

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 93

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Table of Contents

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THE CHIEF SHEPHERD

Key to Initials:

PRECIOUSNESS

THE LORD SPEAKING

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THE CHIEF SHEPHERD

John 17: 11-13; 21: 15-22

1 Peter 1: 3-5; 2: 25; 5: 1-4

DAB We were speaking in the readings yesterday about the Lord's return, and the view of that great event that is shared between Himself and the assembly. It is a wonderful moment of realisation for them both. We should be clear that there is already a state of union between them, and two things flow out of that. The first thing is that, as His wife, she is faithful to Him in the time and scene of His absence and rejection; but in her heart and in her affections there is what is bridal, which He loves and longs to have - cherishes it, in fact. And a day is soon coming which should fill our hearts - we ought to love it, as Paul says (2 Tim 4: 8) - when He will come into His rights, and what is treasured at the moment in the heart of the church comes into display. And the waiting time is a time for her to prepare for that display.

The reason I read these five Scriptures is in the last verse we read: one aspect of the Lord's return is that the chief Shepherd is going to be manifested. We might consider what makes Him the chief Shepherd, and where our responsibility lies in relation to Him in that connection. I would like to illustrate what is on my heart about this by drawing a picture. We are familiar with the idea that shepherding is an arduous and, in many ways, ill-rewarded occupation. I imagine meeting someone who spent his whole working life in the care of the sheep. You could read the story of his sacrifice and exposure in the lines on his face. I imagine that, if I were to talk to him, I might find out about some adventure that he had - rescuing lambs out of the snowdrifts, or something; and so I ask him what the hardest day was in his working life. I think that the answer any shepherd worth the name would give is that the hardest day in his life was when he had to leave the sheep with somebody else. I venture to put it that way because we have now read about four distinctive shepherd servants who have all exposed to us the exercise associated with that transition. The Lord Jesus is of course pre-eminent, and I think we could say, on one construction, that the

whole of John's gospel from chapter 9 is about that matter. We read yesterday from Paul, and there is John also; and now we have added Peter. Peter is an interesting person, because he was not trained to be a shepherd; but I thought we would read these five scriptures to understand how he became a shepherd, and what he understood shepherding to be; and why it is that he calls the Lord Jesus the chief Shepherd.

I begin in John 17, because what we find there is not that the Lord Jesus is entrusting the flock to a disciple, but He is entrusting the flock to the Father; and, in doing so - and this is where it gets rather sober - He accounts to the Father for the sheep. He says that they had been given to Him by the Father, and He had *not lost one*. And He gives them back to the Father: would He guard them? - 'I guarded them, and now will You guard them?'. "Keep them in thy name." We might say that that is the best thing to do, the safe thing to do; so why in chapter 21 does He then entrust the sheep to Peter, whose recent history would surely have disqualified him from being anywhere near the flock of God? How was it that the Lord felt able to supplement the committal of the sheep to the Father with this commission to Peter? We have a lot to learn about that, because Peter is quite like us.

Now, when we come to Peter's epistle, which we recognise is the fruit of a lot of reflection, in a life led with God, the first passage we read recalls John 17: "kept guarded by the power of God". If you asked Peter where he had got that from, he could say that he had been there in John 17; he had heard the Lord say that He had kept the sheep guarded, and He asked the Father to keep them guarded. So he can say, "kept guarded by the power of God"; and that is something to cling on to. Then, in the middle of the epistle, he makes this reference to Isaiah 53, that we have all gone astray; and that might recall John 21. Peter would say, 'I went astray'. Nobody is appointed as a shepherd who is not also a sheep. Peter would say, 'I went astray, and I returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of my soul'. And that is what we all have to do. So there is a reference to the Lord's people as the sheep; but then in chapter 5 he addresses those who take responsibility among the people of God -

people who would have that responsibility when Peter had put aside his tabernacle; and he says that the chief Shepherd is going to be manifested. It presses upon my spirit that a day is coming - and it might be today - when the chief Shepherd might ask *me* to account in any measure for the sheep: 'Where are they?'. Now, there may be other passages we could quote - I could refer to one in Hebrews 13: 17, which I think proves beyond doubt that those who take responsibility are accountable to the Lord for the saints, for the flock - and it is a rather sobering aspect of His return that He has set this example which He can speak to the Father about. The sheep were in His care, and are now in ours.

DMW Is it significant in Ephesians 4: 11 - I am just thinking of the moral order - that it is "shepherds and teachers"; the two go on together. It is as though the Lord Jesus turns to His Father as for example in Matthew 11: 25, when He is about to take up His great shepherd service, the great works of God have been rejected; and He takes it up by example, does He not?

DAB Yes, I agree very much with that. You remind me of something I read the other day in Mr Stoney. Someone asked him what is a pastor - he could have said a shepherd. And I thought I knew the answer to that question: if the brother had asked me, I would have said he is someone who can watch over the sheep and make sure they are safe, and kept from danger and that kind of thing; but Mr Stoney says it is someone who understands the *state* of souls, vol 4 p273. It is not just supplying what I might have been trained to bring in that *ought* to help if it was appropriated, but it involves a penetration, which the Lord Jesus manifested, into the state of His own. And we keep one another by watching the state. Sometimes we think we keep one another by watching the actions, but we keep one another by watching *state*, do we not? Is that the lesson from the Lord's own example that you refer to?

DMW So His feelings were manifested at the grave of Lazarus, for example.

DAB Quite so. Now, if I can bring in what we had in the address last night, it reminded me of Psalm 78. Our brother referred to the climax of David's kingdom. It says He "took him from the

sheepfolds” (v 70) to make him king over Israel, to follow and to feed His people. And what we see in the service to Mephibosheth to which reference was made is the service of a shepherd king. He fed Mephibosheth, did he not?

AKL And when he left the sheep, there was a keeper, 1 Sam 17: 20. I was struck with what you said about the hardest day; David had the right keeper.

DAB And there is just something else to bring in in connection with what you have just said, lest anyone should think this is for people over sixty like me: Samuel asks where is the youngest: “There is yet the youngest remaining, and behold, he is feeding the sheep”, 1 Sam 16: 11. So, none of us can say we can leave this to others; we all have this responsibility, to learn from the Lord what the state of His people is, and to contribute to their preservation.

APD He also says in relation to Abiathar, “with me thou art in safe keeping”, 1 Sam 22: 23.

DAB Yes exactly, and he felt the responsibility of it, I think. We have that passage in Hebrews 13: 17, “Obey your leaders, and be submissive” - that corresponds to the reference in 1 Peter 2 to the wandering sheep, but then, “for *they* watch over your souls as those that shall give account”; maybe we do not always realise that.

KAK I was thinking of the matter of keeping and accountability; it really goes right back to the beginning. That is the issue that came in with the sin of Cain. What do you say about that?

DAB Well, Abel was a shepherd; so we see those two lines from the very beginning. God intervenes to hold Cain to account. What came home to me was this: it is a bright hope that the Lord might come at any moment; but the moment of account might be *today*, and I am sure the Lord will start with my most recent activities.

JRB You referred to Psalm 78: the last verse is, “he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and led them by the skilfulness of his hands.” Perhaps you could help us as to that? I was struck that the “integrity of his heart” came first, as if the flock was in his affections.

DAB That I think you will agree is the answer to the puzzle I raised about John 21: I think it has been said that, in John 21, the Lord put Peter's *heart* right. It was not just that Peter was adjusted about his history, but his heart was put right: "lovest thou me?". A brother suggested recently that the Lord could entrust the sheep to Peter because nothing of the over-confident Peter was left. What was left had integrity, because it was the Lord's work; and it was to His own work that He could entrust the care of others.

DTH Would you say something more about knowing the state of the sheep?

DAB We tend to act, or to become concerned, when *behaviour* concerns us, and we often find that it would have been much easier if we had had some reason to supply some care before those actions. Now, I do not mean that we should be pushing into people's personal space, and probing and examining them as if we were some sort of spiritual investigators, but the Lord will tell you about the state of the saints, and there are ways in which we can learn about it - for example, from the ministry He gives. If we are soberly aware that it is the Lord who is speaking to us, He takes ever knowledge of our state. If we pray about the saints, I think we will find the same. I was in the locality where Mr A J Gardiner broke bread when I was a boy, and his wife told us that every morning he would pray specifically, by name, for every member of the gathering, and ask the Lord for something for each one. There were sixty of us. Now, he knew the state of the brethren, and he would have felt quite comfortable about accounting for the brethren in Streatham. It would not have caused him any embarrassment or disquiet, because he knew their state, and he carried it with God.

WSC I wonder if we do not see a hint of that in Peter in his converse with the Lord in John 21? He says, "thou knowest" repeatedly. There is a long footnote on that, but he was conscious that the Lord *knew*. That would affect Peter, do you think?

DAB Yes, and we learn earlier that the Lord knew Peter's state before his boast, and before his denial. Peter made a boast, and the Lord said, "*I have besought for thee*" (Luke 22: 32); He knew where this was leading, and Peter was not even aware where he was

going, but the Lord knew where it was going to end. As you say, that “thou knowest” is a big lesson for Peter, and it enters into why he calls the Lord the “chief shepherd”.

DTH Do you think Nathan knew how to appeal to David when he convicted him? He used the word of God in such a way that he touched David’s affections in relation to what he was as a shepherd, 1 Sam 12, 1-4. Is it a matter of being able to speak to someone knowing what is in their heart?

DAB Yes. That is a very sober passage that you refer to. David had forgotten, and Nathan’s word reminded him, that the careless loss of one of God’s people was a capital sin. “The man that has done this thing is worthy of death”, David says, v 5. How grave that was, and David had committed that very sin. These things are very sober; the Lord says, “I have not lost one of them”. That does not justify the wandering and the erring; that is why I read the verse in 1 Peter 2: “we have all gone astray as sheep”. We have all done it; but that verse in Hebrews 13 seems to bring out the two sides very clearly. “Obey your leaders, and be submissive” - if you do not do that, you are a wandering sheep, and you need to return; that is your responsibility. But “*they* watch over your souls as those that shall give account”; I cannot say, ‘He would not listen, I had to let him go’, because I have a responsibility to the Lord for any measure in which I put my hand to the care of His people.

HTF In relation to John 21, it refers to someone who said, “Lord, who is it that delivers thee up?”. I wonder if that is quite telling, because, all through the Lord’s public ministry, He knew who it was but they did not. But in the adjustment it comes out. It is not that Judas would have been saved; that is not the point, but they did not know, did they?

DAB I think that is right; and we see in John an element that, the Lord says, is to “abide until I come”. That links with my subject - it is people like John. John does not need this cross-examination; he does not need to be examined about whether the sheep could be entrusted to *him*. John represents something trustworthy that continues “until I come”. Now that is what Peter is saying here: the chief Shepherd is about to be manifested.

HWJ The Lord said to Peter, “when once thou hast been restored, confirm thy brethren”, Luke 22: 32. Is that what is happening in this chapter; Peter is being restored?

DAB Yes, exactly. That is so clearly echoed in the verse in the middle of the epistle. It says, “ye were going astray as sheep”. He would no doubt also speak for himself, and the Lord had restored him; and, in that exercise, the Lord was not only teaching Peter to be a good sheep, but He was teaching him to be a shepherd as well.

AKL He goes on to challenge him twice as our brother mentioned, but the third time Peter adds “all things” - “thou knowest all things”. Is that the turning point with Peter?

DAB I think it is, but you say some more about why you think it is so.

AKL We have been taught that we need to reach that very juncture, that the Lord knows everything. He said, “thou knowest” twice, but the challenges are ended after the third time.

DAB And what we learn from that is that it represented a complete denial of confidence in himself. There were things Peter thought he knew, but he had to come to it that it was the Lord who knew all things; and therefore anything that Peter might undertake under commission from the Lord would have to be by constant reference to the Lord. He could not trust the fact that he loved the Lord only; he would need to rely upon the Lord’s wisdom and daily guidance in relation to every matter that arose.

MJK In Luke 24: 15, it says, “Jesus himself drawing nigh, went with them”. Does that link on with what we are saying?

DAB That is a very beautiful passage, the Lord spending much of the resurrection day on shepherd work. He is not going to manifest Himself to the Jews, He is not going to vindicate Himself, not making any preparation for the public kingdom or anything of that sort, but engaging in arduous shepherd work. It is very affecting, I think, and characteristic of Him.

TRV You cannot really know the state of the sheep until you have made that turning point; is that correct?

DAB That is right, and that is the point the Lord touches with Peter; He says, “lovest thou me more than these?”. How can Peter say that; it was a question about their state, was it not? How could Peter claim that he knew that he loved the Lord better than anybody else? What did he know about Thomas, and Philip, and these other people?

MJK Would you say that it is true that this kind of thing starts in the household setting? I refer to the Lord in relation to Mary and Lazarus. He knew them in their very own circumstances. Would that go along with what you are saying?

DAB I think that is right; and perhaps in a slightly different connection, that is the force of what our brother brought in about David in his address. He was a member of the household, and he was caring for household property; he was caring for the sheep because they were the father’s. That links with John 17. I suppose many of the brethren are familiar - they should read it if they are not - with Mr Darby’s piece *How the Lost Sheep was Found*, about the time he visited the dying shepherd boy who did not know anything about the gospel. He preached to the boy from Luke 15, and he added to the story that we have in that chapter that the *motive* of the shepherd in Luke 15 was that the sheep was the father’s. The boy exposed himself and was taken mortally ill going after one of his *father’s* sheep. He said, ‘I was so anxious to find father’s sheep’. The boy laid down his life for his father’s sheep, and that is what Jesus has done. Then He can account to the Father for the sheep. He says, “I lay down my life for the sheep”, John 10: 15. And then He says in John 17 that not one of them had perished: He could account for them all - every single one of them. And Peter was there in John 17; and then in John 21 it is as if the Lord says, ‘You remember what I said to the Father two or three days ago? Well, I want you to do that. I have to, because I am going’.

APD I appreciate what you say about accountability; however, sometimes, with the greatest care of sheep, they still go away. Does the Lord’s reference, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6: 67) bear on it?

DAB I thought at first that we would just have four scriptures this morning, but then I thought we had better read the one about the

sheep going astray; because what you say is entirely fair, the sheep go astray, and there is will too that takes people away. These things have to be recognised. Now, when I speak about accountability, the shepherds will have to have that conversation with the Lord. The Lord may ask, 'How is it that she is not coming any more?'. I might say, 'Well, Lord, I prayed for her but she would not listen'. And He might ask if more could have been done. We have not only got to account for whether someone is there or not, but how much was done, and whether it was all that could have been done. I am not saying we will be blamed for someone who has gone away in their own will. I think that is what you are getting at, and the Lord is fair about that; but at the same time He might say, 'If I had been there, I would have done this'.

TRV I was wondering if that was not one of the points of "what is that to **thee**"? He was speaking to Peter, and Peter was the one who was accountable, and nothing else really mattered; and that is how we are to take it up.

DAB Yes, "what is that to thee?". What Paul says in Hebrews 13 is interesting in connection with what we are saying. It says, "those that shall give account; that *they* may do this with joy, and not groaning". What we are saying is that there a few groans; the best shepherd has to groan sometimes. They may have laboured even in relation to their own family, as our brother has said; and it ends sorrowfully. The Lord is very feeling about that, very sympathetic, I think. But we cannot contemplate that reckoning leaving any room for the Lord to say that we were careless.

IMS Would we be wise not to defer this moment of accounting?

DAB Quite, yes.

IMS Paul in Acts 20 was quite clear that he had done all that could be done; he had had that from the Lord Himself.

DAB As to Acts 20, we were speaking yesterday about the way that Ephesus left its first love. I often hear that spoken of as if there was just some general cooling down in Ephesus and people lost a bit of interest, and things became a bit formal. But if you read the Lord's address in Revelation 2 with Acts 20, you come to a rather different

and rather grave account of what happened. Paul says in Acts 20 that people would arise, *among those who took responsibility*, who would speak perverted things and draw away disciples after themselves. Paul was right that that would happen, and *that* is how first love was lost in Ephesus. People made *themselves* the rallying point; they made *themselves* the object. So that now the objective was not to gratify the heart of Christ, but to serve the interests of some party person in Ephesus. Responsibility for departure in Ephesus did not lie only with the flock; the flock was *led* away. That happened in the history of the church, and among brethren as well. The reason for departure has been that there were people in each place who, out of their own interest, spoke perverted things and drew away disciples after them. That is what we need to be recovered from, and I think what will recover us is the realisation - to be taken on especially by those who take responsibility - that the chief Shepherd is about to be manifested.

WSC Shepherding is not only about returning lost sheep, is it? It is mainly about care for them - the shepherds were “keeping watch by night over their flock”, Luke 2: 8. It is a much wider thought than just returning persons, as we tend to think of it.

DAB Yes. David began to learn how to do it as a young man. Now it would be a wrong thing to say that David had used a sling to throw stones at the sheep; but he would have used stones to stop them wandering. As we would say, he used the word to stop the sheep wandering. And he developed such skill, that when a crisis arose with Goliath, that skill settled it. It is the same skill he used to care for the sheep. What I admire about David - I always have since I was a little boy - is the raw courage with which he took on things which threatened the sheep. He says, “there came a lion, and also a bear, and took a lamb” - you might say it was overwhelming danger; but out of love for the sheep he found what I call a raw courage - “And I ... delivered it”, 1 Sam 17: 34, 35.

WSC I was reminded by a brother recently that David did not only go against Goliath, but he had much more in his mind: he had four more stones for Goliath’s brothers. He was set for protecting the people of God.

DAB That is right, yes - “the armies of the living God” (v 36); what dignity he had in his mind about the people of God. He was not qualified to be in the army, but he had skills that the soldiers lacked.

AKL Did he move in the power of the wonderful name, “Jehovah of hosts”?

DAB Exactly, yes. He had not practised killing Philistines, he had practised caring for sheep; but the skill he acquired by caring for the sheep dealt with the Philistine.

APD His love for the sheep made him feel protective. I think it is a current matter amongst us, that we feel protective about the sheep, that they are held in relation to the truth, held in relation to Christ.

DAB Yes. And you could not say of David that he cared only for some sheep, and there were two or three persistent wanderers and he would not really mind if they lost their way. That is another thing about the shepherd, that his care for the sheep is indiscriminating: “he calls his own sheep by name”, John 10: 3. His care may be unrequited, as we have been saying, which would be a great sorrow to him. Paul does not say in Acts 20 that they were to shepherd the *sheep*, which might leave it open to ask which sheep, he speaks of shepherding in relation to the *flock* of God, which is everybody.

JKK Is this learned by experience? We did not read the end of verse 22, “follow thou me”. It is the peace which we personally experience, and can apply.

DAB That is why I refer to these five passages. I thought that the epistles give the “follow thou me”. There are these seminal lessons for Peter. The first is that he hears the chief Shepherd talking to the Owner of the sheep about His own stewardship of the sheep; and that was a salutary thing to listen to. Peter remembers that it has been done, and it will never be undone; and he starts off by relying on that, “who are kept guarded by the power of God”. And then he thinks about himself - which is an important thing to do. Perhaps we think we are qualified to do things which our own record would question. He says, “**ye** were going astray as sheep”, but as we have said, he was restored. The Lord did not do that through some delegate. We have referred to the time the Lord spent on the road to

Emmaüs, but he spent half the night sorting out Peter, to the point where Peter was so free of his self-confidence, and his assurance that he knew what to do, that he could be trusted with the flock of God - to the point where he could show *other people* how to do it. There is no point in teaching what you cannot do yourself.

MJK I wondered about Acts 2: 14, “but Peter, standing up with the eleven”; and then in Acts 3, it starts “Peter and John went up together”. Is there something important in the togetherness there? Peter was obviously the mouthpiece but he stood up with the eleven.

DAB Yes. That reads interestingly with John 21 because, as we were saying, the Lord tells Peter not to worry about John, but himself. But then in the Acts, Peter says, ‘I need John. I cannot do this on my own; and that brother has qualities I do not have’. That is another lesson Mr A J Gardiner used to teach us from Philippians: “each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves”, chap 2: 3. He said that you ought to be able to go round your local meeting and identify in everybody present that they had something more than you do. And Peter takes up service on that basis; and then, when he comes to 1 Peter 5, he addresses the shepherds collectively. He does not say that one was to do this, or they should act in turn, but the shepherds are to work together in a common purpose, and a common love for Christ, and a common education as to how the Lord Himself does this work.

APD It is important, if we are to obey our leaders, that our leaders are setting out the truth. Peter was led astray by John into the circumstances where he denied the Lord, John 18: 16. I think it is a very real matter that what is seen in the leaders should be such that we can follow with confidence.

DAB Yes, quite. That is a very important side, although it might not have been the one I was thinking about so much. There are two sides. One is that, for example, we know enough about Peter and Peter’s education to trust him. When Peter says that this is how we do shepherding, his training is sufficiently described to us that we can see that he knows what he is talking about, and what he says about it will be right. That is important, and that is why I make the point that everyone who wants to take up shepherding had better

learn that they are a sheep. And, once you learn that you are a sheep, then you will learn from the Lord how shepherding is done - because He will do it to you. Once you have learned what it is to be shepherded, you might qualify to shepherd other people. On the other hand, we need to remember that those who care for our souls do so out of deep exercise. We might feel overwhelmed by the amount of care we have. We may feel totally unqualified for the burden and work that the Lord has placed among us. As our brother said, we cannot put off addressing this in the hope that the Lord will bring someone else to help us solve that problem: He has placed what He has upon us. Paul refers to “in labour and toil” (2 Cor 11: 27); “our labour and toil” (1 Thess 2: 9), and “in toil and hardship”, 2 Thess 3: 8. Another thing that goes with what you are saying - and maybe it goes back to the picture I tried to draw at the beginning – is that you can tell a shepherd from the hardship he is prepared to accept. It may be unrequited work, but it has to be done.

IMS I was going to add a couple of other qualities: “night and day” (Acts 20: 31), and “spend and be utterly spent”, 2 Cor 12: 15.

DAB Well, “night and day” was Ephesus. How severe that section in Acts 20 is - a flock for whom Paul had laboured “night and day” was going to be led astray by men speaking perverted things to draw away disciples after them. I do not suppose that they did much of *that* at night!

IMS So John in his epistle speaks of laying down our lives for the brethren, 1 John 3: 16. That would be the character of this service.

DAB Exactly. The test of love is whether it is prepared to make personal sacrifices for its objects. That is what we learn in Paul; and we learn it in the Lord Jesus Himself too.

HTF The Lord starts with this matter in Luke 15; and it is just one sheep in a hundred, and it is “until he find it”, v4. There is no possibility considered of failure. I know that is the chief Shepherd, but that is the example too, do you think?

DAB I am often struck that that parable starts with a question. He does not say, ‘Let me tell you a story’, but, “What man of you ... ?”.

DTH I was just thinking about what has been said, and the importance of it. We must accept responsibility too, because the shepherd there says, "I have found my lost sheep". Do we say that in our locality? Do we eat the sin-offering?

DAB Yes. It is very gracious of God that He shares the sin-offering with us. Mr P Lyon spoke of God taking up people who have failed in their responsibility and sharing His best with them. What grace!

DTH I remember once years ago an assembly meeting when some brothers had gone astray; and I thought as a young man that for sure they were going to be withdrawn from. An old brother stood up before the assembly meeting started, and he said, 'Lord, we have sinned'. And all three were recovered.

DAB It may link with what our brother is bringing in - now we are referring to Luke 15 - that the sheep was brought to the house; in other words he was restored to the place where God would have him. He was not brought back to a fold, or to some place where he could wander but perhaps not so unwisely. He was brought to the house, and perhaps we need a greater understanding of what the house means, the need to recognise that there is somewhere here where practical salvation can be enjoyed, because the name of God is there, and God's order is recognised and respected. That is the place of safety, and erring sheep need to be brought all the way back there. It is not that he brought the sheep until it was in the village, and let it run the last bit; he carried that sheep into the house, and that is what we need to do.

KRO I was thinking of the pasture - "shall find pasture", John 10: 9. Does that link with this, the environment where the shepherd would desire the sheep to be?

DAB Yes, I think so; and that links with Psalm 23. David is speaking there about the care that God had expended upon him, and it has its application to the relationship which the Lord had with his Father when here; and it is applied to us by One who had exhibited that relationship. I do not mean that the Lord was a sheep, but the Father was His Shepherd.

DMW The Lord says, "I have given you an example" (John 13: 15); His desire was that, in His absence, there would be others that would take up the same example, and have a love of what was of God in representation here in the scene of testimony, God's house.

DAB What I feel very keenly is that, to the extent that I have listened to and observed that example, what I have then applied is really a very dilute version of the original because of my weakness and self-interest. There is such intensity in this transitional ministry of the Lord Jesus and, these three shepherd servants, Paul, John and Peter. There was a time in London when we were almost over-endowed with people who we relied upon to watch over for our souls, and now we are left without any of them. And now our cares seem very great in relation to our measure. "I have given you an example": speaking for myself, I struggle now to apply even the little I have learned .

DMW Would you say that learning is two-fold? There is the Spirit of Christ coming out in persons who are exercised; but also those who have a love of the truth.

DAB Yes. To go back to what was said earlier, cares are not all administrative or disciplinary - a sister in a nursing home, for example, and bright souls not yet breaking bread.- it is not just *outbound* cases we are dealing with, there are *inbound* cases as well. Two brothers have had occasion to remind me of what Mr J Taylor said, 'if we take care of the principles God will take care of the people', vol 7 p325. What we find from related references is that Mr Taylor is talking about addition, vol 21 p 220. He refers to Revelation, "ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands" (chap 5: 11), 'that is to say, numbers that are incalculable, divine numbers; God brings them in', vol 82 p102. We may have to arrive at this that cares come because we have asked for addition. Are we qualified to receive people?

TRV Linking on with what is being said, I was wondering whether as a sheep or as a shepherd it is a matter of the shepherd's voice? John 10: 4 says, "they know his voice". So as a sheep we have to know His voice, and that is the responsibility of a shepherd: is it the Lord's voice?

DAB That goes to the heart of what I was saying about state, because what the Lord says there is that they know Him as He knows the Father, v 15. Now the Lord's knowledge of the Father is immeasurable, but I think what He means is that we know the Shepherd's voice because we have the Spirit. That is the key to state, the extent to which the Spirit is free, and maybe we should use that as a measure of our state. It is possible, if you listen as you engage and interact with people, to be able if you have the Spirit yourself and He is free with you, to tell if He was free with them. And if you felt that there was any hesitation, I think you would become alerted to the need to care for that soul - lest the Shepherd should speak, and they do not hear, and wander.

TRV That is what you pointed out as to coming back to the house. The sheep and the shepherd may be somewhat on the individual side, but ultimately you have to have a connection to the house. We have to have a connection to the house of God, because that is where the Lord is. We are each responsible in our own measure for taking that up.

DAB Yes, and it is one of the provisions which the Father has made in response to the Lord's prayer: God's house is here, He has created a place to which sheep can be safely brought, where there is practical salvation. The Father has done that. That is a place where there is care and protection, in a world which is otherwise a place of extreme danger morally; and there is pasture too. Then there is also the idea of the "flock of God", which is not so much the outward way in which we are preserved together, but a kind of empathy and mutuality among the sheep which would lead us all to move and to follow. And that brings up a simple point: if you are uncertain about the Lord's leading, find someone who is more certain than you are.

HWJ The inn in Luke 10 would be a similar thought to the house, would it not? And there is someone there who we can look to care for others as well as ourselves.

DAB And that innkeeper does his business governed by the belief that the Samaritan is coming back, which is what we are saying. It is often suggested that the Samaritan made an arrangement which was open-ended, but given that we understand that a denarius was

about a day's wages for a working man, his payment cannot have covered very long. The Samaritan had stayed there, and the man he rescued, for one night already. The rescued man might tell the innkeeper that he would like to meet the Samaritan again and he might ask if he had said when he was coming back. No, he did not say when he was coming back. He did not pay for very long - he could have been back at any time! I think that is an interesting analogy; the Samaritan's return would not just inspire some hope and purpose for living in the victim; but I think we could say that this return also governed the way in which the innkeeper did his business.

DMW The person would then become heavenly in his outlook.

DAB Indeed. Here was a man who was not simply remedying the injuries that the man had suffered, but changing his whole outlook. That is very important, is it not? Our aspirations are not just remedial; the house of God creates a new sense of direction, and a new sense of belonging as well.

KAK What would you say about Paul and his knowledge of shepherding? He must have learned something from Ananias - "Saul, brother" (Acts 9: 17) - and being taken in and being with the disciples in Damascus, the flock.

DAB Well, Paul makes very few references to the flock; it is not one of his reference pictures as it is in John - or indeed in the Lord's teaching. The Lord Jesus and John use sheep and flocks as a kind of currency in their ministry. It has often been said that, where John refers to the flock, Paul refers to the body, except in Acts 20. Now, you ask what had Paul learned about the flock and Paul says something that nobody else says about the flock: it is "purchased with the blood of his own", Acts 20: 28. That is what Paul had learned about the flock, that it was "purchased with the blood of his own". That is why he shepherded the flock - it had not simply been gathered up like sheep in some market place, it was "purchased with the blood of his own".

DMW He had in his soul the value from the divine side, and the feelings of God in relation to it.

DAB Exactly, yes.

DTH He also said to Philemon, “put this to my account”, v 18. Is that shepherding?

DAB Yes, I think that is an interesting example. There are several ways in which you could learn the value of something. You could learn, for example, a brother’s valuation of the brethren by his readiness to serve them, and the selflessness with which he served them would be something you could judge and measure. And that comes out in Paul as we were saying earlier - “night and day”. So there was an intensity about his service, and you could say that Paul obviously loves the brethren; and they love him in return and will not let him go. There is a link established and things seem quite happy there. But Paul would say that there was something greater than that - he did not want people to get the idea that watching him would give you the value for the sheep; the way you value the sheep is to see what *God* gave for them. And Paul served the brethren not because he was inspired by how lovely they are, but because he had learned what God gave for them.

IMS He persevered with the Corinthians because he had been acquainted from the Lord Himself that He had much people in that city, Acts 18: 11.

DAB The Lord does not say, ‘there *are* much people in this city’ but, “**I have** much people in this city”. They were the Lord’s, and I wonder sometimes if I always remember that. They are not mine, and they do not owe me anything; but we ought to get that sense before taking up any service, that we are dealing with people that the Lord chooses to claim as His own, and God has given His own Son for.

AKL As to the sheep in Luke 15, it is never taken away from the shoulder of the shepherd. Does that indicate how the shepherd service is going on, to keep and feed?

DAB Exactly, yes. That tract says that Mr Darby asked the boy how he brought the sheep home: was it willing to follow? The boy said, ‘Well, I did not like to trust it, and besides, it was dead beat and tired, so I laid it on my shoulders and carried it home that way’. It is not

enough to find someone and *tell* them the way back, you have to carry them back, and you need to know where you are going. There is no point in dropping them off on the way; you have to bring them to the house.

DMW It is uncharacteristic for a sheep not to be in the house, as we speak; because he or she cannot rightly represent God unless the house aspect in dignity, and reverence, and respect, and order characterises that person.

DAB Yes. That is absolutely true, but the trouble is that not many sheep understand that; and not many sheep know how to stay in the house, or are even inclined to. So then it becomes the responsibility of somebody else to watch over their souls.

KDD When Elisha came into the house, he identified himself with the child. I often go over that section in 2 Kings 4, because when Elisha came into the house, it says he “put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands”, and then the results, “the flesh of the child grew warm”, v 34.

DAB I read recently what someone said about the sneezes: the first signs of life might not be very well ordered, and you might say that the person needs a lot of help, but the sneeze shows that they are alive; that is the place to begin, is it not?

DMW I was just thinking of Eutychus in Acts 20 in this regard, and Elisha’s ministry is similar to Paul’s line of things. He identified himself with Eutychus. He was the one who could pronounce that “his life is in him”, v 10.

DAB Yes, and just to go back to what Paul said to the Ephesian elders, he refers to “these hands”, “these hands have ministered to my wants” (v 34), but they also took up Eutychus. He was able - he was given that opportunity - to leave them with an object lesson. They jumped to the conclusion that any further intervention would be pointless, but Paul’s hands dealt with it.

DMW Exactly. Perhaps they were thinking that he should not have been sitting in the window to begin with, but that is not brought into it when Paul moved. I suppose we could say that it was the truth that

was committed to Paul that was imparted in some sense by getting close to one who had fallen.

DAB Mr Joe Evershed in London, who was one of the fathers we had, said he thought Eutychus had given up his seat for an old sister.

HTF It was Paul's arms, actually.

DAB I am glad you say that, because it has often been remarked that, when it comes to the government of the world, which is something the Lord Jesus will take up on His return, it is on His shoulder, Isa 9: 6. But the sheep is on His shoulders, Luke 15: 5. Is that another way of putting what you have just said?

DMW God has committed all things into his *hand* (John 3: 35), but in John 13: 3 they are in His *hands*, and the feet washing is with His *hands*.

DAB Very good, and one of the comforts I have is that I know that shepherd service learned from the Lord is effective, because it recovered me. So, provided I follow what I have been taught by the Lord faithfully, then I have the hope of His support, and perhaps the joy of some outcome.

WJK So, when it comes to the sheep, nothing is held back.

DAB Exactly; "I lay down my life for the sheep", John 10: 15. I said that love is ready to make personal sacrifices; first love will make an ultimate sacrifice.

MJK I was thinking of what has already been said as to John 10. He says, "my sheep hear my voice" (v 27); and it does not say '*they* know *Him*', but "I know them".

DAB Very good. That goes back to what I was saying about giving an account. We will not be able to hide the fact that we took some responsibility for somebody; there will not be a single member of the flock that the Lord forgets or overlooks, or treats of little account or insufficient account to ask about: "they shall give an account" and it will be for people that the chief Shepherd knows by name.

DMW Is that account not being given now, and is not the voice of the Lord being heard now - mediatorially?

DAB I am glad that you say that. If I can put that point another way, if we leave it as we were speaking about earlier, the chief Shepherd might have to ask why He has had to wait for any kind of account: 'Were you in relation to me in your service, and the administrative actions you took? Why was the effect on the flock not something you spoke to me about at the time?'. It might be too late, someone may have been lost. I agree with what you say. It is the same with the judgment seat: we learn to keep short accounts (which is an expression we used to use - we do not hear it so often now); shepherds should keep short accounts, overseers should keep short accounts. Is that your point?

DMW The practical reality of Christianity is that each one of us has been recovered, and there is a certain history that we can give an account of in relation to that; but it is also intensely current, is it not?

DAB I could give an example against myself where I have sought over time to help a soul, and I imagined that I had done more than in fact I had. If as you say, I had kept an account, it would not have happened like that.

IMS When David went to seek the welfare of his brethren, he said, "Was it not laid upon me?", 1 Sam 17: 29.

DAB Yes; he "took his charge and went", v 20. And then he went back to the sheep. I think that is very interesting, that he left the sheep with a keeper as was quoted, but he kept going back to the sheep.

APD It has been said that we should keep up to date with what is happening; Ananias said, "Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man how much evil he has done to thy saints in Jerusalem" (Acts 9: 13); he was not up to date.

DAB Quite; that is short accounts. The Lord says, 'Something has happened in the last two or three days that you have not heard about'.

APD I think we need to see that something may be happening, and we want to be in the spirit and the grace of the moment, do you think?

DAB I think that is a very good note to end on: I would love to have that experience, to get down on my knees and talk to the Lord about some of the souls that I care for - and the Lord might say, 'You go and talk to that soul, something has changed. I have been there'. What a joy that would be!

Denton

19th April 2014

Key to Initials:

J R Bellamy, Vancouver; D A Burr, London; W S Chellberg, Wheaton; A P Devenish, Edmonton; K D Drever, Calgary; H T Franklin, Grimsby; D T Howie, Edmonton; M J Klassen, Aberdeen ID; W J Klassen, Aberdeen ID; J K Knauss, Indianapolis; K A Knauss, Indianapolis; H W Jensen, Los Angeles; A K Lidbeck, Aberdeen ID; K R Oliver, New York; I M Shearer, Adelaide; T R VanderHoek, Denton; D M Welch, Denton

PRECIOUSNESS

Robert W McClean

1 Peter 2: 4-8 (“offence”); 1: 18-21, 6-9

Matthew 26: 6-13

Psalms 133: 1-3

You may well have noticed that a link between the scriptures we have read is the word “precious”. It is in mind to say something about what is precious. I think the remark at the end of our reading (see Issue No 91 p 18) links with it when our brother spoke about the scripture, “in him all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell” (Col 1: 19) - in the Lord Jesus. There was that which was precious, which God held precious, and it says elsewhere “in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”, Col 2: 9. And so we have read in the second chapter of 1 Peter about what is “precious”. If you search for the word “precious” in the Bible, you will find that Peter seems to like it; he uses it several times. He uses it here about a Stone. He speaks about it as being “cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God, chosen, precious” and then he says, “elect, precious”. So I wanted first of all to talk about that, the preciousness of Christ to God. And then where we read in the previous chapter, it speaks about “precious blood”; we might speak about that. Who holds that precious? God holds that precious. And then it speaks about: “the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold” as if to say the proving of your faith is precious to divine Persons. In Matthew it is the woman with the “precious ointment”, which would speak of her valuation of Christ. In the well-known Psalm 133 it is “the precious oil” which unites the Head and the body, you may say. How precious that is! And so we will maybe touch on these things, as I am able, in order.

First of all we will speak about the Stone, Jesus, and how God values Jesus. I have thought about this cornerstone. Buildings are perhaps not constructed quite the same way nowadays. Reinforced concrete seems to be the order of the day, but if you go around an old place, an old house, or see an old bridge, you will see quite often, where there is an arch, or a bridge, a stone in the middle of

the top of the arch. That stone quite often is made prominent and you will see it is a slightly different shape to the ones that are around it. The ones around it are all carefully shaped so that they form the arch, but the top one, the one in the middle, is called the keystone of the arch: it holds the arch in place, and everything about that arch depends on the angles of that keystone. This cornerstone serves a similar purpose to the keystone, which is the top stone of what God has prepared for Himself, and everything fits together. Without these stones being the shape that they are, the building will not hold up. You look at these old houses and bridges and you wonder at how many years that arch or bridge has stood up, simply because the keystone holds it in place. That is how precious Jesus is to God - holding everything in place.

It says “cast away as worthless” by men. You could just imagine: there this stone was; I think there was some admiration from the rulers, the Pharisees and so on. At one point some said, “Never man spoke thus, as this man speaks”, John 7: 46. There was some admiration for Jesus. I remember Mr Lamont saying once it is as if they picked up this stone, and they looked at it, and they examined it from every angle, and they put it down because they could not see how they could fit it into *their* building. And so it is: that stone could not fit in man’s building so they cast it away, not as something that could perhaps be utilised elsewhere, but as “worthless”. That really is what man’s systems think of Jesus. They might think He is a nice Stone, but He is “worthless”: “but with God chosen, precious”! And so when you come to know Jesus as your Saviour, you come into something of the appreciation of God’s valuation of Christ, and that is what we sang about:

Sharers of Thy joy to be,
And to know the blessed secret
Of His preciousness to Thee.
(Hymn 277)

How precious the Lord is! Not only is He the keystone in the sense that everything is held together, but He is Son of His love, the Son of the Father’s love. We sang a hymn on Lord’s day morning which we often sing:

Blessed and glorious Man,
which goes on to say:

All that God's holy mind
Has sought in man to find,
All that His love designed,
Secured by Thee!
(Hymn 268)

It is all secured and held by Jesus, a Man of a different order altogether, but One that has gone into death in order that He might secure our blessing.

And so here it speaks about “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood”. I do not feel able to go into that except for us to see that it takes its shape and character from that Stone, and that is what we are brought into. When we put our faith and our trust in Jesus and have a sense of the gift of the Spirit, we are brought into “a spiritual house”.

I thought it was quite interesting in the context that this Stone was “cast away indeed as worthless by men”, that he says, “To you therefore who believe is the preciousness”. Think of God holding such a One so precious, and you have believed on Him. You have put your faith and your trust in Him. I trust each of us has. There is an opportunity now to do that, but it will not always be that you will have the opportunity; so I trust anyone who has not done so would do so now, and put your faith in the blood that we read of too. “To you therefore who believe is the preciousness”: think of that! God's valuation of Jesus held for you, held on your account: “To you”; it is almost like a gift from God, as if He is saying, ‘I hold this One precious and I have secured your eternal blessing through this blessed One’. It is available for you. If you count Jesus worthless, then you will have no benefit from that, but if you believe on Him, then to *you* is the preciousness. It gets us feeling like God, getting beyond ourselves, getting beyond just what has been done for us, into a sense of the assembly, the vessel which God is securing for Himself.

There are two things that we need to remember. One is that everyone who believes on Jesus and has the Spirit is a member of that body, and to every one of them "is the preciousness". It does not have any other barriers at all. The other thing is that there are many families. We speak about that, we read about that, the many families, but each one of those families will all stand there in the worth and preciousness of Christ. The assembly will have a particular and peculiar place, but there will be that which flows out and all those families will be there where the divine dwelling place is: "the tabernacle of God is with men", Rev 21: 3. They will all be there in that eternal day, centred round that blessed One, all in the worth of Christ.

So we read about the blood. It touches on the cost that has been expended on our account to bring us into blessing in this One. Now the preciousness of Jesus was there from His incarnation. I want to be careful what I say, but God found His delight in Jesus here, did He not? Just when the Lord was about to commence His public testimony, and He went to John the baptist and was baptised, the Father says, "in thee I have found my delight", Mark 1: 11. The Spirit descends as a dove upon Him, giving a sense, as we touched in the reading, of "the fulness of the Godhead" being pleased to dwell there. God had found His delight, the Father had found His delight, in Jesus here as a Man. But that One had to go on into death and so it gives us God's valuation of the blood of Jesus. It says, "ye have been redeemed" - it usually means you have been bought back - "not by corruptible things," - how thankful we can be for that, that we were not bought by some gold coins or anything else that men value! People talk about things that have an intrinsic value and that is a value in themselves. For instance, if you had a gold coin and cut it in half, it is no longer any use as a coin, but the gold is still valued at the weight of the gold; it has an intrinsic value. But I think what the apostle Peter is alluding to here is that even that is not a very good figure because it only has a value that someone else is prepared to give. In some countries of the Middle East people take gold around with them; they have gold bangles and things and they use them in payment because gold is valued in that way; it is like a currency. You can imagine you might go somewhere else and

people might say, 'I have no use for this soft metal. I do not think it is worth very much at all'. So the value varies depending on how the people you are transacting with value it. Peter is saying, 'It is not like that. It is not like corruptible things. It is "by precious blood"'. I have often thought about that precious blood of Jesus; it did not corrupt. How precious it was! Somewhere else it says of it, "speaking better than Abel", Heb 12: 24. So we have been "redeemed ... by precious blood". It is the Father, God Himself, who values that blood. He puts that precious value on it, and it stands for time and eternity and when you come to know Jesus as your Saviour, you are coming into the value of the preciousness of that blood. You have been redeemed by it, "the blood of Christ, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world", and then it says "that your faith and hope should be in God".

Then we read about our faith, "the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire". The proving of gold in a fire is where it goes into a furnace and gets very, very hot, so hot that it melts, and when it melts, impurities float; they can be separated off and then the gold tapped off and used, the impurities removed. The fire is doing that: so it is proved by the fire. It says "the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold". It is as if to say "the proving of your faith" in this blessed One, whose precious blood has redeemed you, yields something "much more precious than of gold which perishes". It speaks about being "found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ". It is linking *you*, *your* faith, with this blessed One who has died, whose blood has been shed, but now is raised and ascended, in heaven receiving the praise and honour that is due to Him, "glory and honour".

And then I thought this was really quite touching because - I am appealing to us all, really - you have put your trust in Jesus; you believe on Him; so what comes next is for *you*: "whom, having not seen, ye love". You have not seen Jesus. Peter was one of those who had seen Jesus, but you have not and I have not. But you love Him. And God loves to prove your faith. He values your faith and the proving of it as "precious", the same word as He uses for the

blood of Jesus. That is *your* faith. I want us to be encouraged in our souls by that, because there are things that are discouraging. It is easy to get discouraged when put to grief by various trials, but they have to do with the proving of our faith. The end of the Lord is not exactly whether this is right or that is right, but it is that *your faith* might be proved, and that you might be established in Him. To paraphrase Mr Stoney, the purpose of the trial is not so much that you discover your distinct need, but that you may be cast entirely on the Lord, JBS vol 12 p502. That is why your faith gets proved and tested.

So he says, “whom, having not seen, ye love”. You love Jesus, and these very words of Scripture are showing God’s appreciation of that. “On whom though not now looking, but believing”: we look for the Lord; we look to have an impression in our minds and in our spirits of the Lord, and we look to have a sense that He has spoken to us, but we have not actually seen Him. We are “not now looking”. Peter was one who had seen Him, but he was “not now looking”, and it says, “but believing”. How God appreciates and values your faith and belief in Jesus. God holds it precious, and we are to hold it precious too. We are to value the work of God in ourselves and in one another, and to have sympathy with one another in the various trials that any go through in the proving of their faith. It says “put to grief by various trials”. Peter is not glossing over things, but it is “the proving of your faith”. Then he goes on to say “ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory” - this is what we are to be brought to. The proving of our faith may be very testing, but, as we touched on in the reading, if my link is clear with the Head, then I will be preserved through “the proving”. That is what we want, is it not? We want to be preserved through “the proving” that there may be a result Godward, valuing the work of God in yourself and in others, “receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls”.

How precious indeed it is to see these things, and what I would like to engender in our hearts is a desire to hold them precious. We might have things that we value that are not precious. You may have a piece of equipment, like I have a hearing-aid, which is helpful and I value, but it is not precious and if I lost it or it got broken, I could get

another one. It is not precious. We have things like that that we rightly value. Then there may be other things that hold what we call a sentimental value. I do not mean that wrongly, but we value it perhaps above its face value. It may be precious, might be some gold, even, but it has a value for us beyond that because of what it tells us. It might have a link with someone we love or something like that, and we hold a valuation of it that you cannot put a monetary valuation on, and these things are to be like that. You cannot put a monetary value on these precious things, but we are to value them and we are to hold them tenaciously. There may be other things which to anybody else are worthless, maybe some photographs. To anybody else they are of no value at all, but to you they are precious because they might be a picture of a loved one; they are a reminder. These are right feelings, and we are to hold the precious things of God and to value them because the world does not value them at all. If we drift towards the world, we will lose our sense of the value, but if we hold to these things, we will retain our sense of their value.

Now, this woman valued the Lord Jesus and she had this “flask of very precious ointment”. It was worth a lot. It “might have been sold for much”. In other gospels we get an attempt to put a value on it. It “might have been sold for much and been given to the poor” and that sounds all right, looking after the poor. We give money for things sometimes and perhaps this could have been given to the poor, just the money though, not the ointment itself. The ointment itself was too valuable to be given away. But this woman valued the Lord Jesus so much that she used it for Him. The disciples thought it was a waste, which was rather insulting: “To what end was this waste?” It must have been hundreds or thousands of pounds worth of ointment in our valuation that she poured out on the Lord Jesus - she valued Him so much. She had been accruing it, perhaps, ready, waiting for a moment. She took the moment that presented itself and was not ever going to present itself again and she used what she had accumulated for the Lord Jesus, showing her valuation of Him, she used it on Him, and, it says, she “poured it out upon his head as he lay at table”. What I am thinking there is - we have spoken about the preciousness of these things, but how much do we value Christ? What is your feeling? What is your response? This

woman has been spoken of as a type of the assembly by which we mean the bride of Christ, who values Him and loves Him, and in her affection, intelligent affection, she pours this out upon His head. Do we value the Lord in that setting as the Head of the assembly, Head of the body? How high a valuation do we put on that, holding that in our hearts and honouring Him in the midst? She had this ointment and she was prepared to give it for Him. The Lord says something unique here when He says, "Wheresoever these glad tidings may be preached in the whole world", and we ourselves here, sitting in this room, right now, are the proof of the truth of the Lord's words because it says, "that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her". She had a valuation of Christ and she was prepared to use it. Once this ointment had been poured out, that was it. It was not going to be used any more. It was only for Jesus. Do we value, do we hold precious that blessed One and His links with the assembly, His bride? How we are to value Him and hold Him in our hearts!

Finally we read in the Psalm 133: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!". It speaks about "the precious oil". I think it is interesting when it speaks about "the precious oil upon the head, that ran down upon the beard". This would be a reference to the holy anointing oil, the oil that was established in the tabernacle system. The recipe for it was given: they were to take these proportions and make the precious oil. It was not to be used on human flesh; but it was to be poured on Aaron's head, as priest. Aaron in that sense is a type of the Lord Jesus, and it "ran down upon the beard, upon Aaron's beard, that ran down to the hem of his garments". It is interesting that it does not say that it dripped off the hem of his garments, but, you may say, it accumulated there. There was that which flowed down from the head, it was precious and it was valuable and it speaks of brethren dwelling together in unity. It says that brethren dwelling together in unity is like this; so there is the head and there is this oil which, you might say, is bringing in this union to the hem of his garment. It is not wasted; it does not drip on to the earth; but it is absorbed, it soaks in, and the fragrance of this oil permeates the whole garment. "How good and how pleasant it for brethren to dwell together in

unity!" You may say, 'Well, there is this which we have a difficulty with', and someone else may say, 'Well, I have a difficulty with such-and-such', but the idea is that we "dwell together in unity": we hold that so *precious* that it holds us together and we get help together. The thought is not dividing; it is holding together; it is unity. If these people belong to the assembly and I belong to the assembly, then when the Lord comes, we will all be together. I am not trying to dilute any concerns that any might have, but the thought is dwelling together in unity. It is like this precious oil. I am sure there is a reference to the Spirit in that, that the precious Spirit would work in our souls to hold us together with these things in our hearts. We are to value them and hold on to them.

Then it speaks about "the dew of Hermon that descendeth on the mountains of Zion". That would be a refreshing thing. I think it has been said that the oil and the dew are always necessary to keep us together, to unite us, to refresh us. "For there hath Jehovah commanded the blessing, life for evermore." It is a wonderful thing "life for evermore"; it is a link with eternal life. This is what God has in mind. How precious these things are, precious to God. He values them. They give Him pleasure and joy, and we are to find our pleasure and joy in them too, but we are also to value them. I was thinking about the crown jewels of Britain. You can pay some money and you can go and see them, but you cannot touch them. They are behind thick glass, and there are people guarding them. They may be dressed rather quaintly, but they are armed guards. These items are held precious. The guards do not own them, but they hold them precious and are prepared to defend them, with their lives I am sure, if necessary. We are to hold these things precious. The assembly's knowledge of the love of Christ has been described by a servant of the Lord as a 'precious crown', CAC Letters p13. How we are to love and value these things and hold them as precious. Well, may we be encouraged to do so for the Lord's name's sake!

London

21st June 2014

THE LORD SPEAKING

David J Hutson

Matthew 18: 20

John 14: 18

Revelation 3: 10, 11; 22: 20, 21

I am thinking of the way in which the Lord Jesus in these scriptures uses the present tense. What a comfort that is! It would indicate what a place the saints have in His heart. It would indicate, putting it simply, that He is always thinking of us. I know I am saying things that are very simple, but they are very real and they should affect us.

I read first of all in chapter 18 of Matthew because there is a certain challenge to us there. It does not simply say “where two or three are gathered together”, but “gathered together unto my name”. Others could say more as to that, but there is something which gathers us: “unto my name”. I feel searched myself in saying what I do; I am not putting anything on anyone save what I am searched in myself as to whether I am conscious of being “gathered” unto His Name. We come together; thank God for the liberty we have to come together in this way! The frequency of our comings together we can be thankful for, Lord’s day and Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and other meetings too, fellowship meetings, the three days meetings we are looking forward to when we can be together, “gathered together”; and this is something specific here, “gathered together unto my name”. So it is not simply like persons in the world might come together for a meeting, a conference, or something like that, but “gathered together unto my name”. If He were here, surely we would gather to Him. How He would delight when He was here to have those around Him who came to hear what He had to say, although sadly some came in opposition and criticism, and now we can gather to His Name. We recognise that He is absent, but we recognise that there is somewhere where He can be known at the present time. A person’s name is that by which he is known, and there is somewhere where we can know Him at the present time, and I challenge my heart, beloved, as to whether I am here for that

reason. As I say, it could be that we enjoy the company of the saints. Thank God if we do! Thank God for the company of the saints! But more than that we are gathered together unto His Name. We gather because we have the wonderful possibility which He gives of Himself being with us even if we may be only “two or three”. Thank God we have more than “two or three”, but His promise is there, and I am struck with it that He does not say, “where two or three are gathered together unto my name”, ‘there will I be’, but “there **am** I in the midst of them”. What an assurance, beloved, what an incentive for us to gather in the recognition of His absence, but in the recognition that there is somewhere here where He delights to come, and where there is no question from His own side. As He says here, “there am I in the midst of them”. I speak feelingly and humbly as to it, but it is just that fact that He says, “there am I”. It seems to imply His own delight to be there. Surely, beloved, it would be an incentive to us as we come together to consider the wonder of the provision that has been made for us that we can be together, and thus prove His presence. It would regulate us in the way we come together so that we may prove the blessedness of this.

And then He says again in John, and there are other similar references in these chapters, “I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you”; not ‘I will come’ but “I am coming”. There are other references that I have read and other references that I have not read that speak of this, “I am coming”. It seems as though He is always on the way; He is always ready. What a promise that is, beloved, as we feel the character of things in which we are as orphans in that sense, but we have this wonderful promise: “I am coming to you”.

Again, in Revelation, writing to Philadelphia it is conditional. He says, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial, which is about to come upon the whole habitable world”. In a sense we can see it coming, but we are to be those who keep the word of His patience. He says elsewhere, wonderful mystery as to the reality of His humanity, that He does not know the day nor the hour when He will come to take His own, Matt 24: 36. How patient He is; “the word of my patience”! We do not know, but what we do know is He says, “I come quickly”, not ‘I will

come', but "I come quickly"! How wonderful that is! As another has said, it seems as though He is on the way. "Hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown". So we are to be prepared. What a crown it will be, all our hopes and expectations - our brother has referred to our hope - the substantiality of what we have. What a crown it will be when He comes!

And, finally, the very last words in this book that we have in the Scriptures, "He that testifies these things says, Yea, I come quickly. Amen; come, Lord Jesus". Meantime there is every provision for us: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints". Well, this would be our response, beloved. As He says, "Yea, I come quickly", the answer from our longing hearts is: "Amen; come, Lord Jesus". It just occurs to me as I speak that a beloved brother has been taken suddenly and unexpectedly in New York. It might be something any one of us has to face, our readiness for Him to come quickly in that sense. He came quickly in relation to our brother, I would just suggest, in applying the idea. Are we ready for Him to come? "Amen; come, Lord Jesus". So we would be preserved here in the expectancy of His coming and the imminence of His coming; and not only His coming for us in view of His coming with us, but His coming to us according to His promise while we are left here in the scene of His absence as gathered to His Name.

I trust what I have said may be an encouragement to us of the Lord, in the name of the Lord Jesus.

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