

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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BEHOLDING THE SPIRIT

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A.P.D. It is in mind to enquire about beholding the Spirit. It says "This Jesus has God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses. Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which ye behold and hear" - behold and hear. When Jesus was here the Spirit came upon Him as a dove: "And John bore witness saying, I beheld the Spirit descending as a dove from heaven" (John 1: 32) - John beheld Him. The Spirit came into a form in which He could be seen. No doubt the dove brings out certain characteristics of the Holy Spirit. With Jesus there was perfect complacency, nothing to disturb the sensitive nature of the dove. In relation to the Spirit coming at Pentecost it was as tongues of fire, due to the presence of the flesh in men. This necessitated the action of the fire before there could be complacency; "it sat upon each one of them" implying restfulness. The tongues of fire were largely negative, but I believe that, although the Holy Spirit has not become incarnate, yet in a certain sense He can be seen positively in the saints.

The Holy Spirit, being another Comforter, would take up things as the Lord did by way of example and through teaching. It says "which Jesus began both to do and to teach", Acts 1: 4. The Spirit would operate similarly; His activities and teaching would be seen in the acts of the apostles and others through whom He manifested Himself. The Lord's service was Godward and manward. So I believe the Spirit is operating towards God and towards men. His nature and character are seen in Barnabas. The unselfishness of Barnabas' love is a manifestation of the Spirit. The long service of the Spirit has evidenced His unselfishness, drawing attention to Christ.

B.M.D. Were you thinking that 'This Jesus', where we began to read, would distinguish that Person, but then that it is the Spirit's

service to do that?

A.P.D. Yes; the Spirit's presence, power and comfort are to be interwoven into our moral constitutions, that He can be clearly taken account of in our activities and manifested in our spirits. The Spirit is seen in Paul. Paul's untiring service seeking to magnify Christ is no doubt the fruit of his peculiar link and association with the Spirit.

B.M.D. And the 'beholding' would be of something substantial that was established at Pentecost.

A.P.D. Yes, in the saints by the Spirit. One characteristic feature of the Spirit's service is to magnify Christ and Himself recede.

Colossians would show this; Christ's personal greatness is prominent and there is only one reference to the Spirit in that epistle. That has in mind that Paul had not been seen by the saints at Colosse face to face and therefore their love was in the Spirit. This is a feature that we may well be affected by in our spiritual constitutions, that is to bring Christ forward and go out of sight.

B.M.D. The 'hearing' has come right down to us, to the overcomer - what the Spirit is saying to the assemblies - but I suppose we have to take humble ground as to what we can behold.

A.P.D. That is true, and yet there should be something that makes us different, something additional, the presence of a divine Person who gives character to the whole testimony of God. He would therefore give character to the persons in that testimony.

R.L. You mentioned that the Spirit remains in the background, as it were. He is in the background with many. When you see how people act, their behaviour, it is evident they are not making room for the Spirit at all. It is the responsibility of each of us to make more room for the Spirit. So in a reading such as this it should not be what we think but what the Spirit would say through us, because He is available. It says, "has poured out this which ye behold and hear".

There is no limit, is there, to what the Spirit can do for us?

A.P.D. I do not believe that He asserts Himself, although I would say that I have been conscious of His gracious, persistent service. No

doubt He fills the room we make for Him and gives character to those He fills.

B.M.D. How do we make room for Him?

A.P.D. It is through our emptying ourselves of ourselves; Scripture speaks of empty vessels. No doubt the way to being filled with the Spirit is by thorough self-judgment. If we think of His long devoted service we can see certain characteristic features coming to light.

This would be illustrated by the man in Genesis 24; Rebecca would be formed in these features as she journeyed with him.

B.M.D. What that must have meant to the servant too! He was astonished at her.

A.P.D. You can understand when He said "That is my master!" (v 65). In type, the full bent and direction of His service was in relation to Christ: Rebecca would be daily impressed in her communion with the Spirit by the direction of His thoughts and activities.

B.M.D. He is retiring at that point when He said "That is my master!" The Spirit's whole service is to exalt Christ, and we are in such a time, are we not? Is He not saying, that is My Master?

A.P.D. I think He serves that Christ may have His place, and He gladly retires having accomplished His objective.

B.M.D. Yes; and the assembly is coming through like Rebecca; she is not jaded or weary, she alights with vigour.

A.P.D. What a tangible effect in her character and outlook the journey with the Spirit would have had on her.

B.M.D. Yes, even in her communing with the Spirit it is evident; "she had said to the servant". Something substantial has come through, otherwise it would be a reflection on the Spirit. The body is still here and can be given expression to by just a few.

A.P.D. When Paul said, "Be my imitators, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor 11: 1), he is evidently the product of the Spirit's work.

Christ was therefore brought before the saints in a man who speaks about "commending ourselves as God's ministers ... in the Holy

Spirit", 2 Cor 6: 4,6. That is, I understand, a reference to Paul as a minister whose manner of life is such that he gives an impression of a divine Person about him, around him, and in him. "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit" (Rom 8: 16) would show the intimate link between the Holy Spirit and the spirits of the saints.

B.M.D. That is very interesting. Acts begins with the thought of "This Jesus who has been taken up from you" (chap 1: 11), "they beholding him" (v 9). It is continued here where you read: "this which ye behold and hear". Is that the substantiality of something carried forward, a particular vessel formed at Pentecost?

A.P.D. I think so. In Acts 1 it says "all things which Jesus began both to do" - that would be example - "and to teach". The Spirit would take up the same line of things. The activities of the saints therefore would be a demonstration of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The teaching too would be by the Spirit. The Spirit guiding into all the truth would come out through persons who are vessels of the Spirit, would it not?

B.M.D. Is that why the beholding is put before the hearing? There is something substantial there.

A.P.D. Yes. Mr Taylor said something of great interest, that there is a difference between Peter in chapter 1 of the Acts and chapter 2. In chapter 2 there would be something added, something about him and around him that indicated the presence of Another. He compared it with the three in the fiery furnace in Daniel and a fourth appeared, Another appeared. You could not but be impressed with the fact that with Peter was the presence of a divine Person.

B.M.D. Very interesting; and in chapter 3: "Look on us" (v 4).

A.P.D. Yes. The thought of example is to come into expression in the saints. The Lord Himself was an example supremely. It is what He began to do. But then what we do would involve example and that can only be so in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of Christ.

B.M.D. Christ is presented as "exalted by the right hand of God", and as "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit". Really the whole economy is set up here, Christ up there and the Spirit sent from that position.

A.P.D. Yes; I think heavenly communications in Old Testament times were by angels, but much more wonderful, more intimate, are the heavenly communications now by the Spirit.

B.M.D. John says "the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified", chap 7: 39. That really establishes the present dispensation in the Spirit, does it not?

A.P.D. I am sure it does. So from chapter 8 on, and especially chapters 14, 15 and 16, the presence of Another is anticipated in the sphere of testimony.

B.M.D. That then would be the testimony that Christ is continued here, would it not? You referred to Daniel and the appearance of one like a son of God; there is some expression typically of the Son of God. Paul says in Galatians, "God ... was pleased to reveal his Son in me", chap 1: 16. That would be substantial.

A.P.D. Yes, but the Lord Jesus is not here; the Spirit is here, and how He operates is to affect us. So we (to use the same expression) operate similarly, because of our long and intimate association with Him. If you live with someone you love, you become like that person. Therefore as being with the Spirit and He with us, the object of our activities, even as the object of His activities, is to magnify Christ. You bring Christ forward, not yourself. That is a tribute to the Spirit's presence.

B.M.D. Tell us, how do we see Jesus in one another?

A.P.D. I believe that another character comes into expression. I do not know what Barnabas was like naturally, but what comes to light in him is the unselfishness of his love for the saints. That was undoubtedly the result of the Spirit's presence with him and His work in him.

B.M.D. He was full of the Holy Spirit, and full of Christ.

A.P.D. Yes. I believe that the Holy Spirit as received, and as we give Him full room, provides an area into which Christ comes and lives. Paul said, "no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me", Gal 2: 20.

Christ therefore would come into expression. When we are gathered in assembly, the presence of the Spirit affords a means or medium for Christ to come to us. It is also of interest that one divine Person may impersonate Another. The Lord Himself says, "He that has seen me has seen the Father", John 14: 9. This is more than representation. How wonderful the speaking would be in the assembly if we too did not speak from ourselves but what we hear we speak.

B.M.D. And what mutuality and affection would be thus promoted. It would make way for the organism of the body to evidence itself. The teaching for this extended time in Antioch would be a time of very rich instruction, would it not?

A.P.D. Yes. The whole year would perhaps suggest the four seasons involving not only spring and summer but autumn and winter.

B.M.D. You mean that we would go through things together, our sorrows and our joys, our anxieties; we would share everything.

A.P.D. The result is an assembly. There was a crowd, but through the teaching there is a result which would portray the morally lovely features of the assembly.

B.M.D. It must have resulted in something testimonial.

A.P.D. They were first called Christians, meaning that what was there was named. God loves to name what is substantially in evidence. Christ-like features were there and these were named.

This principle is seen too in the truth of the body. It was there and functioning in Acts 2, but it awaited Paul to bring out the truth of the body, to name what already was in operation.

B.M.D. Mr Coates, when someone was looking for him, was described as a man like Jesus.

A.P.D. The Spirit no doubt is operating to weave these features of moral beauty in the saints.

B.M.D. There is a need for this teaching constantly; generations come and go, but we need to maintain this good teaching.

A.P.D. I am sure that is so. We used to hear much as to young people building up a history with God. How much need there is for this at the present time!

B.M.D. It says "they were gathered together in the assembly". That would be an assembly experience. There were Barnabas and Saul; I suppose they would take some prominence, but something was emerging of the organism.

A.P.D. Yes. The Psalm writer says, "There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God", Ps 46: 4. The river may allude to the Spirit as a source of refreshment and life , but the streams would refer to the saints; they would have the same character as the river, bringing refreshment to the city of God.

B.M.D. Do you mean there is something going up to God?

A.P.D. Yes; it would seem that the streams would provide free course for the water to flow unhinderedly.

In Galatians the inward action of the Spirit is Godward; in Acts the service of the Spirit is manward and through men. "Because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father". It is the Spirit crying, Abba Father.

B.M.D. Say more as to that; in Romans we cry (see chap 8: 15).

A.P.D. Yes; that may be an advance on this. I think Galatians suggests the upward movement of the Spirit.

B.M.D. Do you mean that there is a certain urgency in the Spirit's service in regard to what is going up?

A.P.D. The Spirit gives character to what goes up to God, as well as what is toward men.

B.M.D. That is very interesting. So that it is through Christ and by one Spirit that we have access to the Father (see Eph 2: 18).

G.S.F. It would be of great pleasure for the Father to receive such expressions from His sons.

A.P.D. "Abba, Father" - the same words that Jesus used. Here it is the Spirit crying, but crying in our hearts as if to awaken the feelings of sonship.

B.M.D. Do you mean He is using quickened affection?

A.P.D. Yes: eternally the Spirit will maintain the saints in freshness and life. The assembly, although a marvellous vessel, is still a creature.

B.M.D. The mediatorial service of Christ and the Spirit will continue. Have you any thought as to why the literal words 'Abba Father' are retained?

A.P.D. It is very touching that we can use the very same words as Jesus used.

B.M.D. There would be a kind of spiritual sentiment in that, would there not?

A.P.D. Yes. I believe the Spirit would help us, not only in assembly service but characteristically, that the direction of our intelligent affections is Godward. It says of Jesus that He lives to God: "in that he lives, he lives to God", Rom 6: 10. I think the Spirit would help us characteristically to live to God. His promptings are inward and upward.

B.M.D. We very easily fall into formality, do we not? We have some outline of the service of God, but this would protect us, do you think?

A.P.D. I think so. The service of God was constantly in the heart of Christ; He was always thinking of the Father. I think similarly as to the Spirit; the whole trend of His service as the Spirit of God's Son is toward God.

B.M.D. I think that is very interesting because it is prefaced by "because ye are sons"; that would be from God's side. It is the purpose of God that we have been chosen. It is as if the Spirit of God is linking us on with that now and bringing in the energy of life

responsively to God. Would it take character from the way the Lord addressed the Father, lifting up His eyes to heaven and saying Father?

A.P.D. So in a sense we 'behold' the Spirit in the service of God; it is not a formality, nor a ritual, not persons proceeding in a known order academically. But something else can be seen, can be taken account of, in the presence of 'Another', a divine Person about us, around us, and in us. It is wonderful that persons speak to God, and we would have some sense that they are being strengthened by the Father's Spirit, some sense too of the Spirit of God's Son, the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore both towards men and towards God there is to be a manifestation of the Spirit, evidences of the activities of Another.

B.M.O. That is very fine.

A.P.D. It is not a humanly conceived service at all.

B.M.D. It did not come down exactly doctrinally, although the doctrine supports it. It had to be found out spiritually.

A.P.D. Exactly. I think it has come down to us under the hand of the Minister of the sanctuary; and what gives lustre and feeling and fulness to the service of men Godward is the presence of the Spirit of God. There is Another there with a capital A.

B.M.D. Emphasising that that Person is there – a divine Person. That is very fine.

A.P.D. So the service of God is so much greater than anything that could be conceived by the mind of man.

R.L. As to this statement that you made - 'so much greater' - would it be right to say that, when the Lord was here, there was not the understanding of the Lord's words. It was not until the Spirit came that the disciples understood.

A.P.D. "*He* will ... bring to your remembrance", John 14: 26.

R.L. We are in a very favoured time, more favoured than when the Lord was here. We could not understand except by the Spirit what

the Lord's position is.

A.P.D. The Lord says to His own, "he shall do greater than these", John 14: 12. That does not mean in quality but extent.

R.L. The Spirit is indispensable to us, is He not? The Lord said "I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter", John 14: 16.

B.M.D. The Lord speaks of their advantage in His going away, because the Spirit would come (see John 16: 7).

A.P.D. When we preach the gospel there should be something which suggests the presence of Another, for the gospel is preached by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (see 1 Pet 1: 12). That is a much greater communication than a communication from an angel. You might say, 'our brother is preaching', but what should come into evidence, in the power and grace of the service, is that a divine Person is there.

R.L. Without that there would be no power, would there? This would be what you had in mind earlier as to Barnabas and his being full of the Holy Spirit; after that it says, "a large crowd ... were added to the Lord".

A.P.D. It says, "If any one speak - as oracles of God", 1 Pet 4: 11. Communications now in this favourable time are by the Spirit.

G.S.F. We are to receive sonship too.

A.P.D. Yes; what do you say about that?

G.S.F. It involves our affections.

B.M.D. It is part of the Spirit's service that we should be conformed to the image of God's Son (see Rom 8: 29).

A.P.D. Yes, that is the result of His service. Then, when you undertake to serve, the whole trend or bent of your mind is with the Spirit; that each one should be conformed to the image of God's Son. You take into your soul the wonderful object or trend of the Spirit's service and therefore you have the mind of the Spirit.

B.M.D. He is thinking that way, it is the bent of His mind.

A.P.D. Yes, so it is the bent of your mind. Your association with Him makes you think as He thinks, serve as He serves, His object is your object.

B.M.D. That is very fine.

RICHMOND NZ

6 June 1991

Key to Initials

A.P.Devenish, Edmonton; B.M.Deck, Motueka; G.S.Field, Richmond N.Z.; R.Leadbitter, Nelson

THE LORD'S DAY

David Robertson

Isaiah 11: 9, 10

As the day becomes darker outwardly the true Christian longs all the more for the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that in the circle here tonight there are persons who love His appearing. It is very great to the soul, and a comfort too, in the face of all the moral darkness that is filling the world that there is a blessed Man who will eventually take control of the whole scene. We are reminded of this particularly each Lord's day. It is the dominical day and the Supper that we celebrate is the dominical Supper. I believe that we need to

be exercised to maintain the dignity and the distinctiveness of the Lord's day, the day in which the Lord Jesus has a peculiar claim upon us - not that He does not have a claim upon us in the other six days, because He has. Peter speaks of "the master that bought them" (2 Pet 2: 1), and Paul says "ye are not your own? for ye have been bought with a price: glorify now then God in your body", 1 Cor 6: 19. In each of the days of the week the Lord Jesus would have a claim upon us, but particularly on the Lord's day. It is a wonderful day. It anticipates the day when His dominion will be spread out universally, when He will be owned as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. It is a distinctive day in that way.

Another feature which makes it distinctive is that it is the very day in which the Lord Jesus rose up from among the dead, the day in which the Father operated to take Christ out of the grave. What a day it is in that way! It is no ordinary day. We live in a time when Satan is busy to reduce the glory of Christianity and all its precious features, to make it common. (Remember the word in Hebrews: "and esteemed the blood of the covenant, whereby he has been sanctified, common" (chap 10: 29), that is, just as a common thing).

I believe that the blessed Spirit of God is active, and particularly in the spirits and affections of the saints, with a view to maintaining the distinctive features of Christianity; of which the Lord's day is one.

I remember a time in my own history when my work necessitated shift work, and this meant working every third Lord's day. I felt that. But there came into my soul the light of the dignity of the Lord's day, and especially the fact that it was the actual day in which Christ rose from among the dead, and it was never the same to me again. Something of the distinctiveness and the dignity of that day made its impact upon my soul and from then on I sought to be free on the Lord's day. I say that just to show that these wonderful things have a practical impact upon our lives. As I have said, it is a dominical day, a day in which we anticipate the moment when the Lord Jesus comes and takes up His rights. Indeed it says that we show forth His death until He comes – a wondrous moment when the

Lord Jesus will establish clearly and unmistakably His rights to the whole earth.

This verse which we have read anticipates that: "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, standing as a banner of the peoples: the nations shall seek it". (They are not seeking it today.)

What a Man He is, the Lord Jesus Christ! Think how Revelation presents Him with one foot on the sea and the other on the earth (see chap 10: 2). Imperial rights, universal rights, rights of absolute monarchy belong to Christ, and that blessed Person is the One who is to have sway over our souls. His right to us is absolute. It is not that He has a partial right to you and the world has another right to you. The world has no right to you, nor has the flesh in you any right to you. The Lord Jesus has died to buy you, and He is securing you using His absolute right, just as He will exercise His absolute rights dominically in this whole sphere.

Isaiah anticipates that day. What a wonderful day! He says "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea". Think of the earth coming under the influence of the knowledge of Jehovah. It is not under that influence at the moment, but it will come under that influence, a prevailing influence over the whole earth. What a transformation will be wrought by it: "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse". It would focus our attention on the blessed Man who will bring it all about, and that is the blessed One who has rights over us. It comes out simply in the way in which we handle our affairs, how we behave day by day and how we appear before men, how we dress and how we are subject to the teaching of Scripture, and obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All these are evidences that we have come under the dominical touch of Christ, just as the earth will come under it.

It has often been said that a believer, and too a local gathering, is to be like a little millennium, anticipating that wonderful day when the Lord Jesus will have universal sway. There is an area now in the soul of the believer and in companies of believers where the Lord Jesus already has sway. You can understand how much that will mean to the Lord Jesus in the coming day. In this very scene, the

scene of His rejection and humiliation, where He was so shamefully treated, where He has been crucified, denied and His rights are spurned. What it will mean to Him when in that day He will be honoured universally. God will give Him that day. It has various names, but one of its names is the day of Jesus Christ. It is the day in which the Man who has been publicly dishonoured will be publicly honoured, and God will see to it. Oh that we might give Him His day now, morally! What a day that will be. What it will mean to the Lord Jesus Christ to be honoured publicly.

I specially wanted to speak about the last part of the verse: "and His resting-place shall be glory". The resting-place will mean more to the heart of Christ than all the public recognition of His glory. I believe that those who through divine grace have been brought into the knowledge of the assembly would understand something of the resting-place of the heart of Christ. The hymn says, 'Nor what is next thy heart can we forget' (No.160). That is what I want to bring out, the glory of what is public, the glory of His dominical rights, and yet, I believe, what the Holy Spirit would impress on us is that more precious than all that public glory to the heart of the Lord Jesus is what He finds in the assembly.

I fear that we live in a day when one of the things that is suffering the greatest reduction of glory is the truth of the assembly.

Let us guard it zealously. Let us be before God on our faces that the truth of the assembly might be preserved, not mentally but preserved in our affections, and what it means to the heart of the Lord Jesus. Think of the dignified way Paul speaks of it: "I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly", Eph 5: 32. The dignity of the humanity of Christ! Paul speaks as to Christ, but also of the dignity of the assembly. These are things I believe that need to be treasured in our affections and guarded, because we can become so very much influenced by the prevailing current of Christendom, where things have been reduced and where it is to be feared that this great glory, the great truth of Christ and the assembly and its dignity, might be lost upon us. May we be preserved from that; may we be

exercised to be persons who recognise and honour and love the truth of Christ and the assembly.

Think of what the assembly is to Christ. It is His counterpart. It answers to His affections; it answers supremely and uniquely to the glory of His humanity. You will remember the time when God brought the woman to Adam; and Adam said "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh", Gen 2: 23. Think of the distinctiveness of the assembly in that sense in its type, answering perfectly to the humanity that was there in Adam, and the assembly answering perfectly to the humanity of Christ - a wonderful matter - answering perfectly to all the longings of His affections, the assembly His resting-place. It says "his resting-place shall be glory" - the Lord Jesus resting in the wonderful experience and knowledge of the love of the assembly as satisfying every longing of His manhood. These are wonderful matters. May they not become commonplace to us.

May our souls be maintained in the wonder of them, of what the assembly is to Christ.

The assembly is not only His counterpart, she is His complement - "the fulness of him who fills all and in all", Eph 1: 23. If He reigns in the coming day the assembly will reign with Him. The queen stands "in gold of Ophir" (Ps 45: 9), suitable to take a place beside the glorious Monarch. In the time of His shining out He will have a complement, the one who is "the fulness of him who fills all and in all".

One could say a little more but I trust that I have said enough to show the necessity of maintaining the glorious dignity of these features in our affections - the dignity of the Lord's day when the Lord Jesus has a supreme claim upon us and upon our time, and we may say upon the feelings of our hearts. How He would appeal to us, particularly on the Lord's day. He says "this do in remembrance of me", Luke 22: 19. Oh the appeal that belongs to the Lord's day! Then, too, the wonderful dignity that belongs to this vessel, the assembly. It is the glory of our own times as we have already been reminded. It is the truth of the time, the glorious light of Christ and the assembly.

We may become immersed in other things - love for souls, concerns for the world, concerns for young people. All these things are ancillary. I am not reducing exercises as to them, but the main point is Christ and the assembly. If we have love for a young soul it is because we long to see that young soul taking up his or her place relative to Christ and the assembly. The love for the souls of men is the same thing, everything and all our exercises have to be subservient to the glorious truth and to the dignity that belongs to it, the assembly for the heart of Christ. "His restingplace shall be glory": I think that means far more to the heart of Christ than all the glory that shall be His in a coming day as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The great official reign of Christ in His universal dominion is not to be compared to His own choice portion as resting in the love of His assembly.

DUNDEE

5 February 1991

THE FIRST PLACE IN ALL THINGS

Eric Burr

Colossians 1: 17,18

I refer to this scripture in the light of a reference which our beloved brother made in prayer that the Lord Himself might be glorified in this occasion. I do so the more readily because of a remark made by a brother at the burial of our sister today, that we are not there so much in relation to the person - the sister who is being buried - but we look for something in relation to Christ. That is an exercise which has been with me for some time, as to which I may say another word, but the intention of God is that Christ might have the first place in all things. I think it is something that we regard as objectively true, but, perhaps we would have to admit, it is less practically true.

The distinctiveness of the person of Christ that is referred to in this chapter touches on both His deity and His manhood. In the verse preceding those where I read it says, "all things have been created by him and for him. And he is before all". What can be greater than that? The link with the first chapter of John's gospel is plain: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; but "he is before all", and even that expression itself - although it comes to us to acknowledge the glory of His person - raises the question whether with me or with you He is before all. He has this place in the glory and dignity of His own person, His own Being, that He is before all. It says, "and all things subsist together by him". That connects with the first chapter of Hebrews; but the greatness and distinctiveness of Christ is something on which too much emphasis cannot be laid among us.

The remarkable things that are said in Scripture as to Him in His Person, I feel - and I expect you do - that we scarcely grasp. There is a kind of bar put up by the Lord Jesus Himself at the end of the eleventh of Matthew when He says: "No one knows the Son but the Father" (v 27). Even that fact ministers to the glory of His Person.

There is something that we cannot penetrate into, something that is beyond what is revealed to us: "No one knows the Son but the Father". What glory there is for Christ in that! It comes at the end of a chapter where His rejection by the Jews is mentioned, a chapter in which one who had been His forerunner and, if I may use the expression, had paved the way for Him, is doubtful, and at the end of that chapter He says, "No one knows the Son but the Father". How wonderful, the glory of the Person of Christ!

Other things are said about Him. It says here that He is "first born from among the dead". What distinction that is, that everyone else who is raised from among the dead follows after Him: "the first-fruits, Christ ; then those that are the Christ's at his coming", 1 Cor 15: 23. It comes to us at a burial that He is "firstborn from among the dead", and the glory of the One who is the firstborn from among the dead would shine over the whole occasion and put everything

else and every other person in their right relative place in relation to Himself - "firstborn from among the dead", glorious place of Christ. It bears on the blessedness of the fulness of His work as God sees it, but the very fact that He is the "firstborn from among the dead" shows that He has that distinctive glory above all, and if we look forward to the resurrection (and we have had a word today underlining that the Lord is indeed risen), if the Lord is indeed risen and I am to rise and you are to rise by His power, He will still be the firstborn from among the dead, and it is only because He is the firstborn from among the dead that you and I may look forward to resurrection. What glory there is in that Man!

It says also that He is the "firstborn of all creation" (v 15). What wonderful distinction there is in that! We see creation around us, the wonder of things. You really have to get down to the minuteness of things to see the glory of creation. You may go to the mountains and see wonderful things there. You may go to the sea with its vastness and where, on suitable coasts, you go up another foot and see a bit further and go up another foot and a bit further and the expansiveness of the sea is there - but think of "the glory of the One who set them there! " (Hymn 334), "Firstborn of all creation"! It is a remarkable expression because again, I think, it touches on the glory of His deity and of His humanity. He could not in His deity be described as the firstborn of all creation, but in the place which He takes as Man He has that place; but the One who has that place is also the One who created it all.

He is also referred to as "the beginning of the creation of God", Rev 3: 14. Think of the glory of Christ in that: "the beginning of the creation of God". I trust I speak carefully, but the creation of God has not gone on to get better and better after He was its beginning.

All that has come out in the creation of God after the One who was its beginning is after His pattern and nothing exceeds the pattern that there is in Him. When He was here - we were reminding ourselves of this locally a few weeks ago as we read about Solomon in 2 Chronicles - in Matthew it does not say 'a greater than Solomon is here'; it says, 'more than Solomon is here', chap 12: 42.

These things remind us that He must have the first place in all things. He must have it, and God will insist on it. You can trace it through Paul's epistles. In Ephesians He is going to fill all things - wonderful glory of Christ! He must have the first place in all things, but He is going to fill them! Think of the wonder of that! In Philippians, that well-known scripture: "a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (chap 2: 9,10) - the glory of Christ! These things should not just linger with us as a kind of after-taste as we go away from the meeting; they should become part of our constitution - "that *he*", as it says, "that *he* might have the first place in all things".

I feel, beloved - it was a remark that a beloved brother made at the meeting today earlier in connection with a sister, well-known, long-known among us - that at such occasions it is Christ who is to be glorified. Are all the burials among us like that? Does He have the first place in all the meetings at such burials? Not always, beloved. We have had meetings where we have the life of a sister or of a brother set out before us, dwelt on: one word after another tells us what their pathway has been, tells us what they have been like, tells us what they have been here for Christ. But "he might have the first place in all things"! It is a greater thing to speak about Christ than to speak about any man or any woman, however faithful. A remark was made to me recently when I made this comment privately in relation to a burial where the life and service of one among us had been dwelt on, that they would not have wished forty minutes of the brethren's time to be spent on them. It is that "he might have the first place in all things", not to exclude the preciousness of what there is in the saints - "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints", Ps 116: 15 - the preciousness of vessels in which the Holy Spirit has been and which Christ has given Himself to secure for Himself but there is always something greater than any saint has ever been - 'more than Solomon' has always been there. Put anyone's name you like in place of Solomon, but "more than Solomon" has been there. Let us bear this in mind!

And if I might also raise the question: does He have the first place in all things at marriages? Would you say so? Not always, beloved. I am not speaking about the marriage itself because no marriage would be recognised among us which was not in the Lord, and if there were a marriage other than that which could be recognised as in the Lord, the brethren would have to declare themselves in relation to it. And they would. But the celebration of the marriage? Does He have the first place in all things? Are there not often at a marriage a great many things which distract from attention to the person and the glory of Christ? At the marriage in John 2 He is put first: "And Jesus also, and his disciples, were invited to the marriage" (v 2). Is there not scope for some exercise among us as to these things? Is there not scope for our being exercised in relation to marriages and marriage days among us, as to whether Christ has the first place in all things? I am not going to go round and pick up this and that and tell somebody you should not have done this and you should not have done that. Most things are effective among believers by the climate of opinion among them, not by the rules that are made, but by knowing what is acceptable; and the great thing is that Christ having the first place in all things should be the only thing that is acceptable among the saints. I trust I do not offend in saying this. I do not think I do. That is a very special day, especially for the persons immediately involved. It is a great thing to start with Christ. I remember when I went into the army, the padre came and addressed us as he did all new recruits and he said, 'One thing, men, start as you mean to go on'. Is that not a good word for those who are married: start as you mean to go on? - "that he might have the first place in all things".

And we can work it out in our daily lives. I do not need to particularise. If I particularise I would have to confess how far short I very often fall in relation to it, but it is God's thought that He might have the first place in all things. He has raised Him from the dead for that very purpose that He might have the first place in all things.

What a great thing it is! We talk about the world to come: He will

have the first place in all things then, all things earthly. We talk about heaven: He will have the first place as Man there.

Everything will focus round Him: all the Father's thoughts will centre in Him. Today we were at the burial of our sister and I recall her husband with considerable affection. I think of the hymn (No.185) that he wrote":

"O'er death and the grave now victorious,
With joy we acclaim Thy renown".

Think of that!

"Eternal, Immortal, Supreme One,
The Alpha and Omega Thou;
Thy saints in the blaze of Thy glory,
Before Thee adoringly bow".

That is the touch. Our brother, now with Christ, long ago, has left that among the saints. He has put death in its place: He has put Christ in His place - "Thy saints in the blaze of Thy glory".

I refer to these things: Scripture is full of them. The New Testament is full of them; the Old Testament in type is full of them - "that he might have the first place in all things"! Let us be exercised about it for the Lord's sake.

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THIRSTY CHILDREN

The fountain of water that the Hebrew children had in the desert was a rock which followed them so that they could turn to it at any time and always for satisfaction of their thirst. The rock was a sign or type of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who meets the needs and longings of the soul of every believer on Him. At one time Moses struck the rock from which the water gushed out, when he should only have spoken to it. But the Lord had to suffer and die before we could have the Holy Spirit of promise. He is now "a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life" within the obedient believer.

All the blessings of the thousand year reign of the Lord Jesus, yet to come, can be enjoyed now in spirit by believing on Him! What attractions there are! "with joy shall ye draw water from the wells of salvation". These are available now. Scripture does not tell us how many wells there will be or their several names; one must be forgiveness and another righteousness.

One of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus at Calvary was thirst; one of the seven speakings from the cross was "I thirst". In answer to this, one of the crucifiers offered Him vinegar which He tasted but did not drink. He was, Himself, the One who said to a needy sinner that the believer on Him would "never thirst at any time". Do you drink the living water?

J.C.Evershed