

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THEY SEEK THEIR COUNTRY

David Martin

Hebrews 11: 13-16

I do not intend to explain the meaning and context of this section but there are three references in it which impressed me. There were those who were, “strangers and sojourners on the earth”, there were those people who were seeking “their country” and, God “has prepared for them a city”. It is those three things which I want to speak about, and I would start by asking where you feel you are tonight. Do you feel you are a stranger and a sojourner on the earth? Are you seeking a country? Or do you feel that you have, and are enjoying, a place in a city that God has prepared for you?

Let us think of what we mean by the earth, when compared to references to a country and a city. A reference to the earth and those who are strangers and sojourners on it would give you a sense of a wilderness. It would give you a sense of an expanse such as we read of every day in the newspapers. It is an earth that is running dry of resource, an earth where there is unrest, and it is an earth which is ravaged by sin. The term would imply no boundaries for those things are common right across the world today. I would ask whether you are trying to find your place on that earth, whether you are wandering through the world seeking where you might fit in today. I feel the challenge of that myself because how easy it is in employment to try to find a place where you fit best and achieve the most. How attractive and how tempting it is to try to find a place in the entertainment and pastimes which men have created. How attractive and how tempting it is to try to find a place in them.

The children of Israel had been in Egypt and they had experienced what the earth was. They had worked their hardest, they had given everything, and they were made to work harder and harder whilst desiring earnestly to get out. They were strangers and sojourners, they did not have a place there. I would ask you whether you have a place, or are seeking a place, in that earth, that wilderness waste which is quickly running dry of the resource that it is able to provide, and which is so ravaged by sin and unrest? You might observe that God created it. That is absolutely right; God did create the earth, He also created the heavens, He created the vast immeasurable expanse of them. We referred to the stars earlier, and we were looking

up at them last night and seeing myriads of them. How many more myriads there are which we cannot see. God created them. God is so great that He could do that; and God created the earth. He created the earth in such fine detail. It never ceases to amaze me, when I go to the seaside, how the sea washes to and fro with the tide in such a measured way. Occasionally, as we know, we will get a rough sea and the waters will break over the barriers, but when you think of the vastness and depth of the oceans, God is holding it all perfectly in balance.

How much greater it is though, God created Man. He formed Man after His own image, He breathed into him and gave him life. He gave him more intelligence than any other creature. Why did He do that? Think of the delight of God in having created the detail of the Garden of Eden, the plants and the animals, the weather conditions that were suited to it; all of these things God had set in absolute perfection. Everything was held in balance, and then He placed Man in His garden. What delight God must have had as He saw His creature Man in that environment. And yet, perhaps within twenty four hours, Man had disobeyed his God. Here is the beginning of the earth as we know it becoming waste, the beginning of man's system unravelling as he desired to be independent of God, to do his own thing. When we look through the thousands of years that have transpired since then we can see why it is that the earth is as it is today. We can see why there were those that we have read of here, even in this time who were strangers and sojourners on the earth, not finding their place there but seeking a country. Dear friend, sin has ravaged every part of the earth upon which we stand and every man, woman and child who walks upon it; and I would ask whether you really appreciate that. Do you appreciate what it meant for God to look down upon those perfect surroundings and that creature that He had created perfect, and see disobedience. Man had turned his back upon God, tried to hide from God, tried to hide from his Creator. God had given him everything, and man still turned his back upon Him. You may say, 'How could that be?' But, if you have not acknowledged your disobedience, your sins, and have not turned to your Saviour you are in exactly the same position. God is providing you with everything, and maybe until now you have turned your back upon Him. Maybe you have known God, and you have had a relationship with God, and have your sins forgiven; but for now you have turned your back upon Him; and maybe you have not appreciated His blessing and are trying to find something better.

Next we come to those who were seeking a country. What a great point to come to. If you are wandering aimlessly across the world, if you are seeking in all the corners of the earth the satisfaction that you feel that it can provide for you, dear friend, there is a great point that you will (when you begin) come to seek God's country. Why is that so good? There are some simple things that we know about countries. First of all they have a head of state, maybe a king. A country will have a currency; there is money that you will need to be able to spend there. It will have a language that you will need to be able to speak to be understood, and it will have cities.

What attracts you to God's country? It has certain characteristics. This country has *the* King, who was able to create the heavens and the earth, was able to put Man into the garden; and He is the God who is so patient and so loving that He has created an environment that you can still come to despite man's history of sin. Did God wipe man out of His plans in the Garden of Eden when he showed his disobedience? No. In His mercy and grace He has formed a country for us. It has a king, and the king is the Lord Jesus. He is the One who gives character to it; He is the One whose desires, whose love, whose authority, whose power are expressed throughout that kingdom. The Lord Jesus is the One whom God sent into this world to provide the answer to our sin. He came here and was rejected by man. How terrible the way that He had to go at the hands of man when He was here. Man showed his hatred toward Him and had no place for Him. There is another example of how different this country is to the world, for here was a King, the King of God's perfect, sin-free country who had no place in man's sin-ridden earth. Man seized Him and took Him to the cross. This is the Man who desired the very best for you, who has the same heart of love as God has, and was expressing it in His pathway here by coming into this world to save and serve man, whilst being rejected by those very persons He had come here for. Think of Him for a moment as He went to the cross and in the many things He did in serving man as He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. Think of that woman by Sychar's well, He went out of His way to be with her, John 4. We spoke earlier of the Good Samaritan, making the time, Luke 10. The Lord Jesus made the time, He sat there by Sychar's well, He spoke to that woman, He drew near to her, provided her with everything that she had need of; the satisfaction that she was so desperately seeking for. There she was at the well drawing water again and again; but the Lord Jesus was able to pour in

something that was very special, a resource which this earth could not provide, a resource which is only available in God's country, and a resource that is only available from the King.

Let us think for a minute of the language in God's country; what language does He use. Did the Lord express condemnation to that woman? He did not. He used words of immense wisdom; He was able to point out to her exactly where she was, and what she was seeking to find. He was able, in His love, the language of love, to point out where she could find exactly what she needed. It was a new language to her, she had never heard that language before. She may have been ridiculed in the city; she may have been mocked, but here were new words, and the first time she heard this language she understood it. What an effect it had. All she needed to hear were a few words and she knew God's language, the language of love. She is able to go into the city using that language, saying, "Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done: is not he the Christ?", John 4: 29. Have you heard the language of love? Do you know the King, the One who is prepared to go out of His way to provide for your every need, and in providing for it would draw near to you and express to you words that only He could utter, His perfect love for you? "No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends", John 15: 13. The Lord Jesus has done that for you. The King of this country gave His life. Think of that for a moment. He went to Golgotha, having been tried in the court, having been taken and led to the cross, to that hill. Those cruel nails were driven through His hands and through His feet.

A few weeks back my son and I were working in the front garden and dug some metal up; it was a Roman nail. I have often contemplated what those nails must have been like, but this confirmed to me the real horror of what the Lord Jesus went through, blunt square, thick, cruel nails were driven through the hands and the feet of the Lord Jesus. It actually happened. We often speak about it; maybe I contemplate it sometimes as a story, but think about the reality of those nails being driven through His hands and His feet. The horror, even greater, of that cross being lifted up into place, dropped into the hole which it was to stand in, the Lord Jesus already nailed to it, and then the tremendous injury that He suffered, every bone out of joint, Ps 22: 14. That actually happened. There He was upon the cross. The horror of those hours as He hung there! One robber on either side of Him, so justly meeting the punishment that was to be meted to them under the

law, but the Lord Jesus there, a holy, perfect, righteous Man, the King of my country, who was there for my sake and for your sake. He had set His face steadfastly to go that way because of the sins that I had committed. Even just one of them was sufficient to lead Him that way to Jerusalem to be nailed to that cross and to hang there for those hours. To be ridiculed at the hands of men, to be spat upon and to have that crown of thorns placed upon his head. All of these things He endured for you and for me and to the end that this country we are speaking of may exist. It was in order that the boundaries may be put around it, and that everything within that country should be secured for God and be untainted by sin, that the language of love may be the only language. What a tremendous sacrifice He made for you and for me. Think of Him uttering that loud cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matt 27: 46. Why did He say that? It was because the offering that the Lord Jesus was making was God's offering. The holy and the righteous God, the only God, did not spare His own Son because His heart of love desired that He should have you for Himself - and that He should have your praise because He loves you so much. Think of His side being pierced and the blood and the water flowing out; everything given. It affects me that in His sacrifice absolutely everything was given, nothing was held back. He gave up a life which He loved, His body was taken and was cruelly nailed to that cross and even when He had died His side was pierced and the blood and the water flowed out. Everything was given, a sacrifice greater than any other. Everything has been provided in order that your sins and the stain of them may be entirely removed. I would urge you tonight to consider the wonder of that work. There is a lot recorded for us in detail in the Scriptures, in the Gospels, but also in the Psalms, as to the suffering of the Lord Jesus. Read them, because it has a wonderful effect as you read slowly and contemplate what the Lord Jesus endured for you and for me. The Lord Jesus carried the full weight of all of the sins that have ever been committed, with a desire in His heart that every man, woman and child should have faith in Him and should come to know relief from the guilt of their sin and to enter God's country. The Lord Jesus suffered so greatly for us.

Thus, as I have put my faith and my trust in Him, I can now truly enjoy what it is to be in this country. No longer am I wandering. Why am I not wandering? Because I have a King who was prepared to die for me, a King who was prepared to give absolutely everything for me because He loved me so much. Would I want to be wandering upon the earth seeking satisfaction, seeking a place here, when my King, who I

know is my Friend, has given everything for me and has created a country of which He wants me to be a citizen?

Then we have the currency of this country. This is the grace and the mercy that He so freely gives. How often I fail. How often I slip from the standard, but there is everything there in God's love, His mercy, and His grace that makes this whole system, this whole economy work, because He knows me, He knows me better than I know myself and He knows you better than you know yourself. He has provided the wherewithal for you to be part of His country and to be at home there without a sense of guilt, without a sense of worry but to be restful there. How tremendous this is.

We read, and this shows His love for us again, that, "God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he has prepared for them a city". All these things we are speaking of are not haphazard; God has a great plan. I am often affected by that; we look at situations and we wonder at them, and maybe in our lives we go from one twist to another twist to another, and we think, 'where is all this going?' Maybe in my relationship with my Saviour, maybe from my side, I drift in and out of the enjoyment of it. Dear friends, maybe you are seeking a place somewhere upon this earth; maybe you have found your place in the country, but you feel there is some further enjoyment you are missing. There is great comfort for you and for me in knowing that God has a plan, He has a great plan. Not a plan like man's plans which are written down and they have their deadlines and people responsible for doing this and that and generally they run late or fail, but God has a plan which He has had from the beginning. Here we have read of a city which God *has* prepared, not *will* prepare. We are not talking about a country or a city that God *will* build, this is all done. The Lord Jesus has paid the price, everything has been set in place and now we have a city. The city is where the King lives. We have a King whose character marks the country, whose language is shared across the country, whose currency is used across the country, but then in the city we have where the King lives. If you go to London and you see Buckingham Palace, you see where the Queen lives, and you see the thousands of tourists who go to see where the Queen lives. In God's city there is a place where the King lives. Also in the city there is every resource available to you. You have everything laid on. If you live in a house in the outskirts of the city or away in the country, maybe there are some resources that you do not have 'on tap', but in God's city He has every resource, right there and

available for your every need. It is also God's showpiece and there will be a time that we read of in the Revelation when that Holy City, New Jerusalem, will descend (Rev 3: 12), and we have a whole chapter there that speaks of the glory of that city. It is tremendous, from the detail of the measurements to the precious stones, all of these things, we have the detail of them all laid out for us, Rev 21. That is because God has prepared a city, and it is the city that He wants you to live in and He wants me to live in. He does not want you to be at a distance from your King; He does not want you to be looking for resource: He wants the resources that you have need of to be right there and available to you. He wants your heart and your affections to be overwhelmed by the glory of the King and the glory of the messages that the King would give to you.

So what resources do we have? We have great resource in our hands: we have the Scriptures. We have the Holy Spirit who is available for every spiritual need, from the most simple of our needs to the very greatest of them. The Holy Spirit is there and will provide everything that we have need of. Dear friends, in the city, if you are living there, if that is your life, if in every aspect of your life you feel the need of your Saviour, the One who has done so much for you, He will provide everything that you have need of in every circumstance. However simple, however great, whether it is at school, at home, whether we are playing, whether we are working, whether we are speaking to somebody and do not know what to say. If in a fleeting moment we turn to the Spirit and ask for His help the resource will be right there. Everything is provided for us for our every need.

We have to do, in that city, with the Lord Jesus upon His throne. His throne, as we know, is at the right hand of God. He has ascended, having broken the power of death by Himself. The Son of God, having entered into heaven, is now there ascended on high. Do you have to make an appointment? Absolutely not. Do you have to wait for an appropriate moment to find the right thing to say? Absolutely not. He is there, and my King is as prepared to speak to you as He is to speak to anybody else across the whole face of the earth who desires to be in His country, to live in His city. He will speak to you at any moment about anything in any way. What a comfort that is. Sometimes we may feel that we are coming up against a brick wall, maybe we do not know where to turn next, maybe we are struggling with something that surely everyone else would find, to be simple, but there is One who is not only

my King, but I can truly say, He is my Friend. In that circumstance He is the One who I would turn to because I know that He knows the answer. He knows the end from the beginning in every circumstance I may struggle with, He is right there with the answer for me. Maybe sometimes I will be tested, maybe sometimes I have to wait for His answer, but if I stick with Him, He will provide it.

These things are tremendous. I would ask the question again, are you trying to find a place as a stranger and a sojourner on the earth? I would urge you to look for your country, look for the country that has the King who was prepared to die for just one of your sins, for one of your acts of disobedience - perhaps when you were told to do something and you did not. That is a sin and God was prepared to give His only begotten Son to die for you for that one sin. What great love! Do you have your place in that country? If you do, do you have the enjoyment of being in the city where you can converse with the King, where you can offer the praise which He desires and is so rightly due, where you can draw near to Him in your every moment of trial? And where the Holy Spirit is there available to you, for every moment, for every need, that the fountain of living water that the woman in John 4 came to experience, might spring up into eternal life in *your* experience. Not just now, but finally, when the Lord Jesus will return and everyone who has put their faith and trust in Him will be taken to be with Him, that currency and that language of love will continue eternally. We spoke earlier about the language we will use in eternity, maybe we will call it 'Love', for it is that which speaks for everything that God has done for you and for me.

I would urge you to turn to Him tonight in the very simplest of ways and make Him your Friend. For His Name's sake.

Walton-on-the-Naze

12 November 2006

FAITHFULNESS

John R Bellamy

Deuteronomy 7: 7 - 9

Hebrews 2: 17, 18; 3: 1 - 6

Exodus 3: 1 - 6

Psalms 37: 3, 4

2 Timothy 2: 1, 2

I think it will be apparent to the beloved brethren in the passages that we have read that I have in mind to say a word as to faithfulness. First of all, faithfulness is seen in God Himself. Faithfulness finds expression in the Lord Jesus, both in relation to ourselves, His brethren, and in His relation to His God. And then I hope to speak about faithfulness as related to the saints. I find a great number of passages in both the Old and New Testament relating to faithfulness. It is interesting that in the Epistle to the Colossians Paul speaks of three persons, Epaphras, Tychicus and Onesimus; and if you search out what Paul has to say about them you will find that he refers to each of them in relation to this feature of faithfulness.

I thought it well to commence with a thought of faithfulness as finding expression in God Himself. This is a beautiful passage in Deuteronomy. In the reading this afternoon it was pointed out that being born anew is the sovereign work of God; just as you and I have nothing to do with our natural birth, so we have nothing to do with new birth. It is a sovereign work of God in your heart, dear young brother and dear young sister, and you can always fall back on that. As was helpfully mentioned, "He who has begun in you a good work ...", Phil 1: 6. You can always go back to that. God is faithful and this is what He says in this passage we have read in Deuteronomy. It is not on account of what the children of Israel were. How attractive this is: He says to them "it is not because ye were more in number than all the peoples" but, He says, "because Jehovah loved you." What a fine start that is. Jehovah has set his eye upon you for blessing. Dear young person, I trust that we this afternoon will be able to kindle your interest in relation to this matter of faithfulness, faithfulness in God. He will never let you down. He says, "and thou shalt know that Jehovah thy God, he is God". There is none other, He stands alone unique in His glory, in His supremacy, and in this feature of faithfulness. It says that "He is God, the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy". You can always

fall back on God's faithfulness. We get a reminder of that, do we not, in 1 Corinthians 1: 9, that "God is faithful, by whom ye have been called". He says there, "ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

I came across a reference by Mr James Taylor, (see vol 27, pages 455, 456) in which he speaks about the epistle to the Romans and the epistles to the Corinthians. Romans is addressed to young believers, and there are many of them here this afternoon. It is addressed to young believers from the point of view of you as an individual and God's own personal links with you. When we come to Corinthians, it is addressed to young believers again, but as to how you stand related to other believers, other young believers. Mr Taylor said that, as young believers, we need to have assurance. What we read in Deuteronomy speaks about God's oath, and that God is true to His word. You can always rest and depend upon that. Paul says, in Romans 10: 11,12, that "no one believing on him shall be ashamed"; He will never let you down. I have let Him down many a time but He has never let me down. He is faithful. No one calling on Him shall be ashamed. "For the same Lord of all is rich towards all that call upon him", v 12. He has the resources, dear young brother, dear young sister, to see you through.

Well, as young, we need this assurance. God would confirm your heart. As we get a little older we come to the epistles of the Colossians and the Ephesians and there the thought of faithfulness is not so evident, because we are treated as already grounded. Paul says, "I know whom I have believed", 2 Tim 1: 2. As we advance in the knowledge of God we have learnt to count on His faithfulness, and rest more in His love. We carry the assurance of God's faithfulness with us, but God would lead you on to that tenderly. He wants to get your confidence, the sense that you can depend upon Him.

When we come to Hebrews 2 where we read, our attention is called to the Lord Jesus Himself and to His faithful service. "Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like to his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God". That is what we have been engaged with already today, a sphere apart from the current of things in this world. What our brother has been speaking of as what is new is over against the current of things in this world and the Lord Jesus is a merciful and faithful High Priest in things relating to God. The Lord Jesus has a special interest in your soul and in serving

you to help you in this area of things, apart from the current of this world altogether. It is in relation to a sphere of God's interest, a sphere of favour and blessing, to which God has called you.

A little later on in this epistle it speaks of the Lord Jesus who is able to save you. "Whence also he is able to save completely those who approach by him to God", Heb 7: 25. He is an all-the-way Saviour. This is presented to you in the gospel and you can rest your soul on that. He is able to save you completely, "those who approach by him to God; always living to intercede for them". That is presented almost as if the Lord Jesus has nothing else to do, that is what He is living for. It is a wonderful thing to think of the Lord Jesus available to us, beloved brethren, in this connection, to think of His faithfulness; how you can rest your soul on that, dear young people! No matter what comes into your life, when you lay your head on the pillow at night, you can rest your soul on the sense of the Lord Jesus and His personal faithfulness in things relating to God.

This is not all. In the next chapter we read it speaks about the Lord Jesus as being faithful to Him that has constituted Him. Think of the Lord Jesus in His pathway here where it says, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in His hand", John 3: 35. The Father has complete confidence in the Lord Jesus, everything is safe there. He is faithful in things relating to Him who has constituted Him, "Jesus, who is faithful to Him that has constituted Him". We have sung of Him in our opening hymn -

To man Thy wondrous love and grace,
Thy faithfulness to God:-

Faithful amidst unfaithfulness ... (Hymn 230)

You think of the life of Jesus here in this scene, all around Him unfaithfulness to God, and there He shone in all His excellence, the One who was the faithful One. 'Thy faithfulness to God:- faithful amidst unfaithfulness ...'. What an object He is for our contemplation and admiration. But then he says "as Moses also in all his house", it is evident that God has in mind that you and I should be marked by these same features He is drawing attention to in Moses. In Numbers 12: 7, in a very outstanding way, it says "not so my servant Moses". He says of him "Mouth to mouth do I speak to him", Num 12: 8. But it goes on here to speak about Moses - "for every house is built by someone; but he who has built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all

his house". The comparison is interesting in that section. Moses is referred to as being faithful in his house but then in the next verse it speaks of Christ, as Son over His house. I remember three day meetings in Calgary around this chapter - "Son over His house". Think of the glory and the excellency of the Lord Jesus in this way as Son over God's house. But I just want to go on from that in relation to "Moses indeed was faithful in all his house". You might say, 'How did Moses become that way?' This feature of faithfulness does not mark us as after the first order of man. The first order of man has failed utterly. Unfaithfulness marks him. But here we have a man referred to who is faithful. How did he get that way? We might raise that question. I think that passage we read in Exodus helps us as we contemplate what took place there in the burning bush. It says that "he led the flock behind the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God - to Horeb." Horeb represents divine grace. It stands, in a certain sense, over against Sinai which was another famous mountain in the Old Testament. Both mountains are, I understand, in the same range of mountains but this is Horeb, divine grace. And it says "the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him". It is obvious God had Moses in mind. He "appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a thorn-bush: and he looked, and behold, the thorn-bush burned with fire, and the thorn-bush was not being consumed." A most extraordinary sight this was for Moses. It says "God called to him out of the midst of the thorn-bush and said, Moses, Moses! And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither; loose thy sandals from off thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground." God saw, it says, that he turned aside to see. God is interested as He looks in on this gathering this afternoon. God is interested to see persons who are showing an interest.

I have referred to this before, something Mr Jim Renton repeated time and again, that God is interested in interested persons. God took account of Moses and his interest. I trust we are all here this afternoon on the basis of being interested persons. God has something that He wants to demonstrate, that He wants to show you. So God calls him by name. It is obvious that God is taking account of him. "Moses, Moses!" He says, "loose thy sandals from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." What is He showing Moses as Moses takes account of this sight? It says "Let me now turn aside and see this great sight". What Moses is taking account of is "also our God is a consuming fire", Heb 13: 29. God was demonstrating to Moses here that He had the means of dealing with the

flesh in His people, and yet they were not consumed. God has the means - the resources - to deal with the flesh in His people. He would bring them through - they are not being consumed. It is not unlike what was referred to earlier in Acts 2 in relation to the incoming of the Holy Spirit. It says "there appeared to them parted tongues of fire, and it sat upon each one of them", v: 3. Because of what they were as in the condition of flesh, there was a need for the fire and yet it says of the Spirit, "it sat upon each one of them", suggesting divine complacency. How wonderful that is. This is linked with God's faithfulness. God is faithful. He has the resources, He has the means of dealing with the flesh as it comes into expression, because God being God and true to Himself He cannot countenance the manifestation of the expression of flesh; but He has means of dealing with this and yet retaining His people.

This is not unlike what Luke records in relation to Peter in his gospel. Peter says "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord", Luke 5: 8. He was conscious that there was that in him that was not suitable to be in the Lord's presence - he says "Depart from me". Mr Coates thought it was a delightful inconsistency (vol 17 p 73), that while he is asking the Lord to leave him, he is getting as close to Him as he can. That is, while feeling his own unsuitability, he found the expression of grace in Jesus irresistible, he was not repelled, the power of divine grace attracted him to Jesus. The Lord Jesus had in mind to affect something in Peter and that is what He did there.

Now I just want to turn aside - we have been reading at home in the book of 2 Kings and, of course, as we have gone through this book many a time we have turned to 2 Chronicles because in a certain sense it is a parallel book. And it has been interesting to see what comes into expression in 2 Chronicles. There were three kings of Judah in 2 Chronicles that were used of God to bring in recovery amongst His people and in each of them there was a reference to faithfulness. You get another reference to it in the recovery after the captivity of God's people to Babylon. After they return back to Jerusalem in Nehemiah, you get references to faithfulness there. Indeed I came across an interesting series of readings given in Indianapolis in 1924 (JT Vol 19, page 217). There he speaks about Ezra and Nehemiah as complementing one another. Of course they were contemporary; Nehemiah is referred to in the book of Ezra and Nehemiah refers to Ezra twelve times in his book showing how the two men worked

together and appreciated one another. Mr Taylor draws attention to something that I found very interesting. He says in Ezra you have the sovereignty of God's work. We have been speaking of divine sovereignty in new birth today, God operating on His own behalf. But he says in Nehemiah you have faithfulness in man. Nehemiah personally, right through his book, refers to his faithfulness in caring for God's interests among his people.

In pursuing this, I would like you just to turn with me to 2 Chronicles for a moment because I find there that faithfulness is spoken of in different contexts, all of which I think are both edifying and encouraging. The first recovery is in chapter 19, involving Jehoshaphat, and listen to what he has to say in verses 5-9. His knowledge of God is very affecting. He says, "And he set judges in the land throughout the fortified cities of Judah, city by city. And he said to the judges, Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for Jehovah, who will be with you in the matter of judgment. And now, let the terror of Jehovah be upon you; be careful what ye do, for there is no iniquity with Jehovah, nor respect of persons, nor taking of presents.- And moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set some of the Levites and priests, and of the chief fathers of Israel, for the judgement of Jehovah and for causes. - And they returned to Jerusalem. And he charged them saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of Jehovah faithfully and with a perfect heart." How fine that is. I do not know that we ever are more tested than in matters of judgement and administration, tested in relation to faithfulness. But this is very fine; you see the way that Jehoshaphat speaks about what marks God and what I wanted to point out especially in this is how the fear of Jehovah is linked with faithfulness. Where you get faithfulness you may be assured that underlying that is the element of a fear of God.

I remember when I went to school, in a little country school on the prairie, on the right side along the top on the wall, there was a text and it read, "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge", Prov 1: 7. It almost suggests, dear brethren, that unless there is that element of the fear of Jehovah with us we have hardly started on the Christian path, the beginning of knowledge. We talk about spiritual things, a new beginning, a new departure, it is apart from the current things of this world - "the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge". So here Jehoshaphat emphasises that, he says "And he charged them saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of Jehovah faithfully and with a perfect

heart.”, 2 Chron 19: 9.

Now I do not want to dwell on these things: I just go on to the next reference in relation to King Hezekiah. He was a king with whom there was a very significant recovery of the people of God to Jehovah, and in 2 Chronicles chapter 31: 11 it says, “And Hezekiah commanded to prepare chambers in the house of Jehovah; and they prepared them, and brought in the heave-offerings and the tithes and the dedicated things faithfully; and over these Cononiah the Levite was ruler, and Shimei his brother was second.” This refers to faithfulness in relation to the bringing in of what is due to God. It involves the service of God, the heave offerings and the tithes and the dedicated things. Well, Lord willing, if we are spared until the Lord's day, this is what we shall be engaged with. The challenge comes to me, am I faithful in that connection? You see faithfulness involves being faithful in different sets of circumstances. Well this is in regard to what is due to God.

The next recovery we refer to is in the time of King Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34: 9-12, which can be related to the special collection. “And they came to Hilkiah the high priest, and they delivered to them the money that had been brought into the house of God, which the Levites that kept the doors had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they gave it into the hand of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of Jehovah; and they gave it to the workmen who wrought in the house of Jehovah to reinstate and repair the house: they gave it to the carpenters and the builders, to buy hewn stone, and timber for the joists, and to floor the houses that the kings of Judah had destroyed. And the men did the work faithfully.” Note here you have reference to workmen in relation to the house of God. Our special collection has to do with Levitical service; three day meetings, service in the support of what is Levitical amongst us, and there is the need of faithfulness. It says “they did the work faithfully”.

When we come to Nehemiah, and I have already introduced Nehemiah to you as a man who was faithful, he makes an interesting reference in chapter 7: 1, 2, “And it came to pass when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, that the doorkeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed.” You see how everything is done in an orderly way under Nehemiah, everything is done for God's pleasure and what would be for His glory. And then he says, “And I gave my

brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the citadel, charge over Jerusalem; for he was a faithful man and feared God above many.” Again we see the link between the element of the fear of God and a man in which faithfulness is expressed.

We need to think about these things, dear friends, beloved young people. You have got your life before you, and that is why I read in Psalm 37 because there we had this reference to feeding on faithfulness. This is a very attractive passage, a very encouraging passage for young people. He says “confide in Jehovah”; you can put your trust in Him as we have been saying, put your confidence in Him, confide in Him and do good, dwell in the land. That is, you find your life there in divine things. This is Canaan, God's promised land. It is what we enjoy, beloved brethren, in our relations together in the Christian circle. They are not things relating to this scene, but to what is heavenly, the land. And then he says “feed on faithfulness”, feed on it; nourish your soul on it.

Where do we see it expressed more forcefully, more effectively, than in the Lord Jesus Himself? I know of nothing more affecting in these two precious gospels, Matthew and Mark, than the reference to the Lord Jesus on the cross, speaking in the Aramaic language, as one at a distance from God, saying “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” (Matt 27: 46 and Mark 15: 34). This is interpreted for us so we can understand what He was saying “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Faithfulness was there as the Lord Jesus hung on Calvary's cross; He was sparing us the wrath of God upon sin. “Why hast thou forsaken me?” He says, and, prophetically, “thou art holy”, Ps 22: 3. As He took it upon Himself - “Him who knew not sin”, it says, “he has made sin for us”, 2 Cor 5: 21. Think of the Lord Jesus taking up the language of one at a distance from God. The Lord Jesus in every day of His life knew what it was to have uninterrupted communion with the Father. Here He is taking up the language of one at a distance: think of what entered into His holy soul, His feelings at this moment when He was made sin. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Can you think of anything more affecting? Feed on faithfulness. There it was in expression in all its blessedness!

Well, I encourage the young people to look on it and feed on it as finding an expression of it in your own local meetings. I cherish the memory of fathers in my locality in years past. What was demonstrated in their lives was an interest in care for God's rights in the local

assembly, not only in Vancouver but among those that are now with the Lord in other localities. I cherish the memory of others and what found expression in their lives, dear brethren: feed on faithfulness as you see it in expression in a brother. It is not that you support the brother exactly but you support what he is standing for, what he is seeking to maintain in faithfulness to the Lord in protection of His rights in the local assembly. Be with such in the support of these things. Learn to have your part in the support of it because as you take account of these things working in your local meeting, and as you are affected by that and nourished by that, this feature will begin to find expression in you; and that is what we are interested in.

Now in this passage, just to encourage you, how blessed this is, it says "And delight thyself in Jehovah, and he will give thee the desires of thy heart". I would encourage you, dear young brother, young sister, because the sisters come into this too; we have sisters like Deborah and Hannah and Lydia. Lydia says. "if ye have judged me to be faithful", Acts 16: 15. Sisters can have a place in this as well as brothers, but I would encourage you all to get into the Lord's presence and let Him know that you would like something of this feature to come into expression in you in your part in the local meeting. It says "he will give thee the desires of thy heart". How fine that is. These things are subject to desire and as we come into the Lord's presence and let Him know this He will help us in relation to it.

Finally, we referred to the reference to Timothy because there is a need, if the testimony is to be continued, for faithful men. These things, Paul says "entrust to faithful men". That is how things have come down to us, down to you and me, through faithful men. Can I be numbered among such? The Lord raises that question in the gospel; He says "Who then is the faithful and prudent bondman?", Mat 24: 45. Can I put myself in there? Can you put yourself in there? The Lord is looking for such, He says these things "entrust to faithful men". Can I be entrusted with these things to hand them on faithfully? If there is anything I covet more than anything else it is that I might be helped, in my own local meeting especially, to hand on what has come down to us, what has come down to me, unimpaired. That is a test. Well may we be helped and encouraged in it, each one of us; for His Name's sake.

Aberdeen, Idaho

1 June 2007

FAITHFUL AND TRUE

Eric C Burr

Revelation 3: 14; 19: 11

We have been reading in this book locally and, prompted by the hymn that we sang (No 160), I recalled a comment made during the course of these readings, that drew attention to the Lord being spoken of as faithful and true in the circumstances of both these scriptures. We think about chapter 2 and 3 and the different local assemblies that are addressed by the Lord. He sends these letters to these local assemblies. I think we would do well, in seeking to understand them, to have respect for what has been said, that while they may have been addressed to individual local assemblies in which various characteristics might be found, they are not quite so exclusive as that. In many cases all these characteristics may mark us. It is as if the Lord presents Himself in different ways so that the whole assembly, wherever it is manifested, might get the gain of what He has to say. Our minds dwell a great deal on local assemblies because that is the way we meet and that is all that is available to us, but I think the Lord never has anything less in mind than the assembly, - “on this rock I will build my assembly”, Matt 16: 18. He does not say on this rock I will build seven assemblies, but “on this rock I will build my assembly”.

I wondered whether there was something to assure and establish us in thinking about this, not so much in the context of Laodicea, but in the context of the present state of the church. We ourselves may have little to do with it publicly. The emphasis on the principle of separation according to 2 Timothy 2 tends to give us a closed-up view of what the assembly is. But, whatever the state of things, there is *the assembly*. The Lord speaks to the assembly, I think, when He speaks to Laodicea here and He speaks as the faithful and true. I think that the Lord presenting Himself in that way, whether to one local assembly or to all, is a word to us until the end.

That is why I refer to the scripture in chapter 19, because it shows that even after the time of the assembly on earth is ended and there are still things to be put right on the earth, the Lord still comes out with the name, the faithful and true. We might ask what being faithful and true implies. One thing that His being the faithful and true implies is that He undertakes work that has been given Him to do, and carries it through deliberately and for God Himself. He carries it through and will

carry it through until the end. It is clear, therefore, that there is no room in the assembly itself - and therefore no room in local assemblies - for anything other than faithfulness and truth. These things slip by us sometimes but they have been set out in Jesus in a way that is to demonstrate to us the character in which He was here as Man, and in which therefore we are to be here in our manhood as well.

There is no dilution of these things. He does not present Himself to Laodicea saying, 'be faithful in your circumstances'; but what He speaks about is His character and, if He comes among us, that is His character. One occasion on which we speak especially of the Lord coming among us is the Supper and He has this characteristic even then. He has been faithful and true up to the point when He undertook the work which the Supper recalls to us. Faithful and true to God, but faithful and true to the work that the Father gave Him to do, "I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do", John 17: 4. He is faithful to the One who had given Him instruction and who would maintain things according to Himself here; and according to the will of the One on whose behalf He has come. He was true as well. One thing in which Satan secured an advantage over man from the beginning of the creation was that he did not tell the truth. He said, 'Has God said?' Then he says, 'It is not so, I know something better than that', and he would bring out something that opened the door to the falsifying of truth right down to the present day, Gen 3.

There are other scriptures that show that, if you look for truth in the present day, you might have quite a difficulty in finding it publicly. You hardly need to know anything about public affairs without seeing that that is the way in which things are. Newspapers delight in talking about spin, and what that means is that it is not the truth that is being presented. This is what people are fed on in the present day, variations of the truth in order to make things plausible. But the standard which has been set out in Jesus is, "These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness". It cannot be qualified or adjusted. I think one service of the Spirit to us is to maintain in our minds the characteristics of faithfulness and truth. One thing you can see in 2 Timothy is that Paul is exhorting the younger man to be faithful until the end and that requires that the truth is there.

I do not say these things as pointing to any failure to maintain faithfulness and truth, but it does us well to keep before our minds and rehearse the characteristic elements of Christianity, which are those by

which the Lord appears among the assemblies; and, in the assembly, the character in which He appears is faithful and true. We are to learn from it: “learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart”, Matt 11: 29. That did not hinder His being faithful and true: He did not turn things into a plausible form in order that they might be better received, but He went on with faithfulness and truth; and unless that were so we could not rely on Him. But, beloved, we can rely on Him.

I refer to the scripture in chapter 19 because it shows that when all the matters relating to the assembly on earth are finished, and those belonging to the assembly are with Him, He maintains that attitude still while there are things to be dealt with on the earth. It implies to my mind that there will never be a time when faithfulness and truth are not to be the characteristics of Jesus which are to be manifested in His people. We shall already be with Him in the time to which Revelation 19 is referring. But it is a time for the completion of a work, the completion of a time of service, the completion of things that have borne on the testimony. Things still have to be adjusted on the earth and adjusted according to the standard of what He is Himself. It says, “one sitting on it, called Faithful and True, and he judges and makes war in righteousness”. These things are characteristic of Him and therefore are to be characteristic of those who have part in the assembly at the present time.

I refer to what we have had this evening already about the householder and the bondmen (Matt 20: 6) because what comes out in part of that chapter, and what Jesus is saying is that the householder was faithful and true to what he had said in everyday affairs. People did not like it, they wanted a variation on it, they thought it not fair. He was faithful and true in what he had done in practical detail of daily affairs.

These scriptures were suggested by the hymn: there is that characteristic in Jesus and we may, as following Him and learning from Him, be more and more ready for that bright and blessed hope to be consummated, and we shall be with Him. These things are practical and the Lord would have us bear in mind that it is in practical affairs that the testimony has to be demonstrated.

May the Lord help by reminding us.

London

4 September 2007

THE SIGHT OF THE CROSS

Tim D Ellis

Isaiah 53: 3-4

John 12: 32

This scripture in John's Gospel came to me this afternoon. You will gather from that that I do not have anything very formed to say about it, but it struck me that the sight of the Lord Jesus on the cross is, speaking carefully and reverently, compulsive viewing. That is, that there is to be no turning away from that sight, there is to be no ignoring it. In Isaiah, of course, we have a different thought: that is, that He is "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their faces; - despised, and we esteemed him not". These two contrasting views of the Lord Jesus in His sufferings on the cross would be something for us to contemplate. On the one hand there was a degree of grief and sorrow which men could not bear, which we could not bear to look upon. The turning away of their faces, men hiding their faces from Him, was partly, as I understand it from this chapter, in shame; men do not wish to be associated with it, and do not wish to carry the guilt, the conscience of having had part in that, which morally we do. Men regard Him as cast aside even by God. Men would turn their faces from such a One. We would despise Him, esteem Him not, consider Him of no account. That would be the natural reaction to the view of the Lord Jesus on the cross, and we have all been there, and would still naturally take that view. It would not be the sort of pleasant sight that is suitable to the natural eye, but He is the One who "hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; and we, we did regard him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted".

But He went that way for us. That is what we come to in John's Gospel, that the Lord Jesus having been lifted up there is a sight that cannot be ignored. "I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me". Although the context is a little different, we get some sense of the reaction that could come, in John the Baptist's view, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", John 1: 29. There is a spontaneous reaction to the sight of One who was carrying the full weight and penalty of sin and sins and was about to become a sacrifice on the cross. He was lifted up out of the earth and He will draw all to Him. What compulsion there is in that. That is not something that can be ignored, it is not something that we can simply pass by. In Mark's

Gospel we have a reference to those who passed by the cross of the Lord Jesus, chap 15: 29. What a thing that would be, simply to pass by the cross. The prophet says in Lamentations 1: 12, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?", but there is to be no passing by of the cross. "I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me". That is, that we are drawn to Him as out of the earth, as I understand it. There is a different order of things that we are attracted to in seeing the Lord Jesus on the cross, the One who completed the work, the One who finished everything that God could give Him to do. "It is finished", He says, John 19: 30.

The other thought that was going through my mind, and again I do not have anything very formed as to it - I leave it for contemplation - is the different views that God has of the Lord Jesus on the cross. On the one hand, what pleasure it must have given Him to see a perfect Man displaying the perfection of God in love, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34. What perfection there was in the Lord Jesus on the cross, and what love that must have called out on the part of the Father there. And yet there is the other side of it which was, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt 27: 46, Mark 15: 34, God hiding His face, speaking carefully and reverently, from His Son, in the awfulness of what was there. What a contemplation that is too, that the One who was the Sin-bearer, the One who enjoyed such communion with His God and Father, would have to say such things, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

These are profound matters and I do not feel I can say very much about them, but I offer them as having been struck by them, perhaps on the line of what we had in our hymn and the prayer that there may be some ray of heavenly light, so that there is this compulsive view of the Lord Jesus. And of course, publicly, we do not now see Him given the place that was due to Him, that place where He has the centre, the rightful place. "But we see not yet all things subjected to Him, but we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour" (Heb 2: 9). So that our view of Him is not a view of a rejected Man exactly, though there is that, but we see Him as One who has completed the work of God, who has been lifted up out of the earth. We see One who has, now, as much right, as much expectation that all men should draw their attention to Him, as He will have as the Centre of God's universe. It is a righteous obligation placed upon all men.

Well, these are scattered thoughts but I commend them to the brethren in the Lord's Name.

Edinburgh

14 August 2007

JESUS OUT OF DEATH

Jim D Gray

Psalm 22: 21-22

John 20: 14-18

I am sure what our brother has said has touched our hearts tonight. This scripture in Psalm 22, "Save me from the lion's mouth. Yea, from the horns of the buffaloes hast thou answered me", is, prophetically, the Lord speaking on the cross. Mr Darby said regarding the first cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" that He '*could not* be heard', Synopsis vol 2 p88. Heaven was watching that scene, which was shrouded in darkness to prevent men from seeing what the Saviour went through, but they were there and you have to take account of it. But God was watching that scene, and I think His heart was gladdened when He heard the second cry from the cross because it was a cry of victory. The wrath of God had been sustained and exhausted by Christ on the cross, the forsaking had finished. There was no immediate intervention by God at that time. The Lord commits His spirit to His Father. There is no immediate intervention, but the intervention came when He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. How the Father would rejoice in that. Our brother mentioned His delight in seeing the perfect Man take up the matter. Divine justice had to be met in regard to sin and sins, and Christ bore it all. Propitiation was made, and substitution was effected for those who lay a claim to Him. We often say that, but it is true. If you lay a claim to the One who was lifted up you come in for the blessing of what He has secured.

His delight, immediately on rising from the grave, was to express these very words which are expressed in this Psalm more than a thousand years before He came into manhood, "my brethren"; "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee". It struck me as our brother was speaking that in bringing the Lord out of death the Father's delight was in it, "raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father", Romans 6: 4. The Father's affections were in it. He selected one blessed Man to raise Him from among the dead, and almost the first words of that blessed Man as out of death are, "go to my brethren", John 20: 17. There are a few prior remarks in this passage. But I do not think there had been any other words from Christ on being raised from the dead before those in this chapter. It is understood that Mary was there first at the tomb - I know

she goes back and brings Peter and John, but she remains there. She gets the first message from Christ, the very first words He said. When He says, "Woman" He may have had in His mind the joy He had in the anticipation of the assembly secured out of His death, but the first words He says regarding this great matter of fruit out of His death were, "Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God". It is a fulfilment of the Psalm. That cry that was heard when He was on the cross before He went into the grave, before He gave up His spirit; the cry of victory, everything had been secured for God and the basis laid. The matter of atonement had to be completed by Christ going into the grave. He "died for our sins according to the Scriptures", and "he was buried" and "he was raised ...according to the Scriptures", 1 Cor: 15, 16. He was buried the matter had to be completed in the death of Christ, signifying that the man who had sinned was out of sight before God for ever. Now as out of death He expresses those very words we read in the Psalm, "my brethren"; "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee".

He uses that expression to Mary first of all. Before He deals with Peter, before He deals with any other, before He appears to His own, He says, "Go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God". The whole matter secured in view of the service of God was encapsulated in these words, "Go to my brethren", persons He had relationships with out of death, persons who are viewed in this section as coming out of the death of Christ. There is no past history. History has all gone. There is no past history apparent here. It is out of the death of Christ, and that is where they find their origin. He says, 'Go to such persons', persons who are in the divine eye, the divine purpose. The whole area of divine purpose can now be opened up because Christ has laid the basis in His death, finished everything on the moral side, making way for divine purpose in persons who belong to the order of humanity to which Christ belongs, "For both he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren", Hebrews 2: 11. What a wonderful thing to grasp hold of, that the Sanctifier and sanctified are all of one! We belong to that order of humanity out of the death of Christ. We do not belong to the Adam order from the divine side. We belong to the order of humanity that is out of the death of Christ. So "he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one" - such

a company! He can make known the Father's name to them, the name of God to them, "my Father and your Father ... my God and your God". We are loved with the same love that Christ is loved with and we love Christ with the same love with which the Father loves Him. What a company of persons we belong to, dignified, set apart for divine service.

These were a few thoughts that sprang from our brother's remarks. May the Lord bless His word.

Edinburgh

14 August 2007

“WITH ME”

A Paul Devenish

1 Sam 22: 14-16; 20-end

2 Sam 15: 19-22

Rev 3: 14-18 - 'rich', 20

John 17: 24

I have been thinking a little recently of the thief on the cross, who was crucified by the side of Christ. “He said to Jesus, Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Verily I say to thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”, Luke 23: 41-43. *With me* - that is what I want to preach about. I received a fresh outlook on the gospel when I read in Mr Stoney's ministry what he said about the true evangelist. A true evangelist is conscious of the empty places in the heart of Christ and seeks to fill them, vol 2 p 21. I would like to be a true evangelist today. Is there an empty place that is in the heart of Christ waiting for you to fill it? We often preach the gospel thinking of man's need, and we do not deprecate that at all; man surely needs a Saviour. The thief on the cross had a desperate need of a Saviour. Think of this, the thief, and a malefactor, became fit to associate with the Lord of glory. How could it be? He was the holy, pure and spotless Lamb of God, and the work of Christ made it possible for a malefactor, a thief, to associate with the Son of God. Is that not a change, a transformation? So whatever our history might be, yours or mine, the precious work of Christ has made it possible for us to be fit and suitable to associate with the Lord Jesus. *With me* - not only the thief; what can we say about this Man? I would like to be able to say more about this Man, the Man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Tim 2: 5, 6) - the Man Christ Jesus. There is no one like Him, no one to be compared to Him - the Man Christ Jesus. Has your heart been won by Christ? Is the vacancy still there waiting for you to fill it? Have you never, perhaps, given your heart to the Lord? Has He never heard you say you love Him? Is that your case? Have you never told the Lord Jesus that you love Him? That vacancy still in the heart of Christ, is it waiting for you?

So I read about Abiathar because David is a most attractive type of the Lord Jesus. He won the heart of so many, drew so many round him. The beginning of this chapter speaks about him in the cave of Adullam, “his brethren and all his father's house heard it, and they went down thither to him. And every one in distress, and every one that was

in debt, and every one of embittered spirit collected round him; and he became a captain over them", v 1, 2. There he was the centre, the attractive centre. Oh, you say, 'was there not any better company for David?' They criticised the Lord because He ate with sinners in Matthew's house, you remember; but here it was those who were in debt, everyone of embittered spirit collected around him; that is, they represent those who were drawn to Jesus, drawn to Christ. In I Samuel 22 Ahimelech had sought to defend David in the presence of Saul, he was put to death along with eighty-five priests who wore the linen ephod. And yet one escaped, and that was Abiathar, and what does David say to him? "Abide with me".

The theme of my preaching is '*with me*'. I would like you to be with Him, associated in your affections with the Lord Jesus. David says here "Abide with me, fear not; for he that seeks my life seeks thy life; for with me" (here we are again - *with me*) "thou art in safe keeping." What a wonderful invitation - "abide with me" - "with me thou art in safe keeping"; no matter what the reproach is, no matter what the efforts of the enemy are, David says "he that seeks my life seeks thy life; for with me thou art in safe keeping".

Ittai wants to be with David. It was just because David was so attractive that he wanted to be with him. He could not bear the thought of any distance between himself and David. So he says, "As Jehovah liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be" - whether in death or life. At this time Absalom was on the throne and had usurped David's place, and David was fleeing. As he says, "Thou didst come yesterday, and should I this day make thee go up and down with us, seeing I go whither I can?" "*Whither I can*" - that is the present state of the world; the Lord Jesus goes whither He can. He cannot go everywhere, He would not be received, He would not be accepted. He would be rejected even as He was when He was here. It says "the Son of man has not where he may lay his head", Matt 8: 20. There were those that loved David. He had a place in their affections, and Ittai was one of them. "As Jehovah liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." *With me* - oh, it is a wonderful invitation that we offer in the gospel, that you can be with Jesus. There is no distance, He has removed the distance. Somebody said he had bridged the distance, but that is not accurate, that is not true. He

removed the distance, He took it away. And He wants to have you with Him in close association.

Well, I might go on and speak about Mephibosheth. He is perhaps the most spiritual man in 2 Samuel. He expresses his feelings about the king. No matter what happened to him, Mephibosheth would say, 'it does not matter what happens to me; so long as you, David, have a place in the affections of the people, it is enough for me'. That is virtually what he says, "since my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house". At that time, David was critical of Mephibosheth. He was not warranted in being critical of Mephibosheth, but Mephibosheth was content, chap 19: 24-30. It reminds me of the hymn that we sometimes sing

All thought of self is now for ever o'er Hymn 247.

'All thought of self' - Mephibosheth had no thought of a place, of his own blessing. He only thought about the place that David should have. What a wonderful thing that is, Christ the supreme Object of his heart. He was content that He should have the place that rightly is His.

I just read in Revelation. There is a sad state of things in Laodicea - lukewarmness. Does that mark you? It says elsewhere, "the love of the most shall grow cold", Matt 24: 12. Has your love grown cold? We have a wonderful Counsellor here in this address to this church. That is one thing the Lord Jesus is. The thief says, "this man". Well, who is this Man? "His name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace", Isa 9: 6. That is this Man - "this man has done nothing amiss". Then you see that He wants to be with you in your circumstances. He wants to have you with Him in His. So He says, "Behold I stand at the door and am knocking". That is the word of God in the gospel. Maybe you have some impression that the Lord is knocking at your heart today. What does He say? He says, "if any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him". That is, He would come into your circumstances. He is gracious enough to do that. I can think of nothing more remarkable than that the Lord of glory, the Creator of the universe, the One, as we have said, who is "Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God", that He should be content to come into your circumstances and my circumstances. But then He says, 'I would like you to come into mine, I want you to come into my circumstances'.

And that is why I read in John 17. You may say that is an

unusual Scripture to read in the preaching, but I would like to attract you into His circumstances, circumstances of glory. He says, "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me". Think of how valuable they are to Him, how much they meant to Him - "those whom thou hast given me". The Father knew the longings of the heart of Christ. He knew the empty places in the heart of Christ, and He knows them today. He says, "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me." The Father has given us to Christ in order that we may fill the longings of His heart. But then He says, "I desire that where I am they also may be with me". Here we are again - "that they also may be *with me*; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me". What glory is that? It is the glory of the great Accomplisher of the counsels and purposes of the blessed God. That is the glory that we are to behold: this is not a glory that we share. Earlier on, we have a glory that we share, "the glory which thou hast given me I have given them", v 22. That is the glory of sonship, but this is not a glory that we share. This is His own personal, distinctive glory, the One that has accomplished everything for God. And He wants you to be with Him to enjoy His company; yes; but to see Him in His glory, to adore and worship Him.

I just close with a little story that Mr James Taylor told in ministry. You may have heard it before: I have repeated it a few times because I was impressed with it. I think it is the only story that I have heard or ever read that Mr Taylor repeated. There was a girl that was thoroughly converted by a bishop (see vol 90 p 263). She came to know the Lord and to love Him, but she got away in her soul. Sometime later she went to see the bishop, and she said to him, 'I have found that I can get along without Christ'. And he looked at her and he said, 'He cannot get along without *you*'. And it broke her down; she came back to the Lord.

May He be your portion and mine, in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

Aberdeen, Idaho

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