

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

July 2019

No. 148

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HOLINESS 4

Key to initials:

JESUS ENTHRONED

BITTERNESS MADE SWEET

HOLINESS 4

Ephesians 1: 3-7

Revelation 21: 9 (from 'Come here') - 12, 18-27

Jeremiah 31: 23

AMB We have been pursuing this great subject of holiness and, I trust, finding profit in it while being tested by it. This morning we spoke about our approach to God, through Christ as our great High Priest, and with Christ. There is a dignity and blessedness that attaches to the saints as associated with Christ. I wondered if we could speak now about the holiness of God's dwelling, God's presence. I do not feel able to speak a great deal about these blessed matters. No doubt the beloved brethren will fill the matter out in their contributions, and we do need the help of the Holy Spirit even to begin to appreciate and understand the spiritual blessings that are before us when we speak of God's presence.

This passage in Ephesians speaks about the presence of the Father. The scripture says that we are in His presence as before Him - it says, "that we should be holy and blameless before him in love". I do not think we could get nearer to the Father than being before Him. A sense of blessedness flows from that, a sense of His presence, where we enjoy both His greatness and our nearness to Him. There are some wonderful touches in the passage. It brings out the Father as the source of all. He "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing": He is the source of all blessing; it is flowing out from Him. In verse 6, it speaks of our being "to the praise of the glory of his grace", so that He receives the glory. He is the source of the blessing, and He also receives the glory and the praise flowing from the enjoyment of the blessing; wonderful matter! The saints are used in filling out the blessing; they themselves are the demonstration of the greatness of God's heart, "the glory of his grace". It is the demonstration of His greatness towards those whom He has made the objects of His love.

Another thing to notice in this passage is how Christ comes into it. The Father has blessed us with these spiritual blessings, a comprehensive blessing - "every spiritual blessing", nothing omitted.

And it is “in the heavenlies in Christ”; so the Father is blessing us “in Christ”. We are chosen in Christ, and the Father has marked us out for sonship, for adoption, “through Jesus Christ to himself”. So these are blessed matters and we enjoy them as being before Him “holy and blameless” in love. The passage in Ephesians presents a scene of holy love, love resting and being complacent. It is a scene that is entirely according to God in holiness.

In Revelation what is before us is the holy city and everything about it speaks of moral perfection, transparency and purity: “the Lord God Almighty is its temple, and the Lamb”, and “the glory of God has enlightened it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb”. Features of holiness are seen in the holy city, which is a view of the assembly, the result of the glorious operations of divine Persons through the whole Christian period, wonderful matter! There is the exclusion of what is common in verse 27. That reference comes in because this is a millennial setting. It is the *holy* city, “the street of the city pure gold, as transparent glass”.

This verse in Jeremiah is beautiful: “O habitation of righteousness, mountain of holiness!”. There is something elevated about holiness, in the midst of righteousness. Would that be a basis for enquiry?

WMP The man who writes these very blessed things is a prisoner languishing in an uncongenial cell! I would like to understand how in our spirits we rise to the height of what is presented for us here.

AMB The apostle Paul was suffering at this time, deprived of his liberty. As far as physical things were concerned, he was in poor conditions, but do you think that he had by special revelation from the Lord in glory, a communication of the Lord’s view of His saints? He also had a great sense, communicated to him by the Lord Jesus and by the Holy Spirit too, of what God’s will was. I was struck by these references to “the good pleasure of his will”, and later on we get “the mystery of his will” (v 9), and “the counsel of his own will”, v 11. Paul was settled in what the will of God was, and he wanted very much indeed to convey that to the Ephesians. He wanted to make the height of God’s will available to them.

WMP So the service of the Lord Jesus that we spoke of in the previous reading, and of the Holy Spirit, is all towards the end that you and I and every true believer, including those that are present here this afternoon, might ourselves enter into the blessedness of this experience.

AMB I very much agree. Paul was a special person: being an apostle means that he received a revelation, and he had direct communication from the Lord Himself in glory. That is what is conveyed in the word 'apostle'. But he communicated what he had received to the whole church. He wrote to the Christians in Ephesus what had been made known to him, which was the thoughts that were in God's mind and what God's will was. He was conveying these wonderful things to the whole church, and we are to receive them, not to put them away from us.

NCMcK The foundational fact and the means by which this blessing is all accomplished is the blood of Christ, and the reason is the desire of God, "according to the good pleasure of his will". It is on that foundation and for that reason that we are "holy and blameless before him in love". It is helpful for the young people and for all of us to see that.

AMB I am glad you draw attention to the reference, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences" in verse 7, because that is like an anchor for us. Every one of responsible years in this hall will, I trust, be able to say that they have "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences". That is a fixed point; the blood of Christ gives us confidence and assurance. It is "precious blood" and it is effective in the sight of God for eternity. These blessings come to us because it is God's will that they should, and what is in His mind is our blessing and His glory; and His glory is the greater of these. Our blessings are immense, and His glory is greater! The saints form part of that glory. That is conveyed in the words "to the praise of the glory of his grace". It is not only that the saints are praising His grace, but the saints themselves contribute to the glory; they are taken account of and cause praise to arise to God for the glorious character of His grace.

JRW Could you say a little more as to your understanding of what it is to be “before him in love”? Great as God is, in a sense we are always before Him, are we not? As was remarked earlier we may be before Him in our sins, and glad of the precious blood of Jesus, but say more about what is involved in being “before him in love”.

AMB What has impressed me is that it is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” who is the subject of what follows in the long sentence that Paul writes, from verses 3 to 14. It is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” who has chosen us in Christ, “that we should be holy and blameless before him in love”. The name of Father is a name of relationship and affection, and being before Him seems to convey love and nearness. That love is pervasive. There is nothing to disturb love, nothing to be adjusted, we are “before him in love”, surrounded by it, the whole scene of the presence of the Father suffused with love, characterised by it, and we are there “holy and blameless”. That means that there is nothing in any way to spoil our enjoyment of that scene of love.

JRW Yes, I find that very attractive. There is a marvel about it that grips the soul as you go over it; I wish I knew more of it! It really comes down to what you have been bringing before us, that it is a holy love, and the holiness of God means that it is essential that we are “holy and blameless”. There is something special too about “blameless”, is there not? It is like justification, there is no blame attached to us.

AMB And no history. All that is removed. Very good.

JL It could be said of Adam at one point that he was blameless, but he never was before God holy and in love. Is that the portion of sons brought into relationship with God and entirely suited to His holy presence as a consequence of the work of His own beloved Son? Maybe you can enlarge on the difference between innocence and this blessed state enjoyed?

AMB Adam in his innocence never knew God as we do. The love of God towards us is demonstrated and brought into relief by the way it has been shown. The love of God was shown in the most contrary circumstances at the cross, and it was never more powerful or

sweeter than there! We have come to know that love. Verse 7 would remind us that we know the love of God towards us in the giving of His Son. We have come to know the heart of a holy God in the way that Adam never could in his innocence.

JL And while the expression used is “before him”, that not only conveys that we are in the presence of God, but that we are in the intimacy of that presence. We are always before God in the sense that He sees us and takes account of us, but the impression conveyed here is being before God in nearness, and the enjoyment of relationship in love.

AMB You would agree that it is the Father that is before us here, it is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. The very name conveys relationship, affection, nearness and derivation, as has already been said. So God has before Him those who are like Christ and who are His sons. He has “marked us out beforehand for adoption”, that means for sonship, “through Jesus Christ”. What could be a nearer relationship than sons before the Father, “holy and blameless”, enjoying His love?

GBG Does the expression “in love” convey the thought of atmosphere? It includes therefore what is horizontal, between the saints, does it? It would not suit God otherwise. It is real. Why do we drop from this so quickly?

AMB Part of the thought in bringing the subject before the brethren was that we might be helped as to that. These things that the apostle writes to the Ephesians about are real; they are heavenly things. We enjoy them in our spirits by the Holy Spirit even while we are here. We will enjoy them in a far clearer and more intense way when we are with Him actually, because we will see Him as He is, face to face, and we will know as we “have been known”, 1 Cor 13: 12. They are real things to be enjoyed now, and if they are real to us by the Holy Spirit then we will want to be maintained at this level.

GBG So we would see the effect of this in our relations together.

AMB I think that very much. In the Father’s presence love is pervading; it is horizontal among the saints as well as from Him to us and from the saints to the Father. And Christ is here as well

because we are in Him and His love is flowing too. The Spirit is active in this realm.

DCW It is remarkable that we should get such an insight into eternal things, which is very reassuring and stabilising. We know that love was there in eternity.

AMB This all furthers the knowledge of God in our hearts and minds. He reveals things and makes things known to those that love Him. If we love Him, we desire to know more of Him and of His presence. It is a wonderful thing to be let into the secrets of God's heart. He has revealed these secrets. God has revealed His heart and He has revealed His Person in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Knowing God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is a great opening up of who and what He is.

DCW So He has revealed these things to us by His Spirit, 1 Cor 2: 10. It is striking that the first thing that Paul raised when He went to Ephesus was whether they had received the Holy Spirit, Acts 19: 2.

AMB My coming into the experience and enjoyment of these things depends on the Spirit having liberty with me. We also remember that the Father has His portion as we are in the enjoyment of what He makes known to us. The Spirit has a great part to play in that.

RT The background of what you are saying is "according as he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation". We had no hand in it, had we?

AMB Yes; you might say the ultimate in sovereignty. It is entirely from God's side!

RT It is divine purpose, is it not? It has been said that believers were saints in purpose before they were sinners in practice!

AMB Long before! The great matter of God's purpose is that it is God's purpose and none can interfere with that. If God purposes something it comes to pass. His counsels have to do with 'how', His purposes are the 'what', and what God purposes comes to pass. What a wonderful thing to be allowed into the secret of that, to have that made known to us.

DCB The address here is “to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus”. You are seeing persons who were “chosen ... before the world’s foundation”; it is not an imagination: these are persons who indeed are faithful.

AMB Yes, we look at “the saints and faithful” in this hall, “chosen ... in him”, chosen in Christ “before the world’s foundation”. How dignified such people are, as the subject of the affectionate movements of God’s purpose and God’s mind. How wonderful that is! What a way to look upon one another. This is very definitely a collective setting; the apostle is writing about people together, and the things he is writing about are to be enjoyed together. No doubt we can enter into them in our own contemplation and private time, but these blessings are enjoyed together, and how greatly we should value those that we are able to enjoy them with.

ARH “Chosen us in him”: the benefit of that is for now. This has a particular bearing on us now, because we will be absolutely assured of it there; but then the apostle takes this back to what was previous, before the world was. Is that to confirm to us that God had a hand in it all?

AMB It will be obvious that we have been “chosen ... in him” when we are there in glory, but it is in the present time, a time of faith and not sight, that the truth of these words brings assurance to the soul. It is tremendous assurance to know that we were the subject of God’s thoughts and God’s purpose, and it is unshakeable. Therefore the believer has complete assurance that this is so, and we can go in for the enjoyment of it by the Holy Spirit. There have been several references during these meetings to assurance; I think that is very important. We can be assured that the spiritual blessings the apostle writes about here are more real and more assured than the physical things that go on around us.

AM Does the reference to “the world’s foundation” convey that there came a moment when divine Persons began to operate to secure what was in their heart and purpose?

AMB I would be interested in your thoughts as to that. I have thought of purpose as coming first, and then you get eternal counsel

as to the working out of these things. “Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me)” (Heb 10: 7), seems to relate to the counsel of God; it is how all this was to be gloriously brought about, and then in the ineffable wisdom of God He moves in creation to bring into being a scene where men would be set. What would you say about it?

AM It just seems very affecting to me that divine Persons have worked right through to bring about this end, that we should be holy and blameless before God in love.

AMB It gives us a sense of what the deepest and innermost feelings of the holy and blessed God are: He desires that He should have men in His presence in relationship with Him in love, and set free. The Father is before our minds here. The Father has a house, and there is a Son, His beloved Son, who is over all of that house; and the many sons who are adopted in Christ Jesus are free in that house. We have the Father’s house as our setting.

NJH It says, “having marked us out beforehand for adoption”. That was before sonship came into expression in Christ in manhood?

AMB We have what is before the world’s foundation, that is, “chosen ... in him”. Then, “having marked us out beforehand for adoption” involves purpose; the footnote *d* says, ‘It is not “counsel”’. Would that “beforehand” be at the same point as being “chosen in him before the world’s foundation”, relating to God’s purpose?

NJH Sonship was introduced into the human family, but God’s purpose is based on the sonship of Christ being brought in. It is after that order, is it not?

AMB Yes, it is all according to Christ Himself. I think that comes through the whole passage: everything is in Christ, and so it has the character of that blessed One, indeed His nature. There is nothing that is going to be for the eternal pleasure of God that is not after Christ.

HTF Does “blameless” have in mind the perfection of the work of Christ? That would show that His work was foreseen in purpose; God was not dealing with an interruption, was He?

AMB Yes. We have spoken about the blessedness of being blameless. It suggests something of the moral worth of Christ Himself. He is the One who is without any blame and the saints are made like Him.

JRW It is not easy for us to understand that. Justification is derived from the word 'just'. We are not justified in sinning, but justification seems almost to put us on that ground, that no blame can be attached to us. It must relate to the character of Christ Himself.

AMB Blamelessness would be something that you would be conscious of, so that there would be nothing to break in on our enjoyment of what God has purposed for us.

JRW Practically we need to get a sense of that, because - particularly when we are down in our spirits - the enemy would press on us our history, what we have done, and what we have been guilty of. So we need a greater sense of what you are bringing before us, do you think?

AMB We can point to the atoning blood, and that is a great eternal matter. But then day to day we need to call on the help of the Holy Spirit to be sustained in a sense of favour. We also have the intercessions of the Spirit and of the Lord Jesus in our weakness. There might be weakness on my part, that I am not seeing myself as God sees me, and I can ask for the help of two divine Persons to intercede that I might.

RDP The hymn speaks about -

Thoughts divine conceived in purpose,
Hymn 83.

These great thoughts were conceived in a realm of holiness, and they could never be threatened. It might have seemed that the counsel of God was threatened in its working out, in that the enemy tried to attack the counsel of God, but the purpose of God was conceived in an area of holiness: is that right?

AMB That is interesting. The purpose of God is beyond any assailing, but the counsel involves the working out of things, and His ways come into that too. The enemy became active in the created

sphere, as having been created himself, of course. He was set against God receiving what we have read about, but this is in the purpose of God and is unassailable. What mighty power is on the side of the believer in getting through to the blessings that are spoken of here, and enjoying what we are in the purpose of God.

APG Sons are the objects of affection, are they not? Sons can be embraced and kissed, and they enjoy divine love. Is that the thought?

AMB What a matter it is! It would affect our hearts freshly that God should choose to come into relationship as Father with sons by adoption. There is the great matter of affection from the Father's side first, and then that affection is responded to, and the response from sons suggests intelligence as well. You think of the character and level of sonship; it is in Christ! The model for the many sons is Christ.

APG Acts 20 is often referred to as a love chapter; you can see there the saints and their love for one another.

AMB Yes that is fine, towards one another, and also towards the apostle, would you say? That connects with what was helpfully said earlier as to "in love" involving affection among the saints.

RWMcC It has been remarked in ministry that there is the purpose of God and His sovereign work, but in His ways everything must be secured on moral grounds, JT vol 21 p281.

AMB Very good; you can see that. That is where the glory of His grace comes in.

RWMcC It is all in Christ!

AMB Exactly. The glory and the grace of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ have come out in Christ. How wonderful it is! No one but God could have these thoughts, and He will be praised eternally for the glory of His grace.

JTB How would you distinguish between being 'chosen' and being 'marked out'?

AMB One is "before the foundation of the world" and the other is "beforehand". I had not thought about it, so I would be glad to have

your impression of it.

JTB We have been 'chosen' to enjoy these blessings, but 'marked out' seems to enhance the glory of sonship. Each of us bears that identifying mark, that we are actually a son and can thus enter into the glory of these blessed relationships.

AMB And "marked out" is a dignifying expression, do you think? As "marked ... out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ", we bear the stamp of the One who has marked us out.

JTB The Lord Jesus Himself was marked out, "marked out Son of God in power", Rom 1: 4. It seems to involve a certain degree of distinction does it, a quality of distinction?

AMB That is helpful because it links to our present pathway. We have to go through the world here. The believer has to go through the world, but we go through as marked out "beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself". Do we stand in front of the mirror on a Monday morning when we have to go out to work or school or college and say, 'Well, I have been marked out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to the Father'?

JTB And the saints are "blameless" in that character! In 1 Thessalonians 5: 23 it brings in the matter of sanctification to which you have drawn our attention, "sanctify you wholly: and your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"; so there is that potential, do you think?

AMB Very good. The apostle there is writing about very practical matters, so that the features of holiness and blamelessness that mark the saints before the Father in love are real; they are not ethereal; they belong to God's purpose. As matters are presented here, our responsibility does not enter into it, but the extent to which we enjoy our heavenly blessings there is affected by how we fulfil our responsibility here.

JTB So at the rapture and the appearing all those secured will be without any blame at all. It will not be possible to attach blame to them. Justification is needed, and enters into that; but the concept of blamelessness is something very great and glorious, is it not?

NJH How far is “the Beloved” linked with His manhood, the incarnation?

AMB He is also spoken of as “my beloved Son”, as coming in manhood. What would you say about it?

NJH It is wonderful that we are enjoying together the very thoughts of divine purpose relating to ourselves. In Galatians, Christ comes according to “the fulness of the time” (chap 4: 4), but in Ephesians the purpose hangs on the matter of His incarnation, the coming of Christ according to purpose. He Himself was the subject of purpose, was He not?

AMB They are holy matters. Everything that God has secured for Himself in the revelation of Himself has been secured by Christ and in Christ. There will be no creature before God, with whom God will dwell eternally, who is not there as being in Christ. Is that right?

NJH Yes; divine glory shines. I was thinking as it was being read how the scripture goes on to speak of “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory” (v17), the fountain of purpose. I just thought that everything, all divine purpose relating to the saints, hangs on that Person, on Christ. He is presented here as the One in whom divine purposes are secured, not subject to “the fulness of the time” as in Galatians. In Galatians, Christ came when the fulness of time was come, but here it is according to purpose, the highest thought.

AMB Yes, and the Person whom we have come to know as Christ was one in these eternal counsels with the One now known as Father and the One now known as Spirit. How great He is! And such a One came in incarnation, taking a bondman’s form, Phil 2: 7.

TRC I wondered as to “we should be holy and blameless before him in love” whether the best robe might be the assurance of that. It came from the Father’s affections, “Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it”, Luke 15: 22.

AMB How well the younger son would look in that best robe! He did not think he was worthy of it; when he speaks he does not mention it: he never thought of it!

TRC And that is the assurance of blamelessness as well.

AMB Very helpful, so we are clothed. God is able righteously to clothe us with the worth of Christ; that is a tremendous matter to lay hold of and to enjoy!

PAG I wondered whether 'chosen in Christ' conveys that we should be like Him, but "marked ... out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ" suggests that God has arranged that we should love the One who brought us there. We are before the Father in love, but because it was Christ who brought us there, we love Him too: "that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them", John 17: 26.

AMB God in His purpose, and the Father in His operations in grace, has so wrought that Christ should be loved by myriads whom He has redeemed and is redeeming. What a cause to love Him! How the Father rejoices in myriads of those who have cause to love Christ and do love Him. I think we are really in the realm of sharing the Father's feelings about the Son. We sing that hymn:

In Thy grace Thou now hast brought us
Sharers of Thy joy to be,
(Hymn 277).

The Father's love for the Son must be special and pre-eminent, and greater than ours, but nevertheless we are brought in. I think that would all be included in being before Him in love, do you think?

PAG I do think that. I have had the impression, as we have been speaking together and in the last reading too, that the Lord's desire that "the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them" means that Christ is not simply in us restfully - although He is - He is in us responsively. Our brother was asking how we may be maintained in affection together. As Christ is in us responsively, we are in a circle of affection that came out from God, that Christ worked out for God, and now He brings us back to God.

AMB We are in that "second man, out of heaven" (1 Cor 15: 47); we are in Him, and He is in us. There are practical matters about identifying God's work in us, giving the Spirit room to operate, and judging in ourselves what is not according to what God has done; but

what you are saying is the truth. It is a very elevated view of believers and it is an elevated view of ourselves. We need to walk in the light of it.

JCG I was thinking that all these things that God has had in His heart are according to the good pleasure of His will. Peter speaks about “a people for a possession ... God’s people”, 1 Pet 2: 9. The great result is that everybody together in unity responds in the presence of God. That is what pleases God, that He sees Christ in the saints.

AMB There is a peculiar glory and pleasure to God in seeing the saints united in Christ and responsive in unity. There is what is peculiarly derived from God in inward unity of heart and spirit, and people marked by such features are responsive to Him.

NCMcK Is there anything for God that is not in Christ?

AMB I do not think so. What do you think?

NCMcK We link it, and rightly so, with the peculiar place that the saints of the assembly have, but when the dead in Christ will rise, that will include every saint that has ever been secured by Christ’s work. We cannot see anything that is for God outside of Christ.

AMB The saints of the old dispensations will be secured on the basis of Christ’s work. The earthly families, those secured on the earth after the first resurrection when the church is taken up, will be secured in Christ. Every one that God has purposed to secure for Himself, will be secured in Christ and will be held by Christ for God’s pleasure.

NCMcK It does not set aside the peculiar blessing and privilege that those “taken ... into favour in the Beloved” at the present time, and being formed after Christ as knowing Him, will have. But it shows the greatness of what is for God as everything is secured in that blessed Man.

AMB Yes, the whole universe will be secured by Him.

TWL “The Beloved” is a description by the Spirit of what the Father thinks of Christ. According to this scripture, everything that will be there for the eternal day is “in the Beloved”. It is what we are as

marked out beforehand. The note is helpful, it has 'that to which they are destined' in mind (note *d*), and the destination is before the Father in Christ; it is in His Beloved. It would emphasise the special place that the saints of the assembly have. A remark was made yesterday about the greatness of the people linking to the greatness of the Person. "In the Beloved" is what we are before God as He sees Christ with Himself.

AMB That is His name, "the Beloved". How freely the Father's love rests on that One, and we are in Him.

TWL I was thinking that "the Beloved" is like the Father's personal name for Christ: that is what He thinks of Him. It is also what He thinks of those who are in Him.

AMB That is something to feed our souls on. The character and nature of Christ wholly satisfies the Father's heart, and we are brought into favour in Him, right into the warmest spot of the Father's affections!

TWL So that in Ephesians 1, it is not exactly the power of the working, but the position of the place that the saints are given.

AMB We are viewed as being there, are we not?

TWL Exactly. The saints are viewed as in Him; it is in Christ, the position, where we are, not exactly how we got there.

AMB We have these wonderful references to the power, the Spirit's power, that is towards us who believe; then the reference in chapter 3 to the power that is in us. These show that there is ample divine power to bring us right into the place that is spoken of by the Holy Spirit through Paul in chapter 1. There is more than adequate power to bring us in and to sustain us there. But what is before us here is the enjoyment of our place before the Father and in His love, the love that He has for Christ.

PM And in that place, the Beloved is the Centre of everything that God has done and everything that He will secure. This chapter goes on to God heading up "all things in the Christ" (v 10), and giving "him to be head over all things to the assembly", v 22. How great a Person Christ is!

AMB All the purpose of God revolves around Christ. He is the Centre of the purpose of God and God's counsels are all fulfilled by and in that One.

PM You can understand the Lord Jesus saying, "thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world", John 17: 24.

AMB You wonder at it. It is really the revelation of the secrets of God's heart that there was love there before there was anything else. Divine Persons were there, and love was there, and this is made known to us. There is what is beyond us clearly in the relations between divine Persons; but in making Himself known as Father, He has made known His love to us.

Revelation 21 would particularly bring the assembly before us as the holy city. The special place that the saints of the assembly have has been referred to, and this passage really speaks about the distinctiveness of the assembly. The saints of the assembly will be in eternal conditions as soon as the rapture takes place and we are all with Christ, but this is a description of the assembly in the period of the millennium. Wonderful glories come out in it in display as a result of the work of Christ. In this view of the assembly, she takes on the character of Christ as holy.

JAB We read the opening words, "Come here". These were addressed to the apostle John. Do you think that God would have us all hear Him say this to us? John had been exiled to Patmos and he heard and saw all this. What would you say about, "Come here"?

AMB It is like heaven drawing our attention to this, and it is an elevated view - the angel carried him away. It was an invitation which John would want to take up, but he was carried away and set on a great and high mountain. John was invited to take God's view, a heavenly view of what the assembly is.

JAB Do you think that God would say this to each one of us? He would use what has been before us in these meetings and say, "Come here", 'come up to an elevated viewpoint, think about this, enjoy it'. Nobody here can say 'Well, my circumstances are not suitable' because John was in very poor circumstances and yet he had this view and he enjoyed it too.

AMB Being “set ... on a great and high mountain” would be in accord with what you are saying. One of the many things that the Spirit is able to do for the believer is to give us a divine view, a heavenly view of things. Earlier on in the book of Revelation, John had been given messages to seven assemblies in what is now Turkey, and in most of them he had pretty sober things to write. But in this chapter he is shown God’s view of the assembly in all its glory, and we could take that home to ourselves. Then there is a challenging and searching matter for each of us as to committing ourselves to maintaining what is due to God and due to the Lord in the assembly at the level that heaven sees it.

RHB What is your thought as to why he is invited to come and see “the bride”, and what he is shown is ‘the city’?

AMB Do you think heaven would love to draw attention to what is for the satisfaction of Christ’s heart, “the bride”, and then, “the Lamb’s wife”? It is a very, very attractive description, and it must involve an answer to the heart of Christ. Then we see what is shown is the city, that which represents Him; I wondered if the city suggested that. The greatness of what He is in manhood shines out through this enormous, glorious city.

RHB The city is often connected with administration, and I wondered if that can only properly be taken up in bridal affection. We speak of walking in the light of the assembly; what does that mean to me? It must mean that everything has Him as its object. Perhaps our care meetings would be easier if the prevailing object in them was Christ held in bridal affection, and providing what is for His pleasure.

AMB That is helpful. The context of this scripture is “the bride, the Lamb’s wife”, the one who answers to Christ’s affections. Then the character of the city is transparency and holiness. Related to that, we have what is kept out of the city, which would reinforce the thought of what is holy. Holy affection would characterise the assembly, holy affection for Christ and therefore for His interests and what is to be administered. There are two references to what is pure: there is “the city pure gold, like pure glass”, and then verse 21,

“the street of the city pure gold, as transparent glass”. It is all according to Christ and the features seen in Him.

JL Is it not marvellous that the bride is identified as the Lamb’s wife, suggesting the answer to the sufferings and sacrifice of the Lamb? Whether it be the holiness of the city or the administration of it, or the security of it, or whatever you like to connect with it, it is the product of the sufferings of the Lamb, is it not?

AMB That is fine! What an attractive expression it is: “a Lamb standing, as slain”, Rev 5: 6. He is the blessed One who has given Himself.

JL Yes; He was identified earlier in the book as the One who was worthy (chap 5), but now we see the product of it all, and the answer secured to the eternal glory of God and filling the world to come as well.

AMB He will “be glorified in his saints, and wondered at in all that have believed”, 2 Thess 1: 10. This is a view of His saints in whom He is glorified.

DCW Would it be right to say that John could see nothing else from this vantage point? The “high mountain” would be apart from anything else, and wherever he looked he would see this great vessel, would he not, and nothing else?

AMB He would not have eyes for anything else! Think of that, Christ wholly engrossed with this vessel that He has purchased.

GJR Although it was such a marvellous scene, the apostle expresses no wonder or surprise. When he saw the false wife he wondered at it (chap 17: 6); there was something awful about it, incongruous, but do you think he saw in this city the answer, something entirely in keeping with the Man he had loved and known?

AMB John would have had great insight into this, and he is able to give a full, accurate and detailed description of the city. What an impression the whole scene must have made on the apostle’s mind! His heart would be filled with joy at the thought that he was seeing the counterpart of the One whom he had known here on earth. His

heart would respond to the angel's words as to the Lamb's wife. What a great matter that would be to the apostle John, who had known Christ, and had rested in His bosom, and had seen Him going up. His heart would be filled with the view that he was given of the holy city.

GAB Why is there no temple in it?

AMB It says, "the Lord God Almighty is its temple, and the Lamb"; it is the dwelling place of God; there is no need for temples made with hands here. The whole city is the temple, is it?

GAB The Jewish temple had a great deal of order about it, a hierarchy of priests who have pre-eminence, but all that is done away with; this is all direct.

AMB So it would be right to say the whole city is the dwelling place of God. In the eternal scene men will tabernacle with God, and the scripture suggests that this will be through the holy city. The thought of expansion has come into several of the remarks in this reading. I have been struck by the thought that when God first came into relation with His people and gave directions as to the tabernacle and the holy of holies, it was a confined space. It was also obscure in the sense that the candlestick was not in the holy of holies: there was no light shed there. But in the eternal day the whole city, indeed the whole universe, will become the dwelling place of God. Everything will be according to Him and God will "be all in all", 1 Cor 15: 28.

BWL Does the jasper represent holiness? It comes in in relation to the city and the wall, and when John in chapter 4 is invited to "Come up here" (v1), he sees the throne, and the first thing he sees is a stone of jasper. I was thinking of what you said in relation to the assembly having the character of Christ, the One who sat upon the throne; it is Christ, is it not?

AMB That is fine. You are relating these two references to the jasper to the holiness of God seen in Christ; the shining of the holy city was "as a crystal-like jasper stone". There is a radiating or shining out of holiness from the holy city; it really is its character, like God.

JCG I was thinking of the shining. It is a most remarkable matter of divine grace that she has the glory of God! What a wonderful concept that is! You were saying earlier that everything God sees is Christ really, the glory of God is reflective there. The reference in Romans starts with those whom he has foreknown and ends with “these also he has glorified”, chap 8: 30. This is the collective answer to that, is it? It is a remarkable shining!

AMB And what a counterpart to Christ! He will see Himself over again in the saints of the assembly. There is great detail in the description of the gates and the walls and the foundations, and all of these features together reflect every aspect of what Christ is in His glory.

JCG That is very good.

Every feature Christ reflecting
Hymn 83.

The stones would bring that out, do you think? There is great variety; God has worked in different ones in view of different features of Christ shining out. Every feature will be brought together collectively in the city.

AMB And think of that, as under the hand of Christ, all resonating in response to God. What a full and glorious expression of response in this one who is Christ’s counterpart.

NJH I was thinking of John’s view here. He had been on the mount of transfiguration and seen the glory of Christ there. Now he sees in this city a divinely-constituted answer to that glory.

AMB Do you think John would have seen His face shining? “He was transfigured before them. And his face shone as the sun”, Matt 17: 2. Now John is seeing something here that is like that - the divine answer.

PAG I just wondered if the reference “the Lord God Almighty is its temple, and the Lamb” would suggest that God had now secured everything that He had ever intended in the created sphere. Jehovah Elohim is the Lord God, and Jehovah Elohim formed man and breathed into man “the breath of life; and Man became a living

soul”, Gen 2: 7. While the access had been indirect because of what man is, there is no need for that now: God has everything, and then these three words, “and the Lamb”.

AMB The “Lord God Almighty is its temple, and the Lamb”; what would you say about it?

PAG The line of the hymn comes to mind -

For Thou hast brought again to Him
More than by man He lost;
(Hymn 431).

God has now, through this One who is the Lamb, in this place of holiness, all that suits Him, but it is more than He had!

AMB It is a full answer, and God will have that eternally in Christ and the assembly. Those other families which will dwell in relation to God through the assembly will be entirely to His satisfaction, and entirely according to His purpose in every detail. The character and nature of the city will be wholly according to Him, full of love and full of holiness. He will dwell in such conditions; it is more than our minds can take in, but you can see how wonderfully true it is that God will be all in all. He will be the object of all: God is all. He will suffuse everything and will give character to everything: God in all.

QAP Did you have an impression as to why both the Lamb and the Lamb’s wife are referred to in this section?

AMB I think what has been said is helpful, that “the Lamb” is a particularly attractive presentation of Christ, as the One who suffered to fulfil God’s will. He is now glorified and triumphant, but He is still the Lamb, and He has a full and complete answer to His affections as Man.

QAP Mr Darby’s hymn says -

Of all thy sufferings talk (Hymn 270).

AMB Yes, that is an interesting line! I do not think we shall talk about the agony of the sufferings exactly, but rather the wonderful fruit of what has been secured through the sufferings of that blessed One.

DCW It is interesting that in the first three days of creation there was no sun and no moon. On the fourth day they were brought in, in view of rule. In the eternal day, day and night and times and seasons and all those things will have gone, will they not?

AMB We will be enjoying everything according to God. There will be no need for the imposition of any created thing in the way of rule because God's nature will pervade all; everything will be according to Him.

RHB In the last verse it says, "nothing common, nor that maketh an abomination and a lie, shall at all enter into it". I wondered if that is the climax of what you had in mind, that there is a creature vessel formed in holiness for the eternal ages, and there is going to be glory to God "in the assembly ... unto all generations of the age of ages", Eph 3: 21. Nothing common or unclean or anything of that character has part in it.

AMB I think verse 27 is added because this is still in the millennial setting. In eternal conditions, you could not think of anything like this. The reference also emphasises the holiness of the city, that it is entirely for Christ and entirely for God. What a wonderful vessel.

RHB It should be in our minds that we should not contribute anything of that character in the gatherings of the saint because it has no place there.

AMB Such things are not in Christ, so have no a place in this august vessel.

Jeremiah 31: 23 refers to the mountain of holiness; "habitation of righteousness, mountain of holiness". One thought as to this is that there is something particularly elevated about the blessed matter of holiness. Another thought is that exercise is needed to be maintained in holiness. To be maintained in holiness involves desire and exercise.

TM Where we read in Revelation it says, "Come here", and it says, "he carried me away in the Spirit, and set me on a great and high mountain". I wondered if the mountain of holiness in Jeremiah would be like this, "a great and high mountain", and being carried away in

spirit is a state into which John entered. We need to be in the Spirit to enter into holiness.

AMB That is helpful. It is spiritual and elevated, and so it requires the Spirit. On my part it requires exercise, and we need to remind ourselves this is real. We have talked about heavenly things this afternoon, and I am sure every heart in the room has been stirred by realising that the saints are brought into the purposes of God by the Father's love. Well, how are we going to answer to that? I need to be exercised to maintain things at God's level, at the level that would be satisfying to Christ in holiness and in love.

HTF To speak as we are doing has a practical bearing on each of us, and to speak in this way is sufficient for time and eternity.

AMB I am glad of what you say; it is a real and practical matter.

Glasgow 3 Day Meetings

11th August 2018

Key to initials:

A M Brown, Grangemouth; D C Brown, Edinburgh; G A Brown, Grangemouth; J A Brown, Grangemouth; J T Brown, Edinburgh; R H Brown, East Finchley; T R Campbell, Glasgow; H T Franklin, Grimsby; A P Grant, Dundee; G B Grant, Dundee; J C Gray, Grangemouth; P A Gray, Grangemouth; A R Henry, Glasgow; N J Henry, Glasgow; J Laurie, Brechin; T W Lock, Edinburgh; B W Lovie, Aberdeen; R W McClean, Grimsby; N C McKay, Glasgow; T Mair, Cullen; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; P Martin, Colchester; W M Patterson, Glasgow; R D Plant, Birmingham; Q A Poore, Swanage; G J Richards, Malvern; R Taylor, Kirkcaldy; J R Walkinshaw, Maidstone; D C White, Sidcup

JESUS ENTHRONED

Andrew Martin

1 Peter 3: 22

Hebrews 1: 13; 2: 8 (from “But now”), 9 (to “honour”); 5: 5, 6

Psalms 68: 18

We started this morning with the words as to our Lord Jesus:

Jesus, our Lord, on the throne of the Father

Thou’rt crowned;

Thou once on Calvary suff’redst,

of man the disowned;

(Hymn 311).

The Lord Jesus, we know, was rejected here, but He has been crowned above. What took place when the Lord Jesus went up into heaven? What happened? If you read the Acts of the Apostles you will find that Jesus went up into heaven, and then we do not hear any more about heaven for another ten days. We might even look at the Acts of the Apostles and wonder what was happening there. We are not told there of anything happening. But great things took place in heaven, great things when Jesus went up.

The apostle Peter speaks of one thing. The Lord Jesus went up into heaven, having come out of death. Admittedly there was an interval of forty days when He appeared here, but Scripture does not treat time the way we treat time. The gospel of Luke’s account of the resurrection and ascension would almost read as though He came out of death, appeared to His own and went straight up into heaven, chapter 24. Time for God is not a limiting thing. What was immediately before the Lord as He came out of death was that He should go up into heaven. That is a wonderful thing. He had just been cast out of this scene. Publicly those cries had been heard - “Away with this man” (Luke 23 18); “When will he die” (Ps 41: 5); and then that terrible scene at Golgotha when One who was none other than the Son of God was made an object of the sport of man, and the most callous sport of man at that - to mock a Man who was dying. You think of the awfulness of man’s heart. That is what they

did, they mocked Him, and they ridiculed Him. You think of all that the Lord Jesus suffered there. Not only did He suffer in His body, there is not only the wrath He suffered from God, that exceeds all sufferings; but there was also the suffering in His spirit. What it meant to Him to suffer on that cross we will never know. They hung Him there upon that cross and they said, "If thou art Son of God, descend from the cross", Matt 27: 40. They heaped "reproaches on him" (v 44), upon the One who had done no sin, "who knew not sin" (2 Cor 5: 21), the One in whom perfect goodness had been expressed.

They said, "He trusted upon God; let him save him now if he will have him", Matt 27: 43. You think of that: would God have such a One? The final humiliation of all is in that terrible cry, at the end of three hours of darkness, He acknowledged publicly that God had forsaken Him, v 46. What that must have meant to Him to hear those insults and those terrible expressions of man, and then to acknowledge that in fact God had forsaken Him. Why had God forsaken Him? Not for anything in Himself. He uttered that terrible cry, "why hast thou forsaken me?". I know the answer to that: do you know the answer to that, my friend? Does every one of us here know the answer to that cry? Why did God forsake Him? It was because of you and me. If God had not forsaken Him then, if He had not suffered under the hand of God and borne God's terrible wrath against sin and sins, I would have had to bear it in the light of my own sins. When I think of my sins, sins that no one else in this room knows, I could never think of bearing God's judgment against my sins. He took the whole question of sin upon Himself and He bore the wrath of God against sin, and He bore the sins of everyone who puts their faith and trust in Him.

How can we get away from the cross? I came here to speak about the Lord Jesus in glory, but how can we get away from the cross? It is the fulcrum on which the whole universe pivots. Eternity hangs upon the cross of Jesus, and your future and mine depends upon where we stand in relation to the cross of Jesus. How do you stand in relation to Him who offered Himself, as the great Sin-bearer, to God? The Lord Jesus suffered there. He died, He shed His

precious blood; each a great milestone in the work of redemption that was carried out. He was buried, put out of sight: man in flesh and blood conditions put out of the sight of God; the end of man in the flesh. He answered to God's word to Noah. God had said, "The end of all flesh is come before me" (Gen 6: 13); that is the death and burial of Jesus. If such a One as He was put out of sight in burial, what does it mean for you and me? It means the end of all of us in flesh and blood conditions; not one of us could please God according to our own abilities. It is not within the power of any one of us. It is only by faith, "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb 11: 6), that is God. Who do you have your faith in? It must be in a risen Man, One who is no longer in death, but risen; the Father could not allow Him to remain in death. He came in all His glory, the Father came in glory, and raised Him from among the dead. Men did not see it, no. How was the glory there if men did not see it? Everything that God is was involved, every aspect by which we can know God was involved, in the resurrection of Jesus. It must be so; His love was involved. It was a matter of righteousness that Jesus should be raised. It was a matter of holiness that His Holy One should not be left; "neither wilt thou allow thy Holy One to see corruption", Ps 16: 10. Every feature, every attribute of God was involved that Jesus should be raised.

The glory of God the Father was there and He was raised; it was a question of His power too. The apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians of "the surpassing greatness of his power", chap 1: 19. The surpassing greatness of His power has been exercised once in the raising of Jesus from among the dead. The power of God is towards us now. The greatest expression of it was in the raising of the Lord Jesus from the dead. The power of death has been broken. Men can overcome all sorts of powers, they do what they can to delay the power of death, but they can never break it. It has its claim upon us and it will come to each of us if the Lord leaves us here. There is nothing you can do to stop it. Nothing any man can do. Mr C A Coates wrote a tract called '*The Preacher of the Old School*', vol 21 (A Sure Foundation) p12. It is a wonderful tract. He builds up a picture of a preacher that comes into every circumstance. He comes uninvited, comes into every circle of man,

rich or poor, high or low. He comes in. The preacher of the old school is death and there is nothing man can do to stop it. The Lord Jesus has been there; death for the believer is not a fearsome thing; it is not a thing to be feared. It is an entrance into what is extremely blessed, the greatest blessings that can be open to man. It is an entrance into what is eternal, into the very presence of the Lord Jesus. He has been into death; He has come out of it, the power of it broken. The resurrection of Jesus is the evidence that the power of death has been broken. The power of death was actually broken when the Lord Jesus went into death. Death could not stand before Him. When any one of us goes into death it is because death has a claim upon us because we are sinners. Death has a claim; it is a governmental consequence of the fact that we are sinners. Death has passed upon every one of us, but it did not pass upon Him. No! It had no claim upon Him. He went into death. In a sense the Lord Jesus went into death as an invader, to claim the territory that Satan held. Satan held the fear of death over men, and the Lord Jesus invaded His territory. He went into death itself and by doing so He broke the power of death. He used Satan's own weapon to annul him. When David met Goliath, he slang the stone; then he drew the giant's own sword. David did not have a sword. He drew Goliath's own sword and cut off his head and killed him completely, 1 Sam 17. The Lord Jesus has overcome the one who had the might of death by using the very weapon that he exercised against men. What a One! How great He is to be able to do that!

As having come out of death, He is now ascended on high. Peter says He is "at the right hand of God, gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to him". Death has been overcome by Him. How right it is that every power is subjected to Him. He has gone on high as the Conqueror. He is the One who is there as the great Victor. He has now gone into heaven itself. No earthly place is sufficient for Him. The earth is still in the hands of the wicked one: "the whole world lies in the wicked one" (1 John 5: 19); you get the evidence of it all the time. If you just glance at newspaper headlines; you say, 'I do not want to read that, it is evil; I am not reading that': "the whole world lies in the wicked one". There is no place here for the Lord Jesus. He has a place in glory; yes, a

place that has been reserved for Him, a place that no one else could fill. Think of the Father as receiving the Lord Jesus in glory. We are not told too much about it. One soul had an impression of the Lord Jesus going up into heaven -

Received in glory bright up there,
The Father's greetings, honours rare,
Are heaped upon His Son's blest brow;
He is the mighty Victor now.

Hymn 350

What does the Father say? "Sit at my right hand, until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet", Ps 110: 1. You think of that invitation; it had never been issued to any one before. No one else was worthy of it. Who could fill that place? In Chronicles, at the end of the history of David, Solomon sits on the throne with David his father; they share the throne. Solomon did not have his own throne at that time; it comes later. At that time, he sat on the throne with David his father. The Lord Jesus is sitting on the Father's throne: why is that? Has He not a throne of His own? Yes, and He will soon take that throne and the whole universe will see it when He comes out in kingly glory. What a day that will be; but at the moment He is sitting on the Father's throne. Why should He be sitting on the Father's throne? The Father always conveys to us God known in grace. The Lord Jesus is sitting on the Father's throne because this is the day of grace; a day when God is favourable to us. God is favourable to men because He is setting forth and presenting One who shares His throne with Him; One who has overcome every hostile power. He Himself says that to the overcomer of Laodicea: "He that overcomes, to him will I give to sit with me in my throne" (Rev 3: 21) - that is in a coming day - "as I also have overcome, and have sat down with my Father in his throne". God is there with the One who has overcome every power that was opposed to God, and the Father says, now, "Sit at my right hand". The work has been done: sit; "Sit at my right hand". In natural things, you sit down when you have finished your work. All the work has been done. He is sitting down at the Father's right hand, "angels and authorities and powers being subjected to him". Angels, authorities and powers,

heavenly beings - and in fact all powers - have been subjected to the Lord Jesus. You might ask, 'How can that be? You just told me that "the whole world lies in the wicked one"; how can all powers be subjected to Him?' They are only allowed to go so far. God works things out even through the wickedness of man and they are only allowed to go so far. In the book of Job you find even Satan was used to bring about God's end. Men are allowed to go so far. It is all under the hands of the One who is now established on high at the right hand of God.

What a place He has! It is the One who God is presenting as a Saviour. We read in Hebrews that He did not say to any of the angels, "Sit at my right hand". The Hebrew believers were Israelites; they were Jewish; they were familiar with the ministry of angels. That was the way God communicated with His people in the Old Testament. Angels were sent with messages. If we take people like Samson's parents (Judg 13), and others, Gideon (Judg 6), and even Lot (Gen 19), angels were sent to communicate with them. People were afraid of these beings and well they might be too. They were powerful beings. You think of the angels going down to Sodom; they literally dragged Lot out of the place, and then God destroyed it. You think of a later event in Hezekiah's day: "it came to pass that night, that an angel of Jehovah went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and eighty five thousand" (2 Kings 19: 35); well might people be afraid of angels. When Jesus was raised from the tomb, there was a guard there at the tomb. They were no ordinary soldiers; they were the guards; they knew how to look after things. "Behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending out of heaven, came and rolled away the stone", Matt 28: 2. He did not say anything to them, he just "rolled away the stone and sat upon it", and "the guards trembled and became as dead men". Possibly nothing had frightened them before, but when they saw that angel they "became as dead men". Think how great an angel is. Could one of those beings fill that place at God's right hand, could an angel? "As to which of the angels said he ever, Sit at my right hand". It was unthinkable; that place could only be filled by One blessed Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. There He is now at the right hand of God; He fills that place.

What is He doing there? Psalm 68 says, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts in Man". Could that really refer to the Lord Jesus on high - receiving gifts? Yes it does. You think of the Lord Jesus on high, a glorious Man, and He received gifts. That is something the Father did. He installed Him on high; He gave Him a place at His right hand; He has made principalities and authorities subject to Him and He has given Him gifts; given gifts to His own Son in glory at His own right hand. Why has the Father given the Lord Jesus gifts? Surely One so great as that; why would He be given gifts? He has been given gifts in order that He should dispense them as Man; a wonderful thing to think of that. This passage is quoted in Ephesians; He "has given gifts to men", 4: 8.

The Lord Jesus received gifts. What were the gifts? We already know there was one gift that Peter speaks about in Acts, "Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit", chap 2: 33. What a great gift that was: He "received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this". The Holy Spirit had come. The Lord Jesus speaks in John about the Holy Spirit as the One whom "I will send", chap 16: 7. What a wonderful transaction that was. In a sense it is beyond us to take in, that He should receive "of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit", and then He should pour it out upon faithful believers here who are waiting upon Him. Beloved, think of that taking place; the Lord Jesus asked the Father for that. He asked the Father; that was one of the things He did when He went on high. He promised He would do it: "I will beg the Father, and He will give you another Comforter", John 14: 16. The Father has done that; He has given Him gifts. So the Lord Jesus received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit and then He poured it out. You see divine Persons working together here. If you read chapters 14-16 in John's gospel you find that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father, He is sent by the Lord Jesus Himself and He comes Himself from with the Father. Divine Persons always work together and it is all in view of the blessing of man and for the glory of God. That is primarily what is in view; glory for God and the blessing of man. It is all centred in a Man who is now at the right hand of God

having “received gifts in Man”. God loves to bestow things: He loves to give gifts.

What other gifts do you have? Do you have the gift of faith? It is something that God gives. Faith was seen so perfectly in the Lord Jesus here as Man on earth and it is given to us in order that we should be in the light of One who is now in the glory, One who is now at the right hand of God. How wonderful the gift of faith is. Paul speaks in Ephesians about the gifts that have been given to the assembly, chap 4: 7, 8. That is in view of the good spiritual health of those who form the assembly. Every need is met; all supplied from a blessed Man now at the right hand of God, One who has taken up the question of all that stood in the way and has resolved it all for God’s satisfaction and is now dispensing the answer to every need, “even for the rebellious”; “thou hast received gifts in Man, and even for the rebellious”. You say God is not going to give gifts to the rebellious. I can tell you one thing; I would not be here today if God withheld gifts from the rebellious. Every one of us must take that place. If we exercise our own will it means we have turned away from God. To exercise our own will is an act of rebellion against God.

God has given gifts; He gives repentance. The Lord Jesus never needed repentance. That is one thing that God gives. He is showing His goodness to us when we repent. When we are rebellious, we can repent. It is the only way into blessing, “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ”, Acts 20: 21. We get nothing without repentance. We get nothing without faith. These are the great keys to divine blessings, “even for the rebellious, for the dwelling there of Jah Elohim”, the dwelling of God. Can you have part in the dwelling of God? Yes; indeed that is by the Holy Spirit being here; He has made His abode in us, in those who know their sins are forgiven, who love the Lord Jesus and seek to obey Him. Obey God and ask the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit. He will give His Holy Spirit. What a thing that is to receive the Holy Spirit. If I could give you my spirit it would mean you would think the way I think, and my way of doing things would be your way, my interests would be your interests. In a word you would

participate in my life if I could give you my spirit. God has given us His Spirit. The wonder of that! It is consequent upon the Lord Jesus being on high. It is one of the things that took place. The Lord Jesus went on high; the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out. It could not be done before that because "the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified", John 7: 39. After He was glorified the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out. The Lord Jesus is still there in glory. We are here; we have to go through this scene. We have to learn how to get through; we know that our sins are forgiven, we know we have the gift of the Holy Spirit and that all resources are in the hands of that blessed One, all powers have been subjected to Him in glory.

Still we find it a struggle. Satan is so devious that sometimes you begin to think which way should I go, which way should I look? When I was a boy there was a church nearby, and they had what was called a wayside pulpit, an advertisement outside. I remember on one occasion there was a big sign which said 'if the outlook is dark try the up-look'. When things are confusing, and confusion is one of Satan's greatest weapons today, try the up-look. Look up: there is a Man above. He sees through the circumstances, He is our High Priest, He is not unable to sympathise, He knows, He will afford guidance and be with us in our weakness. He was made a High Priest; Christ has not glorified Himself to be made a priest, God made Him a Priest. God says, 'I have my High Priest, One that I have made High Priest'. He is High Priest above; He could not be a High Priest down here. The Lord was not of the priestly family down here, but on high He is a Priest according to another order; He sees us in our infirmities, in our weakness. He sees us in all the things that afflict us in our time here. The Holy Spirit would constantly direct our hearts to Christ because He is the One who intercedes for us. He speaks to God about us; He speaks to the Father about us. Think of the conversations going on in heaven. Is it not humbling to think that such a One as the Lord Jesus is speaking to the Father about you? That is what He does. He is a Priest there, on high interceding with the Father in order that there may be something from your heart and from mine which is pleasing to the Father. "*Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedec*";

that means that He is a Priest greater even than a priest who might function only according to our needs. This is a Priest who functions in order that there should be something for God; the Lord Jesus as on high, securing an answer for God. He is securing it from souls like you and me.

May He get a greater answer. For His Name's sake.

Sunbury

15th April 2018

BITTERNESS MADE SWEET

Mark Buchan

Exodus 15: 23-25 (to “sweet”)

The thought of bitterness here would bring before us that which is unpalatable, that which naturally is not to our taste, not what we would like. Our brother has spoken about what our sister has seen in her lifetime. She has gone through many circumstances which might be described as “bitter”, unpalatable. He has mentioned when she was born, not long before the war; that would not meet natural human tastes. She has had family sorrows, and she has seen sorrows amongst her brethren, things that would cause bitterness. It is not what would naturally be to our taste.

The children of Israel here, having come out of the land of Egypt, come to it that these waters are bitter, not what is to their taste. We find here that the place is already called Marah; Marah means “bitterness”. I do not think this is one of the instances when *they* name a place, having come to it and having experienced something there, but, having come to it, they found that it was already called “bitterness”. That is the characteristic of bitterness, it infects the place where it is found. Our sister has gone through many things, and I am sure we all go through things that may, if allowed, bring on that spirit. And so we see here the children of Israel murmur against the one who brought them there because he has brought them to a place they are not content with.

It struck me of late, in thinking of our sister, that having gone through many of these things, she was always bright in her spirit. It is something I appreciated much about her, even very close to the end. We find an answer to bitterness here in this passage, an answer that is still applicable to us today; and an answer, I would say, our sister was in the good of.

I do not think bitterness is found only in what is small or large. It is a matter that can arise anywhere. The cause does not have to be something very great; we may naturally become bitter about very small things. But the answer is universal, and it is applicable whatever the situation. And so we see here that Moses has the

thought because “he cried to Jehovah; and Jehovah shewed him wood”. There seems to be a very refined thought in this reference to wood. It is not a tree or a bush; it is wood. There is refinement there and, if we find ourselves in a condition that we are not happy with, if we find ourselves in a condition that is not to our natural taste, we are to look for a solution. Surely that is naturally the case. Where are we going to find the solution? Do we want to find a solution that has never been tried, or would we rather have a solution that has stood the test of time, a solution that has been proved, a solution that is certain? We are to know a solution that is certain, that is sure, and so, “Jehovah shewed him wood”. There is a refinement there; that is, it is something which is applicable in the situation.

For us, dear friend, it is Christ. The believer knows that the solution to anything bitter was Christ; and more specifically, Christ who has gone through this scene and is therefore the *proved* solution to everything bitter in it. There is a solution whatever situation we may come up against. There is sorrow here for us to a certain extent today. It is Marah here today; there is sorrow. Naturally, we would not wish to be here. But there is a solution, dear friend, and our sister was in the gain of it and was an overcomer in it because she had a solution in Christ which had stood the test; the One in whom she could put her faith was One who had been here, had walked the pathway, had seen the tests and had not been overcome by them. And so when Jehovah shewed Moses wood here, it is something refined, something that has gone through the test, we may say; it has been proved applicable for the situation. When someone is in the good of that, that will be the secret of their brightness. It is not just a stoical spirit; it is that the bitterness has been turned to sweetness. It is not just that the bitterness has been taken away and what was unpalatable before has become just about drinkable. No, it has become sweet! Circumstances may not have changed. The name of the place is not changed here. It is still Marah; it is still called that; but our appreciation of it has changed entirely. What was once entirely unpalatable is now sweetness; well, that is the Lord, dear friend. Whatever small or large matter has come in which may cause bitterness, there is an answer to it which has seen that test and has not been overcome by it.

Our sister was in the good of that; it is my abiding memory of her: there was brightness there. In the last few weeks there was much that could have embittered our sister. She was not well; she was in weakness; it was not naturally what she would have wanted, not naturally what any of us would want, I am sure; but we have an answer to it. She had her Bible often beside her on her chair and she had a living link with the One who is spoken of there, an abiding answer. In one sense, dear friend - I do not mean to be discouraging - bitterness will be with us to the end, but the answer is there. Whatever we may come across, the answer is there which will entirely change our appreciation of the circumstances. It may not change the circumstances; we are not looking for a change of circumstances exactly; that will be a coming day. A day is coming when the circumstances will be *entirely* changed, but I think the sweetness is in the *anticipation* of that day, that we can put our hope in the One who in that day will take to be with Himself those who are "asleep through Jesus", as the scripture tells us, 1 Thess 4:14. So while our sister was weak in her body, she could look on to that, and it could bring about sweetness. What it is to be "asleep through Jesus"! Those who are asleep will rise.

Dear friends, I just say these things to encourage us. As I say, it will be an abiding memory that although there was much there that could have caused bitterness, could have cast down, there was something there which could cause sweetness, could make that which is unpalatable palatable. It is available to us all. Our sister, I am sure, if she were here today, would commend it to us all. Well, I do, likewise, commend it to us all for His Name's sake.

Peterhead

26th April 2019

(At the meeting for the burial of Mrs E Turner)

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