

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 98

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Table of Contents

THE CROSS OF CHRIST
KEY TO INITIALS:
KEEPING THE CHARGE
THE LORD JESUS COMING
ENCOURAGEMENT

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THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Luke 9: 18-24

Philippians 2:5-8

Colossians 1: 19-20

1 Corinthians 1: 17-18

AMcK I trust that we will be helped together, beloved brethren, in opening up these scriptures. The scripture in Luke's gospel has been very much on my heart, particularly as to the matter of taking up the cross. It struck me that at this time of year many of our young people are going through significant times of change, perhaps changes of school, going to college, to university, or going out to work, and I have been thinking about this exercise of taking up the cross and how we might help one another, but particularly perhaps help our young people in how we do that. To me, taking up our cross involves taking a path of reproach, and I suggest these scriptures and this subject, not as in any way feeling as if I have come to much myself, but that perhaps in contemplating these aspects of the cross, the cross of Jesus, we might be helped in the exercise of taking up our cross.

The Lord's words in Luke 9 are interesting: He says "let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Mr Coates has a very interesting article which is called 'Daily' (vol 15 p52 - The Believer Established) and I would commend that article to young brethren. Taking up the cross daily is one of the things that Mr Coates speaks of; it is a daily exercise and I would like to think as a result of this time that we will be helped and strengthened in pursuing that exercise for ourselves. The world is very active and it is seeking to disrupt what is for God and to spoil what is for Christ. I wonder whether taking up this exercise daily, a pathway of reproach, would help us to resist the enemy. It is interesting to me that the Lord says this after He has drawn out of His disciples the expression of who He is and the greatness of His Person. It seems important that if we are going to take up this exercise we take it up in the

conscious sense of the greatness of Christ. If there is anything of me in it then it will fail.

Philippians refers to “the death of the cross”. Paul, in writing this, could have perhaps ended what he wrote towards the end of verse 8 at, “becoming obedient even unto death”, but he adds “and that the death of the cross”. Maybe we can contemplate together just what that means, the distinctiveness of the death of the cross. That is where our Lord went; that is what He endured: we might see the pathway that He took, the pathway of reproach. That might lead us to having some sense of the Lord’s own sacrifice involved in taking up the cross. Sacrifice is involved in it, beloved brethren.

And then in Colossians we have “the blood of his cross”. I would like to get a greater impression of what the blood means to God. He made peace by it; what a tremendous thing that is: He has “made peace by the blood of his cross”. That seems to me to be the divine view, and if we are going to take up our cross, and if we are going to take this pathway, we do it in the conscious sense of having peace with God, nothing left to be done, everything resolved, and that helps us in taking up our cross.

And then in Corinthians a simple touch: “the word of the cross”: “The word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us that are saved it is God’s power”- God’s *power*. The King James Version has “the preaching of the cross”, and I do know for myself that the preaching every week is power for us; it is God’s power. It is the strength for us to move forward in this exercise of taking up our cross, but in gaining some help about it let us contemplate what it meant for Jesus, let us contemplate the greatness of the death of His cross: “that the death of the cross”. I believe that has great import for us. It was not a death in which there was any honour. Mr Coates comments that if you saw a man with a cross you would know that he had done with the world (vol 15 p62). Well, that is the pathway that our Lord Jesus took, and perhaps we can find some help together in how we move forward ourselves on that path.

NJH I think it is a very wholesome and needed thought to have before our hearts in the time that we are in. There is the public aspect of the cross, is there not?

AMcK Yes, go on.

NJH Well, there is no cross relating to John the baptist or Elias or others, or one of the old prophets as risen, but the cross of Christ is to bring us into life. According to Luke 9 whosoever shall lose his life for Christ's sake shall save his life.

AMcK Yes, it was public: it was not done in a corner. Publicly, we are to find our place there. Paul shows that, as to being crucified with Him: that is an exercise for us, but it is public. It affects our walk then, does it?

NJH They had to go out to see John; he was presented really in a certain sense to Israel in that area, but the cross is a very public matter, before men.

AMcK Yes.

WMP What would you say about the severity of the language here, “suffer ... and be rejected ... and be killed”? What bearing would that have on your thought?

AMcK Well, I think it would remind us of the reality of what He endured. I feel measured in this but are we not to know what it is to be cast out from the world? He was cast out: He knew what it was to have no place. Now, if we are to follow Him, then we need to prove this: the world would love to have us, it would love to bestow accolades on us, but if we are going to be for Him we have to take that place of reproach.

WMP Elsewhere the Lord Jesus uses the word “hate”: the world hated Him, and we will be hated too as those who are His disciples - so we should not minimise the efforts of the enemy to deter our faith.

AMcK That is my exercise. This is not an easy thing for us to do, and Satan would love to divert the Lord's people from taking up the cross, but I believe there is great reward in it because it brings us close to Jesus.

RJC It is especially for the disciples here, is it not? It is a great challenge, personally, individually, to take up our cross. It would have a real bearing on us, would it, especially in our testimonial pathway? “He said to them all, If anyone will come after me, let him

deny himself and take up his cross daily". Has it a very personal application to ourselves?

AMcK Yes, I am glad you referred to that word "all", because I was wondering about that. None of them are left out, and this particular instruction is for His own; it is not for the crowds. He has brought out the expression of who He is in the greatness of His Person; Peter has given testimony to that. He speaks of Him as, "The Christ of God", and immediately having had that manifestation of who He is in His greatness He says now, 'What about you?' - and none of them are left out of that "all". Can you say some more about that for us, please?

RJC I just thought of the particular bearing of it on the disciples. They had been with Him, but He is going to go on high, not immediately, and He is giving them some instruction as to how to continue in the pathway that He has set on Himself so blessedly.

AMcK Yes.

DJH And it is "taking up his cross"; you have your tests in your life and I have them in mine, and each one of us has, but it is *his* cross. We are sustained in the life of the One who bore His cross, which was unique to Him?

AMcK Yes; we have different exercises, we have different tests but they are all answered in His cross. You may have to face what the cross means in a way that is different to me, but they are both answered in His, are they not? He went out bearing His cross, a Man who was done with the world. That comment impressed me - He was finished with it. He went out bearing His cross and my cross is answered perfectly in that, is it not?

TJC You referred to John, "he went out, bearing his cross", chap 19: 17; I think it has been said that it is the only thing in the gospels that is His own. When He came into this world He was placed in another man's manger, found in another man's boat, another man's house, but when it comes to the time of the crucifixion it says, "he went out, bearing his cross". He could even say to one, "Shew me a denarius", Luke 20: 24. He had nothing to call His own down here.

It is very affecting do you think, the verse that you quote in John that He went out “bearing his cross”? It was His and His alone.

AMcK That is good. None else could take it, none else could go there and I think that is the import of what Paul adds in Philippians “the death of the cross”. It is not a death that would meet with any honour in the world. “Cursed is every one hanged upon a tree”, Gal 3: 13. He took that curse. I like what you say; it is the only thing that is His, “The Son of man has not where he may lay his head”, Luke 9: 58. He had nothing, but it was His cross and only He could take it.

JCG We are to be impressed with the distinctiveness of the Person whose cross it was. That is why you read the first part, was it, because of opinions of others? “But ye, who do ye say that I am?” – this is the test for us, is it? There were various persons round about the cross that bore testimony: “Behold the man!” (John 19: 5), for example, by Pilate, and then the thief on the cross, “this man has done nothing amiss”, Luke 23: 41. Appreciation of Christ is basic to this, is it?

AMcK I think it is fundamental. It struck me just in looking at this verse and reading those words beforehand, that it is so important to look at this from the perspective of the greatness of the Person. There cannot be anything of me in this exercise, can there? To take that path of reproach I have to become as nothing: His greatness must fill all, would you say?

JCG Paul says, “He takes away the first that he may establish the second”, Heb 10: 9. On the cross the first man in flesh was condemned, God “has condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8: 3), and we need to come to that so that hatred or other kinds of opposition to one another would disappear. It brings out the feelings that are proper to the new man, do you think?

AMcK Yes: what a transformation - He has taken away the first, it has gone, but the second is established, and established in the greatness of Christ, is it not?

NJH He departed out of the world on the cross. We are left here; taking up our cross is a daily matter here, and we are in keeping with

that departure out of the world. The greatness of the Person comes before you in that, does it?

AMcK I think so. He has no place here and so it should be with us. We have to come into contact with the world, and we have to live our lives here, and God would sustain us in that, but we know what it is to become contaminated by the world. We know what this means, but really we are to have no place here: the place that He had was to go out in reproach, and if we are to follow Him then we have to know something of this for ourselves.

NJH Exactly, and it is said that the reproach of the Christ and the power of the Spirit are the means for the testimony going through, FER vol 2 p270.

AMcK Yes, exactly; how could it be sustained otherwise?

TJC Did the eunuch come to this early in his Christian experience? I wondered whether he was so affected by the greatness of the Person that had gone this way that he says, "what hinders my being baptised?", Acts 8: 36. In principle he really said, 'If that is the way this One has gone, I have to go that way too', and "he went on his way rejoicing", v 39. Does that fit in with the question about departing out of the world?

AMcK Yes, I think it does. "Behold water": there was the means really to go through the exercise of death, do you think? That was immediately before him because of what Philip had opened up to him; he was immediately full of what he needed to do to identify himself with his Saviour. "What hinders me" – there was nothing that hindered him: he could go immediately into it, and that is where the rejoicing comes from.

NMcK Attention has been drawn in ministry to the fact that the Lord went out of the world publicly at the cross but He went into heaven privately (JT vol 6 p402), and that is the way we must go. We enjoy our privilege and we enjoy that privately. No one knows anything of that, it is not a public matter, but we must go out of the world publicly; it must be evident; we cannot slide in secret out of the world. It is not being true to Christ to do that, do you think?

AMcK No: I think that is good, and that helps because we have to take the place that He took. We cannot literally take His place: no one could, but we have to identify ourselves with the place that He went and the way that He went, do you think? That is a public position, and I feel very measured by this, but the world should look at me and say, 'Well he does not belong here, he belongs somewhere else; he is done with the world'. That is an exercise, but I think it is involved in taking up our cross, do you think?

NJH Taking up the cross in principle means that I have the sentence of death upon me, is that right? Your life is changed; it is a new life you have got.

AMcK Yes, that is helpful, go on.

NJH I think what you have said already referring to the Christ of God, the greatness of the Person is important; and then you see that if He went out that way, I can take no other route, and you come to the judgment that He went there vicariously on my behalf, and was nailed to the cross for me because I am due that judgment: is that right?

AMcK Yes: to see that He has gone there vicariously is the point. He took that place, but He took that place on my behalf, and so I have to be identified with that, and that means going out of sight.

NJH Yes, and the Christ of God means that He has made it effective. The great value of the Christ: He made everything effective by going that way.

JAB I wonder if there is a moral order in this triple commitment in Luke's gospel which is reflected in Philippians. We cannot take up the cross, even if we want to try to, unless we do the first thing – deny ourselves, and we cannot follow Him unless we take up the cross. Did you have anything in mind about that because we see in Philippians 2 the model for us in denying ourselves?

AMcK Well, I am glad you refer to that because it was on my mind. I feel measured just thinking about this but the first step in Luke is "deny himself", then taking up the cross, and then following. There are three things there and you are linking them with the emptying and the humbling?

JAB It is extremely testing to speak of this but we must speak of it because we see the model in the Lord Jesus, in One who denied Himself and before He took up the cross, the night before, He said to the Father “not my will, but thine be done”, Luke 22: 42. Until we do that in our measure with the help of the Holy Spirit we cannot take up the cross, can we?

AMcK No: Mr Darby’s note says, ‘He made Himself of no reputation’ and that seems to chime with the denying. Nothing of me can go through this; would you agree with that? I have to leave all that at the cross?

JAB Some might take up the cross to draw attention to themselves; wearing crosses in a prominent way, almost as a badge of honour. It is not a badge of honour; it is the very opposite, is it not?

AMcK Yes, I agree with that: “cursed is every one hanged upon a tree”. That is what scripture says, and it is perhaps as far as you can get from a badge of honour.

JAB There are Christians today in the Middle East who have been given the choice to convert to Islam or die. We might consider it to be as serious as that. The implications of what you are bringing before us are of a similar significance for us all, are they not? This is real.

AMcK I appreciate what you say: I was thinking about the suffering way. I was talking to somebody about that a few weeks ago, and we do not know too much about the suffering. There are many; you have spoken of those in Iraq and Syria that we read of who are suffering terribly. Now in God’s ordering we have been preserved from that for the time being, but perhaps the suffering for us is self-sacrifice. There is a cost; there is a real cost to this and if we are prepared for that the Lord will honour it, do you think? Philippians brings out the cost to the Lord, the emptying and the becoming obedient even unto death and that the death of the cross.

RJC It is a daily matter too which would bring us into an area of suffering. There is no laxity in it; you are committed to the cross on a daily basis which would affect our lives day by day which is very, very testing, do you think?

AMcK Yes, I agree; that article of Mr Coates is very helpful as to the things that are to occupy us daily. I know what it is to go through a day without being occupied with the death of the cross. We need help as to this and we need to be sustained in it because I think the Lord would bless us and if we consider the death of the cross; I am sure it would help us in our pathway.

JN Would Paul, bearing about the dying of Jesus give us an example of it.

AMcK Yes. He says there, “always”: “Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus”, 2 Cor 4: 10. What a challenge that is for us: carrying it, showing it, displaying it, I suppose. It should be evident to others do you think, that what is engaging our hearts and engaging our minds, is the dying of Jesus, the fact that He went out from this world, had no place in it; He went out from it, and that is my place too?

ARH Where you started in Philippians it says “let this mind”. I wondered if the matter as to our minds is so important - “let this mind”. The apostle felt that that was what was needed, what was in Christ. It is committal; that is, you are committed to this, the thought of the cross and the sufferings.

AMcK Yes: it is, it is the whole bent of our approach, do you think: “let this mind be in you”? Now there may be things that we are minded to do, but this is so much greater: if we have this mind, the mind that is prepared to go down, the mind that is prepared to be emptied and is prepared to be humbled, then that liberates us into His presence.

ARH The matter of your committal comes into Romans 12 too, the renewing of your mind, as if it is a process that you would go through in view of being here for the Lord.

NJH Taking up the cross includes being identified with the reproach of Christ before men, but the cross presented in the epistles is slightly different. “The word of the cross” should affect the people of God. “Let nothing be in the spirit of strife or vain glory, but, in lowliness of mind, each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves” (Phil 2: 3); and you might say, what was used to

accomplish that was obedience “even unto death, and that the death of the cross”. It seems to be how He was affected: what God has done in the cross, reconciled by the cross. It is amongst God’s people.

AMcK Yes, I was particularly thinking about that in relation to the blood of His cross, as to the divine view, God’s view of it, and what has been done there in the divine hand, and perhaps that comes into this scripture in Philippians as well, does it not? Do you think that is why Paul adds “the death of the cross”? He does not just stop with the word death, but adds, “and that the death of the cross”. It is something that was absolutely for God’s pleasure, was it not?

NJH Yes, that is good.

AMcK And I think we are helped in that in the teaching. We would not say this if others had not said it perhaps, but God delighted in Jesus there.

JCG What you are bringing attention to, is what was borne there. The Lord suffered much in the first hours at the hands of men, reproach and hatred and jibes and such like, but during the hours of darkness it was what He went through Himself in the judgment of sin. We would not enter into that, of course. Does the death of the cross involves both? It was so that we might be free and enter into life; and the dying of Jesus is that we might enter into life. “That the life also of Jesus may be manifested”, 2 Cor 4: 10. It is not that the reproach is an end in itself, but there is a positive line to open it up, do you think, because the Lord speaks about that in Luke 9 “be killed, and the third day be raised up”? That is important for us, and it is not just the cross only. Many persons would give testimony as to the cross but life beyond it is very important, is it not?

AMcK And do you think that this is involved in the following Him?

JCG Yes, it is.

AMcK Because He says “and follow me”. That was what He was saying to His disciples. He had already said that to them. He says again to Peter, at the end, “Follow thou me”, John 21: 22. The following seems to be so important; it would be in the area of that life.

APG It says in John 12, “I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me. But this he said signifying by what death he was about to die”, v 32, 33. That is the death of the cross, is it not? There is the public shame, but then He became attractive, a point of attraction to those in whom God was working.

AMcK Yes, “signifying by what death”: that is interesting, and it is in the light of that that we are drawn to Him - “I ... will draw all to me”. We are attracted to Him, would you say, as a result of a deeper impression of what that death was, what that meant to Him, and so how much it might mean to us?

APG These verses in Philippians you read make Him very attractive to us, these downward movements.

AMcK Yes, and what has been said as to the mind, “let this mind be in you” - so we are to allow it in that sense. It does not become an onerous thing, but we are to allow it and that brings us into the area where He went, does it?

RB Is it affecting that He became “obedient unto death”; that was the extent to which His obedience took Him, “and that the death of the cross”? The Lord would have anticipated this as lying at the end of that pathway of committal to the Father’s will. Is that to affect us also along the lines that you are suggesting?

AMcK Yes; say some more about the obedience please.

RB It has been pointed out that the Lord did not become obedient *to* death, but it was the extent to which His obedience took Him. It took Him to that point and that was something that lay at the end of the pathway of the Lord Jesus, and something that He would have anticipated, but it did not turn Him aside from what lay before Him, and I wondered if in taking up our cross in the light of what we see in the Lord’s committal, it should affect us, do you think?

AMcK Yes, His obedience, as you say, went as far as that. I think the distinction you draw is right that He was not obedient *to* it, but even *unto* it. How far His obedience went: it would move us to worship, do you think, if we had a deeper sense of it?

FR This would lead us to an appreciation of the Lord Jesus. There are quite a few scriptures that show that it was men who put Him on the cross, but when you come to Peter's epistle it says, "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. That is the difference: do you think we have to come to Peter's account?

AMcK Yes, I think we do: it is a subject for our affections. To come to what that cross meant in our affections and in our hearts brings us onto the ground that He took and would help us to take up our cross, would it not?

FR It is, "follow me"; that would come next. It has been said that you can only follow someone you love more than yourself. That is really what it comes to.

AMcK Yes, it is what it comes to. So I have to become nothing and then He becomes everything to me.

JCG Do you think at the present time, going forth to Him without the camp bears on the cross? Bearing His reproach would be the same thought, involving that there are certain matters that we are to bear; as the Lord says, "rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes", that is the religious side, is it not? There is much that is against what is of the truth in religious circles, merging with what is of the world, so we have to separate ourselves from that and be clear about persons who are involved in that. Going "forth to him without the camp" (Heb 13: 13) involves suffering of the cross, bearing reproach.

AMcK Yes, and what has been said as to Him being the point of attraction would help us as to going "forth to him". He would be before us and His love and His person is the drawing power that will take us out of the camp, taking up our cross.

JCG And confessing His name, the Christ of God. It is a question of whether our lips are used in that way and not in other ways.

NJH The cross really forms the company. In a broken day you go forth to Him; that is in the recognition of the Lord's rights. But in Colossians, reconciliation is based on the cross, it is His blood there; so the company is really formed by the cross and what is effected there.

AMcK I think that is good: maybe we should go on to Colossians. It is the blood, the blood of the cross. It says “having made peace by the blood of his cross”. Reconciliation is there; that is why I read that verse 20 “by him to reconcile all things to itself”. That is things being reconciled to the fulness. But peace is made; so it seems to me that if we are to take up our cross we do it in the conscious sense of peace with God. Peace has been made. Now that gives me restfulness in my heart, and it helps me to know that all things have been reconciled: everything is done, and that takes me forward on this pathway of reproach in the conscious sense that Christ has done it all and that I have peace with God. Does that help us, do you think?

NJH Yes. In the first scripture it is, “The Christ of God”. It is “having made peace by the blood of his cross - by him ...”: it goes back to the Christ of God, whose blood it was, whose place it was on the cross. It has all been effected for God, for the whole universe: what can be reconciled was reconciled then.

JAB Is this the blessedness of the One who did this, reconciling all? By doing it, He reconciled all things to the fulness, He made peace by the blood of His cross. Do you think that would help us to see that we are to be attracted into this? Denying ourselves seems hard, because we do find it so, and then taking up His cross involves reproach, but following Him is the most blessed and sweet experience that the Christian can have, being near to Him: “Come to me ... Take my yoke upon you”, Matt 11: 28-29. We are not pushed into this, are we? We would be attracted into commitment in this way; because if we try to do it as a duty we will not get very far, will we?

AMcK Scripture speaks of Moses who esteemed “the reproach of the Christ greater riches...”, Heb 11: 26. That would attract us. There is a treasure here in relation to following Jesus. It is a pathway of reproach: we are to realise that, and the exercise of denying ourselves is real, but there is a sweetness about being in His company and we are there in the conscious sense of peace with God, all settled; and that helps us on that pathway.

JAB Every believer knows what it is for his sins to be washed away in Christ's blood but, in this passage, making peace by the blood of the cross is more than that, is it? It is something that is wonderful, to touch in our spirits, and that would, do you think, help us to face up to the very real exercises that you are bringing before us?

AMcK Yes, because God is satisfied in it. He is satisfied in the blood that was shed there, He is satisfied in the One who shed it, but the blood satisfies every requirement that God had and so peace is made.

PAG Does it help us then to see that, if the cross helps us in relation to separation in testimony, it also stands at the entrance to the presence of God? In Ephesians it says that He "might reconcile both in one body to God by the cross, having by it slain the enmity" (chap 2: 16), but then just one verse later it says, "For through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father"; so that the reconciling work of the cross produces a body, a company that can go into the very presence of the Father.

AMcK Yes, and in the conscious sense that everything is reconciled, everything is suited to that presence. It is not that anything else needs to be done or anything needs to be added, but everything is reconciled because of the shedding of that blood and because of what God saw in it. He found His full delight in it, He found His full satisfaction in the shedding of that blood. That is the way in, is it? Mr Darby says, 'The cross is on the road that leads to glory', JND CW vol16 p326). That is your thought, is it?

PAG Very much so, and the cross as we have been taught, meets the requirements of God's holiness, the blood meets the requirements of His righteousness, but it is the outshining of His love as well.

AMcK Yes, it is.

DCB So the blood of His cross brings in an intensity. These two thoughts of righteousness and holiness being brought together at the cross have met the whole intensity of what was there in suffering. This would attract our affections, there is an enjoyment of the peace because of that.

AMcK I think so. I feel measured in my comprehension and my grasp of this. Would that I had a deeper impression of what the blood means to God! It is something for our affections as you say. It is to lay hold of what that meant to God, and the fact is that peace has been made.

TWL We have been taught that reconciliation is for God's sake. Would it help us in taking up the cross to see the feelings of God in this towards us? We sometimes think of taking up the cross as being an onerous thing but really, taking up the cross gives liberty with God because you understand what it is to be reconciled to God for His sake. Does that fit in with this?

AMcK It very much does. That is exactly my thought as to this peace. It is something that I can enjoy, and something that I can come into, but it is for God. That blood was for God, and having made that peace there is now a great answer in the souls of those who have laid hold of the preciousness of the blood of Christ and have come into the good of the death of His cross. So the Lord could say in Luke, "follow me" because there is going to be something that answers to Him in this, is there not?

TWL Yes, exactly. I know the setting is different, but where it speaks about the assembly which God has purchased with the blood of His own, I think it is one of the most distinctive references to the blood in the whole of scripture. To think that God has expended that to purchase me. It is a profound thing, and as you think of the feelings of God in relation to yourself, that is what makes you commit yourself to this. Would that be right?

AMcK Yes; I think it is, and a conscious sense of that therefore takes us forward on this pathway of taking up our cross because what it leads us into is what is for God. There is what is for us, but ultimately it is what is for God.

AMB An aspect too of what you are bringing before us is that the blood of the cross sets us right in our relations together. It is not perhaps at the level exactly of what the blood means for God although as that affects us it would take away any enmity. We have had reference to the scripture in Ephesians where the reconciliation

involves breaking down of the middle wall of enclosure and slaying the enmity, so that an appreciation among believers of the blood of the cross would make for very good relations together, do you think?

AMcK I am sure you are right, and would that we knew more of it, would that we were able to lay hold of that. If we have the same impression and our hearts and our minds filled with the glory of the blood of the cross then how could there be a difference between us?

AMB It is a testing matter: it maybe goes back to denying ourselves. We have to do that first do we, but then that has got something else in view: it is so that life according to God might come into expression in one and another and that quickly would go on to find expression in what is collective, do you think?

AMcK Yes.

JCG I was going to comment on the thought of what God gave up in relation to the life of Christ. The life really was involved in the blood. We speak about that in relation to the Supper. He gave Himself in relation to His body, but He gave His life as represented in the cup, the shedding of His blood, and God found great delight in that life. Yet the life of flesh and blood was given up that reconciliation and peace might be brought in. We should appreciate that more, should we? It would settle a lot of differences if we appreciated God's point of view in what He gave up in view of bringing us into life from the blood of the cross, do you think?

AMcK "The blood of his own": that fills our hearts with what it meant to Him.

JCG It does.

NJH It involves the Father's love, "purchased with the blood of his own". It is the Father's love: it is very profound.

AMcK Yes.

DJH I wondered about the reference our brother has made to the Supper, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood", Luke 22: 20. We are brought into an entirely new order of relationship as a result of it? It is not there stressing the side of the blood of the cross, but I just wondered in relation to what our brother was referring to as to

the Supper whether in that sense there is a simple affectionate way of renewal of our appreciation of the blood from week to week.

AMcK I am sure of that and I feel the need of it. I need to be careful what I say, but I would be very, very reluctant to miss the Supper. I need it personally, and I am sure we all do: we need it from week to week. I think what you say as to relationships, and reaffirming those relationships, is so important when we are surrounded by so much else that will attract us and so much that would draw us in. Week by week reaffirmation of those relationships into which we have been brought reminds us of the peace that has been made so that I can go forward on a Monday morning in the conscious sense of that relationship reaffirmed. I think what you say is helpful.

DJH It is not only our relationships together, but more supremely our relationships with God Himself, and that is our experience as we move on in the service of God, is it?

AMcK Exactly, yes.

WMP What our brother says reminds me of ministry given here by Mr Jim Renton, based on the Supper as nourishment for the believer; and it seems to me that in what has been said about the weekly cycle and what is daily you can see how there is a divine provision for us. So we are not left here exactly to our own resources, are we?

AMcK No: far from it; how paltry those resources are. If we try to do any of these things in our own strength or our own ability it will come to nothing. "Let this mind be in you" – we have been reminded of that and that is where it starts, is it not? He is taking that mind on, a mind that is willing to go down and willing to be emptied in relation to everything that is around us and that brings us into the area where we can follow Him.

PAG I am struck by the fact that we think of the Lord's sacrifice, but the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have all operated sacrificially in order that there might be glory. We have spoken of "the blood of his own", that is the blood of God's own Son: "He who, yea, has not spared his own Son", Rom 8: 32. And then we have thought much of the Lord's sacrifice, but the Spirit is spoken of in the

Acts as being poured out. The service of divine Persons towards us sacrificially should become a real impetus in our soul to provide something in return. We may, as you say, feel it is paltry, but we should give it anyway.

AMcK Yes, and maybe that brings us to “the word of the cross”, because what it says there is that to those of us that are saved it is God’s power. Now, you have spoken of the pouring out of the Spirit: that is real power for us, real power and real strength to take this pathway and to go this way. It says “to them that perish foolishness, but to us that are saved it is God’s power”. That is a real rock for us, do you think, and the outpouring, as you said, of the sacrificial work of divine Persons; that is where the power comes from, is it?

PAG And again, just struck by what you say, “to us that are saved it is God’s power”, not it was God’s power.

AMcK Yes, Exactly.

PAG Of course, it is the basis on which we were saved, the work of Christ on the cross and all that flowed from that, but it is God’s power to us in a present way; so it is present salvation.

AMcK I think so: it is just on my heart, beloved brethren, as to the importance of the gospel, the importance of the preaching. The King James Version has this as “the preaching of the cross”, and how much we need the preaching. We are saved and we give thanks to God for that and probably most if not all of responsible age in this company in this room know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. What a tremendous thing that is; but we still need the preaching; we need it week by week, and it is a present power to sustain us in our pathway, do you think?

JAB So do we learn things by hearing the word of the cross that we do not learn anywhere else. I have been thinking of the malefactor: Jesus walked out of that city gate carrying His cross and two others were led with Him to Golgotha. One of them learned the word of the cross: he said, “this man has done nothing amiss” and, “Remember me, Lord”, Luke 23: 41. To the other one it was made vain and that is a sobering thing, because what you have been bringing before us in this reading is the word of the cross. We have been hearing about

it: the question is what is going to be the response in me to the word of the cross? It would be a terrible thing if it was made vain, if I just went away without actually having taken in anything that we have been speaking about.

AMcK Yes, I appreciate that. This scripture speaks of “them that perish”, and that is a sobering thought: it should be sobering for those of us that are saved that there are those that perish.

JAB I have often thought of the other malefactor: he had the same chance; he listened to Jesus speaking to the women who were there, hearing Him say things to them and he was dismissive of Him; but the other one got it. We are to get what the word of the cross means, and I trust that we all will as a result of our conversation, do you think?

AMcK And what he is drawn to is “this man”: “this man has done nothing amiss”. Thoughts of himself had fallen away. He says, “Remember me, Lord”: he has a desire to just be remembered; he desires for nothing more than that, and the Lord brings him in right into the centre of His thoughts, “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise”. So he is brought to “this man”, and that seems to me to be so important. It is the Christ of God: the greatness of the Person is what underlies this, and without that we shall not move forward but with it we have what we need to follow Him, do you think?

TWL The note the “**word** of the cross” is very interesting: it is *logos*. The word of the cross is a very positive thing because it brings in the intimate mind and feelings of God in relation to the cross. I was thinking in relation to what has been said as to the malefactor; he understood who was there, but he understood the mind of God and the feelings of God in the One that was there. Is that what is particularly attractive about the word of the cross?

AMcK I think it is: you mean that he had the view as to the kingdom, “Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom”.

TWL Yes, and Christ being the perfect expression of the mind and heart of God: that is what he saw, that is what he heard, that is what we hear by the word of the cross. Would that be right?

AMcK Yes, so the exercise is, are we going to lay hold of the word of the cross, are we going to lay hold of this great power that we have that is available to us? It is not something that we can look at, like you can look at a picture on the wall and appreciate it; this is something to be laid hold of and to make our own because it says, “to us that are saved it is God’s power”. Now that is available to us.

TWL Yes, and the importance of it; Mr Darby said, ‘the cross ... is the centre of the history of eternity’, Synopsis vol 3 p360. Anything that there will ever be for God, and anything that will ever be for us, is found there. It starts there for God and for us. That is the importance for all of us of what you are bringing out today, is it?

NJH Does the word of the cross involve authority?

AMcK I am sure it does: say some more.

NJH Well, it “is to them that perish foolishness”: they would accept vain repetition but the word of the cross involves the authority of the cross, does it not? It is God’s power to those that are saved. It is towards you; the whole thing is towards you as you take the matter up, the word of the cross.

AMcK Yes, it carries with it its own authority. “It is God’s power”; it is present power; it is present authority and we find strength and we find liberty, do you think, as we submit to it? As we submit to that authority, and as we take it on for ourselves we will be sustained in it.

JCG That would be involved in the preaching, would it? Paul writes, “we preach Christ crucified”, 1 Cor 1: 23. The word of the cross involves everything that has flowed out from the work of the cross, involving, as Peter stood up to preach, remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2: 38. The power is there. The Lord speaks about that in John 7 at the feast, “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this he said concerning the Spirit” which “was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified” v 38-39. But the word of the cross involves the flowing out of all the blessing, do you think, and we come into the benefit of that?

AMcK Yes, everything in that sense originates from the cross, it all comes from that point.

DJH “Us that are saved”: it is very wide? It is not just saved from our sins: it is very wide, “us that are saved”. All depends upon the word of the cross, does it? It sets us free from everything that would hold us here and detain us and hinder us from entering into the present enjoyment of the purpose of God. I was just thinking of the way it puts it here “to us that are saved it is God’s power”, power of God to bring us into all this, which will be eternal blessings.

AMcK Yes, I appreciate what you say. So in the exercise we are taking up, it is practical salvation for us. There is soul salvation, but this is practical salvation: it will sustain us and it will keep us for Him whilst we are here in the world, do you think?

DJH It is what we are saved for rather than what we are saved from, do you think?

AMcK Very good.

Glasgow

4th October 2014

Key to initials:

A M Brown, Grangemouth; D C Brown, Edinburgh; J A Brown, Grangemouth; R Brown, Grangemouth; R J Campbell, Glasgow; T J Campbell, Glasgow; A P Grant, Dundee; J C Gray, Grangemouth; P A Gray, Grangemouth; A R Henry, Glasgow; N J Henry, Glasgow; D J Hutson, Edinburgh; T W Lock, Edinburgh; A McKay, Witney; N McKay, Glasgow; F Roe, Glasgow; J Newberry, Glasgow; W M Patterson, Glasgow

KEEPING THE CHARGE

David C Brown

2 Chronicles 13: 10-12

These are the words of the king, Abijah, king of Judah, spoken to the men of Israel. You could say it was a broken day because Israel was not as it had been, the twelve tribes together. God had allowed what had come in in Jeroboam, who is fighting against Abijah here. God had allowed that in His government, so that things were not as they should have been in their unity. And not only that, there is an attack against the people of Judah and one that has great force. You will find in verse 3 that Abijah had only four hundred thousand men and Jeroboam had twice that number; “chosen men, mighty men of valour”, it says of them. Maybe sometimes we feel the testimony is being attacked in some way or other, and we may look at what is around, and what is before us and say, ‘That is mightier than we are. How can we cope? How can we answer?’. Abijah is the king, and he sets out the fact that the kingdom was given to the house of David, “to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt”, v 5. What he brings out in this speech gives a challenge to the men of Israel, and then he makes what we could say are various claims here, and they are very wonderful claims. We can look at ourselves in our present time and say, ‘Well, some of this surrounding circumstance might seem to apply to us, things somewhat broken, things somewhat under attack, things not as they once were, and that in God’s dealings’, but it would be for us to be very, very careful about making any claim. Abijah can make a claim; we would have to be very careful. But it is a matter, I would say, to challenge every one of us as to whether we are having, and taking on, the responsibilities that are set out in these verses.

In Israel there were different classes. The priests and the Levites and so on were different persons. In Christianity, for each one of us, it is our responsibility to take on the service that lies to our hands and, distinctly, that priesthood is something that belongs to every true believer who has the Spirit; but that does not mean that every true believer that has the Spirit is priestly. That would be a

question for us. So I would just raise a challenge with myself and with each one of us. Here are persons who can say, "Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken him". How important, in all that might surround, in all that might affect us, that we should be those who are committed in this way and able to say, "Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken him". Elsewhere in this book you get the word of God in somewhat similar circumstances of attack: "Jehovah is with you while ye are with him" (2 Chron 15: 2); so He would give assurance as persons are with Him, but our exercise would be to be able to say in truth and in heart, "Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken him". We would be those who would cling to the divine standard.

Abijah is making a contrast here with Jeroboam's regime where anyone could be a priest. They would be a priest whether they had the moral qualifications or not, and what were they priests to? They were priests to what was false in these golden calves. But here he can say of what is going on in Israel, "the priests that serve Jehovah are the sons of Aaron"; that is, that they are persons who are the kindred of Christ, and that would be a question for us to have some knowledge and experience as taking up priestliness as those who are priests in the right line and in the right order, those who are of the kindred of Christ.

You will remember that later in the Scriptures, there came a time when there were those who could not prove their genealogy (Ezra 2: 62); they could not show that they belonged properly to the priestly family. That is not a simple matter of genealogy with us; it is a matter of moral qualification. Let us be sure that we serve, and serve in that way as the sons of Aaron, those who are acting according to the true line.

There are two sides to priesthood. One thing that qualifies both is that the priest's first thought is for God. That feature is in the two sides of his priesthood; one is towards God, because the priest is there to serve God; the priest is there to offer the sacrifices; the priest is there to offer the praises to God. But the priest is also there where needed to look into the needs and exercises, to know the testimony, to know the position; and in all these things, his first

thought is for God. So that would be a question and a challenge for me and for each one of us. Is God the One who is *first* in our thoughts?

Then the Levites, and, again, there was a special class here in the old dispensation, but now everyone has a responsibility as a Levite, and there was a wide range of responsibilities in the wilderness. But this is not exactly what there is in the wilderness; this is that all the service should be maintained. The service of God has to be maintained. The priests would take that up, but the Levites are doing all that is necessary to maintain it, to supply it, to serve it, and they are “at their work”; so that would be a question for each one of us. Are we at our work in doing what is needed to support the testimony, doing what is needed, that what is priestly should be properly served? All the time the service of God is in view. All the time they have in mind what there should be for His heart, and their desire and their exercise is to foster that. So that it can go on to what they do towards God: “and they burn to Jehovah every morning and every evening burnt-offerings and sweet incense”. How wonderful that they could make this claim that they were maintaining day by day, morning and evening, something that was for the heart and the delight of God, something of the magnificence and the glory of Christ as the burnt-offering and what there is in the sweet incense, what only God can appreciate of the glory and the majesty, what there is in Christ. Whose responsibility is that now? Whose responsibility is it? It is *your* responsibility, my responsibility. It is your responsibility that there should be what there is for the heart of God, for His pleasure and for His delight, morning and evening, maintained, Christ in His glory, Christ in His wonder as the One satisfying the heart of God, being constantly brought before Him.

But then not only is there what there is in the sacrifice, but “the loaves also are set in order upon the pure table”. That is the view that the priests have of the people of God. That is their view, the saints set out according to the divine view and order of them. They look at them in this way. They maintain the order in their view. They see the people of God according to the purpose of God and, particularly in view of the attack of the enemy, they cling to and keep

that view of the people of God. We need to be helped, I believe, to be maintained and kept in a constant view of the people of God as they are “in order upon the pure table”. All depends on Christ. They are “chosen” in Christ “before the world’s foundation” (Eph 1: 4), everything maintained for God in Him, yet “set in order” according to the divine view so that God can say of them, even in the wilderness, “a people that shall dwell alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations”, Num 23: 9. There they are in their beauty *in His view*. We need help - I need help - to be maintained in constant view of the people of God in the glory and the dignity that belongs to them according to divine purpose, and especially in the face of the challenge such as there is here.

Then “the candlestick of gold with its lamps to burn every evening”: think of the way in which Christ in all His glory and purity comes before us! You think of what we had in the hymn:

As the Man of all Thy counsels,
Who the universe will fill
(Hymn 211).

That refers to the One who is so suited to the heart of God, the One who is so delightful in His beauty and His charm, and the light of the candlestick is the light of Christ. How important it is to see the glory and beauty of Christ in the light of Christ, not a human light, nor a human invention. People have their various views of their own of Christ; none of them will be to His glory. But He was to be seen in the light of the glory of what God sees in Him; Christ is to be seen in the light of Christ. But that needs to be maintained. The lamps have to be burning. The lamps require, as we know, the pure olive oil, and it needs to be beaten. Who is responsible for the olive oil to be there? You are! I am! It is the responsibility of each one of us to be continuing to bring in what there is of the Spirit that would give the light and bring in what there is for the light and the glory of Christ.

But not only was there that need, there was also the need, and it was a priestly duty, to keep these lamps dressed, to keep them ready, Ex 27: 21. Perhaps that brings a need for ourselves, to be looking to ourselves, that what is extraneous is removed so there is what burns in a pure light. It speaks of the “pure table” here; but the

emphasis in Exodus on purity is in the candlestick (Ex 39: 37), and the light is going to burn in its purity as that is maintained in the dressing of the light.

So he says, “for we keep the charge of Jehovah our God”. What a wonderful charge it is that has been entrusted to us all! To maintain, to keep it, to stand to it is a matter of being committed to it: “we keep the charge of Jehovah our God”. So he can say “we have God with us at our head”. There He is; He is the One who is our Head, the One who is maintaining things. “And his priests, and the loud-sounding trumpets to sound an alarm against you”. That is the trumpets would set out what there is in the divine view, in the divine principle. Matters are to be set out in clarity, the trumpet giving a certain sound.

Well, these are the exercises. Abijah can be seen to make these claims, claims to maintain these. In our day of brokenness we need to be careful about making any claims, but I trust we are encouraged to take these charges up. And I would simply say, if I did not see something of this element here and continued, I would not be here.

May the Lord bless the word!

Edinburgh

3rd February 2015

THE LORD JESUS COMING

David J Hutson

1 Corinthians 11: 26-28

Acts 20: 7 (to “morrow”)

Hebrews 10: 23-25, 37-39

1 John 2: 28

I was encouraged by what our brother has brought before us to bring forward an impression which I believe brings what he has said into practical expression among us. “For as often as ye shall eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye announce the death of the Lord, until he come”. I think we are to be increasingly regulated by the fact of the coming of the Lord, the imminence of it. I was thinking, in pondering this during the day, as to the word “until he come”. We might say, in a sense, at the Supper we have His coming in three different aspects. Primarily, I understand from the teaching, “until he come” relates to His coming in glory, His return. We are here in the scene of His rejection, acknowledging His rights. As our brother has said, they were acknowledging the rights of God at that time, and we acknowledge the rights of the Lord Jesus in the time of His absence, but in view of the time when those rights are to be universally acclaimed, “until he come”, and we shall come with Him. Before that time He will come *for us*, so there is not only His coming *with us*, but His coming *for us*, when He comes to claim all His own “and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then *we*, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air”, 1 Thess 4: 16, 17. Then the blessed experience we have at the Supper, as He says elsewhere: “I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you”, John 14: 18. He comes *to us* at the Supper. So there is His coming with us; His coming for us; and His coming to us.

These things would be kept before us livingly from week to week at the Supper. They would have a bearing on how we approach the Supper, as it says: “So that whosoever shall eat the bread, or drink the cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty in respect of the body and of the blood of the Lord”. It is a very serious

matter. But then it says, “let a man prove himself”, so that we can be free in relation to that occasion as we prove ourselves. There would be a review of the past week, and we would review as to how we have been occupied, whether it has been in relation to what relates to the interests and rights of the Lord Jesus here or whether we have just been indulging ourselves in something which is completely outside the range of what is according to His pleasure.

Then in Acts it says, “And the first day of the week, we being assembled to break bread”. It is striking that it is related there to “the first day of the week”. So, if there is a backward look in judging ourselves in view of being fit for the Supper and what it means as answering to the heart of the Lord Jesus in His absence, and being available under His hand in view of the service of God, there is also the forward look. It is “the first day of the week”, and so it is to govern us as we go through the week. It is not without significance that it says here, “the first day of the week, we being assembled to break bread”. So that each week we have the Lord’s supper, and what occupies us then and the basis on which we break bread together in holy and happy fellowship is to be maintained through the week. As I say, there is what leads up to the Supper, but then there is what flows out of the Supper so that it is a central matter with us and relating to the fact that the Lord Himself comes to us at that time.

So I read in Hebrews because I suggest that there we have the reference again to the coming of the Lord. We are to “hold fast the confession of the hope unwavering, (for he is faithful who has promised) and let us consider one another for provoking to love and good works”. That is how we would be in relation to one another. But then it says, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom is with some; but encouraging one another, and by so much the more as ye see the day drawing near”. How wonderful that is, “as ye see the day drawing near”! How bright is the prospect before us, beloved, that glorious day! It does not say which day, but I would suggest it would be that day to which we are looking forward, the day of His appearing, the day when He manifests Himself and we shall have been taken to be with Him for ever, when our pathway

here, and the testimony have been concluded, from that point of view. That day is drawing near: "as ye see the day drawing near". It must be so, chronologically, but more than that because of the indications that the Lord Himself would give as coming in among us; and as we see the course of things around us in the world, we "see the day drawing near". And so we are to be not neglectful of "the assembling of ourselves together" so that we may prove the blessedness of His coming, as He says, "I will not leave you orphans" - or 'comfortless' (KJV) - "I am coming to you". So we would be preparing for it.

And then in John, I believe we can apply this as having some reference to it: "And now, children, abide in him". I understand Mr Darby makes a reference to "abide in him" meaning 'to hold fast in dependence and communion', Collected Writings vol 25 p279. What a word that is! He says, "And now, children, abide in him". Hold fast in dependence and communion! What a word that is for us! I must say, beloved brethren, I am very much searched by the word. I am very much searched myself as to it. I am only able to speak of it in power if in any way having its application to myself: "abide in him" - hold fast in dependence and communion - "that if he be manifested we may have boldness, and not be put to shame from before him at his coming", that we might be ready for His coming at any time, not only when He comes in glory. We have thought of that too, when He comes as manifesting Himself at the Supper. Think of what it says in Corinthians, that "many among you are weak and infirm" (1 Cor 11: 30), and because of the conditions that were there, they were "put to shame", in that sense, "from before him at his coming" if one may apply it in that way. But we are to be abiding in Him, holding fast in dependence and communion, "that if he be manifested we may have boldness", we may have liberty in relation to that blessed and precious occasion when He manifests Himself in the breaking of bread.

This is all very searching, beloved. I felt encouraged to bring this forward following what our brother has said as to the way those conditions were maintained in a day when the enemy was active, and the enemy is active at the present time. We feel it for ourselves

that the enemy is active in relation to that which is precious to the heart of Christ, to rob what is for the pleasure of our Lord Jesus, and so I thought it suitable, as under the Lord, to bring forward these scriptures to see how we are to meet these things by keeping near to the Lord, holding fast in dependence and communion, being ready for His coming when He comes in among us and being governed by the fact of His coming in our conduct during the week and in view of His coming to us again.

Well, may the Lord help us! One feels stumbling a little in speaking of these things, but I trust they may just add to what has been said, and that this may have its present application to us in view of what is here increasingly for the heart of the Lord Jesus as of the character of the assembly which He has loved and given Himself for. Amen.

Edinburgh

3rd February 2015

ENCOURAGEMENT

Sam C Lock

Deuteronomy 3: 28

2 Chronicles 35: 1, 2

1 Samuel 30: 6

1 Thessalonians 4: 17, 18

Like our dear brother who has gone before, I felt led to say something in relation to the matter of encouragement. I had an impression about the thought of encouragement and it was on my mind that it is not necessarily entirely about happiness. Encouragement does have an element of joy and happiness attached to it, but I think encouragement also has an element of prompting and strengthening attached to it. Indeed, in Scripture, strength and encouragement are often put together. I was reading this passage in Deuteronomy in relation to Moses and he was not permitted to go into the land, or to lead the people into the land, but in this verse it says, "But charge Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land which thou shalt see"; Joshua was to be charged and encouraged and strengthened. I seek to speak carefully: sometimes we can see things that we would like to do, but it is not God's mind that we be the ones that do them. Indeed, God had Joshua in mind for this task at this point, and he was to be encouraged and strengthened. It says, "for he shall go over before this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land which thou shalt see". That was quite a responsibility, and Moses was to "encourage him and strengthen him". I think we can apply that to our day. Our brother mentioned earlier about responsibilities that we have, and sometimes they may seem quite daunting, but we are to be encouraged. I think we are to encourage one another, to prompt one another, to strengthen one another, strengthen each other in our resolve, strengthen each other in our commitment. We are to be strengthened in our faith. It is not that we would be able to do that alone; I think it would be God who is able to strengthen us in our faith, but we are able to encourage one

another and strengthen one another for the tasks that lie before each of us, by referring to our Lord, and referring to the teaching God has given us.

I had a similar impression in connection with Josiah also. It was particularly verse 2 that struck me: "And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of Jehovah". I think sometimes we need encouragement to take up our responsibilities. We need encouragement to ensure that we each as individuals are doing all that we can for our God. Our brother mentioned what a priest is. It says here, "And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of Jehovah". We each have responsibilities here in this scene. I can speak as a young one, and speak from my own experience, that the Lord showed me quite distinctly one day that I am now no longer a young child. Now I am a young man, and as a result there are things He has in mind that I should be doing, responsibilities I should be taking up. It was not in any way a reprimand, but I do feel the Lord was encouraging me to take up my responsibilities "of the house of Jehovah". I also remember a brother saying to me once, 'A locality does not just run on its own. A locality needs saints to take up responsibility'. I would be very, very careful to suggest that someone is not doing all that they can, but it is a question we must ask ourselves: 'Is God getting my full committal?'. I think that is something that can only be completely or accurately ascertained between ourselves and God. Well, we are to encourage one another "to the service of the house of Jehovah". God has things that He needs us to do. God has things that He would like to show us, things that He would like us to be in the gain of, things that He would like us to be able to show to others, and all of that is done through taking up our responsibilities, and by encouraging and prompting one another to be taking up our responsibilities always, and ensuring that God is getting His portion from each of us.

When we seek to encourage one another, prompt one another, and help one another to be in the gain of these things, I believe that is when the enemy seeks to come in. That is why I read about David, because David at this point in time was greatly distressed. It

says his own people were contemplating stoning him. You may say these should be the very people that should be encouraging him, but this was not the case and “David was greatly distressed”; sometimes we can be distressed by our circumstances. The enemy has borne witness to man, and he has worked with the minds of men for many thousands of years. He is very good at what he does in sowing seeds of doubt and discouragement, seeking to disrupt what is for the pleasure of God. And David was distressed here. But it says he “strengthened himself in Jehovah his God”. I think as well as being able to encourage one another, we can always be like David here and turn to God for encouragement. As I said, encouragement and strength go together quite frequently in Scripture. God has all the answers. He has things He needs us to do. I was struck by that in our reading last week when Peter was to walk across the water to meet the Lord, Matthew 14: 28. Speaking quite practically, it is a phenomenally remarkable thing to be asked to walk on water, and yet Peter does it, but when he looked away from the Lord and saw the wind and the waves, he began to doubt. What struck me at that point is that sometimes when the Lord has asked us to do something, or when the Lord shows us something that we need to do, we worry about how we will go about the task, what is going to happen, how will it all work out. Again I speak very carefully, but sometimes it is not our place to know how or what is going to happen. It is simply the matter that God has laid something out before us and He needs us to do it. “David strengthened himself in Jehovah his God”. God would show us that if He has something He needs us to do, He would not just abandon us to our fears, to our doubts; He would show us that He is with us. He would encourage us if we have doubts, doubts in our pathway, doubts about our commitment. He would encourage us and He would show us that He is with us, that He is supporting us, and He would strengthen us. That is the greatest source of encouragement you can possibly find, strength given from the very Being that created the universe, as well as His desire to have us in such a blessed relationship of dependence as this with Himself.

That is why I finally read in Thessalonians. I know it might be a different context here, but it says, “to meet the Lord in the air; and

thus we shall be always with the Lord". That is what we have to look forward to. Our brother also alluded to the scripture, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you", John 14: 18. That was something else that was on my mind, that the Lord is coming and in the meantime while we are here, He needs us to be taking up our tasks and responsibilities; He expects us to be doing this. He has a right to expect us to be looking after the testimony, to be looking after the things that He has in mind for us to do. He has the right to expect that. This final verse is: "So encourage one another with these words". I find it very testing to encourage somebody. Sometimes I do not feel that I have the words or the knowledge to be able to encourage somebody, but if we have the desire to help a fellow-believer, a fellow-saint, in whatever exercise they may be carrying and whatever task the Lord has set before them, I believe the Lord would surely help us do that. "So encourage one another with these words". We are able to point to our Lord; and we have the Scriptures, and we have access to the Father and, with access to all these things, we do not have to worry about what we have to say. We just have to think about what God would have us say. God would give us the words that would enable us to encourage one another in order that the results would be for His glory, for the glory of the Lord, and that the results would be for the enjoyment of divine Persons. I was speaking about that recently with a brother in relation to the enjoyment that divine Persons get from us, and how we often concentrate on the blessings that we have, and it is not wrong to do that. Indeed, it is a very great thing: we have such great blessings that have been bestowed upon us. But it is quite something to contemplate what divine Persons can enjoy from our service and committal. I was encouraged to speak about this that we can encourage one another; we can help strengthen one another in the tasks that are before us, and prompt each other to take up our responsibilities. I think the enemy is making great efforts these days to disrupt what is for God and His enjoyment, but there is power and resource available in order for us to be able to combat it.

May the Lord bless the word!

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