

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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OUR INHERITANCE

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AM Whenever God acts, it is for a purpose, and there is to be some result from it. The scriptures speak about what there is to be for God and what there is to be for us. They speak of the inheritance. There is that which is ours, and God has *His* inheritance. We might feel that we should speak of God's inheritance before ours, but in our experience we discover our inheritance first. Maybe, just in a small way, we appreciate something which is our inheritance and as we begin to enjoy it, we start to realise that God has something, which is a greater thought: that is what scripture speaks of as *His* inheritance. For this reading we might look at our inheritance and, if the Lord leaves us here, we could seek grace to speak of God's inheritance in the following reading.

Now, we have read quite a few scriptures. First, we have read about what God has prepared for us. He has prepared an inheritance, and it has certain characteristics. Those characteristics are very blessed and totally different from anything on earth; it is in heaven. I think these few words in Peter give us the character of our inheritance, "incorruptible", "undefiled", "unfading", "in the heavens". What a precious thing that it is ours. In Ephesians we have the means to enjoy it. We are not physically with the Lord yet; we are in these bodies. We are left here in this scene but we have the means to enjoy the inheritance. There is One who is "the earnest of our inheritance". Caleb and Joshua had "the earnest" of the inheritance when they came back from the land with that great bunch of grapes. They could enjoy the fruit of the land; they had the enjoyment of it. That is like "the earnest" of it. But I thought of these five sisters; what marked them was a desire for it. That may be a great test. Do we really have a desire to enter into the inheritance that God has prepared for us? Do we really want it? If you have a desire for it, you will get it. Along with that, Caleb was faithful, faithful to God. He did not let his affections stray. He knew what God had in mind and he was faithful to God's word, and he received his inheritance. You might say that Caleb received the best of

the land. The verse that we read in Acts shows that we do not enjoy the inheritance alone. It is, “among all the sanctified”; so we are here together today to enjoy something of the inheritance among those that are sanctified. Well, these are just my simple thoughts. I trust the brethren can enlarge on them.

DAB I think that is a very fine line of enquiry, though perhaps you could say something as to how this first scripture is put together. It says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his great mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead, to an incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance, reserved in the heavens for you”. It is based on the resurrection of Christ, is it not?

AM It is, indeed, and one thing that comes to mind in relation to the New Testament scriptures is that all three divine Persons are involved in our inheritance. We have “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, that wonderful title that the Father has. We have “the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead”, and then, “who are kept guarded by the power of God”. The presence of the Holy Spirit here in the believer is guarding him in the light of what is heavenly and what is so precious.

DAB Really the full resource of the Godhead is for us in view of us enjoying our inheritance and, as we enjoy our inheritance, then God finds His portion, do you think?

AM Exactly, and the question is asked in Romans 8, “If God be for us, who against us?”, v 31. Well, the only one that can put a stumbling block in my way is me!

GBG God has made Himself known in three Persons. Is that involved in our inheritance?

AM I think so. You have more in mind.

GBG It says, “Blessed be the God and Father”. The Father could only be known fully in Christ. That is a very blessed portion to have, is it not? We know the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit makes all these things real to us, but the revelation of God must be the greatest thing.

AM My impression is that the full revelation of God and all that has come to light based on that - the knowledge of God! - is really our

inheritance, is it not? Think of the way in which believers of this dispensation have been brought to know God. Nobody in earlier dispensations had that acquaintance with God. Abraham did not know God in the way the youngest believer here can have a knowledge of Him. It is a wonderful thing, and that is something that is our inheritance.

DSpinks Can you help us as to why it is through mercy that He brought us into this?

AM Well, it goes right back to our beginnings, “according to his great mercy, has begotten us again”. What we were naturally has no part in the inheritance, but God has acted in mercy, “God, being rich in mercy”, Eph 2: 4. In every believer there has been a new beginning. The work of the Holy Spirit in the believer has ensured that, that there is something which is outside of nature. It is a new beginning and really that is the Person.

DSpinks What you are bringing before us is very attractive. It is really all coming from the divine side. The inheritance that we enjoy is really the provision that has come from the operations of the three divine Persons. Is that really the distinctive character of the inheritance because it is all from God's side?

AM Well, it is. There is a psalm that says, “He hath chosen our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved.” Ps 47: 4. It is all from God's side. We did not choose it: God has chosen it. It is all what God has done, and He has reserved it. It is “reserved in the heavens” for us. I think that is a precious thing, to think there is that which is in the heavens and, you might say, it has your name on it.

BB Is faith the key to our enjoying the inheritance?

AM Well, we cannot enjoy anything without faith, can we? That is the answer to God's mercy. God acts in mercy; all we can do in response to that is have faith in Him, do you think?

BB Abraham was told, “Lift up now thine eyes”, Gen 13: 14. It is a heavenly outlook, is it not? Then we have “the steps of the faith ... of our father Abraham”, Rom 4: 12.

AM And then in Ephesians we have our portion that we embrace by faith: He “has raised us up together, and has made us sit down together”, chap 2: 6. We apprehend that by faith, do we not?

JCG You connect the “living hope” with what comes from divine Persons. That is really “the earnest”, is it? The activity of the Spirit brings in the “living hope”. Is that what you understand? I was connecting it with John 4 where the Lord speaks about “living water”, v 10. It is the same idea that we are brought into something that is heavenly and living.

AM I think that is right. The Holy Spirit is the means by which things are made real to us. Really life for us down here is from the Spirit. We need the Holy Spirit for the enjoyment of everything. We do not even enjoy the forgiveness of our sins without the Holy Spirit working in us; it is so essential.

NJH Is the enjoyment of the inheritance the basis for service Godward?

AM Yes; say some more.

NJH I was thinking of the words we have, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”; so the heart is going out to God.

AM Yes, indeed. It is only as there is some enjoyment of the inheritance that there will be what is acceptable to God. What can we say to God if we have no enjoyment of what God has prepared for us? We may have a very small apprehension of it, but even that is something God takes pleasure in.

TWL Would you help us with what you understand the inheritance to be?

AM It is our heavenly portion, is it not? Our heavenly lot is with Christ, and it is enjoyed in the assembly. What would you say?

TWL I have always thought of it in my own mind as the enjoyment of the sphere of God where divine Persons dwell.

AM It is. It cannot be defined. It is something you know when you experience it. The word enjoyment, I think, is crucial to it.

JL Is that why resurrection is necessarily a prerequisite? What association of life have we in the assembly with Christ outside of what belongs to the resurrection sphere?

AM Exactly! In fact, everything outside of that sphere comes to an end, but it was in resurrection that the Lord sent that wonderful message that His own were to be associated with Him.

JL Down here inheritance usually involves land or property or capital or something or other, but what belongs to the resurrection sphere is completely different, is it not?

AM It is, but one thing is that usually inheritance involves the death of someone. There are those who inherit the estate of someone who has died. Now, we know One who has died, but He has risen again; so we receive our inheritance based on the fact that He has died, but He has risen again, and we receive it *with Him*. We are heirs together *with Christ*.

JSS I was going to ask if the inheritance is something we have a right to. It is ours by right. Christ has secured it for us, and it is for us to enjoy.

AM I think that is absolutely right. The Lord says, "I go to prepare you a place", John 14: 2. We have a place in heaven and, you might say, it is rightfully ours. In fact, Caleb established his right, did he not? He more or less said to Joshua, 'You remember what Moses said to me. That land is mine; now just give it to me!' He had a claim on it. Every believer has a claim on what is heavenly. We may not feel heavenly, but what belongs to us is really related to another world. Let us get that into our souls, beloved brethren! We see the world around, and it is hateful really. I do not like looking at a newspaper; it is so awful. But there is another world, and it is centred in another Man, and all our blessings are tied up in Him, and that is ours by right because we are united to Him by the Spirit.

AGM Not only do we have it "reserved in the heavens", but we are "kept guarded by the power of God". That is a tremendous power for the believer in the midst of a scene that is so corrupt; so we are kept guarded from all that is down here in view of enjoying our inheritance up there.

AM That is right. The power is available. It is known in the presence of a divine Person. Who can stand against a divine Person? The whole world cannot stand against a divine Person, and His power is available for every believer. Well, let us keep ourselves by it!

RG It really brings out an underlying spirit of thankfulness in our affections.

AM Yes, it does; hence the touch of worship at the beginning here.

RG In the words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, who, according to his great mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead”, there is an underlying spirit of thankfulness there which brings in worship.

AM It does; so there is an answer to the One who has secured it all for us. May our hearts go out to Him more readily! We do not reserve our thankfulness only for Lord's day morning. Our hearts can be released in thanksgiving at any time.

DCB It goes on immediately to, “Wherein ye exult”, v 6.

AM Yes, indeed, say on.

DCB Well, there is a joy in the inheritance, is there not?

AM It does not come encumbered. Earthly inheritances sometimes come encumbered. A brother told me about one of his ancestors who inherited debt: our inheritance does not come with debt. We can exult; we can rejoice in the richness of it.

JTB I am just interested in Galatians 4: 7 which has been alluded to: “heir also through God”. Note 'k' says, 'God himself has made us heirs'. Related to our scripture in Peter, there is something immutable about “begotten” and “resurrection”. That can never be treasured upon, can it? I was interested in what you were saying about desire. How are we motivated to go in for divine things?

AM I think in the side of responsibility, desire is really crucial. It is wonderful to sit here and enjoy things together. But it is when we are out on our own, or with others, we get occupied with all sorts of things. How much is my desire maintained in relation to that world, “that world, and the resurrection”, Luke 20: 35?

JTB I was just thinking of Ruth. She had the desire to glean and in consequence “she chanced to light on an allotment of Boaz”, Ruth 2: 3. She was brought into contact with most elevated things, and what revenue flowed to her!

AM Oh, yes. You might say she got the greatest prize, did she not?

AMB So the inheritance is described as being “incorruptible”. That is immensely reassuring for us. I wondered if it would remind us of the moral basis of the inheritance that God has prepared for us, for those that love Him.

AM Well, that is good. It cannot be corrupted; it is pure, absolutely pure, and it must be so because it is “in the heavens” and it is “reserved” by God for us; so it is totally in keeping with God Himself, absolutely in keeping with Himself.

AMB It does not depend on anything that man does because God has prepared it and He has provided the means for us to enjoy it. Everything is from the divine side, but it is for us to go in for it, as you are bringing out.

AM Yes, that is right, and how can a person, who by nature is corruptible, have such an inheritance? It is because of God's work in the believer, and there is that in every believer which is incorruptible.

AMB Could you also say something about it being “unfading”?

AM I think these three adjectives are progressive, are they not? In this world things grow old and they fade, and then they become defiled, and the end is they become corrupt. That is the way things deteriorate in this world, but “unfading” is perpetual freshness, is it not?

BWL Does it involve ascension, the ground of ascension? We have spoken about resurrection; that was necessary. The power of God is seen in resurrection, but this involves ascension, which I think has been described as the platform the assembly is on.

AM That is right, so it is “reserved in the heavens for you”. Only that which has come out of death can ascend into the heavens. Ascension follows closely on resurrection, does it not? One of the Lord's first words in resurrection is, “I ascend”, John 20: 17. It brings us into touch with another sphere.

WMP You said a moment ago that there is something incorruptible in the believer, which is true. Is that part of my inheritance, to enjoy that in others?

AM Yes, I think we enjoy the work of God in others as we take account of it. It is very precious and it is to be enjoyed; that is more than just to be admired. I can take account of brethren and admire features of Christ in them. That is easy, but actually to enjoy the work of God involves my contact with them, involves their conversation and what is worked out together, enjoying features of Christ in each one. But then we also need to identify it in ourselves. Romans speaks of that, “*I myself*”, chap 7: 25.

GMcK We would not want to miss out “reserved” either in these words. That is also very precious. I was just thinking of a simple thing. If you reserve a table in a restaurant or something, you might turn up and the place is packed out, very busy, and there might be thoughts of uncertainty or something, but then you think, 'No, I have something reserved'. It is a great feeling just as a simple illustration, although we are not talking about restaurants, but to have it reserved, to have absolute confidence in something reserved for me. God has done that. It is a wonderful thing.

AM It is, and it is personal. God has reserved a heavenly portion for you, and a heavenly portion for me, and it is as though they have our names on them. That is what I am to enjoy. I think our enjoyment of our inheritance involves the way we have been set together; we have been set in localities; we have been set in relation to one another. God has done that so that we should enjoy our inheritance together.

JL Something that is reserved is normally for future use or enjoyment. In what sense does that apply to our inheritance?

AM Well, I think it is for both future and present enjoyment. What do you say?

JL Yes, the comment was made earlier that faith is essential to its enjoyment now and clearly the Spirit, but there is a sense in which the inheritance will be fully enjoyed following the ascension of the saints. Christ has ascended. Reference was made to ascension, and we will not enter into the fulness of it until we are with Christ where He is, will we?

AM Absolutely! We will actually need different bodies, will we not? Think of what has been prepared for us! “We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5: 1), a building which is sufficient and suitable to contain the great work of God, and then we will have the fulness of enjoyment without interruption, without anything to disturb.

AMB That is what the verse you read in Ephesians says. The Holy Spirit is “the earnest of our inheritance to the redemption of the acquired possession”. That is a reference to our having new bodies, and the Spirit is “the earnest” until that point. We will still have Him in our bodies of glory. The Spirit will continue to help us, but it is no longer “the earnest”; it is the full enjoyment of the matter. Is that what the verse

means?

AM Yes, the fulness of it. The earnest is when we are not in possession of everything, but it is the enjoyment of the real thing. That is really the earnest. That is why I thought of Caleb and Joshua carrying that bunch of grapes. It was “the earnest of our inheritance”. It was theirs and “the earnest” is what we have, but then, when they came into the land, there was the full possession. When Caleb took Hebron, no one could raise a question about it: it was his by right. He claimed it and he could enjoy it in its fulness.

JCG There will be a place to enjoy it too according to John 14. “In my Father's house there are many abodes ... for I go to prepare you a place”, v 2. The place is restful and heavenly and endowed by the power of God really. Should we enjoy that now in the assembly as we gather together?

AM I am sure we should. Supremely, of course, we have our enjoyment on the Lord's day morning at the great occasion when we are in the presence of God simply to adore, to worship, but we enjoy it now, do we not? Even speaking about it is enjoying it. If you had a physical inheritance and you were going round your physical inheritance with somebody, you might say, 'Look at this! Look at that! That is good, is it not?'. Well, that is what we are doing now.

NJH “The acquired possession”, God did that. God acquired it. “The redemption of the acquired possession”; we come into what He has acquired.

AM So it is, “to the praise of his glory”. It is not exactly for our glory, though it will be glory for us, but it is “to the praise of his glory”, what God has done.

JW You said it is not easily defined; Paul says to the Corinthians, “Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him, but God has revealed to us by his Spirit”, 1 Cor 2: 9.

AM Yes, do you think the Holy Spirit works in our hearts so that we should have a true understanding of divine things? Divine things are only rightly apprehended in the heart, are they not? They are not apprehended in our natural minds, but they are apprehended in the affections. That is really the operation of the Holy Spirit, that He could say things which have never been known to man, natural man, but have

been revealed to us, things which God has prepared. What a blessed sphere of things that must be where God has acted from His own side, outside of all the knowledge of man, but He has done it for our blessing. And these things are *ours*.

TWL Is it right to say that the Holy Spirit, having come from where Christ is, comes with the atmosphere of love that exists between the Father and the Son, and we share that?

AM We do. I have often thought of Genesis 24. The servant had “all the treasure of his master ... under his hand”, v 10. He saw Rebecca. First, he gave her some of these treasures. Then he went to Laban's house: more things were produced, and he gave her garments. Think of how Rebecca came to Isaac. She came in all the worth of what came from Isaac's house. When Isaac saw Rebecca, he would have seen what was familiar to him because she was dressed in garments that he would have recognised, and the servant had been speaking to Rebecca about his master on that journey; so when she saw Isaac, she saw one that was familiar to her. How blessed that is, and that is the service of the Holy Spirit, bringing us to Christ, clothing us with the things of His Master. The Lord Jesus says, “he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you”, John 16: 14.

DCB Say more about the greatness of “the earnest”. Normally an earnest is a token; the Holy Spirit, a divine Person, is “the earnest”.

AM In divine things “the earnest” is as great as the possession. We will not be able to enter into it fully until we are in suitable conditions but we have “the earnest”. He comes into our hearts, and that is where the measure is. The measure is in our hearts; there is no limitation to “the earnest”. In the type “all the treasure of his master was under his hand”. It is all there.

DCB It seems to be a great matter of grace on the part of the Holy Spirit that He should present Himself in this way as being “the earnest”.

AM Are not all the activities of the Holy Spirit marked by grace? Even when He is in conflict with the flesh, is that not grace, that the flesh should not have the upper hand and that we should be saved? No wonder we sing to Him as the Spirit of grace. It is particular grace that He should take this place. The place the Holy Spirit has taken has been a place of devotion. He is devoted to the Father; He is devoted to Christ, serving them in unceasing labour, and always acting in grace.

JL I believe at the time of the translation of the Scriptures there was some discussion about the word “earnest”, and it was said it was equivalent to an advance payment of wages. That helps us a little in understanding that the Spirit of God graciously gives us a foretaste in advance of the fulness of the enjoyment that is a present joy to be obtained by a way of an advance through the Spirit.

AM That is right, and if I can just pursue that figure, if you were employed and you had an advance payment of wages, you would feel obliged to be faithful until the final day, would you not? Beloved brethren, that is the situation we are in. We have “the earnest”; in that sense we have the advance payment; and we are looking for the final day; and we must be faithful to the One who has given us the earnest.

DAB Is that really what was seen in the daughters of Zelophehad? I was wondering if you could say something as to your scripture in Numbers. They “speak right”.

AM “And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren”. Later in the history they appear again. If they were to marry somebody of a different tribe, they would belong to that tribe, and the inheritance of their father would pass to that tribe and be lost to the tribe of Manasseh. They were faithful and married within their tribe - God came in for them, chap 36.

DAB Help us then as to this word that comes in in verse 7, “and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them”.

AM You mean it became an unchallengeable thing? It was their right, and their right was secured by their desire for it. That is good.

TJC It has been suggested they wanted the title deeds; they wanted the certainty of what belonged to them. That is what we have. In that sense God has given us the title deeds for the inheritance, and the challenge you are bringing before us is, are we going to appreciate and enjoy it?

AM And the word to them was that they would keep the deeds, but their associations were to be kept within the limits that God had set, and that is true for us. We have title deeds to a place in heaven, and we will keep our enjoyment of it as long as we are here seeking to be faithful to the Lord.

TJC I was thinking as to what is reserved. There is a certainty we have as to these title deeds; the inheritance belongs to us.

AM So let us enjoy it! Mr Pellatt made the analogy to someone who has inherited a great estate and when he goes to see it, he sees a nice little cottage at the gate, a gate house, and he says, 'Well, this is a nice cottage'. He goes in and decides to settle down there. He has not seen the estate; he does not know the mansion. He is just settling in the little cottage by the gate. Well, beloved, let us go on; let us enjoy what God has secured in its fullness.

JCG When it says "possession", it involves what belongs to us, what God has given us. In Ephesians 1 it says He has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ", v 3. That is the fulness of it, is it not? The possession involves that we make way for the Spirit that we might enjoy it.

AM That is right. We must make way for the Holy Spirit: He does not push Himself. He does not say, 'I will make sure you do this'. We are on our responsibility. We have to make way for Him and as we do so, He acts, and it is our blessing to prove it. His service is to bring us into what is truly ours, is it not?

BWL There was exercise in this tribe. Half of them did not have an inheritance in the land. Do you think these five sisters had no thought of coming short on what God's thoughts were for them?

AM They were not going to give up any of it, were they? These five souls said, 'Whatever anyone else is doing, we want our heavenly inheritance', and so it became theirs. In a sense you can get whatever you go in for in Christianity if you desire it enough, whatever blessing you want, because "every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ" is ours, involving the greatest blessings in the most exalted sphere, secured in the most blessed One.

WKC The five sisters had a very great appreciation of what had come down to them from their father. We have been blessed with what has come down to us.

AM That is right; much has come down to us. We do not learn doctrine for the sake of learning doctrine, but divine Persons have spoken. The Holy Spirit has been announcing heavenly things for many, many years. They have been placed in the assembly, to be available to every believer. The Holy Spirit has been acting for many

years. How much notice have we taken notice of that? How much have we sought to absorb what He has been bringing out?

RB Another one who had an appreciation of the inheritance of his fathers was Naboth, 1 Kings 21. He was prepared to stand for that in spite of what it might cost him. Does that show the extent to which desire can go?

AM I think so, and he was one who actually was in possession of it. These five daughters and Caleb were not yet in possession of it. They had the desire. But Naboth was in possession. He was saying, 'I have this land; who is the king of Israel to take away what I have?', and he was faithful to it. He stands in the great list of memorials in heaven. There is a man who stood for the truth.

JL Do we get some impression of the delight that divine Persons have in the zeal of the saints in that this became a new entry into the statute book? That was quite remarkable, was it not?

AM Well, it was. You might say the statute book came from God, but God added a new law, a new statute, connected with the blessings these souls desired.

JSS The word is, "Give unto us". They were united in their desire for it. It was not just one of them speaking. They seemed to have a common desire together, do you think?

AM Yes, and they were going to share it. It was their father's inheritance. It did not come from five different people. It was their father's inheritance, and they were going to share that together: "inheritance among them that are sanctified", Acts 26: 18.

NCMcK The fact they are named shows the valuation of them on God's side. God loves to give things according to His own purpose and sovereignty and prerogative. He loves to give that way. He also delights in the desire to take it up ourselves. He has great delight in that.

AM So every time they appear, all five names are mentioned. These are honourable sisters. Psalm 45 speaks of "honourable women" (v 9) and here are some, the five names. Their desires were in keeping with God's own desires for His people. That is so important, is it not?

RJC Is this meant to bring exercise with us as to what we carry in our

affections? Those individuals you are referring to, Caleb and these five daughters here, what they carried in their affections! Is this to cause great stimulus with us today as to what we are carrying day by day?

AM I think so. I think that everything to do with Christianity properly is a matter for our affections. Our hearts have to be engaged. Why is it that brethren have come together like this? What is the common thread through it all? The most basic thing is that everyone *loves* the Lord Jesus and loves one another. Our hearts are engaged with a Man who is the Centre of another world, and our lives are in that world and as our affections are kept pure and kept alive, we will prove what it is to enjoy what has been prepared for us.

WMP The language of Paul in Philippians 3 would help stimulate us, “stretching out to the things before, I pursue, looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus”, v 13, 14. It needs that level of commitment and energy.

AM I had wondered about Colossians, “have your mind on the things that are above” (chap 3: 2), but Philippians brings in the side of energy. What are our activities in relation to? How do we spend our energy?

GBG We could be at work and by the Spirit get an impression of the Son of God. We need that kind of thing, to be just naturally occupied with spiritual things, but we really enjoy it together, do we not?

AM We do, and your heart can go out to God as you get an impression. Your heart goes out in thankfulness to God for that impression. That is really the service of God in principle.

GBG Paul says, “let us walk in the same steps”, Phil 3: 16. We do enjoy all these things together. That is the true thought of it, is it not? So, Caleb and Joshua were walking “in the same steps”.

AM Yes, they were.

GBG They were enjoying the land in their hearts.

AM It would have been very uncomfortable to carry that bunch of grapes on a pole if they were not in step. They had to keep in step and they kept in step for the rest of that wilderness journey.

DSpinks So do we need the saints to enjoy the inheritance?

AM I think so, “among them that are sanctified”.

DSpinks They were enjoying it together. You can enjoy things personally, but is the full thought to enjoy it with the saints?

AM Yes, so once this matter of these five daughters had been resolved, it goes straight on to say, “Take Joshua”, v 18. There is “a man in whom is the Spirit”. He is going to lead the saints into the land. And then in the next few chapters you get the feasts of Jehovah, involving what is for the pleasure of God in the gatherings of His people. It is a blessed thing; these sisters with their desire really form an introduction to that.

JTB “Who has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light” (Col 1: 12) suggests the collective enjoyment of the inheritance. It says, “made us fit”. We are not alone; we are joined together with those similarly minded and similarly the subjects of divine mercy.

AM Yes, so there is what God has done in preparing something for us but then there is what He has done in us. He “has made us fit”. So what God has done in each soul here is totally in accord with our heavenly portion.

JTB I am struck with the word “portion”, “made us fit for sharing the portion”, and it links with the reference to “inheritance among them” in Acts 26. It suggests that we each are given some aspect of it, but to get full benefit of it, we need to share it.

AM We do, and it is “the portion of the saints in light”. It is what God had prepared which was hidden in earlier times, but in our day, and with the presence of the Holy Spirit, it has come to light. With the saints together, sharing with one another that which we have in our heavenly portion, we get the fullest enjoyment of it.

JTB Individually the man in Psalm 1 seems to bring this out. He was “as a tree planted by brooks of water” (v 3); there is something very satisfying and soothing and refreshing about “brooks of water”, but “whose leaf fadeth not”: he is enjoying the unfading inheritance.

AM Yes, indeed. That man kept himself from everything on earth. It speaks of where he did not walk and where he did not sit, and so on. He kept himself from all that because his resources were in the “brooks of water”, “the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”, Phil 1: 19.

MBG I was wondering if the enjoyment of our inheritance would help to form us. I might be inclined to think that deep, moral exercises are

what form me, which, of course, would be right, and there must be a right, moral state with me to enjoy the inheritance, but we may enjoy the inheritance either individually or together. Do you think that would help to form us? I was thinking of 2 Peter: it speaks of what God has given to us, “the greatest and precious promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature”, chap 1: 4. Do you think the enjoyment of these things together helps to form “the divine nature” in us?

AM I think that is right. The enjoyment of things is a bit like feeding on it and being formed by what we feed on, so that the work of God in us, and ultimately when we are changed, will all be in keeping with what God has Himself prepared. That great work of formation will be seen in its fulness, but it is going on now, going on silently, a little here and a little there, going on a bit at a time, but it is to the same end, “until we all arrive”, Eph 4: 13. We had a word on that on Tuesday, “until we all arrive ... at the full-grown man”.

MBG I was thinking that you have referred to the service of God that we enjoy together. That is not a time that is characterised by doctrinal teaching, but we learn a lot together. We grow as we enjoy that time together.

AM Yes, and it is good to retain what we receive. You may have to write things down in order to remember them, but then you can go over them again, in a worshipful spirit, in the presence of the Lord.

MB I was just wondering if that touches on your scripture about Caleb. He could say, “I am still this day strong, as in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now”. Is it the enjoyment of our inheritance that keeps us strong, maintains our strength in the power of the Spirit?

AM I think so. For us the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer will maintain us in life and strength and energy, and that is what marked Caleb here. I do not think Caleb was an aggressive man, but there was something which had to be taken by conflict. Now, in a sense we all have to do that. First, the conflict is in ourselves; Romans teaches us about that: we have to overcome in that conflict. But the power for that is in the Holy Spirit: “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”, Rom 8: 2.

JCG It is interesting that Caleb speaks for the children of Judah. It says, “Then the children of Judah came near”, and then he speaks as if

he is in the enjoyment of what the rest were enjoying. I was thinking of what was said about the collective enjoyment. It brings out the greatness of allowing one another to move together and not be too individualistic in it. Caleb had his claim, certainly, but he is associating himself with the whole company of Judah.

AM Well, that is good. In fact, the tribe of Judah became characterised by that feature. In the book of Judges, when they were going over the division of the land, Judah said to Simeon, "Come up with me into my lot" (Judg 1: 3): 'Let us enjoy these things together!' In fact, as far as I can make out, Simeon's portion was wholly enclosed by Judah. They were enjoying things together, and the spirit of that is a great thing to mark us.

ADM Caleb asked for the mountain. It is the area where the Anakim were, but then he says, "If so be Jehovah shall be with me, then I shall dispossess them"; so the possession of the land required conflict, but Caleb was not deterred by that thought.

AM He certainly was not! He does not say, 'I will have a place on the plain because that will be nice and easy; there will not be any disadvantage from the enemy'. But, "give me this mountain"; 'this is what I want'. It does not matter that it is going to require overcoming. Caleb had the spirit to do it. He had the desire, the willingness; he was faithful; he had proved all that God could be; and he says, "And now give me this mountain". He wanted the elevated piece of land, a place that was above the plain.

NCMcK Does the enjoyment of this inheritance involve the bearing of the truth in our souls, and the reality of that as we enjoy the service of God? Sometimes when I was younger I thought the enjoyment was when I went to a three-day meeting and felt elated by the enjoyment of things, but actually the truth bears on our souls in the work of God and our response to that, and the work of God grows as a result of that inheritance.

AM I think that is important. Actually, a feeling of elation may be a very dangerous thing. I understand somebody once said to Mr Stoney, 'I enjoyed your preaching' and he replied, 'I would rather you had been subdued by it'. A feeling of elation can easily be a natural thing, and in a sense you can understand it because we do enjoy things together, but spiritual elation, when our spirits rise, is another matter, when our souls are affected. That is the way God works: He works in our hearts and

souls.

DAB Caleb was given Hebron because he “wholly followed Jehovah”. That is a faithful man, and faithfulness really leads to a wonderful expansion in the soul both towards God and with one another.

AM He was one who could appreciate that God is faithful. Think of Hebron. They had come out of Egypt; there was something more ancient than Egypt: Hebron was built before Zoan in Egypt. How faithful God had been all those years in preserving His people, bringing them through for this great object. That was the object in mind that they should come into the land, that they should enjoy what He had provided for them. And Caleb said, 'This is what I want'

DAB It is very uplifting to consider, for all of us here, that what has been reserved for us has been in the mind of God from before the ages of time, according to His purpose, and that is wonderfully reassuring and stabilising to the soul.

AM Yes, indeed. It has been in the mind of God, “having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Christ Jesus to himself”, Eph 1: 5. That is beyond understanding, I think, why God should have done that. Why should He have reserved a place and put my name there before even the world was made? And then you think of all that He has done in bringing us together, forming what is done in a collective way.

DSpeirs It speaks in Ephesians 2 of what God has done in raising us up together and making us sit down together in the heavenlies (v 6); I was just thinking of these restful conditions.

AM That is good, restful conditions enjoyed together. One thing the inheritance involves is community. You might say there is a divinely ordered community. Every believer will have part in it, but it is that enjoyment, sitting down together. In a sense you wonder at that, “has raised us up together”. You might think, rightly, that if you were taken into the presence of the Lord now, you would be prostrate in worship before Him, but God's thought is that you will “sit down together” in restfulness and enjoyment. I think that helps.

BB Do you think Caleb is claiming his inheritance in the conscious sense of being in the divine favour? He is constantly referred to as “the son of Jephunneh”. He is in the enjoyment of sonship, a father's love. The Father gives us the inheritance because he loves us.

AM And when he returned from searching out the land, he said, “If

Jehovah delight in us”, Num 14: 8. Jehovah delighted in Caleb. He lived in the sense of that. You might say, for us, it would be keeping ourselves in the love of God, Jude: 21.

ASP Would you help: it says, “for thou hast wholly followed Jehovah”? Caleb got the inheritance because “he wholly followed Jehovah”. It is very testing. I wondered if you could help as to wholly following Jehovah. It is not partial.

AM No, it is not. Everything that has come from God in the unfolding of Himself and the truth really carries the same weight. He “wholly followed Jehovah”. Caleb was faithful in that. What would you say?

ASP I was just feeling quite tested about it. We know what we are, but really we need the Holy Spirit to be on this line of wholly following Jehovah. We need to be focused on Him, and that is the only way.

AM Well, it is. When the twelve men returned from the land, there was great grief in the camp and so on, and Moses was angry with the people. We know what happened in Numbers 14. But then there were those who said, 'Very well then. We know where we are going. We will go ourselves'. They were not following Jehovah. The cloud did not move that way, and their end came summarily. They could not go to the land like that, Josh 14: 39-45. Only following the cloud, the tabernacle, the movements of the ark would be wholly following Jehovah, and although Caleb had the land in his heart, when Jehovah said, 'Go back to the wilderness', he would have said, 'Well, I will accept that. It is from Jehovah'.

DCB The next chapter shows that Caleb can give something himself, “a southern land” and “springs of water”, v 19.

AM Yes, indeed. Think of Caleb and his nephew there. It is as if Caleb would say, 'If anyone wants to have part in my household, he has to prove himself that he has a valuation for it. I am not having a son-in-law who cannot overcome'. “He that smites Kirjath-sepher and takes it” - it is the city of books - “to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife”, Josh 15: 16. Caleb was setting the condition but he had already set an example'. Paul says, “I have shewed you all things” (Acts 20: 35), and Caleb's challenge was who will follow that example?

AGM Caleb says, “give me this mountain”. It was not just, 'give me this land' but it is this elevated area, then he says, “If so be Jehovah

shall be with me". We cannot really do without the Spirit to enter into that inheritance.

AM Exactly, so there is a divine Person here who, we might say, is willing us to go in for it. In a sense He would make it easy as long as we give Him the place. In Acts we have "an inheritance among all the sanctified". Later in Acts the Lord says to the apostle, "that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me", chap 26: 18. We look at the brethren and think we are going to enjoy this company eternally.

Bo'ness

12th October 2024

List of Initials:-

B Bain, Fraserburgh; A M Brown, Linlithgow; D A Brown, Bo'ness;
D C Brown, Edinburgh; J T Brown, Edinburgh; M Brown, Bo'ness;
R Brown, Linlithgow; T J Campbell, Glasow; W K Clark, Kirkcaldy;
R J Cumming, Aberdeen; R Gardiner, Aberdeen; G B Grant, Dundee;
M B Grant, Grangemouth; J C Gray, Bo'ness; N J Henry, Glasgow;
J Laurie, Brechin; T W Lock, Edinburgh; B W Lovie, Aberdeen;
A G Mair, Cullen; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; G McKay, Manchester;
N C McKay, Glasgow; A D Melville, Grangemouth; W M Patterson,
Glasgow; A S Pittman, Grangemouth; D Speirs, Bo'ness; J S Speirs,
Grangemouth; D Spinks, Bo'ness; J Webster, Fraserburgh

FIRES

Bill W Lovie

John 18: 1-27

John 21: 1-14

Acts 28: 1-5

I seek help, beloved, to say a little as to these three fires that we have read of. The first fire is the world's fire. The second fire is provided by the Lord Himself in view of food; and at the third fire, Paul is exercised that it may continue that there might be warmth.

Peter loved the Lord. There is no question as to Peter's love for the Lord - I trust everyone here loves the Lord. Peter found himself in a position that he was not able for: maybe we do that. It tells us twice that he was standing warming himself. He was not at home there; I have no doubt he did not feel at home there. He put himself in a position where he denied the Lord. The first time he denied the Lord must have been a warning to him. Maybe if we are honest with ourselves, we may have found ourselves in a position where we might deny the Lord: it is incumbent upon us to extricate ourselves. Peter was here because he loved the Lord. He did not understand that he could not follow. Peter had followed Him on that pathway of service but there comes a point where the Lord is now going on to accomplish a work that He is going to carry out alone. Peter has to learn that he cannot follow there.

We read all these verses because it gives us the setting of things. It shows us - as we might say - that the ark takes care of itself. Here they came to take the Lord Jesus. The Lord says twice, "Whom seek ye?" and "they went away backward". They could not take the Lord; they could not take Him unless the Lord surrendered Himself in love for the will of His God and Father, and love for you and me, dear friend. That is what He did. He surrendered Himself, they had no power to take Him, "they went away backward". It is like Dagon toppling over (1 Sam 5); there is no power there.

If you go through these sections, you can ask who is in control. Is it the chief priests and the Pharisees and the scribes and the Romans? No, it is the Lord who is in control. What a wonderful matter this is. When you read through these verses at the end of John's gospel, it is also like the ark approaching the Jordon. The waters of the Jordon fled, they fled. It was not like the Red Sea where they stood in a heap and you could still see them. The ark approached the Jordan, and

in the days of harvest the waters of the Jordan overflow all its banks, Josh 3: 15. All that concentrated power was against Christ, and it fled. If you read through chapters 18 and 19, the Lord says more as John records it to the chief priests and the Pharisees and to Pilate than He does in the synoptic gospels.

The Lord is in control. Simon Peter did not realise that. He finds himself at the world's fire. We are told, in the brackets, "for it was cold". John tells us in relation to one of the feasts that "it was winter" (chap 10: 22); he tells us here "it was cold". He tells us when Judas went out "it was night", chap 13: 30. These are moral conditions that exist currently. We are also told in the beginning of John 5 that there are five porches in Bethesda, v 2. That is a current condition. You might ask why that is important? When John wrote his gospel - we understand John was the last writer, and he wrote his gospel as an old man - Jerusalem was in ruins, the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem. He says, "there is in Jerusalem". That means, beloved, that these five porches are a current condition that marks Christendom, man's number, all the 'isms' that make up Christendom publicly. When John tells us things, he makes them current. The fact it was winter, and the fact it was night, and the fact it was cold, are current conditions that are around us, so we need to get warmth and we need to get food. We do not get warmth at the world's fire. That would be a warning to us. I do not want to labour the point. The world's fire is not where the believer is to stand warming himself. Peter denies the Lord as we know because he is in a position that he is not able for.

If you go through these verses, you see the ark moving and taking care of itself. The Lord was scourged in chapter 19. He had a crown of thorns put on Him; they put a purple robe on Him. John does not record that they are taken off, as if he would impress us with the glory of the Person who was moving forward into death. John does record that the Lord carried His own cross; He was going forward in the power and majesty of His own Person in John's gospel as if no one else could take it up. No one could take it up. John gives us things, or omits things, and they always have a point. Every verse of scripture has a point, for our contemplation. What we are contemplating is the greatness of the Lord Jesus as approaching death. The whole purpose of God in His mind, securing the universe for God, all that is in His mind as He goes to the cross. How wonderful to contemplate, I think that is what we need to take from these chapters in John. We need not become over occupied with Peter's failure because Peter was

recovered and, as we know in Luke, the Lord appeared to Simon Himself: "The Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon", Luke 24: 34. Think of the grace of the Lord Jesus in doing that. How gracious the Lord Jesus is with each one of us. Dear young one, the world's fire is not the place for the believer to be because you will find that you deny the Lord Jesus and you have no power. There is salvation for one who confesses the name of the Lord Jesus: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower", Prov 18: 10. Think of that, you can confess His Name: it is a refuge. Peter found himself in such a place that he denied the Lord Jesus. John does not tell us of Peter weeping but Peter felt that: "he went forth without, and wept bitterly", Matt 26: 75. Peter felt it, although John does not record it.

We come on to chapter 21; we have another fire. The point in this section is that it is the third manifestation. The first manifestation was on the first day of the week; we have the second one a week later, and this third one. We have often heard it said that the first one relates to the assembly, the second one relates to Israel, and the third one to the world to come. But they are linked together so that we are to know, as lovers of the Lord Jesus, something of assembly privilege, which is really what the first day of the week speaks of. The second manifestation is in relation to faith and that involves the current time. Then we come to the third one and the Lord is moving in love and grace and service in recovery. Things are broken here; it is not the twelve; there are seven. Simon Peter gives this lead; "I go to fish" and others go with him. They took nothing. It has often been described as 'nakedness, night, and nothing' (JT vol 10 p160), the three 'n's'. The Lord is looking to manifest Himself. It is a word that John uses, manifestation; the other gospel writers speak about appearances. The Lord appears, He presents Himself in a way that we are to take account of. A manifestation would leave an impression on us of His glory. Think of that, on that first day of the week: "Jesus came and stood in the midst", John 20: 19. He showed them His hands and His side, v 20. Think of that; they were hands that were holding everything for God. His side involving what came out of His side. Genesis 2 would bring before us the thought of the assembly as out of the side of Christ: what a manifestation. Here the Lord is moving in recovery. They took nothing; it was not exactly a wrong thing to fish, but these seven were not moving under the direction of the Lord. The Lord allowed them to do it and allowed them to go on and to take nothing. He says to them, "Children, have ye anything here to eat?". Think of the graciousness of the Lord.

“They answered him, No”.

Maybe when we were younger, we thought the end of Luke's gospel was a different account of the same occasion. I do not think that is right at all. This is different from what Luke gives us. They had something there. “Have ye anything here to eat?”, Luke 24: 41. It has been suggested that that involves what is local, “here”. They had something. The Lord was looking to see what they were enjoying: “they gave him part of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb”. We can think of the saints in relation to the honeycomb; the disciples had been working things out together. The Lord appreciates that. Things are being worked out collectively. He enjoyed what they were enjoying.

Here He says to them, “have ye anything to eat? They answered him, No”. Immediately He gives this direction and immediately John recognises who it is. “That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved says to Peter, It is the Lord”. You notice earlier on how John hides himself in his writings. In verse 2 it speaks of the sons of Zebedee. It has been suggested that John could not say there that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved; not that it was not true at that point: it is always true. The Lord loved John; the Lord loves each one of His own. John maybe did not feel he could quite say that at that point. Here he says, “That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved”. He recognised it was the Lord. Is that not wonderful? Someone says it is the Lord: that is good direction. Simon Peter then is moved and he “cast himself into the sea”. He goes out of sight, too. Perhaps he reached land quicker than the disciples in the small boat. “When therefore they went out on the land, they see a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it”. This is the Lord's provision that His own should be fed. They had taken nothing. There is nothing that they were having for that moment. The expedition had resulted in nothing, but the Lord has all the provision that is required; “coals there”, think of the warmth of that, “fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus says to them, bring of the fishes”. He links on with what they have now, these great fishes. It speaks of persons; it speaks of every one of us. Jesus says to them, “Come and dine”. We need to eat to live naturally and spiritually too; we need to eat to live, but the Lord says, “Come and dine”. It is not just getting a meal to get by; it involves an experience, the Lord's abundant provision, just what was required. You might say He has to sort this out and sort that out; He does, and we can leave it to the Lord's time. He feeds them first; He gives them food. If the Lord is providing food, it is exactly what is required at the moment, and it is good. “Jesus comes and takes the

bread and gives it to them, and the fish in like manner". Think of the Lord serving in that way. He would do that; He would do that currently. He has taken up that place of service in the dispensation; we know the greatness of His Person and yet this is how He is acting to His own. "Come and dine". This fire is in view of food; it is in view of food being sustained.

"When therefore they had dined". The Lord is going to probe Peter. Peter as we know denied Him thrice, and the Lord probes him three times. He gets to the bottom of the whole matter. He fed them first. Is that not wonderful? They were satisfied, and then Peter became adjustable, very adjustable. The Lord secured His end in Peter. We could apply this section in relation to the breakdown publicly, but then we have the Lord coming in and bringing in His own provision and securing things: what Peter represents and what John represents as going on to the end. The Lord provides all that; He provides what is required for us individually, locality-wise, assembly-wise. The Lord has just what is required. Have we had this experience, do we know what it is to have this experience with the Lord and be fed and be satisfied?

We come to the end of Acts; here is Paul. It is the aftermath of the shipwreck. They land on this island. It was cold; it was winter, again it was winter. Outside it is winter. You might say, currently it is winter. We go through seasons in our soul histories and perhaps in our localities and assembly histories. We go through the seasons: the winter and the summer, the ingathering of fruit in the autumn. You might say these exercises go on, maybe they go on concurrently, but outwardly, things are winter. In the world, things are winter, so there is the need of heat. That is another thing we get in relation to the honeycomb, "part of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb". The bees stay in the hive through the winter; there is warmth in the hive. If a hive does not survive the winter something has gone wrong, the warmth has not been there, because the bees can survive through the winter. In our localities there is to be warmth, and I suppose that is what we see here. Paul did not start this fire. They "kindled a fire". There is nothing more miserable in winter, than rain and having been shipwrecked and coming out of the sea. You are soaking wet anyway and then the rain compounding things. These persons "shewed us no common kindness; for, having kindled a fire, they took us all in because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold". How thankful we would be for a fire in such a situation as this. Perhaps we feel that we do not have very much, and we cannot do very much; perhaps we feel we

cannot do anything. Gathering sticks is not beyond anyone. Here is a great apostle; it is not a matter of expounding on the truth of Romans, or Ephesians or Colossians, these doctrinal epistles. Who would have capacity for that? It is a matter of continuance, keeping the fire going in the local meeting. We need to be exercised. We can look back on the histories of our localities, and the locality was there before I came into fellowship; things are to continue. In a very simple way, can you gather a stick, can you add to what is going to keep the fire going in the locality, keep the warmth?

The impression at the end of the reading was that we come away fed. That is what John 21 would give us; we come away fed. You come away from a meeting and you are warmed up. Maybe you have felt you have enjoyed a good weekend, you have enjoyed a good Lord's day, you go to work on Monday and you are back down in the doldrums; and it comes to Monday night and you maybe do not feel like going out because it has been a difficult day and you are tired: well, go to the prayer meeting; you will get warmed up. You will get warmed up and maybe by you being there you will warm up an older brother or sister.

These are simple things; Christianity is very simple; it is love for the Lord: what is your motivation, is it love for the Lord? Paul wants things to continue; so he goes out and gathers sticks. He has capacity: what can we say about our capacity? Capacity can be increased; go and gather sticks, put them in the fire. The enemy does not like this: "A viper coming out from the heat". It has been pointed out that the viper does not come out of the sticks exactly; he comes out of the heat. The enemy would be quite happy if things in localities get overheated, but that is not normal. Here the enemy does not want this warmth in our localities, he does not want things going on and working out, impressions of Christ coming in, and persons being fed and built up, warmed up: he does not want that. He comes out and he attacks Paul. Paul shakes off the viper into what we might say is the very thing that the enemy is against, the warmth of the fire. He saw the beast hanging from his hand, but "*He* however, having shaken off the beast into the fire, felt no harm". The Lord said, "By this shall ye know that ye are disciples of mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves", John 13: 35. I think this is the working out of love amongst yourselves. How attractive it is.

I trust we may be helped in relation to these fires, the first one by way of a warning. How subtle and devious the enemy is. If you find you

are somewhere where you might deny the Lord, *extricate yourself*; the Lord will help you in that. But then we come to what is normal, the enjoyment of food, the experience of having to do with the Lord and the warmth when outwardly everything is winter and cold. We can know warmth; it would help us as we go on, go on in the testimony, go on in committal to the Lord Jesus, looking for His coming, looking to be with Him forever. These exercises will be past; they are all in view of formation at the present time. Things are being worked out, worked out in persons like you and me. I trust we may be encouraged, for His Name's sake.

Maidstone

6th July 2024

COMFORT

John Laurie

Psalm 94: 19; 23: 4; 119: 81, 82

Acts 9: 31

It may already be evident that all of these scriptures make reference to comfort, and I seek help to say a little about that, because I am very conscious that both locally and elsewhere, as we have just been reminded in the earlier word, many are passing through times of burden and exercise and comfort is very much needed. Some locally, I have no doubt, especially feel the need of comfort just at this point, and how good it is if any of us, while passing through difficult times, are able to take up these words of the psalmist and be able to say,

In the multitude of my anxious thoughts within me thy comforts
have delighted my soul.

It is a very blessed thing, if that should be so. It may be at times that we tend to get overwhelmed with the burdens and the difficulties, but the sufficiency of divine grace would help us, as we draw near to divine Persons, to rise above the burdens and the difficulties, and find comfort, comfort to our souls. This is a very precious verse that has many times been a cheer to others, and I may add to myself,

In the multitude of my anxious thoughts within me thy comforts
have delighted my soul.

In reading this verse, I would not want in any way to set aside the considerations that have been before us concerning the Lord Jesus and all that He went through, and the burdens and the griefs and the sorrows that He bore. So far as men were concerned, as we are prophetically reminded, He looked for comforters and found none, Ps 69: 1. Such were the sorrows the Lord passed through in a public way, though ever in the enjoyment of the intimacy of his Father's love, and appreciative of those that the Father had given Him. The Lord felt these things in a public way and experienced the reproach and the despisal and being left alone of men. But here the psalmist is rejoicing in the consciousness of divine comfort. And the question arises, 'How would God convey that comfort to us? What characterises it, and how does it come to us?'. Well, I think we would have to say that it comes in many ways. It has to do considerably with the circumstances we are passing through, whether they be circumstances of difficulty and burden in regard of our health or in regard of our families or in regard of

employment, circumstances, finance or whatever it may be. Many things may burden us, and comfort comes in different ways, according to the wisdom and the love of God.

But the psalmist here in Psalm 23 said,

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

I read this verse in order to make specific reference to these two things he was conscious of while passing through the valley of the shadow of death. You may wonder if that only has application to those facing extremity at the end of their lives, but that is not so. We are all passing through the valley of the shadow of death. None of us has assurance of continuity of life here, and if we are left here, we have to face death, and those of us growing older are made more conscious of that, perhaps than others. But to some degree, we are all passing through the valley of the shadow of death. Why then should the psalmist say, while conscious of that,

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me?

I believe the Lord has a particular reference to guidance, and it may be discipline that comes in, in the ways of God, and He uses that for our preservation so that we should be preserved in the paths of life. The psalmist was walking through the valley of the shadow of death, but he was not overwhelmed with despair. He was comforted in that God was with him. How blessed to be assured that the Lord is with us. That is a very, very precious thing.

I sometimes look at a verse in Hebrews 13: 5: "*for he* has said, I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee". How precious that is, that word "*he*" is put in italics to emphasise its significance: "*he* has said, I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee". It is not just me who is saying that tonight, though I am personally conscious that the Lord would graciously do that and would never desert any one of His own. But *He* has said, "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee". And so it may be even in passing through times of difficulty and particular grief, we are made conscious that the Lord is near.

It may be necessary that the rod has to guide us. Perhaps we find in our pathways that if it were not so, we might well go completely astray and be lost altogether in the course of the testimony at the present time. How thankful we are then for the rod of guidance, and it

may be discipline, in the wisdom of divine ways preserving us in what we have to pass through, whether that applies again to our health or circumstances, or whatever it may. But then there is also the staff. The two things are put together, “thy rod and thy staff”. I think the staff has a particular reference to support and help. While passing through these difficulties, we are not left to our own resources; the sufficiency of divine grace and the consciousness of the nearness of divine love would bear us up, “thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”. May we be comforted even tonight. It may be some of us here have burdens right now. Let us be comforted in the fresh reminder of the nearness of the Lord Jesus and of His wonderful grace. He would, if need be, bring in some discipline, to correct us in our ways, or, in any case, guide us, but then to support us too with His staff.

But I read in Psalm 119, because these verses bring in another way that comfort comes in. The psalmist speaks as if he was almost fainting for want of assurance of the word of God coming in to bring its comfort into his soul. He was just longing for a fresh communication by God's word, saying,

When will thou comfort me?

He was longing just for a word to come in from God to comfort his heart. I would trust that what is being said now may come as a word from the Lord to comfort us. Think of the word of the Lord coming in just to bring in its own comfort. We often feel that a word spoken to us, it may be, or a word read by us, just comes in as a special comfort in the midst of circumstances of burden and care. How good if we find just a word that suits the moment in its preciousness. It would be an exercise therefore for us to seek the word of the Lord, just as the psalmist did. Do we read the Scriptures? Do we look for a word of comfort? Do we pray to the Lord? Do we have ears open, ready to hear so that we might receive a word of comfort? May it be so with each one of us, so that we are not left in any despair for want of a word.

My soul fainteth for thy salvation; I hope in thy word.

Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying,

When will thou comfort me?

It is evident from other passages that the psalmist did find joy and comfort because he received these words. If I was to refer, for example, to verse 103 he says there:

How sweet are thy words unto my taste! more than honey to my mouth!

How precious they must have been when they came to him, and were so sweet to his taste and so enjoyable as he was able to appropriate the word that was conveyed to him.

How sweet are thy words unto my taste! more than honey to my mouth!

Well, last of all, I read in the Acts, because it is not an individual thing there, but a collective thing. It is a reference to the assemblies: "The assemblies then throughout the whole of Judaea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified and walking in the fear of the Lord, and were increased through the comfort of the Holy Spirit".

That is a very fine thing. It does not necessarily convey in that passage, I would judge, that there was particular relief as to circumstances, except in so far as they had peace. But sometimes we still pass through times of difficulty and exercise, and yet find that the Holy Spirit would help us to gain increase through what is passed through. The word "edified" conveys the thought of what is being built up in the truth. "Being edified and walking in the fear of the Lord": the saints prospered by doing that. May we be encouraged coming here even tonight, and may it create exercise to stir ourselves, to be here and to be at the occasions during the week. But there is a blessing in that it says, "being edified and walking in the fear of the Lord, and we are increased through the comfort of the Holy Spirit". That is spiritual comfort and increase, not necessarily comfort to our bodies or in material things, but in a special way to do with spiritual comfort brought in by the Holy Spirit. They were increased. Oh, that we all might increase in spiritual stature and knowledge of God, when increased through the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Well, I pass on these thoughts and desire indeed that it might be an encouragement and present comfort to all of us and for glory to God.

Word in Ministry Meeting, Brechin

9th October 2024