in is regard?

B.M.D. Yes. I am sure Paul would never be casual as he approached the assembly time. Is that what you are thinking of? There is a certain awe - or reverence rather - in view of being together in assembly. That remains despite the brokenness publicly today; there is such a thing as being together in assembly.

C.F.D. The Psalmist says "Whither the tribes go up" (Ps 122: 4). How we come up is important so that we are ready for something in the way of a distinct transaction with the Lord as having part with Him, do you think?

B.M.D. "We being assembled to break bread" (Acts 20: 7) is a very dignified suggestion, and of course the Lord's supper is a lordly occasion: there is a peculiar dignity which would preclude any casualness on our side. That does not mean that we are unnatural. We come up from wilderness conditions and from our homes, but there is a certain dignity that attaches to our assembling. In the beginning of Acts, during the forty days, Jesus assembled with them, He taught them how to assemble. We are exhorted not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (see Heb 10: 25).

S.E.H. Would you distinguish between being caught up to the third heaven and being caught up into paradise.

B.M.D. I could not explain it. We can just stand in awe of what that may suggest. I would not think we are yet in the conditions which would enable us to understand what that is. We just have to say, This is the scripture, this is what is recorded.

S.E.H. There is a footnote in one of the gospels which refers to paradise as the place of departed spirits (see Matt 11: 23). I was wondering whether, when we go to be with Christ, that would be paradise. Would that be right?

B.M.D. I would think where we read in Luke: "To-day ... with me in paradise" answers your question; it is a place of delight. In another scripture Paul says "with Christ, for it is very much better", Phil 1: 23. As to Christ personally, of course, He went beyond all the heavens. We can never limit Him, in virtue of who He is in His person. But Paul was caught up as far as the third heaven because there is creature limitation; but then he says "into paradise" as if his description of the third heaven is a place of delight.

T.E.D. Does the word to the overcomer in Ephesus, "To him that overcomes, I will give to him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God" (Rev 2: 7), show that it is available to us today?

B.M.D. And it shows that the paradise of God is a place. But who can describe it? Paul was caught up there but he says at what he heard was unutterable. But we could get some impression by the

Spirit of what it would be; it is with Him, *with Jesus*; that is heaven, is it not?

T.E.D. You gave us a touch last week as to the Christian circle of which Christ is the centre, that it is composed of overcomers.

B.M.D. Yes, that is where we are today, in the company of one another who through the grace of God touch something of the character of the overcomer. It is open to us to touch by the Spirit the delight of the paradise of God.

A.G.S. It is remarkable, and very comforting too, that the Lord responded immediately: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise". The Lord did not hesitate, He answered him immediately.

B.M.D. That is very beautiful, "To-day ... with me in paradise". So that is available in some sense in the power of the Spirit, because He is the earnest; He would say, I will give you a little foretaste of this. The circle we are in today is the nearest on earth we will ever be to heaven. Up there it will be its fulness with no limitation whatever.

C.F.D. "Raised us up together, and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus", Eph 2: 6.

B.M.D. Exactly, the place is assured. But there is the moral way to it and that is what we are going to get at in Colossians. It is there, perfectly established according to the purpose of God, but it involves a certain history experimentally to reach it.

C.F.D. And the peculiar touch of Christ, do you think? It is a collective idea in Ephesians. While it does not describe what the heavenlies are - "the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" - it opens up to us something beautiful and glorious that would answer to paradise in a sense, do you think?

B.M.D. Yes. In Christ Jesus, of course, is new creation, (see 2 Cor 5: 17). Think of what new creation will be if we could ever describe it - it is in Christ Jesus. Think of God, could we reverently say, having expended so much on new creation whereas He expended but six days on this present creation. Is that a fair comparison?

C.F.D. Very interesting; showing how far superior the moral and the spiritual are to the physical.

B.M.D. Exactly. Think of what will be seen from Adam on, through every generation of faith, and displayed in the glory of new creation! That, I suppose, we can safely say Paul describes as paradise.

G.D.P. The first man was in paradise in innocence but Paul was in paradise with a sense of intelligence. Is the moral road the way to the tree of life?

B.M.D. In a way that man in innocence would have never known. It is the mystery of the ways of God. In Luke 23, He says "with me in paradise" - there was no wilderness history. It confirms the absoluteness of the purpose of God that He could take one man directly: he was crucified and he died - into paradise. Now the mystery of God's ways remains with us all, but they are not exactly a part of the purpose of God, as we have been taught.

C.F.D. Will you open that up. We have young people here and maybe some of us who are older do not understand that.

B.M.D. I do not understand it too much myself. God is omnipotent and giveth not account of any of His matters (see Job 33: 13). But we have all had a sinful history and we need to come to the Saviour and confess our sins and be conscious that we have received the forgiveness of our sins; and we also need to be conscious that we have received the Holy Spirit. That is not automatic, it is the gift of God; and eternal life is a gift. All this is available in the gospel, and each one of us in our small measure has come this way. We have been through teenage and the later years and are in an atmosphere of tenderness and sympathy with one another to help us all into the greatness of what has been prepared for us. It is all resident in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

L.McF. Is it not remarkable that with the malefactor there was not much formation; he had no spiritual history and yet he is brought into this fulness, "To-day ... with me in paradise"?

B.M.D. There is mystery connected with it. It is a wonderful comfort that such a thing took place - "To-day ... with me in paradise". To explain the detail would be beyond us. It is sufficient that the Lord said it.

J.A.P. Mr Taylor remarked that God had made a wonderful provision in the meantime for the departed saints. I was at a reading on Corinthians where he made a point of 'as far as' (see note to 2 Cor 12: 2); he said just what you are saying, that there is something beyond us to understand about these heavens.

B.M.D. That will always be the case when we are dealing with the Person of Christ. There is always a creature limit as far as we are concerned. As a divine Person we have to leave that in the area of mystery.

J.A.P. Where would you put a saint like Abraham, for instance? I know that matters are not yet finalised by God, but Abraham died - "All these died in faith", Heb 11: 13. Where would their souls be?

B.M.D. The Lord said, God is the God of Abraham He is the God of the living, for all live for Him (see Luke 20: 38) and Abraham rejoiced to see My day (see John 8: 56). That would be a question of faith I suppose, he could not have described it. The city he waited for, he is still waiting for. He embraced it by faith and God will be true to His promise. Think of what tremendous fulness will enter into the resurrection of all the saints!

J.A.P. It says in Romans "awaiting adoption" (Rom 8: 23); there is a certain fulness that even a departed saint has yet to come into. Is that true?

B.M.D. Does that not answer your question as to where their souls are? Abraham is among such, is he not?

J.A.P. Yes. Are the departed saints touching paradise, do you think?

B.M.D. Yes, I would say that, according to the Lord's word in Luke 22: 43. At death our spirits go to be "with Christ" (Phil 1: 23); our bodies await redemption (see Rom 8: 23). Take the saints that arose

after the Lord arose at the end of Matthew. Where are they? They are somewhere, they would not have returned to those tombs. It is mystery.

K.A.O. Would the scripture in Luke 16 help us in relation to this, where it speaks about Lazarus, the poor man, who was carried away into the bosom of Abraham?

B.M.D. Yes. These are all glimpses into this wonderful matter. It is a question how much we can say, but those are the very words of our Lord as to Lazarus; he was immediately in the place of restfulness and affection. Whether you could say 'paradise' I do not know, but the Lord uses that word. Maybe the brethren have other suggestions that would strengthen us.

K.A.O. The word 'hades' is used in relation to the rich man in Luke 16. Mr Darby's note to the word in Matthew 11: 23 says 'It is applied to Christ, who went into paradise, and to the rich man in Luke 16, who found himself in torment'.

B.M.D. That gives us both sides as to what has happened to those who have died. Clearly the poor man was in the bosom of Abraham: it is symbolic language. Literally I think the Lord would be meaning, I suppose, that he is in a place of restfulness and I would think affection. Maybe the word 'paradise' describes it best. There are certain things left in mystery and we have to leave them there; we are not in the condition yet to understand them. We would be governed by what Paul says about it because to him it was given to complete the word of God; he says, "being with Christ, for it is very much better", Phil 1: 23. That is probably a safer language to use. But the Lord used the word 'paradise', so that gives us title to do that. The departed saints are at no disadvantage - much otherwise.

J.A.P. I am glad for what you say, and of that note in Matthew 11. For the saints that have departed there is yet some further divine action to enter into all that great matter.

B.M.D. They are yet awaiting the redemption of their bodies; that will be the next thing. The Lord Jesus will raise the sleeping saints and they will be raised incorruptible. What a moment that will be! And

how close, how near - at any moment! Then we, the living, will be changed and caught up together with them. These things are not merely doctrine; faith embraces them.

G.H. That expression 'caught up' is a term of affection.

B.M.D. It is, it is love's arrangement. The Lord Himself will do that. We have not come to Colossians yet but as "quickened together" we are in life together. It suggests what is collective. We are learning this - we are in the learning time now - buried with Him and raised with Him and then quickened together with Him. What a scene that will be!

G.H. Beautiful expression!

B.M.D. It is. But it is *with Him* that gives substance to it; it is in virtue of all that Jesus is.

C.S.E. The words that the thief said - "Dost thou too not fear God, thou that art under the same judgment? and we indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done; but this man has done nothing amiss" - seem to point to a condition that was ready for the Lord to speak to him in the way he did: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise". Is there something in that for us: "this man has done nothing amiss"? If that is the language of our hearts, does it not point to the perfection of Jesus? Is that not something we can arrive at in our own souls?

B.M.D. I think that exactly. It shows how rapidly he arrived at preferring Christ to himself. He came to a judgment of himself, undoubtedly involving repentance and his acceptance of the only blessed Man who did nothing amiss. Faith must have embraced the fact that He was there sufferingly for him. Sometimes our histories are protracted. What a wonderful thing if we could arrive at this more quickly and begin to realise what Christianity really is. For us it is living by faith in relation to another Man in another world, but He introduces it immediately to him: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise'.

C.S.E. I remember a dear brother who, before the Lord took him, said, I wonder why the Lord has kept me here all this time. He was suffering. Is it a question of the formation that God is working out in each one of us? As you said, some of us take longer and some shorter, but there is something that He is working out with each one of us to complete His work.

B.M.D. We need to value the work of God in one another. Some of us have been slow learners. I suppose this one was a quick learner; he never went through the wilderness, he did not need to be baptised, he went straight to paradise. I remember a dear old sister local with us in her nineties who was somewhat despondent that it had taken so long for the Lord to complete His work; she felt humbled about it. He will complete His work with every one of us and that work will be absolutely perfect, and there will be some reflection of Christ in every one of the redeemed.

C.S.E. When Paul was taken up to paradise, was that all part of his education? We get the germ of what the Lord was working out with him, and the unspeakable things that he heard from the epistles which he wrote.

B.M.D. It is very likely that the experience was in the midst of extreme pressure and suffering. I think it has been suggested that it might have been what happened when he was stoned at Lystra and thought to have died (see Acts 14: 19). But he rose up, giving a peculiar character to the ministry that proceeded. I suppose the epistle to the Ephesians is the nearest we get to what he said was unspeakable. There is a fulness of things the fringe of which we have hardly touched; we will never exhaust it, never will. Did not beloved Mr Raven say something to the effect that he felt that he was standing on the brink of an illimitable ocean with the waves lapping his feet? That dear man knew something but that is how he felt. We do not know much really, at least I speak for myself, there is a lot to be known.

J.A.P. I sometimes feel in the morning meeting that we touch things and get a sense of glory, but it is hard to get outside in faith of the

condition in which you are in. God has left us that way, but in itself that can be a hindrance.

B.M.D. Yes. We need the Spirit for that. I think we need to be more free than we are to call on the Spirit at any time. We used to speak of His augmentary service and I expect that was safe; at any time we may feel the need of the Spirit. I agree with you that we are slow to get from our side of things to His side. Can we so abstract ourselves in the service of God to think of what Christ is to God as the burnt-offering?

C.S.E. Hymn 74 says, 'And see! the Spirit's power has ope'd the heav'nly door, has brought us to that favoured hour when toil shall all be o'er'. Is that, as you say, just the fringe of things which we might touch? But how precious it is!

B.M.D. I think the Spirit *has* opened the heavenly door. He searches the depths of God too. Everything is in the Spirit; He guides us into all the truth. That I suppose would link with the opened door which no man can shut. That door is open and I believe it involves the full recovery to Paul's ministry, and to John's because they go together; and Peter underlies it, because we will never understand these things if we are not subject to Christ.

L.McF. So that "I know a man in Christ" would seem to be very distinctive. I wonder whether we have had any experience of having to do with such persons in our day, persons in whom the evidence of the anointing was very distinct, a man in Christ. It is not a general thought but it is a tribute to the Spirit that there could be such a man.

B.M.D. Yes, caught up as far as the third heaven - a man in Christ. It would suggest spiritual maturity showing what can, and I suppose what will, be reached; it will be perfect - new creation will be perfect.

D.McF. In chapter 14 of John Jesus says, "I go to prepare you a place" (v 3), and then He says to His disciples: "ye know where I go, and ye know the way". Is that helpful in any way?

B.M.D. That is how it works. He is the way, He is the truth and He is the life (see v 6). It again is like a glimpse into what has been

prepared for us. What a place that will be! It is "where Jesus is entered as forerunner for us", Heb 6: 20.

G.D. It says "caught up to the third heaven", I want to get a better understanding of the heavens. Is there more than one heaven? Is there a first and second and fourth heaven?

B.M.D. I have the same inquiry in my own mind. The Lord went through all the heavens; He went as Creator past everything that is created; we never shall. "Caught up to the third heaven" reminds us of creature limitation. We will never go beyond that in that sense. The Lord Jesus personally is beyond it all. He in His person as God over all is outside of it all in unapproachable light. That keeps us in a spirit of holy reverence and worship. But there is such a *place* as the third heaven and Paul says that is paradise. Would you want any more? When you get there you will not be looking for a fourth heaven, you will say, This is perfect, where "Christ is everything, and in all", Col 3: 11.

C.F.D. It is an area that has never been invaded by breakdown, failure or sin, which we are to touch at the assembly time. I do not say that I always get there, but it is an area open to us that is permeated with the perfection which is set out in Christ, do you think?

B.M.D. Exactly. Let us explore what our brother quoted; the Spirit has opened the heavenly door.

A.S.H. Paul says here "I know a man in Christ", and then he says, "whether in the body I know not, or out of the body I know not, God knows" . Has he come to the end of himself that he knows this and no more?

B.M.D. It would seem to be so. As was remarked, it may have been in a time of extreme pressure for him. But then it is open to us in the power of abstraction in the Spirit, like John in the Spirit on the Lord's day (see Rev 1: 10). It would appear that it was possible for John to be in such a state that he could hear that voice, "Come up here" Rev 4: 1. He went up into heaven in spirit, not physically yet. So it is open to us now in the power of the Spirit.

C.F.D. These are the atmospheric heavens which have been invaded by the enemy.

B.M.D. They have been, and the devil will be cast out. There is a place prepared there for the assembly. What a place that will be!

C.F.D. You make it very attractive to us and the Spirit makes it available to us. Ephesians would point to the fact that the enemy has been active in seeking to invade heaven, so that our conflict is not with blood and flesh but with spiritual wickedness, spiritual powers in the heavenlies (see Eph 6: 12).

B.M.D. The devil seems to attack relentlessly what is a prime thought in God's mind. On earth it began in the garden of Eden with his subtlety and his craft. What is he trying to do now? To spoil the finish at the close of the testimony of the assembly. We are not ignorant of his thoughts, and there is power in the Spirit to see that the divine end is reached in spiritual maturity.

G.H. I enjoy the thought of 'prepared'. The word 'prepared' occurs in the book of Jonah - now God had prepared certain things in His affection for Jonah. There are also the things that God has prepared for those that love Him (see 1 Cor 2: 9). It is something special that God in His infinite love has prepared for the saints. Beautiful, is it not?

B.M.D. It is very comforting. So you are not taken unawares. God does not have to revise His plans. The Lord knows what He is going to do. What He wants us to do is to trust Him. Someone has said that the most difficult thing He has had to teach us is to trust Him. He knows what He is going to do. Faith lays hold of that.

G.H. I enjoy that word 'prepared' because it involves what God has done in His love for the saints - something special.

B.M.D. What He has prepared for those that love Him. What a wonderful thing to be numbered among the thousands that love God. Could you conceive of a greater privilege? We are just a few of them.

T.E.D. Joshua and Caleb had the spirit of things in relation to the land, did they not? "If Jehovah delight in us, he will bring us into this land" (Num 14: 8), and then the expression, "Jehovah is with us" (v 9). Is that the point and bearing of what the Lord would say to us today? He is with us, but are we with Him would be the test.

B.M.D. Well, it would be; He is here Spiritwise. We should be sobered by that always. We are literally now in the presence of God, the Spirit of God is here. We are careful in His presence rightly, but we are free. The Spirit sets us free, and the Son sets us free. It is wonderful to have spiritual liberty among the brethren. Where else would you find it?

C.S.E. I am impressed with what we have in 1 Thessalonians where it speaks of "the Lord himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God, shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord", chap 4: 16,17. I suppose a little bit of geography comes in there - if I might use that expression - the Lord descending from heaven, but then the saints are going to meet the Lord in the air. I suppose that would be a lower area. Then it goes on: "thus we shall be always with the Lord". I was wondering about that area.

B.M.D. It is another precious touch of 'with Him'; it is with the Lord. He comes Himself, He does not delegate that to another. Our mortal bodies will be quickened on account of the Spirit dwelling in us but the Lord Himself will come. You used the word 'geography'; He is equal for that. A cloud received Him out of their sight in the beginning of Acts: as they had seen Him going into heaven He will come in like manner (see chap 1: 11). I think we leave it there. You are thinking of how you are on one side of the earth and I may be way on the other side, and how it is going to work. Faith meets all that and makes it so simple and so real.

C.S.E. I am thinking of the blessedness of the area which the believer is brought into through grace by faith. Repentance coming

in, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, all this great and glorious area of things that He wants us to be occupied with at the present time is opened up, delivering us from some of the other things that are occupying us, do you think?

B.M.D. Yes. So if we get some impression of paradise, and what we yet await actually, we will face these matters in Colossians. Circumcision is the first, the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt. It is Gilgal in the type. The fulness is in Him - that involves His deity - "and ye are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and authority, in whom also ye have been circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh": this is Gilgal. Colossians is transitional; we are not there yet, we are on the way, but there are dangers around. We are not going to be in the land with Egyptian features clinging to us; the reproach of Egypt is to be rolled away. So it necessitated the sharp knives; they hurt, but that has to be faced if we are going, in reality, to reach heavenly ground.

J.A.P. What you are saying to us is very wholesome. Samuel renewed the kingdom at Gilgal (see 1 Sam 11: 14). We have to get back to Peter; we can never leave out the renewing of the kingdom in Gilgal. I often pray to the Lord myself that I might be in the gain of this; we have to keep near the Lord in self-judgment - Gilgal.

B.M.D. Circumcision was neglected apparently throughout the forty years in the wilderness, and when they come into the land they had to face the whole matter again. It rolls away the reproach of Egypt. Worldly features among us are a reproach; they should not appear among heavenly-minded persons.

J.A.P. Is that what is meant by 'the reproach of Egypt', the worldliness that attaches to us?

B.M.D. That is what I am trying to convey. As crossing the Jordan we have seen the ark; the Person of Christ absorbs us, we follow Him. To think now of some feature of the world still attaching to us brings in the necessity of the sharp knives to deal with it, to roll away the reproach of Egypt. Such features do not belong to heaven or to

heavenly-minded brethren. The enemy is introducing them almost relentlessly by infusing some worldly feature which will work ruin.

C.F.D. And would you say too, the features of the flesh: "For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit life and peace", Rom 8: 6? All that requires the knife of circumcision, does it not?

B.M.D. That is what I would say; it is a complete cutting off to arrive experimentally at having no confidence in flesh. I do not know how you get on but it seems to take a lifetime to come to it.

C.S.E. Is that why the sin of Achan in the land was so serious? After they crossed the Jordan covetousness marked him, getting the Babylonish garment, and then there was the solemn judgment of God. Does that show that in the land, where there is to be the enjoyment of the inheritance, those things have to be a judged and settled matter?

B.M.D. Even after circumcision at Gilgal there was someone cherishing a Babylonish garment; such things do not belong to the assembly. Of course the matter was judicially met, because they lost the battle for Ai over that sin. So these are weakening things as they are allowed unjudged among those walking in the truth.

C.F.D. The subtlety of that thing was that it was not visible to anybody. They lost the battle of Ai and had to come back and the matter be judged in the presence of God, the word coming in through Joshua about this thing. It was hidden in the tent. It is like hiding something in our homes that does not belong there, that is foreign to the assembly, but God says, I have an issue with the locality because that thing is there. Is that right?

B.M.D. It is, it is not too severe to say that. I think the Lord expects in love for Himself and love for the truth and love for the vessel that he loves, that there should be something in purity witnessed here before He comes.

T.E.D. The reference to tribe by tribe and man by man, right down to the individual bears on our local settings. It is in our localities that

the Lord is working things out at the present time so that the heavenly standard is answered to, is it not?

B.M.D. Yes. I believe it requires a spiritual condition to force out what is hidden secretly. It does not mean that we are suspicious; that does not belong in the Christian circle; we take persons at their word. Each is justified or condemned by their own words.

J.A.P. Ordinarily there would be confidence in one another.

B.M.D. Surely; it would never do to destroy or weaken that in any sense. We trust one another, that is the fellowship; we are partners in the fellowship of God's Son and we trust one another implicitly. Not just when together but anywhere, whether at business, at work or at school, we trust one another, we are committed to the fellowship of God's Son. Now this may appear negative but it is leading into something better, because buried with Him by baptism is *with Him*. He has gone that way and that is the only way for a lover to go; he must be with Him. You must be with the object of your affections. You see in the death and burial of Christ the removal of the man who caused all the trouble. He bore my sins in His body on the tree; it was in the three hours, as alive on the cross, He suffered the wrath of God. But then He removed the man who sinned - what a relief! Now by faith I am buried with Him by baptism.

J.A.P. He consummated it on the cross; I could not have part in that, only He could do it, but for me He went into the grave and we are buried with Him.

B.M.D. It was all vicarious and all part of the one great atoning work of redemption. Yet the three hours on the cross remains alone in some sense in its awfulness, when He bore the wrath of God and exhausted it as He offered Himself spotless to God who laid on Him the iniquity of us all. That should leave us adoringly before Him who did it.

J.A.P. The hymn says, 'None could follow there, blest Saviour, when Thou didst for sins atone' (No 298). That was His alone.

B.M.D. Exactly. So if He went through death and burial to remove the man, that is the way I must go by faith. Then we come to being quickened, quickened together, still with Him, still in His company, but now in His life.

C.F.D. Quickening is a glorious thing. You referred earlier to the fact that eventually the bodies of the living saints are going to be quickened on account of the Spirit, and we are to know something about that quickening at the present time, do you not think?

B.M.D. Made to live, that is what it means, made to live in the life of Christ as raised from among the dead. Quickening is connected with each of the Persons of the Godhead. So we are quickened together *with Him*, but the with Him is in a risen life; it is in another condition, it is not flesh and blood. He said to that beloved woman, "Touch me not" (John 20: 17); she would have resumed the relationship she had once known. By inference the Lord is saying that there is something far better now, there is another relationship, another condition which death can never invade. And that is in the assembly.

C.F.D. Is this what the Lord and the Spirit hold open to us at the assembly time? The Lord comes in and presents Himself, but then He brings us over into His own circumstances, His own conditions. We leave everything behind that relates to this world and its weakness, its breakdown, its diversion, and get into an area of things which has never been affected by that; it is new creation, is it not?

B.M.D. Exactly; "Go to my brethren", that is as in resurrection, not as the brethren He refers to as doing the will of God (see Mark 3: 34); they are persons viewed in another relationship.

A.S.H. "But this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom, nor does corruption inherit incorruptibility", 1 Cor 15: 50. Would that have a bearing on what you are saying?

B.M.D. It is beyond what is corruptible, it is a life out of death and it is all part of His vicarious work when He took His life again. He laid down His life, He laid down a condition to which in us sin attached. He took our sins and bore them in His body on the tree, but He laid

down that life in order to take it again so that we can have part with Him in new conditions to which sin can never come.

T.E.D. What impresses me as sitting here today is that the Lord wants us to get over to that side of things to which death does not attach. We draw so much from our own circumstantial area, but if we understood more the sufferings of Christ, that this Man has done nothing amiss, our desire would be to be with Him in that area beyond death.

B.M.D. What lay behind the whole vicarious work was His love for us; the great motivating power was the love of Christ, and it is the love of Christ that is constraining us. He wants to get us over to His side, does He not? So things are finished and fixed, "nailed", it says here, taken out of the way, nailed to the cross. But who was nailed to the cross? My Saviour. He took all the ordinances, anything that could stand against me, He took it out of the way. His work was absolutely completed and now I am justified in a risen Christ. That is where Christianity begins, is it not? Oh that I knew it better!

C.F.D. That is important, to direct our attention to Romans 4, that we are justified in a risen Christ - "raised for our justification" (v 25). That was a necessity if justification was to be a reality.

B.M.D. Surely. And would you not say it was part of His vicarious work? And we would have to include His ascension. He entered as forerunner for us: that is vicarious. He has gone all the way in love to secure us a place up there. In fact the very thought of a forerunner implies we are all going to follow. So it ends in victory, "leading them in triumph by it". We should be the happiest people ever, but I think the humblest too. But as together here we touch just a little of the joy of eternal life, and does it not lift our spirits?

L.McF. Paul speaks of glorying in his weakness: "And that I might not be exalted by the exceeding greatness of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn for the flesh", 2 Cor 12: 7. So he is not elated: "Of such a one I will boast, but of myself I will not boast, unless in my weaknesses" (v 5). How would that apply to us?

B.M.D. I do not think Paul was depressed in his own hired lodging with only Luke with him. I think he would have been buoyant. Naturally we can be depressed. Who is going to despise a day of small things? Many are being diverted because of the outward smallness of the circumstances. But I believe the Lord would teach us that there is a moral glory in the day of small things. So let us be in victory. Why not? He leads: "leading them in triumph by it". Would that not be a fine note to reach?

C.F.D. Yes. Would you say more on that? We need this touch of triumph because of the other side - the scattering, the weakness, the isolation, and the suffering that some are going through household-wise.

B.M.D. I suppose there is no one here without some burden they are carrying in relation to families and other things; if we had that alone it could overwhelm us, but for the love of Christ. Here he is saying He has met it all, cleared the way, and now He is leading us in triumph by it. We shall look back on the suffering period and see that every little bit was needed, because the suffering leads directly into the glory. And there are no short cuts. A sister wrote to me a while ago about the ten days tribulation in Smyrna (see Rev.2: 10). She said it is ten days, it is not eleven and it is not nine, it is ten. It is a great comfort that all is measured, it will not be one second too long or too short. Every bit will be needed to bring out the glory in the display of the work of God.

PLAINFIELD

29 July 1989

Key to initials

(Plainfield if not otherwise stated)

C.F.Dadd; B.M.Deck, Motueka; G.Druckenmiller; T.E.Druckenmiller; C.S.Elliott, New York; A.S.Hinkson, New York; G.Hesterman; S.E.Hesterman; D.McFarlane, New York; L.McFarlane, New York;

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GOD'S THOUGHTS AND MY EXPERIENCE

Eric Burr

Exodus 19: 4; Deuteronomy 8: 2-5; Jeremiah 2: 1-3 (to "increase");

2 Corinthians 7: 1

A question which was raised in the reading on Lord's day afternoon enters, I feel sure, into the experience of everybody here. The question is, if things have been so established by God, and for God, why is it that my experience is different; and also, why is it that I do not seem to have the power to maintain what I so enjoyed committing myself to? These are real questions: they come into the mind of every believer. I do not speak this evening in the sense that I can give definitive answers to them, because I think that in relation to such matters we may get light in a meeting like this, but the answers to the questions enter into the experience of each individual. That experience may be different with each one of us.

Nevertheless, the question can be answered, and a large part of a Christian's life lies in finding the answers. The questions are more important than we may think because, if we lean so heavily in relation to what God has done for Himself - and in one sense we cannot lean too heavily on that - that we neglect the other side, I think we shall have some kind of Christianity that has become Calvinistic. That is to say, we have taken up predestination in a way which is not intended in the scripture in Romans 8 to which our beloved brother has referred. If, on the other hand, I say nothing is mine apart from my experience, then I shall find that daily weakness in Christian experience almost overthrows me. I do not wish to use the word 'balance' in regard to these things, because both have to be worked out experimentally. Many scriptures might be read on this because, broadly speaking and as far as practical experience goes, the Bible is about those two questions. It is about a lot of other things, but it is about those two questions. Even the question raised in Job, for instance, "how can man be just with God? " (chap 9: 2) is

the same question in another form. I have read these scriptures because they are the ones which occurred to me as we sat here. (How often one comes to this meeting never intending to say anything - perhaps with one's mind a bit in the direction of saying nothing - but the impression comes and one speaks.)

In Exodus 19 God says "I have ... brought you to myself". Looking back on the previous chapters, you might ask, where were the eagles' wings? No eagle has been mentioned in the book so far. But God says, I have done this: "I have borne you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself". That is in chapter 19. There is a lot of history to go on after this, but this is the point from which God starts. I know that the succeeding verse brings in contingent things - if you will keep my commandments, ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and so on - but God sets out His own position from the beginning, that "I have ... brought you to myself". That is absolute. That is what God has done for you and for me. He has done it in Christ - "I have ... brought you to myself". He gives us the Spirit so that we may fully enter into the power of it. One great weakness among Christians - I venture to say, among brethren - is a lack of power. We know all the words, what we lack is the power. But God has give us the power. We had it here in the preaching on Lord's day - ye shall "be clothed with power from on high" Luke 24: 49. There is power. "I have ... brought you to myself" is the point from which Christian history starts. There was the passover, true enough. What the passover does is to save you from judgment. The Red Sea puts you on new ground. It shows you Christ's death in relation to yourself. You go through the Red Sea and you are on new ground. God does not say, You have learned this and that lesson; He says, This is what I have done. It is a great thing to get established in the soul of a believer what God has done: "I have borne you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself". I ask the brethren, have you had the experience of being borne on eagles' wings? You may like the experience of Isaiah 40, that He gathers the lambs with His arm (see v 11). The shepherd puts the sheep on his shoulders in Luke 15, but God brings in a text here which relates to divine power in its fulness -

"I have borne you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself". That is what God has done and that is the ground that God takes. This word was given to Israel and they were intended to live in the light of it and in the power of it. They were intended to go on - perhaps not for very long, but certainly for a year because they were going to build the tabernacle in the wilderness and that took a year, then a bit of a journey and they were really not far from the land. So God establishes this from the beginning: "I have ... brought you to myself", and I say to all the brethren - as believers - get this into your soul, that God has brought you to Himself! He did it in Christ. When He raised Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, He sat us down in heavenly places in Christ. Let us get this into our souls.

But then there is experience. We all know the history and the Book of Numbers - chapter after chapter. It begins with everything in normality and then it goes on to breakdown. It is history - our history. It begins with everything normal and then it all seems to go wrong. You come to the point of unbelief and God then acts. He says, You will go forty years in the wilderness. The people moaned and cried, and they complained that they had to go through the wilderness. They blame Moses for it. Nevertheless, God did not cut them off. (I know that a generation dies in the wilderness and there is teaching in that, because there is what is in us that has to perish in the wilderness circumstances). But God brought the nation through. And he explains in Deuteronomy why it was. Now this is our experience: when I find that I am not up to what I know is the ground that God has put me on, I need to learn why it is that my experience falls short. I come to this, that God has done these things in order to humble me, in order that I might learn what was in my heart. It says here, "to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart". In one sense God wanted to prove what was in the heart of Israel because He wanted to find out if there was a nation there that could serve Him. But the real lesson is for ourselves - "to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or not". This is our

experience. One thing I say for the encouragement of everybody (it is not much good talking to the young people tonight because the great majority of us are over sixty) is this: God has taken us this way so that we might learn things about ourselves. But we shall only learn these things about ourselves if we cling to what is said in Exodus 19 amongst other things. We shall only go through the wilderness history and the humbling and proving experience if we have clasped to our souls that "I have ... brought you to myself". These two things go on together, but I cannot bear the wilderness unless I have God's view behind me. I cannot bear the wilderness experience with its humbling and proving and testing unless I know things from God's side. He is doing these things to prove to me what I am - all against the background that He has secured me for Himself. How blessed that is! It is grace in God that does this. Deuteronomy is not a book about laying down the law; it is the manifestation of the grace of God in experience. It comes at the end to a man who says "A perishing Aramaean was my father" (chap 26: 5), who brings the fruit of the land and worships. The book is bringing out the reality of what God does in souls. You find that God is humbling you. You cannot do things you would like to do, and God humbles you in that respect. Why did I want to do it? Why did you want to do things you could not do? God was in it; He was humbling you. You find things in you that belong to ordinary human nature that you would like to give expression to, and you find you cannot, knowing that God has brought you to Himself; it is because God is humbling you, and proving you, and showing you what is in your heart that is not yet consistent with the ground that He has taken of having brought you to Him self . It says that he humbled thee, and even suffered you to hunger. Not many people here have suffered actual hunger in any real sense, but why did He suffer you to hunger? In order that you might learn that you live only by the words that come out of God's mouth. It is pretty well true of most of us that, in every testing that we have in our Christian experience, we would rather learn from some other mouth than from God. We might even rather learn from some other brother, or some sister. We might say, Why is it thus with me? Rebecca said that: "If it be so, why am I

thus?", Gen 25: 22. We would rather learn things from somebody else, but the great thing is to learn from God. You learn that you live by every word that goes out of the mouth of God.

I do not like to say these things are 'testing' - it is a word we use a lot. The question is, have we experienced the test, or do we mean that we do not really know very much about it and we had better ask somebody else. The 'somebody else' you had better ask is God Himself. Get back to God and find that you live by every word that goes out of the mouth of God! Every word that goes out of the mouth of God is consistent with what He has done in bringing you to Himself. God works in us. It has been said that He took them through the wilderness to grind the flesh out of them. How much we have had to experience that! But remember this: for a believer - not an Israelite - if the Lord took him the night or the day after he had established in his soul that God had brought him to Himself, he would find the reality of the fact that he was fit for the presence of God in that moment. There may be a lot of experience to be worked out because you are still here. God is working these things out, and it is for our encouragement that we can start with the point that He has brought us to Himself.

I have read the other two scriptures because they relate, not so much to what God has done, but to what I have done. It says in Jeremiah 2: "I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth"; that is what you were. In your youth the response to the kindness of God in you was kindness in yourself - "the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals". What a day that was! Some years ago a lot of cold water was poured on singing 'O! happy day that fixed my choice Thee my Saviour and my God!'. I never mind anyone singing that: it is the love of thine espousals. Let us not be ashamed of them, beloved! Let us seek to have them revived! It says, "when thou wentest after me in the wilderness" - when thou wentest after Me. Everything is credited to them, to Israel. This is not now "I ... brought you to myself", but "thou wentest after me"! It was "in a land not sown. Israel was holiness unto Jehovah". I think that was the commitment of the people; Israel was holiness unto Jehovah. It was

their commitment to God; as we had on Lord's day, that is Romans 12. "Israel was holiness to Jehovah" is "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service". There they were committed. The remaining forty years brought out unholiness of the most extreme kind. Our experience has more than once - dare we confess it? - brought out unholiness of a most extreme kind. Perhaps not the most extreme, but it has brought out unholiness. We would have to say that about most of our lives and things that have entered into our experience. But you began with this: "Israel was holiness to Jehovah".

So Paul says, "perfecting holiness". That is to say, you are not trying to make yourself holy; you are trying to work out into result the holiness in which you first committed yourself to God. It says, "having these promises" - that is what God is for you, having all that in your soul - "perfecting holiness in God's fear". That is to encourage us. Get back to where you began; get back to the joy of your espousals; get back to that first love! The reproach of Ephesus in Revelation is that they had left their first love. Get back to it; be revived by it! It will keep you going in a day when, if you are leaning only on your own efforts, you will find just one failure after another. Do you wake up in the morning and say, This is a day in which I am going to fail again? Have you never said that? Let us face the reality of our own lives! But wake up in the morning and say, 'his compassions fail not; they are new every morning', Lam 3: 22. You can be besought by the compassions of God to present your body a living sacrifice. Then you go through another day perfecting holiness. Some problem comes up, something you would like to do and you are frustrated; something you wish you could do and you find you cannot; something you would rather not do and you have to do - all these things come up. Face them, perfecting holiness. It works out into very great results. The combination of what God has done, and what we did for God (let us not be ashamed to speak like that!), has to be worked out. It is what Paul means when he says to the Philippians, "work out your own salvation with fear and

trembling", chap 2: 12. Mr Darby's footnote there is most useful to everybody - 'work it out into result'.

I touch these things, beloved; and, as I said at the beginning, I do not claim to be definitive about them at all. But these are matters in which, out of our personal experience, we ought to be able to help one another. If I come to you and say, You are an older brother and I have a problem in my life with something that comes up, and keeps on coming up, and I cannot get through it, what are you going to do? Are you going to tell me to read ministry, or something like that? The ministry is invaluable. Are you going to tell me to read the Bible? That would help me a lot. But what I need from you is to say what you learned from the Lord in circumstances like that, that He was enough, and that God's promise would see me through. How blessed to find someone in whom you can find a resource of that kind! As I have said, most of us here this evening are fairly old: the beloved younger brethren are not here tonight. Let us, as older, charge ourselves that, out of the resources of our own experience, we will make ourselves readily available in simplicity to make those resources available to another generation.

May the Lord prosper us in it!

LONDON

21 August 1990

OBSERVANT CHILDREN

It was an old man, Job, who said to God "Thou Observer of men", meaning of all mankind including, of course, the youngest of children. Of another man God said "I will observe him", so we see how this matter is brought home to us in view of blessing. God is especially interested in those who are themselves interested in His things. Moses turned aside to observe a thorn-bush on fire but not burned up, and he found that God had something very important to tell him about redemption.

In the days of the flood God said of the rain bow, "I will look upon it". This reminds us that His eye can rest on that which speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ and His glorious place and service. We cannot look upon the full outshining of the sun in the heavens and we cannot behold the fulness of Christ. His distinct and distinctive glories we may gaze upon just as we see the sun's sevenfold glories in the rainbow. Centuries later in the days of Moses and of the Passover God said, "When I see the blood I will pass over you". The time of judgment had come and in His mercy He would spare all who had faith in the shelter provided.

It much confirms Christian believers to know that God looks upon His own word. In this way we an, as it were, hold Him to His promises. It was to Jeremiah that God said "I am watchful over my word to perform it". The prophet had seen in a vision a rod of almond wood - a tree which is very early to come out and blossom in Springtime. The word 'almond' itself means 'watchful'. Are you keen to read God's word?

J.C.Evershed