

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE MYSTERY

Romans 16: 25-27

Ephesians 3:1-12

Luke 15: 3-24

BWL What was in mind in reading these scriptures was to inquire a little as to the mystery that is spoken of here at the end of Romans, and again where we read in Ephesians. While we might get some help as to what Paul means when he speaks of the mystery, it might be helpful to say first what the mystery is not. It is not exactly something that is mysterious or complicated, although there is tremendous scope in it. I think it really involves the greatness of God's thoughts and the greatness of what He is securing for Himself in the present dispensation. The great ultimate is in the end of Ephesians 3: 21, "to him", that is, to God, "be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen". The mystery involves what God is securing for Himself in the present time. I think Paul speaks of it as a mystery because of what he says in the scripture we read in Romans. He says there, "as to which silence has been kept in the times of the ages". God has really taken something from eternity into time. He also says in Ephesians 3 that it was hidden - it was hidden in God: "to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God". It was a great thing that God hid in Himself. In the present dispensation, God has been revealed. The Lord Jesus has done that; He has come into manhood and made God known. In case we think of things being complicated - for God's thoughts are wonderful and great or as being too much for us, I have read in Luke 15, because there, I think, we get an illustration of the administration of the mystery; what speaks of the three Persons of the Godhead working to bring persons like you and me in. I wondered if we could maybe get some help in relation to this matter as to the mystery?

SWD That is very good. We have not followed "cleverly imagined fables", 2 Pet 1: 16. That is the way Peter puts it; that is man's mind; but the mind of God - how wonderful! You are introducing us in these passages into something that God has treasured, and kept.

BWL Yes; that is good, not "following cleverly imagined fables" - the apostle closes Romans, which is the great gospel epistle, with a doxology to "the only wise God". Think of the greatness of God's thoughts and the wisdom that lay behind them, because God has

secured what He had in His purposes. And He has not had to change anything because of what has come in. God's thoughts stand; they stand in all the glory and the wisdom of God. That comes into both these sections we read in Romans and in Ephesians. It would involve not only the purpose of God but also God's counsels, and the way He has taken to secure His purpose, which sets aside the wisdom of man.

EJH The Lord says, "thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent", Matt 11: 25. What do you think about that, "hid these things"?

BWL What we are speaking of the natural mind cannot encompass. So, for us, there is a way into these things that involves the gospel; that is the only way we can come into these things. But God's thoughts stand in all their greatness. So that, for us, the work of Christ was necessary to bring us in. But it is those that appreciate the Lord Jesus as Saviour that come into this. You sometimes hear speak of Paul's two ministries - his ministry of the gospel, the glad tidings, and then his ministry in relation to the assembly but they are really all one. But for us to come in to it, we have to come by way of the gospel, would you say?

SWD Peter and James and John had a certain advantage in "having been eye-witnesses of *his* majesty"; but Paul coming in later, the mystery was made known to him.

BWL Yes, he speaks of that in Colossians. It was given to him "to complete the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been made manifest to his saints; to whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you the hope of glory", Col 1: 25-27. That involves Christ's place in the affections of the saints.

MTH What would you say as to this being made manifest by prophetic scriptures? If I understand your thoughts as to that, it brings to mind those opening verses of Hebrews 1: 1: "God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly spoke to the fathers in the prophets", but I wondered about your thoughts as to the specific mention of the prophetic scriptures here?

BWL I think this involves New Testament scriptures; this would be New Testament prophecy which relates to the present dispensation, because we look back in the Old Testament in the light of the new, in the light of Christ glorified. And the Spirit as indwelling believers opens up, sheds the light backwards on the Old Testament; but we do not, I think,

get any direct references to the present time of the Spirit here and to the assembly directly referred to in the Old Testament. So, in that sense, as to what we enjoy at the present time, as the scripture says here, "silence has been kept in the times of the ages, but which has now been made manifest".

MTH I appreciate that contrast or difference, because it has now been made manifest by the prophetic scriptures. I think it is important to see the object - that may be the wrong word - that it is made known "**for** obedience of faith". The object of all this is the obedience of faith. What we have said as to the glad tidings is important in that way; obedience of faith comes in there, Rom 1: 5.

BWL Yes, that is the way in for us, the obedience of faith; so that Paul's exercise in relation to the saints in Rome is that they are to be established. We often speak of the boards of the tabernacle standing up, and that is like what we see in Romans: believers are to be fully established in the glad tidings. But that being the case, we are immediately brought into this wonderful realm that answers to the heart of God. So, what God has now in the assembly, and what God will have in the assembly, is far greater than anything He has had in times gone past. God waited; He had to wait for His beloved Son that this may be brought about. This is something from before time that God had in His mind. And now He is free to open up what was in His heart. This is to affect us, that is the exercise in relation to these occasions. We sometimes sing hymn 118 towards the end of the service of God; I got a fresh touch from this a few weeks ago; one of the verses says:

'Twas Thy thought in revelation,
To present to men,
Secrets of Thine own affections,
Theirs to win. (Hymn 118)

God is really making His own heart known, and that is to affect us, is it not? We desire to answer in a fuller way to what is for God Himself.

MTH In the Song of Songs, it has been said that the object really, the outcome of that book, is a full triumph over the spouse's affections; so I appreciate what you have said.

BWL That is good, and I would like to encourage the young ones to read ministry. The Song of Songs is a short book - Mr Coates's Outline of that book is a larger book, but before you even get into the book he has a little foreword in which he says, 'The Song of Songs is a book for

the heart', vol 7. That would stir our affections, would it not?

KDD You just mentioned the heart. That is what really lies behind everything that you are bringing out - the heart of God, that He should touch our hearts as to these things.

BWL Yes, exactly. This is not a matter merely of knowledge; it is a matter of affection. Of course, we want to be intelligent in relation to things, and that would be right, right affections. We would want to answer God in a way that is pleasing to Him. The key is the affections, and God has made His affections so wonderfully known. And as we learn in Romans, "He who, yea, has not spared his own Son", chap 8: 32. There are the feelings of God in relation to what it has cost Him to bring us into this. The purpose of God, what God had in mind from before time, is to have men in His presence like Christ. We know that sin came in; the fall came about and sin came in, but God did not have to change any of His plans on that account to bring us into blessing. That involves the wisdom of God.

SWD And as regards the greatness of what is available in the assembly at the present time, it is said as to the woman of worth, "The heart of her husband confideth in her", Prov 31: 11. What it must mean to the heart of Christ to have a vessel intelligent as to His thoughts, and full of affection and regard for Him: "The heart of her husband confideth in her, and he shall have no lack of spoil".

BWL Yes, that is good; so you think then what a wonderful vessel the assembly is, because she answers to the heart of Christ in faithfulness in the present period when He is absent. She answers to Him in faithfulness as His wife, and she answers to Him too in affection as the bride, as well as being the vessel of praise Godward. She is going to be God's dwelling eternally, "the tabernacle of God is with men", Rev 21: 3. That is the assembly, is it not? What a wonderful vessel she is. We sometimes sing:

The concept and the consummation Thine! (Hymn 370)

The thoughts originated with God Himself.

Perhaps we should go on to Ephesians 3. I suppose the epistle to the Ephesians is really the opening up of the mystery. Paul touches on the mystery at the end of Romans just to introduce it. Well, there is a point in us being saved. Redemption is for God; salvation is for us, but redemption is for God; God is securing something for Himself. Then

the mystery is just touched on at the end of Romans. Paul as the prisoner of the Christ Jesus is free to open up in Ephesians, and, as the brethren will know, this whole chapter apart from verse 1, is in brackets. The chapter almost suggests that God has taken something from eternity into time; there has been no mention of this before. But God always had it in His mind. We are brought into this to have part in what is responsive to God at the present time. Ephesians 3 is the assembly as it is for God. When we come to chapter 5 it is the assembly for Christ.

SWD Israel was to be His own peculiar people, but alas, it has taken all this time. It will yet be, but in the meantime what Christ finds in the assembly is of such value, such worth! That you and I should be made intelligent as to it is wonderful, is it not?

BWL Yes, it is, and God's sovereignty lies behind it. It is wonderful to consider that that is how the epistle opens, that God had us in mind from before time. We are chosen in Christ, and we are "blessed ... with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation". God had us in mind before time, before He started working with men, before He started His operations with Israel. It is not that God found failure in Israel and therefore had to turn to try something else. God had these things in His mind from before time was. I suppose the greatest height reached in the Old Testament was possibly in relation to Solomon in glory, but no one was 'in Solomon' - but we are chosen in Christ. That is wonderful; there could not be anything greater.

MTH What you are bringing before us is encouraging. Where we had read earlier it speaks of "him that is able to establish you", Rom 16: 25. I was thinking of that thought of establishing. If something has been established it is made to last; it is made to endure. I have been encouraged with that thought, and what you have brought before us as to what we can go in for. You had mentioned earlier about looking, about spending time reading Scripture and reading ministry: just to speak very practically about it, these are things that are to go through. There is nothing else that would have gone through, but I had that thought of what is established in us. These are things that we should be putting our time towards because they will go through. There is nothing else that will go through that we see in this scene.

BWL Yes, that is good, and there is nothing, no foundation in this world. Being established - it recalls the two pillars at the front of Solomon's temple: 'He will establish' and 'in Him is strength' (see

footnotes 1 Kings 7: 21); so that the idea of what is established is necessary, but think of what we are established in. We are established in something that can never break down, and will not break down. God is going to bring it through for Himself. We are in days of breakdown publicly, but God's thoughts stand. I think it is good to get a hold of that - to get a view really of what is normal, and that would help us in relation to being established.

DCD The Lord said, "on this rock I will build my assembly" (Matt 16: 18); does the purpose relating to this go back before time?

BWL Yes, I think that is good. There is that which is solid. The Father had revealed something to Peter; it came from the Father. If it comes from the Father, it cannot be anything other than stable, can it?

KDD As to what our brother has brought up, this matter recalls what Paul says, that the firm foundation of God stands, 2 Tim 2: 19. It speaks of what He is securing, these things that He has purposed and He has brought about, as you are bringing before us, this mystery. It stands, does it not? It is not going to be changed by anyone; God's thoughts go through.

BWL Yes, that is good because what you refer to is in 2 Timothy 2: "the firm foundation of God stands". Well that still applies in days of departure, does it not? Without deciding exactly what this firm foundation is, it is of God, is it not? And it stands. There is that which is going through, and that is what we want to lay hold of.

SWD It says, "having this seal, the Lord knows those that are his". We rejoice in that; "and" in v 19, that is our part, is it not?

BWL Yes, that is right - "every one who names the name of the Lord". That is profession, is it not? If we name the name of the Lord we are professing something, and we have to be true to what we profess. So what Paul says here is "to enlighten all with the knowledge". This is for every believer; it is to affect us. One of the things that light is, or should be, is attractive. If we have light as to something, it would attract us into it.

LJG What is attractive is not an arbitrary thought, or anything you would have merely to conform to. It is something of the attraction of Christ Himself. I was thinking as to what Paul says here, "purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I beseech you not to faint

through my tribulations for you, which is your glory”, Eph 3: 11-13. Whatever we may pass through, there is that which has been established in Christ that is so much greater and is stable. We are to be nearer to Him, attracted to Him, so that the believer is established in Christ. Then we think of what we may pass through and what each one would pass through; so that Paul would say you are not to faint; so the strength and power of the Spirit indeed too in the inner man would help us with that. What you said as to what is attractive so that we are drawn to it is helpful.

BWL The Ephesian saints loved Paul; he had been local with them for three years. It has often been said that the epistle to the Ephesians is not the pinnacle of Paul's ministry - the Ephesian saints themselves were. So he is writing to persons that we could think knew what he is talking about. I suppose they felt that Paul was in a Roman prison - this is one of the prison epistles - and he says in chapter 3 he is “prisoner of the Christ Jesus”, v 1. In chapter 4 he is “the prisoner in the Lord” - he was literally in a Roman prison, and the Ephesian saints would have felt that. But really, what he is saying is that what they were to enjoy could not be limited. That is a tremendous encouragement for us. There is no limit from the divine side, is there? The limit comes in on our side. We are to be attracted into these things. It involved that God made Himself known. This mystery was hidden throughout the ages in God.

God made Himself known in various ways in the Old Testament; He was known as Creator, He was known in a family way in relation to Israel, in the way that He redeemed them from Egypt He was known in His faithfulness, but Christ has come in and has revealed God. God has made Himself known in Father, Son and Spirit. You may say that all that can be known of God by a creature has been made known. God's heart has been fully opened up. God is free to come out with the greatest of His thoughts that belong to eternity.

PDB Could you say a little more as to what has been “made known”, where it says here, “made known through the assembly”, in verse 10? You have been speaking about the idea of what has been “made known”, but it says “might be made known through the assembly”.

BWL It is “the all-various wisdom of God” that is made known through the assembly. These are heavenly, angelic beings, I suppose, principalities and authorities - they are not spoken of as angels here but I think that is what they are. The dignity of God's thoughts in relation to the assembly are being brought out so that these heavenly beings are

given their dignified titles: “principalities and authorities in the heavenlies”. The all-various wisdom of God refers to what the assembly is to Christ, and what the assembly is to God. It is a great vessel of praise, and that is now; we do not have to wait for the day of eternity for that. And these creatures are looking on with wonder, at God's wisdom. We sometimes sing of His “thoughts so bold, so free” (Hymn 92) - they originated in God Himself to bring about this answer. We read in chapter 2: 1, “and *you*” - that is the Gentiles - “being dead in your offences and sins”; nothing, no response Godward whatsoever. God has wrought and has worked to bring about this answer, this glorious vessel which will answer to the heart of Christ and answer to the heart of God. What wisdom!

SWD So, do we always comport ourselves in such a way as to be a lesson book for these heavenly dignitaries?

BWL Well, I am sure that is a test for us all. We are seeing things from the divine viewpoint. And this is what we are as in Christ. We do not build up to that, do we? That is what we are; that is our standing. Now whether our state is up to that might be a question from time to time. But, nevertheless, it is true *of us*: that is how God looks on us.

LJG I wonder if you could say a little more as to the all-various wisdom of God. I am not sure if it is spoken of elsewhere, but I just wondered as to that statement. Maybe you could just open that up a little bit as to the all-various wisdom.

BWL I am not sure it is exactly referred to elsewhere. I think the all-various wisdom of God involves counsel; God's purpose is the objective that He has in view, but counsel is the way He is going to bring that to pass. And then we have the ways of God, the working out of things in His ways. But I think the all-various wisdom of God is seen in counsel. It refers to something before the incarnation. That is counsel, I think: how is this going to come about? And God's wisdom has been such. We know what it is at work in our lives - we make a plan and then something comes in that we did not foresee, and then we have to change the plan, or perhaps we have different options: if this happens we will do something else, and things change, do they not? God does not have to change anything. The all-various wisdom of God, His counsels are perfect; He has not had to change anything.

SWD I remember Mr Roy Hibbert saying many years ago that God has something in mind and He is not going to change it for anybody.

BWL That is the truth; He is bringing it through in persons. It is persons that are being secured for His glory.

PDB In order to secure that which is for His glory in persons, persons need to change. So, we all need to change to come into an appreciation of what God's unchangeable plan is. We need to change; we need to change in that positive sense towards what is of God's mind, not change in terms of turning away from what is of God.

BWL Yes, that is right; I suppose the apostle is a wonderful example too in this section where he says, "To me, less than the least of all saints", v 8. That was not any sort of put-on humility or anything; that is how he felt. This is the greatness of God's thoughts and they have been made known to him, and Paul was an elect vessel - Ananias got that word, "this man is an elect vessel to me", Acts 9: 15. Paul was chosen specially to open up this wonderful truth for the saints, and yet it did not inflate him. That is always a danger with us, is it not? But, he says, "To me, less than the least of all saints has this grace been given". I suppose it is a bit like what our brother referred to at the outset: God has hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to babes. That is really how we come into it, is it not?

StWD Sometimes we tend to question God's timing in things, but we should not because His timing is perfect. We sometimes think if some idea had come in so many years ago it would have been a tremendous help, but in His plans and counsels it comes in when it needs to come in. And it is perfect, and we should always be thankful for that too, and always seek to understand God's all-various wisdom. Sometimes it is quite a test.

BWL Well, it is, and we can

... praise Him for all that is past
And trust Him for all that is to come. (Hymn 23)

Faith is mentioned quite a lot in Ephesians. We are in the faith period; we are to be maintained in that.; and our faith is in a Person.

PWH I suppose our entrance into this, the revelation of this, is in the fact that Christ delivered Himself up for the assembly, Eph 5: 25. It is the only vessel, the only family, in which the truth of the mystery could be understood. But it took the work of Christ in delivering Himself up. The fact that that is referred to in Ephesians is particularly telling, because it is brought out there, and then Paul goes on to say, "This

mystery is great, but / speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly”, v 32. We are there in subjection in the assembly recognising Christ as Head. That is why the truth can be opened up to us, because the assembly acknowledges Christ as Head. So we can access the all-various wisdom.

BWL Yes; that is good; I think that helps. So that we have earlier on in Ephesians as to God's thoughts in relation to Christ: “gave Him to be head over all things **to** the assembly, which is His body” (Eph 1: 22), whereas in Colossians He is head *of* the assembly (chap 1: 18), so that the assembly is deriving all from Christ. We sometimes sing,

Great source of wisdom, power and food, (Hymn 199).

Christ, as Head, is imparting to the assembly: He is “head over all things to the assembly”, Eph 1: 22. In the world to come, she is seen as sharing in His headship. What a vessel! No other family will be united to Christ as the assembly is. The assembly is the greatest of all the families. We are given to have part in that and we feel it - we are to understand it more. Mr James Taylor's ministry had much in relation to the assembly. We need help in relation to what answers to the heart of Christ. It is a wonderful thing to have part in that.

PWH So, in that way, the reference in Romans is to a joint body: it is a wondrous thing that it is “one body in Christ”, Rom 12: 5. It really facilitates the opening up of the truth. One body - it is not individual congregations; it is one body in Christ.

BWL Yes, that is right, so that the body derives all from the Head. We see that in our literal bodies: the same is true. Paul uses the analogy of the body: that the body derives everything from the head. The body is introduced in Romans to preserve us from independency, and it is introduced in Corinthians to preserve us from what is clerical, see FER vol 4 p146.

We should go on to Luke 15 because here we have the Lord: “What man of you having a hundred sheep”. I was encouraged by the hymn we started with:

... to seek and save Thy sheep, (Hymn 293).

So, the Lord is operating, and then the Spirit is operating: “what woman having ten drachmas”, and then the Father is operating. And what is in view? It is in view of bringing persons in. That is, I think, “the administration of the mystery”. An administration means that

something is working. Well, Paul had part in it and we are to have part in it. Divine Persons were working; They *are* working. The Lord could say, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work", John 5: 17. There is a work going on and it is to bring about an answer in persons like you and me.

KDD I was interested in what you said in your opening remarks about the three divine Persons having their part in bringing these things about, revealing and opening up the mystery, and that resulting in the return from ourselves. It is something that the whole of the Godhead has part in, is it not? Each one working together.

BWL That is exactly it. Think of the oneness so that divine Persons are operating in unison. They are operating in unison, operating as one, and it is all to bring about this response to God Himself - affectionate response.

DTH We have to see that the assembly is the vessel which has the greatest knowledge of the three divine Persons, and I wonder if we realise the importance of the assembly, which is the chief interest to God - is it my chief interest? That is the challenge. And the Lord Jesus says in John 17 :22, "that they may be one, as we are one". That is the object of it, that there should be unity amongst us. Would that be right?

BWL Yes, it certainly would. These things are to engage our hearts. We see what is in the divine mind. It is really to stir us up in relation to these things, and see what is for the heart of Christ and the heart of God. It is really to help us to come into this realm of enjoyment. This is to be enjoyed, is it not? Think of what God enjoys, and we are to be free. God would have us to be free in His presence and enjoying what He is enjoying: the fatted calf, that is what God is enjoying. The Father is enjoying Christ, and we are to enjoy Christ.

DTH And there is the thought of unity, "that they may be one, as we are one". That is a very high standard; it is not simply by commandment. The Lord was saying, "that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them", John 17: 26. Think of the testimony there is to the world in relation to that: a high standard. And it is open to all; it is not just a special few.

BWL That is exactly right - to enlighten all. God in His goodness has operated to bring us here, has He not? There is a side of our responsibility, but then you might ask, "Why am I here?". We are exercised about these things, and we should be, but God has seen to it

that I am here.

DTH Well, is it our chief interest? You think of the little boy: Andrew says, "There is a little boy here who has five loaves and two fishes", John 6: 9. What the Lord could do with one simple expression in the young amongst us - brothers and sisters!

BWL So that we are to be brought into this realm of rejoicing. The sheep is brought to the house; the drachma was, you might say, never out of the house, but it was lost; it was out of circulation. Money is of no use if it is not in circulation, is it? That is like us; we are to be in circulation. Where are we to be in circulation? We have been set in local assemblies, and we are to be set in circulation in relation to what is for God. The Spirit is operating, the Lord is operating, so that there is light here again - she lights a lamp. You might say we come together and the lamp is lit. The Spirit operates, and operates in our hearts, and this sweeping is a gentle matter. It is not like going around the workshop floors where all sorts of stuff has fallen off the bottom of dirty vehicles that needs swept up and thrown away. This is a gentle action because the Spirit is looking for something; He is looking for something in our hearts; and He is operating. Why do we get an impression as to something? That is the Spirit; the Spirit operating in our hearts. The whole point is that it is then brought into circulation, and the whole house gets the benefit of it.

DTH It is the whole house and then the Lord in John 17 refers to the world, "that the world may know ... the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them", v 23. What is the testimony we render in that way? And how valuable the meetings are.

BWL Well, I think we want to be more in this sort of environment, where there is rejoicing, where there is safety, where the truth is loved, where divine Persons are loved, and where They are free to operate.

PWH It was not just that he came back: the younger son came into the house, and was it not that he became part of the house? He was part of the house.

BWL Yes, that is good. That is like being in circulation. And the house, when we think of a house, we think of a structure, we think of a building such as Solomon's house, the house that Solomon built, but what God is building He is building in persons; but we become part of it. You will remember Mr Harthill probably better than me, but I remember being at the Supper with him on a few occasions and he took part to the

Father and he made reference as to 'not being spectators but being participators'. And that is what we are brought in for. We are livingly in what is responsive to God Himself because our hearts have been so affected by what has been done for us. When the father saw him, he was yet a long way off. We are not told how far the younger son moved. It is not a halfway matter. As soon as he moved in his heart, the father was towards him. How assured he would be of the father's love. He was assured that every matter had been removed and all that was left was complacency.

SWD The father ran. It is not often that we get this idea associated with God but in this case the father ran.

BWL Yes, that is good; that is love in activity. That is what the father was looking for; in this case he was looking for repentance; he was looking for a change. A change had come about. And immediately the father is free, his heart is free to assure us. There is no probationary period in Christianity.

PDB The Father's thoughts and plans are much greater. The son had a plan, did he not? He was repentant and he had a plan in what he was going to say to his father, and his plan was to be a servant; but he did not get that far in terms of the father. He was able to express his repentance, but the father did not give him a chance to tell him that he was going to be a servant; he was a son.

BWL That is good; that leads us to further on in Ephesians 3 where we read, "to him that able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think", v 20. Here is the younger son; he has his suggestions, his proposal - "make me as one of thy hired servants". Well, what is the answer? "To him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think." He is brought in to the liberty of sonship, is he not? That is wonderful. We often go over these things - the sandals - only the family could wear sandals in the house. It really brings out the liberty and dignity of sonship that we are free to move about in these realms.

LJG Our brother preached here last weekend as to that, being set free, "If therefore the Son shall set you free, ye shall be really free", John 8: 36. But, "Christ has set us free in freedom", Gal 5 : 1. So there is an area in this house, where there is what you have mentioned as to the liberty of sonship, the scope of that which would fill this mansion but there is much greater which the father had in mind for the son; there is such a great scope. I was thinking as to the liberty that we are brought

into in that way, that it is greater than what we could ever think.

BWL Yes, that is right, and sonship is for God. Of course, we enjoy it and there is what we come into; we appreciate that, but sonship is for God. This is what is answering to His own heart.

EJH Is there something of the mystery in what the father's particular joy was - the son who this day had come to life again?

BWL Yes, that is good; that is an Ephesian touch as well. I think it has been said that "lost and has been found" is Romans. At the beginning of Romans, we get all sorts of persons presented, and they are living in their sins; in that sense they were lost but have been found. But in Ephesians, "*you*, being dead in your offences and sins" (chap 2: 1); there was nothing for God at all: "dead and has come to life", Luke 15: 32. That is wonderful.

VLH I was thinking that God does not want these things to be mysterious to anyone. Both of these sons may have known the house; its true character was evidently a mystery to them which is a danger for all of us. These things are not understood by the natural man, or the religious man - the older son would represent the Jew. The younger son came to himself, and that is an important thing. God "enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent", Acts 17: 30. Then the father did the rest, did he not?

BWL Yes, that is right; so from our side repentance is required. But then, what opens up to us then is the fullness of God's thoughts. These things are true of us before we may have any appreciation of them whatsoever. But if we can see from God's side what He has in mind, it would help us to appreciate the greatness of His thoughts for us, and it would help us to be free in response to Him.

MTH The thought that is here in these verses as to "Bring out" and "bring", particularly in relation to what you have been bringing before us, because these things were in the house all along. We have been speaking about what was hidden. They were there all along, but "Bring out": that is like the revelation of the mystery.

BWL Yes, that is good; they were there from before time, but now, God is free, because of all that Christ has done; God is free. It is like "chosen us in him", Eph 1: 4? We speak about the best robe being 'clothed in the worth of Christ'; "chosen us in him before the world's foundation". Here, you might say, the best robe would help us to appreciate that.

God would want us to have the conscious sense that we are loved as Christ is loved; that is tremendous. These secrets of His own affections, affections of God for the heart of Christ. We are brought in to know and share something as to that love. It is the same love that is towards us; the more we realise and appreciate that the freer we would be. So that these things are not to be strange. God has been free to open up His heart. We sometimes sing too:

... all, all is told! (Hymn 207)

God is not holding anything back, is He? He has made known the very best of His thoughts.

DTH The climax of the Lord's ministry is John 17. And the object in His ministry was, "I desire that where I am they also may be with me", v 24. Well, where is Christ? Where is He? He is in the bosom of the Father, and we have a place in His. What an area of such affection, where the enjoyment of that love is open to us.

BWL Yes, that is good. And it is the Lord's desire that we may be there; it is the Father's desire too that we are to be there, and we see Christ - "that they may behold my glory". Christ is the One that has secured everything for God.

CALGARY

28 September 2019

List of Initials:-

P D Brien, Calgary; D C Drever, Calgary; K D Drever, Calgary; S W Drever, Calgary; Steve W Drever, Calgary; L J Gray, Calgary; V L Harvey, Vancouver; E J Hibbert, Calgary; M T Holland, Calgary; D T Howie, Edmonton; P W Howie, Edmonton; B W Lovie, Aberdeen, Scotland

FIXED AND MAINTAINED

Alistair M Brown

Psalm 112: 1, 7-8 (to “not afraid”)

Ephesians 4: 12 (from “with a view to the edifying of the body”)-15

Hebrews 12: 1-3

We read Psalm 112 in our local meeting recently, and the passage in verses 7 and 8, referring to the righteous man's heart being fixed as confiding in God, and his heart being maintained, has been in my mind since then. There is an earlier reference, in Psalm 108, to the heart being fixed:

My heart is fixed, O God: I will sing, yea, I will sing psalms, even with my glory, v 1. In the psalm read we have,

For he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance (v 6).

He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed confiding in Jehovah; His heart is maintained, he is not afraid.

I would seek to encourage myself and all of us to have our hearts fixed and maintained. It is not exactly that we fix our own hearts; the psalmist does not say, 'I fix my heart': he says that the heart of the righteous man is fixed confiding in Jehovah. Nor do we exactly maintain our own hearts; he says, “His heart is maintained”. The implication is that there is One who does this; there is One on whom the heart is fixed and by whom the heart is maintained.

It is a great thing to find stability and certainty: being fixed and maintained relates to stability and certainty, and that brings joy as the believer's heart is fixed on and maintained by Christ. A believer in the assurance of salvation and faith in Christ is joyful in having his or her heart fixed on Christ and maintained by Him. The result of being fixed and maintained in our affections and in our thoughts is confidence, joy and stability. These are tremendously positive things, and stand in great contrast to the world around where nothing is fixed and few things are maintained. Apparent certainties break down; we do not want to be occupied with that, but it is true. In contrast to all that, we have Christ, and He is the One on whom our hearts are to be fixed and by whom our hearts are maintained.

One of the interesting things that came before us in considering these psalms, is that in Psalm 111 you have the works of God

described:

Great are the works of Jehovah; sought out of all that delight in them, v 2.

The works of his hands are truth and judgment; all his precepts are faithful: Maintained for ever and ever, done in truth and uprightness, v 7, 8.

We can apply everything that is said in Psalm 111 to Christ. His works are great and they are sought out of all that delight in them; His righteousness abideth forever; what He does and what He says is "maintained for ever and ever"; He is unchanging. As Isaiah says, "he is the stability of thy times", chap 33: 6. So Psalm 111 sets out the faithfulness and immutability of all that the Lord Jesus says and does. What a One He is! He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and to the ages to come", Heb 13: 8. Are you glad you have your faith in such a One? I am. What a blessing to have our faith in One whose precepts are maintained for ever and ever. All that He does is done in truth and uprightness; it is unquestionable, unassailable. Nothing that Christ has done can ever be called into question because He has fully satisfied God in the truth and uprightness of everything that He has done. What a blessed Man to have before us!

Following the works of God in Psalm 111, Psalm 112 speaks of "the righteous" - the believer. The believer is looked upon as a man that fears God and that delights greatly in His commandments. What you find is that the things that are said about the believer in Psalm 112 echo remarkably what is said about Christ Himself in Psalm 111. Among these things is this matter of what is fixed and maintained. So that believers, as we are occupied with the Lord Jesus and have our hearts fixed on Him and maintained by Him, come out like Christ. We often say that He is our Object and our Model. He is the One to whom we look: He is our Object. And we become like the One we love and are occupied with: He is our Model. Everything that we see in Christ is entirely according to God's mind, and thus delights God. He is the Man of God's choice, God's pattern Man. We are not like that; we fail, and we come short, but we desire to be occupied with Christ and to follow after Him. We desire in our measure to be like Him, and we have the Holy Spirit's help in that. Part of being like Christ is, I believe, being fixed in our hearts, our affections steadfastly focused on Him, our affections bound up with Him: it is thus that He maintains our hearts.

We can ask Him to help us to have our affections fixed on Him

and maintained by Him. If we feel wavering or doubtful or upset about things we can go to Christ and simply say, 'Help me to have my mind fixed on You, Lord'. That would be a simple personal prayer that any believer could utter. If we feel down, we can ask Him to maintain our hearts. He is well able to do that; He is able to maintain every heart. We are glad of the believers in this room tonight, but He is able to maintain the heart of every believer that calls upon Him. What a resource to have!

I thought the scriptures in the New Testament would bear out what is suggested in the psalm as to being fixed and maintained. Ephesian 4 was before us on Lord's day. What is spoken of in the passage read is the building up that takes place as a result of the gifts given by Christ from the glory - the edifying of the body of Christ, and arriving at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. What matters these are! The knowledge of the Son of God relates to One who does not change, because He abides the Same; and the unity of the faith is also founded on what does not change. The faith that was there at the beginning, the teaching of the apostles, is the same now as it was then. In chapter 4 the apostle writes, "If ye have heard him and been instructed in him according as the truth is in Jesus", v 21. Would God ever need to change the truth as it is in Jesus? Of course He would not; that is something that is fixed. It is very closely associated with the unity of the faith. It is a unity that exists now, and it has existed through time.

We can go back to the faith of the saints at the beginning, and that is what guides us now. The faith, the teaching and the doctrine at the beginning of the church is unchanged. The external conditions have changed; there has been breakdown and sorrow and public disgrace, but the truth and the faith have not changed. It is a great thing to have our hearts fixed on that. As we do, we will be helped in arriving at the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full grown man. As it says, "at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ". How attractive that is; what a basis of unity! What a basis for joy together in love for Christ and in devotion to Him!

And then the apostle adds, "that we may be no longer babes, tossed and carried about". If your heart is not fixed you might be tossed and carried about. You will not be lost, but you might lose the joy of knowing and experiencing the unity of the faith, and the unity of the Spirit. But the thing is that we are not to be tossed and carried about. "That we may no longer be babes, tossed and carried about by every

wind” of whatever erroneous teaching man might have introduced into the church publicly at a particular point of time, because that is what has happened. But the truth - “as the truth is in Jesus” - does not change. It is a great blessing to have our hearts and our minds fixed on the truth as it is in Him, and to hold the truth in love, because the truth as it is in Jesus will be held in love. It is a great antidote to being tossed and carried about.

In Hebrews 12 it is interesting that there we have both “looking stedfastly” and “consider well”. The translator's note on “looking stedfastly” says, 'looking away from other things and fixing the eye exclusively on one' (note *d*); that is quite a challenge. 'Fixing the eye exclusively on one': who would that One be? It would be Christ, the One upon whom our hearts and our eyes are to be fixed as our Object. We are to look away from everything else, and look stedfastly at Him, on “Jesus the leader and completer of faith”. There is nothing more to be added to that faith. He began it and He completes it; it is all in Him. The great living body of truth has its origin in Christ, and He has completed it. He has fully revealed the mind of God; there is no more to be added to the revelation in Christ. Everything that can be known by us about God, as Father, Son and Spirit has been made known by the Lord Jesus. The apostle Paul was used to fill out the truth; he was given things to convey to the church from Christ in glory, but all the truth through Paul had its origin in the blessed Lord Himself, “the leader and completer of faith”. And what do we see in Him? He was the One who was the great example to us, the One whose heart was fixed. He endured the cross, He despised the shame in His devotion to the will of God and He is now set down at His right hand. He endured contradiction from sinners against Himself and it did not deflect Him. He set His face stedfastly to go to Jerusalem, knowing that there He was to be crucified, but it was the will of the Father that it should be so, and He was going to take that cup from the hand of the Father. What an example to us of One whose heart was fixed.

May it be for our encouragement to see that our hearts are to be fixed on and maintained by Christ, and to ask for help that this might be my experience. There is joy, fulfilment and peace in having our hearts and minds steadfastly set on that blessed One.

For His Name's sake.

Word in Ministry Meeting, Grangemouth

7 January 2020

GOD'S WAYS

Paul A Gray

Ezekiel 1: 19-21

John 12: 32

Ephesians 2: 3-7

1 Thessalonians 4: 15-18

There is concern in the world at the present time about the health of nations because of a virus that is spreading, and it is right that there should be concern, and that attention is paid to what the authorities advise and instruct; but what I have read about is intended to encourage and strengthen us in the fact that God's ways are in no way constrained by what is proceeding on the earth. Man is constrained by what proceeds here, but God knows "the end from the beginning" (Isa 46: 10), and He is not obliged to act in a particular way on account of conditions here. The living creatures are referred to in Ezekiel 1, and what I wanted to convey from that scripture is particularly set out in verse 19, "when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up"; they were not constrained by what was proceeding on the earth. They were in contact with it from time to time as necessary in the ways of God, but there was nothing the earth could do to hold them. "When the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up", and so it is with God. He knows perfectly what is happening here on earth; He understands it, knowing "the end from the beginning"; but He is neither constrained nor obliged by circumstances. He goes on with His ways. His purposes were set in a past eternity; He "works all things according to the counsel of his own will" (Eph 1: 11); and His ways are intended to draw men to Him.

We read in Acts that He has "determined ordained times and the boundaries of their dwelling, that they may seek God; if indeed they might feel after him and find him, although he is not far from each one of us", chap 17: 26, 27. It may be that through the conditions that prevail at the moment persons will seek after God and, if they do, they will find Him. He is not hiding Himself. Paul the apostle says in his testimony before king Agrippa, "for this was not done in a corner", Acts 26: 26. God is very well able to make Himself available to men. We were reminded in the preaching on Lord's day that Christ has been "set forth a mercy-seat", Rom 3: 25. Mercy has been put as near to men as God could righteously make it. Think of that! In the past dispensation of law

the mercy-seat was concealed behind a curtain and accessible only once a year; now God's mercy is right there for you to reach out in faith and accept "through faith in his blood".

These wheels are living and they are able to proceed, and then it says, "When those went, they went; and when those stood, they stood". There were moments when they stood still. God is entitled to do that too. He is neither constrained to move nor constrained to cease moving by what is proceeding here.

In John we have a great Object for our affections: the Lord is lifted up out of the earth: "I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me". Not only do we have the assurance that God is not constrained by the earth, but we have an Object that is lifted up out of the earth, and that Object is Christ. His place is unassailable. We read that He "sat down in perpetuity" (Heb 10: 12); we read that He is "priest for ever" (Heb 5: 6); and we should be encouraged by the fact that the One whom God has set at His right hand is in a place that nothing of this creation can assail. How could creation assail it for it was all made by Him in the first place? He is greater than everything, greater even than death. Death is a creature; we are told that, "neither death ... nor any other creature ...", Rom 8: 38, 39. We are told that "The last enemy that is annulled is death", 1 Cor 15: 26. It will be put in its place when it has done its work, but Christ's place is unassailable. The question is, have you been drawn to Him? Is your life in stability or are you in a state of uncertainty? There is no uncertainty connected with Christ; there is no uncertainty connected with the Lord Jesus. Everything connected with Him is certain and sure. Even when He was here as man He said, "I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it", John 17: 4. Everything is certain in Christ. God's purpose is "to head up all things in the Christ" (Eph 1: 10), and that will be seen in display, and then the kingdom will be handed over "to him who is God and Father", 1 Cor 15: 24. There is certainty, you might say, right until the point where God will be "all in all", 1 Cor 15: 28. Everything is certain and thus, in all the uncertainty and turmoil of the world, we have the certainty of God's purpose, the certainty of His counsel, the certainty of His ways and the certainty of a Man at His right hand.

But then there is what we can *enjoy*. It is not all about looking forward to some future prospect. What came to mind in relation to this scripture in Ephesians 2 is that there was nothing about us after nature that merited the blessing that we have received, and yet God was not

hindered by that. "Among whom we also all once had our conversation" - that is our manner of life, our way of being - "in the lusts of our flesh, doing what the flesh and the thoughts willed to do," - we were self-willed and the scripture tells us that "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3: 4); so we were lawless just like everyone else - "and were children, by nature, of wrath, even as the rest". This is the way we were. But the gospel hymn-writer says,

If it's the hopeless case Thou lov'st to meet,

If it's a sinner Thou dost run to greet,

Then 'tis for me to worship at Thy feet -

For me.

(Hymn 423)

That is the way we came in. We came in against a background of our case being hopeless and yet it was met by God, in Christ, because of His great love: "but God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us". What love it is! What mercy it is! How rich it is!

I simply desire to convey to you the certainty of God's mercy and the certainty of His love. It does not change. "We too being dead in offences": Paul goes back and he says, 'Remember just how bad your condition was, and yet God was not hindered by that for an instant'. He "has quickened us with the Christ". That involves life but it involves life in affection, "quicken us with the Christ, (ye are saved by grace,)". That is not just our salvation at a point in time. Note 'I' says, 'The perfect tense, not the principle on which we are saved, but the actual fact, what has been done and so abides'. That means that the effect of grace continues. It is not just once only; the effect of grace continues. "For of his fulness we all have received, and grace upon grace", John 1: 16.

But then, what of the earth? I have to make my way through it. Perhaps you are young. Perhaps you need to go to school or to university or college, although even that is constrained at the moment. Perhaps you need to be in employment, and we know that there are great exercises associated with that. Or perhaps you are feeling the effects of being older. How will things be? He "has raised us up together, and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". He has taken us in spirit outside the sphere of man's responsibility and He has given us a place in Christ Jesus. It is in view of display in a day to come, but it is for our present enjoyment and for response to God. That is what is in view, that there might be an answer to the God who has done all this for us, and if Christ's place is unassailable, so is this place unassailable.

And then we come to 1 Thessalonians: “we, the living, who remain to the coming of the Lord”. Beloved brethren, God grant that we may “remain to the coming of the Lord”. That is more, I think, than just staying alive. It means that we remain committed to what is due to the Lord until His coming. There are those who may be alive at His coming that are spoken of as “them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev 3: 10) so that they are alive in a literal sense, but I think remaining has more than that in mind. It means being in what is pleasing to Him, “remain to the coming of the Lord”. There are “those who have fallen asleep”: it might be said that there is the turmoil in this scene; and God is above all that, but what about death? Well, death had to bow at the time of the Lord's resurrection. He went into death and He came out of it again. Even death will not prevent the accrual of all the glory that is due to God Himself. “For the Lord himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God, shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first”; think of that! We are told elsewhere that the change will be “in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye”, 1 Cor 15: 52. “The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air”. There is perfect certainty about that. There is nothing the earth will be able to do about it. There is nothing that man's administration will be able to say to it. There will be a lie made up to explain it, but the true explanation is that the Lord has come for His own. That is what we are waiting for, and nothing can stop it. “And thus we shall be always with the Lord”, and Paul adds, “So encourage one another with these words”.

Well, beloved brethren, that is my desire that we might be encouraged that God's ways are proceeding; there is a Man at God's right hand whose place is unassailable; we have a part and place with Him now; and shortly we are going to be with Him forever. “So encourage one another with these words”, for His Name's sake!

Word in a ministry meeting in Grangemouth

10th March 2020

PEACE AND CONFIDENCE

Jim T Brown

Isaiah 26: 3, 4

Our brother referred in prayer to the desire for peace in our hearts and minds in these troubled days. He also referred to the anxiety and consternation among men, and that is evidently so. People speak about it as the crisis of a generation and compare it, perhaps, to what was extant in the last world war, but that is not quite the case, of course, because in the last war one of the great comforts was in socialisation, people and families coming together, but in this public health crisis it is quite the opposite: it is social isolation, minimising social contact or social intercourse.

I have mentioned before that the current issue perhaps has an Old Testament counterpart in the various references it contains to pestilence. If you look at a dictionary meaning of pestilence, one of them describes the idea as an 'infectious or contagious deadly disease', and God has used pestilences in the past to effect His ways. It is a great comfort that God is in control of all these things. He can extend them as far as is necessary to reach His end, but He can also limit things. Almost the first reference to pestilence is, of course, in relation to the plagues in Pharaoh's time, Exod 9: 15. God says through Moses to Pharaoh, "And for this very cause have I raised thee up, to shew thee my power; and that my name may be declared in all the earth", v 16. It was not for Pharaoh's glorification that he had that position. It was actually to bring to attention the superiority of God. It is always a great consolation to realise that. In Ezekiel, there are references to the "four sore judgments ... the sword, and the famine, and the evil beast, and the pestilence", chap 14: 21. By and by, their equivalent - or the actuality of them - will be visited on Jerusalem, but out of it God brings men and women as "sons and daughters", v 22. What a very blessed thing. God had His own end in allowing these awful things, including pestilence, but it had the end in view that those who would be saved out of Jerusalem should be regarded as "sons and daughters". How very wonderful that they would be brought in, as it were, to the divine family as a consequence of so great tribulation. Thus God always has an end in mind in what He does and what He allows, and He can limit it.

But for the believer there is this great assurance that, as

confiding in God, “Thou wilt keep in perfect peace the mind stayed on thee”. What a comfort that is! “Perfect peace”! If you look at note 'd' it is very remarkable, saying 'in peace, peace'. It is of double emphasis, as if the Spirit of God is concerned to underline that the peace which comes from reliance and trust in God and the blessed Saviour, is of that character. Paul says to the Colossians, “have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth; for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God”, Col 3: 2, 3. No virus, however potent, can penetrate that wonderful reality to which the believer has access: our lives are “hid with the Christ in God”. It is an inviolable position; it can never be undermined; it can never be impinged upon: “Thou wilt keep in perfect peace the mind stayed on thee”. It is very wonderful that our minds can be fixed on that heavenly, divine realm where Jesus is. What comfort and consolation that brings!

We tend to apply human reasoning to these things, to let our thoughts descend to human calculation, but, as we do that, we can lose the sense of confidence and security of simply staying our minds on the Lord Jesus and that realm where He abides. It says in Philippians “the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus”, chap 4: 7. That peace is capable of guarding our hearts and our thoughts and preserving us from these anxieties and concerns which can so readily afflict us. Let us draw therefore from the confidence we can secure as our minds are stayed upon Him.

Peace has been made, of course - and at what price - “by the blood of his cross”, Col 1: 20. Think of that! What cost to the Lord Jesus to make peace available to us, so that we should have access to the peace which He enjoyed down here. The Lord Jesus said to His own, “I leave peace with you; I give *my* peace to you”, John 14: 27. That is the peace which the Lord Jesus enjoyed in His relationship with the Father. That peace is available to us.

The Lord Jesus is King of Peace, “King of Salem, which is King of peace”, Heb 7: 2. He is more than that! He is *actually* peace as we know from Micah: “And this man shall be Peace”, Mic 5: 5. Think of that, a Man not only called Peace but that very thing in Himself; He is available to us in that way. He is also, according to Thessalonians, “the Lord of peace” (2 Thess 3: 16), and He would “guide our feet into the way of peace”, Luke 1: 79. It is very wonderful to be linked with such a One as He.

One often ponders that scripture, “and the counsel of peace shall be between them both”, Zech 6: 13. What unity exists between the Father and the Son. Think of the Father's counsels, the glory of divine purpose, all brought to pass by the Lord Jesus. Who but a divine Person come in to manhood could bring these great divine plans to fruition. What unalloyed peace ever characterises the holy relationships between the Father and the Son.

Then this wonderful comment, “Confide ye in Jehovah for ever for in Jah, Jehovah, is the rock of ages”. How fine to have our hopes pinned on such a Person, “the rock of ages”! We often sing about it,

Rock of Ages! cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee; (Hymn 396)
Jesus, my heart's dear Refuge,
Jesus has died for me;
Firm on the Rock of Ages
Ever my trust shall be. (Fanny J Crosby (1868))

How very blessed to be in relationship with such a One. How sure the foundation, how firm the rock on which we build as building on Christ Himself! “For other foundation can no man lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”, 1 Cor 3: 11. Wonderful foundation for our blessing, indeed for everything that is for God!

A scripture comes to mind in chapter 32 of Isaiah, “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever”, v 17. Think of that, “the work of righteousness shall be peace”! That applies to each of us, of course, in some sense, in that we have to be righteous in all our ways but “the work of righteousness” was peculiarly effected by the Lord Jesus in His sufferings and death so that “the righteousness of God” is “towards all, and upon all those who believe”, Rom 3: 22. How very reassuring! “Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him”, 2 Cor 5: 21. Can you think of a more blessed position than that we should “become God's righteousness” in that blessed One?

Our brother has been speaking about the Son. That is the One who secured all these blessings for us. Little wonder that the Father said, “*This* is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight”, Matt 17: 5. This glorious Person has accomplished all for the divine pleasure on the basis of perfect righteousness. It is described in a

footnote to Romans 5: 18 (note *m*) as 'accomplished subsisting righteousness'. It can never be undermined, never diminished. So it says, as I quoted, "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever". Thus we have this affecting blessing - "assurance for ever". It is eternally secure.

Again, Hebrews speaks about "assurance of faith" (chap 10: 22), and "assurance of hope", chap 6: 11. All these things are blessedly and immutably secured for us on the basis of the work of Christ. "Assurance of hope": "hope", as Romans tells us, "does not make ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us", chap 5: 5. Then the "assurance of faith", that great principle on which the righteousness and salvation of God are made available to us: "having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom we have also access by faith into this favour in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God", Rom 5: 1, 2.

How very wonderful these things are! Our hearts expand in the knowledge that we are linked to such a Person, Jehovah, the Rock of ages. The storms and the wind may rage against that rock but it is the Rock of ages and can never be weakened. May our hearts be encouraged by these things. These are troublous times, as we have been reminded, but as we confide in the Lord Jesus, let us enjoy that quietness and assurance of trust and faith that can be found in Him and prove the resource of His holy presence, for His Name's sake.

Word in a ministry meeting in Edinburgh

17th March 2020

HAPPY AND WITHOUT ANXIETY

John N Darby

Philippians 4: 1-9

The apostle desired that we should always rejoice. It is not that the circumstances in which Paul was found were cheering; he had been in prison for four years, bound to a soldier and always watched. Besides, it is debatable if he had done well in going up to Jerusalem; it is possible that he had done wrong, but I do not discuss that. The apostle could have been exercised in thinking of it and say: 'If I had not appealed to Caesar, I would not have been found like this': not at all. He could also have been in need, chap 4: 12. All that was not the subject of joy; and yet it is he who encourages others, those who are free. A power is seen in him above all the circumstances - entirely above them.

It was a great test for a man of such energy to be found thus. He could have thought that if he was free he could display great activity, but he says that "this shall turn out to me for salvation", chap 1: 19. The enemy seemed to have gained a great victory, but Paul says: 'It is *my victory*', and he adds, "I have strength for all things in him that gives me power", chap 4: 13. Being so near to the Lord that He filled his heart, the circumstances have no more place. It is true that since his imprisonment he wrote to the Ephesians, the Colossians, etc, but it was not this that consoled him. It is *in the Lord* that he rejoiced, and nothing could disturb his joy.

We find this in Christ. The Jews had rejected Him; He had been crucified. He found no sympathy, even with His own, and His desire for them is that they should have His joy fulfilled in them. Divine life has its own joy. In the Lord, one can always rejoice. It is the inexhaustible source. We see this in Paul. The more he felt that he had nothing to seek in this world, the more he rejoiced.

What is enough for the Father's affection - His Son - has been given to us. The power of the exercise of love is in us and is a source of joy that nothing dries up. "*Rejoice in the Lord always*". This is a precept. One can see what filled the apostle's heart. There was like a channel there bringing the grace of God.

On the other hand, the apostle was entirely above the circumstances. He was going to be tried, but he is so happy that he knows not what to choose: If he is put to death, he is sent to heaven; if

he is left, he will preach heaven in spite of opposition. One does not know what to do with a man like that. It is a power entirely above circumstances.

Have we afflictions? Christ is found there with us; then I say: I desire to have afflictions - Are you content to keep your thorn?

Christ comes into all the afflictions of our hearts and he desires that we should feel that He is with us. You will find that being with His disciples, He takes pains to make them understand His love. See for example at the baptism of John. What had He to do with the repentant ones? He puts Himself there with His own; there in their place. The heaven opens upon Him and His is anointed with the Holy Spirit. The matter is taught as doctrine elsewhere.

In Matthew 17, we have another example: Peter is asked if his Master paid the tribute for the temple service and Peter said, 'Certainly'. Then the Lord anticipated him, showing that He knew all, and said to him "What dost thou think, Simon? ... Go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when thou hast opened its mouth thou wilt find a stater; take that and give it to them for me and thee", v 25-27. He associates Peter with Himself in this position as sons of the great King of the temple.

See what Christ does for us. He introduces us there, and desires that we have the consciousness of it. More, not only does He introduce us into this heavenly position, but He comes down with us into earthly things. All the circumstances are but occasions for Him.

"Let your gentleness be known of all men" - Do not insist on your rights. - Why? Oh! Because I have heaven. Then the Lord is near. He is coming soon. If Christ is the object of my heart, the things of this world, be it pains, be it joys, will indeed be of little importance. What fascination we often find in the things of this life!

"Be careful about nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God..." How often I have found in this passage a precious consolation for my heart!

"... Nothing ..."; I do not speak only of the things of this life, the wrongs that may be done to me and which would affect my temporal welfare, and the things down here which at the end of the day will be forgotten. But if I see a brother walking badly, or an assembly, I say, yet

how disturbing it is! The apostle cuts short and says "... nothing ...".

Where are you, dear friends? Perhaps you say, 'There are such hard things!'. This exhortation would not be needed if there were not painful circumstances. It does not say: Seek His will, but speak to God about it; lay it out to Him. Is He Himself troubled? Is His throne shaken? The consequence of this is that His peace "which passes every understanding" keeps my heart and my thoughts in Christ Jesus. I say, 'What shall I do?'. I do not know, but I know He loves me. When the heart is thus set free from anxieties, one can be occupied with innumerable things without restriction. And there is God, the God of peace is with us. That is where the Christian is: rejoicing in the Lord and anxious about nothing.

Dear friends, have you confidence in this love to present your requests for all things and be anxious about nothing? God desires that our hearts should be thus set free so as to be occupied with all that is good. May Christ be in our souls and circumstances, and this will safeguard you from all anxiety. It is impossible to manifest a love like that of Christ: - You can have a perfect confidence in this love.

GENEVA

This article is translated from a note published in a French periodical, 'Ondées' ('showers'), in August 1933. The note itself is not dated but there is reason to think it was taken on an early visit by Mr Darby to Switzerland perhaps in the 1830s.

A PRAYER

Walter M Brown

"And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief," Mark 9: 24.

"And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee," John 21: 17.

Lord, I believe, and yet my faith how feeble!
How slow to rise to Thee and trust Thy word!
To Thee I come, to Thee who changest never
Grant me Thy help, O Lord!

Thou art my hope; Thy presence and Thy glory
Will chase away the darkness of the night;
And yet how oft the shadows seem to gather!
O Lord, be Thou my light!

Thou knowest all, Thou knowest that I love Thee;
But Lord, my love's response, how weak and low!
Come, fill my heart with *Thy* love everlasting,
That *mine* may stronger grow.

I know in part, I only see but dimly;
Soon shall I know as known, and see Thy face;
Then faith and hope will cease, but I shall praise Thee
In love's own dwelling-place.

SUTTON

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