

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 61

April 2012

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DESCENDING AND ASCENDING

Key to Initials:

A TURN

CHRIST'S PLACE

DESCENDING AND ASCENDING

Ephesians 4: 9, 10

2 Chronicles 9: 3-12

AM I thought we might take these two scriptures together, not necessarily sequentially. We had a very full time this morning, as I am sure many of the brethren enjoyed. We started with the thought of the love of the Lord expressed in the words:

The deepest depths were fathomed
In that great stoop of Thine.
(Hymn 263)

It seemed to me that, when we sing of 'the deepest depths' being fathomed by the Lord Jesus, it gives a peculiar character, in order that we should experience what is most elevated and glorious and precious. His stoop involved for Him 'the deepest depths'. I just wondered whether we could, at the beginning of this reading, draw for a moment on that. In Ephesians He is referred to as "He that descended", as if this were a particular glory, a particular character. It is almost like a title, "He that descended". Brethren, we have enjoyed the company of the saints this weekend, and we have enjoyed the truth being worked out. We have enjoyed seeing older brothers who are rejoicing in the truth; all this is because of the fact that there was One who "descended into the lower parts of the earth". What we have is most precious and it has not come without cost. It has come, beloved, at so great a cost:

The deepest depths were fathomed
In that great stoop ...

How deep was that stoop! And so He is the One who has "descended into the lower parts of the earth", but that One was morally qualified to ascend "up above all the heavens". He has proved His worthiness, and He is able to ascend "up above all the heavens".

Thinking further of the occasion this morning, Solomon came to mind. There was a whole order of things which was under his hand, and it was all to his glory; and this dear soul, the queen of Sheba,

came, and she saw “the food of his table, and the deportment of his servants” and so on. And then she saw that there was something higher, something greater, something more elevated even than that, and “there was no more spirit in her”. Of course, in our day, what a wonderful blessing it is that God has given us the Spirit of His Son in our hearts so that we should have liberty in His presence!

But then as the passage goes on, she added to what was there. There was the gold, and then she gave the spices. She had seen “the food of his table” but then she gave spices. She gave something that would enrich the food of Solomon’s table that was already there. And then we have this touch as to the servants of Hiram who brought sandal-wood: “And the king made of the sandal-wood stairs”. Again there is elevation, another movement upwards in the service of God, and in order that that service should proceed it says the king made harps and lutes so that there should be wealth in the divine service. I take it the instruments of praise are those here in this room today, formed by the hand of none other than the true Solomon. He made these harps and lutes, and there was nothing like it. It says, “And there were none such seen before”. Solomon did that and he is a type, but what we find in Ephesians is that Christ has been glorified and exalted above all things and the object is “that he might fill all things”. Solomon could not fill all things, but Christ does. He has “also ascended up above all the heavens, that he might fill all things”.

JDG It says in Matthew 12, “thus shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights”, v 40. I was thinking, as you spoke, that time entered into that, time for contemplation.

AM That was a sign, “the sign of Jonas” (v 39), but for the Lord Jesus it was not a sign. It was the reality of it, “in the heart of the earth three days and three nights”. “Thus shall the Son of man be”, He says. Think of what was involved in that. We came together this morning, and there were the emblems of His love, the love that was proved and demonstrated to the extent that He went into death; and He was “in the heart of the earth three days and three nights”.

JTB The Psalm says, “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy cataracts”, Ps 42: 7. It is very affecting that the awful sound of the

noise of the cataracts fell upon an ear that was accustomed to the sweet communications from His Father, do you think? It was an unaccustomed atmosphere.

AM That is very affecting. Death was totally foreign to Him. No wonder He recoiled from it. What can we say about it? Everything that death is was foreign to Jesus. We often remember that remark of Mr Darby: 'For Him, death was death. Man's utter weakness, Satan's extreme power, and God's just vengeance – and alone, without one sympathy ...' and so on, vol 7 p169.

JSp I was thinking of the blessings of Moses in Deuteronomy 33.

“And of Joseph he said,
Blessed of Jehovah be his land!
By the precious things of the heavens,
By the dew, and by the
deep that lieth beneath”, v 13.

I was thinking of these “precious things”. “The deep that lieth beneath” is really the moral foundation for everything, is it not?

AM Yes, that is good. Say some more.

JSp No, I could not say more than that. It is just a sense in the soul that everything God does has a very deep, moral basis and clears the way for us to enjoy “the precious things of the heavens”.

AM That is right; so the enjoyment of precious, divine things amongst the saints is not a light matter, is it? It is in the full appreciation of the One who has gone into the depths. Think of the Lord referring to Jonah in Matthew 12. Jonah says, “All thy breakers and thy billows are gone over me”, Jonah 2: 3. “I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever”, Jonah 2: 6. The Lord felt death in all its horror and its power. He felt it as none of us will ever feel it.

DCB I was thinking of Philippians 2 where you see His mind to descend. You said affectingly that “He that descended” is almost a title. You do not need to say who this is. You do not need the Name. We know this One, and that was the spirit, that was the mind, in which He operated.

AM Yes, you can understand that such a One with a mind to go down like that was so pleasing to God. I was thinking in the interval that man's mind is to go up, is it not? The very first temptation in Genesis was "ye will be as God", chap 3: 5. The history of man develops: "Come on, let us build ourselves a city and a tower, the top of which may reach to the heavens", Gen 11: 4. Man's mind is to go up, but there was One whose mind was to go down and He was the One that "descended into the lower parts of the earth". Every sphere of creation has been entered into. It has been said that the Lord Jesus has manifested the love of God in every sphere of creation. How precious that is for us!

PJM Can you say something about the deliberateness of this: "he also descended". Death did not overtake the Lord Jesus.

AM Oh, no; it had no claim upon Him. Death has a claim upon us, but it had no claim upon Him. He entered into its realm. Death recoiled from Him. Think of the Jordan going back as the ark went through in holy majesty, those descending steps, down and down and down, and death could not stand before Him.

APD I noticed a comment of Mr James Taylor's that when the corn of wheat fell into the ground and the Lord Jesus was in the heart of the earth, there was never such latent power of fertility in the earth as at that time, vol 25 p251.

AM That is very precious. What that corn of wheat produced! How great the fruit! But it had to happen: "Except the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, it abides alone", John 12: 24. When He was here, He abode alone.

CKR "The lower parts of the earth" must emphasise burial. I was thinking there was a touching reference in John 20 when Mary goes in: there is an angel "at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain", v 12. That is a very touching matter to think of heavenly dignitaries even being there.

AM Do you have an impression as to the head and the feet?

CKR I wondered if it suggests the cherubim. The angels are there protecting of that body, the uniqueness of it; and that leads Mary on to resurrection and the glory of restoration.

AM That is good, the uniqueness of it, and that was appreciated in measure by some. The Lord Jesus was anointed by the women in the gospels. He was anointed on the head and on the feet. He was appreciated, both as to His dignity, the dignity of the One who was there, and the way in which He was going. It was appreciated and it is almost as if those angels would guard the preciousness of what was found in that life here.

CKR Then you have Joseph of Arimathæa particularly shining and bringing out these characteristics that marked him as a secret disciple, prepared to embolden himself, to claim the body for burial, chap 19: 38.

AM Well, he did not remain secret, did he? He came out to be identified with a dead Christ, with One who had been rejected from this scene. He was going to be identified with Him, not only in His death, but in His burial.

RT You spoke about majesty entering into these movements. Would you say some more about that?

AM Well, is it not so? I was thinking of what our brother said, that death did not overtake Him, but He went that way. He was as the lion “which turneth not away for any”, Prov 30: 30. He went into the very realms of death itself. He went that way to break its power.

RT From another point of view, the Father exalted Him, but here it is His own distinct movements. It is like going to the Jordan: the waters went back “very far”, Josh 3: 16. The whole scene has to give way before the majesty of this Person in lowliness and manhood, but there is majesty there, and everything has to give way.

AM It speaks of “the feet of the priests”, Josh 3: 15. Think of those majestic footsteps of Jesus going down to death, and death had to give way before Him.

DBR It says, “I became dead” (Rev 1: 18), an act of His own, involving great majesty. What would you say about that expression, “I became dead”?

AM It is very affecting because that is in Revelation. I find it very affecting to think of the Lord Jesus, then in a glorious condition,

looking back, bringing back to John the fact that He had been into death. He had entered into a condition He had never known before. He said, "I became dead". He was the living One, intrinsically: "In him was life" (John 1: 4), and yet He said, "I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages".

DBR I am thankful for what you say. I do not think I had ever thought of it in that way, but it was after He was out of death that He refers back to it for John's sake, and for ours as well, do you think?

AM I think so. Do you think it is rather like when He gave the Supper to Paul? He was in the glory and it says, "in the night in which he was delivered up", 1 Cor 11: 23. He was looking back. That would stir the affections of the one He was communicating to, and it would stir our affections too, for the One who is now in the glory is the One who went that way.

JDG The emblems on the table are a witness to the fact, "I became dead".

AM Yes, they are, and we are brought back to that every week, the fact that the Man who is now in the glory who has "ascended up above all the heavens", before He ascended, He became dead.

JAG Say something about "the travail of his soul", Is 53: 11. All this must be involved in it, what it meant to Him to do that in love.

AM He recoiled from it. I think it is right to say that throughout the lifetime of the Lord Jesus the will of His Father was His joy; it sustained Him. But when it came to His final sufferings and death, He was still submissive to the will of His Father - there was never any question that He could not be - but it involved a horror; there was a travail. The sisters would understand that word better than us; it was an excruciating thing for Him, that He should actually have to face that, and the phrase "of his soul" brings out the depths of feeling, does it not? Say some more.

JAG I was just thinking of the depths of holiness that was in Him, and how He felt the awfulness of being made sin. We cannot really fathom the immensity of it.

AM Yes, that which was so abhorrent to Him, so foreign to Him.

RG-y Do you think that what we are speaking about now, and the glory connected with dealing with the moral question, would bring out also the need for the moral question in the first place?

AM You mean that had to be addressed? Go on.

RG-y The Lord said when He was here, "It cannot be but that offences come" (Luke 17: 1) and other remarks like that, but there was no way in which the wealth and the depth of divine love could be adequately expressed apart from this moral road, do you think?

AM Absolutely. So that there had to be that which was so awful that His holy soul would shrink and recoil from it, as a demonstration of the greatness of the love that would lead Him to take that path. I think that is very helpful.

RDP I was thinking of the expression "the lower parts of the earth". In Colossians it refers to "the visible and the invisible", chap 1: 16. All that comes under the sway of Christ. I was just thinking as we were speaking of "the travail of his soul"; to us there is what is perhaps "visible", but "the invisible" was plumbed by Christ. He comes out in triumph and it all seems to be in view of His headship and the glory of His supremacy.

AM That is right. I appreciate your comment as to "the invisible" because really there is that which is beyond us, is there not, in "the lower parts of the earth"? We just have to stand in worship as we take account of Him that "descended into the lower parts of the earth".

RDP There are areas man has gone to, both physically and morally, but these are areas that are invisible to man. It is what lay in relation even to the founding of the earth. He went that low. It is such an expressive word, "the lower parts of the earth".

AM There is more depth there even than in Jonah's expression, "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains". I think "the lower parts of the earth" involve even greater depths than that.

JCG Do you think the Lord's feelings come out in the type in Joseph? In Psalm 105 he says, "his soul came into irons", v 18. I

was thinking of the depths of feelings the Lord had in relation to His having to die.

AM The Lord Himself refers to His soul: “My soul is very sorrowful even unto death”, Matt 26: 38. We are on holy ground, brethren, and we need to be careful, but consider the depth of feeling that He entered into, that He should go into “the lower parts of the earth”. As you say, with Joseph you get the suggestion of confinement as well: “his soul came into irons”. There would be restriction until resurrection. “How am I straitened”, the Lord says, Luke 12: 50.

DBR The psalmist speaks of what was “curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth”, Ps 139: 15. There is something wrought there. Would that mean that something was being accomplished, and this was the only way it could be accomplished?

AM I think so, and the psalmist refers to what God saw. Now there is what is invisible to us as we have been speaking about, but God saw it, what was “wrought in the lower parts of the earth”.

PAG Is it affecting that it is “He that descended is the same who has also ascended”? It is the same Person and the same love. That love has not been exhausted by this depth of suffering and sorrow. It remains exactly the same and the Person is the same.

AM The angel says, “This Jesus” (Acts 1: 11); it is the same blessed Person. In Luke’s gospel the Lord appeared in resurrection to His own and He went to great lengths to show them that He was the same Jesus, did He not, in order that their hearts should be steadied? It is the same One who is now “ascended up above all the heavens”.

JAG It is something to think about that He knew in Himself when the time was come that the work was finished, and the time was come for Him to deliver up His spirit and go into death, and the time was come when He should rise again. He was always in control.

AM Yes, indeed. He had power to do that and yet, as a Man, He exercised that authority in obedience. He said, “I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again. I have received this commandment of my Father”, John 10: 18. You see the blessed perfection, the merging of the greatness of the power that was His

and the authority that was His and the perfection of manhood that was there, that He had authority to lay down His life. He had authority to take it again, and yet He only exercised that in answer to the commandment of His Father.

JAG Now He says, “I ... have the keys of death and of hades”, Rev 1: 18.

RG Would you say something about “having loosed the pains of death”, Acts 2: 24?

AM I do not know that I could. You say something, please.

RG I have often wondered about it, but “having loosed the pains of death” shows something of the depths of all that the Lord endured, does it not? And then at the point of resurrection He could not be held by it, but the loosing of the pains became manifested in the life that was coming out of death in the power of resurrection life.

AM “Having loosed”: I must admit I have not fully appreciated the expression: “having loosed the pains of death”. It is the liberty of resurrection life, the greatness of the power with which He came out. On one hand He was “raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom 6: 4); on the other hand “it was not possible that he should be held by its power”, Acts 2: 24. Such was the One who was there in death, He could not be held. Death was a realm, totally foreign to Christ, as was said earlier. It was totally foreign to death to have One such as He enter it. He could not be held by it.

PJM Could you say something about dignity? We have the queen of Sheba observing the ascent, the dignity and the pomp, and all that surrounded Solomon as he went into the service of God; but the Lord Jesus had dignity as He went into death. There is nothing very dignified about crucifixion, nor usually death, but the Lord Jesus had a remarkable effect on those who witnessed the way that He died. Even Isaiah writes about it.

AM That is right. The Lord Jesus is never seen other than in dignity. All His movements are in dignity. “if therefore ye seek me, let these go away”, John 18: 8. What a dignified thing to say! When the Lord Jesus went in, He met every power. In the uprightness and

dignity of His own Person, He met everything. We were reading in the house about his trial and how He was asked, “*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” and so on, Mark 14: 61. Think of the dignity that marked Him all that way, and the dignity of those downward movements. It says that He “endured the cross, having despised the shame”, Heb 12: 2. He did not accept the shame. He “endured the cross”; He went through in dignity. Every other man who had been crucified would have been affected by the shame of it, but the Lord Jesus “despised the shame”. He went through in dignity and ultimately it said “having bowed his head, he delivered up his spirit”, John 19: 30. That is dignity.

KM How is it that the queen of Sheba was used in this way? There was a good deal of credit attached to the queen of Sheba. “She came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon”, Matt 12: 42. You can understand that that was a very creditable thing to do, but when you come to Jonah, it does not look very graceful in the way that Jonah moved, and yet it is used as a type as to him going to the bottoms of the mountains and the weeds wrapped about his head. Could you say something about the contrast between the two, and yet arriving in a similar way to what we are saying?

AM The Lord does not say that the queen of Sheba was a sign; He says Jonah was a sign (Matt 12: 39). The queen of Sheba actually saw the glory that was there. Jonah, personally, is not a type of Christ, but what he says is prophetic of Christ. He went through that experience because of his self-will; so he cannot be a type of Christ, but what he says there is prophetic of that which the Lord Jesus went through. It is remarkable that he recorded that for us that we can read such utterances with such depth of feeling, speaking of what the Lord Jesus had yet to go through.

JTB I was thinking of the references in Job: “hast thou walked in the recesses of the deep?” chap 38: 16. It suggests there was not that piece of death’s territory that was not traversed by the Lord Jesus. His triumph is total.

AM That is good. He experienced that fully. He went the whole way. There was no piece of it that was not traversed by Him so that

the One who has been that way and is now “ascended up above all the heavens” is able to fill all things.

JTB I just thought “that he might fill all things” is the total contrast to “the recesses of the deep”.

AM Yes, that is good.

JS I was thinking of how His descending mind is portrayed to us in Philippians 2: He “humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross”, v 8. Does it show that He did not shrink from going to the full extent?

AM We see at the cross the perfection of obedience. He became obedient. His obedience was to God. We may not all understand that scripture. He became “obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross”. He was not obedient to death. His obedience was to God. The extent of His obedience was “even unto death, and that the death of the cross”. That is how far the obedience would go.

JCG It is recorded, therefore, that in going that way, in descending, there was not only the dignity of who He was, but the power that was involved because the scripture speaks about Him annulling “him who has the might of death”, Heb 2: 14. So that all the power of death and the power of Satan was totally vanquished and conquered at that point with His descent. Is that right to say that?

AM I think it is and so the psalmist is buoyant, is he not? He says, “What ailed thee, thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou turnedst back?”, Ps 114: 5. “What ailed thee ...?” There was a power that had existed from the beginning of Genesis. I remember a brother saying that the great river Jordan started to flow in Genesis 3. You can understand that, that great river Jordan - speaking of death - started to flow in Genesis 3, and it has been flowing ever since, and the psalmist says, “What ailed thee ... that thou turnedst back?”. There was One who was greater than the power of Jordan, who entered into it.

JM The fact that He was equal to the work did not in any sense detract from what He did. He still went through all that was involved. I remember we used to speak about ‘unfathomable depths’, but I think we were helped to see that He actually fathomed

the depths. There was nowhere else. He met it all. The fact that He was equal to it does not in any sense minimise the fact that He had to face it all.

AM That is right; so no type is sufficient. You get one type that brings out the power of Jesus as going into death; you get another figure of the sufferings that were involved in that and the way in which His holy soul recoiled from it. You need them all. It all came together in Him. He had the power to meet it and He was prepared for the sufferings that that would involve.

JM The matter of the cross was a public matter; the matter of the grave was not so; and therefore we perhaps tend to overlook it. But He went through a great deal, a tremendous matter that He went through in going into the grave.

AM And the anticipation of it all we see in Gethsemane, do we not? We see what it cost Him there.

JM Exactly.

QAP In the Song of Songs we get the love that led Him that way: "Many waters cannot quench love, Neither do the floods drown it", chap 8: 7. What do you say?

AM Well, that is right and you have to say it was love that took Him that way. It was obedience, but the motive behind it all was love.

PJW Perhaps you could say something as to His soul being in Sheol: "For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol", Ps 16: 10.

AM I do not know that I could say much as to that. It brings out the depth of His feelings as to the awfulness of death. I want to be very careful here because we are dealing with a holy matter and we cannot be analytical, but the psalmist says that. The awfulness of Sheol was there, and His feelings were involved: "thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol".

DBR Scripture is careful there in relation to what that verse in Psalm 16 raises. It says, "neither wilt thou allow thy Holy One ...": it was the Holy One that was there: so it is a holy area we are speaking about.

AM Yes, thank you. I feel very measured as to what I could say at all about it.

PJM Is there something answering to the Lord's life in the descending movements of a man like David, who entered into deep suffering, and in a prophetic way he is able to allude to the Lord's sufferings? Psalm 22, for instance, speaks of the downward steps of the Lord Jesus, who actually went into death. Then we have a contrast with Solomon who ascended? He was the one who had that incomparable reign. The Lord Jesus brings the two types together. He is more than the types of course, but He is the great antitype. Does it need those two kings to really show us what was encompassed in the Lord's life and death?

AM That is very interesting, to bring in David in relation to Psalm 22. You wonder, of course, what experience David had in order to write that Psalm, and yet the Psalm, as you say, is prophetic. No experience could possibly have been entered into fully that gave expression to the sentiments in that Psalm. It awaited Another who was capable of bearing these sufferings and going into the lower parts of the earth.

DMC Could you help us as to the Lord's burial, as to the necessity for it?

AM The Lord's burial was an essential part of what took place, was it not? What was for God upon this earth when the Lord Jesus was in the tomb? It showed that the whole order of man has been put out of sight: "one died for all, then all have died", 2 Cor 5: 14. It showed that we were all in that condition, and a new order of man out of death is what was in mind.

JDG Could you help us now as to the ascent: "who has also ascended"? Not only was He equal to descending, but He is equal to ascending.

AM He was able for that. The expression "into the lower parts of the earth" refers to the deepest part of creation, but His ascent is beyond the created sphere: He "has also ascended up above all the heavens". Think of a Man, a glorious Man, who was able, and has proved His greatness and worthiness, to ascend above the created

sphere altogether, “ascended up above all the heavens, that he might fill all things”.

NJH These glorious movements of Christ in this chapter are meant to benefit the assembly, which has been before us in these days together.

AM She is His ‘fulness’ (Eph 1: 23). She is the expression of such a One as that. It is wonderful to think about it.

JAG She came out of His death.

AM Yes, her origin was entirely from Himself.

CKR “Whom heaven indeed must receive” (Acts 3: 21): that is a touch of victory and glory and it becomes the core of the preaching. A Man has gone in, in the light of everything being completed, the One who descended now is presented as the One who is the Centre of another sphere.

AM That is right. He gives character to the whole sphere because He fills it. He fills heaven, but “he might fill all things”. His ascension is in order that He might fill all things. It is precious to think of it. Heaven must receive Him. That is the place where He belongs. He did not belong in the lower parts of the earth, but heaven must receive Him.

RT Part of the “mystery of piety” is that “God has been manifested in flesh”. It finishes up with “received up in glory”, 1 Tim: 3: 16. We see there everything had to give way. What a reception He received in going in!

AM That is right. We love to sing that hymn:

Received in glory bright up there,
The Father’s greetings, honours rare,
Are heaped upon His Son’s blest brow;
(Hymn 350).

What a reception He had! We spoke earlier this week-end about the fact that the Father was there, and the Holy Spirit was there too as a witness of Christ glorified. We think of the joy there must have been when Jesus was received up in glory.

RJC “That he might fill all things”: He has gone beyond everything. He is at the highest point, and He is giving character to everything from that point, do you think?

AM Yes, and still the word is “that he might fill all things”; so there is a Man in heaven, and there are perhaps five hundred hearts here in this hall, and they are all able to be filled by Him, “that he might fill all things”, and the gospel goes out to that end, “that he might fill all things”.

JB He is “head over all things to the assembly”. I was just thinking we have been engaged with the assembly, and she comes into the secret of how He is ascended above all things.

AM That is right. He “has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all”, Eph 1: 22. The assembly is with Him in that; she has appreciation of Him in that sense, and she has a part with Him in His place of headship.

JAG “All things” is the whole range of new creation, new heavens and a new earth, and everything is characterised by what is of Christ. But the assembly is not one of the “things”.

AM She is not put under His feet. She is with Him.

APD Does the fact that He ascends above all heavens and fills all things from that uncreated sphere give every heart that He fills a sense of the greatness of the Person?

AM Indeed. “Who shall ascend to the heavens?” (Rom 10: 6), but He has gone beyond that. How great He is! And as we make room for the Lord Jesus in our heart, we are making room for One who fills all things. He fills the universe; He is sufficient for that; He fills the heart of God; He fills the Father’s heart with joy; He will be seen as filling the whole universe; He fills all things.

DCB Is worship the result of this? I was thinking of this woman: “there was no more spirit in her”. She sees this one in all his glory and his ascent. Should that have an effect upon us – I think it is having an effect upon us – leading to worship?

AM That is right. She saw “the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built, and the food of his table, and the deportment of his servants, and the order of service of his attendants and their apparel, and his cupbearers and their apparel, and his ascent by which he went up to the house of Jehovah”. You might say, she took it all in, did she not? She just absorbed one glory after another of the realm that was suited to Solomon, speaking of the One “whom heaven indeed must receive”, Acts 3: 21. She gets one feature after another, and her heart is just bowed.

RDP It is a remarkably touching thing that His descent is not said to be witnessed. He went down. But, as coming out of death, the first thing He does is He seeks out His brethren, and He says, “go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend”, John 20: 17. It is as if He would share that moment, and they saw Him go up; and then we are told that as He went up, that is how He will come, Acts 1: 11.

AM That is right. He was the One who, the prophet says, shall “be cut off, and shall have nothing”, Dan 9: 26. He comes out of death and says, “my brethren”. He has what is so precious to Him; and then He says they are to be associated with Him: “my Father and your Father ... my God and your God”. He says, 'I am conducting you to another realm', and that is where He is the Centre.

RDP When you think of what had been effected in His death, and when you think of what had been effected for God, involving the creation, involving “the lower parts of the earth”, involving everything that Scripture speaks about, yet His first thought out of death is “go to my brethren and say to them ...”. It is as if His first thought that was on this ascending way was for those that He loved, and we have that privilege, we may say, of being amongst His brethren.

AM Yes, indeed, and even as ascended, what are His first thoughts? “I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter”, John 14: 16. His first thoughts even in ascension were for those of His own down here. What love that is! He was not resting exactly in the glory that had been given to Him, or the triumph that He had achieved. He was not resting in that. It was “my brethren”.

JS She says, "Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants, who stand continually before thee". What a thing it is to be amongst those, in humanity, who have such a close link with this glorious Man!

AM Such a close link! We could have had no association with Him in His condition of flesh and blood. We could not have been associated with Him in that, but now we have such a close link with Him in His present position and in His glory, and here she saw Solomon in His glory. Isaiah says, "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty", chap 33: 17. It is a great thing to get a view of Christ in His glory.

EJM The gifts given in this scripture in Ephesians 4 show that the great truth of His Headship is to be opened up. He "has given gifts to men", v 8. It is not only sharing the truth of the victory but the opening up of Paul's ministry, the truth of His headship.

AM That is right, and they are given from an ascended Christ, are they not, from Him where He is? And the scripture tells us in the Old Testament (Ps 68:18) that the Lord Jesus as ascended up on high, received all the gifts, and from that point He distributed them. Think of One who has ascended up receiving from God all the gifts that are needed for the assembly and giving them from that ascended and exalted position in view of His headship being known by saints down here!

NJH Did the Holy Spirit bring these gifts down? It shows the whole operation of the economy for the benefit of the assembly.

AM That is right; divine Persons, all working together in order that the assembly should come short in nothing. People may say we do not have the apostles now; we do not have the miraculous gifts. The assembly has all that is needed and has always had all that is needed at any phase in its history.

HP In Revelation He speaks to John: "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades", Rev 1: 17, 18. I am affected by the power He has about this, "of death and of hades".

AM Yes, every power has been given to Him. He has power over every authority.

HP He is “the living one”.

AM Well, what a comfort that is to us that there is One who has “the keys of death and of hades”. He is now on the other side. For us, if the Lord should leave us here a little longer, death will be a way through, a way through into bliss. What a comfort that is! For Him, He experienced it in all its fulness, but now He is in glory.

DBR You were going to tell us something about the spices. I do not want you to close before you tell us about the spices.

AM It just occurred to me as looking over the scripture: she saw the food of his table; she knew what he was feeding on and what he was giving his household to feed on; but she could supply something that would enrich that. There was something which was added. Can you say something? It had only just come to me.

DBR What do you think the particular matter of the spices would mean? I can understand the gold and these other things, but the spice, a certain savour. We have the emblems on the table and then as we proceed there is a savour comes upon our spirits. Is that the thought of the spices, do you think?

AM I think so, that which is suited to His taste. He says in the Song, “I am come into my garden ... I have gathered ... my spice”, chap 5: 1. There is something which is to His own taste and it is as if she had that intuition. She knew it. She knew this would be suitable for his taste.

DMC Would it be suggestive possibly of the part the sisters might have? There is a great wealth in what is coming from the sisters. It is inaudible but it is felt.

AM It certainly is. We are so thankful for the sisters, thankful for the prayers of the sisters. We do not know what is going on in secret, but it is adding to the richness of the service.

JCG Does that bear on the singers because the sisters have part with all of us in that? You had something in mind at the beginning about the ascent of the stairs and then the harps and the singers.

AM It just struck me that this whole passage was one that was leading us upward. She saw his ascent and then this sandal-wood was brought and he made stairs. You might say:

That way is upward still
(Hymn 12).

It is the service of God really that is in mind. These were Solomon's dwelling conditions here, but what was in mind was the service of God. There are these instruments of praise too, for this upward movement. I suppose, apart from David, Solomon would have been the only instrument maker whose instruments were used for the service of God. David's instruments were wrought out through circumstances of suffering and so on, but Solomon is producing instruments for the service of God which have been produced in glory in his own circumstances.

DHM Is there not something very attractive in that it is not only what she saw, but she saw the way things were done?

AM That is right. She knew about his wisdom and his wealth, but there was a whole order of things that was operating, and it was all operating according to his mind so his headship comes into that. It was all under his hand in view of this ascent to the house of God and the service of God being maintained.

RH Would all that has been spoken of be involved in the victory which has been given to us? I was just thinking in 1 Corinthians 15 there is the exclamation: "Where, O death, is thy sting? where, O death, thy victory?", v 55. The sting of death has been taken away, and we have been given the victory.

AM Yes, and if that sting has been taken away, what remains? There is what is springing up for God, what is responsive to God. That is the triumph of it.

Edinburgh

23rd October 2011

Key to Initials:

D C Brown, Edinburgh; J T Brown, Edinburgh; D M Crozier, Warrenpoint; R J Campbell, Glasgow; A P Devenish, Edmonton; J A Gardiner, Aberdeen; R Gardiner, Kirkcaldy; J C Gray, Grangemouth; J D Gray, Edinburgh; P A Gray, Grangemouth; R Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry, Glasgow; R Hodge, St Ives; J B Ikin, Manchester; E J Mair, Buckie; D H Marshall, Edinburgh; K Marshall, Rotherham; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; J Mitchell, Edinburgh; P J Mutton, Walton; H Pfeiffer, Bad Endbach; R D Plant, Birmingham; Q A Poore, Swanage; D B Robertson, Cumnock; C K Robinson, Glasgow; J Spinks, Grangemouth; J Strachan, Dundee; R Taylor, Kirkcaldy; P J Walkinshaw, Gillingham

A TURN

Roland H Brown

Ezekiel 33: 11

1 Thessalonians 1: 9-10

Acts 26: 17-18

You will notice that each of these passages speaks of a turn. The gospel is preached, dear hearer, that you might make a turn, a change of direction. Each of us is on a course, and the man whose words are in the last two scriptures that I have read knew what it was to make a turn in his course. He was an orthodox Jew, and he thought he should do much against the name of Jesus, and against those that were loved by Him. Indeed, the scripture tells us that he was “breathing out threatenings and slaughter” against them, Acts 9: 1. That is very graphic language, is it not, employed by the Spirit of God to describe a heart that was full of hate, “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord”? And something happened to that man that changed his course. He turned. He made a turn in the course that he was on. Towards the end of his life he said, “I finish my course”, Acts 20: 24. That was a very different course from the course that he had been on on the road to Damascus, but he came to have to do with Jesus personally, and the result, as men would say, was life-changing. Everything in his life changed. Now, what about you, dear hearer? Have you come to know the Lord Jesus? Has it had any effect upon you? If you have not, *God* is appealing to you in the preaching.

Behind what the preacher says lies the appeal of God Himself, and it is expressed in these verses that I have read that were uttered many years ago by God through His prophet, but coming from the heart of God to His own people engaged in a course of idolatry and self-will. To such a people came the appeal from the heart of God, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways”. Now, I do not know what course you are on. I do not know whether you are engaged in evil ways. God knows. Nothing can be hidden from Him. We can deceive others. We may at times deceive ourselves, but we never deceive God, the all-seeing God. He takes account of us and of our ways, and He

says here that He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked". You see, some of us might take pleasure in that. By nature we like to see people getting their 'comeuppance', as men say. By nature we like to see people who behave badly suffering for it, particularly if they behave badly to us. Well, God tells us that He is very different from that. He "commends *his* love to us" in the gospel, Rom 5: 8. It comes from His heart, a heart full of love. The Scripture tells us that "God **is** love", that is what He is, and "love is of God", 1 John 4: 7, 8. If you encounter love, it is of God and, in the glad tidings, "God commends *his* love to us"; and it is a very distinctive love is the love of God. It is not to be compared with natural affection. It is very special love, is the love of God. It is His own, holy nature, and He commends it to us in the gospel. He tells us in the epistle to the Romans that "scarcely for the just man will one die, for perhaps for the good man some one might also dare to die; but God commends *his* love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us", Rom 5: 7, 8. I wonder if that affects you, to think that God has taken account of your sinful state, of your responsible history, and what is even more, your impotence to do anything about it, "for we being still without strength ... Christ has died for the ungodly", Rom 5: 6. God has taken account of you, dear hearer, as a sinner. I can say that with great authority. Though I may not know you, and I may not know your history, one thing I do know about you is that you are a sinner and that you need a Saviour. That is what the Scripture tells us, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God", Rom 3: 23. One is historical: "all have sinned"; every one of us in this room has a history, a sinful history. That is historical, but the present position today is that you "come short". As one man was told, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting", Dan 5: 27. God has a divine standard. Do you remember those scales of old? You do not often see scales like them now, but the weight was put on one side and the goods were put on the other; and God has a standard, the weight on the one side, and each of us as we are put into the divine balance discovers to our shame that we come short of God's standard. God's standard has been expressed in a Man, a Man who walked this earth, a Man who went about doing good, never an evil word, never an evil thought, never a lie spoken, nothing

underhand. Everything that He did was good. He went about doing good, and people who came in contact with Him were never harmed, they were never damaged. They were healed, they were blessed, their hearts were cheered. A wonderful Man is Jesus, and He walked the earth, and He expressed all that God is. All that God is was expressed in a Man who did not "come short". He set out all that God is, but He expressed under the eye of God all that God sought from man, all that He seeks from you and me, dear hearer, we who have come so far short by nature of that standard.

Well, God has taken account of us. He has not turned away in disgust. He "is ... not willing that any should perish", 2 Pet 3 9. As you go out of this room this afternoon, you may go out unsaved but you will not go out unsought. God does not desire that any should perish, any of us in this room, and He has made provision. That is the good news in the gospel that God has made provision that you might not perish but that you might have life eternal. And so the appeal goes out in the glad tidings to turn, to make a change in your life, a change that is fundamental. It means turning from a course of self-will, turning away from evil ways and turning to God, and the question is raised, "for why will ye die ...?". Are you on a course, dear hearer, that is leading to death, death morally, death actually? Are you on a course like that? You know, "the wages of sin is death", Rom 6: 23. That is the wages of sin. You slave away, and you get your wages. "The wages of sin is death", but in the gospel God is offering you something freely, "the act of favour of God", undeserved, unearned, unmerited, presented to you freely, but not without cost. What God is presenting to you freely, what He is presenting to you for the acceptance of faith that requires nothing on your part but "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20: 21), is presented to you at immense cost, a cost so great, dear hearer, that you could never meet it, a redemption so great and so glorious that it would be beyond your means ever to secure it; "the redemption of their soul is costly", Ps 49: 7, 8. If your soul was to be saved for time and eternity, great cost was involved in it. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die", Ezek 18: 4. That was the divine word. Well, God is presenting to you a salvation that involves the death of His Son, One who died for others. Death had no claim upon *Him*

because He was sinless. There is a remarkable verse in the Scripture that tells us that “Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him”, 2 Cor 5: 21. If you look at that verse, who is “Him who knew not sin”, who is it speaking about? You could look through the genealogies of the human race; there is only one Man who could be so described, “Him who knew not sin”, the sinless One, “he was made sin”, the Scripture says, “for us”. Who are the “us”? Are you among the “us” for whom Jesus was “made sin”? Are you among those that have embraced the efficacy and value of that finished work for yourself and for your own sin? “He has made sin for us”; sin, the thing that God hates, the thing that *He* hates: He hated lawlessness. He loved righteousness and He hated lawlessness (Heb 1: 9), and He was made the very thing that He hated. Have you ever contemplated that? I doubt it lies within the ability of human tongues to explain the profundity of that, that One who was infinitely holy and sinless should be “made sin for us”.

I have often thought that in this very prophet from whom we have read, the prophet Ezekiel, you get a figure of it, because this prophet was made to lie on a bed and unable to move. God put bands upon him so that he could not move, and his food was given to him as he lay there. God said it was to be cooked, it was to be prepared in dung that cometh out of man. You can read all about that in chapter 4. Most people would say that is gross, it is the sort of thing that is utterly repugnant to any one of us in this room; and in the awfulness of the prospect, the prophet pleaded with God that he might be spared that. The only mitigation that was granted to him was that his food was to be cooked in cow's dung instead of human dung, and there he lay and that is what he ate, what would be loathsome to any one of us. Now that is only a figure; it is a very poor figure, but it conveys, I believe, something to our souls of what it meant to One who was intrinsically holy and sinless to be made sin for us, and that is one of the many examples in the Scriptures of one thing done with another thing in mind.

What was in mind was that those He was made sin for should be made God's righteousness in Him. You think of that: God has a

righteousness for you. God has a righteousness for people like you and me that have no righteousness of our own; God has a righteousness for you. He can approach you and me as guilty sinners. He can approach us righteously and He can clothe us with His own righteousness, the righteousness of God. It is available to all. The righteousness of God is towards all. No-one is excluded from it. Some of the great so-called religions of this world are limited to people of a certain race or a certain geographical area, but the great blessing of Christianity is that God shines out as a result of the work of Jesus. He shines out to all men everywhere. The righteousness of God is towards all. He is no respecter of persons. He does not pay any attention to the colour of our skin, or the amount we have in the bank, whether we are old or whether we are young; whether we have led a very sinful course or a less sinful course, the need is the same. The Lord Jesus spoke of two men, one who owed a lot and one who owed little, but they had one thing in common and that was that they had nothing to pay, Luke 7: 41, 42. Whether your history is long and deep in sin or whether you have led, as men would say, a respectable life, the fact remains that you have nothing to pay, but God has the answer. His righteousness is available to all. It is "towards all", but it is "upon all those who believe", Rom 3: 22. Are you clothed in it, dear hearer? I ask you these things. They are the most important questions that you will ever address. In the world many things are clamouring for your attention. If you walk down the street there are advertisements. People are soliciting your custom. People are wanting decisions about this and that. Everywhere you go people are trying to get your ear, but God has something to say to us in the gospel, and what He has to say outranks anything else in its importance because it involves the eternal destiny of your soul. You know, nothing could be more important than that. You might want to read the newspaper to find out what is going on in the world, but what is going on in your soul, dear hearer? Where do you stand in relation to God? God is appealing in the preaching and He says through the prophet, "Turn". He has no pleasure in persons going on to doom and destruction. He is a Saviour God. That is a title by which God delights to be known, a God who saves, who is able to save. Scripture says,

“Jehovah's hand is not shortened that it cannot save”, Isa 59: 1. Think of God's reach, if I may so speak reverently. He is able to reach and to save to the uttermost. He is a Saviour God, but He is a just God too, “a just God and a Saviour”, Isa 45: 21. He is not turning a blind eye to what you are and to what you have done, but He is able as a result of the work of Jesus to approach you in all the blessedness of His nature and present you with an accomplished redemption, a work that has been done and a work upon which many in this room are trusting for their eternal salvation. Are you among them? Are you trusting? Do you have faith in the Saviour? He is worthy of your trust. I commend Him to you personally as One who is worthy to be trusted. God, if I might say so reverently, has trusted Him with everything. “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand”, John 3: 35. You can trust Him with your small matters if God has placed everything into His hand. There He is “upholding all things by the word of His power”, Heb 1: 3. Have you ever thought about that, one blessed Man upholding all things, even upholding the physical creation in which we are, maintaining this cocktail of air that we breathe? Our breath is in His hands, you know. God gives “to all life and breath and all things”. You have received that from Him. You have received the very breath that you breathe from God. How easy it would be for Him to withdraw it. “If he only thought of himself”, one said, “and gathered unto him his spirit and his breath, All flesh would expire together”, (Job 34: 14, 15), but He is keeping men alive. His is keeping you alive that you might hear the gospel, that you might be saved, saved from your sins, saved presently from this present evil world and delivered from the wrath to come.

So Paul relates of these persons in Thessalonica - they were recent believers, they had not long heard the gospel - how they had turned, they turned to God. That would be a wonderful result from the gospel preaching if you turn to God, not just to listen to what the preacher says, but turn to God; get down on your knees, perhaps in your own room, and turn to God personally. Do not just accept what the preacher says, but find out for yourself the blessedness of it, turn to God, turn to Him in repentance and humility, tell Him that you want these blessings that you have been hearing about, you want them

for yourself. Turn to God from idols. These persons were idol worshippers before they made this great turn; it has often been pointed out that it does not say 'they turned from idols to God' as if they had become fed up with the pagan religion that they were following, but they had listened to the gospel preached by the apostle Paul and they had heard of the attractiveness of Jesus and their hearts were drawn away from idols that could not see or speak or feel; they were drawn away to a living Man in glory. He became a reality to their souls. They "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God"; and not only that, but they had a hope, "to await his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from among the dead, Jesus, our deliverer from the coming wrath".

Have you ever heard about the coming wrath, dear hearer? People speak about all the tsunamis that there have been on the earth and the earthquakes and the unsettlement in the Middle East, and people wonder what is going to happen and what direction the world is taking, but have you heard about the coming wrath? God will tell you about it. You might not read about it in the newspapers, but you will read about "wrath of God from heaven" (Rom 1: 18) in this Book that we are reading from. "Wrath of God from heaven" is coming upon a world that has rejected God's Son. His voice once shook the earth, but He is going to shake not only the earth but also the heaven, Heb 12: 26. "Wrath of God from heaven" is a solemn reality. There was a time when the wrath of God came in the form of a flood, the windows of heaven were opened and the water came down from above, and the water rose up from beneath, the springs were opened up and there was no escape, Gen 7. There was no escape for sinners when wrath of God from heaven came in the flood; there was no escape for sinners when fire and brimstone fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Certain persons were dragged out and saved by God's grace, but there were those that mocked when they heard of coming judgment and were ultimately consumed by it, Gen 19: 14-25. Do not mock the prospect of coming judgment. It is a solemn and sober reality. As one man of God once said, it forms no part of the gospel preaching, but it forms the dark background against which the gospel is preached, FER vol 20 p38. God is not seeking to scare persons into receiving the glad tidings. He is

presenting the attractiveness of Jesus that you might be drawn to Him, but I would be failing in my duty if I did not remind you that for the Christ rejecters there can be nothing else but judgment, and the reason for that is that, in presenting to you and to me in His Son, the One that He raised from among the dead, God is presenting all that He has in His heart. The scripture says, "no good thing will he withhold", Ps 84: 11. The apostle says, "He who, yea, has not spared his own Son ... how shall he not also with him grant us all things?" (Rom 8: 32); all things, "every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies", Eph 1: 3. Think of the blessings that are at God's disposal, and they can all be yours through faith in Christ. You can see therefore that, if you reject that, reject Him, what more has God to offer? What more could He do? What more could God do to bless you than to give His own Son? He "so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son" (John 3: 16), and I ask you to think for a moment, what more could God do to make His love known to you? You can see therefore that the coming judgment and the ultimate limiting of evil to the lake of fire is a provision of the love of God. You think about that. It is a very profound thought and it is not mine, but it is the truth that God is going to limit evil to the lake of fire, and there is going to be "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness", 2 Peter 3: 13. There will be no place there for unforgiven sinners. There will be no place there for persons who have died in their sins, and who will be raised in them, and who will stand before God in them, to be judged by Him on the basis of their responsible history. If you or I were to stand before God to be judged in relation to our responsible history, there could only be one outcome, but God has a righteousness for you.

So the apostle tells us in the Acts how he came to know the Saviour. He was travelling along the road to Damascus to persecute believers, and the Saviour intervened in his life, so he came to know Him. Do you know Him? Do you know the Saviour? He says, "I know whom I have believed", 2 Tim 1: 12. He had a relationship with Him, and not only did he have a relationship with Him, but he wanted to know Him better. He says, "to know him, and the power of his resurrection", Phil 3: 10. You say, ' Well, Paul, I thought you knew Him', and he did know Him, but he wanted to know Him better. If I

might be allowed to use the figure, it is like getting married. When I first met my wife I knew her, not very well, but I knew her, but as I entered into a commitment and a relationship, I came to know her much better. You may have heard about Jesus. You hear about Him in the gospel preaching, and God desires that you should hear about Him, but He is looking that you might make a commitment to Him in faith and that you might come to know Him better, come to know Him not only as your Saviour, but come to know Him as your Lord and Master. That is something else, is it not? To come to know Him as your Saviour is a very important thing, but I am speaking to believers now, have you come to know Him as your Lord? Somebody said once, and it affected me, that in coming to know Him as my Saviour, I learn that He gave His life for me, but when I come to know Him as my Lord, it means really that I give my life to Him. He becomes my Lord. I am no longer at my own disposal. I am turning, through the effects of divine grace, from an evil way. To own Jesus as Lord is to take a different way altogether and a very blessed direction, "to await his Son from the heavens". What a prospect!

But then the Lord speaks of "... the nations, to whom I send thee, to open their eyes". The gospel preaching is preached that your eyes might be open, but then the gospel preacher cannot turn you. You must make that turn for yourself, but the preacher may be able, through God's grace, to open your eyes to what is available, of which you may perhaps have been unaware. He says, "to open their eyes, that they may turn", make this turn, "from darkness to light". Are you in darkness, darkness of ignorance and distance from God? God desires that you should turn towards the light, the light of God as revealed in Christ, and He says, "from the power of Satan to God". You know, the power of Satan is a very real power. It holds men in bondage, but I can tell you that the power of Satan has been broken. There is one blessed Man whom he failed to overcome, who went into death in order to "annul him who has the might of death", Heb 2: 14. How great He is! How great a matter was the cross of Jesus! I ask you to think about the cross of Jesus in relation to your own history, to take account of a Man alive under the judgment of God. What a solemn consideration, to take account of Him as alive under the judgment of God and ultimately forsaken of

God, and *that* on my account. How immense these things are, to take account of a crucified Saviour who, as Peter says, "bore our sins in his body on the tree", He bore them, 1 Pet 2: 24. The sins that I so lightly and idly committed, that would shut me out forever from the presence of God, were borne by One who was sinless. They were laid upon Him, and they were atoned for, not in a block but individually, each sin received its just and holy retribution from God. He "hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53: 6); Peter says, writing to believers, "by whose stripes ye have been healed". Are you healed? God desires that you should be healed. There is healing in the gospel, healing for your soul, healing for your conscience, the blessed balm of peace with God entering into the conscience, the blessed consciousness of "the love of God ... shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5: 5) is healing balm. Think of a divine Person doing that, filling your heart with the love of God, a heart that once like Saul of Tarsus was filled with hate and bitterness, that in that heart of yours a divine Person should shed abroad, should dispense, the love of God. That is a blessed experience. Do you know anything about it? You *can* know something about it. If you ask God for the gift of His precious Holy Spirit, you can know something about that consciously, so that it not only becomes a text in the Bible, but it becomes the joy of your own soul, the consciousness that God loves you. You say, 'That is very simple'. It is very simple but it is very blessed to walk through a world that is marked by hatred and violence and fear and malice, and to walk down the streets of Linlithgow with the inward consciousness that God loves me, a precious possession to have, not only peace with God but to know the love of God. The Holy Spirit is given that you might know that love, and that you might walk in the consciousness of it on your new course, having turned, that you might walk here so as to please God. Think of that, there are persons here on the earth who are walking so as to please God. God is looking down upon them, and He is pleased with them. Whereas it says of men in the early days of the Scriptures that it grieved God in His heart that He had made them because of the wickedness on the earth (Gen 6: 5, 6), there are persons on the earth that are walking so as to please God, 1 Thess 4: 1. So it says,

“receive remission of sins”. You can receive these things; God is offering them. He is presenting them, but it is for you to receive it, and you can receive it through repentance. You turn to God in repentance if you take account of what you are in His sight as a guilty sinner, deserving of nothing from God but His judgment, and God does not leave you looking at that for very long. He would have you to come to His own judgment of what you are and of what you have done but, if He left you looking like that, you would be overwhelmed with despair; so He points you to a Sin-bearer so that you might receive the remission of your sins. That is a blessed thing to receive, to walk down the street in the knowledge that your sins and your lawlessnesses God will never remember any more, Heb 10: 17. I can look ahead to the day of judgment, and I can look ahead without a qualm because the Scripture tells me that “There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8: 1), not simply that they will not be condemned, but there is for them no such thing as condemnation, and that is because the condemnation so richly due to me has been borne on my behalf by Another, and One who was great enough to bear it, to bear the judgment of God and to exhaust it. He was great enough to do that. He was not only the Victim as the Sin-bearer, but in the type in the Old Testament He was the altar. He was the One who was great enough to sustain and exhaust the judgment of God. God as a result can present to you, for you to receive, the remission of your sins, “and”, it says, “inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me”.

There is a present as well as an eternal portion. You can come as a forgiven sinner. You are clean. You can come into a sanctified company. There is such a thing on the earth as a sanctified company, a company that has been sanctified through faith in the Lord Jesus. Their sins have been forgiven, and forgiven sinners belong there. You can receive, the apostle says, inheritance among them. What a great blessing Christian fellowship is. It is a provision of God for those that have been blessed through His grace that they might find their companionship and fellowship in the sanctified company. That is what is for them. What is for God is that your voice can be raised among them in His praise. How God is worthy of that! You think of what He has done to deliver you, to deliver you

and to bless you eternally in Christ that you might find an outlet in this sanctified company. I could not come into it as an unforgiven sinner. It would not be a sanctified company if I came into it with my sins upon me, but I can sit down as a forgiven sinner among others that are forgiven too, and like them I can receive the gift, the precious gift of God's Spirit, and my voice can rise in His praise even now as it will do eternally. What a blessed portion it is, but the appeal of God is that each of us might turn, and we can only do that for ourselves. Nobody else can do it for you. Mother and father cannot turn you round, much as they might desire to do it. The preacher of the gospel cannot do it. You must make that turn for yourself in the intimacy of your own soul with God, but I can tell you authoritatively, and there are many others that can bear a testimony to it too, that it is a turn that you will never ever regret, and the greatest blessing will come through it both now and eternally. May you make that turn! For His Name's sake.

Linlithgow

22nd May 2011

CHRIST'S PLACE

Ron D Plant

Psalm 132: 8, 9, 13, 14

2 Chronicles 5: 6-10

John 8: 3-6

I have had a thought since the Lord's day, beloved brethren, as to Christ's place. I think in its way that each one of these scriptures, gives some indication of Christ's place. God is jealous, we may say, of what is due to Him. You may remember on the mount of transfiguration when Peter suggested that there should be three tabernacles, for the Lord one, and for Moses one, and Elias one, that the voice came out of heaven: "*This* is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight", Matt 17: 5. Think of the immediacy of the answer from heaven in relation to that. I believe that heaven is insistent upon the place for Christ, the chief place, the first place, the central place.

I read these scriptures because the first one, we may remember, gives David's experiences in relation to the ark. I think it is a very wonderful Psalm. It speaks about how he found the ark, how he heard of it. It really answers to all of our experiences as to the Lord Jesus. He says, "Behold, we heard of it at Ephratah, we found it in the fields of the wood", v 6. I suppose that would be the experience of most here, of all here perhaps. We have heard of the Lord Jesus, heard about His work, heard about His preciousness, and then that next important step that I am sure most, if not all, here have taken, not only heard about Him, but found Him "in the fields of the wood". We may remember the history, how the ark was in the house of Abinadab on the hill and so on, and how all of David's life became transformed. He was transformed by Christ typically. Everything he did even through the struggles in his life and his affliction and, towards the end of his life, in his affection, was devoted to one thing and that was that the place for the ark might be improved here; that the place for Christ typically, might be improved, that there might be a better place for Him. It would be like the exercises of the believer as having found the Saviour, as having found for themselves the

preciousness of Christ, as having proved His saving grace through the glad tidings, and going on, you may say from that, so that Christ becomes everything to them. I think that is like Zion. It says here, "Arise, Jehovah, into thy rest, thou and the ark of thy strength. ... For Jehovah hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his dwelling: This is my rest for ever". Think of the delight of the blessed God, beloved brethren, in the place that Christ has in the hearts of the saints. Think of how here, on this earth, in which man is pursuing his own way and corruption is everywhere, there are those to whom Christ has the chief place, whose lives are a reflection of the fact that their chief interest, their only interest, is in relation to Him; that His place might be the first place, His place might be the best place. That is a wonderful thing. I think, beloved brethren, that that is mount Zion: "This is my rest for ever". There are persons here to whom there will never be another One; there will never be another Christ. The danger at Corinth was that they might listen to another Jesus (2 Cor 11: 4), but for the true believer, there will never be another One: "This is my rest for ever". God has secured that which *treasures* the Lord Jesus in the hearts of the saints. I think that is mount Zion, "the mount Zion which he loved", Ps 78: 68. Just to put a word to it, I think Psalm 132 is Christ for me; Christ for me, and the effect that that has on a life.

Now on Lord's day we read in Chronicles and there you get the ark brought into the temple when "all the work was finished that Solomon made", 2 Chron 5: 1. It is a very interesting thing. I think this is somewhat different. In Zion when the ark was brought in in Psalm 132, there is no reference to the staves being drawn out, for instance. This seems to be final; there is something very blessed about this. Even the language is glorious: "into the oracle of the house, into the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim". This is the ark being brought into *the* "most holy place". I think, beloved brethren, that that is beyond what Christ is to me. I think that is what Christ is to God. I think 2 Chronicles 5 is what the ark is to God. The interesting thing is that it is not exactly God that brings in the ark here, but it is in the affections of the people: "And king Solomon, and all the assembly of Israel, that were assembled to him before the ark, sacrificed sheep and oxen which could not be

counted nor numbered for multitude”, and they brought the dedicated things. I think it is in the ordering of God that the understanding, not only of what Christ is to me - that is mount Zion - but what Christ is to God is something that is to be shared by the saints. It is to be known. In John’s gospel, at the end of John 17, the Lord Jesus, speaking to His Father, says, “Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me”, v 24. I think this is something of which in the precious ways of God we might be given some glimpse, not only of what Christ is to us, beloved brethren, but what Christ is to God. I suggest 2 Chronicles 5 might be what Christ is to God. That is an even greater thing than what Christ is to me; this is *the* “most holy place”.

Just finally, you may think it strange that I read of the woman in John 8. You might say, 'I cannot see the connection'. This was a problem. This was an issue, you may say, amongst the people of God. Here we are in the responsible week, and we know what it is that sometimes issues come up which are difficult to solve. What they did here - and I do not want to speak about the particular details - is to “set her in the midst”. I think the midst belongs to Jesus, beloved brethren. I would suggest that even in matters where there is concern and exercise - and matters have to be met and matters have to be dealt with - if we put the matter, the issue, in the midst and constantly fix our eyes only on that, we may find difficulty. I believe in any matter Christ is to have the pre-eminence. The first matter you would think of, even in relation to difficulties among the saints, is what is due to Christ. The place in the midst belongs to Christ.

That is just my simple impression: what Christ is for me; what Christ is for God; and, even in the simple issues that we have to confront, let us make sure, beloved brethren, that in everything Christ has the pre-eminence. And if, sadly, we have things which we have to adjust, let us make sure we do it as keeping our eyes fixed upon Christ. The issue itself will be resolved, but let it not be the central thing. Let Christ be the central thing in everything we do! For His Name’s sake.

Edinburgh
14th June 2011

Edited and Published by
David Brown and Andrew Burr 81 Roxburgh Road. West Norwood. London.
SE27 OLE