

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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THE ASSEMBLY - II

Revelation 21: 9-27; 22: 1-5

J.S. It is interesting that John gets this view of the assembly as the heavenly city. At the beginning of the book he was given an understanding of the Lord's thoughts about the seven assemblies. These were seven actual assemblies at that time, and by that means the Lord also gave him an extended view of the public history of the assembly down through the dispensation. Then at the end he has this view of the assembly. At the beginning of chapter 21 it is seen in its eternal relations, but the section we have read refers to it in its millennial setting, and the description of it would bring out the lustre and glory of God's workmanship. The assembly viewed in this way includes every believer who has a link with the Lord Jesus and has the Spirit, right from Pentecost when the Spirit came until the rapture when the Lord will come to take it to be with Himself. The dimensions are to impress us with its substantial character and the extent of the work of God in its aggregate in the saints, put together into this one glorious entity. The description given relates to a time of display, but these things are being worked out now in persons such as ourselves, and I think there is present help for us in some of the things that are called attention to. So it reads "Come here, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the Spirit, and set me on a great and high mountain, and shewed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, having the glory of God." This vessel has taken on the outshining of God in glory, taken it on substantially.

A.McK. It is "the bride, the Lamb's wife". Could you say something about that?

J.S. I think it would be for Himself, an answer femininely to His affections, an answer that has been formed in suffering in correspondence to the Lamb.

R.G. Mr Taylor said the bride does not come down here: it is the city that comes down. I think it is a very precious touch that the bride

remains, for this time in the eternal condition with the Lord, and then, as the city, comes down in the millennium, so that these two things run on together, do you think? What is eternally known, enjoyed, appreciated by the bride with the Lord and then coming out in administration.

J.S. It is very helpful to point that out: so it is interesting that the assembly, "the holy city, new Jerusalem" in the earlier part of the chapter, is presented in an eternal setting. It is well for us to keep in mind that in actual fact we shall go into the enjoyment of our eternal relations with Christ, these relations between Christ and the assembly, at the rapture, which will be a number of years before this actual coming out in display. These secret relations between Christ and the assembly, which provide the answer to His heart, will subsist there and will subsist eternally. But for the thousand years of the millennium, she will come out as the holy city.

M.G.W. It says, "coming down out of the heaven from God"; to come from God, she would have to be with God and she has the glory of God. What is there for us in that?

J.S. Nothing of man enters into this. She comes from God. She comes from a scene where everything is of God and she comes, "down out of the heaven". She descends - she does not fall - as "having the glory of God". I think that is the glory she has taken on in divine formation.

G.B.G. You mentioned that there was truth here that would help us in regard to the assembly. Is that the point in John being shown things? Previously John saw things. He had ability to see things for himself, but here he is shown. We need to be shown things. Is that right?

J.S. The point for us would be to relate what we are passing through at the present time that leads to formation, and to see its connection with how it will be brought out and displayed. This formation is taking place in the assembly now; there will not be formation in the millennial setting. Formation is taking place now, but the display of it will be at that time. We certainly need the Spirit's help to see the

work that is going on presently, and to see how it is related to what will come out in display.

J.A.G. "Having the glory of God", do you relate that to the divine nature?

J.S. You say some more about that.

J.A.G. She has great liberty. She comes down. She is the expression, I suppose, of divine love as formed in it, and consequently she shines.

J.S. So that the numeral twelve, as we have often been helped to see, comes into this setting very prominently, and that means it is the workability of divine love coming into expression. The vessel is formed in it and therefore can express it.

J.A.G. Consequently she is able to cope with whatever situation may arise.

J.S. Well, the thought of the twelve would be that if it needs six twos or four threes or three fours, then things can be manipulated to bring about what is needed. It is just as well to keep in mind that the city will actually be over the earth at this point. There will be a system of things centred in Israel in an earthly sense and the nations surrounding Israel, but the assembly will be over that with a heavenly aspect.

J.A.G. No problem is too complex for her to unravel and sort out and give the answer.

J.S. That is where the wisdom of God will be brought out into expression. It is related to what appears, according to Ephesians 3, in the wisdom of God at the present time, and is made known to principalities and authorities. That wisdom is worked out now and we are being educated for this time of display.

J.A.G. Wisdom is the handmaid of love. If I get Dr Gardiner's thought, the bride does not come down, but the city comes down as in the full enjoyment of union with Christ. Is that what you thought?

R.G. John was shown "the bride, the Lamb's wife". You get a full stop there, as if there she is in eternal conditions with the Lord, enjoying what the Lord wants her to enjoy eternally. From that point he is taken to a high mountain - "And he carried me away in the Spirit, and set me on a great and high mountain" - and then he sees the holy city coming down. It is the same vessel that is enjoying the blessedness of relationship with Christ, which now comes out in administration.

J.A.G. I think that is very helpful. What a view that is to see the bride, the Lamb's wife! That is a distinctive thing in itself, but then, "he carried e away in the Spirit, and set me on a great and high mountain", which we know is elevation, and then he sees the city in operation.

J.S. So would you connect it with the end of Ephesians 1? She is "the fulness of him who fills ll in all", and really she is in the secret of union with Him and will be used by Him to give expression to what He is. Is that how you understand it?

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. She is the complete complement of Christ.

J.S. Therefore, what comes out here means that Christ will be expressed in this setting. There was a reference earlier to "Her husband is known in the gates" (Prov 31: 23), which applies in the time of His absence. But then Christ will be known, I take it, through the assembly, and if there are difficult matters to be solved, I think they will be brought to the assembly.

D.D. In Ephesians 3 it refers to being filled "even to all the fulness of God", v 19. Do you think everything that can be known of God is found resident in the city?

J.S. She is capable of taking in what God is as expressed, filled even to that extent. The fulness of God is what is of God that has come out into expression, the outshining of God, and this vessel is capable of being filled even to that extent. Now that does not refer to absolute Deity. It is a matter of what has been expressed of God.

D.D. "Having the glory of God" would involve that.

J.S. I think it means that she has been formed by that outshining, she has a formation that is a result of that.

A.McK. She is the "holy city, Jerusalem".

J.S. I suppose the holy city means that she is still having to do with a condition of things where evil can arise.

A.McK. Yes, and then Jerusalem would be related to administration. It is the city of peace.

J.S. It is a beautiful thought of an administrative vessel having such a place in the world to come. It refers to "her shining". She is a luminary, a heavenly luminary.

J.C.G. It is very striking in these settings how the assembly is stressed. We know that the Spirit has been engaged in the adorning, providing the background to the work that was accomplished in the preparing, and also Christ's mind coming to light in relation to the assembly. But this expression of the assembly comes out here as an administration which is for God. There is something beautiful to see in that, is there not?

J.S. So I think what is in mind is that there should be something of this character expressed in administration now. The city and its gates, its wall and the foundations of the wall are features that represent things that are being worked out presently.

R.G. It is interesting that when Stephen looked up he saw "the glory of God, and Jesus standing ..." (Acts 7: 55). It has been pointed out, He was standing; He would have come back if they had responded to the testimony that was given then. But, in the interval now since they did not respond, a vessel has been secured and formed in which the glory of God can be resident, and then come out in display with Christ for a thousand years.

J.S. The wonderful thing about it is that this applies to ourselves, our very own selves. We do not put this off to someone else: this is ourselves. This vessel is what we have been called to have part in.

J.A.G. It shows the direct place she has in the mediatorial system. The angels are there, and on the gates "names inscribed, which are

those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel", but it is a very wonderful place that the assembly has.

J.S. God is taking account of all these. Do you think the reference to angels would remind us of the service they render to the saints of the assembly? Then in relation to Israel, we know Israel will have its earthly place. The city by itself is the acme of divine workmanship.

J.A.G. The full thought of image, I suppose, relates to this: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness", Gen 1: 26; the whole matter is given expression to in its completeness in the city here.

J.S. So completeness is a thing to be kept in mind. We live in days when things are far from complete and yet God has not given up this thought of completeness. The city will be a complete entity and God is patiently working towards this, working in ourselves towards this.

A.McK. Then the idea of compression has been referred to as well, has it not? - the idea of the cube.

J.S. It brings out in a way a certain measure of compression, yet it is very substantial. Each dimension is about fifteen hundred miles. A cube of such dimensions is to impress us with how substantial the thing is. Yet as you think of the vastness of the universe, relatively it is comparatively small, but it is very substantial.

M.G.W. Did you have more in mind as to what we would learn from this "great and high wall" and its foundations? And yet with all the twelve gates, there is access, but the wall is there.

J.S. There is a good deal said about the wall. The point is that this city is so precious, so valuable in the divine mind, that it needs this "great and high wall", which is protective. It is very beautiful to think of the value of what is protected by such a wall. The building of the wall is given and the foundations, and even the foundations are adorned. The foundations are there in the twelve apostles. It shows us the important place that the apostles had.

M.G.W. So it does not seem to present a picture of what is very forbidding but something very beautiful, very attractive. It is a wall,

all right, and the foundations are adorned with all that is precious. The whole thing is tremendously attractive. Maybe we have the wrong feeling about a wall as being forbidding and hard and severe.

J.S. Questions might arise about separation and fellowship, but it is because of the value of the things that are being protected.

A.McK. Nehemiah's wall was the foundation for the two choirs.

J.S. It was protecting Jerusalem and what was inside it in a time of recovery and it became the means for the choirs to go round upon it.

A.McK. I was wondering if in some way there would be the idea of a response in this great idea, the gates and the pearls.

J.S. I think it would result from an appreciation of the one pearl. Every gate would be the same, you would see one pearl: the value of the thing is maintained at every point, do you think?

A.McK. Yes, I was thinking that. It would not be repetitive: each one would have its own distinctive glory.

J.S. And all of the same character. There is no difference in that sense.

J.C.G. The whole setting of the city in its portrayal - for example, the reference to "the city lies foursquare" - indicates the perfection of divine workmanship in formation. The idea of being foursquare would indicate its sureness; and it is not just that it was square, but it was according to the divine plumb line. It would show that the divine handiwork was coming out, not just in the ornamentation although that, of course, was beautiful, but in its setting, the way in which it was laid, as it were, the beauty of it comes out in its perfect origin.

J.S. There is nothing less than perfection in mind. It is foursquare and that would apply to the area as well as the cube. "And he that spoke with me had a golden reed as a measure", that is, everything is divinely measured, all according to the divine standard.

J.A.G. Whilst the wall is very high, there is accessibility on every side. The gates are the standard and the measure of everything.

J.S. These gates, there are twelve of them, twelve pearls, "each one of the gates, respectively, was of one pearl". They are all the same, so every local assembly should be governed by the thought of the one pearl, what is for Christ.

J.A.G. I was thinking of what it says of Paul: he "received all who came to him", Acts 28: 30. The gate was there in operation and so was the great and high wall. But he was accessible; he announced the kingdom of God.

J.S. So that there is a way into the city, the gate is there. I think the idea is that as we come into the assembly, and come to participate in it and in its administration, we are governed by the light that governs the assembly.

R.G. The symbolic representation that we have here of the assembly is to help us to understand stability and ornamentation and beauty, is it not? But we have always to keep in mind that it is composed of persons. It is men who are composing this wonderful organism that is going to come down from God with the glory of God, and it is going to be alive. At the beginning of chapter 22 there are references to the book of life, the water of life, the tree of life, and that is what the assembly is now. It is stable; it is ornamented; it is beautiful; but it is alive. And it is "the life which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 1: 1) that is evidenced there.

J.S. We could carry forward the thought that we had in Matthew 16, I suppose, "the Christ, the Son of the living God". It is a living order of things. It is good what you call attention to that the symbols are to convey something. We are not to think of this in a material sense. The symbols are to convey to us what has been worked out in persons, persons like ourselves. It is not something we are to look at just as a kind of picture. This is what is actually being worked out in ourselves. This is the work of God going on now in persons.

A.McK. The golden reed would be a touch of new creation, would it?

J.S. So that you get a sense of everything being of God. There is nothing different from that. It is all measuring up to the divine standard.

M.G.W. I notice the wall is jasper and the first foundation is of jasper, but that is the description of Him who is sitting on the throne in chapter 4. It is all according to the divine character, would you say?

J.S. I suppose these things would all bring out some feature of glory. It is fine to think of how that is actually taken on by us, that we are "transformed ... from glory to glory", 2 Cor 3: 18, the Spirit doing that as we are occupied with Christ.

J.C.G. Everything that is administered thus in this city not only has a sure foundation, indeed that can be inspected fully, but the ornamentation that is the gates shows that what is done reflects God's will. That would be the character of it, would it not? It would bring God to bear in relation to men as they come to bring glory to God to the city, from the nations, for example, and the Jews.

J.S. The names of the twelve apostles being on the foundations would bear on that.

A.McK. "And he that spoke with me" would be the idea of intimacy.

J.S. I was just thinking of this thought of the twelve apostles. It seems to be the authoritative basis on which everything rests. The Lord commenced with these twelve apostles and that is the foundation of things.

J.C.G. That is helpful, and as to the gates, "each one of the gates, respectively, was of one pearl". They all reflected what was of the assembly; each one reflected the assembly; and that is important. There was easy access into this city, three gates on each of the four walls, so that whatever way persons approached, they saw the same thing. That would be what was in mind, what was of God.

J.S. That is all carried down from the beginning. God has not changed. Things are founded on the twelve and then Paul came in. Even as he came into Damascus he would get some impression of what the assembly was as he was with the disciples there.

J.C.G. Maybe I diverted you from your thought as to the twelve apostles. You had more in mind about them?

J.S. It is just that they are there in the foundation. You take a matter like Ananias and Sapphira arising. Well, the wall was there. The gates are there, but the wall was there.

J.A.G. Could I ask if the substantial working out of what has come to us in the glad tidings is the Pentecostal position, with the apostles?

J.S. Would you say Paul would perhaps come into what is included in the inner part of the city, if I could put it that way?

J.A.G. I think so. I think the idea of the cube and the substantiality of that, the divine nature formed in persons, must relate to Paul, but the public thing and what is in expression seems to me to have been arrived at through the working out of the truth of the gospel in our souls.

J.S. So we are affected by the gospel, and the thing is worked out in that way. Take the man in Acts 3, for example, he held on to Peter and John, and went into that prayer meeting with them. I think he would get from them some idea of the gates of this city as he went in. He was laid "at the gate of the temple called Beautiful", but it did not compare with what he found in Peter and John.

J.C.G. Later we have Stephen seeing "the glory of God, and Jesus standing" (Acts 7: 55). That is really what is spoken about here as to the light, is it not? "And the city has no need of the sun ... for the glory of God has enlightened it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb." Therefore what began at the beginning has gone right through the dispensation and what God is bringing into display in this city is the cumulative effect of that.

J.S. So Stephen was clearly affected by that. The heavens were opened to him and it is very beautiful how he says, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." I think he had the consciousness that there was something in him that answered to Christ, something that really was part of this heavenly city.

A.B. Paul came to light in relation to that. "And he said, / am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. But rise up and enter into the city ...", Acts 9: 5, 6.

J.S. I think Paul would get an idea of the gates as Ananias laid his hand on him and said "Saul brother", v. 17.

A.B. A man's measure.

J.S. It is very interesting that Saul, great man as he was, did not resent being approached by a lowly brother in Damascus.

G.B. I was wondering if the experience that he had would characterise him as he writes to the Corinthians. He speaks of them, despite their failure, as "called saints", 1 Cor 1: 2.

J.S. He regarded them according to the work of God and it is good to look at one another in that way. There may be discrepancies; there may be things that need adjustment, but basically he approached them as "called saints". That was what they were: "the assembly of God which is in Corinth" (1 Cor 1: 2). The gate was there and it would be the same kind of the gate in every other place where God would be represented.

J.C.G. This matter of "the Lord God Almighty is its temple, and the Lamb" bears on the present authority of the way in which we enter into the service of God. There is a wonderful avenue opened up; almost, you would say, direct access to God by the Spirit of God, and that would be experienced at the present time, do you think?

J.S. So if we have that direct access, then "the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon that they should shine for it;" that is, there is no need for anything in the way of created light. It is reliant on what God is; "for the glory of God has enlightened it, and the lamp thereof is the lamb".

G.B.G. What have we to learn from the street, "pure gold, as transparent glass"?

J.S. It is fine to have this one street where we can walk. There is no upper class end of it and no lower class end of it. It is one street. You can walk along it without fear, in liberty.

G.B.G. So in our relations together, there is what is transparent. Is that involved in it? We would be exercised to be like that.

J.S. We are going one way; we are going the same way; it is like pure glass; there is transparency. It is a very important thing in our relations with one another, that we are transparent with one another.

J.C.G. So the street would indicate the liberty there is in movement and would involve communication. It is not that persons are shut up in one quarter of the city, but there is movement in communications, expressing the freedom of love. All those in the city are those "who are written in the book of life of the Lamb." It says nothing other than that will enter into it. It is quite enlightening that because it says, "And the nations shall walk by its light". They are coming into the city, or they are coming in in view of the administration that the city provides, but it would be as under the shelter of the blood of Christ, I suppose.

J.S. "And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations to it." There is a revenue coming into it. Those in the book of life of the Lamb are the persons who enter into it. You are thinking of persons who are really covered by the work of Christ.

J.A.G. Other families, heavenly families, will have access to it. They are written in the book of life of the Lamb.

J.S. Would this be the city that Abraham looked for?

J.A.G. Yes. "The Lord God Almighty is its temple", does that mean that the city is in the full light and glory of the revelation of God and the Lamb, the Mediator, and then the Lamb is the lamp of that glory?

J.S. So do you think this idea of Their being its temple would mean that there would be light shining for the benefit of the millennial earth?

J.A.G. I think persons are directly in contact with God. What wonderful relations they have!

J.S. Now, that is a help to us at the present time because how do we learn how the temple functions?

J.A.G. By asking God about it, and finding out how ready divine Persons are to impart to us, wherever the problem may be, collectively, I mean!

J.S. So Paul says, "Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1 Cor 3: 16). Now, it is a matter of learning about the temple by using it. That is simply what I mean. So we come together for a reading meeting, for example, and we enquire. We are not just saying everything we know, but there is an enquiring attitude that allows scope for God to come in.

J.A.G. I think so. We are sensitive and feeling our way and then it happens.

J.S. A reading may take a course we never thought of. The beginning of the next chapter reads, "And he shewed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, going out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of its street, and of the river, on this side and on that side, the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, in each month yielding its fruit ..." It is very fine that you have this "river of water of life" and it is related to the street. Then you have "the tree of life". The whole thing is sustained in a living way. You were saying something about this earlier.

R.G. Well, it is twelve fruits. This is something the Jew had never known before, because in the old economy there were only seven months in the year that produced, but here there are twelve months in the year. This is entirely new. You can understand Israel being amazed at what they are introduced into.

J.S. I think so. Well, what does it mean for us?

R.G. I think it is the continuing availability of the Lord, the tree of life. The tree of life was barred in the garden at the outset. It is no longer barred here. It is open; it is fruitful; it is producing something of the Lord Himself that is for our sustenance.

J.S. So it is really what Christ is in His own circumstances, and these are glorious. These fruits must be rich. You go to the morning meeting and each time it is different. I do not think I have ever been at a morning meeting that was the same as one that had gone before. You get this rich variety, the twelve fruits, something to feed on and that is Christ, indigenous to heaven. Even the leaves are good.

A.McK. The enemy's attack at the outset was at the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was spoken of as the centre, but it was not. The tree of life was the centre, and you see Christ in His place here; and then the leaves are for the healing of the nations. That will be a great time, the healing of the nations.

J.S. That must be wonderful medicine, the leaves. The fruits are for us, the inhabitants of the heavenly city, but the leaves are for the nations. I think that has a testimonial bearing presently. There is what we enjoy of Christ in our own souls, then the testimony flows out from that towards men.

A.McK. The idea seems to be that the centre of attraction is the city and everything gravitates towards that.

J.S. So what you said about the tree of life is important for us. God's thought was that the tree of life should be in the midst of the garden of Eden. That was His central thought for man - the enjoyment of Christ. God had to meet all that came in through sin, and finally He says, I will put the tree of life in the paradise of God.

R.G. That is the next stage because there are no leaves needed when you get to Ephesus.

J.S. Well, you will have to explain that to us.

R.G. The time is past for it. In the word to the overcomer in Ephesus at the beginning of Revelation, the time is past for the leaves of the nations. The nations have been healed, if you like, and it is the eternal day you are looking on to when all that is for God and for Christ is in the assembly.

J.S. It will just be our eternal enjoyment of Christ in a heavenly setting. Will that not be wonderful?

J.A.G. Everything is so good that they bring the glory and honour of the nations to it. It is most unusual they usually keep it all to themselves.

J.S. That will really be a tribute to Christ. It is brought to the city, but it will really be for Christ.

J.A.G. I think it is put this way to show the attractiveness of the city and the liberty that is diffused by the city. And really, as you say, Christ is the Mediator and it is for Him, but it is not put that way. It says, "And its gates shall not be shut at all by day, for night shall not be there. And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations to it."

J.S. Then it reads, "his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face; and his name is on their foreheads."

J.C.G. Joseph is a type of the life-giver, is he not? It says of him in Jacob's blessing, "Joseph is a fruitful bough" (Gen 49: 22), but then it also says, "His branches shoot over the wall." I suppose the branches shooting over the wall would be the leaves in view of the healing of the nations, and the present application of it is quite interesting, that the testimony continues and goes out, bringing us in as the Gentiles but still extending.

J.S. So in a simple way there is what we enjoy on the first day of the week and it is right that the gospel follows that

R.G. I was going to ask if this means that the gospel is never at a lower level than what you have enjoyed in the assembly? It is the same tree of life.

J.S. What strikes me is that if we enjoy these heavenly things, do you not think the gospel should take on a heavenly character. Would you agree with that?

R.G. Yes, I think it comes out from heaven and it goes back to heaven so that you do not leave the persons that are - to use our ordinary language - saved until they are safe; and they are safe when they come into where the tree of life is.

J.S. You really want to see them where they belong. If persons are converted, putting their trust in the Lord, and receiving the Spirit, they belong in this city and nothing less than that. You might go to someone who is in dire need and say, Look, the Lord Jesus is the Saviour for you. But then, with this background, in the meeting room

there should be a gospel that conveys something of this heavenly inheritance.

J.A.G. The Lord has to say to Sardis, "I have not found thy works complete before my God" (Rev 3: 2), which means there has been a preaching, justification by faith, but the gospel is to bring us into the truth and light of the assembly, to the Lord's Supper and the service of God.

J.S. It is very interesting the way He presents Himself to Sardis as "he that has the seven Spirits of God". The Spirit has been set aside largely in Christendom. You sorrow as you hear of beloved brethren who have had the truth of the assembly going back into systems where the Spirit is disallowed.

BRECHIN

5 December 1998

Key to initials

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THE GIVING GOD

Roland Brown

Romans 5: 12-21; John 3: 16, 17; John 4: 9, 10

The passages that I have read speak of God as a giving God. I wonder if you have ever thought of God like that, as a giver. In a past dispensation, in the Old Testament, people might have thought of God as a demander. He gave a law that required certain things from man: This do and thou shalt live. And you might have thought of God as one who was demanding from you what you could not give. But God presents Himself to us in the gospel as a giver, not as a demander.

This passage in Romans uses three expressions "the act of favour", "the free gift in grace", and "the gift". The Spirit of God uses three expressions there to convey to us the character of God's giving. God is a great provider. The psalmist said of Him, "Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps 145:16). Think of God like that! He spoke to Job about the animal creation and their need for food and how He provided it. I think that is a very affecting thing, to think of God providing even for the animal creation, but He provides for man too, materially. He "makes his sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust," Matt 5: 45. Nothing more adequately expresses God's disposition to bless than that "he makes his sun rise on evil and good". There is no respect of persons with Him.

And it sets out "the kindness and love to man", as the scripture speaks of it, "of our Saviour God", Titus 3: 4. That word, "love to man", has the meaning of philanthropy. Very rich people sometimes set up a trust or a fund with their wealth to help persons who are left without, persons who are needy. They are honoured as great philanthropists, persons that have been benefactors. They have given of their wealth to persons that were needy. There are many such persons you may be able to think of whose names have been connected with well-doing and good works like that, philanthropists.

But the greatest philanthropist of all is God Himself. His "kindness and love to man" has come into expression. And it has come into expression not simply in the meeting of man's material needs - that is all that a philanthropist can do with his wealth: he can meet your material needs. Lord Shaftesbury took children from working in the coal mines and provided for them to be educated so that they could do something other than work long hours under the ground or be sent up the chimneys to sweep. He was concerned to provide for them materially, to better their conditions. There have been many persons that have set up orphanages and the like to provide for people who have nothing materially. Now, God has provided for men and women and children materially. In the world today there are people with not enough to eat, but that is not because God has not provided for them. As a faithful Creator, He has provided sufficient in the earth for everyone to have enough to eat. The fact that there is a great shortage for some and a great surplus and excess for others is because of man's maladministration of what God has given. God is a faithful Creator. He not only gives life, but He has provided the means for its support and maintenance. What a God He is! He has provided for all man's material needs in the earth.

But God has done more than provide for man materially, He has taken account of the state of our souls. He has taken account of what we are. It is a great thing in the gospel preaching to be reminded of what we are. We live in a world where man is exalted, where he exalts himself and where God is left out. That is the world in which we live, a world that takes the blessings of God and does not thank Him for them. I expect all of us in this room thank Him for the food that we eat, but I expect we know of persons who do not, persons who eat their food but never thank the God who gave it to them. That is the character of the world in which we live; people take what God provides and He Himself is left out and man is exalted in his own eyes.

But, in the gospel preaching, we are reminded of what man is as a sinner, and God has taken account of that, that we are sinful creatures by nature. We were "constituted sinners" - this passage

tells us, by the disobedience of the first man. It is good to be reminded of that, not to depress us with it but because, in being reminded of it, we can be reminded of what God has done to provide for that. This passage tells us about sin, how it entered into the world - it already existed in the universe. It had its origins in the devil himself. He was a very exalted being. He was a covering cherub, one of God's cherubim and an exalted one, and he lifted up his heart in pride. He aspired to the place of God and he was cast out (Ezek 28: 12-17). That was the first origins of sin as far as the scriptures reveal them to us. And that talented and gifted creature has used his talents and his gifts as a great master of deceit and guile to lead men and women, boys and girls, into what is hateful to the giving God. He has led men and women and children into doing things that are displeasing to Him. He began with Eve, and he deceived her, by his craft. We read about that in the book of Genesis, how he started off by casting doubt on what God had said and suggesting that He did not really mean what He said, He meant something else, and that it did not really matter too much if God was disobeyed. You hear these things still today; it is not too bad; it does not really matter. It is a good thing to know where that message comes from. It comes from that source, the great source of evil that deceived Eve by craft. She took that forbidden fruit, that awful fruit, the knowledge of good and evil. She bit into it. She wanted a taste and she produced a sinful progeny of persons who have wanted a taste of what is evil. Have your ever found that taste within you, a taste for what is sinful, what is evil? It is a taste that is abundantly provided for in the world. As you go down the streets, you cannot help noticing all the placards that are up advertising films and books with a taste for what is evil in them. She bit into that fruit, the knowledge of good and evil. God had forbidden it, not because He was an arbitrary God, but because He knew the sorrow and the misery that it must bring, but He was not listened to. God was not listened to. What was listened to were the lies of the deceiver, and we know what terrible consequences flowed from that simple fact that instead of listening to God, the first couple to live upon the earth listened to the deceiver.

Now that is the same question tonight. As the gospel is preached, the question is, who will you listen to? Will you listen to God as He speaks in the preaching? Will He have your ear? Will you give your ear to Him or do you want to listen to the dulcet and subtle tones of the tempter? Sin entered into the world through that one act of disobedience and in its train it brought death. Death came into the world. It had never been seen before. It was a sinless world in which Adam and Eve were but as soon as sin came in, death followed. It was not long in the book of Genesis before the first murder was committed. As soon as man disobeyed God, one of the consequences was that he hated his brother. The two things are not unrelated. He hated him so much that he murdered him. That was a shocking thing. Was it? Was it a shocking thing? In the world today, people are murdered day after day, dozens of them, and it is very easy to live in a world where human life is treated so casually and be unaffected by it. But God was not unaffected by it. It was a shocking thing. He said to Cain, "The voice of thy brother's blood is crying to me from the ground", Gen 4: 10. Think of the cry that goes up to God today because of the blood that is wantonly spilled on the earth, lives that are wantonly destroyed, lives that God has given. God is not unaffected by that. He takes account of the groaning creation. He takes account of the state of His creature, not only his material needs, but He looks down from heaven tonight and takes account of you and me in His goodness and in His grace. He knows our circumstances. He knows what school we go to, what job we do, what address we live at. He knows all about our material circumstances, but He knows about the state of our souls too, and God has provided in His goodness for that. What a giver God is! It would be a wonderful impression to take away from the preaching, if everything else is forgotten, that impression of God as a giver. He does not give in order that you might be occupied simply with the gifts themselves but what He gives. He gives in order that you might be brought to know Him, not simply enjoy His bounty, but come to know the Giver Himself because that is why God gives. He greatly desires to enter into a relationship with each one of us, an intimate relationship. Is that not a wonderful thing? To me it is a one of the

most wonderful things that God, being who He is, should desire to be known by you and me and not only known, but to be loved and to have a relationship, an eternal relationship, with His creature. He has set His heart upon it. He is going to tabernacle or dwell eternally with men, men who know Him and love Him and who are known and loved by Him, and He wants you and me to be among them. He could never dwell with sinful men. He could never dwell with people who would rather listen to the tempter than to Himself. God could never dwell with that kind of companionship, but He has made provision in His love, and at great cost to Himself that you and I might dwell with Him eternally.

And so the writer here contrasts what has happened with what God has done. There was that act of disobedience and as he says, "by the disobedience of the one man the many have been constituted sinners". I want to draw attention to that word "constituted". "... Sin entered into the world and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned", and the reason that all have sinned is because all have been "constituted sinners". The psalmist says in Psalm 51, "Behold, in iniquity was I brought forth, and in sin did my mother conceive me", (v 5). That is not the first thing we think of when we see a newborn baby, is it? Everybody likes a newborn baby. We have had one in our family and she has been greatly admired. Everyone says how pretty she is and so on. When you look at a newborn baby, that Psalm is not the first thing you think about. But that is what the word of God tells us: "in iniquity was I brought forth, and in sin did my mother conceive me". What a terrible legacy that is, to look at that little baby and to think of it as being born in sin! We are thankful that a little child is covered by the blood of Jesus. I have no doubt that the mighty work that the Saviour accomplished on the cross covers every little child that is too young to understand anything. Such are covered by the blood of Jesus. But if such a child grows up to a responsible age, as I suppose most, if not all, here are, it will need to be converted. It will need to come to know and love the Lord Jesus for itself as each one of us need to. It will not be sufficient that it was born into a believing

household. It will not be sufficient that it was brought to the meetings regularly or even that it was baptised. It will need to be saved as each one of us needs to be saved and "neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved", Acts 4: 12.

The way of salvation is very simple. There is nobody here tonight who is too young to understand it, the way of salvation. The way of salvation is repentance towards God, turning to Him in repentance and in the acknowledgement of what I am and of what I have done. In His grace, in the glad tidings, God reminds us of what we are and even as the preacher is speaking, He might remind you of what you have done too. You do not have to give an account of it to others, but you will have to give an account of it to God. Each one of us must render an account of Him and He invites us to render an account to Him now while it is the day of salvation. He invites us to have to do with Him. "Come now", He says, "let us reason together", Isa 1:18. You think of God inviting you and me as sinners to have to do with Him in grace, to "reason together, saith Jehovah". He invites us to have to do with Him in repentance, repentance towards God, but then not only being convicted of what I am and of what I have done, but faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is in no other, and I am concerned as having the responsibility of preaching the gospel here tonight that each one of us should know where we stand in relation to the giving God. He has given His Son. He has given so much in the giving of His Son. It is spoken of here as an "act of favour", sovereign favour. There was nothing to call it forth, the giving that God gave. You see, I might give something because it is called forth from me. Speaking of a little baby, I might think it looks sweet and I would like to buy it a little coat or a dress. It is called forth from me. But what God has given was an "act of favour". It was all from Himself. There was nothing in me to call it forth. It was an "act of favour".

Then it is spoken of in this remarkable chapter as a "free gift". The expression is sometimes used in the world that 'there are no strings attached'. How often people speak about 'looking at the

small print' in human dealings, that there is something subtle, some hidden commitment, wrapped up in it that you only discover when it is too late. But with God it is a "free gift". And then it is spoken of as "the gift". Not only is it free, but it is given. God has given. That is a wonderful thing. I think the Spirit of God in those three expressions is trying to convey to us, with our limited understanding, something of the immensity of what God has done in His gift.

And so John tells us the motive for it in his gospel: "For God so loved the world, that he gave ... ". There was nothing in the world to call it forth. It was an "act of favour". It was a "free gift". It was a gift that was given without recall, but the motive for it was in the heart of God Himself: He "so loved". What an expression that is! The apostle says elsewhere, because of his great love wherewith he loved us" Eph 2: 4. I would like to convey something of the greatness of the love of God, which is the motive for all that He has done. He "so loved". Nothing could more adequately express the depths and feelings of His heart than that he should give His only begotten Son. I never read that verse without thinking of the story in the Old Testament of Abraham and Isaac going up the mountain. God said to him, "take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest ...", Gen 22: 2. God knew what He was asking, none better, because He was going to give that Himself, His only begotten Son. We know that Abraham went up the mountain and that he was prepared to give his son. He built an altar and he piled the wood upon it and he bound his precious boy to that altar. He was an old man and he had that son, that precious lad, in his old age, and he bound him to the altar and he stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. What a solemn moment that was! The Spirit of God tells us that he "stretched out his hand, and took the knife ...", Gen 22: 10 . Now we know from other scriptures that he was prepared to go through with it because in his soul he had the faith of resurrection and he knew that all the promises of God were connected with that boy, and that if he was called upon by God to put him to death, he believed that God was able to bring him back from the dead again. Is that not a remarkable thing? There are many

people today, even in these so-called enlightened days, who do not have the faith of resurrection in their soul. And there was a man long ago in what you and I would probably regard as a primitive age, but he had the light of God in his soul of another world, the resurrection world.

Well, God so loved that He gave. What would He give? He gave what was precious to Himself, His only-begotten Son. Sometimes people think that they ought to give a gift and they look round for something that they do not really want anyway. They say, Well I will give that, but I will not really miss it. But, you know, that is not the way God has given. He has given what was very precious to Himself, His only-begotten Son, and He has given Him with a purpose. It is one of the great examples in the Bible of one thing done with another thing in mind. That none of us in this room should perish He has given His only-begotten Son in order that through faith in Him we might come into the joy of eternal life.

I only close with that last reference in chapter 4. He says to this woman, "If thou knewest the gift of God ... ". He was Himself the gift of God, the One that God had given, and He said, if you had known that, you would have asked. You would have asked, "and he would have given thee living water". I wonder if each of us here has received the Saviour in faith into our souls, the great and free gift that God gives without recall. But there is another great gift in the preaching and it is the gift of the Holy Spirit and that is a gift that God gives to those that ask Him, those that desire it. It is not a gift that is given, I might say, indiscriminately. It is a very precious gift and it is given to those that obey Him, and it is given to those that ask Him. It is important that all of us should receive that gift, and God is concerned about it. It is a great concern with God that you might not only be saved from your sins and from the judgement to come, but He desires to give you of His Spirit. The Spirit of God desires to take up His abode in you and He will bring the joy and the blessedness of things that are heavenly and eternal into your heart. It is spoken of by the Lord Jesus here as living water. It is quite different from the water that she was going to draw. He said, "Every one who drinks of

this water shall thirst again". How well she knew it! She went to that well, I suppose, every day for the daily supply of water, but He is speaking of water so thirstquenching that he that drinks of it would never thirst forever. How wonderful that is! Do you know anybody like that? Through grace I do. I know persons who have found satisfaction such that they want nothing else. They have found it in Christ, and He has been made good to them in their hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit. They do not seek for anything else. They do not need all these things that the poor worldling needs, all the things on offer, the knowledge of good and evil, all the taste for what is wicked, the interest, the curiosity that man has by nature in what is evil and wicked. You open a newspaper and it is full of it. It is full of murders and rapes and violence in the world. And why is it full of that? Because it is catering for a taste and an unsatisfied desire in man and in his lust. But, it is a wonderful thing to have contact with persons whose every need has been met, who will never thirst for ever. The gift of the Holy Spirit not only satisfies your heart, but it brings you into contact with others because through having the Holy Spirit you become part of the assembly, part of God's house here on the earth. It is composed of believers who have the Spirit of God and it is a wonderful thing to have part in Christian fellowship with persons who have drunk of this living water and have found that it has met every need of their souls.

Well, I think I have spoken of these things long enough but not adequately enough. I would greatly desire to be able to speak of them better, the greatness of God as a giver, the immensity of what He has given without any recall, fully and freely from His own side, and giving it in order to make Himself known, to endear Himself to our hearts. He has given it not only that we might not perish, but in order that we might be satisfied both now and eternally. May we each one of us be exercised to come into the blessedness of these things for ourselves for His Name's sake!

St. Albans

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