

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 55

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OBEDIENCE

Key to Initials:

LOOKING STEADFASTLY

ASSEMBLY PERSONNEL

OBEDIENCE

Luke 22: 39-46

Romans 5: 18-21; 6: 17

Acts 26: 11-19

JD I wondered whether in this reading we could get some help as to the matter of obedience. It may at first appear, especially to those of us that are younger, that it is not the most attractive subject to consider. We often think that when we are younger. Piety is another matter which we may initially think is not too attractive. I noticed Mr Raven has a remark that the world thinks that piety means that you go round with a long face (vol 18 p68), and yet how far from the truth could that be because it really involves that we should live our lives here in the light of the revelation of God. I trust that, in considering these scriptures that we have read, we may see something too of the glory of obedience and find that it is not something that is irksome. Indeed, I suppose we could say at the start of this occasion that it is almost a principle of Christianity that we should be attracted towards something, and attracted into something. That is how God in His grace operates. I am not sure that I could really think of anything that God would present to us that would be burdensome to us but, as being marked by faith and moved in our affections, we would be attracted to whatever God may have to say to us and present to us.

Of course, everything is always made especially attractive as seen in our Lord Jesus Christ. That would be where we would see things in all their glory, see them uniquely so. It is worth saying that at the beginning of the reading as we consider the first passage in Luke. I read from Luke because I think it is right to say that Luke provides something in the way of pattern for us, but there is also ever that in Christ that is unique. There is that which belongs to Him that is entirely unique. It has been said that in both the sufferings of Gethsemane (although Luke does not refer to it as Gethsemane) and the sufferings of the cross, no mere creature could undertake such suffering (JT vol 17 p4), but what we have in Luke is an example of how the Lord was marked in manhood by obedience. Wonderful matter! So we can speak of it as a glory, the glory of obedience. It is a moral glory. I think as we apprehend it we may

see that it is a moral glory that leads to spiritual glory. How wonderful these things are! That can be seen if we look at the way that Moses was given the pattern on the mount. There was what Jehovah commanded, and Moses conveyed that to the people, and it led to the tabernacle being built, and it had in mind that there was going to be a system of glory. So when God introduces things for our consideration, He has an end in mind, and that end in mind is that Christ should have a greater place in our hearts and that there should be glory to God. I trust we will find that obedience becomes something that is attractive. I suppose really, you could say, it leads to "the law of liberty", Jas 2: 12. It brings us into things that we could have no part in otherwise. I read in Luke so that we might see the thing expressed in its excellence in our Lord Jesus. As we sang in our hymn, we can have some blessed contemplation of such a One in His movements as He faced death and was moving towards the cross.

In Romans we have the application of it to ourselves, bringing out the teaching that lies behind working the matter out. We have the references there, "by one righteousness" and "justification of life" and the matter of being "constituted righteous" and "that grace might reign through righteousness". Perhaps we can get some help as to the order that starts to come into the believer's life. Think of what it is to be "constituted". It is wonderful that we can be even gathered today with those who love the Lord Jesus and there is something being "constituted" in the believer's heart and the believer's soul that is not of this world. How blessed it is, and neither is it temporary or momentary. It is a constitution that is actually of God that is formed after Christ.

We also read one verse in chapter 6. I was initially attracted to this verse, more than perhaps the verses in Romans 5, but I felt the verses in Romans 5 would help us in the thing opening up. It is a wonderful matter to "have obeyed from the heart the form of teaching into which ye were instructed". Faith and affection are involved in that.

Lastly I read in Acts and I especially had in mind what is said at the end of the section we read, in verse 19, "Whereupon, king

Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision". What a matter that is, and perhaps that is one of the tests of the current day that we should not be "disobedient to the heavenly vision". I was linking that in my thoughts with the matter of Christ and the assembly, a wonderful truth that has been recovered to us, but it is a truth that the devil, the enemy of our souls, is set against. He is really envious of the position that Christ and the assembly should have in heavenly places and he is determined that that truth should be diminished in our thoughts and in our affections. Perhaps we can get some help on that also. Do you think that would be profitable?

JS It says elsewhere about this scene we have read from in Luke 22, "though he were Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered", Heb 5: 7, 8. It is very affecting to think of Him coming into a position where that could be said of Him.

JD It is something to consider. He came into a position and into a condition from one to which obedience had not applied, and in that position He learned obedience, related to the circumstances that He was in. What comes out in Christ is that it was His very nature to be obedient.

JS Quite so. There was never any disobedience in Him, but He came into these circumstances where obedience applied. It is very beautiful to see how He says, "not my will, but thine be done".

JD I think that is helpful. So He also says, "Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will", Heb 10: 7. All His life here until the cry on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19: 30), was complete obedience to the will of God. That would distinguish Christ from ourselves. We learn obedience because we have been marked by disobedience, but that could never be said of Christ. That is the uniqueness of His humanity.

JS We see obedience in perfection in Him.

GBG Paul speaks about Him "becoming obedient even unto death", Phil 2: 8. Would that link with our first scripture, do you think, "becoming obedient"?

JD It has often been drawn attention to that it does not say there that He became obedient 'to death' but "unto death". Death had to

bow to such a Person. But it was part of the Lord's pathway here. Do you have something further in your mind as to this matter of "becoming"?

GBG I just wondered if this scripture in Luke shows that, the Lord "becoming obedient". He prays and He acknowledges that it is the Father's will, "becoming obedient". That was quite a thing because the Father had constant pleasure from the Lord in His life here. Moment by moment He had pleasure in His life. There was a point coming when that life would end. He was coming to it here, taking the cup from the Father's hand. That is quite a thing to consider. I noticed a remark in Mr Taylor's ministry (vol 5 p 433): he said the Lord would not have deprived the Father of the pleasure He had in His life were it not the Father's commandment, the Father's will, that He went this way.

JD That is helpful. It says in John, "I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again. I have received this commandment of my Father", chap 10: 18. This brings out the wonderful perfection that marked Christ. Also, what you referred to in relation to this matter of "becoming": the oblation was prepared in the cauldron, or in the pan, or in the oven, and that would be this here. It was, more and more, we may say reverently, the pressure that came upon Christ, but then the perfection of His humanity and the perfection of that life and the perfection of His obedience became more and more manifest, do you think?

GBG That is very helpful.

MGW Would it appear in this time of pressure that the Lord Jesus went through - and it is particularly touching as to His obedience - that He alone could grasp what divine holiness and divine justice required in the work and the sacrifice to meet all that God was? We are often tested as to obeying things which might be fairly routine and which might not put a lot of pressure on us, but the pressure here on the Lord was immense. He only could assess and estimate what would be required to meet the justice and the glory of God. Would that be right?

JD Yes. We can say simply, He knew; He knew. It has been said that the idea in atonement is that sin was measured not only by God, but by Man; and that is the Lord Jesus, the One who can take this cup and drink this cup, JT vol 5 p436. And then you mentioned our own exercises and we are all perhaps humbled and tested as to how much we enter into this. This passage begins with a reference to the mount of Olives, as if coming from such an area would help us in relation to the exercises that come upon us in the way of obedience so that we get some view of God's thoughts for us and learn why certain things may come into our lives. Of course, there is much that we do not know the reason for but the mount of Olives would give us a sense of elevation and purpose. It is not exactly the same as the end of Romans 8. That suggests a different mount - I suppose that is typically mount Pisgah. It says in that chapter, "But we *do* know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to purpose." (v 28), and if we have that mature thought in our hearts, it would help us in relation to the matter of obedience, do you think?

MGW It is lovely to read in the Lord's earlier days when, as a boy of twelve, He went down with His parents to Nazareth and He was subject to them, Luke 2: 51. That grace was with Him all through His life. It is a wonderful contemplation really, is it not?

JAG Does this help us as to how the devil is to be met? He brought in disobedience right at the beginning, did he not?

JD It has been said that the distrust of God lies behind all lust and disobedience. What a matter that is! It is why this matter of obedience becomes so essential because elsewhere it speaks about "the obedience of the Christ", 2 Cor 10: 5. The Lord Himself has taken on the whole issue that had come in to give offence to God and bring distance in between God and man. You can say more.

JAG As meeting the devil here, and with the pressure that is upon His spirit, He comes from the mount of Olives, from the Father. It is a pattern as to how we should go through exercises because the devil wants to break down this type of life.

JD What the Lord does here is He prays, “and having knelt down he prayed”. It has been said helpfully that you cannot lose your footing when you are on your knees. How important that is! So practically this works out by getting into the Father’s presence and praying to the Father that we may be preserved from the attacks of the devil, of the enemy. Here, of course, this is particular to the Lord. It has been said that Satan brought the pressure to bear not through human instrumentality but directly as in the beginning in the wilderness, JT vol 17 p5. In our lives he may use different instruments to attack God’s work in us, but here the attack on the Lord is direct.

RG It is interesting, is it not, that even at the age of twelve He says, “did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father’s business?”, Luke 2: 49. And then it says He went down with His parents “and he was in subjection to them”. So there was that feature of obedience shining out even at that tender age as being morally natural to Him. But then “to be occupied in my Father’s business” - we see that being worked out in conditions of extremity, and here they are, but it was still His “Father’s business”. Do you think that should be in our minds when we think of obedience?

JD I am sure it should. In Hebrews it speaks of His “strong crying and tears; (and having been heard because of his piety)”, chap 5: 7. We can think reverently of the faith and piety that marked the Lord as a Man, faith in God.

DTP It says prophetically of the Lord, “I looked for sympathy, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none”, Ps 69: 20. Typically that was the Lord’s life, was it not? But His comfort and resource really was in another sphere. We need that objective in our lives because that strengthens us for the difficulties of the way. We have resource and there is power in it.

JD It is a challenge that we should know more continually what communion is with divine Persons because really that is what weighed upon the Lord’s heart here. That communion was going to be broken when He would be made sin. There was a communion that had sustained Him, if we can say that reverently, in His pathway here; and now the Lord is having to consider the matter of that

communion being broken. It brings out the holy perfection of His manhood that on the one hand He should shrink from taking this cup and yet, as a Man, He should accept it from the Father. It brings out the perfection of His holiness and His obedience.

JS Do you think along with this feature of obedience we get the feature of dependence in His praying so that it says, "And being in conflict he prayed more intently"? It seems that He takes this up, we may say, in increasing intensity of prayer, do you think?

JD I think that is helpful. I was noticing just recently that the man of Gath had six fingers and six toes (2 Sam 21: 20), which would speak of independence; and where there is independence there could never be obedience, could there? I think what you say is helpful; the two go on together, and dependence on God strengthens in the believer the ability to be obedient, do you think?

JS You get this touch as to "an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him". He was strengthened in view of this.

JD He was, and that shows the pattern for us. As having said, "but then, not my will, but thine be done", He was strengthened. So as we commit ourselves here for the will of God, strengthening will come in.

RG Eating the passover includes the lamb's head and its legs and its inwards; we are reaching the inwards here?

JD I am sure that is right. It is the passover, and we referred earlier to the oblation and the oven. It is what is taking place inwardly. There is a certain secret side to this and yet it is "a stone's throw"; so there is something for us to contemplate in it. It is not two thousand cubits, as we have in Joshua; it is "a stone's throw" which would suggest a man's measure although we have to be very careful as to how unique the Lord is. There is something here for us to take account of.

DCB I was thinking of the scripture that refers to the Lord as "the instructed" in Isaiah 50: 4. That is "morning by morning". I think it is very attractive to think of the speaking of the Father on this particular morning, so that every word that He said is in obedience to the Father.

JD Do you think that would link with what it says here: it was “according to his custom”, “morning by morning” would be His custom. Viewing the Lord, I would say carefully, as pattern would strengthen us in our pathway here. Certain customs and certain good habits would strengthen us so that when exercises and tests come along, in God’s grace, we are made able for them, do you think?

DCB I was thinking too that it would affect us to think that even in His saying, “Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me ...” He was speaking in obedience. It may cross our minds to think that there is another will working, but He is expressing this as an obedient Man.

JD Bringing out, as we have said, the perfection of His dependence and His obedience and also holiness as anticipating what would be in this cup and what lay before Him.

PAG You spoke of habit. This matter of “becoming obedient” was the Lord’s habit. He went into death: as you have said that was the extent of it, but it involved His coming into a condition that He was not in before, a condition to which obedience attached. So in that sense it did not become His habit instead of something else; it became His habit because He became man. Is that right?

JD Yes, it is linked to His condition, and the position that He came into. It is necessary ever to guard the uniqueness of the Lord. Then this matter too of “an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him”. Think of the wonder of that! The angels took account of every step of the Lord here and the angels take account of our walk. They watch us and they see what we do and take account of it, but think of the wonder of this, “an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him”. Now, we know angels are marked by obedience, but they had never seen obedience expressed in such a way as seen here, a Man, the Lord Jesus, who, as we have said, was prepared to be “obedient even unto death”. How wonderful that is for the angels to take account of, and how wonderful it is for us to take account of!

JAG “Strengthening him” would be in His body, physically. Conflict like this takes great toll on the body.

JD This brings in a physical aspect to it. It says, “And his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth”. In Genesis after the ground is cursed, “the sweat of thy face” is brought in (chap 3: 17, 18) as a result of man’s disobedience. Here we see it rather in the Lord’s obedience. It is used to bring out the intensity of what the Lord was going through. Do you have more in mind about the body?

JAG No. He could count upon angelic help in this regard.

JD I think that is right, and we also see that in Paul. He gives an account in 2 Corinthians 11 of the things he went through and you really wonder, how a person could endure what he endured. Well, the Lord endured more than any one, and something of the immensity of that would be seen in the verses we have read.

RG It is something to consider just for a minute, because you might have thought that since the Spirit of God was with and in the Lord, and His every action was by the Spirit, as He tells us in the gospels, that would have been sufficient. But do you think that there is something very special and precious about the fact that an angel from heaven appeared? The blessed Spirit of God was always there with the Lord, and He was always in communion with the Father, but here is an angel considering for His body, and the circumstances through which that body was having to pass, do you think?

JD It is very precious. In Hebrews it speaks about Him being “made some little inferior to angels” (chap 2: 9), and He came into a condition in which His very body is strengthened by one of them.

APG It says in verse 45, “And rising up from his prayer”. That would suggest strength and power there. He was not overcome by the pressure.

JD How the Lord could overcome. He is a model for us as a Man so that “he prayed” and “he prayed more intently”; and the angel strengthens Him, and then He rises up. How blessed it is to see that in Christ Himself, in circumstances of extreme pressure, but it should also be for our encouragement.

JS Do you think the way He is presented in Luke for a model is a great help to ourselves? We may be faced with something that calls for obedience and we are tested by it, yet the Lord took it up and this attitude of prayer would be a help to us, the strengthening He receives.

JD I do, and I think again of what we spoke of earlier as to what was “his custom” and the way, we might say reverently, in which the Lord lived His life. He loved righteousness and hated lawlessness (Heb 1: 9), and as these features are developed in the believer being here for the will of God; it becomes “the good and acceptable and perfect will of God”, Rom 12: 2.

JS In a way, to put it simply, this matter of obedience is always the way to blessing.

JD It is, and that may cause us to think of Romans because Romans begins and ends with references to “obedience of faith”. Obedience is not something that suddenly becomes new to the believer. It is how we began. It says in Romans chapter 1, “by whom we have received grace and apostleship in behalf of his name, for obedience of faith among all the nations” (v 5), and then the book ends with a reference to “obedience of faith” (chap 16: 26), bringing out that this is something that belongs to the believer. And then we know too that it is through obedience that we come to know the gift of the Holy Spirit; so these are matters that the believer can readily identify with.

MGW Is this not something that we know practically when there is something pressing on our spirits as to obedience or any matter at all of real pressure? There comes a point where one is tempted just to give up and get up off one's knees again, but to persevere, to really call on the Lord to give us strength, this we do and we prove it. I am sure every heart here could echo that. The Lord is such a precious example to us in this.

JD None of us would claim very much, but in the simplicity of our circumstances, these things are to be proved, and then too in our experiences, these things have to be built upon, do you think?

MGW Yes, I wondered if in the contemplation of this we should remember the marvellous communion that was enjoyed between the Lord and His Father. What seasons They must have had in prayer together! When we think about that, and the Father's unbounded delight in His beloved Son, and we have a scene like this, and He is under such pressure in calling on the Father, it is quite a contemplation.

GBG The Father got pleasure from this also in His whole pathway, but there was pleasure in relation firstly for God, then in the offerings there was also food for Aaron and his sons. You are speaking of Christ as a model. It is food for us because it does not come to us naturally. Do you think it is when we really see it as moral excellence in Christ, that it builds us up in the way of food?

JD I think that is right, and it links on with what we have in Romans as to constitution. As feeding upon Christ, this becomes part of our constitution, and this type of manhood needs to become more attractive to us. It has to be so or we will not feed upon it, but, as feeding upon it, we can be encouraged that we can be built up in this way. I think that is really important for those of us that are young. Any experiences we have, and the experiences we may go through no one else may know - and to others they may not be significant either. What is a big exercise to you or me may not be to someone else, but as we prove God, and God in His grace gives us to prove Him, we can be built up. If God should allow exercises to become large in our lives, then perhaps we are more able for them because we trust in the God that we know and we have proved Him in our pathway here.

RG Is the partaking of the loaf at the Supper part of the feeding on this kind of Man that gives us the constitution, to be like Him?

JD I am sure that is right. Are you thinking that the loaf especially relates to the Lord's will, and there is only one will? The loaf would remind us that every other will is set aside and as appropriating the loaf and entering into that one will it makes way for the cup and the liberty that comes through that.

RG It is the kind of Man I was meaning. Transubstantiation is abhorrent. Every feature that has been reflected and shown forth in that body as He laid it down in death and then took it in resurrection power: that is what we feed on.

JD So it says in Corinthians “This is my body, which is for you”, 1 Cor 11: 24. It does not say there, 'which is given for you'. A body indeed was laid down, but it would also draw attention to the fact that it was all that has been reflected and shown forth in that body. There was what was in that life: the perfect expression of God's will here becomes food for our souls.

AMB Does the matter of sacrifice link on then with obedience?

JD These are features that mark the dispensation, do you not think, faith and sacrifice?

AMB The Lord offered Himself in obedience, by the Spirit, a spotless sacrifice and that was infinitely pleasurable to God: such an offering, such a sacrifice, and such obedience that God is able to count all those who come into relation with that One as righteous. What a moral matter that must be in the sight of God, that sacrifice of Christ in obedience!

JD That is good. It brings before us the immensity of it really, that there was such a life here under the eye of God, ever marked by perfection, and yet that life, that perfect life, had to be laid down. The Lord in that condition went on to the cross and, as on the cross, He was made sin and took upon Himself the whole matter of sin and sins. He went into the grave and it was in a new condition that He came out. But that wonderful life, think of what it secured! That is what we read in Romans: it is that “one righteousness towards all men”. I suppose that is really, what the Lord accomplished in His life and in His death, and the immensity of it is that there are now those who can be “constituted righteous”.

AMB What a triumph for God that is, that He has a race, sons, for Himself, that are taking on the features of Christ. One of these is that we are to be marked by sacrifice, do you think?

JD I do.

MGW I wanted to ask, we have got to a point in chapter 5 where it says, that they might “reign in life by the one Jesus Christ”. This is a great help to us in our souls, is it not? “By one righteousness towards all men for justification of life ... so also by the obedience of the one”. This is really helping us into the glory of what we have come into in Christianity.

JD So it does not say 'by the one obedience' but “by the obedience of the one”. It is that Person. As we know, Romans 5 is really introducing the believer to Christ as Head. It is the new Head; it is “the last Adam a quickening spirit”, 1 Cor 15: 45. That is all before the believer.

MGW Very good.

JS What we have been reading in Luke 22 would show us, do you think, how the whole matter of God's will in relation to men really hinged on what the Lord Jesus went through, “the obedience of the one”?

JD So verse 11 of Romans 5 has been drawn attention to as one of the high points in the whole book: “And not only that, but we are making our boast in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom now we have received the reconciliation”. That is the result of what you have just referred to, do you think? We make our boast in such a One.

JS Quite so. We enjoy so much in the way of blessing, as Romans sets out, and it really hinged on the obedience of this one Man; so we treasure that.

JD We have been speaking about our appreciation of the Lord Jesus, and someone also referred to the Father's appreciation, we may say God's appreciation, of Christ. That is what Romans is all about. It is all about what God has done in Christ. Think of God's satisfaction and delight, so much so that we can reach a sphere where it says, “grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”. How wonderful it is, all that Christ has effected as the obedient One!

JAG So are we touching the light of the inheritance now?

JD I am sure we are. Go on; say more.

JAG “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts” (v 5), and what you speak about as reconciliation, and then this is federal headship, it has been said; it is not the headship of Christ: that is to the assembly, but in relation to men, and the greatness of all that opens up the glory of the kingdom and eternal life.

JD I think that is right. There are still some exercises to go through, in Romans chapters 6 and 7 especially, but “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit”. What a wonderful matter that is! So there is an assurance that God would give us, give us in our lives and in our circumstances, that we would be assured of His love, “shed abroad in our hearts” as we take on the exercise to be here for His will and, as doing that, we start to enter into what the kingdom really means, and that makes way for the inheritance to be enjoyed.

GBG In the previous chapter it is, “reckoned to him as righteousness” (chap 4: 3); in this chapter it is “constituted righteous”. Do you have some thought?

JD It says, “so also by the obedience of the one the many **will** be constituted righteous”, as if it is something to be arrived at concretely in the believer’s soul. There is what is reckoned to us, and we have that standing before God, but this involves our state becoming in accord with our standing, do you think?

GBG That is helpful. So in God’s sight, by the operation of faith, we are reckoned righteous in God’s sight to be fit for God’s presence. I think it is helpful what you are saying about “constituted righteous”.

JAG Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are objective, and we have light as to things. We come through chapter 7 to the Spirit in chapter 8, but when he is speaking about reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5, “he has made sin for us, that we might become” - that is a process - “God’s righteousness in him”, v 21.

JD I think that is helpful. It is as appreciating these earlier chapters and what is true of us that we get the confidence and the liberty to enter into these things. In verse 18 it speaks about, “so by one righteousness towards all men for justification of life”, and so we can

start to appreciate - because of Christ and all that we have considered in Luke, and all that He has accomplished - that there is no charge against us. If you know there is no charge against you, you can start to have some confidence and liberty to take on the very features of the One who has removed the charge.

JAG Yes, so your life is changed, and you are justified.

DS So we are no longer under law but we are under grace. Is that not a wonderful thing in the dispensation in which we find ourselves as we take account of the One who was obedient? As we are obedient persons, we are no longer under law, but we are under grace. That opens up a great avenue of all that is in the love of God for us.

JD And what an attractive feature grace becomes. Grace is not in contrast to righteousness or obedience, so here we have that “grace might reign through righteousness”, but grace is what makes the whole thing operate. There is one thing that will maintain us in the testimony and in our links with one another and that is grace, but also we need to know grace and prove grace in our links with divine Persons so that matters can be worked out.

DS It seems to be that, as you prove grace, it is something that is operational and, under the hand of the Spirit, we are drawing from something that is exhaustless in that sense. We are moving into a sphere which Christ proved here when He was in this scene. As a Man, He was dependent, but now as dependent persons and obedient persons, we are touching something that is exhaustless.

JD I think that is right; so whatever circumstances may come upon us, one of the things that we can prove is the sweetness of divine grace to sustain us in our exercises, and then, in His will, He may grant mercy to change certain things in our lives. We can prove grace individually, but then really God has in mind that we should come into a realm in which grace reigns. As has been alluded to, this is leading to eternal life. These are conditions in which the attributes and, indeed, the very nature of God can be enjoyed.

DTP It becomes a very happy thing to make your boast in God. The substantiality of it there is in Christ for us - we have proved it - but it

makes you joyful in this sphere that you are enjoying a new kind of life because everything is settled before God. You can come out then in the brightness of that shining to men.

JD What a thing it is to boast in God, and we may reverently ask why we should not. Adam having fallen through disobedience, God has provided Christ, the obedient One, as the new Head for the race. How wonderful that He is the Head of every man, woman, boy and girl. He is not just the Head of those who believe; He is the federal Head of every man. Is that not wonderful? And yet it is only the believer who can really appreciate that, and as appreciating that, we can thank God that He has made Christ the Head of every man, given every man, we may say, a right to Christ, a claim on Christ.

PAG Is the matter of His headship here then underlined by the matter of obedience? We come into the matter of headship first on moral grounds. We come to what is personal and what is official later, but it starts with what is moral, do you think?

JD I do. It is when you come to Colossians that you get Christ presented as Head because He is not only morally but personally before all. Then in Colossians 2 you have the body referred to, but the Spirit waits until then, we may say, before presenting Christ as Head in relation to the assembly. Prior to that we need to work out the teaching morally and it is those who do who really come into the gain of being part of the assembly, His body, in which there is no breakdown.

PAG It is righteousness to recognise Christ as Head. That is a matter of righteousness.

RG Is there not a process being worked out here? The chapter begins and in the middle you get, "through our Lord Jesus Christ", v 11. Everything has been worked out that way. But when you come to the last verse it is, "through Jesus Christ our Lord". "Through our Lord Jesus Christ" is the Man where we read in Luke, but when you come to "through Jesus Christ our Lord", that Man has become authoritative, and you are subject and obedient to Him. That makes way then for headship coming in later, and then into Colossians, and through into Ephesians. Is that right?

JD Yes. You begin to see how attractive lordship is as underlying headship. The believer as going through exercise can exult in the lordship of Christ. It is his means to salvation and liberty, is it not?

RG Yes, as the Lord becomes Lord to you, then you become obedient and subject, and then He becomes Head to you, and that is then influential.

JD Locally we have been considering something of that in Deuteronomy in Moses and Joshua. There is lordship seen in Moses, but then, as appreciating the Lord's lordship, it makes way for the Spirit's leading, and then we can prove the Lord's headship, which is a more influential matter, involving our part in the assembly.

JAG The government has changed, especially in Acts 9, so you are under a different authority, different government, to enjoy the benefits of the kingdom and you act as a person who knows the kingdom.

JD We are not of this world and what a wonderful matter it is to know what world we do belong to, and it is that world, that kingdom, that is Christ's.

I thought it would be attractive to consider verse 17 of chapter 6: "But thanks be to God, that ye were bondmen of sin, but have obeyed from the heart the form of teaching into which ye were instructed". There is something very attractive in obeying "from the heart". I know "the form of teaching" is linked with baptism, but it was not especially in mind to consider that, but simply this matter of obeying "from the heart"; the affections are involved but it also involves instruction. We have spoken about what is objective and we also speak about what is subjective, and there is a need to prove things experimentally, but there is also the need to believe in faith the instruction that is given to us in scripture. Romans gives us certain instruction, and it is almost presented to us so that if you have faith to believe the instruction, you are going to make progress. We should not allow our apprehension of the truth to be governed solely by our experience or we may find that confusing and discouraging, but there is certain instruction provided, especially in Paul's teaching, and if we obey that teaching from the heart, it will lead to more manifest progress. Would that be right?

JAG Yes, I am sure it is because obeying “from the heart” is not the demands of the law; it is attractive. We are coming under the new covenant, are we not?

JD Yes; about this matter of “obeyed from the heart”, at the beginning of chapter 6 it says, “We who have died to sin”, v 2. You could never command somebody to die to sin; that would be absolutely futile, but as having come under the lordship and the headship of Christ and obeying from the heart, that becomes true of you.

JS I was just thinking of this matter in regard to what we have been instructed; this obedience from the heart is to be intelligent, is it not? We have instruction and the heart enters into it, and Christ has a place there.

JD Romans is linked with what the Lord says in John's gospel where He speaks about the truth setting us free, John 8: 32. It has been said that if we read Romans, it induces in us a love for the truth, JT vol 89 p 449. These matters underlie this obeying from the heart and you are governed by divine light and all that God has done in Christ, and you are led by right affections.

AMB Do you mean that the spirit of obedience should mark us? The verse that you have read, “obeyed from the heart” would become characteristic. It would be a spirit of obedience that is intended to mark the believer, do you think? If we are marked by that, in reading the scriptures and in listening in the meetings, and in reading ministry, as we are helped to do that, then, as you are saying, we will grow, but we need to guard against a critical spirit in our hearts. A spirit of obedience is in contrast, do you think?

JD I think so. Most of us are tested as to our measure and how much we have entered into divine things. It is humbling to think about the speed of progress that we make in divine things, but nevertheless, our experience does not change what is the truth and what is available to us. As marked by the spirit of obedience it is a feature of the believer's heart to acknowledge and respond to the truth.

AMB Do you not think that the Holy Spirit is a great practical help to us? If I am sitting in a reading meeting one evening and feeling a bit rebellious and not getting the benefit of what is going on, I need to turn to the Spirit to give me an obedient heart, do you think?

JD I am glad you mention the Holy Spirit because, as we know, the receiving of the gift of the Spirit is not expressly mentioned in Romans, but what a resource He is to us! Simply cry to Him in a meeting, cry to Him for His help, cry to Him after the meeting for help if there is something that does not make much sense, and He can and will help in these matters.

RG Would Lydia be a type and example “whose heart the Lord opened”, Acts 16: 14?

JD She would be, and it says, she attended to the things spoken by Paul. It is wonderful to have your heart opened, and would that the Lord would open our hearts more, but not only that, she attended to the things. That would bring out this matter of obeying “from the heart the form of teaching into which ye were instructed”. That is helpful.

MGW Does it help to refer to Isaiah 50, that lovely section we often quote? He says, “The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of the instructed, that I should know how to succour by a word him that is weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed.”, v 4. What a blessing there is flowing from that, do you think?

JD We were speaking about the matter of being “constituted righteous”, but now really what we are starting to see formed in the believer is the constitution of priesthood because there are certain things that you can hear, certain things that you can keep, and certain things that you can speak, do you think?

MGW Yes, and affection too. The thing that hurts when I sin and get back to confess is that I am conscious that I have sinned against love, really.

JS I was just thinking of Lydia, how the Lord opened her heart “to attend to the things spoken by Paul”. Do you think obedience from the heart really prepares good ground for Paul’s ministry?

JD I am sure that is right. It is like the soil being fertile. Do you have more in mind about being prepared for Paul's ministry?

JS I was just thinking of what you had in mind in Acts. He had much to open up as to Christ and the assembly, and we need a suited state of heart to take that in and respond to it.

JD That is helpful because something of what we have been speaking about involves moral exercise, but Christianity is not all about what is moral; it also involves what is spiritual, does it not? What is moral may have more reference to what is individual but what is spiritual takes us more onto the ground of what is collective. It is our affections that will lead us onto what is spiritual and what is collective, and so you find there are references in Colossians and Ephesians to having love towards all the saints as we are introduced into this wonderful area of Christ and the assembly.

JS Quite so; so the sequence is first of all the moral exercises and then the spiritual.

GBG In the kingdom we are formed in obedience, do you think? We often speak about formation, but we have to be formed in that moral feature, and it does not come to us naturally.

JD Well, it is a challenge as to whether God can view me as a reliable person, and as a reliable person that is formed by obedience and is true to the kingdom. Paul must have become a very reliable person because we read, "rise up and stand on thy feet; for, for this purpose have I appeared to thee, to appoint thee to be a servant and a witness both of what thou hast seen, and of what I shall appear to thee in". Although Paul was an apostle, there is in those who are formed and become reliable persons that which God is prepared to reveal things to.

GBG So we are suitable material then for the assembly. I remember Mr Jim Renton saying we want to find out, have a desire to find out, what the Lord's commandments are. A believer normally wants to be obedient and pleasing to the Lord.

JD So earlier we spoke carefully of the Lord's nature, but this is the divine nature being formed in the believer. So we have these

desires which are normal to a believer as knowing Christ and having the Spirit.

JAG Paul is reigning “in life by the one Jesus Christ”, and Agrippa cannot handle it.

JD It is so beautiful the way this chapter begins. He says, “I count myself happy, king Agrippa”, v 2. What a demonstration of the kingdom that Paul belonged to! Then he goes on to also speak about the light. As we know, it is recounted three times and here he recounts it as “a light above the brightness of the sun”. How wonderful these matters are! I really had in mind this matter of not being “disobedient to the heavenly vision” that we might be encouraged to really hold onto what has come to us in this wonderful matter of Christ and the assembly, some of the things that the brethren have been touching upon already.

JAG He says, “Who art thou, Lord?” (Acts 9: 5), and then the Lord says to Ananias, “for, behold, he is praying”, Acts 9: 11.

JD It is a moral characteristic that marks the believer, both in relation to working out exercises, practical exercises here, moral exercises here, kingdom exercises here, but also in relation to assembly exercises. We may ask what it means to have a heavenly vision; and, of course, there was what was distinct to Paul, but one way to get a heavenly vision is to desire it. I do not think we should underestimate what divine Persons think of and how they appreciate the right desires that we may have. We may say it begins simply with that, to have a desire to have a heavenly vision.

RG It is an Ephesian touch here because he says, “taking thee out from among the people,” - that was the Jews - “and the nations” - that was the Gentiles - and the whole heavenly vision was related to the two being formed “into one new man” (Eph 2: 15), do you think?

JD I do, and we have been reading Ephesians locally, and what a wonderful matter it is, Paul’s desire that we should share his intelligence in the mystery and enter into the wonderful truth that was given to him. I would encourage the younger ones because we may often sit and think, ‘Well, that is all very wonderful for those who are older’, but actually it is for all of us. That is a great thing to come to

as soon as you can. Whatever truth is spoken of, and the greatness of the truth that is spoken of, it is as much yours as anybody else's, and what was given to Paul has been given to us and primarily. That involves the wonderful truth of Christ and the assembly, something that should remain in our hearts until Christ comes for His assembly. So we may ask why it is especially Paul's ministry that is referred to as being given up. It is because it involves what is heavenly, and the devil, the enemy of our souls, is a fallen angel, and I may say simply, as a result of that, he is envious of the place that Christ and the assembly have in the purposes of God, and the place that Christ and the assembly should have in heavenly places. If he manages to dim our appreciation of Christ and the assembly, what he will do is he will take away the service of God because the truth of Christ and the assembly underlies the service of God, because we can never enter and progress in the service of God except as in known relationship with Christ, and that involves the truth of Christ and the assembly. Would that be right?

JS Yes; it is very interesting he says, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision"; so something of heavenly truth comes in to enlighten us. The thing is to be obedient, not to be disobedient.

JD I think that is right and yet this would normally be a very attractive light.

JS I think so. It seemed to become more and more attractive to Paul as he went on. I think if we are affected by heavenly light which, as the hymn says, 'makes all things bright' (hymn 12), it becomes more and more attractive.

JD Whatever we may be able to say about it there is nothing that compares with the truth of Christ and the assembly. Think of God purposing that Christ should have such a vessel and that we, as believers with the gift of the Holy Spirit, should belong to the body and the bride of Christ, which is the assembly; that should affect our lives. We read in Romans about the justification of life and then in chapter 6 about newness of life, and these are features which begin to mark the believer, but then think too of what marks the believer as one who walks here with the light in his heart, enthroned in his heart, of Christ and the assembly, this wonderful mystery.

AMB Does this verse that you are drawing attention to place us under a responsibility? It does not raise the question with us whether we might feel equal to the heavenly vision, but are we obedient to it?

JD We often say, the more light we have, the more responsible we are. We can speak about having the light of the assembly, but I really challenge my heart: do I have the light of the assembly? That means that I have to receive the light into my heart and be true to it, and that involves, as you suggest, responsibility.

AMB We speak of it as the light which is set out for us in the scriptures, and made further available to us in ministry. We all need to recognise the value of what you are referring to as “the heavenly vision”. It is really the revelation of God’s mind and what He has in His heart for Christ and for us. We can never be indifferent as to that, can we?

JD It is a wonderful matter. In Deuteronomy you come to the point when Moses looks into the land and he sees it populated. It has been said that Moses got a view of the land in communion with God, CAC vol 5 p360. How blessed that is! Ask God to give you a view of things, divine things, in communion with Him! Moses saw the whole land populated. We may speak about a panoramic view, but the view that Moses got was really a panorama *par excellence*. Moses could see the whole land inhabited by the saints. What a matter it is! This is our light. Christ and the assembly, we may say, is our light and we are given, as it says in Ephesians, “to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height”, chap 3: 18. .

PAG Is it a practical evidence of answering or being obedient to the heavenly vision that we answer to the Lord’s request, “this do in remembrance of me”, Luke 22: 19? Is that how in a sense - I do not want to make it too simple - you could tell that someone had been obedient to the heavenly vision?

JD I think that is helpful. So in Revelation it says, “Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and that they should go in by the gates into the city”, chap 22: 14. We

may say the gates are like the loaf and the cup. You are going to enter into assembly privilege in that way. That is how you are going to be obedient to the heavenly vision and have part with Christ, by committing yourself to Him and committing yourself to the Lord's supper.

PAG So young brethren answer to this. This is not just for older brethren.

JD We all can answer to this. Another thing that can be said is that we should not think that because something is spiritual, that it is complicated. It is a love matter. It is the believer's affections that are drawn into this.

APG In the last chapter of Ephesians, just after Paul has spoken as to Christ and as to the assembly, he goes on to speak about the practical matters as to "Children, obey your parents" (chap 6: 1) and, "Bondmen, obey masters", v 5. You spoke about the glory of obedience, so that glory is seen in every sphere.

JD So we have contemplated obedience in Christ and thought also of our pathway and also of entering into privilege, but then it is also seen as coming out from partaking in heavenly blessings and marks us, as you suggest, in our movements in every sphere. Perhaps that just concludes what we have considered, that this whole matter of obedience underlies the maintenance of these wonderful truths and our enjoyment of them.

Dundee

12th March 2011

Key to Initials:

A M Brown, Grangemouth; D C Brown, Edinburgh; J Drummond, Aberdeen; J A Gardiner, Aberdeen; R Gardiner, Kirkcaldy; A P Grant, Dundee; G B Grant, Dundee; P A Gray, Grangemouth; D T Pye, Kirkcaldy; D Spinks, Grangemouth; J Strachan, Dundee; M G Wood, Dundee

LOOKING STEDFASTLY

G John Richards

Hebrews 12: 2

Philippians 3: 16, 17

John 2: 1, 2, 11

The exhortation in Hebrews as to “looking stedfastly on Jesus” is a well-known scripture; one, like many, that I am learning to appreciate more in a living way. The brethren well know that the thought of “looking stedfastly” means that ‘we take our eyes away from looking at other things and fix the eye exclusively on One’. I wonder how many moments I can sustain with my eye exclusively upon Jesus. Of course, it is the eyes of our heart that we are speaking of; our literal eyes are very important (as are our literal ears) because they are the way into our minds, and the mind is the avenue to the heart; we have to keep our hearts, and so we have to keep our eyes and our ears too. This exhortation is that the eyes of our heart are to be “stedfastly on Jesus”. He is in glory. It has been drawn to our attention in recent ministry that one of the great and distinctive features of this dispensation is that there is a Man in heaven. *He* is the object of the believer’s faith. None of us have seen Him, and that is what Peter says, “whom, having not seen, ye love”, 1 Peter 1: 8. Our occupation is to be with Him. I think this is important because I see in myself, and I have observed in other dear brethren, the very great ease with which other persons, fill our minds, occupy us, and become dominant in our thinking. There is plenty that is negative that one might be occupied with. Our brother made reference in prayer last night to the desire that there might be with us, in what others with whom we come into contact might see, something consistent: consistent with what we hold and teach and believe and sometimes confess, that men might see a consistency there. I think I perceive the unfruitfulness of being occupied with others, even brethren. I do not know what scripture it would be based on (possibly Eph 6: 12) but I do recall it being taught (FER vol 14 p219), and I think it would be sound teaching, that the persons are never (let us say *rarely*) the issue amongst us. But how much

time, how many hours and how many column inches of writing too, have been taken up with persons; and the profit would be questionable. The word is, "looking stedfastly on Jesus". We have a race to run which is not easy; this is not a race where speed matters, but rather what is called for is *endurance*, "run with endurance the race that lies before us", Heb 12: 1. It describes the time that is before us now until the Lord takes us or until the Lord comes. That is the race and what is needed is endurance. Now weariness is a very real thing, fatigue is a very real thing: physical fatigue, mental fatigue, one might say *spiritual* fatigue, and they are very real things which can afflict anyone of us. Endurance is needed and this depends upon "looking stedfastly on Jesus". He is the object of God's pleasure. I read in ministry of Mr Raven (vol 20 p22) this remark: 'The moment Christ came to earth, there was that in man which was acceptable to the eye of God. In the cross, all that was offensive was removed, and in resurrection there remains nothing but what is grateful to God' - *what is entirely grateful to His heart*. This is the One with whom we are to be occupied.

He is the "leader and completer of faith", that word 'leader' is only used of Jesus. It is used here; and Peter uses it when he says "the originator of life ye slew", Acts 3: 15. So it is a unique glory of His, the Leader, the One who sets something on and completes it; and the completion is equal to the setting on. Think of the Man: all His thoughts, all that relates to Him - perfect - no falling short, no decline. And of Him it was said, "the leader and completer of faith". It was, "in view of the joy lying before him" - He has entered into that joy; that is something we can rejoice in, that the Lord Jesus today has joy. I do not doubt that He feels the sorrows of His own, but He has entered into that joy. Soon the saints will enter into the joy of their Lord; meanwhile we have Him as our object.

The second scripture might present a paradox - and I acknowledge that - because here Paul is saying, "Be imitators all together of me, brethren, and fix your eyes on those walking thus as you have us for a model". I suggest that "as ye have us for a model", and "those walking thus" would be persons who, like him, could truthfully say, "But surely I count also all things to be loss on account

of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”: that is an appreciation in the soul transcending any other knowledge or apprehension that we could have. “I have suffered the loss of all, and count them to be filth” - *filth*, that is quite a strong word - “that I may gain Christ”, Phil 3: 8. Then he says, ‘I am anxious to touch something that is on the other side of death’ - not in physical resurrection - for that is not in doubt, and does not depend on exercise of soul on the believer’s part - but, he writes, ‘I long to touch something of that now, to know Christ where He is, to know the power of His resurrection’, v 10. He says, “forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue, looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”, v 13, 14. There are such persons beloved, known to us, men and women, and their life is Christ. What the apostle is saying is that we can safely admire such features in them. He even says, “fix your eyes on those walking thus”: that is the consistency that our brother referred to in prayer. Not all walk like this, in fact he goes on to say, “for many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (v 18); not that they are enemies of the Christ, but “enemies of the cross of Christ”, and in some way - be it witting or otherwise - they are maintaining what Christ’s cross ended for God. I would not wish to be that way. I am not saying that my brethren are like this, but he says that there are such; in fact he says, “for many walk” in that way. We are not to be occupied with them, but we do have models, and I commend this to the brethren.

I wondered whether John 2 brought these thoughts together. I know that what is said, and the order in which persons are indicated, is slightly alarming. We read that a marriage took place on the third day and the Lord Jesus, anointed with the Spirit, and so having begun His public service, was present. The evangelist describes days and they are hard to fit together, if we think of the distances involved. But here we are in Cana, and whenever the starting point was this was the third day; “a marriage took place in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also, and his disciples, were invited to the marriage”. I am not sure what others have said about this, and I know this is not the best situation which is

described when it is “Jesus also”; but I would suggest that there is something positive here: that firstly the Lord Jesus was invited, *He was wanted there*. The couple and those who were associated with them did not want to go ahead without the Lord being there. What I want to draw from this is that little statement, “Jesus also, and his disciples, were invited to the marriage”, and I think it is a very, very fine thing when persons love the Lord and they love His people: because they are inseparable. I wonder if those two thoughts - that paradox may perhaps be brought together and explained here, “Jesus also, and his disciples”. The result was fine: “This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed on him”.

May that be the outcome of our experience here, beloved.

For the Lord’s glory.

Malvern

5th April 2011

ASSEMBLY PERSONNEL

John A Turner

Acts 9: 15-20; 16: 10-15; 28-31; 20: 8-12; 21: 5, 6

These scriptures relate to the personnel who constitute the assembly. We were hearing in the previous word that the Lord Jesus is inseparable from the saints, and how true that is. Our hearts were touched on Lord's day in the first hymn we had:

While thus we call Thee, Lord, to mind,
Thou dost Thyself now come,
In thine assembly here to find -
Where Thou hadst none - a home!
(Hymn 430)

The Lord Jesus came into this world with nothing, a babe in Bethlehem's manger. He brought everything with Him in the way of grace. Who could say what was there as to the Lord Jesus Himself? Yet as to material things, He brought nothing with Him. He took the body prepared for Him. What went into the preparation of that body, what infinite affections! Whose body was it going to be? Whose life? This is the One with whom our minds and hearts and affections are to be engaged. How we can say 'Amen' to that! He is God's object and He is to be our object. I am sure He is our object, but who of us would not say that He could be a greater object and fill a greater place in our lives and hearts? The Holy Spirit is here to make way for Christ.

How wonderful it is to be in the Lord's presence. His presence provides the opportunity for us to provide for Him

Where Thou hadst none - a home!

Beloved brethren, what do we provide for Him? What is He acquiring in coming here? He has done the work that has set us entirely free. How wonderful that what He came to do has been completed. But what is there for Him, and what is for God from each of us? In Matthew 16: 16, Peter confesses the Person of the Christ. Then the Lord Jesus speaks of "my assembly". How wonderful! "On this rock I will build my assembly", Matt 16: 18. It is Christ's

assembly. What it means to His heart to have a vessel that is His, one that He can come to; one that He can confide in; one that He can enjoy because of her understanding of His heart! Which of us could say that we know all that is in the heart of the Lord Jesus? We would not take that ground, but there is something here in the collective thought of the saints. The saints together unitedly with one object before them have great capacity to provide something for the heart of Christ.

What it means is that whoever we are, whatever our age, whether we are man, woman, boy or girl, we are to fit into this wonderful vessel together, the assembly. The Spirit fits us, helps us, so that we are fitted together. The assembly is a wonderful entity. Think of the Lord Jesus in His manhood, coming here and what does He find? "He came to His own" John 1: 11. What a reception His own could have given to Christ had they recognised their Messiah, what an embrace. But for the moment there is no embrace with Israel as a nation.

There is, thank God, an answer from those of whom He is according to flesh (Rom 9: 5), Saul of Tarsus amongst them. He embraced Christ, He received Christ. How wonderful to have received this glorious Person. What is the answer to the heart of Christ? How can I fill out my place in the assembly for Christ - His assembly?

Ananias belonged to the Lord Jesus. I would love to know how Ananias was secured, how he was touched and came to the Lord Jesus. There is a wonderful intimacy of love between him and his Lord; and he is told to go to this house. It says, "And Ananias went and entered into the house; and laying his hands upon him he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus that appeared to thee in the way in which thou camest, that thou mightest see, and be filled with the Holy Spirit". They were the hands of a brother - these were not apostolic hands, we get those elsewhere. This was the laying on of the hands of a brother from a local assembly, on another brother, giving him absolute confidence which I would say he lacked at this moment. Saul had come through such an experience that he needed a brother. Do we not all need a brother? As we heard

earlier, as we look on the Lord Jesus exclusively, we can view the work of Christ in one another. We need to come into the gain of one another. Saul had this initial experience that would prepare him for the reality of what the assembly is to the heart of Christ. There are persons in the assembly who have feelings that belong to the assembly. What a privilege to belong to the assembly of God, the assembly of Christ. Am I filling out the place that is given to me as a brother or a sister, or a boy or a girl?

Further on in Acts we find the women in Philippi. It is very interesting how the assembly in Philippi is brought about, Paul having his part in it with divine direction and help. Every local assembly is an expression of the whole assembly. They each belong to Christ. The man in the vision says, "Pass over into Macedonia and help us. And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go forth to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us". We could say that Paul had been invited, and eventually came to the conclusion that he had been called to come, that he was meant to come. Now Paul has come to that place, "And we were staying in that city certain days. And on the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where it was the custom for prayer to be". There was no visible assembly here yet, but here were the women with this custom of prayer. "The women who had assembled" - there is something precious in being "assembled". These people could be viewed not just individually but as the moral whole. The working out of the truth and the light and the joy of the assembly is found along with others. The enemy has tried to overshadow this precious truth, but it exists and it is divine. It has not come about by any human instrument, although Paul was used greatly. It is what divine Persons have done for their own pleasure.

The scripture goes on to say, "And a certain woman, by name Lydia". It is not only the women, but "a certain woman". Beloved sisters, each one of you has a great responsibility. One would ask, are you filling out that place? Or are you thinking, 'I have not a great place, I do not count for much, I fill a seat, and I attend the meetings?'. Thank God for that, but there is more to it than that. I am sure each heart would allow the challenge, as to whether I am

filling out the place that God has given me. A woman has her place locally in His ordering. In Philippi, where God was going to have His assembly represented, it involved women; and not only women, but a woman. "A certain woman, by name Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God...whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul". She is distinguished by name (we each have a name), by the place, and by how God is operating in her for His own pleasure. The things of Paul have to be attended to, not just by the brothers but by the sisters who are so vital to the truth of the assembly. May these things just touch our hearts afresh.

Then we have this dear man, the jailor. This is God's amazing ordering, this is His route, not our route, not our choice; it is God's plan, God's wisdom. The jailor was going to kill himself. He had not succeeded in his responsibility. But God is going to take him from that situation and use him for Himself and add him to the local assembly. How wonderful that is! He was possibly a hard man - God takes on hard people. He takes up all sorts of people. Who are we to say what God can do? He took up this man, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?". That is the first thing. How can we help others of the household or the locality if we are not saved? Thank God for salvation. You might say he did not deserve to be saved, he had just beaten them, and he belonged to something completely different. God is acting and we recognise it. How much Paul and Silas recognised it - what grace! "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here".

"Believe on the Lord Jesus" - if we belong to the assembly we have come by way of believing on the Lord Jesus. What salvation is in His Name and His work; just believe and confess. How wonderful! It is not a complex formula. God has provided the Saviour. I am the sinner, and through faith I receive the Saviour and I am received on that ground before God, justified. Beloved brethren, what God has given to us! We have no means of our own. The jailor is serviceable and his house is secured. A household - how precious! What is the enemy attacking today? Households. We grieve as we think of those who are giving up, those heads of

houses. They may not feel that. We are not charging anyone, but beloved brethren, it seems that someone leads. If we were without feeling about these things we would not really represent God or Christ: what feelings enter into these things. However, we do not speak without hope either.

In Acts 20, a most wonderful chapter, we have a young person - "overpowered by deep sleep, while Paul discoursed very much at length, having been overpowered by the sleep, fell from the third story down to the bottom, and was taken up dead". But it was the very one who was discoursing at length who descends upon him and embraces him. We would embrace you, all these persons found in the assembly, man or woman, boy or girl. We find all these kinds of people in chapter 8 of Luke's gospel. There is a man secured from his deranged and unclean state; the blessed Lord Jesus helps him. There is a woman who needs help, her life is ebbing out. If your life is ebbing out, beloved sister, the Lord Jesus has the power to prevent that continuing. What a Saviour! Then we have the girl raised up. How wonderful! We need the boys, the girls, we need the youths, we need everyone. This is just my simple point, that the work in us is needed. Are we filling out our place?

Then we have the children. How precious are the children, such potential in our children. Moses said, "We will go with our young and with our old", Ex 10: 9. We will not leave the young behind, we will not do it. It is not God's way. "But when we had completed the days, we set out and took our journey, all of them accompanying us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And kneeling down upon the shore we prayed". It comes in again, prayer. This is the only way we are kept. What prayers have gone up for each of us here, what prayers! How good it is to look upon one another as those who are the work of God and to realise that we are here through the sovereign grace of God, through the mercy of God and doubtless through many prayers.

May we be encouraged and strengthened. For His Name's sake.

Malvern

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