

# A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 42

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## LIVING STONES

**Matthew 16: 15-18**

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**PTvdB** I am sure that these scriptures have often been read together since each of them speak to us of stones. I thought we might consider together what the meaning is, and what we have to learn from the thought, of the 'living stone'. It may seem, in a sense a contradiction because a stone itself has no life in it, but I am sure that with spiritual understanding we might get some instruction as to what the Lord's desire for us is, that we should be like Him, that we should imitate Him, as He was, the Living Stone. But also, that we come to Him as a living stone, and that we ourselves "as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house". In English speaking countries people have a surname, 'Livingstone', and it shows us that in some way people in the past must have given thought to this and wanted to be marked by what is mentioned here, "a living stone".

Peter is the one who writes about this in his epistle, and I thought it would be good to look at what the history of Peter had been. That is why I read from Matthew's gospel where the Lord asks the disciples, "who do ye say that I am?". Peter says, "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the living God", and then the Lord answers and says to him, "on this rock I will build my assembly". Peter must have had an impression of what the Lord implied, that the assembly was to be built on a rock, on stable ground. If anything is to be built on a rock, it should itself be of no less a quality, in order to maintain that stability. There is not much point in building in wood or any other substance on a rock: we are to be built out of the same material, we are to be like the Lord Jesus, as stones. Peter had the revelation of who the Lord was as "the Son of the **living** God". I think this is how he got the impression of the importance for us to be alive, to be livingly available to the Lord. Especially in the days in which this occurred, people were worshipping idols and carved images, and in the day in which we live there are still people who are serving gods

in whom there is no life. It is good to recognise God as the living God.

How do we acknowledge Him as the living God? It is in one sense that God is known personally and that we realise He is looking to have relationships with men. We cannot say that of a dead idol. You may serve a dead idol, you may ascribe all kinds of merits and benefits you may have had in your life to the influence of a dead idol, but you will never enter into a relationship with a supposed god in whom there is no life.

Another aspect we have to recognise with God as a living God is that we have a responsibility. Coming to know God as the living God implies that He is looking for an answer with us; as He desires to enter into relationships with us, He searches us; and we have a responsibility for or all our actions, for who we are and what we do, but also for what we have for His delight.

The Lord says, "Blessed art thou ... for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee"; the Father had revealed it, and only by the spiritual mind could Peter lay hold of it. Peter no doubt had to reflect on his own history and had to come to see all that he had gone through in his experience with God, and the relationship he had with the Lord. We know how fallible Peter was, but we also know how he desired to come out to the Lord. He had a right desire when he left the ship, but he looked at the waves and he was sinking, Matt 14: 29, 30. There are numerous instances in scripture where we can point at things Peter did that were not according to God's mind, but it is so encouraging to each one of us that, whatever Peter was in all his weakness, whatever flesh and blood had not afforded him, there was something that was spiritual in Peter on which the assembly could be built. That is an encouragement to each one of us because we may easily be disheartened by what there is within ourselves that is not in accordance to what God's mind is, but we find that there is also a spiritual ground which has been formed in us by the Spirit. In recognising God as the living God, and recognising His rights, and recognising who the Lord is as "the Son of the living God",

something is opened up to us where we can grow into things, where we can be as the rock on which the assembly can be built.

In 1 Peter we see that Peter, with all his background history, can write "if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good". It would mark a point in our relationship with the Lord, where we come to the acknowledgement that the Lord is good. From there he can encourage us: "To whom coming, a living stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious". It is for us all to gain an understanding of what the value of the Lord Jesus was, and is, in the eyes of the Father, and we should ourselves have the same appreciation of the Lord in our own hearts. We should come to Him as "a living stone", and in ourselves we should also acquire these qualities. So there should be life within us as there was life within Peter. In another way there was plenty life in him, so much so that he often reacted too impulsively, made wrong suggestions, wrong moves, and had to be corrected time and time again; but at least he was energetic in his desire after the Lord's work. But there also has to be that aspect in us that we are stones which cannot be moved, that we make a certain vow that whatever influences there may be in our lives, whatever may change in our circumstances, we are as stones, that there is a certain ground that we will not give up, that we will hold fast, and as such we are made of the right material so that we can be "built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ".

We learn more about this aspect in Ephesians where we are "being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit". That brings us into the relationships that we have one with another, that we are fitted together and that there is increase, the "building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord". I think that is an increase that we still see today and the Lord would be looking to us today to see if there is any further increase. He looks at the way in which we

are fitted together and in which we are suitable for His service, so that there is “a habitation of God in the Spirit”.

There is a lot in this that I still need to learn myself, and I need to grow in the knowledge of these things, but I find there are certain scriptures that are often referred to, and when you hear them, you automatically register and say, 'Yes, I have heard that many times; yes, I know that expression “living stones”', but we might forget to stop and think about what it really implies. I wanted to concentrate on the value that the Lord Jesus is looking for in each one of us, as being marked by the character of living stones; that we are alive for His service, alive for His delight and at the same time that we are steadfast enough for Him to build with.

**RWMcC** The line that you are presenting to us, and indeed the thought that God has presented Himself as a living God and desires to enter into relationships with us, is a wonderful concept, but it is more than that, it is a living reality.

**PTvdB** We have to accept that, on our side in practice, these relationships mainly concern our education. God has His delight in us, and is looking for increase, but the growth on our side usually comes from correction, and that is a great part of our relationship with God. Coming to Him in our initial conversion, we come to Him on the basis that we are lost sinners and He accepts us in our helpless state; but as we grow from there onwards, we will find that time and time again, like Peter, we have certain ideas that need correction, and God finds His delight in the way in which we overcome ourselves, and in the way we come to understand what His desire for us is. God does not look for perfection from us from the outset; as long as we are alive, as long as we are in the body, the work of God in us is not complete. There is always room for improvement, for increase and correction within us.

**PHH** Does the living stone have to do with what is of the work of Christ formed in each one, “To whom coming, a living stone”? It is built up, there is that character formed in us?

**PTvdB** That is right; it is precious to see in Ephesians that even all the work of the apostles and prophets is based on the Lord Jesus, the corner-stone. Even in the day of the Old Testament prophets, whatever was communicated already looked forward to the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus; and everything that we enjoy, and every result that there is for God, any praise that there is for God, is based on the work of the Lord Jesus. He is the origin, the centre of it all, and He is the basis.

**RWMcC** We were reminded last week that everything for us is secured in Christ, and everything for God is secured in Him.

**PTvdB** We have been impressed locally by the relationships between the Lord Jesus and the Father, the delight that the Father had in the Lord Jesus; even at the outset when the Lord Jesus was born, the angels could already report the finished work because there would be no deviation with the Lord, and that was for the Father's delight. Although the Lord in His humanity had to go through great depths for us, in everything He was perfect.

**HTF** In being firm are we like God? Paul says, "immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord", 1 Cor 15: 58. That is not stoicism. The Lord Jesus was immovable Himself; He could not be diverted from the truth. I speak for myself, I am anything but that naturally, but His work in the soul is what you are drawing attention to.

**PTvdB** It is a spiritual order of things; there is nothing that belongs to the natural man that can become like a stone. It is a spiritual work in us, spiritual formation and only that can be immovable. It is often referred to, the treasure that we have in earthen vessels. The vessel may be broken, but the treasure itself is something that cannot be diminished; it cannot be taken away from. I think that in answering to what the desire of Peter is in this epistle we should concentrate on forming for ourselves spiritual wealth, a spiritual treasure which cannot be moved, so that we become as living stones. Peter is a good example to us, because he himself was very fallible, very fickle. Also, in his affections for the Lord he was tested, but there



was a firm ground with him. At the end when the Lord Jesus said, “lovest thou me?” the Lord had a mission for Peter which was based on what was immovable: “Feed my lambs”, “Shepherd my sheep”, “Feed my sheep”, John 21: 15-18. The Lord appealed to the spiritual formation in him, not to what he was as a natural person.

**HTF** If we try to take the feature up naturally there is what would come out in the flesh as stubbornness. The Lord’s answer to that is yieldingness. It is not that we are to be inflexible and we may have to be adjusted; yet there is what is immovable in myself in relation to His work.

**PTvdB** You bring in the point of yieldingness; think of the example that we have in God’s grace! It is beyond our comprehension, that in spite of who God was in His righteousness, and the rights that He had over us in judgment, He, in grace, came down. The wonder of the incarnation - He went out of His way, speaking reverently, to bring us back into blessing. An impression of the grace of God, His love, and His mercy, teaches us something about yieldingness; yet in doing so He never gave up any of His rights, or any of the grounds of the truth.

**RWMcC** I was thinking what you said as to idols and figures which are dead - that is how we are towards God naturally; and in the old man, we are like dead stones, obdurate and hard. But it seems that the idea of a living stone is that it is God’s own work. It is of the same order as the Lord Himself, and it is to be fitted into God’s thoughts.

**PTvdB** Being alive ourselves would involve that we are open, available for God’s work with us. Life has several aspects. The life that is in us may be life in the service of God in rendering praise to Him, but life is also seen in the way we can adapt ourselves in whatever we have to learn in our own experience. I am thinking of the human body and its ability to heal, and to adapt itself to circumstances. I think that, in the relationships we have been brought into with God, as long as we live, we learn that we are marked by life and that as such God can work with us and make us

to be suitable, so that we can fit together and that we can be built up as a holy sanctuary. If we are stubborn, as suggested, there is no way that we could ever fit together.

**PM** The feature of the expression of the living God come out in His Son, "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the living God". Is it seen here in One who lived in the enjoyment of the relationship, in that all that He did flowed from the enjoyment of that relationship? It displayed the feature of the living God?

**PTvdB** You could almost say that the incoming of the Lord Jesus and what was presented in Him as the Son, must have brought home to Peter that there was more for man in mind than what had thus far been in the old dispensation. The Lord Jesus as example was in His life perfect, and Peter and the other disciples must have noticed that there was something unique here, and that it must be divine because no other man had ever spoken or acted like Him. People "wondered at the words of grace that were coming out of his mouth, Luke 4: 22. Nobody had ever been able for the things Jesus did. There was a recognition of this with Peter, and possibly also later with the other disciples, that He was the Son of God, in the perfection that there was in Him. That showed something. We see that God had come in in incarnation and that God in all that He was in His majesty was here on earth moving, walking, talking. That was a miracle that to me is largely unexplored territory that I would like learn more about.

**PM** I was wondering whether the reference in John 1 bore on it. John says, "we" (Peter would have been included in that) "have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father, full of grace and truth", John 1: 14.

**PTvdB** And it says, "In him was life", John 1: 4. That is one of the things that appealed to John; at the outset of this beautiful gospel, he points out to us this impression that the Lord made on him, as he says, "In him was life". That would be part of that glory of the Son of the living God. Then when he finishes his gospel he says, "but these are written that ye may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of

God, and that believing ye might have **life** in his name”, chap 20: 31.

**TJH** Contemplation would have been spiritual contemplation. Somebody who was not converted, supposing they sat at the Supper and watched what was going on, would not see what we would see. I wonder if you could help us that the answer that Peter gave was not from himself. Then just a few verses later we see the human sentiment coming out, and the Lord Jesus has to rebuke him, Matt 16: 23. But, here what is revealed to him is not by flesh and blood but by "my Father who is in the heavens". It is a divine revelation and connection from heaven which causes the real life in the stones.

**PTvdB** That is right. Peter had a deep way to go, he had to learn to be dependent on the Lord, on spiritual contemplation, on spiritual provision. In the setting on the mount of transfiguration Peter is the one who says, "let us make here three tabernacles", Matt 17: 4. That was the human mind; he had to be corrected as to that, he had to come to know what the spiritual application was of the setting. Then in John 21 when Peter says, "I go to fish", he is the one who takes the initiative again and wants to bring in food in his own way, but he was unsuccessful. When the Lord graciously intervenes, and they finally bring their nets on the land, the Lord Himself has a different provision, the Lord has a fire with coal and fish laid on it, v 1-10. That was not according to Peter's idea, but in the warmth of the love and the fellowship of the Lord. From that setting the Lord can say to him, "Feed my lambs", and "Shepherd my sheep". It was not the natural mind; it was the spiritual that had to be built up in Peter.

**TJH** So, for Peter to serve in that manner he had to be recovered from what comes naturally, the denying Christ, and here in this chapter an attempt against the death of Christ which was the very purpose He came here. He had to be converted, recovered, in order that this service which was in mind for him could be rightly taken up.

**PTvdB** And it is so encouraging for us to see that it is not just once. It was not that Peter was waiting for one conversion, or for one touch from the Lord, but every time he needed it again. Having been corrected several times, again at the end when the Lord is before the authorities, Peter has the experience that he has to go back on his steps, and he is weeping bitterly, Matt 26: 75. I know for myself that times will come in my life when I will still need correction, when I will still be saddened as to the weakness that there is in myself. That does not affect our availability for the Lord's pleasure and delight. There is that within us which is a living stone, and that is a spiritual thought.

**PHH** There is formation going on in the living stones; it is not a fixed matter.

**PTvdB** It is difficult to speak of growth when we speak of stones, but there again, it is the wonder of the way things are put in Scripture. With a spiritual sense we know how life causes the increase. There is an increase in the building, but that increase does not only come from the amount of stones, that increase will also come from the quality that is seen in the stones, that is, in each one of us.

**PHH** It is important that we do not put these things off for the future. What we are speaking of relates to the present time. It will come out in display in the day to come where we have every precious stone in the heavenly city.

**PTvdB** That is the thought of life. I know many people who will admit that there is a God but they are waiting for their death to know more about it. They have no inspiration to go into relationships with Him, or to learn more about who God is. They just leave things. They will call themselves believers but there is no life in them and as a result there is not much delight that the Lord finds in such.

**JTB** So the living God is also the God of the living, Mark 12: 27. For persons who have taken character from Christ with a vital living link with that blessed Man where He is, the moral question has been resolved and we are brought into life. God is the God of the living.

**PTvdB** That is right, and there is no limit as to what we can grow into in this respect. I would say that the more life that there is within us, the more we begin to see who God is, and we come to live closer to Him. As a result there is a reward for the increase that there is with us, our own increased enjoyment of what God has for us.

**JB** It is encouraging that not only are we privileged to come to Him, but He is Himself building His assembly. It is encouraging that that is what He is doing in this wondrous living way.

**PTvdB** He is the architect, and He leaves a lot of responsibility to us. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “I have planted; Apollos watered; but God has given the increase”, 1 Cor 3: 6. He and Apollos were working together on things, but it is the Lord Himself who is actually the One who builds. It is a comfort to us that He does not leave it just to us.

**TJH** There is a need for maintenance for this life which is in these stones. The young ones would know about the land of black gold, that oil comes out of the stones. It has a spiritual bearing, but the foolish virgins failed to maintain the oil, and that would be that maybe they did not have the Spirit before the Lord Jesus says, “I do not know you”, Matt 25: 12. Is there not a need for maintenance of the life in the Holy Spirit?

**PTvdB** That is another feature of life: life needs to be maintained. Every living creature needs to be supplied with food and if there is no food the life will go out, it will come to an end. We are responsible to take the food to ourselves. We can be in an area where we are starved; we can say we take food, but do we take the right food, do we take enough food? There could be deterioration on our side. That is another aspect of life. Life can improve, but also deteriorate, and we are challenged as to this, whether we are looking after ourselves in this respect.

**MJP** The Lord said, “I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly”, John 10: 10. We are perhaps satisfied just with life, but He wants us to have an abundance of life.

**PTvdB** That is right. I am almost amazed to experience that, when you read a certain scripture and gain a certain understanding of it, you can be really satisfied and happy with what you have gained from that scripture; and then later you can read the scripture again and there is even more in it, and later you read it and there is still more in it. As there is spiritual growth with us, as there is increase on our side, you will find that there is more and more available in what God has for us; and that would be a challenge to us that we have this life abundantly.

**MJP** The apostle Paul was converted and when he recounts his conversion every time it becomes greater!

**PTvdB** That is very interesting. Conversion may be one thing in your life, but as you go on in your experience you gain an understanding, on the one side of the evil that there is in yourself, but on the other side the grace and the patience of God. It is the goodness of God that brings persons to repentance, Rom 2: 4. You gain all the time a deeper sense of repentance, and as you grow, the impact of your conversion that you once had in your life, grows on you and you begin to appreciate it more deeply all the time.

**AM** The Lord is looking on here to His assembly. If the assembly is composed of living stones built upon this living Rock of Himself then we have a wonderful living edifice.

**PTvdB** That is right, and as we are made of the same stone, because we are all like Him, in a sense there are no differences between each other. This building is fitted together in Ephesians. We are often reminded of the stones that were brought for the temple of Solomon in 1 Kings 6:7 They were ready made at the quarry, and they fitted together, "so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was being built". This is a challenge for ourselves; if we are close to the Lord, and have a deep understanding of what His will is, and if we are like Him, there is no difference between us and we are of the same material as He is.

**PM** Is it affecting then that the next section begins, “From that time Jesus began to shew to his disciples that he must go away to Jerusalem, and suffer many things ... and be killed”, Matt 16: 21? It gives the impression that there was that here in the scene in which He would be absent, which would stand in the scene of His absence and would be entirely in keeping with Himself.

**PTvdB** What it must have meant to the Lord that after His death and resurrection He still found that people had no understanding of what He had gone through. He had gone through it entirely alone, in every sense. The Lord had to come near to two that were on the way to Emmaus and correct them as to what had been going on, Luke 24: 13. He says to them, “O senseless and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”, v 25. There was so much that the disciples could have known in these days but they did not, they did not understand the great things happening. But the Lord had a basis that He could refer to after the resurrection; it says “having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”, v 27. All that the Lord had said and done fell into place in the perception of His own after the Lord had risen, and the Holy Spirit had come.

**PM** In the upper room, the stones were all together, perhaps the woman of John 4, and the man of John 9 and many others were together. They had come through the most difficult times in their soul history, and yet that work was still there in all its character which could not be overthrown.

**PTvdB** They were together there on the basis of the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus and the value of His blood and, whereas these things were not understood when the Lord Jesus was here, afterwards there was somewhere for the praise for God, where the Lord Jesus was recognised that was not there when He was here in the body.

**HTF** Those persons had names. Peter was named by the Lord, he had said, “*Thou* art the Christ”; the Lord Jesus said, “*thou* art Peter”.

Is that another evidence of life that there is what can be divinely named, and so each stone while fitted together is distinctive in life?

**PTvdB** That opens up a whole new subject, what is implied in the names that we are given. We are known by these names, and it is beautiful to see the personal interest that the Lord has in us that is connected with the names. No one of us is identical to another, we each have something which is unique to us, and the Lord knows it. The Lord addresses us by these names, but whatever there is now that is connected to our name that has to do with what is corruptible, strife, error or sin, in our history, all these things will be taken away and we will be given a new name that will relate to what is not fallible. "I will give to him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it," Rev. 2: 17

**TJH** The heavenly city was adorned with stones but they are all slightly different. They are precious stones. What you are speaking of is living stones, but they are precious stones. Is that to say that they have no history as precious with Christ?

**PTvdB** What we see in the heavenly city is that it comes down out of heaven, and is a perfect thought which is presented to us for us to live up to. It is something for us to behold now and in time we will have our part in that. We have an impression now to learn about because that is the direction in which we are heading and that is what we have to work on.

**GMcK** This scripture in Matthew has been misunderstood, "*thou art Peter, and on this rock*"; as if it was on Peter, but that is not the idea. I was wondering why the Lord puts it that way. Why does the Lord say this? He could have said that the assembly was going to be built on Himself as the foundation, but it seems to be particularly important to the Lord to take note of what had been revealed to Peter.

**PTvdB** That is interesting. I would like to hear what other brethren have to say about this. The name Peter means 'stone, rock'. That is not for nothing. I think that when the Lord Jesus says, "on this rock" that He means the recognition in the heart of the saints of who He is



Himself as the Son of the living God, as the Living Stone. That recognition was seen in Peter but can also be seen in you and me, and I think that is the rock on which the assembly is being built.

**JB** It is something special. The Lord Jesus speaks of “my Father who is in the heavens”. Think of that wonderful relationship between Himself and His Father and He is in the heavens. It is a heavenly structure.

**PTvdB** How wonderful it is that we are called into that relationship, even though we are on earth now, that in the day in which we are living we have access to such heavenly relationships. We feel how the Lord when He was here on earth experienced the condition the world is in. At Lazarus’s tomb He had to weep because He saw the effect of sin in this world, John 11: 35. He must have suffered so much from the weakness and lack of understanding among the people. He brought healing of the suffering that there was, yet He must have known He was only here for a time. He was, speaking reverently, visiting. He was going back to a sphere where the Father was and He was going to draw us all away from this scene of distress and disease, and draw us to Himself to an area of perfection where He was in His relationships with the Father, and bring us also into that Himself.

**RWMcC** In resurrection He says, “I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God”, John 20: 17. Is it your thought that on resurrection ground He brings us into the same relationship?

**PTvdB** The Lord had been looking forward to that all along. We read of that in John 17 too, what His desires had been for His own, that He wants His own to be glorified along with Him, with the glory that He had with the Father. That is very beautiful and you can almost say that the Lord was triumphant in saying, “I ascend to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God”. What it must have meant for the Lord to say these words. It certainly meant more to Him than to those hearing Him.

**GMcK** The corner-stone is not in question, but in order for there to be a building the stones are needed. I wondered whether that was what the Lord saw here, He saw that there was building material in what Peter says. The stones are needed for the building; the corner-stone cannot be moved. In order for it to be built into a structure, the Lord was looking for this.

**PTvdB** It is an encouraging thought to know that the Lord will always have what is for His delight; even if we are unfaithful He will see it through. In the days of Elijah, the Lord could say he had seven thousand in Israel, 1 Kings 19: 18. We have to recognise that what the Lord desires as to the assembly He has for Himself and He will have it, but the challenge to us is, are we part of it or not?

**CB** How can we be part of that?

**PTvdB** I think that one thing that is important is obedience and being open for what the Lord has to say to us. We have been speaking about stubbornness but the point is that we need to be hewn out, shaped, to be fit for this. Being hewn out means that we are going to lose part of our identity or part of the things that have been precious to us, but it is important that we are being shaped to become serviceable to the Lord. I was thinking of the stones that were in the brook that David could use for Goliath. There were five stones which in a sense implied human weakness, but then they were in the current of this brook, all the sharp corners had been taken off and they became smooth stones. And only one was needed to sink into the forehead of Goliath, and that ended the order of the first man in Goliath, 1 Sam 17: 40, 49. It could have been any one of those five, they were available, and I think for us it is a question of being in the brook and being shaped and not holding on to anything that is of our own mind, or our own will, but that we come to understand what God's word is, what His will is. There is so much involved in this and as long as we live we will learn about that, but the closer we are to the Lord, and the more we understand His will, and why we are here and what He needs us for, we will become available and we will find that we are part of that building.

**CB** What you are saying is that we come under the will of another. We take shape from the head of the corner, direction comes from that; any building that is built has to take shape from the corner-stone.

**PTvdB** That is right; what we are part of is a divine thought, and it is not for us to determine where we are going to be built, but the increase is to be in relation to that corner-stone. It is for God to appoint how the building is being built, but for us we are to be in relation to that corner-stone.

**PM** Is it therefore important that the revelation came from another source altogether; it was not from Peter and it was not from flesh and blood but it was from another source all together.

**PTvdB** We can contemplate why that was. Was that grace only? Or was it because - in grace - God was working out something for His own delight in the souls of the saints? Why was it revealed to Peter?

**PM** I suppose in Peter there was a vessel that could receive it.

**PTvdB** Yes, and there was need for a vessel to receive it.

**PM** I was wondering whether it linked with being born of God. It is from a new source, that which is born of God. John tells us that "Whoever has been begotten of God ... cannot sin", 1 John 3: 9. It has its origin in the new source. The revelation here to Peter was such that would build up and strengthen what had had its origin in a new source.

**PTvdB** Is it not really so, that anything we enjoy in a spiritual sense has been revealed to us from God through the Holy Spirit? There is nothing of our spiritual wealth that we have achieved by our own calculations. Anything that we enjoy in a spiritual sense is something that has been given to us, given to us to enjoy, but also to be responsible about, to share with others, to build with, that there might be increase, that we are fitted together, and that the whole building increases.

**PM** And what has been given to us as light becomes formative in the stone-like character by the Spirit's own operation.

**PTvdB** In a sense you cannot be a stone without being alive, and you cannot be alive without being a stone.

**HTF** In the epistle, Peter speaks of this matter of newborn babes? Where you began to read there are specific things that they laid aside.

**PTvdB** It is new work that is being built up in each one of us, and as newborn babes we desire that mental milk of the word that by it we may grow up to salvation. Salvation is presented in the glad tidings, but we also need to grow up to practical salvation. There is something that governs us in our practical lives, which is going to save us, which is going to protect us while we are here. We grow up to that, the more we increase in our knowledge of God, the more we will find what this salvation means.

**RWMcC** John the baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease", John 3: 30. Is that necessary in being available in a place?

**PTvdB** I believe, in the first place, that that is something that applies to each one of us. The more we decrease ourselves, the more we find that the Lord will fill the space that we have made. There is never empty space. Whatever there is in ourselves the space will always be filled, but it is a question of how do we allow the space in our own selves to be filled? Will it be Christ or will it be another?

But then John the baptist was of the old dispensation, which was about to pass, and he draws attention to the Lord coming in as the One who baptised with the Spirit in order of a new dispensation; He was to be magnified.

**RWMcC** The new order which is in Christ is a spiritual order. It speaks in one place of "a spiritual rock which followed them", 1 Cor 10: 4. It says also, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit", John 3: 6. So that we are of that same new order that, as has been touched

on, is outside of failure, but then there is the thought of spiritual growth with us.

**PTvdB** I think it is good to understand that spiritual growth means increase. What is given to us to lay hold of and enjoy in the Spirit, itself does not grow, it is of a perfect order, but we ourselves should grow in our comprehension and appreciation of it. With spiritual growth one impression is added to by another impression, and each impression adds and forms increase in our apprehension of eternal life.

**JTB** Do you think that involves that we come to an appreciation of God's thoughts as to Christ? There was reference to that phrase, "but with God chosen, precious". Do you think that part of normal spiritual growth is that we come to an appreciation of what God thinks about Christ?

**PTvdB** I love to think about that, and I am almost sad to realise that there is something that will always be beyond me in what God's feelings for Christ are. It is a level which we will never fully reach. In whatever measure we are allowed to have some understanding of it, it helps us to appreciate the Lord in the same light. When Peter is asked by the Lord, "ye, who do ye say that I am?", there was not just an answer like 'Thou art sent from heaven', or 'Thou art a divine prophet'. Peter could say, "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the living God", bringing in the thought of these relationships; Peter must have had an impression of the beauty or the wonder of that relationship.

**JTB** Do you think from the way that the Spirit has come that that is one of His objectives? The Lord Jesus could say, "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you", John 16: 14. "Receive of mine": I suppose it relates to what God thinks of Christ.

**PTvdB** I would say that what God enjoys in Christ is what we enjoy in Him, although it is not in the same measure; the way the Lord Jesus has become known to us in His grace, in His obedience, in His perfection, in His love. In all these things He reveals to us the nature of God, the character of God. All these things have become known

to us by who the Lord Jesus was, as here. That is what we have come to love, and that is something of what was in God's heart, that these things should be carried out into this world and should be made known to this world. The Lord could say, "I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it", John 17: 4. There is completion there and everything that God had wanted man to know has been made known by the Lord. It is all for us now to contemplate and enjoy, and it has all the features that God loved to see in Christ.

I thought of another reference in John's gospel, "This word is hard; who can hear it? ... It is the Spirit which quickens, the flesh profits nothing: the words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life", John 6: 60, 63. We get there that the Lord brings in what is living and there were those there standing around and trying to understand what the Lord said with the natural mind - they got nowhere, but it is in the Spirit that things are quickened. If we want to be living stones we will need the help of the Spirit and it is He who quickens us, and then we will be able to understand the words which the Lord spoke because these words were spirit and life. So, on the one hand John says, "In him was life", but also the words that the Lord spoke were life, and it is for us that if we hear His words, if we apply them to ourselves, they will create life within us because the words that the Lord spoke "are spirit and are life".

**TJH** These words are still difficult for persons to receive. Maybe you could give us some impression as to how we can receive these words which stumbled many at that time, "for my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink", John 6: 55.

**PTvdB** Today many people question scripture and say, 'How can these things be? Scripture is alleged to contradict itself: why is that?'. The flesh does not get anywhere. You cannot argue it on the basis of the flesh either. It is the Spirit that works in us and enables us to understand all these things. As the Spirit makes these things life within us it is built up in a different order of things altogether. You cannot alter the natural perceptions you have of scripture, and make them spiritual by your human mind, but something else is given

which replaces the arguments and the reasonings. These things have been revealed from above. We can never argue about the truth on a natural level.

**PM** Is it affecting in that chapter, John 6, that the Lord Jesus speaks of Himself, "As ... I live on account of the Father", v 57.

**PTvdB** That is very good.

**HTF** "No one can come to me unless it be given to him from the Father", v 65. I was wondering whether that linked with what you have been speaking of. We are given background in John 6 as to what was going on in Peter's soul in Matthew 16.

**MJP** The Lord speaks about coming to Himself in order to find life. Is that not what the man in John 9 discovered?

**PTvdB** That is right. The way the Lord brought in healing also involved the restoration of life. Those that were troubled, those that were ill, all those people were not in the gain of what life should be, and, although that was in a physical sense, the healing that the Lord had brought in is symbolical to us of what happens to our soul. He restores life. The Lord Jesus is the One who maintains life.

**AM** We see in John 6 that there is no one else for a living stone to go to; it would not fit in anywhere else but with Him.

**PTvdB** Peter says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal", John 6: 68. If these words come from our own hearts, that is a very solid basis for each one of us. There are so many challenges that we may face in our lives, things in the testimony that we find difficult. There may be opposition. The question is where we draw our help from; "thou hast words of life eternal". It is not that we look within our own resources for a quick solution to problems that may solve the situation for the minute, but we are to look onwards to what are the words of life eternal. We are connected with something that is eternal and we often tend to forget the impact and the value of that.

**TJH** The bread in John 6 will give life forever: "if any one shall have eaten of this bread he shall live for ever", v 51. It is the life-giving

sound, and that is Christ, Jesus.

**PTvdB** He was the bread of heaven, and it is God's provision for us in Him. We have been speaking about food and how that maintains life. He is the source where we should get our food from.

**PM** That reference is so encouraging, "living bread ... of heaven", because it gives us an impression of what you were saying earlier that God would have us to share in what He feeds on in Jesus. I wondered if something of divine feelings entered into the revelations to Peter, that the Father would find such delight in revealing something that was of such infinite value to Him upon which the assembly would be built.

**PTvdB** I am sure that Peter had an impression of the relationships of the Father and the Son. John says, "we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father", John 1: 14. Think of how the Lord in His graciousness was with the disciples, was with man; and then He would go out onto the Mount of Olives and He would be in prayer. In relation to His prayer as to Lazarus the Lord said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me; but I knew that thou always hearest me; but on account of the crowd who stand around I have said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me", John 11: 41, 42. He says this so that we might get some touch, some impression, of the feelings that there were between the Father and the Son. It is wonderful to see how in Bethany one saint had deceased and there was grief - these are normal circumstances - but we see the Lord there, in communion with the Father, sorrowing over the effects of evil. It is moving to see the One in whom the life was so affected by the impact of death.

**RWMcC** So that makes what has been secured, as being on the other side of death, even more precious. Death is never going to spoil it again.

**PTvdB** There is the material that we have been built up out of as living stones. I think that building will not be seen in the eternal setting, but it is of a nature that will not pass; and whatever we have



acquired, in whichever way we have been shaped, it is of a substance that will go on into eternity.

**RWMcC** It is not a fossil or anything like that; it is not something that has a character of what was once living, but it is a habitation of God in the Spirit. Does that relate to the assembly in the final day?

**PTvdB** I have a feeling that the passage, “increases to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” also has a current bearing.

**PM** Is that not the force of the reference, “in the Spirit”? Soon the divine habitation will be seen actually. The Spirit’s presence will pervade it, but this relates to what God is doing now, and what He is finding His rest in now.

**PTvdB** The building fitted together increases. I think in a coming day there will not be increase; that is now.

**TJH** It would be a continuation of what you have in chapter 1? God has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ”, Eph 1: 3. It is “in Christ”, and implies that we have these blessings in Christ, that we have the Holy Spirit, and that it is “in Christ” that we are fitted together, and can sit down together. Is this a continuation of those blessings that we have in chapter 1?

**PTvdB** There is nothing in the way of blessing that is not in Christ. There is nothing that we enjoy today that is not “in Christ”. And as such, what there is for God is all based on Christ as well.

**PHH** Could you say something as to the household of God? It speaks of being “fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God”. How can we understand and appreciate that?

**PTvdB** I think that the household of God involves all believers, all those that He can call His own, and all those who have come to know God as a Father. It would be a household setting. I think that the household of God is a wider setting than the temple.

**JTB** The temple of God is where His mind is made known. It would be through divine speaking. The household of God would relate to

His habitation, the place where He dwells, an area of divine love and an area of divine glory.

**PTvdB** It begins, “ye are fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God” and then, “Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord”. That is a higher thought. From the household setting there is an increase in further understanding of the principles of the truth which would make us fit to be in the temple in the Lord.

**PM** Does the household involve the personnel? We have the house of God, which is the place where He is known, but the household is the personnel. Does that not dignify the saints, we are “fellow-citizens of the saints”, we are sharing things together, our life is together, but such persons are of the “household of God”. I thought that brought in the dignity of what the personnel are as those that are enjoying the divine presence.

**PTvdB** Yes, that is good.

**MJP** Would it be right to say that the “household of God” involves the stamp of God Himself on everything?

**JTB** Joshua tells us that “the living God is in your midst”, chap 3: 10. That would involve habitation, the place where He dwells.

**PTvdB** Yes, in your midst; “the Most High dwells not in places made with hands”, Acts 7: 48.

**HTF** Would your thought as to relationships involve the household?

**PTvdB** It is also a setting where we have a sense of being set together, where we have a responsibility in relation to one another.

**TJH** We sometimes refer to the bulwarks of Jerusalem (Ps 48: 13, 122: 7); would that be the household setting of the saints where we may work things out, where things are to be strengthened in order that there may be what is more precious and greater actually in the temple.

**PTvdB** It is the thought of protection which is needed. The whole idea of the stones which the house is built with tells us something

about the building itself, but the house is needed because there needs to be something which is protected of which the outside world has no understanding. There is that which is within which is for us to appreciate.

**RWMcC** It is “a holy temple in the Lord”. Often when men build temples they are temples to something, but here it is “in the Lord”. I wondered if there was a difference there in the temple?

**PTvdB** Jesus Christ Himself is the corner-stone. That may be connected with the thought “in the Lord” and is in line with His thoughts, in line with His will. It is not something that we have thought out ourselves, that we have built for His delight; it is something that we are, entirely in line with what His desire is. He Himself is part of that.

**JB** Would the thought of being built together be delightful to God. I was thinking of what it says in Malachi as to what God observed, how they spoke together to one another. Do you think that there was something in communion with one another in relation to what was for God that is pleasurable to God? He "observed it ... and a book of remembrance was written before him", chap 3: 16.

**PTvdB** That is very beautiful. Psalm 133 is often referred to, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”, v 1. The enjoyment for ourselves in these things is in what is collective also. In Ephesians we get this thought, “until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man”, chap 4: 13. It is what we are together, “in whom ye also are built together”. It is not something that we just arrive at on our own, but it is looking around us and making room for our other brethren, and by enjoying these things in a collective setting that we come to the enjoyment of that.

**TJH** Your exercise is that getting on with each other brings Christ in. It is observed by heaven, it is observed in the Psalm referred to, brethren dwelling together in unity; and where this is so, would we not have a greater enjoyment when we enter into union in the service of praise?

**PTvdB** The enjoyment of what we have together, the contacts that we have with one another, precious though they may be, do not just lie in the fact that you and I go out and enjoy creation together; but what is meant is that as together we are in the enjoyment of what has been given to us as on spiritual grounds. I arrive at something and you arrive at that same thing. I am a living stone and you are a living stone, and the fact that you are placed next to me in the building is never a burden.

**Grimsby**

**11<sup>th</sup> October 2008**

## **Key to Initials**

C Brown, Buckhurst Hill; J T Brown, Grangemouth; H T Franklin, Grimsby; T J Harvey, East Finchley; P H Hutson, Grimsby; J B Ikin, Manchester; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; P Martin, Colchester; R W McClean, Grimsby; G McKay, Manchester; M J Picton, Spaldwick; Paul T van den Berg, Rijswijk

# THE FOURTH WATCH

**David J Willetts**

**Matthew 14: 21-36**

**Revelation 22: 16-17 (to 'and the bride say, Come')**

I believe the Lord spoke to us distinctly last week as to His coming, "Behold, the bridegroom" (Matt 25: 6), a distinct appeal to the affections of the saints. I think I can see there are increasing stirrings of affection, thinking of what it will be, not to us but to Himself, to have that blessed vessel for which He paid so much. I have pondered that, beloved brethren. That cry was at midnight. We may relate it, of course, to the beginning of the recovery of the truth, approximately one hundred and eighty years ago. But there is a period of time between midnight and the dawn, and I have pondered, beloved, what does Scripture say about that period? It occurred to me that Scripture is not without its pointers.

So you will notice in the passage that I read in Matthew 14 it says, "But in the fourth watch of the night he went off to them". Midnight, of course, is the beginning of the third watch. The fourth watch begins at three a.m. and concludes at six a.m. It seems that the Jews had taken to using the Roman timetable, and there is never a single word in Scripture that is put there without reason. I wondered whether the Lord might speak to us about this period between the answer there was for His own heart to the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom", and the moment when He will appear as "the Sun of righteousness ... with healing in his wings" (Mal 4: 2), "until the day dawn, and the shadows flee away", Song of Songs 2: 17. That is the prospect before the believer, when the Lord takes to Himself kingly power and reigns. What a moment of joy that will be to the saints when He takes His rights in the scene where He is currently rejected. How precious, therefore, it is to take account of these final few moments of the church's history here.

The Spirit's voice, "Behold, the bridegroom", is very precious. He has said it clearly; He has said it distinctly; and there has

definitely, without question, been an answer to Him. It was a public cry. Christendom was affected by what the Spirit did at that moment. It was a singular moment in the testimony, but it seems to me from the Scriptures, that it will never be repeated in the same way. What I do find is this reference to the fourth watch: it is the Lord distinctly appearing personally to His own in a private way.

So I suggested this passage that we might see in it what the Lord might say to us. One thing that is clear is that they were in the ship by compulsion. I think one thing that the cry "Behold, the bridegroom" did was to establish the truth authoritatively as regards the truth. I think the Lord has opened up steadily from that time the truth that was in darkness from a public point of view. So that at the present time there is a practical answer to the Spirit saying, "Behold, the bridegroom". So history has gone on and what has been gathered in a distinctive way as a result of the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom", is the true formation of the bride of Christ. They were "labouring in rowing", Mark 6: 48. In John's presentation of the same event it says, "Having rowed then about twenty-five or thirty stadia, they see Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the ship; and they were frightened", John 6: 19. Now twenty-five or thirty stadia is quite a substantial distance. In fact, I think it was about five miles from where they were to Capernaum; I think twenty-five or thirty stadia represents about three-quarters of that distance; so they had made quite a bit of progress, and I think we could say, beloved brethren, that there has been quite a bit of progress in the souls of the saints.

There comes this point when the winds were contrary. I do not need to tell you with regard to the public position in this country that the winds are contrary. Persons who take a public position religiously fail the church. Even 'political correctness' is seeking to obscure the light of Christianity. The winds are gaining in momentum, and the effect of that is that it stirs up the water, and so it says, "But ...". I think it is very touching that the Lord is intervening again personally in regard to those who have answered to the compulsion of His love, to take on the truth in relation to His lordship,

kingdom thoughts. Compulsion involves His rights in the testimony, and I believe I can say the Lord has re-established His rights. There is a dispensational bearing to this. It involves Israel, and refers to the time of Jacob's trouble, when Israel will go through so much pressure until finally He comes in and reigns as the Prince of Peace. But I think the Spirit of God gives us sufficient in this chapter to warrant us applying this section to this final period of time, from three a.m. to six a.m. That is where we are. You say, 'I wish I had been in the early part of the recovery, when that clear word, "Behold, the bridegroom", went out'. I thank God He has given me my place in the testimony now. It is a great privilege, because it may be that I will be alive at the rapture. That is what I am looking for. I am not looking for events; I am looking for Him. I want to see His face. Do you? What will it be to see the One who has been so careful about me, and the One who has been so careful about the testimony, to see His face, and to know there will be no more sorrow, no more tears, no more crying? All that is contrary will be removed. There will be no trace of it left. All that will be left will be eternal bliss. It is about to dawn; it might be now before we have finished.

Well, I would like to just point out that "the disciples, seeing him walking on the sea, were troubled". They found it difficult to understand. I think their eyesight was a little defective. That is a challenge for me. That is a challenge from me: is your eyesight defective? It was not with Rebecca. At the end of Genesis 24 she "lifted up her eyes" (v 64), and it says of Isaac "he lifted up his eyes", v 63. These eyes were focused. That is beautiful. You can almost feel the pulsations of her affections growing stronger as their eyes were lifted up. She had eyes for no-one else. She had been speaking along the way to the servant. "Who is the man that is walking in the fields to meet us?", v 65. Do you ever ask those questions? Do you ever turn to the Spirit of God, and say, 'Open up to me the glories of Christ, who He is'? He would like nothing better. I just point to the fact that it says of all of them that they were troubled, and that they thought it was an apparition. Could the Lord leave such a situation? It says, "But Jesus immediately spoke to



them, saying, Take courage; it is I". I would like, beloved brethren, to say to each one of us here to pass on the Lord's message: "Take courage". Do not doubt; do not be fearful; do not start looking at the breaking up of the boat; do not start looking at the oarsmen; do not start looking at persons elsewhere; keep your eyes on Christ! It says of Peter, "And Peter answering him". You notice that word, "answering". The appeal is to take courage, and Peter answers. He says, "Lord, if it be *thou*" - notice that emphatic "*thou*". In this last moment, beloved brethren, the Lord wants to be indispensable to you. Peter says, "if it be *thou*", and he makes a proposal that to human thought is an impossibility. You say, 'How can the testimony continue?'. Things look so fragmented, so difficult. The winds are so contrary. The darkness is getting deeper. Peter says "if it be *thou*". Do you have that link with the Lord that instils confidence? Have you got confidence in the Lord about the history of the testimony until the moment that He comes? I have. Paul says, "for I know whom I have believed", 2 Tim 1: 12. Do you? Can you lift up your eye and focus on Christ and have implicit confidence that whatever the circumstances, you will be able to go to Him?

It says, "And Peter, having descended from the ship". From practical experience, beloved brethren, I will tell you that that is one of the most difficult things to do, to let go, to let go of everything else, and go to Christ. I will speak about my own experience to amplify this. I remember when things were confused amongst the saints I was in fellowship with. Spiritual discernment was needed. One thing I knew was that the Lord's word was quite clear: "Be not diversely yoked with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6: 14), and that meant professional associations were not of Himself. What do you do? You look at others in the boat and you say, 'How can I leave them?'. They were persons locally I have received a great deal of help from, and for whom I have a great deal of respect. One brother, who himself had come out of one of these institutes on his own exercise, was now saying to the brethren, 'What I did I cannot lay on others'. The scripture says, "Be not". That is a command; that is not an option. To maintain the principles of fellowship, I would have to

leave the boat. I had to leave persons I loved, persons who had helped me, because they would not answer to the appeal of scripture, and that step of leaving the boat to go to Christ was a difficult one. Someone here today may be feeling that they have reached a point where they have to move to Christ Himself. You have heard His voice and you have said, "if it be *thou*". You have confidence in Himself, and you begin to walk on the water.

It says, "And Peter, having descended from the ship, walked upon the waters to go to Jesus. But seeing the wind strong he was afraid". It does not say he saw the waters were agitated. There was no question about that. We have known what that was, persons who would not even shake hands with you. We have known these things, difficult times within, and you leave the boat and go to Christ. You ask, 'What is the future going to hold?' So we broke bread in confidence in the Lord and His word. I say that to encourage the brethren, not just because it is my experience. The critical point is to get out of the boat and go to Christ, and what you touch then is normal Christianity. That is one thing that is commented on in the ministry about this passage, that when Peter walked upon the water to the Lord, he was experiencing normal Christianity.

Then it says, "But seeing the wind strong he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught hold of him". Oh, the wonder of divine grace, that from that time onward He takes hold of his hand. He will take hold of your hand, and lead you in His own way! What a moment! Just ponder it! Bear in mind, beloved brethren, I am speaking about these last three hours of the testimony, from the third hour to the sixth hour, just before He comes, and here is normal Christianity being enjoyed, Peter going in affection to Christ. Having cried out, he is now being held by His hand, walking upon the water. Think of that! There he was, being held by the hand of his Saviour, but more than that, who was holding his hand? The Son of God. Brethren, there is nothing like it. What a moment, at the end of this glorious dispensation, to come to reach dry land. What is in view? The glorious time when "the Sun of

righteousness” will come “with healing in his wings”; when what I have enjoyed will actually be imparted to everything publicly. Can you imagine it? What a moment!

You may ask what connection there can be with what I read in Revelation 22? Well, another thing just prior to the dawn is the morning star, and the Lord Jesus Himself, in His grace, has given us another pointer, that is, “the bright and morning star”. So the Lord says, “I Jesus”. That is the Man of the gospels. He would make an appeal. It is what He is personally to you, and He says, “I am the root and offspring of David”. The “root ... of David” is John’s gospel; the “offspring of David” is Matthew’s gospel. The “root” involves His deity; the “offspring” involves everything that will be His by title as the great King. But then He does not finish there; it says, “the bright and morning star”. The one who sees the morning star is the one who is conscious of the darkness. Are you conscious of the darkness? The morning star shines the brighter because the background is so dark. I think there is something very attractive in it.

It is not the only reference to the morning star, but here it is a bright one. I would like just to point you to another reference to it and that is the address to Thyatira in chapter 2. Things were very dark there. What can you say when you look at things publicly going towards Rome, and there, in principle, is Jezebel? Ahab was one of the worst kings that Israel ever had, and there was Jezebel his wife, and the appeal to the overcomer in Thyatira is, “And he that overcomes, and he that keeps unto the end my works, to him will I give authority over the nations, and he shall shepherd them with an iron rod; as vessels of pottery are they broken in pieces, as I also have received from my Father”, Rev 2: 26, 27. And then He adds, “and I will give to him the morning star”, v 28. It is almost as if, in the movements in the time of the recovery of things under Luther, the Lord would say, 'I will give you some idea that in the darkness there is going to be a morning star'. It says in Genesis He made the sun and the moon and the stars. We all know what the sun speaks of, the glory of Christ in His kingdom glory; we know that the moon speaks of the assembly; but it just adds, “- and the stars”, Gen 1:

16. It is interesting the way it puts it, as if they were reserved for a special time, do you not think? The stars even come into the book of Daniel (chap 12: 3), another dark period of history, and it is as if the star is reserved specially for this last moment. Have you ever actually seen the morning star? If you have not, you need to get up just before dawn, and look towards the heavens and see the morning star; but stay a bit longer, and see the sun come up. That is a worthwhile experience. You suddenly feel the warmth of the rays of the sun as it comes up over the horizon. There is something majestic about the creation. It gives you an impression of God's "eternal power and divinity", Rom 1: 20.

There is another place that speaks of the morning star. I will just read that one: "And we have the prophetic word made surer, to which ye do well taking heed (as to a lamp shining in an obscure place) until the day dawn and the morning star arise in your hearts", 2 Pet 1: 19. That is an interesting reference to the morning star. That is just before the dawn, and where is it arising? "In your hearts". "And we have the prophetic word made surer": that is to give you confidence. The Spirit of God has opened up the truth of what is prophetic. It had a distinctive place at the beginning of the recovery, the midnight session, you may say. Things were re-established as to where the church fitted into the great scheme of divine teaching.

It says here, "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star". The moment He presents Himself as the bright and Morning Star, "the Spirit and the bride say, Come"; the Holy Ghost in the church says, "Come", I find that alluring, attractive, gripping, to think that my grasping that the morning star is glistening in the midst of the darkness is a sign that we have reached the end of the dispensation. The glorious, magnificent dispensation of grace is coming finally to a conclusion, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come". A divine Person and the bride in total unison saying to the Lord just one word, "Come". The star therefore gives you hope.

I leave that, beloved brethren, with you. I trust I have not been too technical in what I have said, but it attracts my heart that the Spirit of God would give us a glimpse between the midnight call and the moment when the Sun is going to shine. That is where we are. Where are you in relation to it? Is your eye on the morning star or is it on the wind or on the waves? Is it on the darkness? Is it on the difficulties? Is it on the problems? I say, the Lord is making an extraordinary movement at this fourth watch in relation to the saints. Have you seen His extraordinary movements? Can you explain what is happening in India? Can you explain the recovery of many brethren amongst us? No, it is an extraordinary divine movement, another sign that we are right at this point when the morning star is shining in all its brightness. May the Lord bless the word for His Name's sake!

**Gillingham**

**20<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

# **PREPARATION**

**John S Hutson**

**Luke 22: 7-13**

I have just been contemplating this Scripture, beloved, which was before us on Lord's day. I feel very challenged by what went through my mind and what I have to say. I was thinking of this matter of being prepared, to be prepared as we come together to remember our Lord Jesus Christ. The occasion is before us as we come to the latter part of the week, and we look forward to the time, and we are to be prepared as we come to the time of the Lord's supper. We have been reminded us of the greatness of the One before us, our Lord Jesus Christ - how great He is! When we think of the One that we come to remember, how great He is. I feel challenged as I ask myself how much do I prepare for that great occasion, an occasion which has carried on right from this point we have read of onwards. We can think of what it was for these disciples, the ones who had been with the Lord, who had loved the Lord, who sought out His heart, who knew His heart; what it was for them the first time they came together to take the Supper. What it must have been for them; how they would have prepared - preparing themselves - for what might be before them. And yet what an answer it must have been as He manifested Himself to them! How wonderful! But I wonder how real it is in my life, how real is it to me every week as we come together? I think the Spirit would be speaking to us to help us, to promote in our hearts that it might still be the same as it was then, the brightness of it as we would be looking for Him.

And then it would be that, as we contemplate these things, as prepared in our time, we might think more of one day when He will come for all of us. Indeed, the time we enjoyed very much on the past weekend - the coming together to remember the Lord Jesus on the Lord's day - that time might have been the last time that we were able to come together to remember Him. We often remind ourselves

of it in the gospel; the preacher often tells us that it might be the last gospel preaching, but it might have been the last Lord's supper. When we came together to remember that blessed One, that might have been the last time that we remembered Him. What a privilege it is to look for His coming for us. How wonderful! But we should be prepared day by day, not just prepared - as we may be left here - for that great occasion on the next Lord's day, but that we might be prepared day by day to expect His coming, His coming for us - that time now nearer than when we believed. I feel it should be more and more before us. We should be more and more prepared for the time when He will come for all of us. What a time it will be, beloved, when we will see Him face to face, the greatness of that One we have known; but how wonderful that time when we can be those who enjoy His company for all eternity. But let us be prepared for it; let us be prepared for His coming.

May it be so, for His Name's sake.

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