

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 111

June 2016

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THE BASKET SET DOWN BEFORE THE ALTAR

Deuteronomy 25: 17-19; 26: 1-11

WKC The passage of scripture here is a very beautiful picture of what God intended for Israel and, I suppose, we can all say, a type of what God intends for us. I was particularly impressed by verse 4 of chapter 26, "And the priest shall take the basket out of thy hand". It is a very wonderful thought as to what each of us can bring. I wondered first when I read this passage if the basket would be collective but I notice more than once in ministry it is spoken about as being an individual basket. To that extent we can say we are all like baskets, out of which something can be offered. Moses never really had the privilege of enjoying this experience as we can in what it typifies. I suppose the fulness of it is linked with all that we are brought into, all the blessings in the "land flowing with milk and honey". There is ample provision for every one of us and there is abundance of fruit. The fruit, of course, would be Christ, the first-fruits, Christ in resurrection, Christ out of death. You may say every impression that each of us can contain and bring is brought. It is a wonderful contemplation. I suppose the occasion we have come from, the breaking of bread, is an occasion where we could gather things up. Things are gathered up here. Each of them brought their basket and they brought it down, and they gave it to the priest, and he put it "before" (not 'on') "the altar".

TWL He brings what is in the basket, and it involves the goodness of God. It is interesting that there is no blood attached to what is brought to offer.

WKC It is "before the altar"; it is not 'on the altar'. Often throughout these books of Moses, they place offerings on the altar; there is offering in the sacrifice, but this is "before the altar"; but there is no blood involved in it. Think of it actually as these baskets were brought: it would be a beautiful sight, a great collection. Mr Darby speaks in the hymn as to

Varied fruits of richest flavour
Offers still the Tree divine;

One itself, the same for ever,
Every precious fruit is Thine (Hymn 50).

This chapter is like that.

TWL He brings it as having taken possession of the land that God has given him. It is His fruit, and that is one of the things you come to the service of God with, some fruit of what God has placed you in the good of.

JTB Amalek was the first enemy. “For the hand is on the throne of Jah; Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation”, Exod 17: 16. He speaks about blotting out Amalek, v 14. I just wondered if, applying it to ourselves, we can blot out Amalek as we enter into the service of God, and bring our offering as producing the fruit of the land.

WKC That is why I read the end of that chapter first because the whole thing is cleared out of the way. When we come to enjoy what we have just enjoyed, the glorious work has been done; there is nothing left to be done. It was Samuel that “hewed Agag in pieces”, 1 Sam 15: 33. He was the king of Amalek, was he not? The whole thing was cleared out of the way so that the people could come into the enjoyment of it.

JTB 1 Corinthians 10: 4 refers to “a spiritual rock which followed them: (now the rock was the Christ;)”, as if, for the very weakest that lagged behind, there was the Rock; we can take refuge in that. That is what Rephidim gives us, the first battle. Jehovah fought their battles. We are really brought to have confidence in God that He will make a way through for us. “Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens” seems to be connecting us with a heavenly side of things which the land connotes.

WKC I wondered, too, if the fact that Amalek has been dealt with puts our feet on solid rock. I wondered if there is a sense of a people who have been “taken ... into favour in the Beloved” (Eph 1: 6) when we come to our portion with the Father. We are taken into “waters to swim in”, Ezek 47: 5. You may say, for a moment, our feet can come off the ground.

JTB The first reference is that the priest takes the basket; then the man himself sets the basket down; he becomes the basket, and what is in his heart outpours in the service of God.

WKC That is open for every one of us. Think of what is arising at the occasion we have just come from! It is not just from brothers; it is from every one of us; sisters have impressions that come into their hearts as we sing these hymns. They have impressions exactly the same as we brothers, do they not? The whole thing arises as one.

DWS It says somewhere else, “all is of thee, and of that which is from thy hand have we given thee”, 1 Chron 29: 14. There is something of that in this scripture. It is from “the land that Jehovah thy God giveth thee” that the first-fruits come. It is what we have been given, in Christ, that we can present, nothing of ourselves.

WKC These are indigenous to the land; not fruits that they brought from the wilderness. These would be fruits that were gathered in the land. You may say the fact that they had the basket was divine excess. There was plenty for every one to put in his basket.

DWS It is what God had prepared in His love for His own people.

WKC That is why I thought there might be a link with Ephesians 1, Paul breaking out in his heart there, as to every blessing that God has given. I thought reading Ephesians 1 would be a bit like “waters to swim in”. It is hard to know where to stop and start in Ephesians 1. It is “every spiritual blessing”, v 3.

JDG It says in verse 2, “thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the ground”. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground (Gen 4: 3), but it was not acceptable. Does this show the scope that results from the death of Christ?

WKC In the light of this I thought of that passage, “He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied”, Isa 53: 11. You may say this is the “satisfied” chapter. We have now reached the satisfied area.

JDG It is sanctified persons we have in this section.

DHM One of the hymns says:

Out of Thy death has sprung

A wondrous living throng:
All, all to Thee belong,
And in Thee live. (Hymn 152)

We see that here, do we not?

WKC It is wonderful fruit! These references in the chapter go on to the kind of land that it is, “flowing with milk and honey”. We are meant to be the baskets, and I was thinking of baskets literally. Maybe the basket would be one of those woven baskets. I always go back to the thought of what was woven when Mr Meek gave a word many years ago in Kirkcaldy about the warp and the woof. The warp is the vertical lines, which may suggest God’s principles, God’s ways with us. He said interwoven into the warp is the woof which is like our experience with God. Many in this room know what I am talking about in that because it is how God deals with us. If it was only our experience, there would not be much of a basket. If it was only these horizontal threads in our lives, the enemy would have an inroad, but if it is interwoven into God’s ways with us, it becomes something very strong. It is like a piece of material. It is like something that when the pressure comes; is it the vertical lines that are giving strength or the horizontal lines? It is the material that is giving us strength. Thus the fabric of a Christian is very beautiful, and I wondered if that was linked with the basket: a durable object that can contain something.

TWL What God has made has ability. It has function but it has ability so that it can bring. And one other thing: only God could have done that; only God does.

DCB You mentioned that Moses did not enjoy this. Thinking of that in its principle, rather than his personal failure, everyone who is in the land is there as attracted into it in following the ark. That is why they have come there. Authority, as we see it represented in Moses, is important, and the history of Moses is gone over, but there is something that is entered into entirely on the basis of being drawn in affection, and that is where God gets His answer in the first-fruits.

WKC There is a hymn that says,

Our title is that light to share (Hymn 88).

Applying this to ourselves, we all have title to it. We may not enjoy it. As has been said, a man may have a house and have title to it, but he may not live in it. Applying this to ourselves, we all have title to it. I thought about Moses; I almost read the end of Deuteronomy because he was shown the whole land. He went up the mountain, and God showed the land to him. There was a touch of divine grace in that. The whole land was shown him; his feet were never in it, but he had an appreciation of it.

DCB That is the land inhabited. It is quite a wonderful picture, if you think of it, that all over that land there were persons travelling to the altar to present what they had gathered up from that year's produce, one after another, coming together. It is a beautiful picture of what there is as we gather at the Supper and what flows from it. No doubt individuals would enjoy what was collective when gathered, but each one was coming with their own touch, their own impression, to present.

WKC It will be eternal, will it not? I always like Mr Darby's hymn:

Every view of Him unfolding
Wakes fresh bursts of joyful praise! (Hymn 83)

You may say that is every basket coming, time and time again, but we can enjoy that. The occasion we have just come from is a tremendous opportunity to enjoy these wonderful things.

GB I was wondering about Mary. She had "a pound of ointment of pure nard of great price", John 12: 3. Was it something that she had gathered up?

WKC The effect of that was that the odour filled the house. I often wonder about that passage in the light of how the Lord comes in amongst us at the Supper. Often the very atmosphere in the room changes as the Lord comes in. It says, "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment". There is a change when the Lord comes in and fills the room with His atmosphere, and the whole thing moves forward. It is a very great privilege that we can have this from week to week.

DJH Every basket would be of different capacity but capacity according to the one who brought it; what had gone into it has been

acquired through the knowledge of God and experience. It is wonderful really to think of it. That entered into our being together this morning, did it not? Each one had been formed in different experience, but all contributing in the same way and all in relation to the altar.

WKC I wonder if it is a good thing as we look around our local company to see the exercises that one and another has had. It is linked with what we were talking about in the baskets being woven. We have all come through different exercises. God has dealt with us in different ways, resulting in what is of Christ being used in the service of God, which will continue eternally.

JDG Is there a difference between the basket and the “treasure in earthen vessels” 2 Cor 4: 7?

WKC I do not know. That is an interesting enquiry. Could you help me?

JDG I was thinking of what you have been saying: I wondered if the basket represents something that goes through; it is eternal; so it must be different from the “treasure in earthen vessels”. It must relate to what is spiritual. Testimonially, we have a treasure in earthen vessels, but when it comes to the service of God, what is operating is linked to new creation.

WKC I often think of that passage, “the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes”, 1 Pet 1: 7. There is something that is proven and that comes through.

JDG It says in Jeremiah that God made “another vessel”, Jer 18: 4. The first one had been marred, but He made another vessel. He uses experiences to form us; so there is something that is not related to man after the flesh. It is “treasure in earthen vessels”.

WKC I like the passage in Jeremiah about the potter’s wheel. The forming of the vessels is in the hand of the Potter, the Lord Himself, and all divine resource is in the formation and it is something that is going to shine eternally. It is durable.

AB I was just thinking that. This fruit literally would perish but if we bring anything in our baskets to God, it would never be lost.

WKC Yes, actually this fruit would perish, but there is something that will never perish in the Christian. The passage I have just referred to says “much more precious than of gold”. It is formed by the divine hand.

RCT I was trying to count up the times “Jehovah thy God” comes into this passage. It is about twelve times in this section. Is that source? What we have, we have been given.

WKC These are very fine references to “Jehovah thy God”; it is all going Godward. I was just looking at 1 Chronicles 29, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer willingly after this manner? for all is of thee, and of that which is from thy hand have we given thee”. There has been a reference to that in the reading already. In that chapter, which is somewhat similar to this chapter, David was coming to a point where everything was Godward; he was praising God. He had had a lot of experience, but everything now was towards God Himself in 1 Chronicles 29. I suppose in this chapter it is in view that the saints should be enjoying the land and worshipping Him. Mr Coates said that this is the only chapter in Deuteronomy where worship comes in, vol 5 p317. It comes in in verse 10, “And thou shalt set it down before Jehovah thy God, and worship before Jehovah thy God”. It is the only chapter in Deuteronomy where worship comes in; you can understand that because if we are bringing this to Jehovah, as has been said, and it is all Godward, it can only but be worship. What else can we do?

JTB I thought that. When you come to worship, it is the point where the basket becomes the person himself. There is no mention of a priest in that verse; so you are really brought into a scene where we can do nothing else but adore. I just wondered about the reference in Ephesians to “being rooted and founded in love”, chap 3: 17. That is how the produce is produced from the land, do you think? It takes you back into the realm of divine purpose.

WKC There is a winding up in this chapter; we come to the point of worship. How often Paul comes through to a doxology which is worship. It is often by the sense of mercy as in Romans 11, and other chapters. He is talking about God’s ways and he breaks out. This chapter here is different. This is worship as a result of

everything that has been given to God. I thought it linked with what we can enjoy in the Father's presence.

JTB "Filled even to all the fulness of God" (Eph 3: 19) is the product of full baskets, is it not?

DJH The note 'a' refers to this question of the land as 'the soil'. I wondered if that would link with what has been said as to the root. It seems as though something deep has been secured in that way.

WKC Something that can continue bearing fruit, do you mean? If we have good roots, there will be something for God continually, do you think? I do not know if this would just be once, but we have the privilege that we can bring it often, can we not?

DJH Something fresh week by week, but coming from the same source, through our experience but all with a view to something for "Jehovah thy God".

WKC Mr Darby says in his hymn that we referred to earlier:

Fresh and ever new are yielded (Hymn 50).

It gives the whole picture of it, does it not?

GB It says in John when the disciples came together on the second occasion they "were again within" (chap 20: 26), so that there was a complete company at that second time. The expression conveys quite a bit, does it not, the way of life?

WKC Do you mean the enjoyment of it collectively? I suppose, as we assemble together, we can have that experience. We "are again within" each week. That is a fine thought.

RCT It is why we have to remember, "A perishing Aramaean was my father" and all that line. Is there really a line of things that we have to leave behind, but it is to be productive?

WKC I do not know. I wondered about this and, of course, we are in the right company for enquiry. It really is a good thing to remember where we came from. We were "aliens ... and strangers", Eph 2: 12. I thought about Ephesians in this regard. In chapter 1 Paul is breaking out completely, and in the first ten verses of chapter 2; then he comes to a point in chapter 2 where he says, "Wherefore

remember", v 11. You may say the brakes go on for a moment: "Wherefore remember". He goes on to say that we were "without God in the world" (v 12); we had no hope; we were far from God. I do not know if that links with this. I do not know if that is a right passage to bring in. What do others think?

TWL It is not so much to bring in our failure but the God who brought us in. I was thinking about this in relation to the idea of what we have been saying about worship. It is the glory of the God who did it that brings forth the worship. It is not so much what was done but who did it, and the most remarkable thing is he brings the basket, and the word says, "Jehovah thy God will choose to cause his name to dwell there". This is the God whom the heavens cannot contain, and yet He causes His Name to dwell there. It is *that* God who moved *that* way that causes worship and praise. That is why you bring it because you have come to know *that* God.

WKC Do you think that is what led Paul frequently in the New Testament to these doxologies? It all runs on to that. In that doxology I have referred to in Romans 11, he comes to the point where he says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord ...?", v 34. The thing was too great to contain it.

TWL You made reference to Ephesians. It is a remarkable that Paul brings them there to understand that they do not have right to any of this, and yet God gives us it all. The first two chapters of Ephesians are God's movements for God's sake in relation to the persons of His purpose; that God loved me enough to bring me in.

WKC He has given us title to sonship. Galatians is a really testing book at times, but there is one passage where he says, "because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts", chap 4: 6. What he is saying is that whatever other problems you have, you have title to it and that is a glorious thing. Every one of us here has title to it.

TWL Because God gave it to us.

JDG Was Jacob the "perishing Aramaean" when he thought he had lost all? - "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin!" (Gen 42: 36) - until he got a sight of what God had in

mind when he made his journey and went down into Egypt. He left the “perishing Aramaean” as coming from the God who said, “I am God, the God of thy father” (Gen 46: 3), alluding to Christ in resurrection and glory.

WKC Jacob was a wonderful, interesting type in the Old Testament. I like reading about Jacob because I find so many of the problems he had in myself; yet he comes through to some glorious things. God deals with him and God works with him and he comes to wonderful points in his history.

DHM I was thinking in line with what you were bringing out there that they would never forget Egypt and what had happened, but they were not occupied with it. They were occupied with the Deliverer, and not exactly what they had been delivered from, but what they had been delivered to.

WKC And yet, as you read through this book, and you come to the end of it, and then go on to Joshua, you find that Joshua starts off with quite an urgency to get them over. Just to use everyday words, you can talk about the thing long enough; you need to get into it. That was Joshua. Joshua wanted to get them over there. He wanted to get them in it, and I suppose that is what we want for every one of us. There is so much that we speak about often, that we speak about in the sense that they are not there, but there are some wonderful things that are there, positive things.

AB It is what God wants us to enjoy as well. God has spoken about this from Exodus. He described it as “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod 3: 8), but then we are to enjoy it. God would look forward to His own enjoyment, would He not?

WKC God’s “inheritance in the saints”, Eph 1: 18. You may say it is all in Christ, but, as you say, when the land is spoken of once or twice, it goes back over the whole history of who it had been promised to. To Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, because God’s promises stand, and God is never going to let us down. I suppose the Jews will come into it, but it is written for our enjoyment now. How much of Deuteronomy is that.

DCB The history here is the history of God's operations with the people. There is no reference to their numerous failures. God has brought them through from the beginning. Is it helpful to have in our view too how God has acted in all these different pressures? He has operated that there should be persons brought into the enjoyment of His land.

WKC If you go back to the very first verses of Deuteronomy, it is spoken of as an eleven days' journey (v 2), right at the very beginning, as if God says, 'There is where you can go'. And we are now in chapter 26, and there had been a lot of history, and there has been a lot of history with us, but God's promises stand true. He is never, ever going to let us down. God is faithful. How faithful He has been with every one of us!

DCB The basket is formed in the wilderness; what is within us is the product of the land.

WKC You mean the basket refers to each of us in all our experiences; I have never quite thought of that. God works and, as we are amenable to God, there is something that is formed. It is durable; it is like what we were saying; the vessel is the work of God. The vessel in Jeremiah was just a lump of clay, but God's hand was on it and then it would go through the firing as these things do. And there might be paint, some form of varnish, and it shines, has its own lustre. What has been formed in the saints will shine eternally, but it is a vessel that can contain something, and we have the ability to contain something. No matter how young or old we are, it is a question of what we can contain because we all have different capacities.

SCL I was quite struck with the beginning of verse 5; after the basket is brought before the priest, it says, "And thou shalt speak and say before Jehovah thy God". One might ask why we would have the morning meeting every single week when we do the same thing? But God wants to hear from each one of us our impressions and thoughts. We read later on what they were to say from their own experiences, their own knowledge of God. It is not a simple case of standing up and reciting the right scriptures when we give

praise and give thanks to God. It is what we as persons have come to know and understand and have gathered up of God ourselves.

WKC It would also link with having liberty before God Himself. It is really sonship; it is enjoyment of sonship. You can have free intercourse with God Himself, but is that the result of divine formation, something of Christ? It is Christ raised and that is what the first-fruits are, Christ in resurrection. All our enjoyment is the result of that.

JTB Where is the altar in the land? I do not think there are any specifications given for an altar in the land until we come to the temple, but it seems to me it links with your reference to Ephesians 1, "in whom we have redemption through his blood", and it draws your attention centrally to Christ Himself as really the great Operator in the great system, the scene of bliss, in which the Father's affections are known.

WKC That is good, but I ask the question: would it be the same altar as the altar that the blood was put on?

JTB I think it is left that it is a reference to the Person. The idea is to draw attention to the Person, is that right? Therefore you have in Ephesians chapter 1 "we have redemption through his blood". It is the Person; that is the point.

WKC "Into favour".

RCT In recovery days they began with the altar.

JTB That is right. "They set the altar on its base", Ezra 3: 3. The Person becomes the focal point and, therefore, the reference to the inheritance, which was mentioned before. Everything has been secured on that basis. We have the "perishing Aramaean", or as note 'b' says, 'A Syrian in danger of perishing' - where would we be without redemption? It all comes back to that blessed Person who has secured everything, brought back everything for God.

WKC Does it bring out God's mercy towards us?

TWL Is it determined by, "Jehovah thy God will choose to cause his name to dwell there"? I was thinking in relation to all of this what we have is a land to take possession of. It is in the same land where

God rests. They never owned the land; they could not sell it; they could not rent it or do any of those things; but they could possess it. It belongs to God, but we are allowed to possess it. It is the place where God rests; it is the place where we offer. It is, "Jehovah thy God will choose to cause his name to dwell there" in relation to the question about the altar. It is the Person that is involved in that choosing. Would that be right?

WKC If we only had the Scriptures like this, and did not have the New Testament and Paul's writings, we would not fully be able to understand this. When you go through all that Paul writes in these chapters in Colossians and Ephesians and Philippians and other books, you can see how Paul is bringing you into a whole area where God is dwelling.

TWL It helps that we would not forget what was historical, and that is right, but the soul of a Christian would take a firm account of what God has made it; if you do you realise how fit you are for this land. That is not being presumptuous; it is a statement of fact that God has made you fit for this land. You do not go in and possess it as being an alien; you are going to go in and possess it as belonging there because God made you fit for that place.

WKC Sometimes it is a good thing to look back on our lives and look back on how God has been faithful with us. Mr Darby's hymn says:

In the desert God will teach thee
What the God that thou hast found (Hymn 76).

You may say there was experience before this. They came to the point here where Amalek is dealt with, that terrible foe cleared out of the way. Christ has wrought everything for us, so that we can go in. As we go into the Father's presence on Lord's day morning we may remember all the glorious work that Christ has wrought, but very quickly we are taken to the enjoyment of sonship. We get to a point where we can just enjoy where we are, just enjoy everything that has been wrought. Would that be right?

TWL Absolutely. When we say that we touch eternity at the Supper, in the service of God, when we say we touch what is eternal, that

does not exactly occupy us with things that happened in time; it occupies us with things that were according to the purpose of God before time ever existed, and our place there. That is a wonderful thing. He did that and operated through Christ. He operates on the ground of redemption, but the purpose of God is not limited by the failures of time. When you are touching what is there in the service of God, you are touching what God had in purpose before time. Would that be right?

DCB I wondered whether this chapter, while it is a wonderful type that you have been using, also shows us, therefore, the limitations. We are in the dispensation where we can actually leave the history behind when responding in the service of God.

WKC There was still history to go through here; they were still on the way. This was a wonderful forward look, God giving them a taste for it, but we can come into the fulness of it. Was there not an old man who said he could go in at any time? We can enjoy it at any time. We definitely enjoyed it today, but we can enjoy it tomorrow.

DWS I was reflecting on the fact that the land had not changed from the time the spies were sent to look it out. I think they all said the same thing of the land: "it floweth with milk and honey" (Num 13: 27), and it is still the same, but the people had changed, and are now ready to go in.

WKC Joshua and Caleb came back and said, it is "a very, very good land", Num 14: 7. From that experience, they knew it was a very good land, "a land flowing with milk and honey". We often talk about that, but it must have been a tremendously fertile and beautiful land. Milk is nourishment, and honey is the activity of the bees; these two things cannot be there on their own. If there is milk, there have to be other things; there has to be grass and everything else; and for honey there has to be flowers and everything else. There has to be a whole area of goodness, and God has brought us into that.

DWS It makes you think of the greatness of the work that God has done that there should be this supply for His people, this supply that is there for us to enjoy.

TWL Milk and honey would suggest life sustained by life. There is no death attached to them. Death attached to an offering in meat, but milk and honey is life sustained by life; that is the land.

Edinburgh

31st January 2016

Key To Initials

(Edinburgh unless shown): -

G Bailey; A Brown, Grangemouth; D C Brown; J T Brown; A Buchan, Kirkcaldy; W K Clark, Kirkcaldy; J D Gray; D J Hutson; S C Lock; T W Lock; D H Marshall; D W Scougal; R C Trotter

THE WORK OF THE LORD

David J Wright

Ecclesiastes 9: 10

2 Timothy 2: 21

Matthew 13: 51, 52; 25: 14-30

Luke 10: 1, 2

I desire, with the Lord's help, to stimulate us all to have our part in the work of the Lord. This verse in Ecclesiastes is very striking; "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do with thy might". That raises the exercise as to availability; whatever comes to your hand, you do it with your might. The work of the Lord is not to be carried out in a negligent way. It is important that your motive in taking up the work of the Lord is love for the Lord Jesus and love for His people. If that motive is in place, the Lord will give you grace in what comes to your hand. Many things may be done out of sight of which no one knows, but all is taken account of by the Lord. The exercise would be as to availability.

Isaiah says, "Here am I; send me", chap 6: 8. In 2 Timothy this verse brings out the necessary underlying moral state to be a vessel fit for the Master's use. "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work". You will notice that is an individual action; "If therefore **one** shall have purified himself". It goes on to what is collective in pursuing "righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart"; but this is an individual action. In a way it proves your genealogy. It is a path of separation here from a world that crucified your Saviour and mine - separating from vessels to dishonour; and in doing so there is an underlying moral state in which you are useable under the Lord's hand.

I would like to concentrate on the householder who had a treasure. He brings things out of that treasure, "things new and old". The first question would be, 'How did he get that treasure?'. I believe it involves a living, healthy link with Christ, cultivated in a

secret way. We often speak about secret history with God and that secret history is known only between you and God. The effects of it come out. It involves prayer, it involves daily intercourse with the Lord; I am tested by these things. It involves giving place to the Spirit, and giving time to read the Scriptures. The importance of the Scriptures; they stand as one whole. The exhortation that Paul gave to Timothy was to, "Have an outline of sound words", 2 Tim 1: 13. Particularly those who are younger, look at the good teaching that has come down to us in the recovery. All these things will contribute to the treasure.

The next thing is, where is the sphere in which that treasure is to come out? It is to come out in the Christian circle. I am challenged sometimes as to what contribution I can make. There were two persons on their way to Emmaüs; they loved the Lord but they were downcast. The Lord drew alongside of them and said, "What discourses are these which pass between you as ye walk, and are downcast?". Things had not worked out the way they had thought they were going to work out and they lost heart. It is an experience I have had myself. "And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself", Luke 24: 27. They would have been Old Testament scriptures; if you like, they were something of the old treasure. He goes along the path with them, turns in with them, and He broke the bread among them, v 29, 30. Immediately there was some touch which quickened them; they had seen Him do it before. Then it says, "he disappeared from them ... And rising up the same hour, they returned to Jerusalem", v 31, 33. There is no reference to say the Lord told them to do that. There was an instinct in them; they go back. To where? The Christian circle.

As finding the eleven together, they came with a fresh, a new impression, something new in their treasure that they had not had before. They departed despondent and downcast; they returned with their heart burning in them. They had something to contribute to that circle. Everyone there would have said the Lord is risen; what hope! All these experiences add to the value of the Christian circle. The Holy Spirit is here indwelling the assembly, and something of

these things can be known even in a day of public breakdown and ruin. They are very precious things.

When Peter was about to put off his earthly tabernacle he said to the saints that he wanted “to stir you up”, 2 Pet 1: 13. He brought out something old from his treasury: it was impressions of the Mount of Transfiguration; things that he had carried through his whole life, which had become of antique value. We all know that antiques increase in their value. What is antiquated is worthless but an antique increases in its value, and Peter says he would stir them up. Peter was experienced enough to know that the only thing which would stir the saints up was some impression of Christ. It is interesting that he speaks about “the excellent glory”, v 17. He speaks about the “holy mountain”, v 18. All these positive things remained in his soul and had grown. It is also interesting to note that there is no mention of three tabernacles, one for the Lord Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elias, Matt 17: 4. He had been left with an impression of no one but Jesus alone. It has been left in the canon of Scripture for us to be stirred up, and that One is soon coming again.

At the end of Malachi it says, “they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another”, chap 3: 16. What do you think they were talking about? I think Luke 2 would give us a clue; Simeon and Anna would no doubt have been two persons like those referred to in Malachi that feared the Lord. They were waiting for their Messiah. They had been in the temple each day; one day their Messiah came as a Babe. Simeon took Him up in his arms and blessed Him, v 28. What it says of Anna is interesting. It says that she “spoke of him to all those who waited for redemption in Jerusalem”, v 38. That gives you a clue to what that little company at the end of Malachi were occupied with: they spoke of Him. There is a book of ministry we have, given by our brother Norman Meek, who many here would remember and love. The title of that book is ‘Raising the Level’. I would suggest that this line brings out the treasure new and old in relation to Christ; it is what will raise the level.

We are gathered together today, and we enjoy speaking about Christ to one another: what is our conversation together outside the

meeting? Is it about Christ? He is the One we will be occupied with eternally. He is the One who can hold us now.

What holds Thy people now while here on earth
Is what Thou art in all Thy wondrous worth.
(Hymn 229)

What I have in mind as to having your part in the work of the Lord leaves nobody out; it does not leave the sisters out; it does not leave the young people out. I would soberly say that we could do more in our table talk indoors as being occupied with the Lord Jesus.

One of the old worthies said that he spoke to the Lord Jesus about the saints and to the saints about the Lord Jesus. I believe this would raise the level, and I think it would increase our valuation not only of the Lord Jesus Himself, but of one another, to see the work of God in one another, the treasure that is there which can be brought out, "things new and old".

In Matthew 25 you have a situation where the Lord went away. It is like the present dispensation; the Lord Jesus has gone away. It is a great comfort that, subsequent to His ascension on high and His glorification, the Holy Spirit came and is still here. The Lord had given these persons something of His substance before He left, one five talents, one, two and one, one. We have all been given a measure of faith. God in His sovereignty may have worked in you and me, and you can thank God for any work of God you can take account of, not only in yourself but in one another. The great thing in this scripture was that the talents were to come into circulation; they were to be trafficked with. Is this what happens in your local assembly and mine? If it is, it makes it a very attractive place. If a brother brings in an impression of Christ that you had not thought of before, that becomes your impression. It enriches the Christian circle. That is the way it works practically. It will enhance the Lord Jesus in your affections. It will increase your value of the brother or the sister that passed that impression on to you. These things are living and they are real because of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Things are becoming enriched all the time. Are we having our full part in that? You say you know Mr So-and-so will be there tonight; he always has something to bring in; but what about

you - and young persons as well? No one is to elect themselves out of this. We can all be contributors to the enrichment of the Christian circle.

There came a time in this parable when the Lord returned. We are looking for that. Can He witness and observe the increase in the work of God in you and me? Can He observe the fact that the Holy Spirit has a free way in your heart, so that you are formed in what you may speak of; and so that there is an increase in moral power? There is no power in speaking about something that you clearly do not display in your walk and ways here. We ought to know how to behave ourselves in the house of God. The Lord returns here and the one who had five talents had gained five other talents. He gets the word, "Well, good and faithful bondman, thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter into the joy of thy Lord". Have you ever thought about what it means to "enter into the joy of thy Lord"? I think the Lord Jesus finds great joy in seeing the increase of His work in one and another. The master left those men with five talents and two talents and they doubled it. They put it into circulation. We are not talking about theories here. We are talking about experience. I think the more we enter into it the more our valuation of the Lord Jesus, and of the Christian circle, and of one another will be. It raises the level.

There was one who did not put anything into circulation. I do not want to speak so much about him; only to learn from it. He just put his talent away and waited for His Lord to return; a "wicked and slothful bondman". My desire is that each of us might be stimulated to have part in the work of the Lord whatever that may be, whatever comes to your hand. It is not a question of volunteering, but it is a question of availability and suitability, and the Lord will be pleased to take you up. As bringing things into circulation, it works the other way as well: you receive something that you had not thought of before and that becomes part of your treasury.

That entire treasury will go through; we have the "treasure in earthen vessels", 2 Cor 4: 7. We take account of an old saint, the strength gone physically, and yet there is a treasure in the earthen vessel and that treasure will go through. As we said earlier, nothing

that is unsuitable to heaven will go into heaven. The treasure that you may have is what will go through and it is a reality to know it, as the Spirit is free.

It says in Luke 10, "after these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place where he himself was about to come". There were the twelve who were already workmen and He sends seventy in addition. That would not make any difference to the power: the power is in the Holy Spirit. Any limitations to that power are on our side. Sending out seventy others brings in variety but brings to my mind the greatness of what the assembly is - "star differs from star in glory", 1 Cor 15: 41. Each star has some impression of Christ. They are sent out two and two; I do not think they chose each other. The Lord put two and two together, and they worked together. Can you work with your local brother? Can I? The work is to go on. Paul said to Timothy, "do the work of an evangelist", 2 Tim 4: 5. Timothy is not called an evangelist as far as I know in Scripture; very few are. He is told to do the work of one. The work is to go on. It will take the whole assembly to reflect what is seen in one Man; impressions of Christ in the assembly, a vessel that is suitable to Him in every way; Christ says that it is Himself all over again. Let us value increasingly the truth of the assembly brought to us by the apostle Paul, the teaching of which has largely been turned away from in Christendom; I desire it may be more precious to us.

"The harvest indeed is great, but the workmen few; supplicate therefore the Lord of the harvest that he may send out workmen into his harvest". Would you or I be ready to go? He says the harvest is great. In this area, there is a call for preachers, and some labour at it very heartily, and we thank God for it; but I would seek to stimulate a desire that if it comes to your hand, if you get asked to take on that service in a simple way, do it. Do it with your might; be available to the Lord. It will enrich the Christian circle. Your impression of the Lord Jesus will be enriched with speaking about Him in the gospel, and your valuation of the Christian circle will become more precious. May what has been said stimulate us to be available and to be

suitable; that involves my moral state to have part in a circle of things in which we find our life and our joy.

May God bless the word.

London

16th January 2016

THE ROCK

David Martin

Isaiah 26: 4

Psalms 71:1-5

Psalms 81:16

I would like to speak as to the Rock. We see stability in the Rock in these scriptures; we can receive salvation from the Rock and also receive satisfaction.

The first scripture speaks of “the rock of ages”; a term we often use and a phrase in a hymn we often sing. We can see the need for stability and certainty particularly at the present time. We know that there are times which we pass through where circumstances shake us, whether it is persons taken suddenly to be with their Saviour, or other specific circumstances in our own lives. There are times when, in a particular way, we feel the need of stability, the need of a rock.

If we look at man’s world, we could say there has never been a more unstable time. Consider the relationships between the nations; think of the uprising of terrorism and the awful effects of it; even consider the things that man sees as progress. We are in an age where man is developing technology far beyond his ability to control; the robotic age they are beginning to call it. The effects will be profound; man is consciously building for himself an unstable world.

The scriptures that we will talk through this afternoon contrast for us man’s world with the One who is absolutely stable. How can we say that? By bringing in the One who is “the rock of ages”, the One who alone was “in the beginning”, John 1: 1. He is the One who has observed the actions of man throughout the history of time, the One who repented that He had made man, and the One who today, as we can read of in the Scriptures, even “frustrateth the counsel of the nations”, Ps 33: 10. He is the One who is above all this instability and observes the actions of man. He will even allow things to witness to us the instability and insecurity of a world in man’s hands. He is the God who continues. He is the God who in years to come will still be the same, even through the terrible things

that will transpire on the face of the earth after believers are taken. We can read in the Revelation of the things that will happen in a profound degree of detail, and they *will* happen. How do we know? Because He is unchangeable, He remains the same and He is eternal. We think of that God who, when all has been overthrown that is opposed to Him, will eternally remain the same. He is the God of love. He will have an answer in myriads of persons whom He has secured through His only begotten Son, and they will be His, the answer to His perfect love. Why? Because He remains the same; He is that God of love. He is the One who provided the answer for sin, and He is the One who, having overthrown sin and its power, can bind Satan and his angels. Having removed all that is contrary, He will have a universe of bliss. We have to do in the gospel with “the rock of ages”, unchangeable, ever the same and eternal.

He is the One who we can read of in the Psalms. I was struck here by the references to salvation, particularly verse 3,

Be to me a rock of habitation,
whereunto I may continually resort:
thou hast given commandment to save me;
for thou art my rock and my fortress.

What an affecting word that is:

thou hast given commandment to save me.

Consider the actions of the Lord Jesus, and His movements coming into manhood. We think of the desires of God that it should be so. Think of the obedience of the Lord Jesus as coming into this scene in order to save you, and that pathway of the Lord Jesus here. Those words were uttered at the beginning of Matthew’s gospel, “thou shalt call his name Jesus, for *he* shall save his people from their sins”, Matt 1: 21. You see in the certainty of that statement the purpose of God that the Lord Jesus should come into this world as a Man, walk amongst men, and provide the very basis of salvation. There was no doubt from God’s side. Those who heard those words in faith would have no doubt themselves that this One would provide salvation; “the rock of our salvation”, Ps 95: 1.

Let us contemplate for a moment the features of the Rock seen in the Lord Jesus when He was here amongst men. I am often struck by the time, as He came out into public service, when they were seeking to cast Him over the precipice. For me this is an illustration of the perfection and certainty of who the Lord Jesus was as Man. As they sought to do their worst to the Lord Jesus, who was in a position of apparent weakness, He passed through the midst of the opposition, He passed through the midst of those who sought to remove Him. This was the One who in the face of everything that was changing, everything that was marked by evil and hatred was able to pass through the midst of that very power. You might say He would have appeared untouched by the effects of it, but we know His feelings in relation to what was evil and sinful.

We think of the Lord Jesus as He was by the well at Sychar, John 4, the contrast of One so lowly, “wearied with the way he had come” (v 6), and yet able and present to deal with the needs of that woman in a way that none other could. There was absolute certainty in the way that He would deal with this woman’s needs, because of who He was. He knew all about her; He knew her needs and her weaknesses. He knew the resources that she needed, and He was able to provide it all; there was no question as to the purposes and the desires, the actions and outcomes of what the Lord Jesus did there because He was the Rock. He was “wearied with the way he had come”, a Man feeling, more so than we feel, conditions of humanity. He was there and He was able to provide because He was the Saviour Lord.

We think of the Lord Jesus as He was in Gethsemane. The opposition moved against Him; Satan did His worst, and yet we see the lowliness of the Lord Jesus as He was there alone, the intensity of His feelings as a man, and Satan working forcefully against Him; yet He remained as the Rock: “if it be possible let this cup pass from me” (Matt 26: 39), the feelings of a perfect Man facing what it was to be made sin. He was to be made sin; and yet it was sin that was behind the intense opposition against Him. He faced what was before Him there; He faced it alone, and He remains as a Rock. God has “given commandment to save me”. There could be no

alteration, of course, no other way. This was God's desire, God's plan, and the Lord Jesus in His absolute and perfect obedience fulfilled it; He remained as the Rock. We think of Him later on having that cross laid upon Him. We see the foolishness of His accusers: here was One who had all power under His hand, and yet was caused to bear His cross. Yet still He remained the same. Think of Him being nailed to the cross, man in his hatred doing his worst, driving those nails through His hands and His feet. The Lord Jesus remained silent, He uttered not a word of protest. There was nothing in what He said, nothing in what He did that was like any reaction that you or I might have had; He remained absolutely the same, unchangeable; commanded to save us.

We think of the Lord Jesus upon the cross and of those hours when darkness came upon the face of the earth (Matt 27: 45), and He was made sin. God Himself forsook Him. Again we see another aspect of the command that He fulfilled. The full weight of sin being borne by Him for His own, yet He remained the same, the Rock, unchangeable. He was the One alone who was able to bear that burden. Was there any other who could withstand those forces of evil? No. Was there any other who was morally perfect and therefore able to be made the perfect sacrifice for sin? No, there was not. The Rock was unique, "the rock of ages". We think of persons looking on who would have wondered at Him. Their own world so unstable, their own world so uncertain, their own lives marked by sin and suffering; and yet they looked at the One who was unchangeable and perfect and full of love for them. The eyes of so many were blind to His Person. He remained there upon that cross in love for them. In those hours of darkness, as He went into the very depth of what it was to be made sin, He suffered in ways which we will never fathom. We so easily become accustomed to sin and the effects of it. He knew it not, but was made sin, and yet through all that He remained unchanged, the Rock. We read of Him committing His spirit to the Father; the perfect obedience and sacrifice culminating there on the cross as He entered into death itself to complete the work.

Dear friend, how wonderful that we can speak with absolute certainty and, too, with joy in our own hearts as to “the rock of ages”; “the rock of our salvation”. We can make this very personal to ourselves because all I have spoken of He did for those who trust in Him.

The psalmist speaks of it in a very personal way -

thou hast given commandment to save me;
for thou art my rock and my fortress.

I would ask as you look upon that cross, as you see what the Lord Jesus has done, whether *you* see Him as unchangeable and perfect, the answer to sin itself? I would ask if you are able to say those acts of love were for you? How wonderful, if you are able to answer to those words, that the commandment was given for Him to save *you*. It is true, in the ways of God, as He looked upon you in your sin and your need, He gave commandment that the One who is the Rock should be smitten for you, for your salvation. The psalm gives us what I might call a personal instruction from God, giving the basis for your sins to be removed forever.

We would all be quite impressed if we had a letter from someone very important. If we get an instruction at work from a senior manager, or if the head teacher speaks to us at school, we feel something of their importance; there is something special about it. Here we are speaking of the Creator God who gave commandment that the sacrifice should be made for your personal and eternal salvation, for the absolute removal of your sins, that you should have to do with Him eternally. There is no greater act or commandment that has ever been given. The psalmist made it personal for himself; he saw that it was for him. Have you owned it for yourself; not just acknowledging the general outgoing of the glad tidings to millions of persons across the world, but that God gave this commandment in relation to *you*? This is personal, *your* Rock, *your* salvation.

We know that, having died upon the cross, His side was pierced and blood and water came out, John 19: 34. How that displays the One who was unchangeable; even in death His blood

was able to flow forth. The power and the witness to salvation was there; there was an act beyond the natural power of any man, an act of “the rock of ages”. How wondrous that we have to do with the Rock; your Rock.

It speaks to us here of a habitation, and in that too I see the salvation that we have in the Rock; “Be to me a rock of habitation”. Consider this, that the Lord Jesus, as He was upon the cross, had that call from the malefactor next to him, “Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom”. The answer was, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”, Luke 23: 42, 43. That malefactor had seen the witness of the glory of the One, “the rock of ages”. He made it personal, and he made the Lord his own. He claimed the Rock for himself; he acknowledged the glory of the Person, and he had the desire to have a habitation with Him. How wonderful! Moments later he himself went into death, not death to suffer judgment, not death at a distance from God, not consigned to a place which has been set for the judgment of those who turn their backs upon God; no, he entered into the place where Christ was. He entered into, “a place by me”, Exod 33: 21. How personal that God should have marked out a place for that malefactor to enter into and to enter into it that day. It was for eternity. There would be no need for correction, no need for any development from man’s side or from God’s side. Why? Because God had granted him that place. It is true and perfect for the ages; and Christ is there, His work complete. “Today thou shalt be with me in paradise”; the malefactor had his habitation of glory with Christ immediately and forever.

How powerful is the work of the Saviour with whom we have to do. I would ask you where your habitation is. We are here for a little time and the psalmist speaks here of his confidence and hope in Jehovah from his youth. The psalmist had proved what God was in every circumstance, and he had his habitation in the rock, in the fortress, and in the strong tower. We pass through a world that is changing. There are subtle and unsubtle influences that we face as we pass through school and work, and that we see all around us, especially through technology and communication. There is much that Satan is doing to bombard us with information to influence the

way we think. The psalmist here found his habitation in Jehovah from his youth. That is the place that he would resort to and reside in to get away from the things of this world. He could reside in a place of safety, stay in a place characterised by the Rock who is immoveable, “the rock of ages” who is unchanged forever, the One who was able and prepared to suffer and to die for you. The psalmist found safety and comfort and certainty in the environment where Jesus was. When the forces against you are strong and powerful, there is a habitation, with Christ, which is a shelter from the storm.

The hymn we know as ‘Rock of Ages’ (No 396), was written by somebody who found himself in a storm. God showed him a cleft in the rock, and he remained safe. There may be times when uncertainties come and you feel there is a storm; it may be something you feel uncomfortable about that you have heard or a situation you are in. The Rock is always there; the Rock never changes. How wonderful and powerful the habitation that is available to you right now in the Rock, “the rock of ages”.

Psalms 81 would show that not only is the Rock available as our salvation and our habitation, but too we can draw satisfaction from it. The world will do its best to tell you that satisfaction can only be derived from things in the world. There is, however, perfect satisfaction and supply for the journey from the Rock. We have the reference in the psalm,

with the honey out of the rock would I have satisfied thee.

We know naturally that honey provides sweetness. Honey too, in biblical times, was used for medication and healing and it also provides us with energy. These are three things which we would find as we rest in the habitation of “the rock of ages” - sweetness, healing and energy.

First of all, we should taste the sweetness of the One who is the Rock. Think of those in the Scriptures who took the time to rest in the presence of Jesus. What did they see? They saw One who was lowly, One who demonstrated love for them. The woman that we referred to at the well found that Jesus understood her and was

able to converse with her about her circumstances. He knew what she had need of and the nourishment she was lacking; they had a very personal, simple and profound conversation.

There were others too who spoke to the Lord and saw there was something in the spirit of this Person which was different. The centurion saw that; "Truly this man was Son of God", Mark 15: 39. There were those who wondered at His words of wisdom. There was that demonstration of love as He touched the leper, Mark 1: 41. There was the spitting and touching the eyes of the one who could not see, and providing sight, Mark 8: 23. In your circumstances, as you bring them before the Lord Jesus, you too can taste the sweetness of having to do with a Man who not only understands, but has the answer; not just One who sympathises, but One who provides answers; not only One who you can talk to about your past, but One who absolutely knows the future. What greater sense could there be of being in a habitation with One who you know is unchangeable; the One who provides the sweetness of a friend, who understands all and can provide all.

In our pathways here there are often times when healing is needed, when there are times of sorrow. There are times when we just do not quite know which way to turn or what the next chapter will look like. There are those who we know of today who are suffering in those ways. We think too, across the face of the earth, of the immense number of persons who are suffering, in a sense unjustly, in what they are passing through. We think of persons who are in prison because of their faith; we think of young children growing up in war-torn lands; we think of persons who are under governments where there is intense oppression. Whilst we feel the injustice and sorrow of all those in these circumstances, what is available to each is a habitation, the sweetness of a relationship with Christ and the healing power that He can pour in. I feel tested by speaking of this as we can identify with these things only to a limited degree. We feel them naturally; we feel them in our affections for others. We are all tested, however, in measure in our own pathways. We can have the certainty, as the psalmist did, that in those circumstances there can be provided that which is perfect for the healing of the faithful saint.

How wonderful the provision and resource of the One with whom we have to do.

We are also brought to know the power of the Holy Spirit, One who the Father has given to indwell those who believe, in order that the reality of this habitation and our relationship with “the rock of ages” may be real and living. How can it be that honey can come from a rock? How can it be that in other scriptures the water can flow forth from the rock? It is because of the perfect power of God in the Holy Spirit. The resource from God’s side is not constrained by anything that is natural; He is the provider of all. Whilst He provides stability in the absolute sense, as the Rock, it does not constrain Him from providing nourishment through the free flowing water. God is perfect in all His ways.

Finally, the honey would provide energy. I would ask whether you are partaking of all the resources that He would provide for you. In your circumstances of need, does receiving healing and strength also provide you with the energy to serve, the energy to be here in testimony? We are tested by this; I am tested by it. The time that is left here is short. There are those that we meet with at school, at work, and those we commute with, who may not have found that habitation for themselves: if they never find the certainty of that Rock, the judgment that will be theirs is terrible. We referred to it earlier; I will not dwell on it but it says elsewhere that from the rock came forth fire, Judg 6: 21. God is able and will absolutely act in judgment over all that is contrary to Him.

In relation to my testimony, is my energy focused where it should be? Am I partaking of the resources that will give me focus and energy to serve Christ as He would have me do? Am I growing in my understanding of the greatness of all that we have in the Scriptures, all that we are able to enter into in our understanding of divine Persons and all that is to come? Where is my energy and focus in entering into them? Do you have dependence upon the Holy Spirit to understand them, dependence upon the Holy Spirit and the power of the Lord Jesus to put that understanding into expression in your pathway, and to form you in substance? These things are testing and challenging; which is why God provides the

honey. He did not provide it just that there should be an enjoyable and easy time. He provided it because it is needed, needed by us, but also needed for the testimony. Therefore, each of us must look to see if we are partaking of it and using it.

I leave these words with us. We are passing through a world that is unstable and uncertain and increasingly so. Man is doing his utmost to improve it, but making it more unstable as he does. We will pass through a world in our own personal circumstances where sorrows and trials come in. Through all of this you must have to do with the Rock, the One who is absolutely and perfectly stable. He is eternal; He has commanded and provided salvation. He has provided a habitation and in that habitation He has given the resources of sweetness and appreciation of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus. He has provided everything that is required for salvation and for healing, and He has provided us with the resource for energy to pursue in the testimony. Everything from God's side is perfect and strong. May we take something from this to the end that our pathway may be one which is found to be in the habitation of Christ, based upon "the rock of ages", and marked by energy to serve Him; in some reflection of the perfect and glorious way He has served us.

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

Colchester

29th November 2015

WORTHINESS

Jim M Macfarlane

Revelation 4: 11; 5: 1-10, 12

Luke 7: 1-10

The hymn with which we began the meeting on Lord's day morning (Hymn 232), at the gathering to remember the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread, spoke of His worth, and it was a theme which was taken up by our brother as he gave thanks for the emblems. It was one which featured later in the service of God, that the Lord Jesus is the worthy One. My mind turned to Revelation 5. This, of course, refers to a future time. The Lord Jesus has been received up in glory; He is ascended up above all heavens that He might fill all things, and this is all because of the worth of His Person and the worth of His accomplishments. He has set Himself down at the right hand of the Father in heaven, a place of unique distinction, giving a measure of the worth of the Lord Jesus according to heaven's measure of Him; and He is seated there and will remain there until He moves to take His own throne, and from that throne He will administer the earth. What we read in Revelation 5 refers not to the final establishment of His reign on the earth, but to what will unfold on the earth, under His direction, so that His reign can be established. The earth will profit from that in a thousand years of blessing, and God's ways in respect of man on the earth will be fully justified.

But there are things that have to take place during this period of the arrangement of things on the earth to allow His reign to be established and that is, I think, what we read about in Revelation 5. There is a book to be opened and it is sealed with seven seals. A significant part of Revelation relates to these seals being opened, one by one, and the consequences for the earth of their opening. Now, a seal is something which, in the simple application of things, requires strength to open, and it is interesting that there is "a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book,

and to break its seals?” It is not simply a matter of strength to break these seals. There is a strong angel here but it is he who raises the question. He does not have what is required to be able to open the seals, whatever his strength, but his word is interesting; he says, “Who is worthy to open the book, and to break its seals?”. The Lord Jesus will engage in all that is involved in the events of the breaking of the seven seals in order to establish things on the earth for His glory, for the glory of God, and for the blessing of men; He will do it because He is worthy to do it. He has entered into heaven because of His worth and we have a place there because of His worth. Since we are taken into favour in the Beloved, the blessings that we know are consequent upon the recognition of the worth that is His and its basis is elaborated here: “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open its seals; because thou has been slain, and hast redeemed to God, by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God kings and priests; and they shall reign over the earth”. Now that refers to the work that He has already accomplished, and by means of which He has established this worth, of which the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders speak. It is a complete work but He will continue to operate in respect of things on the earth. These will unfold according to the opening of the seals, only by Him and only because He is worthy.

His acclamation by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders constitutes a new song in verse 9. In verse 11, millions of angels are added to this company, which continues the theme: “Worthy is the Lamb that has been slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing”. May we be impressed by the emphatic way in which His worth is declared in this chapter. Ultimately, He is acknowledged by every created intelligence.

I read in Luke 7 because the centurion is recognised as worthy. The centurion had a position in the Roman army, which was the means by which the dominion of Rome was established and maintained. This was a dominion which was very different in character from that which the Lord Jesus will ultimately have over

the whole earth, the preparation for which we have read a little about in Revelation. Nonetheless, the word as to the centurion is that he is worthy. This accolade is from the elders of the Jews and, in view of their systematic opposition to the Lord Jesus, its value might be doubtful. However, I think that worth is recognised in this man by the Lord Jesus Himself: "Not even in Israel have I found so great faith". So if this man is recognised and referred to as worthy by the elders of the Jews, it is because of the substance that was manifestly in him and which is identified by the Lord Jesus Himself. The elders of the Jews spoke of the centurion as worthy, because his public testimony witnessed to the faith which the Lord Jesus so warmly appreciated

Now, as personally worthy of that recognition, it is interesting to see the centurion's assessment of himself in verses 6 and 7: "Lord, do not trouble thyself, for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof. Wherefore neither did I count myself worthy to come to thee". There is a humility that is appropriate in the presence of One whose worth has the level of distinction that we have seen in Revelation. This is a man who establishes his own worth by recognising the worth of Jesus and putting his "great faith" in Him unreservedly.

So my desire is simply that we would be encouraged to follow along these lines. May each of us be able to walk in evident consistency with our faith in Him who is worthy, so as to be able, perhaps, to reflect something of His worth. We have often remarked that the brethren were first called Christians at Antioch. This was a consequence of what was seen in them. I think there was an acknowledgement of worth in that, and it is a challenge to me, and perhaps to us all, as to whether we reflect in any way the worth of the One in whom we have faith as our Saviour and Lord.

May we be encouraged by these things. For His Name's sake.

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