

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 338

May 2001

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WHAT IS EXPRESSED IN CHRIST

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WHAT IS EXPRESSED IN CHRIST

John 10: 1–18; 11: 23–26; 14: 1–6, 20

R.W.F. There was reference this morning to the scripture in John 10 where the Lord says, “I am the door”: indeed, there was more than one reference to it. I wondered whether we look for something fresh, particularly on the Lord’s Day as a result of the Lord coming to His own. He delights to come and to impart what is fresh as He does so. But I did wonder whether this might connect with what we considered yesterday as to God speaking in the Person of the Son. One thing we concluded in the reading was that if God was speaking in the Person of the Son it was not simply as messenger; it was not simply by word, that is, by what is uttered; but there was that in the Son which set forth God Himself. Indeed, we know that the Son was and is God Himself so there was the expression in Christ of God Himself in both what He said and what He was. What He was, of course, includes His manner and His disposition. These scriptures, as the brethren will readily see, contain references by the Lord Himself to what He was: “I am the door”; “I am the good shepherd”; “I am the resurrection and the life”; “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”. These are, to believers, very telling scriptures and the very mention of them immediately affects us (at least this is the way it seems to me) because they convey the extensiveness of what was expressed in Christ and what He was in His person.

The last scripture we looked at in the fourteenth chapter is rather different. It says, “In that day ye shall know that I am” – the ‘am’ is in brackets – “in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you”, and I wondered whether we might understand that the Lord’s presentation of Himself as the door, the shepherd, the resurrection and the life, and the way, the truth and the life, is to lead us into a better understanding of His place in the Father’s affections and of His place in our affections. This is so much extended in John’s mind as to say that “I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you”; words that to the natural mind are impossible to understand but which to the spiritual mind are full of meaning. I wondered whether we might also read

back from the last verse to understand that when the Lord spoke of being the door, being the shepherd, He was conscious of His place, not only in the Father's heart, but *in the Father*, and He was working to ensure that we should understand something of that. We cannot embrace it in its fulness but we should understand, at least by a little experience, what it is for Him to be in us - "and I in you".

It seems to me that when the Lord says, "I am the door" or the Shepherd or the other words that He uses (which are almost titles), there is - underlying His words and not far beneath the surface - an allusion to His deity: "*I am*". We reminded ourselves yesterday that for the unbeliever the Lord's word is quite solemn. The word in the glad tidings is preached to convict and attract but there is what is solemn conveyed in the Lord's words: "for unless ye shall believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins", John 8: 24. Embedded in that is the truth of His deity, "I am", and I think we see it running through these scriptures. We might say, well, that makes the scriptures impossible to understand, and, in a sense, that is so. Which of us can understand deity? But the Lord also uses simple words and it is most interesting to trace (particularly in John's gospel, although it is true of other gospels), that the Lord's words and the Lord's illustrations are exceedingly simple and understandable. The brethren will readily see something that perhaps we almost take for granted because of familiarity with the scriptures. The references to the door, to the shepherd, to the sheep, to the wolf, to one that climbs up and seeks advantage and to the thieves and robbers, are all words that are readily understandable. We have a very fine blend in scripture. Many words that the Lord uses as to Himself convey deity and therefore inscrutability. Other words are simple and therefore intelligible. I hope there is something in that which we can look at and feed upon.

V.E.W. There is no other whosoever who could speak as He does.

R.W.F. That is right. If you just take just the first of the references in the scripture which were in one's mind, "I am the door", no one else could say that, but it is full of meaning.

P.J.W. It seems to me – you will help – that it draws attention to Himself in contrast to every other. I thought about your reference to the thieves and robbers. He says, “All whoever came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them.” How do you understand that verse?

R.W.F. Well, there were those that came in their own name, to whom we find some reference in the Acts, who drew away disciples. They came to an end, sometimes to an abrupt end. There were those who, within the recollection of the Lord’s hearers, announced strange doctrines. Such occurrences were rife, I take it, in the Lord’s day. He is not referring to those who were taken up for prophecy in earlier days, to whom we referred yesterday: “God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly to the fathers in the prophets ...” (Heb 1: 1), but rather to those who came in their own name who were exposed. But I think what you say is helpful: He contrasts Himself implicitly with all who went before whatever their doctrine, however strange it was, or however acceptable it might appear to be.

V.E.W. The Lord Jesus was here in this very scene but, in speaking as He does and drawing attention to Himself, it has no reference to this scene at all.

R.W.F. No, what He has in His mind and in His heart - because He has the shepherd’s heart - is to draw His sheep out of this scene. Is that what you had in your mind?

V.E.W. That is what was in mind. Yes, and as we were impressed this morning, into what is abiding, what is eternal.

R.W.F. To connect back once again, although we do not live on connections and links and so on, what comes to us is to be constructive. His sheep hear His voice so that if God has spoken in the person of the Son, there are those that have heard, there are those upon whom and in whom the voice of Christ - *Christ Himself* in whom God was speaking - has had an effect. I expect it is common knowledge, particularly with mothers who have had young children, that in a child’s mind, at a very early age, the voice of the mother is imprinted. From the earliest age the child is able to discern his or

her mother's voice. And this is the effect of the speaking of Christ, the effect of Christ as the Word, that as soon as we hear, there is that imprinted on the mind which is indelible. He would have it so and it is to our advantage and to our blessing that it is so. I think some of us would say that that has gone on with us unconsciously. What could a young child say about the imprint of its mother's voice in its mind? It has gone on from an early age. It goes on with children among us. They might not appear to be interested. They might be occupying themselves in other things. (Even as adults we can be occupying ourselves with other things, but I have the children in mind, by way of illustration). There is what goes on, which is beneath the surface which is not visible to us and which is not even detected by us, but which the Lord is doing deliberately. He is imprinting Himself upon us.

D.J.R. I was thinking of what you said yesterday as to the Word. The Word is the Lord Himself. It is not a philosophy. What you have here in these others that came up are philosophies, but when they come to the Lord, it is the thing itself.

R.W.F. I hope what I have said helps to make the distinction between what is philosophical, which we can toy with in our minds, we can toss about, discuss with others and modify and so on, but there is nothing in it to match the effect of the Lord's voice. We are to remember that. I hesitate to speak of these things because I think the brethren know them better than I do. There is that which the Lord is pleased to convey and which in grace He does convey, very often unknown to us, which is of an abiding character, and upon which He can then rely. He calls and His sheep come. Some of us can remember that happening in the glad tidings.

V.E.W. It is very attractive what you say as to the Lord's voice. It is not only attractive and holds us but it is adjusting too - all in view, I take it, of entering in to what the Lord says as to Himself.

R.W.F. There is nothing condemnatory in the Lord's voice. If it is adjusting, we find it is an adjustment in grace. We have spoken a little at the weekend of what is cumulative and we are to read John's

gospel, I think, in that way. The Lord had said in John 8 to the woman who was taken in adultery, “Neither do I condemn thee”, v 11. Now, I think that spirit of “no condemnation” – “There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8: 1) – continues from that point in the gospel and we are to understand that there is nothing condemnatory in the Lord’s speaking and His sheep come to appreciate that, come to rejoice in it.

V.E.W. We had that in the gospel last Lord’s Day.

K.J.M. I was just thinking of what you said as to the divinity of the Lord. In chapter 18 in the garden, He says, “I am”, and “they went away backward and fell to the ground”, v 6. There was not there the capacity to receive Him or to appreciate Him that there was in this chapter.

R.W.F. That is a helpful reference. I was thinking about the reading and lighted on the scriptures that I have suggested but there are others, I think, that could expand the subject even further. We might say that the references by the Lord to Himself as the door and the shepherd and the resurrection and the life and so on are already very extensive and so they are. We need help perhaps to understand, if only briefly, what He had in view, but I have in mind not so much the detail of one reference or another but the whole scope of what the Lord says. From one point of view we can scarcely take it in at once and, of course, He does not refer to all the titles at once.

P.J.W. Is it your thought that the teaching through the gospel and what the Lord says is progressive and cumulative? You mentioned the woman taken in adultery. He says immediately after that incident, “I am the light of the world” (chap 8: 12) so that might be the starting point in our history, do you think? A light comes into the soul, then through the apprehension of Him as the door we may be able to enter into a little more of what God has in mind if we do, and then these other things. Is that your thought?

R.W.F. Yes, that is the thought. There is a sense – I do not know what you think of this – in which what the Lord said when He said, “I

am the light of the world” is no longer true because He said subsequently, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”, John 9: 5. He is not the light of the world now in the sense He was when here because He is in another scene. While He was here, He was *in* the world and the light of the world as in it, but we can understand that there is great advantage now in the fact that He has gone to be with the Father because He can be seen by all – “we see Jesus” (Heb 2: 9) – in His glory. The light that shone in Him is not limited to Palestine, but it is available to all. He is now at the right hand of the Father and can be seen there, so “we see Jesus”. But if we speak of Jesus as the door, I wondered if we might be helped as to it. It does have a particular meaning for those to whom the Lord spoke. When He was here, He spoke having primarily in mind the lost sheep of the house of Israel. John’s gospel does not contemplate sheep as lost, as we know. But the Lord ever had in mind His people when here, and the scripture we have read makes that plain. He speaks of Himself as the shepherd and the One who lays down His life for the sheep and He says, “And I have other sheep which are not of this fold: those also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd.” The “other sheep” were the Gentiles and we are numbered among the “other sheep”. There is a sense in which the scripture has its application to us. The Lord *is* the door; *He is* the One by whom we come into the gain of divine pasture, into the gain of God’s blessing in its full extent. *He* is the One by whom we come into what is vast and is not constricted, as might be the thought of the fold.

D.J.R. “Shall go in and shall go out and shall find pasture” implies that there is a sphere where the sheep are at liberty and they are at liberty because of the Shepherd and the place that the Shepherd has established for them. We know the Shepherd and therefore we can ourselves know the liberty that comes of being in the flock.

R.W.F. We do not want to bring confusion into the scriptures but we can read scriptures with the benefit of the teaching in other passages, teaching that has become known to us now which was not known to the disciples when the Lord spoke to them. So we can

understand in this passage that going in and going out speaks of liberty. Now, liberty is actually enjoyed by sons, and it seems to me that while the scripture does not say this, it takes us in our minds and our hearts through to the point where we enjoy the liberty of sonship. That is suggested in the scripture. There is another instance of it in the scripture we read yesterday, that we might “be children of God” (John 1: 12), and as is sometimes said to remind us so that we do not confuse one scripture with another, the scripture there does not say that we shall be *called* children of God; it says that we should “be children of God”, actually enter into the reality of *being* God’s children. Now, that implies something further. It implies the divine family. Of course, John develops that in his epistles. There is much, it seems to me, in embryo in John’s ministry, which shows us the richness of all that is to be known if we come to the Lord and recognise that He is the means by which we have entry into the greatest blessing that is available to man, that is, what is open to us in Him as the door.

V.E.W. “That they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”

R.W.F. Yes, indeed. Once again that goes on to touch the liberty, the reality, the joy indeed, of sonship. This is John’s ministry rather than Paul’s but we can see how fully they are integrated and consistent with each other.

E.C. I was just thinking that the Lord stands out alone and unique here as the good shepherd. “I am the door”, but it says, “All whoever came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: if any one enter in by me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and shall go out and shall find pasture.” I was thinking of the discernment that we need to have in relation to what has gone before. The Lord is saying, He alone is the door and there is no other entry in but by Him.

R.W.F. That is right. There is what has gone before and we can consider that in two ways. The Lord has had to do with His people already in the view that is given here: His sheep *know* His voice. They hear it and they discern it. They will not answer to the voice of

strangers. They have already had to do with Him. There is that in the Lord's voice which becomes imprinted on our minds and in our hearts which is unmistakable and indelible. However there are those who have in false activity tried to disturb that and undermine the Lord's work. In the face of that threat we can understand the second reference here that the Lord is the good shepherd: "I am the good shepherd", He says more than once.

A.W. Say something about life. There is One here that had to lay down His life that we might come into it.

R.W.F. Well, I hoped we would touch on that and I am glad you take us on to it: "I lay down my life for the sheep." And He goes on to say, "On this account the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again." It is most affecting but what has been accomplished, what is now open to us, has been secured by the laying down of His life. But the laying down of His life was not the end. He laid it down that He might take it again. What is more, as having taken His life, He has the power to *impart* life. It is a great thing to know Jesus as the One who has dealt with the power of death and has come forth victoriously in life and who now has the power to impart life, "that they might have life, and might have it abundantly."

A.W. It says here, "I lay down my life": it is what He has done deliberately, is it?

R.W.F. Definitely. That has called forth the Father's love: "On this account the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again." It has called forth the Father's love and when I read the section, I have to say, has it called forth mine? I would encourage the brethren to ask the question of themselves, not necessarily to say to others, Has the fact that He has laid down His life called forth my love? It called forth the Father's love.

V.E.W. There was never a life like it.

R.W.F. That is right and never will be in this scene again.

V.E.W. But now it is a life in relation to another order of man altogether.

R.W.F. Yes. Tell us more about that.

V.E.W. I was thinking about what must have been involved in the Lord laying down that life that was so pleasurable to the Father, but now as out of death and in resurrection, it is the same blessed Jesus, but another order of life altogether.

R.W.F. Yes, I was wondering if we might touch that in connection with John 11. Martha was distraught at the death of her brother: "if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (v 21). But she had confidence in the Lord: "but even now I know, that whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee" (v 22).

V.E.W. She would have had, I take it, the light of a Man in resurrection, but the reality of entering into it is another matter.

R.W.F. Yes, and in the Lord's dealings with us, His words are to encourage us to progress. He knows that we are not able to take in everything at once and I think it is a great comfort to those that are younger (and perhaps those of us that are older) that the Lord will lead us on to appreciate one thing after another. That is very gracious, but, of course, it is just what we need. In secular education you do not arrange for a lesson to impart all knowledge at once. You arrange lessons in a timetable, over a period of weeks, so that knowledge might be imparted gradually. The Lord knows our needs and He is able to meet them. He knows the point we have reached and He is able to help us forward and it seems to me there is something in this scripture here which helps us to understand that. He was dealing that way with Martha but He is dealing with us all. He says, "I am the resurrection and the life". What can we say about that? There are two things stated in one sentence: "I am the resurrection and the life". As I understand it, the life in this verse is much the same as what the Lord refers to elsewhere and we find in other parts of scripture, that is quickening. When the Lord says, "I am the resurrection", He was speaking of what had reference to death, that is to the condition in which so many were held and which

binds man even now, which restricts him and terrifies him indeed, unless he has faith in Christ. "I am the resurrection" has a retrospective look because it has reference to death, the Lord's power over it and the fact that He is victor over it, but when He says, "and the life", there is a forward look. It introduces us into a realm where He has the first place, where all are in life, where there is life and that abundantly. So that there is the termination, (as we sometimes say in a rather doctrinal manner), of one order and the commencement of another, but I trust we do not rest in words. The Lord has had to say to death Himself and He has provided a means by which we can understand that the power of death has been broken for us also, but He has established a new order of life. Words almost fail: I do not like to use the word 'order'; but He has established life and that in Himself: "I am the resurrection and the life". We know the termination of what is so limiting, what to man is so terrifying, but we know at the same time the commencement of all that can be found in Him of all that abides, one of John's favourite words. There is what abides and it abides in Him.

D.J.R. The bent of what you are saying is that things can therefore be present realities. Martha was looking forward to the last day. That was right. But the Lord was really bringing the whole matter of life right down to the time where she was.

R.W.F. And in the Lord's words, "I am", we have reminded ourselves that in a veiled way that speaks of His deity, but it is present: "I am", not 'I will be'. It does not only look on to His work and the completion of it, although always dependent on it as we can understand from the scripture in John 10. "I lay down my life that I may take it again" was in order that He might be to Jew and Gentile the door, that He might be shown to be the good shepherd. We can prove Him thus. He said when He was here, "I am" and it rings true as much now as it did then: "I am the door"; "I am the good shepherd"; "I am the resurrection and the life". These things are to be known in Christ now. How attractive it is! How attractive He is!

V.E.W. All this is for the glory of God.

R.W.F. That was the intent the Lord had in this chapter. Go on.

V.E.W. I thought it would help in view of what we had in chapter 10 that He was the door. Think of all that the entering in would involve and it is all for the glory of God.

R.W.F. We come to a realm through Him as the door in which all is to God's glory. There is little publicly to God's glory in this scene.

V.E.W. Jesus is saying this to one that He loved. I thought that would be a point for us, that the Lord may have things to say to us but He loves us.

R.W.F. And what He says to us is always in love. Even if He has reason (and sometimes we acknowledge the fact that He has reason) to speak severely, He speaks in love.

K.J.M. It is common amongst men that they will question why God allows certain things, and that came in in this chapter, did it not? They questioned why Lazarus should have been allowed to die, but is that just to bring out the present power of life that was in Him?

R.W.F. Yes, I am interested you put it that way. It is not simply power over death but the power of life: "I am the resurrection and the life" I think reaches right on to that. That is no doubt what you had in mind.

P.J.W. So Paul says not only that He has annulled death; He has done that, but has "brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings", 2 Tim. 1: 10.

R.W.F. Yes, that expands the matter for us. It is life and incorruptibility: that is, we are brought into a realm which is in itself incorruptible. We ourselves come into the gain of what has been established in Him. What God has done is incorruptible. I hope when we are younger we lay hold of that. We have spoken about an imprint, sometimes we speak of an impression, but I have used the word imprint because it seems to me that that is what the Lord actually does with us. He writes indelibly. That is a scriptural thought, writing on our hearts. We are to understand that the Lord acts that way early and He desires of holding us to it. In itself God's

work is incorruptible. We may allow other things to encroach upon God's work, the robbers and the thieves might be active, but God's work is God's work in its integrity and in its incorruptibility. I think that is why the apostle says "that he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day" (Phil 1: 6) because it is of an incorruptible character.

V.E.W. It is a work that is going through. It does not belong, as we have said, to this scene.

R.W.F. We have further expansion in chapter 14. We find there is much in this section which we have no time to dwell upon in detail, but the "Father's house" and the "many abodes" give us some idea of the expansiveness of all that the Lord by Himself and *through* Himself, conducts us into. "In my Father's house there are many abodes ... for I go to prepare you a place". We are to be assured as to that. But there was the question that was raised by Thomas, "Lord, we know not where thou goest, and how can we know the way?" It is the kind of question that we might have asked. "Jesus says to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life." How full are His words! We have spoken of other ways in which He has presented Himself but "I am the way" implies the only way. It is the way of blessing but it is the only way of blessing. It is the way that the Father would have us to follow and it is the only way. He is the truth. The truth was fully expressed in Him. Nothing but the truth was expressed in Him. The truth is still to be discerned in Him and to be learned in Him. We do not come to the full understanding of the truth unless we learn it in Him. And once again, the life. That is not left out. We are not to be left resting in terms. I have no doubt all the brethren appreciate that. He is the life, the source of life, the Sustainer of life, the object of our hearts as we sense the power of His life working in us. He is the life as well as the way and the truth.

V.E.W. Do you get the impression that He is *everything*, both now and throughout eternity?

R.W.F. Yes. I am glad you say that. The words the Lord uses here are very comprehensive.

P.J.W. It must have had quite an effect on Thomas because it was Thomas that said, "Let *us* also go, that we may die with him", chap. 11: 16. So whatever way He was to go, they would follow Him.

R.W.F. Yes. I did wonder whether we might understand, because the Lord says, "No one comes to the Father unless by me", that the object in His mind is that we might apprehend the sweetness of relations of the Father and the Son. We are not able in their fulness to comprehend what they mean and which of us can say that we have fathomed the meaning of what appears to be simple language in this section. Nevertheless in the various ways in which He has manifested Himself as the door and the shepherd and so on, He is leading in this direction. It seems to me that the Lord is introducing us into the secret of His mind. We might almost say the secret of the divine mind. "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."

V.E.W. Are there not secrets in the souls of believers? I was thinking of the holy mount, of the way that those three disciples came into the secret of Who the Person was. Man would say and did say that He was a malefactor on that cross but there were those there that had a secret in their souls that He was the Son of God.

R.W.F. Yes, and so this gospel presents women standing by the cross. They were to a considerable extent in the gain of what the Lord had taught. I think they were in the secret of His mind. They were surely held in His heart and they held Him in affection in their hearts. They were prepared to stand by His cross.

V.E.W. So "in that day" I take it has in mind what is future and yet in the soul of the believer there is that cherished now.

P.J.W. I was going to ask about that expression. Would it be the Spirit's day?

R.W.F. Yes, I think, in spirit, we do have entry into this now. He says, "Yet a little and the world sees me no longer; but ye see me" (v 19). He was to return to the Father but He was going to send another Comforter and this very chapter speaks of the Comforter. In fact, the reference we have looked at is bracketed by the Lord's

words as to the Comforter. “He will give you another Comforter” (v 16) and then in verse 26, “the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *he* shall teach you all things, and will bring to your remembrance all the things which I have said to you.” Verse 26 would help us to understand that we enter into the spirit and the reality of what the Lord said even though we feel it is unfathomable: “In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” Does that commend itself?

P.J.W. Yes, I wondered if it was only by the power of the Spirit, the Comforter, that we can have any apprehension at all of what the Lord says in this verse.

R.W.F. We are left at no disadvantage here because the Lord has gone. In fact, we are given every advantage. The advantage we have could almost be said to be greater than would have been the case if we were here when the Lord was here physically because the Spirit is available to all. The Lord when here was seen and heard by a few. The few entered into the greatness of blessing that was available to them through faith and through contact with Him, but the Comforter is available to all.

K.J.M. He would otherwise hardly say, “It is profitable for you that I go away”, John 16: 7.

R.W.F. Yes, that scripture was running through my mind. I wonder if we appreciate the profit of the fact that the Comforter is here. We would rejoice, no doubt, if we could in some way be translated or transformed - whatever was necessary - to be in Palestine when the Lord was here, but there is every reason to rejoice now because the Lord has sent the Comforter. The Spirit brings us into the gain and reality of what the Lord said as to Himself.

D.B. Tell us about the Lord’s words at the end of verse 20, “and ye in me, and I in you.”

R.W.F. Well, one thing I can say as to it is that it is very intimate. The Lord desires to have to do with us intimately in our minds and in our hearts. We might say that there is a suggestion of distance – I hesitate to use the word – when the Lord says, “I am the door” and “I

am the good shepherd”, though there was no thought of distance in His mind, but we think of a door as that through which we go and we think of a shepherd as available to the sheep. We cannot exactly connect intimacy with the services of the Lord, but we can in this verse, “ye in me, and I in you.” “Ye in me”, shows us how far the Spirit is able to carry us in our spirits and our affections into an appreciation of the heart of Christ Himself and “I in you” shows the degree to which Christ is identifying Himself with His people. He is identifying Himself with His people in this scene to the extent that the scripture says, “I in you.” These things are very profound; they are very affecting if we allow the meaning of them to sink into us.

K.J.M. Do we get a similar intimacy in the address to the Laodiceans? “If any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me”, Rev 3: 20.

R.W.F. Yes, that scripture always conveys to me the desire of the Lord to be on terms of intimacy with His own. We might not have that desire. We might not be aware of His desire, but it is there: “Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking”. We might well ask ourselves and perhaps ask others – it is a question that is raised in the preaching sometimes – is the Lord at the door of our hearts? Does He have entrance? If we are given some inkling (and it is available to us in a meeting like this) of the strength of desire on His part, not only to have to do with us, but to be intimate with us, to be at home with us and we with Him, I think we would allow Him greater access into our hearts. Do you think that?

V.E.W. This is very practical. Does it involve what Paul says in Philippians that He had been “taken possession of” (chap 3: 12)?

R.W.F. I am sure it does. That is another way of looking at the matter, that the Lord has asserted His claim upon us, and He has taken possession of us. Do we respond to Him thus? He has not taken possession of us as if we are captive; He has taken possession because He loves us, because of the strength of the desire in His heart that we might be His, we might be for Him, that He might be able to commune with us. We had the word ‘commune’

yesterday. It is a favourite word of mine, but I do wonder for my own part about the extent to which I enter into it. The Lord desires that we might enter into communion with Him.

GILLINGHAM

26 November 2000

Key to Initials

D.Bodman, Gillingham; E.Christopher, Gillingham; R.W.Flowerdew, Sunbury; K.J.May; Maidstone; D.J.Roberts, Gillingham; A.Wraighte, Gillingham; P.J.Walkinshaw, Gillingham; V.E.Wraighte, Gillingham

GLORIES AFTER SUFFERINGS

R.W.Flowerdew

1 Peter 1: 3 – 12

The preaching of the glad tidings, as believers will understand and rejoice to know, concerns Jesus Himself. It concerns, therefore, Jesus in the place where He is. It has reference to Jesus where He was, assuredly, and most instructive that reference can be - I trust it may be so as we are together now – but it has reference to Him where He is, and the gospel is illuminated, therefore, by the brightness of the present shining of His glory. What a fine thing to appreciate! The gospel has a radiancy about it which is distinct from all else that can be heard or seen in this world in which we are, and because of that it is altogether distinguished. We can rejoice in the fact that Christ is no longer here but, having suffered and died, He has been raised by the glory of the Father. What a display of glory that was! And He is ascended and is seated at God's right hand. He is in the place of glory. He has entered upon and is the centre of "the glories after these" of which we have read.

But we are to remember that there was that which preceded His present exaltation. Indeed, we are never to forget it! And I think that those who believe will never forget the cost, the price paid by Jesus, to secure their blessing. For that is what has happened. He has paid the price: "For the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be given up for ever" (Ps 49: 8), but He has paid the price. He has paid it in full. It was not a price that could be reduced. It was not a "cut price". It was the full price. He has paid it in order that there might be the knowledge on your part and on mine of salvation. The apostle Peter speaks of, "the salvation of your souls". What a great matter that is and how essential it is, the salvation of our souls! The apostle runs on to speak of even more in what awaits us, what we speak of as "the redemption of our body" (Rom 8: 23), "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." There is what awaits the believer. What a bright prospect it is, the change that will occur physically, and that not simply a change for the better but a change

so that there might be entrance into what is most blest, what is beyond comparison in its brightness and attractiveness and, to use the word that is found in the plural in this section, its glory. We are to reflect upon the price that has been paid and the cost that has been met.

Now there is much in this section to look at but I would just like to mention one or two things that perhaps are topical but which might strike a chord in us. In this month of the year there is remembrance of those that have suffered and died in conflict. It is a time of remembrance and there is good reason for such a remembrance. Many have suffered and died to secure what they thought was liberty in this land. Of course, the believer can see far more than that. The believer can go back even further than the Second World War or the First World War. The believer can go back to remember the martyrs in this land, who have suffered, in many instances who have *died*. How final that sounds! They have *died* for the sake of the truth they loved and the Lord they honoured. They honoured Him in their death. And the believer can go back even further. He can go back to the time of general persecution, which occasioned the dispersion of which we can read in this section. The apostle was writing to the "sojourners of the dispersion". What occasioned the dispersion was persecution which very often resulted not only in suffering but in death. The testimony - which has continued in life, one can be thankful to say, and has been divinely supported – has been continued at great cost and it has been continued very often because there were those who were prepared to give up their lives for the sake of it, for the sake of the One who instigated it, Christ Himself. Of course, the believer in his or her mind and heart, is able to go back to the Lord Jesus who was the One above all others who suffered and died. How full of meaning, how full of consequence, the suffering and death of Jesus was and is, for the efficacy of His work remains. That means it is available for you and me as much now as ever it was when the apostles preached or when the martyrs continued perhaps in secret or when there was general conflagration and conflict in this land and there were those who through sheer

terror called on the name of the Lord and found salvation. The consequence of His work is as much available now as ever it was and we can rejoice in it.

In connection with remembrance, in the town in which I live that is particularly poignant at the moment for two reasons. One is that it is a military town and there are those in it who have endured conflict and to whom the act of remembrance is very significant. Of course, the believer has his act of remembrance and we acted upon that this morning. That is of prime consequence and significance to the believer. But there are those, and we are not unmindful of them, who remember the suffering that they and their friends endured and sometimes it meant a painful loss of friendship. Quite a number in our area remember these things and attendance at ceremonies is often interestingly full and, as we might say, well supported. This shows there are feelings in men's hearts which are touched by the work of sacrifice, whatever that might mean to them. To whatever extent it is appreciated, to whatever extent there were results consequent upon it, there are those whose hearts are touched by sacrifice, by loss of life.

The second reason why remembrance is poignant in our area is that just over a year ago there was a severe accident which was reported widely in the local and the national press, when two young people, teenagers and sweethearts, were knocked off a motor bike by a car that went out of control, and they lost their lives. They lost their lives in an instant. Now, that is a solemn matter and it immediately raises the question with us whether we are prepared to enter upon eternity, a question which God would have us to address in our minds. It would have us understand that He has provided a means by which we can be assured as to our eternal condition and position before Him, our eternal salvation, the salvation of our souls and the salvation of our bodies. This occurrence evidently had a profound effect in the locality. You can understand it. Families, friends and neighbours, school friends and schoolteachers, were all distraught, and to this day fresh flowers are placed at the point where those young people died. There is therefore continued in the

hearts of some an act of remembrance. They provide fresh flowers to be put there. The old are cleared away and the next day or the next week fresh are placed there. It is over a year since these young people lost their lives.

Now, these things are affecting, but what remembrance is there generally - and what remembrance is there in your heart - of the sacrifice and the death of Jesus? Of what consequence is it to the world at large? Of what significance is it to you? The One who did not deserve to die, the One in whom there was no reason in essence, in actuality, for death to intervene, laid down His life – we have used these words already – that He might take it again. He who did not deserve death has laid down His life and at the same time it can be said that His life was taken from the earth. He was in control but there were those who moved against Him. There were wicked men and wicked hands that were active in crucifying and in slaying the Lord Jesus. What were they doing? What were they thinking? What remembrance was there on their part of what they had done? Of what significance is it to you that He has laid down His life? The fact is that He laid down His life even for those evil men who were maltreating Him. He laid it down for Jerusalem that had excluded Him. The glory, the grace of it, is that the glad tidings were preached from that very point. Think of it, the grace of God! These things are to mean something to us, they are of significance: I trust they mean something to you. The grace of God in Jesus overabounded in the face of rejection, in the face of rebellion on the part of Israel, in the face of ignorance, and enmity – He was delivered up through enmity, this we know – in the face of the suffering that was put upon Him, which He passed through and endured without any deviation from the will of God which He had set Himself to accomplish. He endured these things for the sake of those who were enacting them. He endured them for the sake of those who were prime and prominent in rejecting Him. He endured these things for Israel. He endured these things for *all men*. He endured them for *you* and for *me*. How poignant these things are! I wonder if we compare one thing with another. We are moved in our hearts about

the incidents that occur and we might be stirred enough because of catastrophe and calamity to give money to one cause or another – I do not raise questions about that for there are people in very great need – but what stirring is there in our hearts towards Christ, the One who has given His all? What readiness is there on our part to honour Him and to accord Him the first place?

Now, the great thing is that He has not been forgotten in heaven, and we can rejoice that in the hearts of many He has not been forgotten here. He has been accorded the first place in heaven. He has been given the place at the Father's right hand. It is not only that the Father remembers what He has done but the Father has Him in His very presence and rejoices in Him. He has been put in the place of greatest favour, the place where there can be, and undoubtedly is, communion between the Father and the Son. There is therefore an answer to the sufferings of Christ. There were the sufferings of Christ but there are the glories after these.

Now Peter was writing to the "sojourners of the dispersion", those who themselves were in suffering. I suppose not only was suffering their cause of the dispersion but they endured suffering personally at the time. The scripture seems to bear that out because they were "put to grief by various trials, that the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire, be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ". I would like to suggest as to this that God delights in the presence and in the exercise of faith, in the use of faith on the part of those who hear the glad tidings and respond to it. He delights in it because He has put it there in the first place, but He delights to have us use it.

Repentance is a sign that faith is beginning to work, "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ", Acts 20:21. He is the One in whom our faith is to be centred and fixed, "towards our Lord Jesus Christ". What an object of faith He is! But even when faith is beginning to stir within us God observes it and marks it. I think it is right to say that He treasures it because the scripture here says that there is what is "much more precious than of

gold": "the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire, be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ". You wonder at the sacrifice that has been made by so many as to which there are various memories and memorials and remembrances. You wonder what the outcome is. But God is acting deliberately. God has acted deliberately in Christ in what He has accomplished in answer to His will and to secure our blessing. He is acting deliberately with you and with me that there might be an outcome to the trial, however severe it is or however light it might seem to be, an outcome for His pleasure. "The proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold" is to have this result "be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ".

And He is coming. He is coming again. There is no doubt about that. It is an aspect of the gospel, an aspect of the truth, in which the believer rejoices and I hope you rejoice. He has already come to this scene. He said, "I am come" (John 10: 10), which is most interesting expression, not simply that I have come, but "I am come", as if the whole scene has been affected by the coming of Jesus and the effect of it even now is as if He has only just come. In coming to this scene, He has made an entire difference to it and, though that might not be acknowledged by men at large, it is acknowledged by believers by virtue of the fact that they repent and believe. It would not be possible for them to do that, it would not be possible for the Father to look on and treasure that which is in the heart of one and another, were it not that the Lord had been to this scene. He has made an entire difference to this scene in coming to it. He has made an entire difference to it in leaving it. How much He accomplished in leaving it! But He is coming again. What a prospect it is! There are those who will reign when He comes, whom He will acknowledge. There are those in whom God's work is proceeding and I trust it is proceeding in you and in me. Remarkable and impossible though it might seem, there are those in whom God's work is coming to perfection, such that they can come with Him and they can reign with Him. There is a beauty, there is a glory, a

radiancy about the work of God in the divine eye - and I trust increasingly it is in your eye and in mine - which is unmistakable, which is durable, which will go through into the eternal day for God's pleasure.

Now, there is what needs to be pressed in the glad tidings, "the salvation of your souls". Once again you wonder about those who have suffered and who have given their lives for this cause or that, for those who have suffered accidents and so on. You wonder what they knew about the salvation of their souls. Solemn consideration! But what do you know about the salvation of your soul? Have you discovered that there is One in whom it is assured? We have spoken of God speaking in the Person of the Son. We have spoken of Christ as the light, as the door and as the shepherd and many other references. It is not simply a case of saying that these are the terms of the truth. They are to be accepted if we are to make any progress. The preaching concerns Christ Himself and the blessing that is available from God. It is available in Christ and in no other. Let us be assured of that! There is no-one more attractive than the One in whom the blessing for man that is in God's heart is available. How attractive is, "the salvation of your souls"!

Now, prophets "sought out and searched out" that salvation. There was much enquiry beforehand as to that which would be introduced when the Messiah came to this scene. The fact, of course, is that when the Messiah came He was cut off and He had nothing. What a solemn thing that is! But by that very act, by that very fact, the blessing has become available to Jew and Gentile alike. Think of the grace of it! We can rejoice in the grace of God. The ultimate crime in the rejection of Christ has been met by the fulness of grace, and what grace it is! It is a measure of the fulness of grace and the richness of supply which comes from the Father's heart that, in spite of *utter* rejection on the part of men, grace should still be flowing, and it flows 'o'er the barren place where Jesus died' (hymn 13). Think of it! What a flow it is! When you begin to see the flow of grace, the barren land means less and less to you. It is unproductive Godward. But there is what is productive in the

acceptance of grace that is still flowing in the glad tidings, that in which God rejoices and in which you and I can find blessing.

So there were those who looked into the question of blessing. I suppose they strained their minds to do so. They made diligent enquiry. They looked up all the references they could find to see what this salvation might be. They were inquisitive and they were determined if at all possible to find what would occur when the Messiah came. You do not have to do research of that kind. You do not have to move heaven or earth, as the expression is. You do not have to look up or look down. You do not have to look here or there. You do not have to labour because the work has been done by Christ and all that you need to do, as was indicated earlier if Israel were ready to realise it, is to look and to live. You will recall the time when the serpent bit and the toxic effects were felt and there were those who died. A serpent of brass was made by Moses. It was raised up and the exhortation was to look and to live. And it is open to you to look and to live, to see Jesus, not only Jesus where He was on the cross, where He was lifted up so that He became visible to all. That is one of the meanings, perhaps the essential meaning, of Jesus lifted up in John's gospel. He could be seen by all and the benefit of His work could be found by all. But He is now lifted up and has ascended. Where faith has begun to operate within, where there is readiness to look up away from this scene, away from self, away from the attractions around, to see Jesus, we can do so and can find our life in Him. We can look up and we can live: that is the great result of the sufferings of Jesus.

Just contemplate what is meant by the serpent of brass, Jesus was made sin. He was made that very thing. The serpent was active in seduction and deceit at the outset and to some extent he was successful in it. I say 'to some extent' because no doubt he wished for even greater damage. That is what is in Satan's mind, as much damage as possible to attack God who caused him to fall because he lifted himself up in pride. But there was that which Satan was successful in bringing about in the character of the serpent, its seduction, its persuasion. And there are those in this

scene who would persuade us into another way, another path, another manner of life. There are siren voices that can still be heard, persuasive, attractive. I wonder if we are prepared to refuse them if we hear them. There *is* the appeal in the glad tidings and there is the injunction still which lives on from the Old Testament. The instruction given when the serpent was lifted up was to look and to live. Christ was made the thing from which He shrank. He was made the thing that God abominated. Think of the enormity of it! He in whom there was no sin, in whom it *was not*, was made that very thing “that we might become God’s righteousness in him”, 2 Cor 5: 21. That has its fulfilment in a day yet to come but we can come into the gain of His work even now and come to appreciate not only the sufferings of Christ but have some entrance into the joy that was consequent on those sufferings. There was what lay before Him, which He has now entered upon. There is joy in His heart. There was sorrow in His heart when He was here and in particular when He suffered. There is joy in His heart now. There may be sorrow in your heart. There may be good reason for it. We have spoken about the sorrows that are endured by humanity and we can understand the way this and that calamity, difficulty, loss, bereavement, restriction and so on all bear heavily upon man. There is what is concentrated on man to cause him to be occupied with himself. Satan is adept at causing us to be focused upon ourselves, unable to lift our eyes up, to look and to live, to lift our eyes up to Christ where He is, having accomplished all, having been given the place of glory.

How liberating a view of Christ is! I commend it to all who are here and all who *can* hear, that we are to look up, look away from the scene in which we are. There is some gain in looking back, I would accept, because we can learn from history. There are those who seem to be entirely unaware of history. The view of history has changed as time has passed, but there is profit in looking at history as recorded in the Bible, in looking in particular at the way it all pointed on to Christ. The fulfilment of God’s mind was by Christ Himself. These things are of great “historical” interest, and I use the

word “historical” in inverted commas. But the incentive in the glad tidings is to look up. As doing so, we can see Jesus where He is and see something of “the glories after these”.

Now, just as Christ has suffered and has entered into the glory there is shortly to be an end to that which we are enduring here. It may be that you are burdened; it may be that you are bowed down by the difficulties. I say, not only look and live, but look up to Christ where He is. That is the advantage for the believer now. It is not only a view of Christ, One who suffered, who was Himself made sin. Surely that is full of meaning and full of result. But we are now able because of the work that Christ has completed to look up to see Him where He is in glory and that itself brings practical salvation and deliverance.

I wonder whether we have laid hold of the fact – it took me some years to do so - that salvation is *in* Christ. It is *in* Christ. It is not in repetition of scripture. It is not in learning it by heart. It is not by good conduct. It is not by familiarity with the terms of the truth, however well we may know them. All that is available to the believer is available *in Him* and it is open to us now to look not only at Christ where He was on the cross, but at Christ where He is in heaven at the Father’s right hand. There were the sufferings that preceded, the sufferings were essential, the sufferings were deep and unutterable; and the Lord Himself knows what it means for you and for me to go through any suffering. There was an outcome for Christ in glory and He is in the place of glory. There is the fulfilment of the word of scripture, “the glories after these”, but there is to be an outcome for you and for me; there is to be what is wrought in your heart and mine which is of this character, soul salvation and before long the redemption of the body; but there is to be an outcome now in the sense that *you* perceive, *you* see the glory of Christ, and that has an effect upon you.

We have been affected - although it is not my intention to preach an emotive gospel – by some impression of the sufferings of Christ. But what about the effect of the glories of Christ? What about that effect? Have we considered that? Is our eye upon Him?

Are we in the gain of His glories as much as we are of His sufferings? We give thanks for His sufferings. We have every reason to be thankful for them. We will be eternally thankful for them. But are the glories of Christ having an effect upon us? Do they brighten us? Do they quicken our step? Do they enable us to continue in our walk here in newness of life? Of course, we know that entails identification with Christ in His death and His resurrection, but “the glories after these”, speak of what lies beyond. He has entered into the place of glory assigned to Him by the Father and there is a place *in spirit* for you and for me there. We speak of the glory to come, which is actuality, but *in spirit* it is open to you and to me to have part in that now, to be affected by it, to be illuminated by it, to be fully in the gain of it so that we can walk in a different manner in this scene. It is for us to come to the light and to remain in the light, but let us recognise the greatness of the light that shines. It is a light shining in and from Christ in heaven and it is available to us that it might shine into our hearts, “for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”, 2 Cor. 4:6. What comes to the surface in that scripture, I think, is not only the knowledge of the truth and the way God has enunciated it in the Person of the Son, but the fulness of glory.

I wonder if we have thought about light and glory. Light shines in the glad tidings and it is intended to shine in your soul and mine, but the fact is that Christ is in the place of glory and the radiancy in Him is shining out. The light into which you and I come is not a cold light; it is not a clinical light; it is not a light which merely exposes evil and helps us to distinguish good from evil, necessary though that it is: it is a light that warms, a light that is calculated to have and does have an effect upon the innermost part of us. There is to be with us that “the hidden man of the heart”, 1 Pet 3: 4. What does that mean? That refers to Christ where He is. We treasure His pathway here, His sufferings and all that He has done; they are to be of increasing value to us. But “the hidden man of the heart” is that which is treasured in the heart as to Christ *where He is* in the light and radiancy of the His glory. We can see that there is a kind of

overlap of meaning of light and of glory. The radiancy of His glory is to strike us and, if I am not using too extreme a word, to *inspire* us, to *move* us towards Christ. The glory of Christ is to enable us to move in a way that pleases Him in the scene that is contrary to Him. These things are very blessed but they are open to us. They have been made available to us at great cost, which we are ever to remember. But we are to rejoice in what is available in Christ now, Christ *as He is* and *where He is*.

Do we rejoice in our hearts in His present place, in His present glory, in His present attitude, His disposition which is as much gracious now as it was when He was in this scene and manifested grace to all around? His grace is available to all. It is available to you. It can be appreciated as the heart is open to Him. We can come into the gain of it; we can be expressive of it; we can be those in the gain of the present place of Christ in glory with features of that glory coming into in us. That is what the Father treasures. There is what is far more precious than gold.

Men will go to great lengths to secure gold. We remember from history – not necessarily very profitable history - the gold rushes which occurred in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries and perhaps at other times. Men will travel vast distances across sea and land. They will suffer all kinds of indignities and illnesses and attacks and so on to secure one nugget of gold. What will *you* do to secure for yourself in faith what God values, which is far more precious than gold? What will you do? I say, look at Christ where He is, not only One who was lifted up as the serpent was on the pole, but Christ where He is in His present place of glory with the Father and you will find nuggets aplenty, you will have that which is for your enrichment, both for time and for eternity. May we prove these things for His Name's sake!

GILLINGHAM

26 November 2000

