

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

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No. 149

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**ABUNDANCE OF SUPPLY IN
THE DIVINELY ORDERED PATH**

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ABUNDANCE OF SUPPLY IN THE DIVINELY ORDERED PATH

Exodus 13: 21, 22; 15: 22-27

BES We could have read much more from Exodus chapters 13 to 18 in order to illustrate what is in mind, but we rely on the general acquaintance of the brethren with the Scriptures, so that it is not necessary to read everything that we may refer to. In chapter 19, the people begin to be put under the law, but, as we have often been taught, in these early stages of the wilderness journey, Israel was under grace. I thought we might look at the path, the divinely appointed path for them (with its application to ourselves, of course), and the richness of the divine supply that marked those early stages of the journey in the wilderness.

There was *the pillar of cloud and fire*, which they had even before they reached the Red Sea; there was *deliverance* in going through the Red Sea; there was *the joy of salvation* expressed in the song of chapter 15. Then they felt the need of water; they came to *the waters of Marah*: these waters were bitter, but they were made sweet by *the wood* that God showed to Moses. Then there was the *healing*, "I am Jehovah who healeth thee"; then the *twelve springs of water and the seventy palm trees*.

In chapter 16 we have other things: *the quails* and *the manna*, and *the Sabbath* (for us the rest of God).

In the chapter after that we have water again, *the water from the rock*, and then we have the *intercession* of Moses, leading to '*Jehovah my banner*' (chap 17: 15, note 'h') at the end of the chapter. Then in chapter 18 we have suggestions of *fellowship* with the people of God who were outside the circle of the specially chosen people, Israel. However, that did not come up to what we understand and enjoy as fellowship in this dispensation (it corresponds more with what is millennial). At the end of it Jethro went back to his own land (verse 27): he would not go any further. Numbers 10: 29-32 tells us how even one who did remain with them up to that point declined to go on with Israel, though they offered to

do him good, sharing their blessings; so the type falls short there. But I believe we can get instruction by considering these various things in divine supply of the riches of God's grace, before there is any question of law and curse for disobedience.

RJF Are you thinking that what we have in the two verses you read in chapter 13 gives the divinely appointed path, that He "went before their face by day in a pillar of cloud"?

BES Yes, and it has that character of lighting up the way even at night, and protection from the enemy: "the one did not come near the other all the night", it says (chap 14: 20). The Egyptians rode into the sea in self-confidence and they were destroyed, but Israel were preserved and came through.

RJF I was just reflecting, as the passage was being read and as you were speaking, that there is an immense reassurance that God was with them, you might say, twenty-four hours a day. There was no interruption, was there?

BES That is right. We often speak of the desert as without a path, without a way: the only way is what is marked out by divine Persons, first in the Lord in the path where He has trodden, and then for the people of God, a path marked out by the word of God and the presence of God - for us the presence of the Spirit. That takes in all believers, of course, all *true* believers. We must keep that in mind, but not all may be following in the way that He leads. If we see the glory of what God has supplied, that helps us forward and keeps us remembering that the path is not a path of our own devising. If we resort to that, we shall very soon come to disaster. But it is where the Lord is leading or where the Spirit is leading.

AEM Would you say something further as to the divine presence here, maybe rather than divine instruction?

BES Well, God did not exactly tell them beforehand in detail which way to go. He gave light that the objective would be the mountain of His inheritance, the land that He had promised to Abraham, but the way to it was not what man would think a direct one. It was necessary to follow the cloud step by step, and it led at times in a direction different from what man would have expected, but God saw

and sees what lessons are needed on the way, to learn what they were - what we are as according to flesh - but chiefly to learn what God is, what He is to us.

PJW Mr Darby's hymn says:

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

BES Yes, we find that, do we not?

PJW It has been said that the wilderness does not belong to His purpose but is connected with His ways. Could you help us as to that?

BES Well, purpose is what God has determined at the beginning to have at the end. His purpose typically was the land, the promised land, and the mountain of His inheritance in it, but there is a way for us to reach it, and that way is not part of what God has purposed to have eternally, but it is very necessary for us in order to *reach* what He has in mind for eternity. That is what we mean when we say it is part of His ways, is it not? It is the way that God takes in wisdom to bring us morally and spiritually into accord with what His final thoughts are. You have some more in mind about it.

PM I was wondering if you could help as to the antitype of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, and the distinction between the two.

BES It is the same pillar but two different aspects of it. The character of it is that it gives light even in the night, but the cloud emphasises more the side that we are baptised. They “were baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea”, 1 Cor 10: 2. The cloud, to us, brings separation from the world so that we can be wholly for the pleasure of God. We are not up to it most of the time, but that is the divine thought, is it not? So there is separation from the world and the comfort of divine presence; but what would you say about it?

PM I think that is helpful. We are travelling by night, are we not, as well as by day? Is the assurance of the presence of the Spirit suggested in this?

BES Yes, I thought that. Being baptised in the cloud is not anything spectacular exactly. This is not what men generally could take account of as something spectacular marking out the Israelites from everybody else. It was *for* the Israelites; it was for *their* assurance and *their* guidance.

QAP Is there a link with what the Lord Jesus says in John 8, “I am the light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”, v 12?

BES Yes, I think that can be connected with it. He *is* “the light of the world”, but He is not perceived and accepted as such by the world generally; but the one who follows Him, *he* gets the benefit and has the experience of “the light of life”. Is that what you had in mind?

QAP So although there is a bearing towards all, it is the individual that comes into the gain of it, “he that follows me”, do you think?

BES Yes, exactly. So for us as well as for Israel we are in the path as individuals; we find that others are there too and that brings in the thought of fellowship and the path of the saints collectively, but as regards responsibility, we must accept that we are in it as individuals, each one for himself or herself. If we are not in it by conviction, the weakness will soon show itself.

AJET As you say, the cloud was not spectacular, but it was constant. This is something to give us great reassurance; it was *always* there. Movements would be regulated by it, but it was *always there* for them; in our day, He is there and would lead us in all the way.

BES Yes. In a day of breakdown and recovery such as we get in Ezra and Nehemiah and some of the prophets, the cloud was no longer visible, but God’s word and God’s Spirit remained among them, the same word and the same Spirit that He covenanted with them when they came out of Egypt, Hag 2: 5. So in a day of breakdown like our own there may not be the evidence that there was in early assembly days, when there was fear coming upon all in Jerusalem, and “of the rest durst no man join them”, as it says in Acts 5: 11, 13. We have not got quite that today, but in faith we can perceive the essential things that were typified by the cloud. God’s

word and God's Spirit are still the same, even if the public evidences of them are not what they were.

RMB Do you have any impression of the direction in which the Lord is leading us today?

BES Well, that would bring us perhaps to the next thing that God supplied - the waters of Marah. As we have rightly been taught, that suggests the bitterness of death and disappointment according to the flesh; we must be in self-judgment about that, more today, I suppose, than ever; but there is what God showed Moses, the wood, the humanity of Christ, how He went through suffering and death, gave up everything according to nature and accepted the will of God. When we see the way He went through death, that makes it "sweet" and acceptable to us; they were able to drink of it then, to drink the water that became sweet. Does that help?

RMB In regard of the actual journey that they took, God led them in one particular direction at one time and then another. We have a list in Numbers of the various places that they passed through or passed by, and we know too in the history of the church that at particular times it has pleased the Lord to lead His saints a particular way. I just wonder whether there is any way in which we can get a sense of what that might be for us at the present time.

BES I think the need of self-judgment is being impressed upon us more perhaps than before. I, at least, could not identify in Numbers 33 in the list of places exactly where we are at present. Perhaps others could; if so, we should be glad of their help. But in a general way we are being made to feel, I believe, the importance of judging ourselves and everything in ourselves that would divert attention from Christ and His will. That would lead us on to the next thing, which is the healing that comes in: "I will put none of the complaints upon thee that I have put upon the Egyptians," God says, "for I am Jehovah who healeth thee". That is one of the distinctive names of God. We get in Genesis 'Jehovah will provide' (Gen 22: 14, note 'g'), and then this is "Jehovah who healeth thee". In chapter 17 we get 'Jehovah my banner' (v 15 note 'h'), and others in the Old Testament. They mark the knowledge of God as made known in a particular way, and this one is "Jehovah who healeth thee".

PM Does your reference to the maintenance of self-judgment link with the Lord's own service in Ephesians 5: 27: "that *he* might present the assembly to himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless"? I wondered if that was the way in which divine purpose is being worked out in the saints at the present time.

BES Yes, the Lord is doing the washing as well as the nourishing and cherishing. We have been thankful many times for a sense of the Lord's nourishing and cherishing of the assembly, even if in comparison with the whole number of believers there are only a few that get the gain of it; but there is washing needed as well, "washing of water by the word" in that passage, v 26. There are things that we need to be purified from. That would come into it, would it not?

PM I thought so. Is it not in view that the assembly should be entirely, if we might speak reverently, compatible with Himself as a blessed Man?

BES Yes; so however unlikely it looks naturally, there will be at the end what is "holy and blameless", "having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things", and the Lord will then present it to Himself. In Genesis it was God who brought the woman to the man. That, I believe, is alluded to in that scripture in Ephesians. From one point of view it is God who brings the assembly to Christ, but from another Christ presents it to Himself, which brings out how He Himself is really a divine Person as well as man, having the assembly for Himself.

GCB As to the enquiry as to where the Lord is leading us at the present moment, is it important to note what Peter said, "to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal" (John 6: 68), in contrast to those who "went away back and walked no more with him", v 66? We know that Israel was constantly beset with problems, but "to whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal" should be our joy and prayer constantly, do you not think?

BES Yes. Those who went away in that chapter did it because they thought the word was hard; "who can hear it?" they said, v 60. That was because the Lord had brought before them the great truth that

the life that He was giving and sustaining for them by means of the living bread, was only available through His death; it had to be those who eat His flesh and drink His blood who get that life. They found that hard, and they “went away back”, but Peter and others, though they may not at that time fully have understood what was in the Lord’s mind (because the Spirit had not come), yet they felt, as I think you are suggesting we should feel, that if the Lord is speaking, even if we do not fully understand it, we are attracted, and could not think of going to anyone else. Is that what you have in mind?

DCW Just before where we started to read there is a reference to “the bones of Joseph”, chap 13: 19. They too went right through the wilderness journey, did they not? There was a man who had confidence that the journey would be completed, and his bones were buried in the land.

BES Yes; he had faith that God would visit them and bring them up out of the land of Egypt, and he left them with the obligation of carrying his bones with them, Gen 50: 25. Moses took that up and made himself responsible for it.

DCW Hebrews says “Joseph ... called to mind the going forth of the sons of Israel” (chap 11: 22); so there was to be a dignity about their movements and a confidence that the journey would be completed.

BES Yes, it was what God had said that Joseph took account of. It was not just something he had thought of himself. It was the word of God, because he had promised that land to Abraham and his seed.

DAA I was wondering whether it was important for us to see where we commenced reading, “And Jehovah went before their face”. I was wondering whether you had some impression as to that, because that is important, is it not?

BES Yes; you mean they could see for themselves the way that God was leading. Is that what you had in mind?

DAA I think that comes into it, but also the way in which God maintained the initiative right the way through. He led them “before their face”. I was impressed by the expression that He “went before their face” or the cloud “went before their face”.

BES Yes, that is right. It was not that they chose a way and hoped that God would support them in it. It was the way that God Himself was going, and even when, to protect them, the pillar moved behind them, it was still morally in the lead, so to speak. It was God leading them. It was not that they were choosing a way and God was following.

PHM I was looking at that verse too, and I was just thinking, when you were speaking earlier as to the great and divine supply, we get a sense here that Jehovah drew near to them, as our brother has drawn attention to it: Jehovah drew near to them so that they could see. What we have been speaking of would help us: the Lord is near, and we can take advantage of the divine grace you have referred to.

BES Yes, Ephesians speaks of the “surpassing riches” of God’s grace, chap 2: 7. There is that which we shall enjoy eternally in it, but there are riches that are available to us now, and the richness of divine supply in grace before the law comes in is something for us to take account of and to be exercised about in our day.

DCB You mentioned that the children of Israel were not yet under law, but there is the element of authority that has to be recognised. Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea and, if they were to come into the healing you have referred to, that depended on them inclining their ears to His commandments and keeping all His statutes.

BES That is important. Verse 26 of chapter 15 brings that out: “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of Jehovah thy God ... I will put none of the complaints upon thee that I have put upon the Egyptians; for I am Jehovah who healeth thee”. The word of God is always obligatory. We do not classify that as law. The essence of the law was that if they declined to keep the commandments, then they were under a curse. That was what had not yet come in, but the obligation to obedience is always there. We cannot set that aside or call it legality. It is simply what is due to God. Is that what you have in mind?

DCB Yes; so that we are in this time and dispensation of grace - that covers the whole dispensation - but it is also the time when the words of the Lord would be what would govern us.

BES Certainly. We can never set that aside or neglect it. If we do, then the Lord will have to say to us, perhaps severely.

GCB You have impressed upon us that they were under grace up to chapter 19. Perhaps you could say more about the fact that law had to come in. I know that it is explained to us in Galatians, but perhaps you could give us your own impression.

BES Well, Galatians and also Romans give us light on that, do they not? The law came in by the way; it came in because of transgressions. It came in to show what man was and to prove that there was no hope for man if it depended on his keeping the law. Grace was absolutely necessary, the only way of salvation for man and satisfaction for God. The way of the law would only condemn, and that would not be any source of pleasure to God. He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live", Ezek 33: 11. What do you say about it?

GCB I am glad of your impressions, but I was impressed afresh, and I suppose we all were, by what you said at the beginning, the fact that they were under grace and we are under grace; but the necessary thoughts are gone through in Galatians and other scriptures, and are put out far better than I could, of course.

BES God often brings in His prime thoughts *initially*, before the practical side of breakdown and all that comes in historically. We arrive at it the other way round. We arrive at it by the experience of repentance and God's ways with us in discipline and so on, to see how hopeless the flesh is and man after the flesh, even when he is trying to please God, and we arrive at grace that way, as the answer to our need; but God in His ways brings it in first; and He did that here. He led them on a journey of some months under the principles of grace before He brought in the law. So, as has often been pointed out, in Exodus chapter 16 we read that God supplied the quails. Now later on (Numbers 11), when they were under law, the same thing became a judgment upon them and an experience by which

they had to learn how objectionable the flesh was, and the desires of the flesh; how objectionable these things were to God, and how objectionable they became even to the people. But here in Exodus 16 the supply of the quails is not made a matter of reproach. It is something offered by God without even being asked for, and then there is bread, the manna. Later on that also became an occasion of judgment for those who neglected the word of God about it. The history of the brazen serpent has to do with that. But here in Exodus it is the supply of the manna in grace: that has, so to speak, priority over the lessons learned under the law, and it is brought in historically before the law.

RJF I was impressed that as we look through these early chapters of the movements of the children of Israel, up to chapter 19, Moses was *with them* through that time, was he not? It is only in chapter 19 that he goes to the mountain, goes away from the children of Israel to receive the law. I was noticing the passage that has been referred to earlier in Corinthians, where it says, “all were baptised unto Moses”. I wonder if you could help open that out a little bit, that Moses was there with them.

BES Well, it was in mind, if the Lord will, in the second reading to take up something of that chapter in Corinthians, but what you say is important to notice, that Moses was with them through this period of grace; it was when the period of law was beginning that he was absent from them on the mountain, and breakdown came in. He was with them during this time, and they were kept; they were preserved, not really being conscious exactly of how God was doing it, but it does say at the end of chapter 14, “and the people feared Jehovah, and believed in Jehovah, and in Moses his bondman”, v 31. There was that element of faith, not of understanding exactly, but there was that element of faith by which they were preserved as long as Moses was with them. Your question was, ‘What is the significance of that?’. Well, of course, with the Lord there was a time when He was on earth with the disciples. Now He is in heaven and only faith can see Him; but even then, when He was here bodily, it was really only faith that discerned who He was. To those without faith, what was He? What did they say about Him? All kinds of

things, various opinions about whether He was John the baptist risen or not, and whether He was of God, and why He did not keep the Sabbath, and so on; but for those who had faith, His presence preserved them. When He is absent, that brings to light those who are governed by the Spirit and those who are not; because it is the Spirit now who is present, and it needs faith, discernment and self-judgment, which we began with, to discern and get the gain of His presence and of His word.

GJR Could you say something as to Peter and John in John 21? They were both men who had faith, and there were probably a few others there who had faith, but one of them recognised it was the Lord; the other did not immediately. I am just following what you said, that faith is necessary to discern the Person, and I fully respect that. I am just conscious there are brethren around me who discern the Lord more readily than I do, perhaps the Lord's presence and what He is doing, and I was thinking of John 21 where it is John who says, "It is the Lord", v 7. It was a breakthrough moment really. Is it a breakthrough moment for all of us if we can recognise the Lord?

BES Yes, I think we should always recognise that there are those who are nearer the Lord than we are, and more sensitive perhaps to His word, and more devoted in following; and that would exercise us to be more on that line ourselves, not to compare ourselves with others exactly, as if others were the standard, but to recognise as Paul says, "each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves", Phil 2: 3. I do not know whether that promotes further what you had in mind.

GJR There is also the matter of authority ever being present: that is the chapter where the Person is designated several times as Jesus. In the mind of the discerning disciple it is "the Lord".

BES Yes, the one who discerns Him and His word perhaps more vividly than others is more ready to submit to His authority. Is that what you are suggesting?

GJR I had not thought of that, but thank you.

PJW So John is spoken of in that chapter as "following" and it adds, "who also leaned at supper on his breast", v 20.

BES Yes, it is the same one.

PJW I was thinking of what you said as to nearness to the Lord. He also said, "Lord, who is it that delivers thee up?". He was able to ask the Lord things that the others were not, it seems.

BES Yes, he was near enough to be able to do it in confidence.

PJW How do we reach that state or position?

BES I should like help from others on that. Have you some thought?

PJW Well, not really. I wanted to ask whether the exercises of Romans would link with your thought, particularly 5, 6, 7 and 8.

BES Yes, that must always come in. We can never leave that behind.

PJW It is the Deliverer, not exactly deliverance, but the Deliverer, do you think, that we arrive at?

BES Yes, "who shall deliver me out of this body of death?", Rom 7: 24. It is the Person, as you say, rather than the deliverance or the experience of it that is before Paul's mind; so he can immediately say, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v 25), and he can go on to "no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus", chap 8: 1.

PJW Do you think walking by the Spirit (v 4) and being led by the Spirit (v 14) in chapter 8 link with the springs of water?

BES Yes, you are connecting that with the next step, "And they came to Elim; and twelve springs of water were there, and seventy palm trees". Would that suggest the Spirit among the saints collectively, and the food of the tree of life available to the saints as going on together?

CHS In relation to John's moral state, do you think it would help us to be conscious of how we are seen by God? "And we have known and have believed the love which God has to us" (1 John 4: 16), he says. He knew how he was viewed by God. It has been said if we try to be self-judged, it is perhaps a very testing and difficult thing, but it makes it easier if we know how God views us.

BES Yes, how God views us and how God sees us at the moment. If we are conscious of being examined by Him, that is what shows us what we are morally in its true light; but then how God views us in the sense you have been speaking of it is, so to speak, beyond all that. It is according to His purpose. Is that what you have in mind?

CHS Yes, we have been helped about it that there is a certain deliverance, delivering power, to be conscious of how God sees us, which I think helps us in the matter of self-judgment and particularly in relation to how John was maintained in his affections for the Lord.

BES Yes. One thing that helps us in self-judgment is that we see on the one hand what we are according to God's purpose and on the other hand what we are naturally and in the flesh, and the contrast between the two helps us to put each in its right place in our minds. Would you agree with that?

CHS Yes, and it is necessary to be near to God in both those matters.

BES Yes, we only get a true sense of what we are naturally (or according to flesh) in the light of the presence of God, really.

PM In John's gospel in chapter 12 you have one who distinguished our Lord Jesus by anointing Him, and in chapter 13 one who rested on His bosom. Is there an order in that, and is it in the appreciation of the excellence and superlative greatness of Christ that He is marked out in all His distinctiveness? I have to go into the presence of such a One and find rest in His bosom.

BES I believe that is right. In making much of Him and getting help in that way to leave ourselves behind, so to speak, we find the rest that you speak of.

PM Could you then just say a little as to the wood that was cast in?

BES I suppose we are all familiar to some extent with what has been said about it before, and I do not think I can add much to that, if anything. Wood generally is typical of the humanity of Christ: Christ as man. It was as Man that He gave up a will of His own; as Man that He suffered and went into death, and gave up even all that was good and right; there was no evil to give up with Him, but He gave up

what was good and right and proper to Him as Man and as the Anointed of God, in order to secure for God what was greater. If He did that, what right have we to retain anything of ourselves? If He did that (and we see in the Scriptures how He did it and what He did), that brings an entirely different light to bear on the application of death to the flesh. 'Putting to death the deeds of the body' and so on (Rom 8: 13) then becomes something that we are glad to do.

QAP Paul says, "our passover, Christ, has been sacrificed", 1 Cor 5: 7.

BES As the passover, of course, it is to satisfy the claims of God. It is the price of redemption for His people. We might have mentioned that as all part of the divine supply. It is something furnished from God's side to meet His requirements and our need. But what we are speaking of at the moment, the wood and how it made the waters sweet, is more on the line of our practice and our experience in discipline under the hand of God, to come to a complete judgment of what it was that had to be removed in the sacrificial work and death of Christ.

AM It says, "Jehovah shewed him wood". It is necessary, is it, by the Holy Spirit, to have our eyes open as to the way the Lord Jesus has been? Otherwise, discipline could tend to lead to bitterness, but "Jehovah shewed him wood".

BES God Himself draws our attention to the perfection of Christ in this, in His humility and in His going into death, giving up all that was best, for the sake of the will of God.

RMB Has the experience of the waters being bitter not been likened to the experience of a new believer having recently been converted and come to the Lord and being baptised? The world in that sense becomes a wilderness to such, and they can no longer find their refreshment and satisfaction in the things that they did. They can no longer be engaged in the same occupations; they can no longer perhaps keep the same company; and there is a certain bitterness about the discovery of that, do you think?

BES Yes, what we have here is typical, as you say, of new believers. They have only just come through the Red Sea. This is

the beginning of their path of pilgrimage. The path out of Egypt and through the Red Sea is not exactly that; it is a necessary beginning, but the path of pilgrimage begins at this point when they are out of the Red Sea and to one just converted that may be bitter in what it involves. But then if God draws attention, as we have just been reminded, to Christ and how He went through things - He who had nothing evil at all to give up, nothing questionable in any way - if He made that sacrifice in that way, then surely it need be no longer bitter to us to have to follow Him in some of those steps.

TJH Naomi said, "Call me not Naomi - call me Mara", Ruth 1: 20. I wondered maybe this may not only be the experience of a new believer. We may have to be brought to it again, do you think?

BES We may have to be brought back any number of times to a lesson that we have not learned the first time, and this is one of such lessons.

PJW The remedy is always the same: "Jehovah shewed him wood".

BES Yes, that is right, always the same.

RJF In relation to that, there is something that is unknowable about the expression "Jehovah shewed him wood". What I mean is that the account is not given that there was a tree or anything like that that could be taken account of, readily apprehended, but "shewed him wood". There seems to me in that expression something that was beyond the ken, as it were, of the believer, that the Lord Himself knew and took upon Himself.

BES Yes, even Moses would not have known if God had not shown him the wood. He would not have known what to do or say about it; so it was something God made known at the time, when it was needed.

RJF And it was sufficient. It says, "he cast it into the waters, and the waters became sweet". There is not any suggestion that there was something that was left that was still bitter, but "the waters became sweet".

BES Yes, very good.

DAA What would you say about what it says as to Moses that “he cast it into the waters”? It does not seem that he had any instruction in relation to it, but he seemed to see it as the remedy to the situation.

BES Well, there are things from time to time that Moses does without instruction. He seems to have a knowledge by the Spirit of God of what is appropriate at particular times of crisis. Later on he took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, Exod 33: 7. He had no word to do that, but God showed His approval of it by bringing the pillar of cloud to rest upon that tent (v 9), and making the skin of Moses’ face to shine when he came out, Exod 34: 35. So Moses is sufficiently in the current of the thoughts of God, or for us it would be the Spirit of God, to know what to do in an emergency like this.

DCW Is the implication that something was already prepared and available?

BES Oh, surely, yes. God always has something to meet what is needed whether we see it or not.

DCW So that the Lord is available, then, to meet every situation, is He not?

BES Yes.

IMcK What was your impression as to the banner? You have mentioned that twice, in connection with the richness of God’s supply. What were you thinking of then?

BES Well, if there is conflict (because it is brought in in that context), we rally to the Lord or to His word, and that is our banner: ‘Jehovah my banner’, it says. He appropriated it for himself. We get in that section that there was a great need because they were under attack by the Amalekites, and God has His resource of supply in that too, that Moses interceded for them. You have Christ on high making intercession for us. *He* has no need for His hands to be supported as Moses did, but that was just to show that it depended on that, not that God had any intention of letting Amalek prevail. It was only as long as Moses’ hands were upheld in intercession, that Israel prevailed. So for us there is never any question of Christ’s hands becoming weary. He is always living to intercede for us, Heb 7: 25.

So we can be quite confident and rally to that banner, so to speak. 'Jehovah my banner', Moses says: we can say 'our banner'.

RMB There was what had to be rehearsed "in the ears of Joshua" (Exod 17: 14), so that while on the one hand Joshua was to learn, as he did, how God could help him in the present conflict, the banner was also giving him the assurance of final victory, do you think?

BES Yes, because it is the same God throughout.

GJR Psalm 60 is about a time of great trouble for Israel:

Thou hast shewn thy people hard things;
thou hast made us to drink
the wine of bewilderment.

Thou hast given a banner to them that
fear thee, that it may be displayed
because of the truth, (Selah,), v 3, 4.

BES Yes, very good. That is an instructive psalm. It brings in the distinction later on between vessels to honour and vessels to dishonour, and how they have their place in the ways of God; but there is confidence in God, as in the verse you draw attention to,

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.

PJW It is also said somewhere, "When the adversary shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of Jehovah will lift up a banner against him", Isa 59: 19. "Will lift up": there is no doubt, is there? While we may be very weak and faltering, it is the Spirit of the Lord that lifts up the banner, and it is for us to rally to it.

BES That is the point, I think. "When the adversary shall come in like a flood", well, we can see that in the world. The flood is rising and rising; there is nothing we can do to stop it; but the voice of the Spirit of God is clear, and He is the one that lifts up the banner against the enemy, showing that ultimately there will be victory for the truth.

So we get these riches of supply throughout chapters 16 and 17. The level is not quite so high perhaps in chapter 18 though, in one sense, it is fuller. It points to what there will be in the

millennium. But all of it brings out typically “the surpassing riches” of God’s grace (Eph 2: 7); and that, even while we are in these wilderness circumstances, we can appreciate what God supplies and what enables us to go forward for His pleasure, before there is any question raised about the law.

Sunbury

14th October 2017

Key to Initials:

D A Alexander, Sunbury; D C Brown, Edinburgh; R M Brown, Strood;
G C Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; R J Flowerdew, Sunbury; T J Harvey,
East Finchley; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; P Martin, Colchester; I
McKay, Witney; P H Morris, Sunbury; A E Mutton, Witney; Q A
Poore, Swanage; G J Richards, Malvern; C H Smith, Chelmsford; B
E Surtees, Colchester; A J E Temple, Sunbury; P J Walkinshaw,
Strood; D C White, Bexley

COMPLETENESS

A Barrie Brown

John 19: 28-30

1 Corinthians 15: 28

I have a very simple impression that came from the hymn that we sang (No 355) as to perfect timing, and the Spirit's service as to things in the divine system being complete; that is why I read the scripture in John as to the work of the Lord Jesus being complete and then, too, looking on to the end of things, "that God may be all in all".

We can say that in relation to God's work, that it will be complete and nothing will be left undone. And too, I suppose, abstractly, at any point, if we look at the work of God in ourselves or in fellow believers, it is always complete; but then we know, as Philippians says, "he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day", chap 1: 6. So there is the thought of what progresses as well, but the work of God in the saints is a very wonderful matter and something that has come before us recently, and we should foster and encourage it in one another. I think we do, and I think we had some impression of that over the weekend in the ministry to us. The passage in 2 Corinthians 7 came to me as to the matter of holiness; Paul says there, "perfecting holiness in God's fear", v 1. I suppose, fully, what is perfect waits for the eternal day, but the matter our brother brought before us in relation to our "most holy faith" (Jude 20) and then holy ground is something that we should seek to advance for all of us. I think holiness is a very wonderful matter, a sensitive matter; the matter of "perfecting holiness in God's fear" is a wholesome matter.

In relation to the work of the Lord Jesus, I thought it might freshly attract our hearts to that blessed One that He knew the end from the beginning, knew what God's will involved for Him, and He was irrevocably committed to it. Nothing could turn Him away. Think of Him in Gethsemane, the enemy bringing all His forces to bear upon the blessed Lord Jesus! We see the cost it was to Him, and

He chose to obey. How wonderful that is! Then in this passage where we read here we have, "Jesus, knowing that all things were now finished". It is very remarkable that the Lord Jesus, being who He is in His Person, wonderful and divine Person, knew "that all things were now finished, that the scripture might be fulfilled". It is a very wholesome study to see the number of times it says that in John's gospel. It comes into other gospels too but particularly in John's gospel, how the Lord Jesus fulfilled each one of the prophetic scriptures and fulfilled them in their entirety. Nothing that was written about the Lord Jesus in the Old Testament, the law and the prophets, has failed; that is one of the many glories of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would be a good matter, certainly for me, to follow up.

Think of the Lord Jesus here! You get a touch as to His manhood. He says, "I thirst"; then those around Him - in hatred and spite - bring vinegar. You certainly would not give that to a person in distress, but the Lord Jesus bore it. Think of all that was on His heart and on His spirit at this time, but then in verse 30, He "received the vinegar", that the scripture might be fulfilled, and He said, "It is finished". What a wonderful matter! Think of all that He had gone through! John's gospel does not give us the hours of darkness - we have to go to the other gospels for that - but it is involved and because of the irrevocable commitment of the Lord Jesus to the will of His God and Father, because of His love for each one of us here and all believers who put their faith and trust in Him, the work on the cross has been finished. That has laid the eternal basis for the universe of praise, and what we sang of in our hymn as to the Spirit and the bride saying, "Come". All of that is the result of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His work is complete. How wonderful that is!

It says, here, "and having bowed his head, he delivered up his spirit". I always wonder at it that the Lord Jesus did not perish under the judgment; He was in control, and John's gospel gives us that aspect. For example, earlier on, it says, "he went out, bearing his cross", v 17. You see the divine hand, divine control. I thought we might just be freshly encouraged that the work of redemption has

been completed, every matter has been seen to; and what a wonderful thing it is to be amongst a company where I think that every one is a believer in the Lord Jesus but, as we were reminded in a recent preaching, the matter of reality is very important in the glad tidings, and perhaps we might assume things, but if anyone here still has a need in their soul, what a Saviour! We can point you to a completed work and a Man in the glory, who completed that work, and that is a very wonderful thing. May we be freshly impressed and affected by the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross as being complete! We did not read on but we get the matter of the blood and the water, the blood covering things in God's sight and the rights of God upheld, and then the water which is blessedly available.

But then we read in Corinthians. It says in verse 24, "Then the end". It says in Ecclesiastes, "whatever God doeth, it shall be for ever", chap 3: 14. Everything God does is marked by completeness. Everything He does is marked by perfection, of course. What a contrast that is to the world we live in, a world where generally seventy, eighty, ninety per cent is considered acceptable, but in God's things, because everything is upheld by the Lord Jesus Christ, the whole of God's work and God's activities is perfection.

Of course, solemnly, it says to one of the churches, "I have not found thy works complete" (Rev 3: 2), and that is something to take home to myself, individually. Why should my works not be complete? The resources are available; help is available in the Holy Spirit. I was affected by what we sang together to the Holy Spirit in that hymn:

Our hearts have been awakened
To give Thee greater place,.

We sang that collectively, and that would be involved, but I think we need to take that on individually as well. If our works are to be complete, if we are to go on "perfecting holiness", and if we are to be formed in features of Christ, how necessary the blessed Holy Spirit is; how well acquainted He is with the glories of the Lord Jesus!

That is another matter that would apply to the Spirit's work in relation to the adorning the bride for Christ, so that soon that wonderful vessel, counterpart of the Lord Jesus Christ, will be complete, and then all the saints will be caught away to be with Christ eternally. What a prospect it is! Think of the Lord Jesus awaiting the Father's word to come and take His own to be with Himself and have that vessel complete!

We read in verse 28; not that I can say much about it, but I was impressed particularly that, following the matter of subjection, which is a very wonderful feature, a prime feature that God takes delight in, we have "that God may be all in all". I read something recently suggesting that God is "in all" as power and "all" as Object. I think that is very wonderful; so we have the power to appreciate all God has done, but then He is the blessed Object for our hearts. What a profound statement this is! We need the Holy Spirit to understand it. Think of the completeness that marks the eternal day! We anticipate it. I think we anticipate something of it on Lord's day morning; maybe particularly towards the end of the service of God when the brethren may sit in silence for a few moments, we can anticipate the completeness of things, and too we can anticipate divine joy, and enter into it now. These are some of the wonderful privileges of Christianity, which are open to all, that what we are involved in is marked by completeness, marked by glory.

These thoughts are simple, and I just trust there might be some encouragement for us, first that the work of Christ is complete, and what a matter that is, and how we should be affected by it day by day. One of the hymns speaks about how we should never forget,

Thine own most faithful love,
(Hymn 427)

but then looking on to the day soon to come when things will be complete, and then being exercised that *my* work should be complete. Paul speaks about pursuing, and I am sure we would all be exercised to pursue, to go on in the pathway with the help of the Holy Spirit.

May these things just be for our encouragement, for His Name's sake.

Word in a Meeting for Ministry, **Grangemouth**

13th November 2018

THE DESIRE OF THE LORD'S HEART

Jim T Brown

Psalm 21: 2

This verse was before me on Lord's day. It is very precious to think of the desires of the heart of the Lord Jesus. How wonderful that He has been given His every desire! What a perfect man He is in every respect.

We read of the mind "which was also in Christ Jesus", that lowly mind, Phil 2: 5. King Solomon could speak of "the cedar-tree that is on Lebanon", which suggests the dignity of Jesus, but he also spoke of "the hyssop that springs out of the wall", which conveys the lowliness of Jesus in all His movements, 1 Kings 4: 33. See Him at Sychar's well, "wearied with the way he had come" (John 4: 6); here He was - the hyssop that springs out of the wall. Even at the cross, in the midst of His sufferings, He could consider the plea of the malefactor, saying to him, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise", Luke 23: 43.

Then the Scriptures refer to the holy soul of Jesus. His soul was made an offering for sin, Isaiah 53: 10. His soul became "very sorrowful even unto death" in Gethsemane, Matt 26: 38. Isaiah says, "he hath poured out his soul unto death ... and made intercession for the transgressors, chap 53: 12. What intensity of feeling is there.

But there is something particularly appealing about the heart of Jesus, and the desires that were in it. If the mind "which was in Christ Jesus" brings out that every thought of His was perfectly consistent with His God and Father's will and, if His soul suggests a depth of feeling, the heart seems to suggest a perfection of affection, which underlay all His desires. The Lord Jesus, on that passover night in Luke's gospel, said, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer", chap 22: 15. There could never have been a passover like that. No doubt it had been celebrated, even perhaps by the disciples before they became associated with

Jesus, as a kind of ritual, or as a yearly event; but this passover was supremely different. The sacrificial Lamb was there in their midst - "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", John 1: 29. As we know, when the lamb was sacrificed, Moses added the fact that the households were to take a bunch of hyssop, bringing out the lowly character of that blessed Sin-Bearer, the One who was made a sacrifice for sin as bearing the judgment of God, Exod 12: 22. The lamb was not to be boiled; it was to be roast with fire (v 9), emphasising the severity of the judgment Jesus bore, and then the blood was taken from the basin and smeared on the door-posts and the lintel. How affecting to ponder the desire in the heart of the Lord Jesus to eat the passover with His own on that auspicious occasion..

In John 17, the Lord Jesus says, "I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world", v 24. What a request from the lips of the Lord Jesus to His Father at the golden altar! It will not be withholden, but eternally fulfilled. How blessed that the Lord Jesus should have such a desire in His heart that men, who have been secured by His precious work, should be capacitated to see the distinctive glory that the Father has given Him. We cannot, of course, share or compass that glory, only behold it. Another has said that "the saints are brought to the edge of abstract Deity" (JT vol 48 p178), that glory involving a link between the Lord Jesus in manhood and what He is in Deity, such a One being loved "before the foundation of the world".

Then, too, how glorious that the assembly is seen as the object of Christ's desires. Psalm 45 says, "the king will desire thy beauty", v 11). Applying this, the Lord Jesus desires the beauty of the assembly. He has secured her at such infinite cost; He laid down His life for her; He sold all whatever He had in order to acquire her for Himself, Matt 13: 46. The spouse says,

I am my beloved's,
And his desire is toward me.
(Song of Songs 7: 10)

It is affecting to reflect on the preciousness of the assembly to the Lord Jesus and His longings for that vessel, which will satisfy His heart eternally. She is His counterpart, a creature vessel yet so formed as to be His fulness, Eph 1: 22.

What richness there is in these words, “and hast not withholden the request of his lips.” What holy conversations there must have been between the Father and the Son in His pathway here: His longings, deep affections, desires, made known to the Father in these blessed communications as He unfolded what was in His heart. The Father would understand them completely because they were in full consonance with what He desired for His Son. So every desire of His is fully met. In Gethsemane, of course, He said, “My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me”, Matt 26: 39. That cup could never pass from Him, if we were to come into blessing and the assembly be secured for His pleasure eternally and thus, in perfect obedience to His Father’s will, He says, “not my will, but thine be done”, Luke 22: 42. He took that cup unreservedly from His Father’s hands, and drank it to its last dark drop. His desire was ever to do His Father’s will. Our verse concludes with “Selah”, as if we are urged to pause in consideration of this affecting fact, that every desire of the heart of the Lord Jesus has been fully met, and that for all eternity.

But this brings a challenge to our own hearts as to what our desires are. Spiritual formation in us will flow as our desires deepen. A fine exercise it is to seek a greater desire for development in these things so gratifying to the heart of Christ and to be more substantial contributors to the things which are precious to Him.

We find in the New Testament things which we are to desire. Some of them might not appear very great, but they can yield much. So Paul says, “in the assembly I desire that I may speak five words with my understanding”, 1 Cor. 14: 19. Just five words, but it is “with **my** understanding”. We often misquote by saying ‘with *the* understanding’, but it is “with **my** understanding”. That surely is the product of communion with divine Persons, and of earnest

contemplation. In this way, there is opportunity to convey through these five words some impression of the Lord Jesus or indeed His mind for His people at that particular moment. Paul says that “we have the mind of Christ”, 1 Cor 2 16. Just five words might be used to convey what is necessary and applicable for the testimony at that juncture.

The numeral five is very interesting. David took five smooth stones from the brook: smooth stones, stones over which the water had flowed to make them serviceable, 1 Sam 17: 40. Only one was selected for the slaying of Goliath: only one was necessary for that purpose; just one smooth stone. It was not a boulder; nothing outwardly large. “The word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division ... of joints and marrow”, Heb 4: 12. That is like one of the stones - conveying the word for the moment that will secure the divine end

Then there was the young lad with the five barley loaves and two small fishes (John 6: 9), some seemingly little impression of Christ risen and glorified, having conquered the power of death. Five loaves. Just someone, maybe a young person, may be able to bring into the reading meeting or any other meeting a simple impression. What were these five loaves able to do? Five thousand souls were fed, and there were taken up afterwards twelve hand baskets of fragments left over, v 13. What is outwardly small can edify and build up the spiritual constitution of the saints. We can be encouraged by that. Let us each, old and young, have such desires.

Well, how fine to see that the desires of Christ’s heart have been met. May it inspire in us an answering response of desire and affection towards the One who can satisfy our every longing. “For he hath satisfied the longing soul”, Ps 107: 9. The Lord Jesus is able for that; that is His desire. Let His desires for the prosperity of the assembly be our desires too.

For His Name’s sake.

Word in a Meeting for Ministry, Edinburgh
4th December 2018

THE MAN OF GOD'S CHOICE

Paul A Gray

Matthew 27: 15-16

Mark 15: 7

Luke 23: 18-19

John 18: 40

Philippians 2: 5-11

These scriptures have been in my mind today as thinking of the Man of God's choice. We learn by contrast, and Barabbas is presented here as the world's choice in four different aspects. In Matthew, the gospel which particularly emphasises the truth of the kingdom, men had the King before them, and yet they preferred a man of whom it says he was "notable". The writer in Isaiah 53 says prophetically as to the Lord, "when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him ... - despised, and we esteemed him not", v 2-3. The world prefers what is notable. They have a King who comes to them meek and mounted upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass (Matt 21:5), but they would rather have what is notable. What is notable in the world perhaps includes skill in music or sport, perhaps involves a person's appearance; perhaps it relates to a person who discovers or invents something that is of value to mankind, something that makes a person notable in the eyes of the world. And yet, all that will fade, and the Man that goes through is Jesus, the Man foreshadowed in Esther, when the word is, "What is to be done with the man whom the king delights to honour?", Esther 6: 6. He was not someone notable in this world, "He shall not strive or cry out, nor shall any one hear his voice in the streets", (Matt 12: 19), and yet the Man of God's choice goes through. I have felt the edge of this as I have been thinking of these things. You may have trusted in the Lord Jesus as your own personal Saviour, and know Him, but Satan has many ways of putting choices in front of us, drawing our attention to what is notable, to distract our eyes from the Man of God's choice. The Holy Spirit is here to help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

In Mark different features are brought before us. Barabbas was bound with those who had made insurrection with him. He and others had risen up against the authorities; they despised authority. The Lord accepted the Father's authority in every matter. He could say of His own life, "I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again. I have received this commandment of my Father", John 10: 18. He was perfectly in accord with His Father's authority. It never rankled; He never rebelled against it; He did not feel it irksome. He accepted the authority under which He had placed Himself as Man even when, as we read in Philippians, that involved "becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross". His obedience to His Father's will took Him even to the death of the cross. But this person Barabbas, he was among those who had made insurrection, not just himself but others with him, a man of influence who disliked authority and rose up against it; and the end of it was death. Think of that, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the ways of death" Prov 14: 12. There was what seemed right to Barabbas, despite the fact that it led to the sentence of death, and yet the crowd's choice was to ask Pilate for him: "And the crowd crying out began to beg that he would do to them as he had always done". They cried out in favour of Pilate releasing to them one who was insubject, and they cried against the One who was always subject to the will of God.

Then in Luke a further feature comes out. It may not be very different from Mark but what I wanted to draw attention to was one who was being held, "for a certain tumult which had taken place in the city". In Mark there was the general despising of authority, but I think a tumult in the city would involve in its application to us despising the rights of the assembly. Barabbas created a tumult. A tumult involves a great deal of uncertainty, perhaps a great deal of misdirection; nobody can be quite sure what is going on; that is the way Satan works. Think of the time when the people threw away their clothes and cast dust into the air, Acts 22: 23. The Lord never acted like that; there was never any uncertainty about what He said. He never misdirected anyone. His words were clear and true and

certain, and in His subjection to the will of His God and Father He would teach us about the importance of subjection to the assembly. And again, the end of tumult is the loss of life; yet persons preferred this man who had brought about tumult in the city.

In John's gospel, all it says of Barabbas is that he was a robber: that is to say, he took something that did not belong to him. Our brother spoke earlier of love; Scripture tells us that love “does not seek what is its own” (1 Cor 13: 5), which is entirely different from seeking to take what belongs to someone else. Love does not seek what is its own and in this, as in all things, the Lord is an example. He goes even further; He says, through the psalmist, “then I restored that which I took not away”, Ps 69: 4. Barabbas took something that did not belong to him, and men were in the presence of the One who restored that which He took not away. He had every right: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”, John 1: 1. He had every right: “without Him not one thing has received being”, v 3. He had every right: the Light of the world. He had every right: “the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father”, John 1: 18.. He had every right: One who had the inherent power of life, quickening power in Himself, “the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and ... shall live”, John 5: 25. He had every right over death itself, and yet the world chose one who had no right to what he took; Barabbas took what was not his. The Lord claimed nothing for Himself even in the presence of Pilate. “Pilate therefore said to him, Thou art then a king? Jesus answered, Thou sayest it, that I am a king”, John 18: 37. He did not assert Himself in the matter, but when it was said He assented to it, “I have been born for this, and for this I have come into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth”. Not only did He restore that which He took not away, but He set out the mind of God for man in all its glory.

The Man of God's choice stands in complete contrast to the choices that the world makes. The world will have to bow. Heavenly and earthly and infernal beings will all have to bow, but the great thing is to bow the knee now, and to “let this mind be in you”. This

suggests making way for such a mind; it involves displacement on our part. The note says, 'be found amongst you'. If it is going to be found amongst us then it would have to start with me. I could not be looking to somebody else to "let this mind be in you" if I was not doing it myself.

I feel most tested by these things in speaking of them. This Man, the Man of God's choice, who "emptied himself, taking a bondman's form", also "humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death", as if, one might say, it was not already enough that such a One had emptied Himself. He went further and humbled Himself. He stooped and wrote on the ground, and then He stooped again, John 8: 6, 8. I remember a brother asking why He stooped twice. I believe that love would stoop until there is a full answer for God; that is what love would do. He stooped once into manhood, and He stooped again into death and secured a full answer for God, and God has highly exalted Him. That will be seen publicly in a day to come. He will be acknowledged universally, but as we acknowledge Him now I believe we are preserved in our hearts, in our souls and in our minds from the choices that the world makes. John says, "Love not the world, nor the things in the world", 1 John 2: 15. You might say, 'I do not love the world. I know it is the place where Christ was crucified', but there are things in it, and the enemy knows at each age and stage of our lives how to put these things in front of us, but the things in the world lead to the ways of the world, and the end thereof are the ways of death. This is the way of life, the Name which is above every name, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow". That is the way of life.

I commend the Man of God's choice to you and trust you may be blessed in considering Him, for His Name's sake.

Word in a Ministry Meeting, Edinburgh
5th February 2019

THE OBLIGATIONS OF LOVE

Terry W Lock

John 13: 3-5, 12-14; 21: 7-12 to “dine”

Philemon v 11-18

I have been thinking, beloved brethren, in relation to these scriptures, about the obligations of love. There are, indeed, many things to be enjoyed in a company like this where the love that exists is according to the love which comes from God. It does not have its origin in man: it has its origin in heaven; it has its origin in the One whose very nature is love. That is where everything that we have, everything that binds us together, everything that claims us and sets us together begins, with the love of God. God who “has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all”, (Rom 8: 32); “God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us ...” (Eph 2: 4); God setting out all these things according to Himself. That is a glorious and a wonderful thing, and I hope we are all settled in that. I hope that we are absolutely sure of what our origins are, absolutely sure, indeed, that we have a personal link with the God who loves us so, because it is of the utmost importance. I feel exercised to speak this way about it because if it is not there, these other things will fail.

The obligations of love are the things that the Lord took on in John's gospel. He took them on in John 13. You go through the whole of the book up to this point and there is what is there in His public testimony, there is what is setting out the glory of Himself, there is what He is in Himself, what He is as the I AM; but you get to John 13 and this is private, what is going on secret from the world, but it is the obligation of love, the Lord setting Himself in relation to the maintenance of what was precious to Himself. Beloved brethren, if the saints are precious to us, if the things of God are precious to us, if Christ is precious to us, we have an obligation. Love lays an obligation upon us, not indeed to maintain things in a legal manner; the Lord did not maintain things in John's gospel in a legal manner:

the Lord maintains things in John's gospel according to the glory of His nature.

So in John 13, we might wonder why the Lord does this; after having supped He takes this linen towel and girds Himself and goes and puts water in the washhand basin to wash the feet of His disciples. The Lord here is maintaining what was true of Himself, and He did it by washing them. He does not tell them that they may have been defiled by the places where they had had to walk, or by some of their associations of life; He does not do any of that. He maintains what is true in them that is according to Himself. He does it by washing them and He does it with gentleness. He also shows them the necessity of the action by His reply to what Peter says (v 10), but what an obligation of love this was. Indeed, you think it was the Lord of glory here, the One who will indeed come out in a coming day amidst His holy myriads, that Man is this Man, and yet He takes this linen towel and, speaking very reverently, in humility takes a place where He washes the feet of His disciples because they were precious to Him. They were going to carry forward the testimony of Himself. He wanted to maintain them in that; He wanted them in comfortable conditions.

Beloved brethren, do we have this obligation? Indeed we do, and the reason we have this obligation is found in what the Lord says to them; He does not just leave it that He has washed them, "When therefore he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, having sat down again, he said to them, Do ye know what I have done to you?"; and then He says, "Ye call me the Teacher and the Lord and ye say well, for I am so. If I therefore, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet". The obligation of love lies on us as it was expressed by Christ. Christ is the model, and that is quite a test. You may say, 'Well, I cannot do it like Him'. Why? That would be the test, why? You can, beloved brethren; we all can. We can all take up this exercise. The Lord has shown us how; the Lord has given an example and the Lord never puts things before us that He has not shown us how to do. This is one of them. The maintenance of

things, the obligation of love in relation to the maintenance of things, is of all importance for our day. Do we want everything to go through to the end for the Lord's sake? Do we want to have here a testimony suited to His own glory? Do we want to have here what pleases His own heart? Then the obligation of love is upon us to do what He has shown us to do. The first thing here in John's gospel is that you wash the saints' feet to maintain them as He would according to His love.

But then it goes on to the end of John's gospel. This chapter is almost like an addendum, it is almost like a piece that is added on to the end of the gospel, but it is a very precious chapter. We were reminded recently in our fellowship meeting, in relation to what one of the brothers who has gone before has said, that here in this chapter there was night, nakedness, and nothing, JT vol 74 p374. Well, that was true. You might say there were moral conditions that were abominable. The Lord knew they were abominable too: He had to die because of them; He knew better than any, and He knows better than any about the conditions that exist now. There is no point in time, ever, that the conditions govern the affections that are true in Christ; they are never altered by conditions. How He may be able to express Himself may be a different thing but it does not alter the love. You cannot alter the character of the nature of Christ, speaking very reverently. God is never put aside by what He is in Himself due to the failures of men. It has never happened and it never will.

So in these conditions you might think that the disciples would know better, and that is true, and you might say, 'How is the Lord going to meet this?'. Well, here the Lord feeds them. Does He say to them they were wrong? Does He say to Peter he was wrong? If you think about Peter's history here, Peter had denied the Lord and been recovered. Now he has no sooner been recovered than he is away again fishing, naked in a boat. That is after his recovery. You say, 'How can those conditions exist? Why does the Lord not correct them?'. He does correct them, and He does it by feeding them. The obligation of love as the Lord showed here was to feed the man He loved, so that he could come to a moral assessment of his own

condition himself, and bring himself into line with the Man who loved him and died for him and who had restored him already. That is what the Lord did. What a wonderful thing that is! Beloved brethren, are we going to feed the saints? Are we going to do that? It is a wonderful thing. I was thinking about this in relation to Abigail who is, in a certain sense, a perfect type of what I have in mind, because David was going on in a vengeful spirit in relation to Nabal's house and there he does not shine as an example of Christ. He was going to go on in impetuosity to do something that he ought not to do in a manner that fulfilled his own rights with nothing in it for God. What does Abigail do? She brings food, and as she brings food, and as she feeds him and his men, what does she say? "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living", 1 Sam 25. She raises him up to see the estimation that God had of him, and she did it by providing food for David so that he had the constitution to take in the moral import of what she was saying. Beloved brethren, it was an obligation of love.

Here the Lord fulfils an obligation of love. Peter gets restored. The Lord goes on from this point here, and He says to Peter, "lovest thou me?". He lays it on Peter. Peter then needs to search himself. How did he have the capacity to do this? How did Peter have the capacity to judge where he had been and what he had done? How did he have the capacity to move from where he was to being alongside the Lord, to preach at the beginning of the Acts, to be the lead apostle there? How did Peter move to that point from where he had been as naked on a boat? How had he moved? He had moved by the food that the Lord had given him so that he had a moral constitution according to the glory of the Man that had saved him. That was the result of the obligation of love, and the fruit of it was an apostle able to preach the glad tidings. What a glorious thing. The obligation of love accomplished that.

But then you come to Philemon, and Paul was one who was very aware of how much Christ had paid to save him. He was well aware of the debt that he owed. Beloved brethren, so should we be, well aware as we see, "that for your sakes he, being rich, became

poor, in order that ye by *his* poverty might be enriched", 2 Cor 8: 9. We should never forget what it has cost Christ to purchase us. We should never forget what it has cost God to purchase us "with the blood of his own", Acts 20: 28. That is the level of the love that has set us together. Paul understood that. Paul was willing to take on the pain, to sacrifice what was his own, what was his right. Did he have an obligation in relation to Onesimus? Yes, he did. He had an obligation of love to pay another's debts. He was willing to sacrifice what was his by right that another should be set free as a brother in the Lord. So that is what he takes on here. He says in relation to this, "but if he have wronged thee anything or owe anything to thee, put this to my account". Paul was a wealthy man in Christ. He was able to take on others' debts and pay them in full so that the brotherly covenant could go forward in all the glory of what it is in Christ. What a wonderful thing that is, it was an obligation of love.

Beloved brethren, we all have it, we all have an obligation of love. If we are attached to Christ, if we love what He loves, we need to love what He loves *as He loved it*, and in order to do that we have an obligation to care as He cared, to act as He acted, to love as He loved, to hold what He holds so that what goes through to the end of the testimonial day is according to the glory of the Man who has died for us.

May it be so! For His Name's sake.

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