

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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Please note: No 19 should have been dated October, and not September as shown

THE MEAL IN THE BARREL

1 Kings 17: 13-16

Luke 1: 1-4, 30-35; 2: 6-14, 25-32; 7: 11-17; 22: 39-45, 50-51; 24: 26-32, 50-53

CKR My exercise, beloved brethren, for these two readings is that we might enquire into the meal and the oil. I think we get an indication in this portion in 1 Kings of the two essential features God has given for the maintenance of His rights in widow conditions, against a background of what relates to Jericho beginning to be rebuilt at the end of chapter 16, and of Jezebel, which we can see very much from the public position around. Elijah teaches this widow woman typically, and I trust the Lord may help us in these two occasions to see, that the two essential features that will sustain the rights of God in publicly broken conditions are a deep appreciation by feeding on the humanity of Jesus, and a real understanding of the blessing and service of the Holy Spirit, which in our day links with a glorified Christ. I think we need to see the way the scripture puts it that, "The meal ... did not waste" and "the oil ... did not fail". I desire that every one of us should increase in an understanding of, and have a faith in, the divine resource that has been brought out as a result of the way God has drawn nigh in the humanity of Jesus and in the service of the Holy Spirit.

Now I have read in Luke's gospel. If time had permitted I would like to have read the whole gospel. I would desire that we would focus our attention and our enquiry on the beautiful features of Jesus that are in Luke's gospel. Matthew highlights His kingship, Mark His service, John His sonship, but Luke dwells on the humanity of Jesus. We might get impressions as to Luke's style. I think he had the exercise that the meal was not going to waste, and he wrote twenty-four beautiful chapters to Theophilus. You get from this gospel some impression of the resource for the day that we are in, and that it will see us through. The younger ones should note as we enquire together that generation after generation has come down in the testimony, and these two features have characterised lives and enquiry and blessing amongst the saints. There has been and is a deepening appreciation of the humanity of Jesus and the power and resource of the Holy Spirit of God.

We can draw on one another's experiences and impressions of the value of Luke's gospel. We may not touch on all we have read, but we can touch on certain things. We can touch on the beautiful way that

Luke refers to the incarnation, “the holy thing also which shall be born”. We can touch that this humanity came in as a sign, “a babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger”, and on Simeon with the Boy in his arms saying, “a light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel”. Simeon had a sense that the meal was not going to waste. We have read the affecting reference in Luke 7 as to the widow; then as to Gethsemane. And I thought it was very lovely to see in Luke 24 how he says, “that Jesus himself drawing nigh”; and, as He touched their two hearts, that they were ushered into activity, “he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”. Then He is carried up into heaven. Not an aspect of that precious humanity was ever going to fail or be wasted. It was going to be taken into glory and developed down here in the power of the Spirit in those who were secured.

EJM The prophet says, “but make me thereof a little cake first”. It is crucial that we must consider for the Lord. We must have our priorities right if the Lord is to come first, do you think?

CKR I trust we can make a little cake through the two readings. As we focus in the enquiry upon these essential features we see that the result formatively is something that is for the pleasure of the Lord Jesus.

RB Did not God have that in His mind after the flood? The first thing God promises is “seed time and harvest”, Gen 8: 22. He was thinking about the meal, was He not?

CKR Quite so. There is something very substantial about it. God chooses at this point, as Elijah is brought on to view as to the rights of God in a difficult period in the testimony, to bring out these two features. As the time goes on, is the diet going to change? Is the agenda going to change? No! The food for the souls of the believers as gathering together to the name of the Lord Jesus must be more than ever the humanity of Jesus.

EJM In Revelation 3 the Lord says to Philadelphia, “because thou hast a little power”, v 8. It is commendation, it is not reproach, is it? He is commending them. Do you think that would be in keeping with the little cake?

CKR Yes, I think it is. It is little as being unpretentious, but a cake also means that there is something there to be provided. In other words,

she would never have made the cake without the ingredients. So she takes the meal. It describes it as “a handful of meal”. But in the words from verse 14 onwards there is no handful; it is the substance of the ingredients that is stressed. It is the meal and the oil. So, while it is right to think of what is little, the important thing is its substantiality.

RB Do you think in figure Elijah made “the life also of Jesus” (2 Cor 4: 10) precious to this woman?

CKR Quite so. I desire that as we enquire together, and we trust everyone here is a believer in the Lord Jesus, that we will begin to realise that there is something that we require to feed on and consider that God brought into this scene. A character and order of manhood that was delightful to heaven has brought into display features of lowliness and meekness and grace, and all these come into Luke's gospel. Luke says, 'I am not going to go without leaving a record of how important the gospel is, and this aspect of the life of Jesus'.

RT Is that what John refers to, “That which was from the beginning ... that which we contemplated, and our hands handled”, and it says, “the eternal life, which was with the Father”, 1 John 1: 1, 2. It was something entirely different, was it?

CKR Something entirely different, but something eminently precious, and so necessary, if the diet and the constitution of the saints is going to be developed, we need a cake, representing an appreciation of this character of manhood.

DBR Does Luke really engage us with the intrinsic excellence of the humanity of Christ? There is a verse in chapter 1 that says, “And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right of the altar of incense”, Luke 1: 11. I understand from the good teaching that that really is the power of the intrinsic excellency of the humanity of Christ, JT Vol 32 p310. Would that link with what you are saying?

CKR Absolutely. I really trust that the Lord will graciously bring in impressions like that of the uniqueness of the humanity of the Lord Jesus, its distinctiveness and the holy nature of it; and the fact that it was incorruptible. It was maintained in vitality, according to Luke's gospel, and grace emanated from Him, in every environment, as in all of it He was bringing God's grace to man. Think of all that is in a handful of meal, and every one here can pick up a handful of meal from the reading, and consider it and can make it their own. How much progress

there would be for us all.

GCMcK It is interesting that the oil is in a cruse and the meal is in a barrel. Could you comment on that?

CKR I wondered about that. The barrel is probably a slightly more substantial item than the cruse. The widow wanted to preserve the purity of it. There was also room for more. I just wonder whether if Luke is giving us twenty-four handfuls of meal in this barrel.

GCMcK I wondered if it would indicate how things are to be preserved and maintained. It is really in the affections of the saints, is it not? Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart. These precious matters have to be preserved amongst us, do you think?

CKR That is right. Well, every one of us is like a barrel. I thought we would see it is essential that this appreciation of the humanity of Jesus is maintained in every local company. There has never been anyone like Him.

JDG In the first section you read in Luke's gospel there were "those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses of and attendants on the Word". They had gathered up some features of Christ in relation to Him as "the Word".

CKR That is right, and Luke was not with them. Luke had gathered it. He must have gleaned and searched it out. A lot of conversations must have gone on; he had done his own research, and he had put the whole thing together. We get in Luke's gospel the reflections and writings of a contemplator of the life and perfection of the Word.

JDG "Communicating spiritual things by spiritual means", 1 Cor 2: 13. It is a remarkable thing.

CKR It is a remarkable matter that he was able to do it, and that he finds an object for it, Theophilus. Does Theophilus mean 'lover of God'? It appeals to me that Luke wrote to a lover of God, and that is the condition that is needed for the last days when men have been "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God", 2 Tim 3: 4. So if we consider ourselves to be a lover of God we have this letter from Luke this afternoon.

RG It was a lover of God who had the title, "most excellent" at the beginning of the gospel, but by the time he gets to the end of the gospel and into the Acts that is dropped. Is he more like Jesus as a lover of

God by then, do you think?

CKR Exactly. I think it is appropriation. He must have been so affected by it. The day came when this gospel arrived. How it came we would not know, but it arrived in his hands and he opens it up, and he must have been affected from the first paragraph. This is not just thrown together. This is a considered reflection of one who is accurately acquainted. He has gathered all this from the origin. "To write to thee with method, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things in which thou hast been instructed". What an opening for any letter received! And as he went on he might say, 'What a Person this is!' And this is the meal that we are seeking to get a hold of, to understand and to appreciate. We can take Jesus into our affections, a character and display of humanity that will enable us to maintain the rights of God in public conditions.

TM In the beginning of the Acts he begins, "I composed the first discourse, O Theophilus, concerning all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach", Acts 1: 1. His first discourse was that he may have the meal. Have you in mind that his second discourse would bring out the oil in the Book of the Acts, the Acts of the Holy Spirit?

CKR That is right, but we will keep that for the second reading! Think of the beauty of the meal! I could ask every one of us here, when did you last read Luke's gospel? May be it is being read in your locality at the moment. We need to see the value of the Gospels. I came across an interesting comment that helped me just on the structure of scripture. In the five Books of Moses you get the figures of Christianity, in the five Books of the Psalms you get the feelings, in the Prophets you get the forecasts, in the Gospels you get the facts, and in the Epistles you get the fruits. The younger ones can perhaps write it down, five Fs, and ponder on that a little, the way the whole thing hangs together, but I would emphasise the importance of the Gospels to get the facts. The glory and distinctiveness of what comes out in the Gospels focuses on the preciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we are in days requiring faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. As we know He has been publicly rejected; "When will he die, and his name perish?", Ps 41: 5. So let us desire and let us seek to feed on the Gospels and to feed on Luke's gospel particularly.

NJH The meal and the oil do not have death in view, is that right? I am just thinking of the spirit of cowardice in 2 Timothy days (2 Tim 1: 7),

which is similar to the line of failure here, is it not?

CKR And so what Paul leads to is power and wise discretion, does it not? So that we need to have that encouragement, to see that “The meal in the barrel did not waste, neither did the oil in the cruse fail”. We need to take that confirming word to us as some might say, 'Well, these are broken days and things are getting smaller'. The humanity of Jesus and the perfection of it is one essential feature for us all to understand in a greater way and to feed on, that we might become characterised by something of these features that came out in Him.

RG Do you think that Luke, when he journeyed with Paul who heard that voice saying, “I am Jesus”, Acts 9: 5, saw the product of that in the company that the Spirit was forming through Paul, and is that to be the end result today of contemplating the perfection of the manhood of Jesus?

CKR That is what I thought; so as we enquire together, let us make a little cake, let us desire to continue to work together in our local gatherings. It is the principle to be maintained, “make me thereof a little cake first”. It is not an afterthought, but the prime purpose of continuing together, as well as the service of God, is in the formation of what the little cake would speak of substantially.

TDB Does the thought of His humanity suggest how near He came to us?

CKR Quite so. How near He came! He came into a condition in which He could be near. You could have seen Him any day if you had gone around Nazareth and that area. It is a very touching matter. The other Gospels tell you more about His kingship and His service and His sonship, but in Luke you are presented with the humanity of Jesus Himself, such a glorious Person in manhood.

DBR He is spoken of here as “the holy thing”. Could you make some comment on that? I was thinking of what has been said as to how we are formed, but perhaps we could be formed in sensitivity too. It goes on to the holy conversation between Elizabeth and Mary and opens up a great sensitive area, do you not think? What would you say about “the holy thing”?

CKR Well, as has been said, it is not 'a holy thing', it is “the holy thing”. There never had been anyone else born intrinsically holy. The Lord Jesus is unique in this description and there is also the environment of

Mary and Elizabeth and the sterilised and priestly conditions that go into the early chapters of this gospel. "And thou shalt call his name Jesus"; once His name is declared matters seem to expand. While He is a Babe, He is no mere babe. There is a glory that intrinsically marks this Person who is coming in, whose name shall be called Jesus, who is "the holy thing", and "the holy thing ... shall be called Son of God". The understanding of His glories is opening up now, and we always need to have a sense when speaking as to Jesus Himself that behind that lies the glory of a divine Person.

DBR He is substantially holy. He did not need to arrive through any process; there is no process in it in a moral sense. He was substantially that, and do you think it is interesting how beautifully it refers to, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee"? We need to be preserved in that line of things, do you think?

CKR Absolutely. We have to preserve the absolute uniqueness of the incarnation, of the birth of the Lord Jesus. How precious! It is all part of the meal. He was holy. That is ever to be maintained. "Perfecting holiness in God's fear" (2 Cor 7: 1) is through divine operations, and though all of that touches the divine nature He in Himself was God coming out in holiness into a condition of manhood.

JW I was thinking about the comment that the Spirit of God makes about Moses in Numbers at the time when things were difficult, that "the man Moses was very meek, above all men that were upon the face of the earth"; the footnote says 'lowly', 'humble', Num 12: 3. I was just thinking, whatever the outward circumstances, He was the same.

CKR That is exactly what I was trusting the Lord would continue to touch, to bring out these features of Himself, that young believers here, as with us all, may be more than ever attracted and attached, and understand that something came into display in this blessed Man that had never been seen before on earth. A Saviour had been born; "A Saviour has been born" - what a word this was! - "... who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign to you: ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger". You think of heaven's interest in all of this, "ye shall find a babe", the lowliness of all of that; then "suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men". Wonderful matter! There was a point for God's complacency on the earth in this day that there never had

been before.

AGM The meal had undergone a process. Is that Luke's gospel, bringing out a process? Luke is full of incidents in the Lord's life. There is not another gospel with so many incidents, and that has been opened up to us. Now what are we going to do with it? Is that what is behind your thought?

CKR That is the exercise. What are we going to do? Let us appropriate it. As another has said, 'Luke's pictures are brought out chapter after chapter'. There are various ones. You could read the whole gospel, and that would have been for profit, but we can enquire into it just to bring out some of the features of the Saviour. Think of that characteristic coming through, "a Saviour has been born ... who is Christ the Lord". The glory is again confirmed. This is the Lord Jesus in manhood in which He could be the Saviour.

JB Luke says, "ye shall find". Do you think that is for us at this present time?

CKR That is right. "Ye shall find"; have we found? Have our hearts been touched, not only in the past? We would desire quickening in this reading so that we might find Him. Every one of us could have a handful of meal. We are gathering it by our consideration, but this is what we need.

EJM In Leviticus, in regard to the oblation, it says of the offerer, "he shall take thereof his handful of the flour", and it goes on in that section to speak of "fine flour mingled with oil", (Lev 2: 2, 4), does that relate to what has been referred to as to the substantial spiritual character of the humanity?

CKR That is right. You may have the energy of a Paul, the ardency of a Peter, the devotion of a John, but in Jesus everything was in perfection. Mr Darby says, 'There was no unevenness in Jesus, no predominant quality to produce the effect of giving Him a distinctive character', Synopsis, Vol 1 p116. He was feeding upon the features of a blessed Man, over against the demonstration of the full-blown nature of man that is obnoxious to God and has been finished in the death of Christ. So in the testimony we need the meal; we need the handful of meal; we need to have a real sense of the fact that God has come in in Christ, in Jesus the Saviour. So there is going to be, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men". All of that is

going to be secured.

RB We are going to take what we have acquired from that handful of meal into heaven, are we not?

CKR I trust we can reach through to the end of the gospel, when the whole matter is carried up into heaven.

RB There is a beautiful thing about these graces that impressed Luke so much: they came through death, and these same graces will shine eternally.

CKR Exactly. It is beautiful to see that the Lamb's wife has the fine linen which "is the righteousnesses of the saints", Rev 19: 8. I think that is all part of it.

Then we come on to Simeon. If you contemplate for a moment what this meant that here is a man who "came in the Spirit", and he is in the right place at the right time, and he takes the Babe Jesus into his arms. What a priestly utterance opens up!

RG Did he have two handfuls?

CKR Very good. Say more.

RG He took him in his arms, "And it was divinely communicated to him". Is that the way the meal is kept fresh, with divine communications?

CKR I thought that. This must not and cannot fail! Let us, on our knees, take up this exercise that the meal continues. How touching it is to see that he had the capacity to hold this Babe in his arms, and then to see the expanse that opens up. There is no way what Simeon saw of this Babe was going to fail. This is "a light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel".

RT It is not just what he had read, but these divine communications are a daily thing, are they not, something that is fresh all the time?

CKR Quite so. Hence we need to go to the Scriptures, reading verses of scripture, and gathering, praying about these things, meditating, contemplating. It is all part of feeding upon this character of humanity.

DAB He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners", Heb 7: 26. What a humanity!

CKR What a humanity, the perfection of it! And that humanity underlies His priesthood, as we would understand. And so we have Simeon gathering these things up. What wealth is in the early chapters of Luke's gospel, all leading up to the point in chapter 3, which we did not read, where the heavens are opened when He is baptised and a voice says, "*Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight*", Luke 3: 21-22.

DBR Do you think Simeon is divinely prepared for this moment? I think it has been beautifully said that you see the priest with the Babe in his arms. There is moral power in Simeon to hold Christ on our side. He is presented from God's side, "a Saviour ... who is Christ the Lord", but there is power here in Simeon to hold Him on our side. That is what you have in mind, that we might be able to hold what we have and appropriate it.

CKR Absolutely, and he has this view of "a light for revelation of the Gentiles", which includes ourselves; all that has come in, "and the glory of thy people Israel". Think of the whole opening up, the scope that is in all of that! This is not a narrowing exercise, it is expanding to the believer as we begin to feed on and appropriate it intelligently, and it becomes formative in us.

RG What our brother has said is very important, is it not, because we might be very attracted to the idea of the meal? But it says of Simeon that he was just and pious, and he was waiting, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It was such a person who took the Lord into his arms. What do you say?

CKR So there is preparation, exactly. In one sense the widow was prepared. She had the ingredients, but she did not have the intelligence. But in the days in which we are we ought both to be prepared and to have some understanding of the necessary features in order to hold this character of truth and humanity.

RG The humanity of Jesus is unknown to anyone that is not in the line of what Simeon was on here in this gospel, do you think?

CKR Exactly. So Luke is writing to one who is a lover of God, and I thought we would just want to carry that forward. He is not just writing this, he is placing this letter in the possession of one who will value it and appreciate it and will reflect upon it. In one sense we are taking the place of a Theophilus today in order to understand and to see the

greatness and glory, and to appreciate the value of this character of humanity.

DTP Hungering and thirsting after righteousness are features that would help us to come into something of the gain of this.

CKR Quite so.

JDG In order to get a disclosure, “I ought to be in the things of my Father”, Luke 2: 49 (note). The Lord discloses these things to us.

CKR That is right, and that is a touch you get in Luke that you do not get in other Gospels. You get that touch of what the Lord was as a Boy of twelve. The natural side had not missed Him, but He says, “did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?” What a beautiful touch that is!

NJH He has already come into the bosom of the Father as coming into manhood, but there is nowhere else to receive Him but into the bosom of this character of man. Is that right?

CKR That is fine; so that is what we want. We want to take this truth, centring in a Person, into our affections and let it become part of us. Let it become formative so that what comes into demonstration reflects that I have been feeding on this character of humanity.

APG So we see a lot of praying in Luke, do we not? So dependence is a feature of manhood. Luke brings several widows in which might suggest dependence, would it?

CKR That is one of the reasons why I read chapter 7. As you say, there are other widows. I could have read of Anna, but I thought there was a touch even at the moment, in the light of the many sorrows that are going on, just to see the way the Lord has moved; so He comes to a locality. He comes to Nain. He is moving this way. Then there is a touching reference to this dead man carried out, “the only son of his mother, and she a widow”. It is beautiful the way Luke writes, “And the Lord, seeing her, was moved with compassion for her, and said to her, Weep not”. Think of the touch that that would bring in to the widow woman. The Lord is graciously dealing with the sorrow, but He has the power to deal with the death of the son. What a glorious matter this is to contemplate! The One who has the power to say to death is the same One who can touchingly be moved with compassion when He sees the widow.

GCMcK And in the end it says, “and he gave him to his mother”. Do you think sonship is something to be preserved amongst us as a living state of things? The young man, “the dead sat up and began to speak”. It is a living state of things in sonship which is to be preserved amongst us, do you think?

CKR We did not read further on in 1 Kings 17. That was going to be Elijah's experience too with the death of the son and his recovery. I think the Lord is moved with this condition, is He not? He sees the widow condition, and He sees sorrows amongst us, and then there is the concern, that life in sonship would be maintained. And He had compassion. He is a feeling Person; that side would come into all these things, and also the touch of power.

DBR The pressures that God allows amongst us are to have an end. We speak feelingly about these things. I am sure we are all touched by them these days, but God does not bring anything indiscriminately. There is an end to be reached, and the end surely is the formation of Christ in us.

CKR That is exactly what I was pondering a little. The Lord sees the widow. There is something very touching in that. God had provided the widow woman to maintain Elijah. Now Luke brings in this incident where the Lord sees the woman. He saw this procession, but then he saw the widow. He saw the condition and He “was moved with compassion for her, and said to her, Weep not; and coming up he touched the bier”. Think of the greatness of that; the whole procession stopped. Divine power and divine authority come in and life is preserved, and that is really what we are looking for, sonship in life to be maintained in vitality in the next generation, because it is the next generation that is dead here. “Youth, I say to thee, Wake up.”

DTP Do we need this call today, “Wake up”? There is an immediate reaction from it. We need the vital touch maintained in our lives as to the links that we have with Him.

CKR Quite so, but the link has to be with Him. The only way life will be preserved is in the vitality of our link with Him, the One who is great enough for every condition, for every moral and physical condition. The Lord is able for that and has the power to deal with it, and will do so.

DBR I suppose the situation looked impossible. The bier was being carried. Sometimes things are like that if we look naturally, but it is

different when the Lord comes into things. He gives His own touch. We have all spoken together about the second Man out of heaven. It is a different order of Man, and there is to be an order of men like Him.

CKR That is right. The whole thing is being developed, but the period of affliction and discipline has to be gone through. We might prefer if it did not happen, but everything in God's ways is measured, and we see the Lord coming into this particular incident. The widow woman had one son; so she had gone through the sorrow of becoming a widow initially, and then gone through the sorrow again of losing her son. She was bereft; so that the Lord is moved with compassion and brings in the touch of grace and power, and the situation is recovered.

JS I was thinking how He was moved with compassion for her. That would bring out His feelings, as a feeling Man. Do you think the power would show that He was "marked out Son of God in power ... by resurrection of the dead", Rom 1:4?

CKR Quite so. There is the blend of these two features in Jesus. These are holy feelings. Think of the Lord as Son of man in Luke's gospel, feeling the conditions of the race, and this is just one example of it, but death had come in. Death had come in in a situation which was really cutting to the core of people's affections and life in this particular locality and household, and yet there is a touch coming in.

TM The background in Ruth is widowhood. We have exercise with Ruth gleaning handfuls, and then there is more capacity and other measures. It all leads to Boaz, the mighty man of wealth.

CKR All these things give another indication of the way progress can be made.

Perhaps we should go on to chapter 22. There are so many incidents between chapter 7 and chapter 22 that could have been touched on, but I thought we could not but pause for a moment or two to consider how Luke presents this period in chapter 22. It is the mount of Olives, not described as Gethsemane in Luke. Features that come out include, "And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw", "Father, if thou wilt", and then the touching reference, bringing out the depth of feeling that the Lord was going through, "And being in conflict he prayed more intently", and the angel coming to strengthen Him. We may think of all of this, feeding on such a character of Manhood that is not going to be overcome but is going to triumph in the committal and

glory of it, as He agonises in His spirit over what He was going to take away in His power.

RB Is this Luke helping us how to handle pressure?

CKR Yes, chapter 7 likewise, which we talked about. It is a very testing thing to handle pressure; yet the Lord Jesus could handle everything perfectly. He handled everything according to the will of God, and we see His committal to that as He says, "Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me:- but then". He adds a bit even into that verse, I have often thought. It does not just run on. He says, "Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me:-", then there is a little pause, and then He says, "but then, not my will, but thine be done". It ought to deepen with us the perfection and depth of the Lord's feelings as He anticipates what He was going to take away.

AGM The intensity of what He was going through inwardly comes out in "his sweat became as great drops of blood". Persons who are in pain can sweat like this, but the Lord Jesus was not in pain. It was inward conflict, such was the intensity of it.

CKR So what can you say? You cannot say anything about it. You just feed on it and ponder the greatness and glory. This is all characteristic of the meal. These are all the features that are going to be kept going over in local meetings, going over in our own exercises and considerations, the ability of the Lord to handle the whole situation, a unique situation.

GCMcK In view of what we are just saying, it is remarkable that an angel strengthens Him. Do you think the Lord's perfect humanity comes out in that, that He was the Object of angelic service? What would you say?

CKR It is a divine resource. You have to be careful what you say about this because of who we are speaking of but, "an angel appeared to him ... strengthening him". It is an added touch of divine sympathy and divine committal to the whole matter. But you could probably say more.

GCMcK Is there just an indication in it that angels will be available to us as going through pressure?

CKR That is helpful. They will be there. In circumstances of particular deep pressure, we can always count on divine support.

JDG The angel would be there as filling out the will of God, would he not?

CKR Exactly. The Lord Jesus pre-eminently was fulfilling the will of God.

JDG The angel is one that was under authority. Is that right?

CKR Yes. These are deep matters, but they are very precious matters.

RG I often wondered if this angel was the one at the end of Revelation when the Lord says, “I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify these things”, Rev 22: 16. It has been said that was a personal angel of the Lord's.

CKR It is obviously a touch of a distinctive nature that Luke brings out, “And an angel appeared ... from heaven strengthening him”. He rises from His prayer.

JD The angel would be marked by obedience, but do you think there is something remarkable here in him taking account of a Man who became “obedient even unto death”, Phil 2: 8?

CKR Very good. I think these are moral, substantial truths for us to feed on, and I just keep coming back to this. We are going to need these features to maintain the rights of God in the testimony against such a dark background publicly. The moral triumph of this humanity is secured and brought out by the saints, but we have to feed first. These things are not taken on academically. This is what we require to commit to and to consider, in order that the meal is used. No impression any one of us has of the perfection of the Lord Jesus in this character is to be wasted. It will sustain us to the end.

RT Have you something to say about “rising up from his prayer”? There is something very dignified about that.

CKR There is something very dignified and very distinctive about that. He is not overcome, but it is as though He had arrived at something, speaking carefully; it was time to move forward. We can think of the ark going forward in dignity. On another occasion it says, “Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered ... Return, Jehovah, unto the myriads of the thousands of Israel”, Num 10: 35, 36. In John He says, “Rise up, let us go hence”, John 14: 31. Think of Him going forward here, knowing what He was going for, and I thought there

was a beautiful touch in what we read in verses 50 and 51. This was the last touch of healing in Luke's gospel, and it is only in this gospel you get it, that He healed the bondman's ear. It is very touching that even in that condition the Lord ever brought out the spirit of grace, even to the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34. This is the character of manhood that we have to feed on for the testimony.

TRC I just wondered if this was the Man becoming very great? In Luke's gospel you get that impression, do you not? "And the man became great, and he became continually greater, until he was very great", Gen 26: 13. Would that link with what you had in mind in the meal, and in our own experience that the Lord Jesus should become very great in our affections?

CKR And as He becomes greater He becomes more precious. There is a link with Him becoming greater and His becoming more precious to us. So He is really becoming our all, the One that we feed on. There is no one else. You are appropriating and desiring to learn more and more about these glorious features and how the Lord brought them into demonstration in the various situations.

So when we come to chapter 24, we come to the way Luke presents the forty days. The work is over now. He has completed it. Three days and three nights, and He has been raised, and now we come to the forty days, and again it is, "the things concerning himself" and, "Jesus himself", v 15. Luke would say, 'I want to give you my impression of what I gather of the forty days', and the central element of it is "Jesus himself".

RB Luke would impress upon us that He is still a Man, and that really is the foundation of the glad tidings, is it not, a Man out of death?

CKR Exactly, and a living Man. So, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?". He went over this conversation and He got so far, then in verse 25 you get the sense that He interjected, and He said, 'There is a whole matter opening up which I want to tell you about and convince you about'. They were disappointed, they were downcast, and He interjects with this great divine matter, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?" And then He continues and He opens up the Scriptures. How fine that is.

JB They did not answer that question.

CKR He did not give them time. The Lord was taking over the conversation. He was going to use the Scriptures, and bring to light the whole matter of the history of Moses, and the prophets, and in all the Scriptures the matters relating to Himself. He looks on to a work complete and a living condition of things which goes on to the second Man out of heaven.

ARH In Luke you get, "To-day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears", Luke 4: 21. Does He now open that up here concerning Himself? Is that the little cake coming in?

CKR I think that is beautiful. By the end of the gospel the whole matter is coming together. What was there before, and the glory of it, came together perfectly "in all the scriptures the things concerning himself". Would you not have loved to have heard this conversation? You wonder how He would touch on it. Think of how He would draw on the tabernacle system, on Moses and all that he introduced, bringing out "the things concerning himself". Let it be our desire in every reading meeting to bring out and touch "the things concerning himself".

BL Their hearts were flammable, were they not? The widow was gathering a few sticks as well. We need something that is combustible if there is going to be a cake.

CKR Exactly. "Was not our heart burning in us as he spoke...?" Beautiful matter that. It does not say, 'hearts'. It is a single heart, is it not? "Was not our heart ...?", as though they were drawn together. Would you not love, and I think perhaps there has been a little stirring going on with us even in our reading, that all our hearts would be burning in relation to the deep appreciation of everything that is in this humanity?

DBR So we come to what was referred to at the beginning, "Handle me"; it is substantial. What do you say about it? I know John speaks of "eternal life, which was with the Father", 1 John 1: 2. This is Luke speaking of it, do you not think?

CKR That is right, Luke speaking of it, bringing out the substantial nature of it. They needed the Spirit for the confirmation and full understanding of it all, but He is giving them the substantiality of what is in Himself in a new condition. And so it is "part of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb; and he took it and ate before them". All these matters

would cause them to see that what characterised the Lord Jesus is not to be wasted.

DBR I was thinking that in times of pressure we are served divinely to have our eyes fixed on another order of things, and it becomes more valuable to us. There is another order of things.

CKR Exactly. And so at the close of the gospel He takes them out to Bethany and then He is carried up in the spirit of blessing. Think of the beauty of all of this gospel and its own touch at the end. "He was separated from them and was carried up into heaven". The grace of heaven has been shown here, the perfection and glory of what He brought out, and the features that we have been referring to. But now you think of the delight that the whole matter is "carried up into heaven".

AGM Luke's gospel was really written from the standpoint that He is in glory.

CKR Yes, it has to be, because Luke never knew Him any other way, but he brings home to us the value of what he has written, the substantial features that came out in the humanity of the Lord Jesus. So it has all gone to heaven in Him, and heaven is where it belonged. He belonged to heaven, "the Son of man who is in heaven", John 3: 13. In the next reading we will look at the oil.

Buckie

3rd May 2008

Key to Initials:-

R Bain, Buckie; T D Beveridge, Kirkcaldy; D A Brown, Grangemouth;
T R Campbell, Glasgow; J Drummond, Aberdeen;
R Gardiner, Kirkcaldy; A P Grant, Dundee; J D Gray, Edinburgh;
A R Henry, Glasgow; N J Henry, Glasgow; J B Ikin, Manchester;
B Lovie, Aberdeen; G C McKay, Glasgow; A G Mair, Cullen;
E J Mair, Buckie; T Mair, Cullen; D T Pye, Kirkcaldy;
C C D Remington, St Albans; D B Robertson, Cumnock;
C K Robinson, Glasgow; J Strachan, Dundee; R Taylor, Kirkcaldy;
J Webster, Fraserburgh

COMPANIONS OF THE CHRIST

Robert Gardiner

Hebrews 3: 14, 15

2 Kings 2: 1, 2, 4, 6-14

Daniel 3: 24, 25

John 17: 11, 12, 20-24

I want, beloved brethren, to say a word about being companions of the Christ. Recently we have sat under the sound of ministry which has reminded us of the testimony of the Christ being confirmed in us, and as I thought about that, I thought about this scripture because if the testimony of the Christ is to be confirmed in anybody, surely it is confirmed in the companions of the Christ. The thought of companionship is a very special idea. If you are a companion of someone, it means you think the same way as they think, you feel the same way as they feel, you have the same desires as they have; that is what true companionship is. The apostle is saying to the Hebrews: "For we are become companions of the Christ if indeed we hold the beginning of the assurance firm to the end". Then he goes on to speak of the provocation in order to open up to them what he meant by saying, "hold the beginning of the assurance firm to the end". You will remember that, when the twelve spies went into the land and probably about two million persons were waiting for them, only two of them came back with a good report. The other ten had to agree that what they said was right, but they were afraid, and all that unbelieving generation died in the wilderness. How God was provoked at that time, but through Moses's intercession God did not bring in judgement immediately; nevertheless, His judgement was there, and there were all those persons whose bones were ultimately strewn in the wilderness; but there were two who were companions of the Christ. They held "the beginning of the assurance firm to the end".

What was the beginning of the assurance? It was what they saw in the land. That was the beginning of the assurance held in their hearts. Going through the wilderness in suffering was surely worthwhile because of what they had experienced in the land. They had that assurance in their hearts and held it to the end; these were true companions of Moses, companions of the Christ. Well, every believer surely would want to be a companion of the Christ. Everyone that knows the Lord Jesus as their Saviour does not necessarily know what

it is to be a companion of the Christ. What we had this afternoon about the place that God has with us, and the activity and energy of the Spirit within us, are the hallmark of persons who *become* companions of the Christ. Now you notice it says, "become". The idea of becoming companions of the Christ is a process. You do not make companions overnight; it is a process. In the natural way of things, in our lives, companionship does not come immediately. You grow into companionship. You begin to see that this person is thinking the same way as you think, has the same likes as you have, has the same desires as you have, has the same outlook as you have, hates the same things as you hate, loves the same things as you love, and slowly but surely you become companions and you can talk to one another freely. Now, how do we become companions of the Christ? It is not that we make Christ our companion, but Christ makes us His companions if there is the basis for Him doing so.

That is why I read of Elijah's history with Elisha. Here is Elijah who is a type of Christ in this passage and Elisha, a type of us, journeying together. It says: "And it came to pass when Jehovah would take up Elijah into the heavens by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal". Elisha appears to be in movement when Elijah joins him. He saw in Elisha a person that he would make his companion. But in the making of his companion he has to take Elisha a certain moral way, and the Lord Jesus in our lifetimes takes us a certain moral way if we are to become His companions. I want to say to every one here that sometimes when you are older and look back on your history, you can see certain landmarks in your life and you know that, at these landmarks, the Lord was speaking to you because He wanted you to become His companion. If you sidestepped the landmark and moved another way, then there was a longer or a shorter time when you had to come back to that landmark. The Lord had to speak to you again and draw to your attention what He had wanted to draw to your attention months or years before, so that you might become His companion. Would it not be wonderful to be a companion of Christ? Does that not attract you? Not just to know your sins forgiven, but to be a companion of Christ, and to know that He has wrought in your soul on this journey through life so that *He* might make you His companion.

So Elijah takes Elisha and they are as one moving on. You might say figuratively, 'The Lord is moving on to glory'. Now the moment is coming when Elijah is to be taken from him. Gilgal is

Elisha's first staging post in his moral history so that he might become a companion of Elijah. These places that we read of here were not what they had been. You will find that in Christendom, in which we have our part, there are landmarks that are spoken of but they are not what they are meant to be. The beauty and the wonder and the glory and the moral worth of each of these places is not now in Christendom what they were meant to be. When Elijah would speak about Gilgal, he would speak about it as to what it was meant to be. He would remind Elisha that it was the place where the flesh had to be dealt with, Josh 5: 3. The stone-knives had to be used. There was the cutting off, and, beloved brethren, if we are going to be companions of the Christ, there has to be the use of the stone-knives so that whatever feature of the flesh is still evident has to be cut off. Nothing of that can go into the land. Circumcision had not taken place in the wilderness, and it had to be carried out immediately they were in the land so that they would be suitable for going in with Joshua. I think the Lord would say to us this evening that this is one of the first landmarks in our history if we are going to become companions of the Christ. Have we allowed the sharpness of the knife to sever from us what belongs to the flesh in whatever form it might take? This is something that has to be kept always before the soul, that the flesh is the flesh, and when it appears it has to be dealt with, and dealt with immediately.

When Elijah says he is sent to Bethel, then Elisha says: "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee!" This is another landmark. If you are going to become a companion of the Christ, you have to understand something of Bethel. Bethel was the place where Jacob found on his moral road a ladder, and it was reaching to heaven. He recognised the place as the house of God, and heard the One standing at the top of the ladder saying, "I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac" (Gen 28: 13), but Jacob considered it a dreadful place. The time came when Jacob had to come back a different man. After all those years when he had been away, pleasing himself, he had to come back and face what he should have faced at that time. There was the house of God but he was not equal to the place in which God was to find His delight. However, when he came back after wrestling with God, and having his name changed, he was equal to it; he could pour a drink offering on the pillar.

Then it says, "And Elijah said to him, Elisha, abide here, I pray thee; for Jehovah has sent me to Jericho". Jericho was the place the

children of Israel had to go around after they had crossed the Jordan. It stood athwart the entrance into the land, typical of man's administration, standing in the way of the people of God going into the enjoyment of the land. It was the ark that went round. I can hear Elijah saying to Elisha, 'What about the ark, how do you feel about the ark?' The ark went round each day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day, then that shout and the walls of Jericho fell, Josh 6. The ark, Christ, the beauty of the ark, the wonder of that which was made of acacia-wood, overlaid with gold. It was small and yet what infinitude was in it; two and a half by one and a half by one and a half cubits, Exod 25: 10. It was not large to man, nothing ostentatious, but oh how precious to God! Elijah would say to him: 'that is representative of the One that God finds infinite delight in'. It would be another landmark in Elisha's history; get rid of the flesh, come to recognise the greatness of Bethel and what it is to God, and come to recognise the awfulness of man's system that would stand athwart the entrance into the enjoyment of the land.

Then, they come to the Jordan. You can understand Elijah saying: 'Do you remember the Jordan, Elisha?' Think of the ark going over the Jordan, typical of the way the Lord went into death, and think of all that He endured, Josh 3, 4. Then think of the way the twelve stones were put in the bed of the Jordan and another twelve stones taken up out of the bed of the Jordan and set up. There was One that overcame the power of death, One that went through. Who was He? It was the Christ. Do you want to be a companion of the Christ? He would say, 'You have to understand what it is to take your place going through the Jordan'. The priests' feet stood firm and the ark remained there, and the waters went back out of sight. Death could not stand: "What ailed thee ... thou Jordan, that thou turnedst back?" Ps 114: 5. Elijah would be telling Elisha about that, and the Spirit of God is telling us about that; that if we are to be companions of the Christ, death has to come in on everything that would hinder our relationship with Him. No matter what there is about us, death has to be applied to it so that we can come out on the other side, glorious, able to enter into the land and take our place as His companions. When they came to the Jordan, Elijah took his mantle and smote the waters. What power there was with Elijah, and Elisha was learning from that too. If I am to be a companion of Christ's, I have to understand these landmarks to which He is taking me. Here is the man that is on his way to heaven, Christ in type, and he is taking Elisha along with him on this way.

So then it says: “And it came to pass when they had gone over, that Elijah said to Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so to thee”. You can imagine Elisha saying to himself, 'I want a double portion of his spirit. I want to be like this man who is a man of judgement on the one hand, but a man who is displaying grace on the other as he is showing me what all these places signify morally and spiritually'. The double portion is what is characteristic of this dispensation in which we are. The Lord is here: “And behold, I am with you all the days” (Matt 28: 20), and the Spirit is here, that is double testimony that there is power here to see us through until the end. Then it says: “And it came to pass as they went on, and talked”. Now we are getting closer companionship. Elisha has answered to each of these landmarks and now Elijah can be free in his talking with him.

It does not say what they talked about but “they went on, and talked”. What companionship! To walk and talk with the Lord on the other side of Jordan will be no surprise. As has been said, 'The rapture will not be a surprise to those who are accustomed to walk and talk with Christ over Jordan', JT vol 20 p220. Have you ever thought about that; do you think you will be surprised when you see the Lord? We often wonder what it will be like. Well, if you walk and talk with Him on the other side of the Jordan now, you will not be surprised. It is the Man that has been your meat and your drink in your lifetime here. How attractive! Now “Elijah went up by a whirlwind into the heavens”; what it must have been to Elisha to see Elijah go up! Would he be bereft of his companionship? No, when the Lord went up into heaven, He did not leave His disciples bereft; He says: “And I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter”, John 14: 16. When the Spirit of God came, He brought all the wonder and perfection of Christ in glory with Him, so that the disciples retained in their hearts the glory of the Person who had been here and gone into death, and had risen again and had gone into heaven. The Spirit Himself was here to sustain them and to make them realise, understand and enjoy the companionship of the Lord Jesus.

I read in Daniel because there we find these three men who were in difficult circumstances. They had been faced with a problem. The king ordered that at the sound of the pipe and the sambuca and

other musical instruments, the image that had been built would be bowed down to. This is the time we are in. Man has built up an organisation in this world that is called in Scripture "great Babylon". He has set up this organisation, partly religious, partly commercial; and persons are expected to bow down to it. I would like to draw the young people's attention to this. The sound of the music suggests that it is not only a command, although the command was in it. It was meant to be an attractive thing, attracting you naturally to bow down to this great edifice that man is building here in this scene which one day is going to fall. The crisis that is currently affecting the financial world is an indication of how quickly Babylon will fall. But in the meantime men are bowing down to it, they are spending all the hours of the day, every day of every week, bowing down before it. Beloved brethren, if you have gone by way of Gilgal and Bethel and Jericho and the Jordan, that music will have *no* appeal to you whatsoever. Your ears will be attuned to another kind of music, a heavenly music. Your ears will detect that this kind of music is not of God. It is not the music of heaven; there are no harps to be heard in this music. The bagpipe and these other kinds of instruments would arouse the flesh so that you might be completely overcome with the power of Babylon.

Oh, my beloved brother and sister, be able to detect the sound of this music. It may be that if you will not bow down, you will be put into the fiery furnace. How hot that was made, but how wonderful if you are a companion of the Christ, to find Him in the midst of the opposition, hatred and ridicule! These three men would not bow down, they would not answer to the music, they knew One who could play so eloquently on the harp. That was the music they answered to, but they were found in the fiery furnace. The king says, "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said to the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of God". These men had gone the same moral road as Elisha. Christ points out these essential parts of the moral road to you that have to be answered in your soul, and then answered in your walk. Such persons can take their place as being companions of the Christ. How He honours them by being in this fiery furnace with them. Think of the Lord of glory being with us, not only all the days, but in all the situations that we might find ourselves in through faithfulness to Him.

Well, that is companionship in times of great trial. I now want to

finish with companionship in times of blessing. The Lord in John 17 is speaking to His Father and He says, "When I was with them I kept them in thy name; those thou hast given me I have guarded, and not one of them has perished". He is saying that when things were happening that would have overcome them: "I have guarded, and not one of them has perished". How wonderful! He says: "I have given them thy word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, as I am not of the world", John 17: 14. Oh, beloved brother, beloved sister, could that be said of you or of me: "not of the world"? We sing that hymn: 'Not of the world' (Hymn 284). We sometimes sing it with zest, but is it true? Now, the companionship is getting closer: "that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me". How wonderful that the Lord has persons that He claims to be His own, His companions and He uses them in a display of testimony: "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me". Then He continues, "And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them". What a glory! The glory of sonship. You see how companionship leads into the greatest blessing of all. It is not sonship by adoption by signing a paper. If you are an orphan in the world and you are adopted, someone signs a paper and that is the transaction done. No! It is a personal gift from the Lord Jesus to His companions. You will never forget that experience of having a sense that the Lord, in the glory of His sonship, wants you to share in the joy of that relationship as sons with the Father which you will value for all eternity.

In verse 23 He says: "I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me". There is a Philadelphian touch about that: "thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me". How wonderful to be taken, not now as companions, but as sons, into the presence of the Father. Then He goes on, "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me" (you see how near we are to Christ) "that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". Now we are in the area of purpose, and it is only sons that can appreciate and enjoy it. It is only sons that can behold His glory which He has been given. What a glory! We have known what it has been to be companions of the Christ in the testimonial position down here, but now He is taking us into the very innermost realm, the place where we behold His glory. The ark with the staves drawn out, never to move again. It has moved through the

wilderness over the Jordan around Jericho into the land, into the oracle of the house, never to move again.

Do we realise that we are destined for a place in heaven that was prepared before the foundation of the world? What a marvel that each one of us has come by way of the redemptive work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit, come by way of the moral road that Elijah took Elisha, come by way of being companions of the Christ testimonially, then come into the enjoyment of the very closest relationship with Him as sons before the Father, and to have the Father's name made known. The Lord says: "And I have made known to them thy name, and will make it known", v 26. He made it known when He said to Mary: "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God", John 20: 17. Mary - what a companion she was of Christ, Mary of Magdala - one out of whom seven demons had gone! It was not that they were put out, they had to go, they could not stay. He gives her that message which comes right down to us, involving the full revelation of the name of His Father and our Father, His God and our God. How wonderful it is to have the testimony of the Christ confirmed in us who are the companions of the Christ, and as such to be taken into such a close relationship, the relationship of sonship! We are looking forward to the Lord's Day, if in the meantime the Lord has not come for us. How we long that He will come for us! Do we? That is one of the most demanding questions that I know. Do we want the Lord to come for us? Well, if He does not come for us and we come together again tomorrow morning, what a joy will be ours to behold His glory and to be with Him for the Father's pleasure!

May it be so for His Name's sake!

Brechin

10th November 2007

THE LIVING GOD

Gordon C McKay

Matthew 16: 13-16

I venture to speak a little, dear brethren, about this remarkable expression, "the living God". Men have not thought good to keep God in their thoughts, and where they do allow any thought as to God they relegate Him in their minds, you might say, to the distance as if He was not to be heeded, or He was not active. But as believers we are brought into the wonderful light that we are connected with a living God. Even as to dead saints, He "is not God of the dead, but of the living", Matt 22: 32. All live to Him. He is the God of resurrection, the living God. He makes Himself known in wonderful grace; through the Lord Jesus He has made Himself known. In the revelation to Peter here, He gave him an apprehension of Christ in this wonderful setting, that He is "the Son of the living God". Jesus and the disciples had just left the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the Lord had warned them as to their leaven, v 6. They had left behind a system that was dead because the Lord Jesus was introducing the disciples into another realm, and the Father was active in it too; it is a realm of life, a realm of divine Persons. The doctrine and teaching is so valuable and so important, dear brethren, that we ought to pursue it energetically and seek to cut "in a straight line the word of truth" (2 Tim 2: 15), but always remembering that we have to do with divine Persons themselves. They are active, and where God is He speaks. If it is His house, He speaks there, He is known there. It is the house of God, the assembly of the living God. So we are in days when God can act and does. He is not in any sense quiescent, and He would introduce our souls into a living system of things quite apart from any of the deadness that would mark Judaism, or the emptiness and deadness that would mark paganism. He would deliver the saints. This gospel does that, delivers the saints from such things. This is an expression that comes into Hebrews too, "the living God": "See, brethren, lest there be in any one of you a wicked heart of unbelief, in turning away from the living God" (Heb 3: 12), because the Hebrew believers were in danger of doing that and going back to a dead system, to dead works. That is an expression that is also used, "dead works". We have to apprehend divine grace in that wonderful living system where God is known and God is active. It is a living system.

That being so, and as having part in it, the question would arise

as to ourselves whether we are living. Spiritually, are we alive? Is there life with us? Is there some sense of that, that through divine operations and through the gift of the Spirit there is spiritual life in our souls? If there is no life, in one sense there is nothing. You see that in natural things, but think of spiritual things. If there is an outward form, even great activity without spiritual life, what is it? What is it for God? What is it for the saints? What is it for our meetings? Everything in one sense depends on the fact that there is a living state of things. It begins with individuals. Peter's ministry introduces the thought of the Lord Jesus as the living Stone, and then he adds that the saints are living stones, 1 Pet 2: 4, 5. It seems a paradoxical expression, but still the structure the Lord Jesus has built consists of living stones, and they come to Christ as the living Stone. I speak as desiring to enter into this more, to have some sense of a realm of life. All around, everything you touch in the world is marked by death, moral death. There is no life in it. The world is a morally dead system, and it leads on to death itself, the wages of sin, but we have been given light as to a realm of life, we have been given light as to a living God and as to a living Lord, the Lord of life. How great He is, the Lord Jesus! God is the God of resurrection and the Lord Jesus is "the resurrection and the life", John 11: 25.

I believe that as we receive the Holy Spirit our souls would be attached to the Lord Jesus as beyond the power of death, so that we are delivered in our souls in a very real way, not only from the fear of death and the power of death but from all that is dead, and we are introduced into a realm of things where the Lord Jesus is known and where there is spiritual life in our souls. We want to try to nurture that amongst ourselves, dear brethren. How do we do that? We cannot bring in life. That is the divine prerogative; God does that and the gift of the Holy Spirit is essential to that, but then I suppose we can nurture one another, we can edify one another. At the very least we can bring in food for life. The Lord Jesus is that. He is the living Bread. We have food that sustains life. Not only are we given life, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, and are given food that sustains us in life.

So that could be one thing we could do, individually ourselves appropriating Christ and also seeking to feed one another and encourage one another in this way, contributing something that would bring in spiritual life in our souls. Life shows itself. If there is spiritual life it shows itself. We look for it in the children and are thankful for what we can see when it begins to come to light in them. We can see it in our brethren locally and generally. We see where there are signs of

maturity that do not relate to the flesh or the world or what is natural. Something more than that appears. We are still in flesh and blood and what is natural is not set aside and has its place in regard to righteousness in the world, making our living and so on, because there are responsibilities that we have. That all has its place. But you will not find spiritual life simply in natural relationships as natural relationships. There is really another realm of things that depends entirely on the Holy Spirit to touch, to find something moving in your soul, something moving in your affections, Christ being the great Object. We have been taught that life in the creature needs an object (JND Synopsis Vol 5 p51); not so in God, but in a creature life needs an object. We have a blessed Object in the Lord Jesus, drawing out of our affections and thoughts towards Him, and we have the Holy Spirit linking us with Him too.

These are just some thoughts that came to one that over against all that is dead, whether here in this world or among the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sadducees denied the resurrection. Over against that there is a living God, and a living system of things centring in His beloved Son. It is over against paganism too, for the Thessalonians "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God", 1 Thess 1: 9. Think of the darkness that marked their souls before they discovered there was such a One as "a living and true God" and they discovered He had a Son. How blessed that is! Here we have it, "the Son of the living God". Thus we are introduced into this thought of the living God as it becomes light to our souls. We understand also that this realm of life is a realm of affection, "Son of the living God". It is the realm where Christ is, drawing out the Father's affections. He has done that and He continues to do it. It is the realm where the Father loves the Son. In one sense, spiritually there is not an enormous difference between life and love. They are very close together spiritually. Surely if we know what spiritual life is, it must involve that we are enjoying divine love. May it so more amongst us. It would be our prayer that there might be here in this city a more vigorous and consistent expression of spiritual life in all of us, rather than any sign of decline or of lapsing into what is merely of nature or of the flesh.

Glasgow

1st July 2008

INTENSITY AT THE SUPPER

Eric C Burr

John 4: 21-24

I just use this scripture to recall an impression I had on Lord's day morning as to the intensity of the time at the Lord's supper. We can easily reduce the level of it, especially if our memories are good, but I think the general tendency of scriptures that relate to worship, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, put's the spirit of things to be reached at some level of intensity which seizes hold of the company that is there. It is not just to go over again things that have been said before, valuable though they are, but some impression came to me that the intensity of the time was something which would leave a mark upon us and would open the door with a great deal of substance in relation to the service on the Lord's day morning. It is very easy to fall into a pattern, but if you get some distinctive impression that lays hold of you then the occasion takes on a new form, and certainly a new tone.

I use this scripture for the expression of Jesus, "neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem", that is to say, as in Mr Darby's hymn:

By sight, nor sense, defined. (Hymn 74)

We are taken out of the circumstances in which we are at the Supper as the service unfolds itself. We find that we are enjoying things on a level that we find difficulty in expressing by way of anything that amounts to description, but what we do find is that something happens in us because of the intensity of what the Spirit is able to work in the company and bring it out for expression and enjoyment. It does not require lengthy prayers or anything like that, but what it requires is the impression. Think of the value of that expression, "the name of the city from that day, Jehovah is there", Ezek 48: 35. You go to the Supper and have the emblems in remembrance of Him, but what you are going to touch is a place where the Lord is.

Then we have contact and experience with the Spirit, but then there is also a transcending aspect of things, "My Father ... is greater than all", John 10: 29. Think how that must imply intensity in the souls of those who can touch it. Such expressions are used by Jesus, they are not used by the woman, or by the disciples. They are used by Himself, bringing out that from His point of view one object of the gathering that follows the Supper is that believers who are participating

should, in their spirits, be taken out of their ordinary environment and find the blessedness of that place where Jesus is.

These things occurred to me at the Supper on Lord's day morning. I commend the thought to the brethren, not that we pray to have an intense time, but, as things work by the Spirit in the spirits of the brethren, I think it is possible for us to be lifted out of what we have always heard, out of what we speak of, out even of the scriptures that we have read. There is the power which comes into our spirits as we experience having our place with Jesus - certainly, "neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem", not in a book or anything like that, but in the company of one another in whom we have confidence where there is the ability to enjoy the things of Jesus Christ together.

I leave this with the brethren because it was quite a distinct impression to me to be able to say how intense the time is, and yet it binds you into the circumstances of Christ and His Father.

London

26th August, 2008