

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 143

February 2019

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WHAT IS PROFITABLE

Key to initials:

THE RIVER OF GOD

UNITY

WHAT IS PROFITABLE

John 16: 7; 12-15

Acts 20: 18-21; 26-32

2 Timothy 1: 13-14

Hebrews 12: 9-11

JAB In this scripture in John 16, the Lord said that it would be profitable for the disciples that He would go away, for if He did not go, the Comforter would not come. I would like to suggest that we enquire about what the Lord meant when He said, "It is profitable for you that I go away". On the face of it, this may have seemed a strange thing for the Lord to say, because He, in all His blessed attractiveness and in the power of His ministry, was there with them. You might have thought that it would be better if He could have stayed. He was a Man of only thirty three years, and yet He said that He was going away; but the Spirit was going to come, and that would be profitable for the disciples. The Lord said that the Spirit would announce to them what was coming, and that "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you". I wondered if what Paul said in Acts 20 linked on with these words of the Lord Jesus. Paul, in this address to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, reminded them of what he had announced to them, which had been profitable; he had announced to them "all the counsel of God". You will notice that not only was the thought of what is profitable mentioned in what Paul said to these elders at Ephesus, but he used the same words as the Lord did: "announce it to you".

My simple thought was to enquire about this matter of what is profitable. The good deposit that Paul wrote about to Timothy would be an element of what is profitable. He does not use the word, but what Paul had opened up and had given to Timothy as "a good deposit" had been something that was valuable. Then in the last scripture we read in Hebrews, there is a different aspect of what is profitable, one that again we may find surprising - that when the Father of spirits chastens us, it is for profit. There is much

chastening in bodily weakness of one and another, and the assembly sorrows which we experienced over the last three years have been allowed to teach us something. What God has in mind as the Father of spirits is that the chastening would be for profit in order to the partaking of God's holiness. There is great depth in these words of the Lord Jesus in John 16 and then in what Paul says in Acts 20. I do not have in mind to go into the detail of what is said, but to get some idea of what the Lord had in mind in the Spirit coming, so that there might be profit for believers like us right through to the end of the dispensation.

GAB It would be important to see that, although going away, the Lord's influence and power is not in any way impaired by His physical absence, and He exercises His mighty power from where He is now. And we have the Holy Spirit here as well, so we have what is doubly profitable.

JAB That is helpful. The scope of the Spirit's operations is universal. We speak carefully and reverently of the Lord Jesus, remembering who He is, but He moved in quite a limited area of Palestine, whereas when the Spirit came, what flowed out from Pentecost was universal and has led to a great response to God. I wanted to enquire about what that means for us and whether we value it.

AMB The Lord in going away was going into the glory and to the right hand of the Father, as you mentioned in prayer. His activities there are towards the saints, but these things of His in glory are received by the Holy Spirit and are announced to us here. So we have the wonderful benefit of the impartation by the Spirit of the things of the Lord Jesus in glory.

JAB It is good to see that. Before Jesus went to glory, He said, "I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth", John 15: 26. From that position He had much to bestow on the church. There is an initial sense in what the Lord Jesus said here; the ministry of Paul links with John 16. The "breadth and length and depth and height" (Eph 3: 18) that Paul wrote about to the Ephesians would perhaps

be connected with the “all things”. The Lord Jesus in glory was the source of that ministry, and the Spirit down here announced it; “he shall guide you into all the truth”. My thought is that the Spirit is still guiding us into the truth. It is not only a historic matter, and I would like to enquire about it. Are we aware of the Spirit guiding us?

JTB The Lord Jesus went on high that the gifts might be given, prophets and teachers and others, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ, Eph 4: 12. Do you think the Spirit uses these channels for developing what He announces in the constitutions of the saints?

JAB He does. And what He announces draws our hearts to where Christ is now. We sang in our hymn:

Let no distracting thought Intrude ...
(Hymn 254).

We trust that no distracting thought will intrude in this meeting, but when we are on our own, or engaged in our everyday occupation, how easy it is to become deflected from this. But do you think that what the Lord had in mind, and what the Spirit would bring before us, as to all the truth would raise our hearts to the place on high where Jesus is glorified?

JTB Paul says to the Corinthians that “All things are lawful to me, but all things do not profit”, 1 Cor 6: 12. Do you think the Spirit’s service would help us to identify what is profitable as well?

JAB That is what I had in mind. It goes without saying, but the Holy Spirit would never occupy us with anything that is not profitable. For us to be occupied with these things, we have to realise how profitable they are. That was what I had in my heart for this meeting, that we might all realise that these glorious matters are for profit, for eternal profit.

NJH These movements of divine Persons are in keeping with divine counsel. The Lord says, “I say the truth to you”. He felt leaving His own, they were in His heart, but the profit was to be according to divine counsel and blessing.

JAB What a wonderful thing that Paul could say, “I have not shrunk from announcing to you all the counsel of God”. We tend to be limited in the apprehension of these things because of our own weakness, but the Lord and the Spirit have great things in mind to show us and to guide us into. Guiding is not exactly teaching. There is teaching in Scripture, there is teaching in the ministries of the apostles, and indeed in the ministries that have come to us more recently than 2,000 years ago. What the Spirit does is to guide us into all the truth, so that we might see the profit that there is in these openings up of all the counsel of God.

GBG I am thinking in a general way of the profit there was to be in the Lord going away. We can partake of what is in Christ personally, which we could not have done otherwise. The disciples did not do that when the Lord was here, but, by the Spirit, we partake of His life, of His own spirit, all these things. There is profit in that.

JAB That is fine. So we should appreciate these things deeply. Everyone in this room of responsible years knows that the Lord Jesus is in heaven, and has heard that the Spirit is here. But what do we experience of it in the way, we might say, of divine impulse? The Holy Spirit is in us, a divine Person operating in us to open up to our hearts what Paul opened up to the Ephesians: “all the counsel of God”. I do not think that it is going too far to say that, although whether I am in the good of it is another question. But we need to see what the Lord has in mind and what the Spirit has in mind.

JTB(G) So “the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God”, 1 Cor 2: 10. Does the apostle show the scope of the Spirit’s operations?

JAB Yes. I was thinking of that, and I am glad you have brought it in: the scope of His operations. We mentioned the geographical scope of the Spirit’s operations in a universal sense, but in a spiritual sense it is a very much greater scope, is it not? There is nothing of what God has made known in revelation that is excluded from the scope that you have spoken about. We speak about ‘the truth’, and

it is a wonderful thing to see its scope and to be affected by it as the Spirit brings it before us.

JD I was just going to link on with what has been said about partaking of what is in Christ. Paul says, “but if even we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer. So if any one be in Christ ...”, 2 Cor 5: 16,17. There is a wonderful new realm being opened up.

JAB Very good. My exercise is that we might see that these things which are written in Scripture are to be experienced by us, because the Spirit brings before us subjectively what we have before us in Christ objectively. He is in heaven, He has been glorified, and the Spirit’s service is to glorify Christ in our hearts. Christ was glorified, the Spirit came consequent on that, and now He glorifies Christ. It is a wonderful thing to get hold of.

RB In verse 13, it says, “But when *he* is come, the Spirit of truth”: do you think it is in the Spirit of truth that this profit comes to light? Could you say something as to this title of the Spirit and what it entails?

JAB I would be glad of help, but we cannot know the truth unless the Holy Spirit opens it to our understanding and to our affections. We have it on the page of Scripture, we have it on the shelves of our bookcases, we can read about it but it still might not be the truth to us, but rather just ideas or familiar words. I want to choose my words carefully, but the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, brings the truth before us as a living thing. It is the life that He gives in the opening up of it. I am feeling my way, but you can help us.

RB It has been said as to the Spirit of truth that He maintains things at their proper height for the whole of the dispensation. Essentially the dispensation and the truth are safeguarded in that One. You can see, therefore, how profit results from that.

JAB What you have said is important, that the Holy Spirit maintains the truth, the declaration of God. John Richards said a very fine thing at Grimsby: ‘The truth is really the declaration of God, all that God has been made known to be by His only-begotten Son, both in

His pathway here, as well as in the glorious light from where He is now'. Obviously there is that which will ever be beyond us, but the truth is in how God has made Himself known to us, and that must be living. It cannot only be doctrine, although it is that, but the Spirit of truth makes it live subjectively in our hearts.

JL Part of the revelation of that truth involves coming to know God as Father and reminds us of the prime thought of God in relation to sonship, which could not be enjoyed apart from the indwelling Spirit, the Spirit of His Son in our hearts.

JAB That is very good. Would that be one of the things of the Father that are spoken of by the Lord Jesus here?

JL Yes, I think so. And I was also thinking that it shows the profit of the Spirit coming. All the dignity and power connected with sonship should be livingly in our hearts through the indwelling power of that blessed Person.

JAB I could not add to that, but what you have said is very important. In that sense, and I am speaking very reverently, the Spirit is the Spirit of relationship, is He not? He links our hearts on with the Lord in heaven. He brings us into relationship with God as our Father. He is the Spirit of adoption "whereby we cry, Abba Father", Rom 8: 15. He is more than the Spirit of relationship, of course, but we can enjoy these relationships in the good of His indwelling power.

NCMcK The Lord had been the truth, and the disciples had known that when He was here. There was no question that He could not answer, nothing was too difficult for Him, and in His going away He was still the truth, but they were to have the Spirit of truth in addition to that. Does the Spirit in that way open up the truth to us here and now, and glorify Christ in that way?

JAB That is right. I am glad of what you have said - 'here and now'. The Spirit did this in the early days of the Acts. We can read about the power of what was there in the apostles' ministries and how the height of the mystery, one of the great aspects of the counsel of God, was opened up, especially to the Ephesian saints.

But what about here and now? The Spirit is still opening that up to each generation, for we all need to come into the good of this, each one of us individually. We cannot have it unless we see for ourselves that the Spirit is opening the truth up, and we want to know something of this profit.

DSp One of the things that the Spirit opened up as Christ went into glory was His death and burial and resurrection. This would never be a current matter to us apart from the Spirit's power at this present time.

JAB When the Lord said , "It is profitable for you that I go away", He knew what that would entail for Him. He knew what would happen to Him before He ascended, and what you have said is important. Do you think that would help us to understand that the truth is something that must engage our affections as well as our minds?

DSp What is current at the present moment is the Spirit relating us to a living Man in heaven, but the Spirit has also helped us to understand the glory of the One who went into death and broke the power of death. Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, we would never understand the depth of the love of God in relation to these matters. It is the Holy Spirit who has helped us to understand the ways of God's love and the movements of the Lord Jesus, would you say?

JAB Exactly. These are wonderful things, and I would like everyone here to realise that "when *he* is come, the Spirit of truth, he shall guide you into all the truth". The Spirit is available to us to do that. Do we realise that? I trust that we may experience something of His announcing; "he will announce to you what is coming". That would include the hope that we have of the soon coming of the Lord Jesus. All of this is available to us if we have an awareness that the Spirit within us wants to open it up to us, and I trust that we all have some experience of that.

PAG The Lord says in verse 28 of chapter 16, "I leave the world and go to the Father". Is it important for us to understand that the profit

involves that we are linked not only with Christ glorified, but with truth that is heavenly?

JAB Yes, I very much had that in mind, and I am glad you have said that. "He shall glorify me"; that is where the Lord Jesus is now in heaven. From that position of glory, which the Father has given Him, the Spirit "shall receive of mine". The Spirit is there; He knows what the Father thinks of Christ. I read something in Mr Taylor's ministry the other day, that heaven is 'aglow', J Taylor vol 80 p141. For instance, there are impressions of the Father's appreciation of Christ - current impressions - which the Holy Spirit would open up to our affections, but it is Christ where He is now. Is that what you have in mind?

PAG It is, and although we are in the world, I was wondering if we could grasp that part of the profit is that we are connected with something that is not of this world in any way at all.

JAB Yes, because even the best aspects of the world will be what we sang about: "Let no distracting thought". What is of the earth may not be sinful, but it will distract us from the enjoyment of what is heavenly.

GAB At Pentecost, all these different nationalities heard the apostles speaking in their own tongues the great things of God. We here do not practice the miraculous aspect of that at the present time, but do you think the universality of the way in which the Spirit operates transcends every district, country and language? It is the great things of God that are being communicated, and it is a universal idea.

JAB Yes, it is. God does not just have in mind that the truth of what He is in revelation is to be only for particular persons. It is not just that believers who have been in the testimony for fifty or sixty years are able to take this in; God has this in mind, through the Holy Spirit, so that every one of us might realise the scope that you have spoken of.

DCB Could I ask further about the guiding? I was wondering whether that often comes through persons. In fact much of what we

have spoken about comes through persons who are indwelt by the Spirit.

JAB That is right. I was interested in why it says 'guiding' and not 'teaching'. The Spirit is a divine Person, and I am not saying that He does not teach, but guiding "into all the truth" involves that the truth is there. What am I going to understand of it? How am I going to appreciate it? How are my affections going to be engaged with what God has in mind for me? A good teacher is also a guide. But say more of what you have in mind, because I trust that in a meeting like this we might experience the guiding of the Holy Spirit.

DCB I was thinking that, in an occasion like this, we have the experience of it. It is not the only experience, because as indwelt by the Spirit we have what comes directly from Himself, but such a meeting as this is a practical way of working out and opening up the truth. There is a tentativeness in guiding; it is step by step. I was thinking of Acts 16 which describes a practical matter, but really Paul and those with him moved forward step by step with a Guide.

JAB Would you say that guiding sits alongside the matter of what is subjective in us? The teaching can be objective. You might say, it is there on the blackboard. We can look at the blackboard and see what is written there and be taught by it, and that is for profit. We need teaching; we must have teaching, but then the Holy Spirit would guide us in our understanding of it to see the meaning. I feel for myself the need to understand the meaning of the truth, the spiritual implications of what the truth is. Do you think the Spirit would guide us into an appreciation of that?

DCB Yes. I was thinking about the type of Rebecca and the servant in Genesis 24. He knew who Isaac was, and if Rebecca was going to get to what was in mind, she had to go step by step with the servant.

JAB That is good. That is fine type of guiding. The journey back to Beer-lahai-roi is a very good typical example of the Spirit's guidance.

DAS Do you think that guiding involves affection? You cannot properly guide a person unless you are doing it in affection. It says in the Revelation that John saw the assembly descending from God, having the glory of God, as a bride prepared for her husband, Rev 21: 2. I was thinking about the service of the Spirit in guiding into the truth, that He is really guiding at the present time in relation to this great presentation that is going to take place in the future, when the Lord will present a vessel to Himself that is suited for Him.

JAB I am very glad of what you say, because I do not think we will make any progress in making the truth our own unless our affections are engaged with Christ. That is what the Lord Jesus desires from us, and it is what the Spirit would promote in us. When the servant in Genesis 24, after all that guiding said, "That is my master!" (v 65), Rebecca leapt from the camel - her affections were engaged with Isaac. I think that the Holy Spirit would have us all to be enamoured with Christ. He would cause us to have deep affection, not just loving Him as our Saviour, but that affection growing in our hearts. What you have brought in is excellent.

JD Do you think that the Spirit gives us a distinct link with Christ and a distinct link with one another? I was wondering in relation to what the brethren have been saying about being guided into the truth, if we see it worked out practically in Acts 18 when Paul comes to Aquila and Priscilla. It says that he came to them and because they were of the same trade, "he abode with them, and wrought", v 3. I wondered whether our being guided into the truth results in us working things out together.

JAB Yes. That might take us on to Acts 20. Paul says to these Ephesian elders, "I have not shrunk from announcing to you all the counsel of God". The Spirit had used Paul to do that. Then he goes on to say, "Take heed therefore to yourselves ... to shepherd the assembly of God". What Paul is saying to these elders is, 'I have opened up the truth to you, now work it out between you'. The Spirit is needed for that too.

NJH Does the announcing need a God-given ear in the person hearing it?

JAB Yes. We know that announcing means 'bringing a report' (John 16: 14, footnote 'f'). The Holy Spirit is bringing a report from heaven of what is happening there. I go back to that phrase of Mr Taylor's; heaven is aglow, and the Spirit is there. He is in us but He is there too; we cannot limit the Holy Spirit as a Person of the Godhead. He brings the things of the Father, which are Christ's, so they are shared by the Father and the Son, He brings them to us. Are we interested in that?

NJH It says, "He that has an ear", Rev. 2: 7. That is formed by the Spirit in the person to receive what is announced.

JAB Very good. I know that my own exercise to be in the good of that has been stimulated in thinking of these matters. And I trust that a result of our enquiry will be that we are all stimulated to want to know more of all the counsel of God. Younger brethren might think, 'That sounds really exalted', and in a sense it is, because everything of God is exalted, but what was "all the counsel of God"? His thoughts for Christ, that Christ should be the centre of everything eternally; His thoughts about the assembly, that that blessed One should have a counterpart composed of all those who have believed in Christ and have the Holy Spirit; the coming of the Lord Jesus. These are things that the youngest believer can have some appreciation of. All the counsel of God is not fifty volumes on a bookshelf: it is what the Spirit would give to us.

JL It would also be true to say, would it not, that the purpose of God has been fully expressed, but in so far as Paul announced the counsel of God, was he showing the workability of Christianity through the indwelling of the Spirit here?

JAB That is fine. What you have said is very important. What is the difference between purpose and counsel?

JL I would not profess to give you a comprehensive answer, but my understanding is that God's purpose involves what He has proposed in love, of Himself but involving the blessing of the saints of every

family. Then my understanding of the counsel of God is the divine arrangements, administratively, to work it out, arrived at between divine Persons in wisdom and, no doubt, love. Counsel seems to stress the way that things can be made possible, not only the objective set out but the workable arrangement to give effect to it all.

JAB That is very helpful. So purpose is, and I speak carefully, the 'what'; it is what God desires to have eternally. Then the counsel is the 'how'; how it has been and is being worked out.

JTB So the scripture says, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed", Prov 15: 22. That bears out what has been said.

JAB Yes. God's purpose could not be disappointed. It involves the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, coming into revelation in what we call the economy, although that is not a word that Scripture uses. But it is a wonderful thing to think that it has been worked out, so that there might be an answer to divine purpose. The purpose of God was there in a past eternity, but the working of it out is in time, and it involves the work of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit as we are speaking of it.

DAB We see the oneness of the Godhead in what you are referring to. I was thinking in relation to what we have been saying as to all the counsel of God, that the Spirit does not speak "from himself", but whatever He hears, He announce it to us. But the Lord also says, "All things that the Father has are mine; on account of this I have said that he receives of mine". There is a wonderful oneness in the workings of the Godhead.

JAB You are reminding me of something I read in Mr Taylor's ministry, that these chapters in John, starting at chapter 13, lead us into the circle of divine Persons, JT vol 40 p55. That is a remarkable thing to think about, that the Persons of the Godhead would have us come into some appreciation of what They have desired for Themselves, and then be part of that. The scope of the purpose of God that our brother has described would include the other families too, but what we are speaking about now is about what the assembly

is in the purpose of God and, as indwelt by the Spirit, for the heart of Christ.

DAB Paul took that heavenly ministry that he had received and this is part of it - announcing the counsel of God. You can see the fruit of that as you read the epistle to the Ephesians.

JAB He took three years, and he did it with tears and in all lowliness. I was thinking of what it meant for Paul to work in his service to God in Ephesus, and the fruit of that labour.

NJH This is a fresh announcement, when Paul refers to the assembly which God “has purchased with the blood of his own”; the circulation of divine love was involved in the whole matter.

JAB Yes. I do not know if I am making too much of the word “therefore” at the beginning of verse 28. Paul says to them that he had announced to them all the counsel of God, and then he is really saying - so the effect in you should be that you take heed “to shepherd the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own”. That is a fresh way of looking at it, but it also means that the response in the Ephesian elders to the announcing of the counsel of God was to be this shepherding. It is not all on spiritual lines, although it starts there, but shepherding the assembly of God works out in our daily relations with each other, how much we love each other, how much we are prepared to put ourselves out to help each other.

DSp So it is right to say then that the saints are part of the divine economy?

JAB The word ‘economy’ is used by Mr Darby in a footnote. It is the administration of God, and the saints are part of that, because this economy is operating. We know that an economy is an arrangement, such as the economy of the United Kingdom, and persons are involved in that. But my thought here was that at the end of verse 32 - and this would maybe link on with what you have said - Paul says, “I commit you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give to you an inheritance among all the sanctified”. Would that link with what you have asked about?

DSp Yes. It seems that there are to be trustworthy persons here. It speaks in verse 28 about the Holy Spirit setting them “as overseers”. The saints of the assembly must be trustworthy persons who understand divine feelings and carry them in their hearts, in the same way, in measure, as the Lord and the Spirit do.

JAB What you have said is important, because we have that divine Person, the Holy Spirit, in us to produce what you have just described. The work of God in a believer cannot be destroyed or corrupted; it is what it is: God’s work. We often fail because we are not true to the work of God in us, but God is always true to His work, and that is an encouraging thing. Paul says, “I commit you to God, and to the word of his grace”. What a wonderful thing it is to know the grace of God in relation to what we are speaking about.

JSS Do the profitable things which we have been speaking of have an eternal effect? I can spend much of my time on things that will end when I die, or when time ceases to be, but there are things that I can be engaged with which will have an eternal effect. Are those profitable things?

JAB Yes, and all the rest is nothing in contrast. What I desire for myself, and for all of us, is that we might have God’s view of what is profitable. The Lord Jesus used that word, “It is profitable for you” and Paul uses it here. And then when things were beginning to break down, Paul wrote in 2 Timothy about the good deposit entrusted: “Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted”. Would that link with what you are thinking of as to what is eternal?

JSS I was thinking too of what Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4, “piety is profitable for everything” (v 8), and he refers to the present life and that to come. The things which please God are profitable things, now and eternally.

JAB Very good; that is important.

AMB If we profit by the operations of the Spirit within us and by giving room to Him, we will become spiritually wealthy. You are encouraging us to give room consciously to the Spirit. As we do so,

the enjoyment of heavenly truth grows in our hearts and we become spiritually enriched. We enjoy that ourselves, but we can then share the way in which we have been enriched with others. You get the impression of the apostle Paul that he was a spiritually wealthy person and he enjoyed that, but he shared the wealth that he had among the assemblies where he ministered and those that he wrote to, so that others were enriched too.

JAB Very good. So, “Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us”; that is the Spirit in us collectively, which links with what was said about our links together - the horizontal aspect of this. Each one of us has to keep the good deposit entrusted to us, but then the Holy Spirit who is in you is the Holy Spirit who is in me, and keeping it, we can help each other in this.

JD It causes us to think of that bar that went around the tabernacle boards. They represent persons held together by the Spirit in their links of affection, do you think?

JAB That is a very helpful thought.

ADM I was wondering if you would give us your impression as to what the good deposit is; it is a very full expression.

JAB It is; “the good deposit entrusted”. The only thought I had, but I will be glad to hear yours, is that it links with what we have been speaking about as to what has been announced, all the counsel of God. Any real appreciation of that in the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit, if it is real, if it is in the affections, is a good deposit, however much or little that appreciation might be. It is incomparably more valuable than any bank deposit, and it has been entrusted to us. God has trusted us in giving us that deposit.

ADM I wondered if Paul saw it in embryo on the Damascus road in the way the Lord spoke to him, and then in what he saw in Damascus. There was something that Paul saw then and it grew in his experience, do you think?

JAB That is good. What struck me was that we might think that what happened in the Acts took place a long time ago, and that

things are different now. But what Paul is saying here to Timothy was written after failure had come in publicly; Ephesus had turned away. The results of Paul's ministry were beginning to be eroded by the attacks of the enemy, but the good deposit stands because it has been entrusted, and the Holy Spirit which dwells in us will see to it that it goes through. It is really what is eternal, as was said earlier.

PAG We usually think of a deposit as involving money and you spoke about the Holy Spirit which dwells in us as being involved in our relations together. Is it important for us to remember that there is only one standard of currency? There are not multiple standards; we all trade in the same currency.

JAB Yes. What would you say it is? Describe the features of this divine currency.

PAG The standard is Christ. The Lord asked when He was here to see a coin, and He said, "Whose is this image and superscription?" (Mark 12:16), Caesar's image was on it. Whose image and superscription is on believers? Christ's. That is the standard; there is not a different one. We all have to operate according to the one divine standard.

JAB Yes, and it is a heavenly standard. This is one of the prison epistles, written by Paul sitting in a jail, or in conditions of restriction anyway, perhaps chained to a Roman soldier. What we are speaking of does not depend on circumstances; it has to do with what has been brought before us in our conversation. It is eternal in its durability and in its worth, and it has been entrusted to every one of us.

In Hebrews, I felt the test, but also the blessing, of what the writer says here about "the Father of spirits". It is a very interesting title of the Father; "shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?". What we are speaking about, dear brethren, is something that is living, and it is to live in us. It is living in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, but it is to be living in us, and it can only be maintained in life as we are in subjection to the Father of spirits. Mr. A J Gardiner once said that what the Father of spirits

desires is that our spirits might be perfected, brought into line with Him. It goes on to say here that this blessed Person, the Father of spirits, chastens “for profit, in order to the partaking of his holiness”. Now we do not often think of chastening as being for profit. Many brethren are facing considerable health problems, and there have been many assembly sorrows experienced, which has been a humiliating experience. It has been chastening, but it is for profit if we are exercised by it. You spoke earlier this year about the humiliation that God has allowed among us, but it is for profit, is it not?

JL Well first of all, I think it was necessary, but I can also see that it is for profit. But I would like to enquire about the fruitful result, the partaking of His holiness. That seems outstandingly attractive.

JAB Yes, because we are not to become occupied with the chastening. We are to see what God has in mind in it. What you have said is important; it “afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it”. What did you have in mind as to that?

JL It seems that the subject of profit is to bring about some enlargement in blessing under God’s hand. It is not only to protect or to keep and guard the deposit, but God has expansion in mind in blessing. And the partaking of His holiness and then the reference to the peaceful fruit of righteousness seems to confirm that God is looking for expansion in blessing through His own activities, do you think?

JAB That is fine. I was interested that this word for holiness means the character itself and not the effect produced. We are probably familiar with the note in Romans 1: 4 which says that there are two words for holiness, footnote ‘i’. One is the character and quality and the other is the sanctification that comes from exercise. This word here is the character; it is the partaking of God’s holiness. I would like help about that.

GBG Would this be for the Father’s enjoyment? We are, as through exercise, more suitable for His own presence and His joy in us.

JAB So, do you mean, speaking reverently, that it is for the profit of the Father?

GBG That is good. There is profit for Him; that is right. We are His sons but as we partake of His holiness, we become more like the Father for His own enjoyment. It is very attractive. The Father of spirits is the One who especially cares for our spirits. Think of it - the Father Himself caring for my spirit.

JAB Yes; so would that link on with the Holy Spirit in us? The fruit of the Holy Spirit in us is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control. These things are of pleasure to the Father, when He sees these features of Christ in believers. And chastening sometimes is necessary for that to be brought about so that what I am naturally, whatever it might be, is taken away, and what is left is for the pleasure of God.

AMB There was an old brother local here whom many will remember, who said that discipline clears the vision. Chastening has that character. Do you think that the effect of chastening should be to cause the unimportant things to fall away in our minds in terms of their importance, diminishing in our minds and in our hearts, so that the eternal things that we have been speaking of are brought before us? That is the effect that the Father intends in chastening. But then we are intended to go through the chastening with Him and with the Lord. It is important to desire the Father's help not to be bitter about whatever chastening we might pass through, but to get the gain of it by going through these things with the Lord. The result then is "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" and a state of holiness worked out in the soul of the believer.

JAB Paul knew much of chastening; he had a thorn for the flesh that he asked God to take away three times but it was not taken away, so he accepted that. He was with the Corinthians in all lowliness and tears. This phrase in verse 9, "shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits ...". The Father knows what He is doing if we are exercised to understand and get the benefit of it, and it is for profit.

DAB Does the Spirit come into this matter of exercise? “To those that are exercised by it”; it seems to depend on that.

JAB Yes. We need to go through these tests and see what God is doing. We so often think of ourselves. When something happens that affects me, the natural reaction is to think first of how it affects me, but if it is of God to teach me something, then I think what you say is very important. We need to get into His presence and find out what the Father of spirits is teaching us.

JD Do you think this is not only a painful exercise to remove what might be incongruous in us, but really to form us? The Lord could speak of Himself as doing all things in like manner to the Father (John 5: 19); we become in that sense representative of the Father in how things are done.

JAB I am sure that is right. “The Father of spirits”: it is a very attractive name given here to the Father, and He has His hands over it all and knows what He is achieving.

PAG Would it link somewhat with what has been said that the scripture you have referred to in Romans 1 about holiness is about Christ “marked out Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness”, v 4. Do you think one aspect of this partaking of the Father’s holiness is that we become more like Christ?

JAB Yes, that is what it is for; we become more like Christ. We can read what Paul said about himself in terms of dying and his life being in Christ, and that is what God has in mind for all of us.

GAB We are chastened as sons. The Father has a beloved Son in whom He finds perfect delight, and all He is doing in us is to bring us into conformity to His beloved Son.

JAB It is very comforting to know that. Sometimes we need faith for it when the trials are severe. It may be ill health, or it may be dear brethren who are facing the reality of assembly sorrow every time they go out to a much reduced meeting. Whatever it is, the Father knows what He is doing, He knows the result, and we will come into

the benefit of it as we are in subjection to the Father of spirits, and as we are exercised by His chastening.

Grangemouth

2nd September 2018

Key to initials:

A M Brown, Grangemouth; D A Brown, Grangemouth; D C Brown, Edinburgh; G A Brown, Grangemouth; J A Brown, Grangemouth; J T Brown, Grangemouth (JTB(G)); J T Brown, Edinburgh; R Brown, Grangemouth; J Drummond, Aberdeen; G B Grant, Dundee; P A Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry, Glasgow; J Laurie, Brechin; N C McKay, Glasgow; A D Munro, Grangemouth; D A Steven, Grangemouth; J S Speirs, Grangemouth; D Spinks, Grangemouth

THE RIVER OF GOD

John A Brown

John 7: 37-39

Acts 2: 32-33, 36-39

Psalm 46: 4

2 Timothy 1: 14-18; 2: 2; 4: 9-11

Revelation 22: 1-2; 17 (from “And let him”)

We have been going through the Psalms in Linlithgow, and we read recently about the river of God; the psalmist says, “the river of God is full of water”, Ps 65: 9. I would like to speak about that river, which is not like any other river.

In the land of Israel even today, and it was so in history, there are rivers which sometimes do not have any water in them. In the summer they are dry, and then in the winter when the rain comes, they fill up with water and there is a torrent; then after a month or two they dry up again. The river of God is not like that; the river of God is always full of water; it is never ever dry. I want, dear brethren, to speak about what characterises that river and how we can experience it. I am conscious that I may be speaking about the things which we have already spoken about in the reading, but that is one of the glories of Christianity. You can take the truth and look at it from different angles, as it were, and it is all the same truth because it is all about the same blessed Man, our Lord Jesus.

The first thing about this river is that it has its source in heaven; it comes from that blessed Man who is above, from the very presence of God. When it was poured out - as Peter said in Acts where we read, “he has poured out this” - it was poured out from that position on high after Jesus was glorified. Another thing which characterises this river is that it does not have any tributaries. Those of you who study geography know that all rivers start as a stream and then other streams flow into them and thus they get deeper and deeper. But the river of God does not have any tributaries. In the language of Revelation 22 it is “bright as crystal”; it flows in all its

purity from its source and it flows into the hearts of believers in the Lord Jesus who have the Holy Spirit.

In John's gospel where we read, the Lord Jesus spoke about this river; "He that believes on me ... out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water". You might say that it flows into and out of believers. It is interesting to look at the Old Testament and see what the river speaks of, because it came in early in Genesis 2. The river there watered the garden of Eden, v 10. That teaches us that the river of God has in mind fruitfulness. It is to bring life and fruit for God, and there is a very great blessing in that; there is fruitfulness. The trees that were in the garden of Eden were good for food, and the river watered them. A river sustains life. The Nile is the only reason that Egypt as a country is there. If it was not for the Nile, Egypt would not exist because all the water that the Egyptians need, even today, comes from that river.

There are several rivers described in the Old Testament, references to the river of God, the river of God's pleasure that we sang of. One of them is in Ezekiel, in a vision which Ezekiel saw. What characterised that river was that it flowed out of the house and it came south of the altar, Ezek 47: 1. What is flowing in the power of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers is flowing because of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. It is not a theory; it is not an idea that men have. The river that we read about in Ezekiel 47 had its source in the house of God and it flowed past the altar. It has its source, you might say, in the sufferings of our Lord Jesus, and I trust that, for you, 'the sufferings of our Lord Jesus' is not just a phrase that you hear brethren use. I trust that everyone here is a believer in the Lord Jesus, and knows that what He bore in His atoning sufferings were for you, dear friend. I trust that something of the life which this river brings to wherever it flows, has flowed into you. What we were speaking about in the reading is a living reality. That does not mean to say that everyone experiences it as a living reality, but my exercise is that these conditions of life and fruitfulness that were there in the garden of Eden might be found in my heart and in my life and in yours, and in our gatherings too, because otherwise

there will be nothing for God. Otherwise we will be like these rivers in Israel that dry up in the summer, and the plants that depend on them wither; there is no life.

The river in Ezekiel was not like that. It had no tributaries and it got deeper and deeper. The man with the measuring line who guided Ezekiel in his vision measured a thousand cubits at a time. Ezekiel started with his ankles in the water. It is good to get into this river. You do not start swimming the first time you experience it, but you experience it by getting into it in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then Ezekiel goes on in that vision to his knees, then to his loins, and yet there were no tributaries. There was nothing else flowing into that river, but it became deeper than he could stand in, waters to swim in. Dear brethren, may we have some sense of the greatness of the things of God that He has in mind for us in life and in movement, because that is what a river is. There is no such thing as a stationary river. The river of God is not only full of water but it is flowing, and the question for myself and for you is this: Is it flowing in your affections and in your life?

The Lord Jesus said here, “as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”. I trust that every one of us has some sense of what that is, the life of Christianity. Have you ever knelt down and spoken to the Spirit? Have you ever had the experience of asking the Spirit to give you an impression of Christ? I wish I had more experience of it, but when you speak to the Spirit, you will get an answer; you will never be disappointed. An impression will come into your mind, maybe an answer to a question you have been wondering about, and it will be something that draws your heart to Christ, the blessed One who said these words. Mr Coates spoke about how the river of God flows through the garden of the soul of the believer and it causes it to be fruitful, C A Coates vol 30 p17. In his vision, Ezekiel was in the river and it speaks later of how the river caused the trees to grow. Mr James Taylor spoke about being in this river, and thus being ‘in the very midst of its fructifying power’, JT vol 90 p158. It is really the operation in us of the Holy Spirit. Oh, that I knew more of that fructifying power which

causes us to bear fruit to God. May something of the attractiveness of this river appeal to every one of us.

The Holy Spirit has come down from heaven, as Peter says in Acts 2: “having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit”, the Lord Jesus “has poured out this which ye behold and hear”. These persons in Jerusalem who heard the apostles and the other disciples speaking with tongues wondered at that, and so Peter can refer to it in that way, “which ye behold and hear”. That is what Peter was doing here, drawing attention to the glorified Man. “Let the whole house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him, this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”. We here do not speak in tongues now; but we do trust in the living power of the flow of the Holy Spirit drawing attention to the glorified Man. The Spirit always draws attention to the Lord Jesus; He makes Him, you might say, live in our hearts. The Scriptures speak of the life that we as believers have in Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit that makes that real to us. So in answer to the question, “What shall we do, brethren?”, Peter says, “Repent, and be baptised ... for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”, and then they did that and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus did the river of God flow in Jerusalem just seven or eight weeks after Jesus had been crucified, and it flowed out from there. It flowed out through Antioch, it flowed out to Corinth, it flowed throughout the ministry and epistles of Paul: it even flowed to Rome. At the end of Philippians, Paul wrote salutations to the saints, “specially those of the household of Caesar”, Phil 4: 22. This river had flowed into the very household of the emperor and had touched the hearts of some there. That was an amazing triumph!

This river has flowed on, and it does not need any augmentation. Mr Taylor remarked that when the Spirit came down at Pentecost, He brought with Him everything that He needed, and He did not need to draw on anything that was in this world, JT vol 36 p328. That is the purity, “bright as crystal”, which we read about in Revelation 22. The river of God is of heaven, it has a divine source,

and it is flowing in hearts that love the Lord Jesus and make way for the Holy Spirit.

But it was not long before the enemy tried to corrupt it. In Acts 5 there was a man, Ananias, and his wife Sapphira, who told a lie to the apostles in Jerusalem. There were other disciples who had sold estates and brought the money, laying it at the feet of the apostles for distribution to others in need. Ananias and Sapphira sold their estate, but they only brought some of the money and laid it at the feet of the apostles, although they pretended it was all they had received. You might think that they had a right to keep some of the money. Yes, they did, but I think their sin was that they must have pretended that they had brought all the money. Peter said that they had lied against the Holy Spirit, Acts 5: 3. So the river of God was flowing and the enemy would try to corrupt it; he would try to bring in other influences. In that case, it might have been a desire for status that was not deserved. But the river of God flowed on.

You might look back where history is obscure, the so-called Dark Ages and ask what was there for the Lord Jesus then. Well, there is a hymn that we so often sing, translated from one written nearly a thousand years ago:

Jesus! The very thought of thee
With sweetness fills the breast;
(Hymn 279).

I think that the river of God flowed into the soul of the man who wrote this hymn. Anyone writing such words must have had something of the life that we are speaking about, for the Spirit as resident in believers draws attention to the Lord Jesus. The writer poured out his soul about the Lord Jesus in that hymn which we still sing. Thus the river flowed down through the centuries in the hearts of persons who were faithful to the Lord Jesus. You think of Luther studying in his monk's cell. We heard recently in a preaching about Luther's agony of soul when he tried to confess every sin that he had ever done, and he was in bondage, but then he got the light. Something flowed into his soul and it changed him, and as a result the basic

truth of the gospel began to be recovered despite the darkness that there had been.

Oh, dear brethren, may we value what has been flowing since Pentecost. It is flowing now in the lives and in the affections of millions of believers; in every member of the assembly who makes room for the Holy Spirit, in every believer in Christ that has the Spirit and makes full way for Him, there is something living. We read about these streams in Psalm 46: "There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the sanctuary of the habitations of the Most High". You might ask where this river is. When everything seems to be in breakdown, everything is difficult, circumstances are not easy. Well, circumstances have never been easy for faithful souls. The Lord spoke about how the Jews would deliver up the disciples, Matt 10: 16-22. Paul and Silas on one of their missionary journeys ended up in a jail in Philippi, and one of these streams flowed right into that jail. They were in chains in the inner prison, and they had been scourged. They would have been sore, and yet they were praising God with singing, Acts 16: 25. That is because Paul and Silas had in them that source of life that we were speaking about in the reading, and which I am speaking about now as a river, something that is flowing, and it flowed there in the jail. The prisoners listened to them. I wonder if any of the other prisoners were affected by listening to these two men singing. The jailor was certainly affected. We know the narrative well; that stream of the river of God flowed into the jail and then flowed into the jailor's heart; he became a channel too. I think that would perhaps be an example of what the Lord said in John 7, "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water". The jailor affected his household. I do not think that he just told all his household to get baptised, that they did it just because he said so. I am sure that they must have seen the change in that man. He had a new life; there was something different about him. It says here that "the streams ... make glad the city of God". The jailor rejoiced; there was rejoicing in his house as he set the table and washed the wounds of his erstwhile prisoners. Oh, dear brethren, dear young people, this is real. What happened

at Philippi is not just a story in the Bible. It actually happened to two servants of God who were there, and that jailor was converted. Paul wrote later to that assembly; his epistle to Philippi was to these persons. It had started in the household of Lydia (v 14); the river was there in her heart too. It flowed into the household of the jailer and then in those who were added.

What a wonderful thing it is to have this life, for the Spirit is pointing us to the glorified Man in heaven. Have you had the experience of the Holy Spirit actually working in you? It is not just a doctrine, although it is - it is a truth, but it is more than that. We speak about what is subjective. The Lord Jesus is in heaven in glory, and the Spirit opens up His glories to those who are interested. There is something in our affections that responds to the touch of the Spirit, and we can know that in our experience. We can know it, especially in praise and worship in the service of God. We often have a touch of it in our meetings for ministry; the brethren are uplifted by something that is given in spiritual life, because Christ has been magnified. But you can have it in your lunch hour at the office. In a quiet moment, you can turn to the Spirit. This is for everyday life because the Spirit is in us all the time, not just when we come to the meetings.

We spoke earlier about the good deposit, and here Paul was committing things to Timothy. How sad Paul must have been; even Ephesus, that city in the province of Asia, had turned away from him. Think of his three years of labour there, and how he had been able to write to the Ephesians about "the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge", Eph 3: 18. Yet they had turned away from Paul. He writes, "Thou knowest this" - Timothy knew about this - "that all who are in Asia ... have turned away from me". How much service Paul had rendered in Ephesus, Timothy knew best. Was everything finished? No. "The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he has often refreshed me". I thought of that as this river of living water flowing, you might say, out of Onesiphorus and into Paul. You might think that someone like the apostle would be refreshing others,

but Onesiphorus had been refreshing Paul, even in his prison in Rome. He “has not been ashamed of my chain, but ... sought me out very diligently and found me”. How much Paul appreciated Onesiphorus.

Well, Paul writes to Timothy to “be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus”, and Timothy was to hand it on “to faithful men”. So this river, dear brethren, is flowing today. The question for all of us is: Am I, are we, in the gain of it, in the experience of it? You might have choices to make about how you use your time, and the Spirit might prompt you, ‘Read that scripture again which was read last night in the ministry meeting, and think about it’. But something else is available and you pick it up, whatever it is, the newspaper or the iPad or the phone, and you do something else. The Spirit would occupy you with the heavenly Man. That is what He does, and He works in us that there might be a living answer to that blessed One. And so these things that Paul had taught were to be entrusted “to faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also”.

Two of these faithful men were Luke and Mark. But Demas had forsaken Paul, having loved the present age. There is another river. I was interested to look at it in Ezekiel; it is the river of Egypt. Ezekiel was told to “set thy face against Pharaoh ... and prophesy against him, and against the whole of Egypt ... Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which saith, My river is mine own, and I made it for myself”, Ezek 29: 1-3. There is another river in this world, which is flowing to destruction, and it has its source in Satan; it corresponds to “the rivers of Babylon”, Ps 137: 1. Oh dear young friend, do not paddle in that river; do not try to swim in that river. Pharaoh says in this prophesy, “I made it for myself”. There is a current flowing in that river which would take you further and further away from Christ in your affections. It might superficially seem more interesting. It is flowing now through the availability of technology that was not available when I was young, or even more recently than that. It is flowing all the time. Every time you watch a movie or whatever it may be - I do not want to go into detail - you are paddling in the river of the world,

the river of Babylon. But it will never satisfy you. You might think that it does; it has an enormous variety that caters to every taste, and it is only one click away nowadays, but it will never satisfy you. I am speaking from experience. What you will find is that, if you get a taste for the river of Babylon, you will lose your taste for the things of God, you will lose your appreciation of Christ as the heavenly Man.

But this river that we have been speaking about is pure; it does not have any adulteration. Oh, may we all be attracted to the Lord Jesus and may we make room for the Holy Spirit. He would draw our hearts to the Lord Jesus so that there might be a greater and fuller response to the blessed Father who said, "*Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight*", Mark 1: 11. May we all, young and old, find our enjoyment and our refreshment in that river, the river of God, "a river of water of life, bright as crystal". You will not find water like that anywhere else.

Luke would have known something of that water; he had been with Paul on some of his missionary journeys, and Mark was serviceable to Paul for ministry. What an encouragement it must have been to Paul that these men - who no doubt were in the good of the river of God being full of water - were available to Paul for his comfort and encouragement, even in these dark days of imprisonment.

In Revelation 22, we see this river as it will be in the day to come, although we can apply it now. It is going out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, and it is bright as crystal. And there is the tree of life, which speaks of the Lord Jesus, this blessed One who is the Source of life. We can feed on Him, on the glories of the heavenly Man. You can ask other believers, other people in this room, about their impressions of Christ. You will never exhaust them, and the reason is that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, the Holy Spirit is a divine Person in us, and His service is to magnify to us the glories of our Lord Jesus. I feel the test of it; "let him take the water of life freely". Have you done that? Do you know what it is to take of the water of life freely? This river, this water of life, is available to be taken freely and it will for your blessing.

If there is anyone here who desires to have this water of life, get before God and ask for it. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, you know who He is, you know that He has saved you, and you are aware that the Holy Spirit has been given to those who obey the Father; He gives the Spirit to those who ask Him. But this river of life means more than just the knowledge that these things are true. It is the experience of them, the experience of your heart being softened and enlivened and being fruitful to God. If you have not had that experience before, if you have never felt your soul welling up in responsiveness to God, whether in prayer in your bedroom, or at a meeting, then God is missing something that He desires from you, and which the Holy Spirit is in you to stimulate. This invitation is to all of us, "And let him that is athirst come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely".

Dear brethren, may we all be in the good of having this water of life. The Spirit draws attention to Christ glorified; it has heaven as its source and nothing can adulterate it. May we all be in the life of it so that, as Mr Coates said, the river of God flows in living power in us, watering the garden of our souls. May it be so for God's pleasure.

Grangemouth

1st September 2018

UNITY

William Johnson

Zechariah 2: 7-14; 14: 5-7

It is a very great exercise to speak on such an occasion as this. I desire that the Lord may give a word directly from Himself, so that our present need may be met. It is quite possible to say something perfectly true and interesting, and a passing pleasure might be found in it; still it might not be a word from the Lord. That is what makes it so serious to get up and speak to you. Hence it is absolutely necessary that both speaker and hearers should be found together in exercise. I wonder how many here have been exercised as to these meetings. Exercise leads to prayer - to desire. How many of us are found here in faith - waiting on the Lord? We are tested as to how far we can count on His love, expecting from Him that which will meet us in our present need. Though I feel it serious to speak, yet I feel encouraged in the thought that the Lord cares for us, and can meet all the exigencies of the present moment, and prove to us the way of His love in a very peculiar and blessed manner. He is still the Blessor of His people, and our need will only bring out the strength of His unchanging love.

We could not expect anything from Him on the ground of our faithfulness. A spirit of pretentiousness would be very distasteful to the Lord. I hope we have chastened spirits, the effect of being in His presence. What has happened, what is happening, and what will happen should make us very serious. We have never passed through such times, yet they are blessed times because they will bring out what the Lord can be to us. The pressure will not cease, it may be increased, it may assume another form, but pressure there will be until the Lord comes. Do not anticipate its removal, but greatly anticipate what His love can do for us. Hence we must not look back regretfully at the past, but if there is any future accorded to us here, let us look forward most hopefully. It is better on before, only we are in danger of being swept away. Being in fellowship and having taken a certain position will not save us. The needed thing with each is downright exercise of soul.

I have said all this by way of preface. I might have chosen other scriptures to bring my subject before you, but I have read these as suiting that which is pressing on my spirit, I trust from the Lord, the subject of UNITY. Appreciation of Christ always produces unity, and unity always secures blessing. I want to bring it before you in connection with the Spirit of Christ as being necessary to it. His blessed Spirit is seen in the last scripture which I read. Many are anticipating unity, it is in their minds, but to us it is exceedingly painful, because we know it is vain and futile. They hope that peace will be secured by the unity that is in their minds, but it is all in vain. If you think of unity down here, you will find that it is God's intention to bless this earth through a unity produced by the Spirit of Christ. If you go back to Genesis xi. we get there the moral springs of that which has happened since. Men sought unity in connection with *their own glory*. They proposed to build a tower that would reach to heaven, in order to make a name for themselves. This attempt to secure unity in connection with their own glory was frustrated. They sought to build a tower front that which was of this earth. They made brick, and slime had they for mortar, but nothing having its origin in earth can reach heaven. The only thing that can reach heaven is that which comes down from heaven. We are born from above and hence heaven is our portion. The attempt to build a tower was frustrated and confusion was the result.

God called Abram to be the heir of the world, and his call indicated that God had created this earth for *His own glory*. It was "the God of glory" that appeared to him and by His call indicated that He purposed blessing for man, saying, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed". Whatever may happen, God always keeps to His purpose. Nothing thwarts Him. All the counsels and efforts of men come to nothing. If we were nearer to God, we should see what a poor puny creature man is, but away from Him our thoughts of man are exaggerated. Hence it is repeated to Isaac and again to Jacob that the nations of the earth should be blessed in them. It was a very small beginning, was it not? but a great comfort to read that which the Lord said in Isaiah 51: 1, 2, "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for *I called him*

alone, and blessed him, and increased him". Out of that solitary couple God has blessed and is blessing to-day. That is God's way. He begins from Himself. The gospel opens with this fact, that Jesus Christ was the son of Abraham.

Let me recall to your memory the time when Jacob slept by the road side, *a lonely stranger*, away from his father's house; there was a ladder, not a tower, but a ladder that reached to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it, that speaks of intercourse between heaven and earth. How beautiful is that! A number of sad things are happening which we feel, and rightly feel if we are with God. I do not believe in people being Stoics. The reason of all the sorrow is that earth in people's minds is divorced from heaven, but by-and-by that will be over. It is a great thing to see that: it will give stability, and prevent your being carried away by the thoughts of men. A confederacy is coming to pass as surely as it took place in the days of the tower of Babel.

When Jacob was at the end of his course, he prophetically goes through the history of that which would befall his sons in the last days. When we are in the light of the glory of God, we get a fine outlook, so this prophetic vision of Jacob gives the history of the people from the start to the finish. When he comes to speak of Judah, it is Christ that fills his vision (Christ is seen both in Joseph and Benjamin) but Shiloh was to come of Judah, and Jacob says, "Unto him shall the gathering of the peoples be". There is going to be unity, but He is the Person that will secure it; it will be upon earth mediatorially through the twelve tribes of Israel. The key verse to these ways of God is found in Deuteronomy 32: 8. "He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number (that is, the *twelve* tribes) of the children of Israel". There will not be blessing on this earth until there is unity in Israel. The twelve tribes must be united, but this comes from their being brought under the anointing of the true Aaron and drinking of the dew of heaven. It will be in their appreciation of Christ that the twelve tribes of Israel will be knit together, and through that unity will be the blessing of the nations, see Ps 97.

What can be more touching than this passage in Zechariah 2. I want you to see what God's thought is. Zechariah is a very rich prophet richer than any other save Isaiah. The blessed Lord is before us here, He is here seen as the Shepherd in the midst of the flock. You have Matthew's gospel in a nutshell. They were a flock of hatred towards Him, but He was there to feed them. Blessed Shepherd! How we need a Shepherd! "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob", Gen 40: 23, 24. That is verified in Psalm xxii. Then we have further, "From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel". How beautiful scripture is! Psalm xxiii. must follow Psalm xxii. What a Shepherd for Israel! He had been hated and grieved and shot at, but He shepherds the poor of the flock. See where His love led Him! He was the staff "Beauty," but they abhorred Him and hated Him. Beloved brethren, you will never find out your badness from a book, you will not discover it until you have learned the true character of human nature, that when Jesus was presented to your natural mind, you abhorred Him. Many of us never reach it save in theory. We may know *the doctrine* that in the flesh there dwells no good thing, but I mean more than that. The real sense of it would break you up, and lead you to appreciate Christ. To use one of our current coins, "the removal of the man" that must be realised, but no one could ever appreciate the "removal of the man" till they have learned the true character of the man. You learn it by way of contrast. What a contrast to Christ is fallen man. The Almighty God put Himself in the presence of His creatures, and He asked the price they would give for Him - "Give me my price". Think of it! They weighed for His price thirty pieces of silver - the price of a slave!

I speak in fear and trembling, but let me say that our spiritual growth is not measured by our knowledge, it lies in the appreciation we have of Christ. Do we not hear His voice at the supper saying, as it were, "Give me my price" (that is, At how much do you value me?). I am fully aware that the supper is introductory to the privileges of the assembly, but in it He appeals to us, "Give me my price". Pay attention to it, dear brethren. How it should come home

to us! I do not know anything more sanctifying than the supper. It is love's appeal to us every Lord's day, and your spiritual growth lies in the value which you set upon His love. There may be great ability to expound scripture and so on, but with it all there should be increasing affection for Christ. He looks upon every one of us and He sees how our hearts are in relation to Himself. We shall value our brethren rightly as we value Christ. If all the dear brethren spoke of me as a spiritual man, the great matter would be, What does God think of me? He sees where I am in relation to Christ, for He prizes affection flowing out to His dear Son, though it may be imperfectly.

I verily believe that some of us think that spirituality lies in correct statements. No, it does not, it lies in affection for Christ. One would not desire that saints should be unintelligent, but let intelligence be the result of affection. What did Thomas say - ignorant Thomas? He only saw the Jews and how they sought to stone Jesus, but *He* walked in the light of God His Father, and saw neither Jews nor stones. Thomas said, "Let us also go that we may die with him". Very ignorant, but very affectionate, full of affection. Surely the Lord prized that: He did. Life is not worth the living where Jesus is not - so we may regard the words of Thomas. I am not putting a premium on ignorance; but mark well, that spirituality does not lie in correct statements.

There was another ignorant person, yet full of affection: Mary Magdalene - she only thought of Jesus as being dead, and she sought His dead body. "Tell me", she said, to the supposed gardener, "where thou hast laid him and I will take him away". The Lord prizes such affection. Thomas said, "Let us go that we may die with him", and Mary said, as it were: I have no home where Jesus is not. Are you conscious of decline? Listen, and let Him speak to you! "Give me my price". What will you sacrifice for Him? That is the point. I see men who will lay down their lives for their country. What will we do for Christ? What trifling things worry us, shame on us! What will you give up for Christ? What are you prepared to sacrifice for Him? Let it come home to each one. Are you prepared to suffer for His sake?

The religious leaders of Israel prized Him at thirty pieces of silver, and with the money they bought a field to bury strangers in. It was called the field of blood. Now mark the Spirit of Christ speaking through the prophet, He accepts their valuation, and breaks His other staff "Bands". As a living Messiah He ceases to be the bond of brotherhood between Judah and Israel. Now pass on to chapter 13; there the Spirit of Christ again speaks, not as taking the place of a prophet but as accepting the position brought in by Adam – "I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the ground; for man [Adam] acquired me as bondman from my youth". Is that how Jesus is known? Was there ever such a Person? He who subsisted in the form of God taking the form of a bondman, and as such He became obedient unto death to serve guilty man. Do we take the place of service to the saints? Who is the greatest man in the meeting where you are? The man who is in the Spirit of Christ, and is marked by the love of Christ. Why are we not charmed with that? Why are we charmed with that which is official, which often gives a spirit of pretentiousness? The greatest man in the meeting is the man who is the servant of all in the love of Christ. Where the love of Christ is present in a meeting there will be unity. Where there is no gift in a meeting, there is often more spiritual prosperity than in a meeting where there is gift. You cannot *localise* gift, it is for the whole church of God. The moment you localise it you spoil it. I say these things that you may be exercised.

Where there is unity there is blessing. There is gathering power if we love each other. No matter how few there may be, if there is lowliness God will bless. There will be the recognition of our nothingness, but God will be praised. Where there is unity, there will be the outflow of praise. I could indicate it from other passages, such as Psalm 132; unity is realised when the ark of the covenant finds its place. There is the delight of David as he dances before the ark. He takes no place of prophet or of king, but he found his joy, because the ark of the covenant had been brought into its place. His wife (Michal), who was full of proprieties, despised him in her heart. In her eyes he was making a fool of himself. She was a true daughter of her father Saul, who said, "Honour me now ... before the elders of my people". She despised the man who would take off his

kingly robes, and dance before the Lord in the joy of his heart. Hence she was not fruitful; legal people are not fruitful. In the Book of Psalms there is a moral order and Psalm 133, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" follows Psalm 132. The secret is in being near Christ. Let us avoid questions which gender strife. He is now saying to us by the Spirit, "Come near to me, I pray you" as Joseph said to his brethren. If I understand the movement of the Spirit, I think that is what Christ is saying; and as we have "come near" to Him, so we come nearer to each other.

May the Lord be pleased to bless what I have tried feebly to bring before you. I have endeavoured to shew you how unity is brought about in the future by the appreciation of Christ, and it is brought about now in the same way. In Psalm 132 the ark of the covenant is going up to its place on Zion, and in the Epistle to the Ephesians we see Christ set in His place at the right hand of God in the heavenly places. Then in chapter 3 we have the true subjective state of the assembly, and Christ dwelling in the hearts of His saints by faith - thus we may say there is a resting-place for Christ maintained by the Spirit down here, and hearts drawn out to Him in affection and also to one another. May we realise it, beloved brethren, and if you are conscious of anything inconsistent with unity in the meeting where you may be, may this word produce exercise as to it. May we each be able to say, as it were, "I am no prophet" - but take the low place, ready to be the *servant of the saints in the Spirit of Christ*. May God grant it for the sake of His own dear Son.

From 'Mutual Comfort' 1919

Scripture quotations in this article are from the King James Version

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