

# **A WORD IN ITS SEASON**

**SECOND SERIES**

**December 2019**

**No. 153**

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**CHRIST AS PRIEST**

**Key to Initials:**

**A REFUGE AND A HOPE**

## CHRIST AS PRIEST

**Hebrews 5: 1-10; 7: 1-3, 11-28**

**PAG** In this reading, if the Lord will, we should speak about Christ as Priest, and the scriptures that we have read bear directly on that. Other scriptures may come to the brethren's minds as we enquire together. I wanted to draw out a few features from these scriptures: firstly the direct link between sonship and priesthood; the fact that Christ is "high priest according to the order of Melchisedec" although we may say something about the *character* of His priesthood in the present dispensation; the fact that He is a priest "continually"; and in "indissoluble life"; and "for ever"; and "unchangeable". These are the features of His priesthood. And then at the end "a Son perfected for ever"; so there is both unchangeability and completeness in respect of the priesthood of Christ, distinguishing Him from every other priest that had ever been. No other priest had "the priesthood unchangeable"; no other priest was "for ever"; Christ is "unchangeable" and "for ever". So what a glorious High Priest we have! I trust we may just speak of these things together in a spirit of enquiry and reverence, and that we might be enlarged in our appreciation of the way in which Christ Himself fills out and brings dignity to this office of priesthood.

**GBG** So does His sonship underlie His priesthood?

**PAG** It seems very clear that it does from the way that the scripture is set here. Say more about it for our help.

**GBG** There seem to be other qualifications for His being Priest. He has been here in similar circumstances to men also. Earlier in the epistle it brings that out: "for, in that himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to help those that are being tempted" (chap 2: 18); He understands what we pass through. But then there is also His sonship; so He is that glorious Person in that office. Is it also implied that this is God's thought for ourselves? He is Son and that underlies His priesthood. That is God's thought for ourselves. Is that right?

**PAG** It is. Sonship underlying priesthood, do you think, would draw our attention to what priesthood means to God? We may think of what priesthood means to us, the intercessory aspect of it and so forth, and that is very important, and we may touch on that; but, whereas the Mediator brings God to man, “the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2: 5), the Priest brings man to God, and furthermore He brings man to God in sonship. It means a great deal to God that the Son is the Priest and the Priest is the Son.

**GBG** I know there are contrasts in this epistle but there is also type: you had the line of Aaron even in his sons. They were priests; so sonship underlies that priesthood for ourselves also, does it?

**PAG** Yes because they are spoken of as “Aaron’s sons, the priests”, for example in Leviticus 1: 5. It does not say ‘the priests, who were Aaron’s sons’; it says “Aaron’s sons, the priests”; so sonship, in that sense, takes precedence over priesthood because sonship is for God and what is for God must always take precedence.

**RWMcC** Why does it emphasise “the order of Melchisedec” so much?

**PAG** Well, because “the order” involves what is “for ever”. It could not be said of Aaron’s order that it was “for ever”; it could not be said of Aaron’s order that it was “unchangeable”; it could not be said of Aaron’s order that it was in “power of indissoluble life”; it could not be said that it was “perfected for ever”, because the priests of Aaron’s order offered sacrifices not only for the people but for themselves, but in the Melchisedec order of priesthood, the Lord has no need to offer a sacrifice for Himself, and He establishes something permanent for God that will go into eternity. What would you say?

**RWMcC** I think that is helpful. It emphasises that it is a different order, does it not?

**PAG** That is not to say that the Aaron *character* of priesthood is not maintained by Christ. The intercessory aspect of the priesthood that Aaron would speak of is maintained in time in order that we might benefit from it, but it is the Melchisedec order that will go through to what is eternal.

**JL** Would it be profitable in that respect to look at the introduction of Melchisedec, where he comes onto the scene with supplies in view of blessing. It is the thought of blessing that is particularly prominent in relation to this character of priesthood rather than bringing in sympathy and support in relation to the burdens of the wilderness.

**PAG** Yes, and he is characterised as “priest of the Most High God”; so the greatness of God is brought out in relation to that order, and the blessing that he brings involves “bread and wine”, Gen 14: 18. So he brings in, you might say, what speaks to God directly of Christ.

**JL** I was just thinking that, as was also true in regard of Aaron and that order of priesthood, God had to be considered for first of all. However Melchisedec seems to very specially stand in that connection as well, but particularly so in coming out in blessing on God’s behalf, and that is what is enjoyed for us through Christ and the service of His priesthood, is it?

**PAG** And that phrase you use ‘on God’s behalf’ is of great importance to us. Who better to act as priest on God’s behalf than One who is Son, so that there would be a representation of divine affection in the actions of the priest?

**NJH** The priestly family stemmed from Aaron, originated in Aaron and his sons, but with Melchisedec God is the origin; is that right?

**PAG** I think that is right. The characteristics of Melchisedec are important in that regard; so it says in verse 3 of chapter 7 “without father, without mother, without genealogy”, while Aaron had a father and a mother and he had a genealogy. When we come to Melchisedec, it says, “having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but assimilated to the Son of God”. Now, it is important to notice that the Son of God is not assimilated to the High Priest; the High Priest is assimilated to the Son of God.

**JD-i** Would sonship remind us of the Lord’s manhood, and “according to the order of Melchisedec” remind us of His deity?

**PAG** The Lord is presented as Son as coming into manhood, as we know, but what is inscrutable lies behind that. “The order of Melchisedec” would involve what is inscrutable (“without father,

without mother, without genealogy; having neither beginning of days nor end of life...”), and would therefore promote worship in our hearts in relation to that blessed One.

**JTB** Say a bit more about the manner of priesthood, which may be more Aaronic, as opposed to what we ascribe to Melchisedec?

**PAG** Well, you can help us on that. Please do.

**JTB** We often speak about priesthood and the Lord’s priestly service, identifying Himself with our infirmities and frailties, which may correspond to the way Aaron’s service is presented in Hebrews, Melchisedec bringing out more distinctively His deity and the glory of His Person.

**PAG** I would say so, and I wondered on that line whether we could perhaps carry away an expanded view of the glory of Christ’s priesthood, not that we should in any way reduce or diminish how it applies to us, but really to have something in our souls and our hearts of how it appeals to God Himself that there should be One before Him who is entirely consistent with His thoughts.

**JTB** I was thinking of the scripture in Zechariah which, of course, has a millennial setting, “and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (chap 6: 13), bringing out the mutual relationships which exist between God and His Son in that way.

**PAG** We would do well then to remember the Lord’s own words, “I and the Father are one” (John 10: 30); so the Melchisedec order of priesthood is not an order of adjustment; it is not characterised by adjustment; but it is characterised by divine blessing.

**RDP** Is it a wonderful expression of His love that the Lord Jesus continues with intercessory service, which was seen typically in Aaron, but which will cease because infirmities will cease? A time will come when there will be no more infirmity. It is a wonderful expression of His love and of His dedication that He takes on that wonderful service now even though Melchisedec may represent a greater and higher thought.

**PAG** That is helpful. We have been impressed, I think, by the fact that love lies behind the Lord's service. It lies behind His speaking in prophetic character, and now we see it lies behind His service as Priest; so, in that sense, the nature of God is expressed in every office that Christ fills. Is that right?

**RDP** I think it is perhaps something that puzzles some of us, the distinction between the Aaronic aspect of His priesthood and the Melchisedec aspect, but the Aaronic side that He takes on is for a time and that will cease, but it is His wonderful love. I think you referred yesterday to "I sanctify myself for them" (John 17: 19), the devoted love of Christ in relation to His own that even though these great things are before Him in relation to God, He still takes on that service for the time.

**PAG** It shows how great He is because generally speaking a person, a man, would fill out one office, but Christ perfectly fills many offices, and no office is diminished by the other and His capacity to fill out different offices is not diminished by the fact that He has others as well. How great He is!

**DCB** He is not only Priest here but High Priest. Would you say something about that? Does the High Priest give character to the whole priestly order?

**PAG** That is helpful and would bear on the earlier enquiry as to the fact that sonship would apply to all priests. If there is an "order of Melchisedec", there is what is distinctive and unique to Christ, but then there is what is to be like Him. It would help us, do you think, to see that God is looking to men to be part of this service of blessing that we have spoken of? We may think of priestly service in relation to need or to adjustment, but there is a priestly service of blessing and Melchisedec, that is to say Christ, leads in that service of blessing.

**DCB** Does the High Priest come out to bless?

**PAG** Well, that would be the thought, and the great thing about this High Priest is that He can both come out to bless and He can go in, and there is no hindrance to it, and there is no veil, no cloud. Everything is clear. This High Priest is going in into an atmosphere

of blessing, and He brings blessing out from that atmosphere and everything is clear.

**JW** Melchisedec has been referred to as a mysterious character who came on to the scene suddenly. We do not know where he came from nor where he went to. I was thinking of that scripture in Matthew - I wondered if that would link with it - that “no one knows the Son but the Father”, chap 11: 27.

**PAG** That is helpful. In speaking of the order of Melchisedec, we have to protect the inscrutability of His Person and that, I think, is what would draw out worship from us. We cannot enter into it, but we can worship in the light of it. Is that suitable?

**JW** Yes, that helps.

**KJW** Part of His service is “minister of the holy places” in chapter 8: 2. His present position as Priest is that He “has sat down on the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens”. I suppose that immediately raises our thoughts to the priesthood being heavenly, and then too to have a view of the One who is preparing a response for God so that everything is perfect in God’s presence, in the Father’s presence.

**PAG** Yes, and I think what you say about what is heavenly is important. It was in my mind earlier that the Lord’s speaking to the woman in John 4 was intended to elevate her thoughts in relation to worship. Well, this would elevate our thoughts in relation to priesthood. It is right for us to be concerned about what proceeds in the world. I do not mean in the sense of allowing it to take up a lot of our time, but we are concerned about it in order to protect ourselves, and particularly our younger brethren, from the manners and customs of the world. The best way to do that is to be occupied with Christ where He is, rather than to spend time speaking about terribly bad things that should be avoided, although we must have a judgment of what is unsuitable. But there is something better, and there is a better Man, a better place, a better covenant, a better priesthood, and that is what should fill our souls.

**KJW** We have often been reminded in Hebrews it is what we have come to, and in chapter 9 of Hebrews we get, “Christ being come

high priest of the good things to come”, v 11. Think of the blessed things that have come in in Christianity. We can be occupied with the problems of the world and other things that are against us, but there is what is very positive and excellent in Christianity which we get in Hebrews relating to Christ.

**PAG** We sang in our hymn at the beginning of this meeting

Come, fill our souls! (Hymn 254)

and if our souls are filled with Christ, all these other things just go away. There is not room for them. God grant that our souls might be filled with this blessed One!

**APG** Luke’s gospel closes with Christ blessing His own and that resulted in “great joy”, Luke 24: 52.

**PAG** And does it not say that the result of that was that they “were continually in the temple praising and blessing God”, v 53? Israel’s praise was silent, but the praises of Israel were not lost; they were “continually in the temple praising and blessing God” as a result of the blessing they had received. Is that what is in your mind?

**APG** He “was carried up into heaven”, v 51. That is where their full attention was.

**PAG** Yes, and that is another thing in relation to the heavenly order of this priesthood. He is spoken of as the One “whom heaven indeed must receive”, Acts 3: 21.

**AMB** Does it help us in considering these scriptures in Hebrews to remember that the writer was writing to Jewish believers whose background and culture had a lot to do with the old priesthood, literally what was of Aaron and Aaron’s sons? And what the writer is saying is that there is something that has superseded all of that, and it is in one Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who He is able from His position in glory to carry out perfectly every function of priesthood. We are dealing with believers who generally saw priesthood as it related to their infirmities, and that would emphasise to our souls the sympathy of the Lord Jesus in His ability to sympathise with us because He is a Man and He has passed through experiences here that enable Him to sympathise. But then what the writer then opens

up in speaking about Christ as being “high priest according to the order of Melchisedec” is really what was new in Him, would you say?

**PAG** I think that is helpful. I recall a brother saying to us that the Apostle maintains the calling at its height, and the High Priest maintains the saints at the height of the calling. That is what the High Priest does, you might say, in the Aaronic character of His priesthood, see end note. But what you say about what is new, elsewhere the writer refers to those who “seek a better, that is, a heavenly” (Heb 11: 16), and this is not “better” in the sense of an improvement on what had gone before; it says very explicitly in chapter 7 “the priesthood being changed”: it is different. Say something for our help about the fact that what is heavenly is both different and better because that seems to me to be important.

**AMB** What is heavenly proceeds directly from God and does not depend on the responsibility of man although we are responsible to answer to it. God has placed things in the hands of His Son; indeed, He “has given all things to be in His hand”, John 3: 35. There is no possibility of failure when things are maintained entirely according to God.

**PAG** What you say is helpful because I think this aspect of heavenly priesthood, namely there being no prospect of failure, should lay hold of us. The priesthood as it was on earth before recognised the prospect of failure and, indeed, it was designed to meet failure. Now, that is not to say that that service does not go on, but if we can grasp in our souls that there is an order of things to which no failure attaches, that is very stabilising.

**AMB** I would also just add that it has also been said that the commitment we see in the Hebrew bondman in chapter 21 of Exodus underlies what we find in the high priest later.

**PAG** Well, we are glad of brothers who have experience with God and can bring such things out for us. We should be thankful for them and, beloved brethren, we should seek to take on what they have taken on. That was not something that was just exclusive to old brethren; that is something that is available to everyone.

**JAB** In view of the heavenly character of this priesthood, why does the writer write as he does from verses 7 to 9 of Hebrews 5, because that is not heavenly? We have “the order of Melchisedec” at the end of verse 6 and then he refers to it again in verse 10 but in between he speaks of the sufferings and piety of Jesus.

**PAG** My impression is that this shows the Man who is in heaven is the One who suffered and died so that I could be there too, and so that God should be satisfied. If we lay hold of the glory of the Melchisedec order of priesthood, it is not a distant, austere glory that we can only look at and wonder. We have spoken about worship and that is entirely appropriate, but this is the blessed Man who died for me on a cross in order that God’s rights might be satisfied, and it is the same Man in the glory. What would you say?

**JAB** I was thinking yesterday when you introduced these different aspects of our blessed Saviour for our consideration over these days that it would be in view that our hearts might be enlarged. Really worship in its depth comes from an appreciation of this blessed One, and from our affection for Him being enlarged. Some might think that there are a lot of different aspects to what we are speaking about; but the point of this conversation is that our hearts might be further enlarged as they were yesterday when we spoke of Him as the Servant.

**PAG** I trust so. The Song of Songs has many aspects to it but one thing it does is to draw attention to many and various glories of Christ prophetically, and I once heard a brother describe the Song of Songs as the song of a captured heart. Now, this blessed One of whom we are speaking should capture our hearts. This is the Saviour; this is Jesus; this is not a different Person; this is the One who met us in all our need and now He has wonderful glory; and if our hearts have been captured, our desire would be to know more of His glory.

**AJMcK** At the end of that section that has been referred to it says that Christ is “addressed by God” or, as the note says, ‘saluted of’ (note ‘h’ to verse 10). That sets it at the right level, does it not? “Wherefore also God highly exalted him”, Phil 2: 9.

**PAG** We should pause on that for a moment. God has 'saluted' Christ. It says in John 13: 32, "If God be glorified in him," - that is, in Christ - "God also shall glorify him in himself, and shall glorify him immediately". God has saluted this blessed One and He is glorifying Him in the assembly. Again think of that, beloved brethren! We are part of that in which God is glorifying Christ. That is our privilege and our portion.

**GAB** Aaron had sons to ensure the continuance of the priesthood; there are no sons referred to in regard to Melchisedec. Could you just explain the difference?

**PAG** Well, Aaron and his sons were all of the same order; there is only One of the order of Melchisedec, and that is Christ; but there is "he that sanctifies and those sanctified" and they are "all of one", Heb 2: 11. Does that help?

**GAB** You are relating the "all of one" to Melchisedec?

**PAG** No. I understand that when the writer says, "he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one", the Sanctifier is Christ, and "those sanctified" refers to the saints; but all are of God. We come in as "those sanctified"; Christ is the Sanctifier. He sanctified Himself - that is to say, He set Himself apart for holy purposes - but He had no need to be sanctified in relation to what is unsuitable, as we do, because He was entirely pure and holy in Himself, but then there *are* those who are sanctified, and "he is not ashamed to call them brethren"; so we come in in association with Him but in association with Him, we are in the presence of God as sons.

**GAB** I am just enquiring, but does the fact that Melchisedec has no sons indicate that you have really arrived at finality? In Aaron's case there is renewal because of the condition in which he was. But when we come to Melchisedec we have a state, a condition of things, which is final and which can never be improved or changed.

**PAG** It cannot be improved or changed, and that would be clearly set out in a "a Son perfected for ever"; so in that sense the thought of what is "unchangeable" and "the power of indissoluble life" and "for ever" and "continually" suggest that what is vested in this One never needs to be renewed, improved or changed, but what I would desire

to lay on our hearts is that nevertheless sonship is open to every believer. It is the proper portion of every believer. The Lord says that, "And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them", John 17: 22. He has given us the glory of sonship. None of us is after the order of Melchisedec - I am not suggesting that, because that emphasises His deity and none of us can participate in that - but nevertheless sonship is proper to priesthood and underlies priestly service.

**JD-i** Would you enlarge on the thought of what it is to be perfected? The word perfect does not involve any process or the thought of development, but in the humanity of Christ all that shone out was absolute perfection.

**PAG** I think what is particularly brought before us in the matter of "a Son perfected for ever" is that what He has set on is complete and eternal in its character. There is no need for adjustment or improvement. So the word says, "but the word of the swearing of the oath, which is after the law". The law could not make anything perfect. The law left men incomplete in the sight of God because men could not keep it. The Son is the One who "magnified the law, and made it honourable" (Isa 42: 21), and He is the One now who is set down at the right hand of God and everything is complete in Him, including, "**ye** are complete in him" (Col 2: 10); so "a Son perfected for ever" involves what is complete.

**JW** I am just wondering whether the verse in Revelation in any way relates to what you are saying. It says, "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father", chap 1: 5, 6.

**PAG** Yes; so the present love of Christ is referred to, "To him who loves us," which, of course, will continue for ever but is expressed as a present matter, "and has washed us from our sins in his blood", which is what has been done and never needs to be done again, "and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father", which will be seen publicly in a day to come. So really what is established in Christ rests on the fact, as again Revelation says, that He is "the Alpha and the Omega", chap 1: 8. He is the beginning of everything

for God, but He is the completion of everything for God. Do you think that bears on it?

**JW** That helps.

**RDP** Bearing on what our brother has said is the expression “author of eternal salvation”. It seems to me the thought of “author” is an interesting one and “eternal salvation” is perhaps a fuller thought of salvation than we often allow into our minds. I wondered if it linked with what our brother was saying.

**PAG** What would you say further about the “author”?

**RDP** It is not a word that is commonly used in Scripture. The note says, ‘causer’ (note ‘g’ to Hebrews 5: 9), but the thought of “author” is in Himself, a full, complete exposition. I thought “eternal salvation” is more than the meeting of my sins. Does this involve a whole finished matter?

**PAG** So the “author of eternal salvation” began it, and He will complete it. It might be said that He has already completed it. However, He has completed the work on the cross but He will give us new bodies. I have the impression that our “eternal salvation” in that sense would go right on to the point where we have bodies of glory and will be with Him for ever so our bodies will be saved as well as our souls.

**VC** The Lord Jesus completes everything which is of God. At the end of Revelation we get, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end”, chap 21: 6.

**PAG** Yes, we were speaking recently locally of the fact that He is the Corner-stone; so, in that sense, the whole building is founded on and takes character from Him; but He is also the Head-stone, “he shall bring forth the head-stone with shoutings”, Zech 4: 7. The head-stone of the arch of a bridge is what holds the whole bridge together; so there is a Foundation but there is a Head-stone, and both are Christ. The beginning and the end of everything that is for God is Christ, none else, and this One of whom we are speaking, the High Priest, of the order of Melchisedec, is bringing out blessing on the basis of things that are complete.

**NCMcK** Would you say that the section referred to in verses 7-9 emphasises His moral qualifications, and that is of the utmost importance if we are to have a High Priest to serve us? He must be morally great to approach.

**PAG** Well, that is a very helpful point to draw to our attention because really Christ's moral qualifications are demonstrated under the most extreme test. He was found to be perfect in every circumstance, even in the matter of submitting to the will of the Father in relation to the cross, and what the scripture says, "and that the death of the cross", Phil 2: 8. His moral qualifications, if I may use this word advisedly, were proved to be flawless under testing. Men test things to see if they meet a standard; Christ's moral qualifications are flawless, and they are demonstrably so.

**NCMcK** Is it important, especially for the young, to understand that the One whom we approach as Priest, who intercedes for us, is absolutely morally great; He is not a weak, failing man such as men would understand, and they had in the previous dispensation; He is absolutely perfect and He is absolutely towards us in love. These things are immutable, are they not?

**PAG** They are. I may speak to a brother about an issue but I would speak in the light of my own clear acceptance that if there is any failure, I could be just as capable of it as any other person. The Lord does not serve us in that way. He was "tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart", Heb 4: 15. We must keep that in our minds.

**DCB** He was priestly before He was Priest. Through His whole life in this scene He acted in a priestly way, but it is only as glorified that He is saluted as Priest, is it?

**PAG** That would, I think, bear on what has just been said about the moral qualifications. He was demonstrated to have the moral qualifications of priesthood before He was acclaimed as such. Luke is the priestly gospel. I say this very simply: if you want to see the Priest in action, read Luke's gospel. Think of Him going after the two on the way to Emmaüs. He did not send a messenger; it says, "Jesus himself drawing nigh, went with them", Luke 24: 15.

**TJC** Just as you were speaking as to Luke's gospel, I suppose the Lord as the good Samaritan showed the incapable character of the priests on one side. The Samaritan drew alongside the man and showed the true priest in function.

**PAG** That is helpful. It says, "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and at his mouth they seek the law", Mal 2: 7. The law could not help the man on the Jericho road. The Levite could have been a Kohathite, or a Merarite, or a Gershonite. Perhaps he carried things, but he saw this man and he said, 'I cannot carry this', but there was One who could draw near, who took him up. He did not come down to him; He came up to him; and He poured in the oil and the wine. He took him to a place of safety. What a Priest! Really that bears on what has been said about the moral qualifications of the priest. Even the world knows something of what we mean when we speak about the good Samaritan. I just point out that nowhere in Scripture is the Samaritan called good. That is not because He is not good, but because it is really what we see in Him that is good, the moral qualification of Christ.

**AEM** Do His moral qualifications mean that there is no restriction on His priestly service? There was restriction under Aaron, time restriction, even movement restriction, but when the good Samaritan brought him to the inn, He said, "whatsoever thou shalt expend more", Luke 10: 35. There was no restriction.

**PAG** No, "whatsoever thou shalt expend more, / will render to thee on my coming back". There was no restriction on what could be spent in order to make this man comfortable and there was no sense that the man was not going to see this Samaritan again. What you say matters too in relation to what is heavenly: the Lord is not restricted in going in.

**AEM** I was thinking of the Aaronic priesthood and the fact that there were certain things that could only be done once a year. Christ has every right to be before God continually.

**PAG** That would, among other things, remind us of the value of the blood of Christ because of the reference you have made to certain things being done once a year; it says, "not without blood" (Heb 9:

7), but now the blood has been shed; the “eternal redemption” (v 12) has been wrought. The blood of the Christ is eternal in its value and does not have to be shed time and time again; it is once for all. I trust we can be stabilised in our souls in seeing the perpetual character of this priesthood and its stability in the sight of God.

**LM** The disciples on the road to Emmaüs said their hearts were burning, so He brings in fire. Would that be right?

**PAG** I think so. My exercise is that as we speak of this blessed One may we go from this time together and say our hearts are on fire. “Was not our heart burning in us ...?”, Luke 24: 32. The Lord would desire to enliven us in our affections so that we might live for Him as He lives for God.

**AGM** Could you say something about “such a high priest became us”? There has been much said as to drawing nigh to God, and the approach to God, but then “such a high priest became us”: is that our appreciation of that greatness seen in Christ in the Melchisedec character?

**PAG** It would dignify the saints in our minds and our affections, do you think? “Such a high priest became us”, but you can help us further.

**AGM** The saints are in divine purpose. The divine purpose involves that they are brought near, and it requires One so great, because we are so great in the divine thought, to bring us in near to God.

**PAG** It is verse 26 of chapter 7 that we are speaking about. It is important that we look at that: “For such a high priest became us”. That means “such a high priest” was suitable for us and was becoming for us, but look at these features, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners”. You might say that is the Aaronic character of His priesthood, but let us not forget the last clause, “and become higher than the heavens”. That High Priest became us, but we cannot go higher than the heavens. He can go into a sphere that is uncreated, but that High Priest becomes us. This is a High Priest of not just meeting need; this is a High Priest of blessing and exaltation, and blessing and exaltation are becoming to the saints of God.

**JTB** In relation to the moral qualities of the Lord Jesus, I was thinking of the contrast in the Psalm, “He weakened my strength in the way, he shortened my days”, Ps 102: 23. He received that in perfect submission. But then such a One is “without genealogy”. What a contrast! It brings out the glory of the Melchisedec priesthood. I was thinking too of the garments of the high priest: the shoulder pieces, which would, no doubt, include capacity to carry our weaknesses and address our frailties, but also the breast-plate was “Square” and “doubled” (Exod 28: 16), carrying us really into a great realm of blessing and affection.

**PAG** Say more about what you are thinking about it being “Square” and “doubled”; these are important features.

**JTB** The square is universal. Every believer in the Lord Jesus is there. We can take comfort from that. Being doubled suggests that area of blessed security, do you think?

**PAG** And one of the features of the breastplate was that it was not to be loosed from the ephod, v 28. That is an important matter to consider in priestly service. Love, the breastplate, underlies all, but God’s rights are to be maintained. The breastplate cannot be loosed from the ephod. There is no point at which love is not needed; but there is no point at which priestliness is not needed. Both go together.

**JL** There was only one high priest then; there is only one great High Priest now, and it is such a One who holds us in His heart. It is good to keep that in mind. The great High Priest is equally identified with Melchisedec.

**PAG** Yes, say more as to that. It is important to emphasise that whereas there may be priestly service afforded by the saints, there is one great High Priest.

**JL** I do not have a lot more to say except just to emphasise that point, that there were not several functioning great high priests. God had in mind One that was suggestively brought out in the Aaronic order and distinctively so in the greater order that is now found in Melchisedec.

**PAG** And a word that may be used in relation to the priesthood is that it is 'intransmissible', note 'h' to "unchangeable" in Heb 7: 24. That means that it cannot be passed to anyone else, and there is a reason for that: no one else could do it. There is no one great enough. There is only this One.

**JD** Do you think the first three verses read in chapter 7 relating to the order of Melchisedec would link with Christ as being "image of the invisible God", Col 1: 15? He is the only One who could represent God.

**PAG** That is very helpful.

**JD** I wondered if Aaron would suggest more the thought of likeness in Christ's service towards His saints, securing likeness in the saints, but Christ has this distinctive place as being the only One who could be described as "image of the invisible God".

**PAG** Yes, likeness might bring before our minds, insofar as it refers to us, the thought of formation, but this blessed One never needed formation. He is "image of the invisible God". As Man, He cannot be anything less than "image of the invisible God". I trust that these enquiries together might result in formation in us, but it is after a pattern that never has to be changed.

**BWL** Could you maybe say something about these titles that belong to Melchisedec in verse 2, "King of righteousness" and "King of peace"?

**PAG** Well, there is a very simple point to make: you are not going to have peace if you do not have righteousness. There is a word upbraiding those who say, "Peace! and there is no peace", Ezek 13: 10. Righteousness underlies peace. Millennially it is said of Christ, "Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of thy throne", Ps 89: 14. We do well to have that in our minds. He has established a basis in righteousness whereby we may approach God, whereby He may bring us in to God, and we may be there in perfect peace, but you think of the Lord saying, "Peace be to you" (John 20: 19), but it says, "he shewed to them his hands and his side", v 20. He shewed them that righteousness had been established; He shewed them that

the assembly was in view as the fruit of His death; but it was all on the basis of righteousness.

**BWL** Does it link with what has been said already about security and blessing? Righteousness would establish the security, and peace would involve blessing. It is limitless.

**PAG** Well, “righteousness and peace have kissed each other”, Ps 85: 10. There is not a discontinuity between righteousness and peace; it is not a question of choosing one or the other. They can and should go on in perfect unity with one another.

**GBG** He represents the saints, does He not? There was a point with the children of Israel when God says that Moses was to put an end to the murmuring, Num 17: 5, 10. This was by laying up Aaron’s rod, which budded, before God. The people actually murmured afterwards, but it had been put an end to before God because there is no murmuring in Christ. I would just like help as to that because He represents the saints before God.

**PAG** And therefore everything that goes up to God is perfect. That is another thing. I know that it was part of the priestly service here that the crop and the feathers were taken and set aside (Lev 1: 16), but - again, I say this for the encouragement of our younger brethren - we are speaking about an exalted, blessed, perfect Man, who makes what you present to God perfect before God. He does that for you. It does not mean that you should come half-heartedly or carelessly. The word says, “none shall appear in my presence empty”, Exod 23: 15. He is waiting to serve you in order that what you bring to God might be acceptable to Him if it comes from a true heart.

**RDP** Melchisedec comes in uniquely in the Old Testament, to Abraham. I wondered if practically it is important to see that while doubtless Abraham would have been feeling the toils of the battle of the kings and the search for his brother, it is as if Melchisedec comes and reintroduces him to a higher level of things. These are great truths we are speaking of, but there is a very practical aspect to the Melchisedec side, would you say? The battle was finished. We have come through some difficult times, but our occupation is to be

in relation to all that is for God, so that Abraham is able to say he would not take even a sandal-thong from the king of Sodom.

**PAG** Melchisedec immediately elevates Abraham in his thoughts: “And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heavens and earth. And blessed be the Most High God, who has delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he” - Abraham - “gave him the tenth of all”, Gen 14: 19, 20. Melchisedec brings in blessing for Abraham but he immediately takes Abraham on to the blessing of God, and that is a wonderful thing for us, beloved brethren, that we may be transported through the blessing that God has given to us to render blessing to God Himself. This Priest is serving us with that in view.

**NJH** Abraham immediately quotes the title Melchisedec used, “the Most High God”. I wondered if you could give us some help as to what bearing Melchisedec has on the Supper and service of God.

**PAG** Well, the Aaronic character of the priesthood carries on, and we have spoken about any adjustment that may be needed. The Lord would still provide that even as we are together in view of the service of God, but the Most High God is spoken of in Genesis, where Melchisedec is introduced, as “possessor of heavens and earth”. The service of God is intended to take us from the earth to what is heavenly. We are not to be occupied then with our needs and our wants. It says here, “For, the priesthood being changed, there takes place of necessity a change of law also”. These Hebrew saints were being taken from one thing to another. Well, surely it must be for us: we are not occupied with what is down here.

**NJH** Drinking in the new covenant begins matters, we might say, as we proceed in the service of God. I just wondered what the bearing of that might be.

**PAG** The new covenant would tell us of relationships established in righteousness, but then it says, “And having sung a hymn, they went out to the mount of Olives”, Matt 26: 30. I think what the Melchisedec order of priesthood would draw our attention to is *going out*. It is a going out character of priesthood. It is a priesthood of

blessing so we go out, having broken bread in the wilderness, to what is heavenly.

**JL** Earlier in the meeting a brother quoted from Hebrews chapter 8 where the Lord's function is identified as well as being "minister of the holy places", and it is particularly in that capacity that the Lord comes in, is it not?

**PAG** I believe that. I do not want to over-emphasise the service that He might provide by way of adjustment - in a sense it is incidental - but rather that what is in view is what is heavenly, what is holy, and also what is eternal. These are the features that would be brought before us particularly by Christ in the pursuit of the service of praise.

**RWMcC** I was noticing from the note that "most high" is a proper name (note 'g' to Heb 7: 1 which refers to note 'b' to Mark 5: 7). Would that relate to the greatness of the service?

**PAG** It does, and we know the name of the Father, and the Father is supreme in the economy of love into which divine Persons have entered; so we have access to what is most high, to what is supreme, but we have access in a known relationship. "The most high God" would bring before us the thought of glory and exaltation, but what is brought in in this dispensation additionally is that there is relationship.

**JAB** You began by making the link between priesthood and sonship; and for us to understand and act as sons Godward we need the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of sonship. What part does the Spirit play in all that we are speaking about? It is something I have been wondering about as we have proceeded in the reading.

**PAG** It says in Romans chapter 8: 14, "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these* are sons of God"; so the first thing is to be subject to the leading of the Spirit. That would include, not exclusively, His leading in the wilderness setting on the earth here, and the Spirit would always be leading us to what is glorious, "*these* are sons of God". "For ye have not received a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye have received a spirit of adoption", v 15. Now "a spirit of adoption" means a spirit of sonship. The gift of the Spirit, therefore, brings us into the good and enjoyment of sonship's place

and portion. The Lord says, “the glory which thou hast given me” - that is the glory of sonship - “I have given them”, John 17: 22. He is speaking to the Father. If the Lord gives us, His own, the glory of sonship, the Spirit makes it good in our souls, and it says, “a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry,” - that is sons who are crying - “Abba, Father”. One other thing in passing I would like the brethren to notice is that the Lord says, “Abba, Father” in Gethsemane, Mark 14: 35. He says it at the time of the most intense pressure. It suggests to me that His relationship with the Father was of very special and particular value to Him at that point when He faced the most intense pressure of all, and it is these very same words that the Holy Spirit gives to us. Does that help?

**JAB** Yes, it certainly does. The Lord when He was here, priestly but not officially Priest, said that the disciples could not understand everything then, but when the Spirit was come, He would open it up; so the Spirit’s part in opening up to us these glories of Jesus that we have been speaking about is essential to us. That would mean that we engage with Him in our affections, the Spirit opening up to us these glories, would it not? So it does not become just a subject in a reading, but the Holy Spirit makes it real to our affections, would you say?

**PAG** He does, and you appealed earlier to our younger brethren that they might hear and be attentive to what is being said even though it may seem complex. It is all speaking about Christ. If after a meeting like this, a thought comes to our mind, or there is something that we did not fully grasp, we can ask the Holy Spirit. Speak to Him directly and just ask Him to help you, and I can *assure* you He will; He loves to exalt Christ in the hearts of believers; it is what He came to do. He came to make sure that Christ was appreciated. He has other services and offices too but He came to make sure that Christ in glory was appreciated by believers.

**RB** When priesthood is introduced in chapter 3, it is set in relation to the house. Does that help in the enquiry in relation to the Spirit’s service, producing priestly features in the saints?

**PAG** That is helpful in our understanding of our suitability for God’s dwelling-place. We are not there as visitors; we are there as sons.

The Spirit would give us that confidence in the divine presence.

**RB** Do you think what we are saying now is answering the question you asked in the first reading as to “part with me”, John 13: 8? Is this all part of it?

**PAG** Well, I think we should have an extensive view of “part with me”. We should not narrow it down. The Lord wants us to have part with Him in every sphere that is suitable to us and for us to be suitable to these heavenly places.

**JD-i** I was thinking that we are given the glory of sonship, and also the gift of the Holy Spirit. Sonship makes us positionally God’s sons, and God gives us the Holy Spirit to enable us to function and respond as sons.

**PAG** God does not only want to *regard* us as sons; He wants us to *function* as sons. He would hold us at that level, but the gift of the Spirit has in mind that we might *respond* to Him at that level. That would be suitable.

**JD-i** As you said, we should call on the Spirit to help us so that we increasingly enjoy a relationship as sons, and also respond to Him more suitably and more powerfully as sons.

**PAG** Beloved brethren, I desire that we should become accustomed to speaking to the Holy Spirit from day to day, not in a casual way; as we do so we are speaking to a divine Person; but you can speak to Him at any time as you can speak to the Lord at any time, and as you can speak to the Father at any time. Learn to distinguish the services of divine Persons and speak to them. And yet I would say this: no divine Person is going to turn you away and say that you ought to have addressed Another. The Lord would not do that, but He will give you intelligence.

**DCB** Psalm 133 helps us: “Like the precious oil upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, upon Aaron’s beard, that ran down to the hem of his garments”, v 2. The Priest is anointed by the Holy Spirit, but that influences the whole realm, does it not?

**PAG** “Down to the hem of his garments”, so it goes right on. The blessing of the Holy Spirit really goes right on to what is testimonial.

The golden bells were there, suggesting the outgoing of the gospel, as were the pomegranates, speaking of the unity of the saints; it involves what is testimonial. Something flows out of the work of the Holy Spirit anointing Christ.

**DAB** I was interested in the enquiry as to the function of the priest according to the order of Melchisedec in the service of God. There is a reference in Psalm 110, a psalm of David, "Thou art priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek", v 4. What would you say as to that? Why was David able to write in that way?

**PAG** It would bear on "holy men of God spake under the power of the Holy Spirit", 2 Pet 1: 21. The Spirit was there; "the Spirit of Christ which was in them", 1 Pet 1: 11. But we should look at Psalm 110. Maybe you could quote the verses you had in mind.

**DAB** It is a very interesting psalm including, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in holy splendour: from the womb of the morning shall come to thee the dew of thy youth" (v 3), and then verse 4 particularly, "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek". I was wondering if there was a link with Psalm 2: "And / have anointed my king upon Zion, the hill of my holiness" (v 6), and, "Thou art my Son; / this day have begotten thee", v 7. I wondered if there was a link between sonship and priesthood in Psalm 2 and Psalm 110.

**PAG** I think that is right, and this is what is referred to in Hebrews, I suppose, as "the word of the swearing of the oath which is after the law, a Son perfected for ever"; so God has installed Christ in the place of highest exultation and He has appointed Him, "a priest for ever". Think of that: God's anointed Man is also God's appointed Man. Glory attaches to what God does in Christ, and makes good in our souls by the Holy Spirit, and I am assured that you will not find such glory anywhere else. I can also assure you from personal experience that there is nothing better or greater than focusing our minds and our affections on what God has done in and through Christ, and what He will secure eternally as a result. I use the word stability again. It stabilises our souls in a scene that is passing on to judgment: "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek".

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## Note

*It is not in mind to produce the next reading at these meetings in this magazine, but this extract from the opening remarks to it is included for further help:*

A brother mentioned to me in the interval that not everyone was sure what the Aaronic character of priesthood was, and it as well to be clear. Aaron was the priest, constituted priest, at the time of the law, at the inauguration of the tabernacle system in Exodus; so when we speak about the character of the order of priesthood that was established in Aaron, we sometimes, as a shorthand, refer to it as the Aaronic character. The Aaronic service will cease when the need for it ceases - when the saints have bodies of glory - but the Melchisedec services continues for ever. There was a priest, on earth, serving in relation to the tabernacle system and the people and having in view both the support of the people and service Godward. But what it says as to Melchisedec is that his service primarily is in “things relating to God”. Now, we say that the Aaronic character of the priesthood continues. That is because we are still on earth and we need the help of the priest on earth in relation to our bodily conditions and our weaknesses, but the primary purpose of Melchisedec’s order of priesthood is “things relating to God”. We must also be clear that although we have been taught (see JT vol 50 p370) that the order of Melchisedec brings out Christ’s deity, we would have access to neither His Aaronic service nor His Melchisedec service were it not for His manhood. I just mention that because it is as well that when we use expressions we should be clear about what they mean, and I used this one: so I should make it clear.

**DUNDEE**

**6<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

## **Key to Initials:**

R Bain, Buckie; A M Brown, Grangemouth; D A Brown, Grangemouth; D C Brown, Edinburgh; G A Brown, Grangemouth; J A Brown, Grangemouth; J T Brown, Edinburgh; T J Campbell, Glasgow; V Cimmino, Castellammare; J Desai, Los Angeles; J Drummond, Aberdeen; A P Grant, Dundee; G B Grant, Dundee; P A Gray, Grangemouth; N J Henry, Glasgow; J Laurie, Brechin; B W Lovie, Aberdeen; R W McClean, Grimsby; A J McKay, Witney; N McKay, Glasgow; A G Mair, Cullen; L Meagher, Secunderabad; A E Mutton, Witney; R D Plant, Birmingham; K J Walker, Dundee; J Webster, Fraserburgh

# **A REFUGE AND A HOPE**

**Roland H Brown**

**Hebrews 6: 17-20**

You will have noticed that, in the last two verses I have read, there are references to runners, persons who are fleeing for refuge; they are running for their lives. And there is reference to One who “is entered”, the writer says, “as forerunner for us”. The Forerunner is the One who runs on ahead, for others.

I want to speak about Him because He is the great theme of God’s glad tidings; but I want to ask if you have fled for refuge, whether you feel the need to flee for refuge, whether you are very comfortable as you are, or whether you have ever felt the need to run to safety in your soul? Because, if you have not, dear hearers, you are in the gravest peril. You could not be in any greater danger if you have not run to the refuge that God has provided. God has provided a refuge for people in danger, for people at risk, a very blessed refuge.

This epistle was written to Jewish believers, and I have no doubt that as they read this epistle their minds would go to the cities of refuge, Num 35. You will remember in the Old Testament that God in His grace provided what I suppose today would be described as safe havens, for persons who deserved to die, persons for whom the avenger of blood was looking. You see, even in the Old Testament, you could not keep out the grace of God. Even though He was dealing with men in a different dispensation, far less favourable than the present moment, the grace of God was testified to abundantly in the law. There was a means for the sinner to bring his sin-offering and to be restored. There was means provided in the grace of God for relationships that had been broken to be mended; but the grace of God entered into the fact that there was a place of refuge. And the cities of refuge were spread throughout the land: you would never be very far from a city of refuge; and if through inadvertence you had shed blood, you needed to run for your life because if the avenger of blood found you outside it would be death.

Do you feel, dear hearer, that you need to run to God's refuge? If you have not run to it you are in the greatest possible danger. God in His glad tidings would point you to the refuge that is available for the guilty sinner, for any person who does not deserve it; God has provided it for them, the city of refuge. The danger you are in, if you are still in your sins, is that you could die in them. You could die in your sins. The Lord Jesus said that to some persons in John's gospel; He said that they would die in their sins, chap 8: 21, 24. What a solemn thing! You see, to die in your sins is to be raised in your sins. To die in your sins is to stand before God in your sins, before that great white throne, and the books opened, and the record of them there, Rev 20: 11-15. What an appalling prospect is presented to us! It is presented to us in the Scriptures undramatically, but the solemnity of it comes home to the soul, of a sinner standing before God. And there are no 'ifs' and 'buts'; there are no mistakes: every sin is recorded, every sin is there. And then search is made in the book of life, but you know that there can be only one outcome if someone stands before God to be judged in relation to their responsible history; there can only be one outcome from that. If you are a sinner, and you have not fled for refuge, the judgment of God is the danger that we must flee from.

Another danger is the standard that God will apply: the standard of righteousness. "He is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness" (Acts 17: 31): one standard; God has one standard and one standard only before Him. How do you measure up, dear hearer, to the standard that God has? The Scripture tells you! The Scripture not only tells you that we have sinned - "all have sinned", Rom 3: 23. I do not know much about everybody in this room, but there is one thing I know about every person present here this afternoon, and that is that each one is a sinner as I am. It says "all have sinned" - that is historical, but it goes on to say, "**and** come short of the glory of God". What a solemn thing, to think that I come short of God's standard! It is a standard I could never meet in my own endeavours, the standard that God has; He is going to measure everything by that standard, the divine standard of righteousness. And I come short. You know, one wicked king was faithfully told that; he was told, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found

wanting”, Dan 5: 27. You do not often see such balances today; you go into shops and everything is electronic; but some that are older will remember the balances. You went into a shop and the standard weight was put on one side and the goods were put in the other, and they were weighed in the balance. You think of God having a balance, and this king was weighed in God’s balance, he was measured against the divine standard, and the result was that he came short. And we all come short, and I want to tell you in a minute - if I was only here to tell you that you come short, there would be no glad tidings about it! - how you can flee for refuge.

Another thing that we fear as unforgiven sinners is death; the wages of sin, the judgment of God. The guilty sinner goes on his course, the temporary pleasures of sin, and the wages are collected: “the wages of sin is death”. How solemn it is! One man in the scriptures speaks of it as the king of terrors, Job 18: 14. People are afraid of it, afraid as they say of the great leap into the unknown, the end of all that they have found their life in - and what is beyond? Well, the Scripture tells us what is beyond. It says it is “the portion of men once to die” - but there is what is after this - “and after this judgment”, Heb 9: 27. I desire, dear hearer, in speaking of these things, to arouse with you the need to flee for refuge. God has provided a refuge for persons that are facing death and facing judgment, and the possibility of meeting God and being judged by His standard of righteousness.

But there is a refuge, and the refuge that God has provided is in a Man, a Man: the Scripture says, “And a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the storm”, Isa 32: 2. What a Man He is! God commends Him to you; He commends His own love to you in the glad tidings in that Man, the Man Christ Jesus. God commends His love to you; He does not want you to perish. He does not want you to come under His judgment; He has provided a means whereby you need never come into judgment. What a God He is! He has taken account of me in my rebellion, in the lawlessness of my heart; He has taken account of me, but He has taken account of me in grace, and I thank Him from my heart. He brought home to me the solemnity for my own soul of my

position. The apostle Paul says, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men", 2 Cor 5: 11. I remember Mr Bellamy, who was local here, saying once that he wondered what experience had entered into the life of the apostle that he spoke about knowing the terror of the Lord. We begin in our soul history on the road to blessing through conviction, conviction of what we are - not only of what we have done but what we are, and of our own inability to do anything about it. But God is able to do much about it: He is known as a "Saviour God" (1 Tim 2: 3), which is a title in which the blessed God exults, that He is a Saviour God, and "not willing that any should perish", 2 Pet 3: 9. There is not one person in this room that God is willing should perish, and He has made provision that you might not perish. The Scripture says that "God so loved the world", John 3: 16. What a heart God has, a heart that reached out in its fulness to the whole of humanity. He "desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth", 1 Tim 2: 4. That is why the gospel is preached, that you might be saved.

I wonder if everyone in this room is a saved sinner? God desires that you might be saved, and not only saved but that you might come to the knowledge of the truth. It is very important that you should be saved - you *must* be saved: "neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we **must** be saved", Acts 4: 12. You *must* have to do with God about your sins - you *must*! Your eternal destiny depends upon it; but that is not the end of the gospel: God has in mind that you should come to the knowledge of the truth. And if you come to the knowledge of the truth, you discover how blessed it is, and how blessed God is, and how wonderful His thoughts of love are. For sinners like you and me, God has had the most wonderful thoughts of blessing and He would share them with you. And He has given His Spirit in order that we might be led on into the truth: "he shall guide you into all the truth", John 16: 13. He will enable you to explore the great things of God; what a God God is: not only saving us from our responsible history, but you might say opening the fulness of His house, His heart, to share with men. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish" - that is the beginning - "but" - the Lord says.- "but have life

eternal”, the enjoyment of a life to which death does not attach, the enjoyment of relationships which death can never interrupt. You may be part of a family, you may enjoy family relationships as a member of that family, but all lies under the shadow of death. When people got married, they used to say, ‘until death do us part’. You think of that: persons falling in love and getting married - you say how attractive that is! - and the shadow of death rests upon it; ‘until death do us part’. God is speaking about relationships that death will not interfere with. The apostle speaks in Romans about a list of things, including death: he says, “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities” - and he lists many other things - “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”, chap 8: 38, 39. Have you got a relationship like that? If somebody you love dies, you cannot enjoy their love as you had enjoyed it, or they enjoy yours; but death cannot “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. That verse has been a great comfort to persons who have been bereaved, in the knowledge as to the one who has been taken, that they may have been separated from us and the enjoyment of our love, but they are not separated from the enjoyment of “the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. They enjoy it without any interruption whatever, without any disturbance whatever; well might the apostle say that their portion “is very much better”, Phil 1: 23! How wonderful these things are, that sinners under the judgment of death, and the fear of judgment to come, and the standard of righteousness that God will apply, and He is speaking about not only saving them from those things, but bringing them into the greatest and most blessed relationship with Himself which will be the joy of their souls eternally.

How magnificent the glad tidings are, and God has provided a city of refuge; He has provided it in One who came into this scene in order to be a Sin-bearer; who wended His way to the cross - “he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9: 51) because He had come to die; He had come “to give his life a ransom”, Matt 20: 28. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6: 23); there were no sins that He committed that made Him subject to death. Death had no claim upon Him, but He was wending His way to the cross to die for the

sins of others. Through God's grace, I can say that he died for my sins: I can say with Peter that He bore my sins "in his body on the tree" (1 Pet 2: 24); those sins that I could never ever atone to God for, He atoned to God for them. He bore the sins of believers. It is a solemn thing to take account of the cross of Jesus: God would have you take account of the cross of Jesus; take account of the One who was on it, the One who alive on that cross bore and exhausted the judgment of God against sins. So that I can rejoice in that word, "There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus", Rom 8: 1. One of those things that struck terror into my soul was the thought of standing before God to be condemned eternally: what peace it brings into my soul to know, not simply that I will not be condemned, but for those who are in Christ Jesus, there is *no such thing* as condemnation. There could never be: the righteousness of God requires that I should go out free, that I should go out blameless, because all that lay to my account has been paid; it has been paid in precious blood. It was blood that was precious to God. God said to His people of old, "when I see the blood", Exod 12: 13. God is looking upon the blood: on the mercy-seat the blood was sprinkled, and the cherubim - the great guardians of God's rights - were looking down upon that blood, sprinkled on the mercy-seat, Lev 16: 14, 15. I can draw near to God without fear. You think of the first sinner, driven out - not only running away from God in his fear and his guilt, but God drove him out: he was unfit for the presence of God, and He set the cherubim there with the flame of the flashing sword. If that sinner looked back at that lost paradise, at that beautiful garden that he had forfeited through his disobedience, there were the guardians of God's righteousness, guarding the way to the tree of life, holding the flame of the flashing sword - there was *no way back*, Gen 3: 24. There was no way of meeting that divine standard of righteousness, but through faith in Christ, and through faith in His blood, God clothes me - *me* the guilty sinner! - with the righteousness of Christ! What a matter it is: I have no righteousness of my own; the Scripture tells me that "our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa 64: 6), but God has a righteousness for people who have no righteousness of their own, and He is pleased to clothe them with it. The "righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ

towards all" (Rom 3: 22); that is, that God would clothe with His righteousness all who would avail themselves of it, but it is *only* "upon all those who believe"; those who have fled for refuge, they are clothed with the righteousness of God. No charge can be brought against them, and when they look at death, they know One who is risen from the grave; One who has been into death, and death could not hold Him. It held every other, but it could not hold Him: "it was not possible that he should be held by its power", Acts 2: 24. He lay among the dead, but from among the dead God raised Him: He was "raised from **among** the dead" (chap 3: 15): you think of that selective resurrection! Myriads and myriads lie in death, but there is one glorious Man that God claimed; He claimed Him by His glory from the grave! He has broken the power of death, and through going into it, He has removed - for me at any rate - the fear of death; He has broken it for ever. What a refuge Jesus is! I commend Him to you, that you might run - run with alacrity! The need is great, but the blessing is even greater. As you run to the refuge that God has provided, you are safe.

But then God intends not only that you should be safe, but that you should be blessed. The One who is a Refuge is also a Forerunner. The One who died for my sins, who bore them alive on the cross, He went into the grave and was buried, He went out of sight, and He took those sins from God's sight for ever. God says of such that "their sins and their lawlessnesses I will never remember any more", Heb 8: 12. He did remember them: He remembered them at the cross of Jesus; they came in remembrance before God, and His judgment without any mitigation was poured out upon the head of that sinless One. And the result is that God says 'I am never ever going to remember them again'. And that brings peace, it brings the most profound peace into the soul and into the conscience.

But then this Scripture speaks of Jesus as a Forerunner. He is risen, not only risen from the grave, but He has ascended up where He was before. And in the gospel, God presents to you a glorified Man, a living Man, One who has entered into God's presence. And He has entered in there at divine invitation: "Sit at my right hand" -

God has said - "until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet", Ps 110: 1. Now that tells me that every issue in relation to my sins has been resolved to God's eternal satisfaction, because the Sin-bearer, who bore them "in his body on the tree", has been exalted to the place of supremacy and dominance. And from that place of supremacy and dominance, God presents Him in the glad tidings. It is God's appeal: you may not think much of the preacher - the way he speaks or looks or whatever - but you must remember that behind the preacher of the gospel lies the appeal of God Himself. And He presents a glorified Saviour. And He presents Him as a Man in subsisting righteousness before God. Every question of sin and sins has been resolved. He could never have been exalted to the right hand of God if He was still bearing my sins. And the fact that He is available tells me that every matter related to that has been for ever settled to God's entire satisfaction.

He has entered in not only in the glory and greatness of His own Person, but He has entered in as a Forerunner: "entering into that within the veil", Heb 10: 19. Now I think these persons reading this letter would be used to the tabernacle system, the veil, and the holy of holies where nobody went except the high priest, and then not without blood, and there were certain precautions in case anything happened to him. He had bells on his garments so that his sound could be heard, so that they knew as he went into that holy place where the presence of God was that nothing untoward had happened to him. God was dwelling in thick darkness, and these precautions were taken, but no common person could go through the veil. But the veil is where you can go - through the veil - into this place where Jesus is. He has entered in as our Forerunner; He has become the Head of a heavenly company. Persons who have fled for refuge, and have been indwelt by the Spirit of God, have become part of that heavenly company. They do not belong here; they have no place here; they have no place in this world. The Lord Jesus in speaking of them said, "they are not of the world, as I am not of the world", John 17: 14. And these persons to whom this letter was sent were suffering under the Roman power for their Christianity, some of them even unto death, unto martyrdom: they had no place here, but they had a place there and He has entered in as their Forerunner.

The gospel brings peace to our souls and to our consciences, but it gives us a hope too, a living hope. It is spoken of as a “living hope” (1 Pet 1: 3); it is spoken of as a “blessed hope”, Titus 2: 13. It is centred in a blessed Man, but He is in another world altogether. He has entered there as the Forerunner for myriads; there are going to be myriads like Him, and with Him eternally. He is presented not only as a Refuge but as a Hope; and it says here that we are to “lay hold on the hope set before us”. Lay hold of it tonight if you have not laid hold of it before: it is brought within your reach. Lay hold of it for yourself; do not rely on the fact that you sit in a Christian company, or even that you belong to a Christian family, but make sure that it is your personal hope: lay hold of it. It can be an anchor for your soul. There is not anything else that you can anchor your soul on in this poor world; it is marked by instability and turmoil, people wondering what is going to happen next. Is somebody going to set off a bomb? Are governments going to fall? People do not know what is going to happen next and they are bewildered and frightened.

In the midst of such conditions, you need an anchor for your soul, something you can rely upon without fear and with perfect certainty. When it comes to the salvation of your soul, you cannot rely on ‘perhaps’ and ‘maybe’ and ‘I will hope for the best’: you must be *absolutely* certain, and God has provided a certainty. In fact, He has taken account of our poor weak hearts, our doubting hearts, and as this Scripture says, He wanted to show to the heirs of the promise “the unchangeableness of his purpose”. He wanted to do that; He wanted to convey to these persons that nothing could alter what God had set His heart upon: He wants you to have that security in your own soul - “both secure and firm”. The anchor is outside of the ship and if it is a good anchorage, the anchor is safe and secure down there on the seabed, and it is firmly secured in the boat. Then the boat is safe. Now the anchor we are speaking of here is not down on the seabed, it is the Forerunner who has entered in for us within the veil. You think of having an anchor in a glorified Man beyond death! Nothing will upset that anchorage, but the question is, is it firm in your own soul? Have you laid hold of it for yourself; are you bound by an indissoluble bond to the Man of God’s choice?

I commend Him to you, dear hearer; He is worthy to be presented in the gospel; He is a mighty Saviour. Myriads have fled for refuge to Him and He is still available. God is appealing in the gospel that you too might run, and run with alacrity. Lay hold of that hope set before you and find the peace and joy in believing.

May God bless the word!

**Buckhurst Hill**

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