

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE SERVICE OF GOD

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1 Chronicles 16: 7, 36; 25: 1-2, 6-8

JTB On Lord's day we sang hymn 100:

Holy, holy, holy! Blessed God, we praise Thee;
From eternity Thou art, to Thee all glory be!

What a privilege it is to be participative in the service of God, one of the greatest blessings that could ever be bestowed upon us, and the exercise is always that we should be enriched in our contribution to it. I wonder if these scriptures might give us some indication as to how our part might be strengthened in acquiring greater wealth.

Psalm 22 would bring out that all praise is founded on the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. The doxology in Revelation expresses appreciation of the work of Christ, in particular that, in His love for us, He shed His precious blood, and the young people might be encouraged by that as they seek to participate in the service towards God. In the Acts, we have how conflict, and what is adverse brings forth that which is contributive to the service. Asaph, as described in Psalm 73 and 1 Chronicles, is a very interesting person. He was perplexed, as so many of us are at times; but had recourse to the sanctuaries of God, where he got some impression from God as to why things were so. Then, as we trace his history, he became, in effect, an instrument of David, “which I made, said David”, 1 Chron 23: 5. Thus in 1 Chronicles 16, David's psalm was delivered through Asaph and his brethren, and then he becomes a prominent contributor in chapter 25. The references in that chapter to prophesying and singing are interesting, as linking them to the service of God.

AMB This is being worked out at the moment in the time scene, as you have mentioned, with adversity and these things, but the result is eternal. The service of God is something that is not bounded by the time scene.

JTB The writer of hymn 100 encapsulates that: 'To eternity', (v 4); worship goes on to eternity, and we will praise there eternally! But we often say that what goes on in our lives and our pathways here helps

furnish us for what will be our eternal portion, and what a joy it is to be lifted up above circumstances and to absorb ourselves in what is for God and His service. For it to be inaugurated required that the Lord Jesus had to be forsaken. These words “why art thou far from my salvation” convey the depths to which the Lord Jesus had to go in order that the holy nature of God might be vindicated, without which the service could never begin.

PAG The foundation of the house of God - I am thinking of the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite - was on the basis of sacrifice, and it says as to David that he paid the full money, 1 Chron 21: 24. We may think of the full money as involving a quantity, but do you think that in Psalm 22 we are brought into touch that the full payment was measureless.

JTB That is interesting. Two principal things that David did were to bring the ark to Zion (1 Chron 15), and to purchase the place of the threshing floor of Ornan for the full price. It brings out the glory of the work of Jesus; we could never enter into these things so glorious were it not accomplished in its entirety and perfection. But it involved such distance: “why art thou far from my salvation”, and then these words from His lips, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”, bring out the deep feelings which it occasioned Him.

NJH Stringed instruments require tuning for full praise. I am thinking that applies to us, but with Christ it was always perfect, “I praise thee, Father”, Matt 11: 25.

JTB Yes, every string plays its own note and, as applied to us and exercise through which we pass may perhaps even add a string. We have in Habakkuk: “On my stringed instruments”, and “he will make me to walk upon my high places”, chap 3: 19. These upward movements! The service of God ascends; it goes upwards. We have the Lord's supper, and then we rise up and move from glory to glory. “And thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel”: it is God in His holiness that is the subject of praise, and it required that the Lord Jesus, who Himself is the Holy One of God, must suffer that there might be an answering response to God.

AMB A great feature of the service of God and His praise is that He is known. He has made Himself known, and we answer to the way in which God Himself has made Himself known. I wondered if that comes into this first scripture, “And thou art holy”, something we learn of God;

and we see how that holiness of His was upheld in the depths to which Christ went, which brings about depth in the soul of the lovers of Christ, those who love God.

JTB He was heard “from the horns of the buffaloes”, from that extreme point, but He was answered in resurrection. Perhaps we do not sufficiently ponder that going into death was part of His vicarious work, but His rising again was also vicarious, because He was “raised for our justification” (Rom 4: 25). Were He not raised we could never have been introduced into such glorious things; so how important resurrection is. But how affecting it is to think of the Lord Jesus, as enduring these three awful hours so fully borne! He was far from God. What it must have meant to the heart of God not to answer His Son! We should contemplate the significance of that. It is as having been heard and answered that the Lord declares His name to His brethren, and then there is the wonderful expression “in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee”. My own limited experience is that we speak to God, and also the Father, very much of Christ's acceptability to Him and that is very appropriate, but perhaps we do not ponder enough what God is to Christ. Here He says, “in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee”. What is He saying to God and to His Father? As our brother has quoted, He said in His pathway here, “I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth”, and He does say also to His Father that “thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world”, John 17: 24. The Lord Jesus was ever appreciative of the Father's love. How affecting to consider what God was to Christ in His infinite love.

PAG Do you think that “to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge”, (Eph 3: 19) is not just His love for me or His love for the assembly, but it is His love for the Father? We can ask the Lord what He thinks of the Father, if I might put it as simply as that.

JTB The reference in Chronicles to prophesying might bear on that. There were those who were to prophesy with the harp, the only instrument mentioned as being in heaven, perhaps suggesting that by this means we might be given an insight into these precious relationships between the Father and the Son, between God and the Son. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son” (John 3: 16), that must involve the deepest affection between the two. At the end of 1 Chronicles we have some indication of the greatness of God as known and appreciated by David, which he was able to express relating to the headship of God, and the wisdom, power and majesty

attaching to Him.

GBG You mentioned what God is to Christ. In Psalm 16 it says,

Therefore my heart rejoiceth, and my glory (or it can mean tongue) exulteth; my flesh moreover shall dwell in hope.

For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol, neither wilt thou allow thy Holy One to see corruption, v 9-10.

It says, “my heart rejoiceth”, and His tongue “exulteth”, and his “flesh moreover shall dwell in hope”; that would be hope in God! That was what God was to Christ. And -

Thou wilt make known to me the path of life: thy countenance is fulness of joy (v 11)

It is very attractive.

JTB That is very helpful. So that the path of life for Christ lay through death and involved His resurrection, and what God has in mind is that we should enter into the sphere of life, which Christ has opened up for us.

GBG Resurrection has that in mind for us; it says that in the epistles, does it not? So he says, “thy countenance is fulness of joy”; you can in some way understand that! To be in the presence of the Father, but then, “thy countenance is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore”. It is what God was to Christ but then Christ being there, we can think of how much the Lord Jesus contributed to that scene of joy as a Man. He had never been there before as a Man.

JTB The King James Version of the Bible says, “thy presence is fulness of joy”, but “thy countenance” really exudes the favour of God towards Christ, and what Christ enjoyed as in that favour. So Christ rejoices to make known His God and Father's name to us in the light of what God meant to Him.

TWL We often quote it, but in John 20, “I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God” (v 17) is what God was to Christ, and what the Father was to Christ, and what we are to God.

JTB I thought that “my God” in John 20 is the counterpart to “my God” in Psalm 22. In the latter, He addresses God as conscious that the sense of the relationship, hitherto enjoyed, was broken, but when He says, “I ascend ... to my God and your God”, He has in mind a great

realm of favour for us, as in the joy of sonship. Yet, when He says, “my God and your God”, in John 20 He draws a distinction, and there must be a reason for that, no doubt to emphasise His own unique relationship with His God. It thus causes us to ponder what God is to Christ when He addresses Him in such a way. It brings before us the distinctiveness of the relationship between Christ and His God that He addresses Him so explicitly as “my God”.

DCB Ephesians refers to “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory” (chap 1: 17), distinguishing God; and that remains, that He is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

JTB That is very helpful; so it is something we should carry in our spirits, the uniqueness of that relationship between Christ and His God.

DCB So the apostle is bowing his knees to that One. We come into the benefit of the excellence of the fact that He is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. I was thinking that in Ephesians 1 we have, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us”: it is the One who is His God and Father, and we come into the benefit and blessing not simply that He is ours, but that He is His!

JTB So it would encourage our hearts to appreciate the great system of relationships into which we are introduced. He is our God, but He is also Christ's God. We have a link with the same God, but Christ has that distinctive relationship and is able to say, “my God”.

APG With the overcomer in Philadelphia (Rev 3), the Lord refers there several times to “my God”; is that an encouragement to us at the present time to be overcomers, that we can share in what belongs to Him?

JTB Yes; we derive these wonderful resources and blessings from the One whom the Lord Jesus addresses as “my God”.

NJH Does the matter of revelation apply to God and to the Father? He makes a difference “my God and your God” and “my Father and your Father”. Both involve revelation for us.

JTB Yes, that is helpful, so that what we know about God is on the basis of revelation.

In Revelation 1 we have a doxology, this outburst of praise “To him who loves us”. How that strikes a chord in every heart in relation to Him who “has washed us from our sins in his blood”. It is affecting that

the Lord Jesus Himself has done it. In chapter 7 the persons themselves wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb (v 14), but in this chapter, so specific to those who love Him now, He washes them Himself. How very affecting to think of the action of the Lord Jesus in washing us from our sins, and in what? In His precious blood! So that must immediately evoke a chord in our affections that our precious Saviour should wash us from our sins in His blood. The conscious nearness of the love of Jesus must surely underlie our praise toward God, and that really motivates us and sets our hearts forward to glorify Him.

WMP We begin with the emblems before us on the table. What a testimony of the love of Jesus! I am impressed with what you said about how wealth is to be developed in our souls; so for a believer there is to be something of that in our own affections, something freshly touched by the way that He has gone on each fresh occasion.

JTB And then too He has made us priests; He constitutes us as able to participate in the service of God. The priest of old went into the holy place, where the candlestick was, typically, for us to see the glories of Christ shine, and that stirs our affections for Him. And then, “made us a kingdom”; so we are brought into a protective area where the praises can ascend unhindered. It is not 'the kingdom'; it is “a kingdom”. It is a protected area, where we are able to participate so freely in the service.

ABB Peter speaks in his first epistle of “a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, that ye might set forth the excellencies of him who has called you”, chap 2: 9. Do you think this praise and response would be involved in the setting forth all the excellent things He has done for us and the excellency of His love?

JTB Yes. He loves us and He has washed us from our sins in his blood, but then He is so much more to us. Our opening hymn brought before us that He is our Head, our Saviour, and our Leader. What a galaxy of glories attaches to Him and these colour our praise as we are together so that we are moved to say, “to him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen”. We can all say, “Amen” in this way as freshly appreciative of the One who has done so much to secure us for Himself.

DAB Say something further as to “made us a kingdom”, the thought is of it being a protective area where we can be at liberty and in freedom in the divine presence.

JTB I thought perhaps our local gatherings should be that, each having the same desires and longings and, as together, having no other object but to praise God. We find that at the Lord's supper, as we each come from our houses freighted with impressions of Christ which can be released in an area where we can share such precious things all together. It is a kingdom, it is protected, and the Lord Jesus Himself would give us that protection. It is not the kingdom of the heavens, nor the kingdom of God exactly, but an environment devoted to His interests and praise.

DAB It is on the basis of One who loves us and has washed us; it is, "To him who loves us". I appreciate your remarks as to that, because we come together as those who have come under the divine will but in perfect joy and liberty so there is a free flow as we come together, and there is no inhibition as we come as contributors as to what is in the divine mind.

JTB This "Amen" is significant, and I think it just bears that out, that, as coming to this protected area, we are at one in our desires. Elsewhere, "all the people said, Amen! and praised Jehovah", 1 Chron 16: 36. We are happy to do that. We are joyous; we have harmonious links with one another blending in praise to Him, who has made us priests to His God and Father.

RB So what He has done in washing us from our sins is past, although we enjoy the benefit of it, but His love is still present and current; does that always evoke a response, the preciousness of the love of Christ, the way as gathered we can take account of it together?

JTB That is right. One of the things that actuates praise is the conscious sense of love for divine Persons, and their love for us. So, "To him who loves us" is the start of everything. He loved us before we loved Him, and that love continues and will be with us eternally. Love is the divine nature, and that love will never end throughout the ages of eternity.

RB Love underlay the revelation of God, and that necessitates a response from our hearts.

JTB So this doxology should be an encouragement to us all. It is the outflowing of a heart conscious of the love of Christ, and thus able to utter these very precious thoughts.

MBG Is it the persons that are the kingdom? I wondered, because

that will then show the importance of each one who forms part of that protective area that you have spoken about, and that should be our experience. If you have a company of persons who are all conscious of the love of Christ and the effect of His work in washing us, then it is a great experience to be part of such a company.

JTB I think that is right. Each person assembling with the same desires and longings and as a partaker of the divine nature helps contribute to a seclusive area that is so conducive to praise.

AGM In Psalm 22 at the end it says, “A seed shall serve him”, but then it speaks as to “a generation”, v 30. Do you think that is the divine end? The doxology comes from His affection for us, “who loves us”. Every believer has their part there, but all may not enjoy it. Do you think we should appreciate more, be deepened more, as to the love of Christ? He went to such lengths to secure us.

JTB That is fine! The last verse of Psalm 22 is very blessed; “They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done it”! Everything has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Himself. Psalm 22: 27 says, “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto Jehovah”, and then it says in verse 25, “My praise is from thee, in the great congregation”, no doubt referring to Israel but, by and by all nations will be brought into this anthem of praise that will ascend to Him eternally.

AGM Is that why it brings in the idea of priests? We are really priests serving in relation to the Lord Jesus and also to the Father and to God. It is a spiritual service.

JTB Yes; He has constituted us in that way. We have been given a priestly constitution that enables us to participate in these blessed things.

NJH Does the very presence of the kingdom, “made us a kingdom”, mean that the service of God will continue whatever the outward conditions are?

JTB Yes. It is the great barrier to anything extraneous intruding into our joy and our worship.

When we come to Acts 16, there could hardly be conditions of greater adversity or opposition but here, at midnight, at the darkest hour, Paul and Silas “in praying, were praising God with singing”; what a wonderful outcome that, in conditions so dire, in that dank prison,

there were praises ascending to God. The jail became a sanctuary it has been said, praises ascending to delight the ear of God.

PAG The prisoners listened to them, but do you think that the jailor is evidence that God wants us to do more than simply listen? He wants us to be part of it!

JTB That is good; how the jailor was affected, and his whole house! It must have been a wonderful experience! Initially a painful experience for him as thinking he had lost his prisoners, then he is brought to appreciate that there was something far better in store for him.

DAB I was thinking of the minor prophet Habakkuk; chapter 3 begins with a prayer of Habakkuk, but at the end of that section,

... he maketh my feet like hinds' feet,
And he will make me to walk upon my high places.
To the chief Musician. On my stringed instruments.

You almost get that picture in Acts 16. What they were really doing as praying is praising God; one leads to the other.

JTB There they were dependently praying to God and then there must have been some sense of what God was for them in these awful conditions, and that led to an outburst of praise to Him.

DAB I suppose the martyrs knew something of this. I have just finished reading the book that our brother published about the martyrs, and it gives you some idea of the sufferings, but the glory to God that emanated from their lips and from their hearts.

JTB Yes, and Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs' is very interesting, full of what those who have gone before have suffered on account of the testimony of our Lord. So often they uttered these expressions of praise and glory, even as they suffered and died!

DCB This passage shows it is not confined to thinking of an hour on Lord's day, and it would come into our own prayer meetings when appropriate to be moving on to praising God.

JTB Perhaps that is something that we are not too good at, but the meeting is for prayer and thanksgiving. We come together with that in mind, and perhaps it should have a greater place in all our gatherings. We often start our reading meetings with some expression of praise to God which is very appropriate, evoking the help of divine Persons, but

thanksgiving is something that ought to enter into our prayer meetings.

AMB Is part of your thought as to this scripture that deep exercise and sorrows that we as believers pass through are to yield for God in greater appreciation of Him, and response to Him?

JTB Yes; it is a path of suffering, but it is not suffering without purpose, and one of the great outcomes ought to be a result of richness and wealth which can be released in the service of God.

AMB There are some among us who pass through exercises that we know about, such as ill health; and others who no doubt pass through sorrows that we do not know about, and you would encourage us to take all our matters before the Lord and before the Father, spread them out and to ask to be shown what He has in mind for us in them.

JTB Yes; the psalm says, "in pressure thou hast enlarged me", Ps 4: 1. It leads to expansion and a fuller understanding of how and why divine Persons are operating to deepen their work in our hearts and, importantly, develop greater conformity to Christ.

GBG So it is "in order to the partaking of his holiness", Heb 12: 10. Chastening and discipline would involve being more like the Father, like God, so that God "looked on Abel, and on his offering", Gen 4: 4.

JTB We often refer at the Supper to the Sanctifier and the sanctified being all of one, that is, of one kind, Heb 2: 11. That is because of what Christ has done and thus He can say, "in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises", v 12. We are regarded there abstractly, as I understand it. But the understanding of divine Persons operating in our hearts, and of what is in mind for us, would lead to a greater practical outflow.

GBG We need what is abstract: as we gather for the Supper, we are not thinking of faults and failings: we are only looking at what is of God in a person. But it is important that there is practical formation after Christ for God's pleasure.

JTB Yes, "For both he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren". It is a blessed thing that He is not ashamed; so you can see that what is abstract enters into that. But then, of course, the more we enjoy that relationship, the greater the incentive to bear it out practically.

TWL Does it help us to see in our practical circumstances when it

comes to suffering, it is how God separates us to Himself. It is not just suffering in relation to circumstance, or suffering as consequence, but it is how God separates us to Himself. It is where we have the intimacy of relationship outside of physical circumstance.

JTB So it encourages us therefore to take matters to God, to divine Persons, to seek the help and grace that enable us to react to the circumstances we encounter in a way that pleases God. I think that is what Asaph found when he went into the sanctuaries; he understood what God had in mind for him.

TWL I think it was Mr Coates that asked that the particular affliction he was going through be removed until he found out that, actually, it was a much more blessed thing to go through the affliction to its completion, because it expanded his knowledge of his Saviour, which is a very testing thing when you are in the middle of it; and there are some who have been in the midst of it recently. It separates you to the Man who loves you so well. This is just what you were saying in relation to sanctification, that came about by the most intense suffering.

JTB That is something we should touch on more perhaps, as contemplating what is said in Psalm 22: 3, “thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel”. It required that Christ be forsaken in order that God's holy nature should be vindicated. Only Christ as the Holy One of God could, through suffering, accomplish the work to secure an answer, which could satisfy, in praise, the affections of God. So that if we can approach adversity and circumstances, which are so painful and so bitter sometimes, in the light of what Christ has suffered to secure us for Himself, it helps alleviate them and bears us up in the endurance of them.

WMP The suffering in Acts 16 is on account of the testimony. Could you give us a thought on that? We know what the pressures are in that regard as well as what we have said about personal matters and health and so on, but there are testimonial pressures on the saints, are there not?

JTB Much comes into the testimony that affects us in families and in other ways but there is a particular challenge for each of us as standing for the truth in relation to the testimony. We have had brethren in the past having to deal with trade unions and such things, because it affects the testimony of our Lord. Paul speaks to Timothy about that: “Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner;

but suffer evil along with the glad tidings, according to the power of God", 2 Tim 1: 8. It suggests the glad tidings themselves were being attacked, which is happening at the moment, and so the testimony of our Lord needs to be protected and kept before us.

RHB I just wondered if the link you are making between suffering and praise is not illustrated in our own hymnbook. Many of the much-used hymns, some very choice hymns, are the product of deep suffering.

JTB Yes, that helpfully brings us on to 1 Chronicles 25: "And David and the captains of the host separated for the service those of the sons of Asaph ...". We might wonder why this military thought is introduced. It relates to this matter of suffering as linked with praise. By illustration it has been suggested that Mr Darby was a military man as engaging in conflict for the testimony in so many settings, while some of the most beautiful hymns in the hymnbook are his. Thus we have the dual reference in this first verse, "David and the captains of the host". There we have David as the sweet psalmist of Israel and the chief Musician operating with the captains of the host, thereby combining the musical and military sides.

RHB The hymn 'The Man of Sorrows' arose from the personal suffering of Mr Darby at the time he wrote it.

JTB Hymn 14 gives the other side: "Hark! ten thousand voices crying"! So we have both sides, the outcome of his links with God in affection but his determination too to stand for what is right in the sphere of testimony at great personal cost.

NJH Some of his choicest hymns were written in periods of conflict. If you look at the dates, it is quite choice; he rose above it all.

JTB Yes, it is helpful to see that.

Asaph is a very interesting study. He was perplexed, and we are sometimes worried and puzzled about the route the testimony seems to be taking and about what things are bearing on us circumstantially, family-wise, and collectively. He was almost overwhelmed; his steps well nigh slipped, but then he went into the sanctuaries. Then he understood, and got God's mind about things. What then emerges as to his function in the great system of praise is very interesting. He is used by David, as the ark is brought up to Zion, to deliver the psalm which David himself had written.

AMB Asaph went into the sanctuaries of God. It was a deliberate

action on this man's part; he sought out the presence of God and he prepared himself for it. The idea of sanctuaries suggests he would not have gone in casually there, but with desire to have God's mind, to see God's view of the thing.

JTB Later in Psalm 77, he says as to God, "thy way is in the sanctuary", v 13. He establishes that that is the place where we find the answer to our difficulties. Asaph wrote most of the Psalms in the third book of the Psalms. It is interesting to trace the variety of the titles; Psalm 74 is an instruction; Psalm 75 is a song; Psalm 76 is on stringed instruments; Psalm 77 on Jeduthun, which means praising or celebrating; and Psalm 78 an instruction. What a variety of experience in his links with God there was that Asaph was able to put into verse. What scope there is for turning our own experiences into praise.

ADM I was thinking of the children of Asaph, numbering one hundred and twenty-eight, and they had instruction under Cyrus to go and rebuild the house of God at Jerusalem, Ezra 2: 41. The first thing they rebuilt was the altar, and they had two hundred singing men and singing women, as part of that service, v 65. Is that really the fruit of Asaph's experience, being able to bring in response and lead in the burnt offerings that were offered?

JTB You are helpfully referring to the recovery from Babylon as set out in Ezra. It is helpful to see how Asaph's experience is carried forward. He is referred to elsewhere as Asaph the seer (2 Chron 29: 30), so that he had that prophetic perspective, enabling him to understand the mind of God. It is interesting that what pertains to Asaph, and indeed David and the instruments which he had made to praise, are carried forward into the various recoveries. We find references to the instruments of David, and to Asaph, for example, in Hezekiah's day, v 26. So that nothing according to the divine mind is lost, and that should encourage us. We were speaking about the testimony, and it is reassuring that nothing which pertains to the rights of God and what is secured for His pleasure is ever lost or diminished but rather accumulates. That recovery in Ezra to which you refer is very interesting: they built the altar, but what follows is a great movement of praise to God, chap 3.

ADM It says there that the foundation of the house was not yet laid (v 6), but the important thing was the praise of Jehovah, praising His Name and offering; that was re-established first of all.

JTB It was as if they could not contain themselves; they could not wait until the house was built, but they wanted to engage in the sacrifice of praise just as soon as it was possible.

PAG You might say something for our help about the expression in 1 Chronicles 16: 36, "Blessed be Jehovah the God of Israel, from eternity and to eternity!". Could you open that up for us.

JTB What we are engaged with is eternal and will never cease. What a thing to stir our hearts and galvanise our affections, that the God with whom we are engaged is the eternal God, and what is for His pleasure will endure throughout the countless ages of eternity!

PAG It might just encourage us all, and especially our younger brethren, that when we are responding to God, we are participating in something that will never end. We think of suffering, and the response to God is not temporary relief; response to God is what is formed in the heart of a saint, and it will never go away. I am not minimising the suffering, which can be very real and taxing, but the God who came out from eternity in Christ to claim us will have our response eternally; that is His thought.

JTB Yes, Mr Darby's hymn, 'Rolls around the endless song', Hymn 14. Then we also have, 'On earth the song begins', Hymn 308.

APG The final verse in some of the books of the Psalms close on this note. The first book of the Psalms ends, "Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel, from eternity to eternity!" Some of the other books are similar. Is that the outgoing of heart, the fruit of experience with God?

JTB So it should stir our hearts and encourage us that we are engaged with something that will never end. It may be perhaps gained through conflict, pain and sorrow, but what is thereby established in our hearts is for all eternity.

AMB And all characterised by the love of God. We might have certain thoughts about eternity, particularly when we are young, that it is too vast to understand, and it is beyond our finite minds, but eternity will be a celebration of, and a response to, the love of God revealed in Christ.

JTB So we can see that we have an immediate basis for participating in it as recipients of the love of God.

1 Chronicles 25 helps us in the service of God, and we sang

about the headship of Christ in our opening hymn. The sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph, “who prophesied at the direction of the king”. In that regard we often speak about a word at the service of God. It is not a word that would tax our consciences as we might have at a ministry meeting, but it is one that would direct and sensitise our hearts to what the Lord has in mind as the Minister of the sanctuary.

SCL Do you think that draws out the distinctiveness of every occasion? Sometimes a brother will get up and prophesy in relation to a word that has been given, drawing particular attention to the distinctive glories of the Lord at that particular occasion; it is not vain repetition.

JTB Yes, all comes through Christ Himself so that we move as “at the direction of the king”. He gives character and tone to the service as the Minister of the sanctuary. It is interesting to read that “all these were sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to exalt his power; and God had given to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters”. A brother would give a word, but some touch might come through a sister if we are sensitive to it. And then it says, “All these were under the direction of their fathers Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman, for song in the house of Jehovah, with cymbals, lutes and harps”; so there is great variety in the praise that comes from hearts that are under the direction of the King.

GBG You could come in with a hymn, and also as a brother on his feet in addressing divine Persons, and the Lord can speak to us in these ways also. What I mean is we do not need a formal word for the Lord to speak to us under His headship.

JTB In fact, we have in ministry that the giving out of a hymn is really the most elevated service in the house of God, and requires the most profound spirituality, CAC vol 27 p246. What I meant by the service of sisters is simply that they have part in this, not speaking, of course, but in fact something might be conveyed to and through them which can sensitively be felt by the brothers who can articulate and express it. All this underlines the need for thoughtfulness in giving out a hymn.

TWL Could you give us your thoughts on what it was for them to be instructed? To be instructed makes you intelligent in relation to the things of God. It is not just what you feel, but it is the knowledge of God.

JTB Yes; it involves the knowledge of God. I was thinking about what we have in Colossians where we grow by the true knowledge of

God and thus become instructed, while in Ephesians we grow up to Him in all things, who is the Head. As deriving from Him in that way we become instructed. The Lord Jesus took the place of hearing “as the instructed”, Isa 50: 4. What an example! Increasing in our knowledge of God, as you say, must help us.

TWL And I wondered if it did not go back to where we began in what God was to Christ and what Christ was to God. A person who is instructed would have spent time to learn what Christ was to God and what God was to Christ.

JTB That is done in the sanctuary. You can see how important the sanctuary is, a sphere where everything that is contrary to nature is excluded, and we can be in the presence of divine Persons and become instructed by them.

PAG Do you think the service of the Spirit would enter into that? It was said by those around at the time of the apostles after the Lord had gone on high that they were ignorant and uninstructed men; they were not educated persons. Every instruction they had came from Christ as Head by the power of the Spirit: “the teacher with the scholar”. Everyone can receive something from the Holy Spirit. We should be intelligent, but we should not be inhibited in contributing to the service of God.

JTB I thought that; and that is why I read verse 8, “the teacher with the scholar”. So young persons might think they are inadequate, but 'scholars' suggest those who are devoted to learning. We can learn from those with experience, and as in the school of God we are learning all the time.

Linlithgow

11th January 2025

List of initials:-

AM Brown, Linlithgow; AB Brown, Linlithgow; DA Brown, Bo'ness;
DC Brown, Edinburgh; R Brown, Linlithgow; RH Brown, Maidstone;
AP Grant, Dundee; GB Grant, Dundee; MB Grant, Grangemouth;
PA Gray, Linlithgow; NJ Henry, Glasgow; SC Lock, Edinburgh;
TW Lock, Edinburgh; AG Mair, Cullen; AD Melville, Grangemouth;
WM Patterson, Glasgow

STANDING BY THE CROSS OF JESUS

Jim T Brown

Matthew 27: 39-43

John 19: 25, 26

There were those that passed by the cross of Jesus, passers-by of the cross on which the Lord of glory suffered, uttering ridicule as they passed. But there were those too who stood by the cross of Jesus, silent in their adoration of the One they so dearly loved, uttering no words of ridicule, but absorbed in the contemplation of that awful scene. Their names are recorded, how lustroously they will shine in the annals of heaven as having stood by the cross of Jesus, no doubt with the Master's own accolade: 'You stood by My cross in My day of sorrow'. The names of those that passed by are not recorded, but surely they will be called to account when the divine assessments are made: 'You passed by My cross, in My day of anguish'. So two distinguishable groups emerge, those who passed by the cross and those who stood by it. This verse says, "standing by", not just near it but "by" it, identifying themselves with the cross and the One who hung on it, the precious Saviour. How important the cross is! It has been described as "the centre of the history of eternity", JND Synopsis Matthew-John p360. It was no impromptu matter, no inadvertent occurrence in the history of time, for the Lord Jesus was "given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God", Acts 2: 23. But He was crucified "by the hand of lawless men"; so men cannot escape their own responsibility.

So, we are challenged as to where we stand. Are we standing by the cross of Jesus or passing it by? I do not mean in the sense of the passers-by in the verses read but perhaps our affections for the One who hung there have waned a little, and are not quite so fervent as once they were. The Lord Jesus in that address to Laodicea described them as being "lukewarm" (Rev 3: 16), and He says, "I counsel thee" - think of the Lord Jesus counselling us - "to buy of me gold purified by fire", v 18. The Lord Jesus has borne the fire so that what pertains to the gold might be enjoyed by us - the outshining of His grace, His mercy, His love, in order that we might be brought into these glorious relationships about which we were speaking this afternoon. So, how do we stand in relation to the cross of Jesus? What sufferings He bore. It is refreshing, stimulating, and challenging too, to occupy ourselves with them. Mr Darby's pamphlet 'The Sufferings of Christ' (Collected Writings vol 7) is ever edifying, ever convicting, ever stimulating, and it

is edifying to read it often. The sufferings of Christ should become more precious to us, His sufferings on the cross pre-eminently, but ere He was on the cross, He suffered too, suffered at the hands of men, and suffered on account of righteousness.

We were speaking a little at our reading on Wednesday about Judas, who betrayed the Lord Jesus. Judas was at supper with the Lord Jesus, and it says, "Having therefore received the morsel, he went out immediately; and it was night", John 13: 30. How dark was the night when Judas went out to parley with the chief priests about a valuation of Jesus! Can you think of that, men seeking to place a monetary value on the worth of Jesus? Dark were the footsteps that took Judas there, and they settled on thirty pieces of silver. How do we value the Lord Jesus? Do we see Him "despised, and we esteemed him not", as it says in Isaiah 53: 3? His worth is not to be reckoned in monetary terms. See them count! - twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty pieces of silver - 'Not a penny more', you might hear them say. Such was the callousness of men that they valued the Lord of life and glory at thirty pieces of silver, "the price of him that was set a price on, whom they who were of the sons of Israel had set a price on", Matt 27: 9. So Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ, His own "familiar friend". It says in the Psalms,

But it was thou, a man mine equal, mine intimate, my familiar friend ...

We who held sweet intercourse together. To the house of God we walked amid the throng, Ps 55: 13, 14.

Then Judas led a band to Jesus to take Him captive. It is profitable to compare incidents in Scripture as described by the different gospel writers. We were noticing one in Grangemouth the other Lord's day. So it is interesting that Luke is the only gospel writer to refer to "a sinner" (in the singular) or "the sinner" or a "repenting sinner". All the other gospel writers refer to sinners collectively, but Luke makes that distinction, perhaps bringing out his particular love for individual souls.

Another distinction in relation to the betrayal of the Lord Jesus is set out in John's gospel. The synoptic gospels describe Judas leading the band to the Lord Jesus "with swords and sticks" to take Him captive, but John uniquely says, "having got the band ... comes there with lanterns and torches and weapons". "Lanterns and torches": it is perverse in its contradiction. They brought "lanterns and torches" as if to seek to dispel the moral darkness which shrouded that sorrowful scene, and to illuminate it with artificial light, when before them was the

One who is “the light of life”. Indeed “the light appears in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not”, John 1: 5. So sunk in moral darkness were they, that they were unable to apprehend that before them was the One who was “the light of men”. He Himself says, “he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”, John 8: 12. How great the depravity of men, their absolute rejection of the Lord Jesus, and their hostility to Him, that they would come to take Him with such implements.

Then, having taken and bound Jesus He was subjected to the most ignominious, shameful sufferings. They buffeted Him; they spat upon Him - surely the nadir of human behaviour to spit upon anyone, far less the Originator of Life, the Creator of the world! Yet that is what they did to Him. Then “one of the officers who stood by gave a blow on the face to Jesus”, John 18: 22. In Micah it says, “they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek” (chap 5: 1), insolence so great that the Holy Spirit intervenes immediately to identify the glory of the One on whom they were inflicting such things: “And thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall he come forth unto me who is to be Ruler in Israel: whose goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity”, v 2. Such was the One they dared to smite, and then, too, to strike Him with a reed to His head, Mark 15: 19. And on that head they placed a crown of thorns, which they had plaited. One of the gospel writers says, in one place, “the crown of thorn” (John 19: 5); others say, “a crown of thorns”, Mark 15: 17. The singular reference to “the crown of thorn” is perhaps to emphasise how men were at one in their rejection and humiliation of the precious Saviour. And yet without resistance, He accepted it all. He did not accord such treatment to the actions of men; He accepted it all as from God, “who, when reviled, reviled not again; when suffering, threatened not; but gave himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously”, 1 Pet 2: 23.

Then He was crucified. Scripture is largely silent on the details of the actual act of crucifixion, when men in their cruelty and malice took nails and drove them into the hands and feet of the Redeemer; and we can but ponder and marvel at the perfection of One, so great in His own Person, that allowed Himself to be maligned in such a way. We had Psalm 22 in the reading. It says, “Many bulls have encompassed me; Bashan's strong ones have beset me round”, v 12. There was the pressure of the religious elements bearing in upon Him. Then it says, “For dogs have encompassed me”, v 16. Dogs, the Gentile soldiers

mocking Him, molesting and ridiculing Him. O the sufferings of Jesus! For Him, there was 'the violation of every delicacy which a perfectly attuned mind could feel', JND vol 7 p172. Every delicacy! Not a single human feeling - and Christ was perfect in them all - that was not violated in His sufferings. How men despised the Lord of life and glory!

Yet, to bear the malice and reproach of men was not sufficient to secure redemption and make atonement for sins. He must bear the judgment and the wrath of God, during these three awful hours on the cross. He cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Ps 22: 1. What it must have meant to the Lord Jesus to be deprived of His God and Father's love. What it must have meant for God that His love could not be enjoyed by Jesus! What it must have meant to His heart! Words could never fully express the feelings of the Lord Jesus as He endured in His soul the consciousness of the privation of God. 'Love has no place in wrath against sin', JND vol 7 p190. Love could not sweeten, could not mitigate, wrath. All that God was in His nature was against sin, and Christ was made sin. Consider the awfulness of that, "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him", 2 Cor 5: 21. How awful to think of what the Lord Jesus endured in order that we might be saved and come to the enjoyment of every spiritual blessing that heaven could bestow upon us. It says, "he has been crucified in weakness" (2 Cor 13: 4): just to read it affects the soul. Then, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is become like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels", Ps 22: 14. Solemn it is to consider the horrible nature of crucifixion, the physical pain, and the anguish, which He suffered as "crucified in weakness". No one ever knew weakness like Jesus: 'One who was weaker than any other ever was', JBS vol 3 p125. What a comfort therefore when we feel weak, that we can have the sympathy of One who was weaker than we could ever be. But it has to be said, of course, that the Lord Jesus did not die from exhaustion. He died in the power of life, and "he lives by God's power", 2 Cor 13: 4.

Then, finished all, in meekness
Thou to Thy Father's hand
(Perfect Thy strength in weakness)
Thy spirit dost commend. (JND Spiritual Songs, p37)

He had power - or authority - to lay down His life and to take it again, John 10: 18. It is wonderful to think of the Lord Jesus now beyond the cross, beyond all that men did to Him, the reproaches and the judgment that He bore.

These things are calculated to affect us. How much has been accomplished by the cross. By the Lord Jesus, all things are to be reconciled to the Godhead, "having made peace by the blood of his cross", Col 1: 20. Think of the distortion, the disturbance and disquiet in the world today, nation rising up against nation, enmity existing among men, yet He has "made peace by the blood of his cross". The whole universe - things in the heavens and on the earth - is to be reconciled, and the basis of it all is the work of Jesus on the cross. Then, too, "by the cross" He has "slain the enmity", Eph 2: 16. How much hostility is abroad, antisemitism and so on, but the work of Jesus on the cross has provided the basis for Jew and gentile, as believing on Jesus, to be reconciled in one body to God. How wonderful to think of that!

So, what effect does the cross have on us? We think of our histories. We think of all that was involved at the cross, what Jesus did, and all that attaches to the old man done away with there. My sins, my state, addressed by the work of Jesus on the cross! What do I give in return?

The cross shall meet its sure reward (Hymn 399).

I think these five persons who stood by the cross just exemplify that. See them standing there, no doubt themselves bearing reproach as they stood there. As the passers-by reviled the Saviour, they too would not have gone unnoticed. Some of them had come from Galilee, and there they stood by the cross, resolute in their devotion, and in their contemplation of that shameful scene. They would see how the Lord Jesus had been treated. So close to the cross were they that they might have heard Him say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34. They might have heard Him cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt 27: 46. They might have heard His words, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit", Luke 23: 46. There they stood, in principle, in "the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil 3: 10), where we ourselves are called to be, that is, into a bond of suffering with Him. It is said that suffering with Him is greater than suffering for Him. What a challenge that is, and how far short we come. Of course, He suffered uniquely; His cross is distinctive, but we are required to take up our cross: "If any one desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me", Matt 16: 24. Things come into our lives; pressures bear in upon us like a cross; but we are exhorted to endure all, as following Him, and accepting everything from His own hand. Thus we take up our cross and follow Him.

Paul could say, "I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, /, but Christ lives in me", Gal 2: 20. His heart was so full of love and affection for Christ he was unreservedly committed to the service of the One who had saved him, and who had commissioned him in such a distinctive and unique way. His heart was filled with Christ. Christ was living in Paul to the exclusion of everything else. He could also say, "But far be it from me to boast save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world", Gal 6: 14.

May the consideration of these things have a fresh impact on each of us as taking up our cross and following Him, and as affected by all that Christ suffered on our behalf. The challenge is that we should do something for Him. We do that every week as we commit ourselves in fidelity to Him in the breaking of bread, and follow Him in the light of that. What a reward there is in so doing. These five persons had their reward. Think of Mary of Magdala! What a reward was hers to be assigned such a message, "go to my brethren", John 20: 17. What recompense for standing at the cross of Jesus! Then too John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was entrusted by the Lord Jesus with the care of Mary, His mother. What a privilege for him, and he was designated too to write the Revelation. And of Mary, the Lord's mother, it was said that even, a sword would go through her own soul, Luke 2: 35. What pain, what anguish for her! She would never see the Lord Jesus in such a condition again, never know Him again in flesh and blood, but she would see Him during these forty days in another condition, in a different relationship, as numbered among His brethren. What a recompense for her! So, indeed,

The cross shall meet its sure reward.

So may we be exercised to have regard to the cross of Jesus, not to be among the passers-by, but to stand resolutely by it, and to prove the blessings of so doing, for His Name's sake!

Linlithgow

11th January 2025

THE VALUE OF HAVING A BIBLE

Phil E Hogan

2 Timothy 3: 16

Hebrews 10: 38 to “by faith”

Isaiah 49: 8 to “preserve thee”

Revelation 21: 23

Our brother has spoken earlier about the matter of comfort. I have been thinking for a while that this book that we have in our hands has given more comfort than any other book that has ever existed. It is the most widely translated, widely printed and most widely circulated book ever. And that book is the Holy Bible.

In this world, with its social media and other forms of communication, why is it that this book, that you and I have been privileged to have been brought up with, is still so popular? It is because it is different to every other book. It is not a book that is just formed out of paper and leather and printed, but, as it says here, “Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction”.

So, through the Bible, through the Scriptures, God would speak to hearts; and before the pages were written in this book, God was writing in hearts. And He is still writing and forming features of Christ in human hearts. He is doing that now, currently. And what is He forming? Every aspect of what He is forming is marked by perfection because every detail of it, every stage of it, takes after the One who was the Man of God's choice, the One who loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. What we find as we pick up our Bibles and look through the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, is that the Spirit works in our hearts in order to magnify Christ and to bring the Lord Jesus to our attention.

The reason I read in Hebrews is because the existence of a Bible in our own language came at a tremendous cost. As an illustration: in 1536 William Tyndale was burned at the stake because he translated the Bible into English. At that time the national church did not want the people, the general population, to have the Bible, but Tyndale was unwilling to go back on his word and they burned him at the stake.

The reason that William Tyndale did that is because of this

verse: "But the just shall live by faith". Now you and I might take that statement for granted. You could say it is one of the very basic principles, a very basic doctrine in what we believe, and what we enjoy, and what we enter into, as is the fact that we have a relationship, a direct relationship, with divine Persons. But at that time what men were trying to do was put an intermediary between God and man, someone in between. In the Old Testament there was a point when Job said, "There is not an umpire between us", Job 9: 33. Well, what I can tell you is that the Lord Jesus is the Mediator. The Lord Jesus is a divine Man and He can put His hands upon God and man. As a result you and I have been brought into a sphere of liberty. We have been brought where salvation is for time and for eternity and no one can say anything against it. So, that is just an illustration of how at that time, in the Dark Ages and in recent times as well, people were willing to die for the Scriptures. They were willing to die for something that they believed in. You might say, 'Well, that was a long time ago', but it still happens in different parts of the world.

I have an old book which has a photo of a Bible, and the Bible has a bullet hole in it. The story relates to this scripture in Isaiah. There was a soldier in the trenches in the First World War, and all the soldiers had been issued with Bibles. An enemy bullet went through this man's tunic and it stopped on this line in the middle of verse 8: "And I will preserve thee". After he recovered, he opened the Bible and there it was: a bullet "and I will preserve thee". The soldier wrote a letter home to his mother and told her how his life had been preserved. That soldier's name was George Vinall. Now, he went on to become a missionary not just because the bullet had stopped on this line, but because he came to know the Man, who as God, saved his life: saved his life physically and saved his life spiritually.

So for that one individual the bullet stopped on that line, but there are millions and millions of persons who have come to know salvation. As it says here, "In a time of acceptance have I answered thee, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee". What a salvation we have, dear friends, a salvation that is assured. It is not just for a future time but salvation that is applicable now: a present salvation. Why is that? Because faith gives us a different objective. Faith gives us an objective of a risen Man in heaven. Faith gives us a hope, which is a source of great encouragement.

What it is to go through this world with such a hope in your heart!

Think of the multitudes of people at the moment who are going through this world who do not have such a hope. They have their hope in all sorts of other things. They might have hope in material wealth. Perhaps they have a hope in what the next political party can do. They have their hope in things that fade and deteriorate and eventually end up in death. We have a hope in the One who is the Originator of life. We have a hope in One who is our Lord and Saviour. And as a result of that we can know present assurance and the present certainty of this. So it says, "And I will preserve thee". What an encouragement that is, that in our life here, whatever else happens in our circumstances, despite the fact that we are fragile mortal beings, as James says in his epistle, "what is your life? It is even a vapour" (chap 4: 14), so our life is just as short and delicate as a vapour, but God says, "and I will preserve thee".

I think as we are gathered here this evening, we know something of what it is to be preserved, what it is to be sure, what it is to be certain and to know the certainty that we have to do with a God of love. Think of what it is that the God that we have to do with, the God that we have a near and close relationship with, is a God of love. You might wonder how we can understand the Old Testament, where some of these scriptures are very obscure, some of them seem difficult and complicated. Well, we have access to the Holy Spirit, and He would give us the sense of it. In Nehemiah 8: 4-8 it speaks about person who stood on a stage, "And they read in the law of God distinctly out of the book, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading".

And that is what the Holy Spirit does. You may look at a scripture in the Old Testament and it might look dark and difficult, and sometimes in the Old Testament there are all sorts of negative things - warfare and violence and all these things, but then like a spark of light, the Holy Spirit would illuminate it and He would make it living. Then all of a sudden what you see is some impression of the greatness of Christ, some impression of the greatness of what God is doing and has done. The Spirit would make that living now, and He would make it living presently. That is the wonderful resource that we have now, and what an encouragement that is. So, as we go about our daily lives - whether it is at school, whether it is at work, whatever our situation is - our view is not just of the circumstances that surround us here, which are marked by deterioration, but our view is heavenly. Our view is of a Man in

heaven, and as well as a view of the Man we have a view of the place. We can have a sense of the atmosphere of heaven. As we gather on a Lord's day morning, I think we do have that. We gather in a simple way, but there are many ways in which we can have a sense of the atmosphere of heaven. There is One who we can gather around and He is the Centre, so that there is a circle that gathers around Him. What an encouragement that is from week to week to week. May we not take these things for granted; they came at a cost, and yet we can enter into them at present.

Finally, I read in Revelation where it says, "And the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon, that they should shine for it". There will come a point shortly, dear friends, dear brethren, where we will not need these Bibles any more. The Bibles themselves will have done what God intended them to do. And then we will know the reality of having to do with the Lord Jesus. This life that we live down here is just for a period of time (and none of us know how long that time is because it is different for every one of us), but our view is not marked by the limitations of time; our view is marked by the whole scope of eternity. Think of that. There will come a point when even the Bible that we know and love, the Bible that has meant so much to us over the years, will not be needed any more because the reality and the enjoyment of what God has in mind for us will be there to be enjoyed through all eternity. At that point we will be with Christ. Think of what it will be to be with the Lord Jesus, to see Him in reality.

In the meantime we can see Him by faith. There is coming a point when we will be able to see Him in all His greatness, all His glory and all His love. In the meantime may we be helped to have a greater appreciation of what has been involved, and what is involved and what can be enjoyed and what can be appreciated in these scriptures that we hold in our hands.

May the Lord bless the word.

Word in Ministry Meeting at Grangemouth

8th January 2025

“IN HIS NAME”

John 5: 43; 14: 12-14; 15: 16, 23, 24, 26; Matthew 28: 19, 20

It is of the first importance that we should understand that we are left here *in the name of Christ*, that is, to represent Him while He is absent, to care for His interests, to be occupied in His business. To illustrate the idea, we might think of a firm in another country, sending someone to represent them in this country. The business of the representative is to look after the interests of the firm that sent him. If he spends his time in seeking his own ease and pleasure, or if he set up some independent interest of his own, he would be unfaithful to the firm that sent him. And if he behaves himself in any dishonourable way, he would dishonour the name of the firm.

This may serve to illustrate the thought of our being here in the name of Christ. He was here in His Father's name, and faithfully represented Him who sent Him, devoting Himself to the Father's interests, seeking only His glory. He kept the disciples in the Father's name. At the end He could say, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”, John 17: 4. And now on going away He has sent us into the world *in His name*, as He said to the disciples, “As the Father sent me forth, I also *send* you”, John 20: 21. We have been delivered from the world, and then *sent* into it. As the Lord said to the Father, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world”, John 17: 15. Again He said, “As thou hast *sent* me into the world, even so have I also *sent* them into the world”, v 18.

We are sent to represent Him, to promote His interests. If we give ourselves up to self-gratification, or to taking our ease, or if we set up some interest of our own, thus seeking our own things, if we conduct ourselves in a manner unworthy of the holy name we bear, then we are unfaithful to the One who sent us. The day will come when we shall have to give an account of our stewardship.

We may well inquire what are His interests here? He has no interest in the world as such. “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine”, v 9. His interest is in *His own*, those whom the Father has given Him out of the world. If we are occupied in worldly politics and schemes for the improvement of the world, seeking to make it a better place for man to live in, or interfering in

its government, if we are engaged in human plans for the betterment of men, we are not serving the interests of Christ. Such matters are good in their way, and useful work for men of the world, but they are not the business of Christians. Christ has no interest in the strivings of the nations of the earth, nor in their schemes to bring about a millennium of peace and prosperity. All this awaits the day of His coming. He died for us that He might deliver us from this present evil world. His present work is to save men out of a world doomed to judgment.

The Lord's interest here is the testimony of God, the kingdom of God, the assembly of God, the work of God in His saints. To promote these things should be our interest. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness", Matt 6: 33. In teaching the disciples to pray, the Lord taught them to put these things before their own personal interests, "Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt 6: 9), &c.

In any way in which we can support the testimony of our Lord, or minister to His saints, or further the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, we are supporting the interests of Christ.

We see this remarkably exemplified in the apostle Paul, he was not ashamed to suffer for the gospel (2 Tim 1: 12), and he was willing to lay down his life for the prosperity of the saints, Phil 2: 17. He did not belie the testimony in his manner of life, 1 Thess 2: 10; 2 Tim 3: 10, 11. There are many ways in which we can support the testimony, see Rom 16. There are two important things indicated in Philippians 2: 15, 16. The first is to *shine*, the second is to *hold forth the word of life*. These are open to every saint. In whatever circumstances we are found, however obscure, we can *shine*, that is, display the spirit and grace of Christ, and exhibit the character of God in our conduct toward men.

Then apart from public preaching, we can find plenty of opportunities for speaking the word of life to those we come in contact with. Again, the opportunities for ministering to God's beloved people are innumerable and always at hand.

As representing the interests of Christ, we can pray, assured that we shall receive what we ask. "Whatsoever ye shall ask *in my name*, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything *in my name*, I will do it", John 14: 13, 14. Asking in His name does not mean tacking His name on to the end of our prayers,

but asking in His interests, as representing Him. If we are really here for Christ, we have all the resources of heaven at our disposal for faith to draw upon. Like the man who represents his firm, he can always appeal to head-quarters for all he needs to support him in carrying on the business of the firm.

If we are intelligent in the mind of Christ, and in communion with Him as to His interests, we shall pray as Christ would pray if He were here. For this we need to look to Him to direct our prayers by His Spirit.

The spring of this devotion to Christ is love, abiding in His love. This will deliver us from self-interest, self-gratification, and from all our natural selfishness. We are all naturally self-centred, until we come under the influence and power of divine love.

This devotion to the interest of the Lord becomes a bond, uniting us together. Hence we *gather together to His name*, to pray in relation to His interests. We have something in common to pray about, this produces spiritual agreement. We do not come together to pray about our own individual interests, we can do that at home. We come together to take up things in connection with the interests of the Lord. If we pray for a saint in affliction or in sickness, we do not take it up in a natural way, and ask that he may speedily be delivered from it, but rather that it may be turned to account for the promotion of the work of God in his soul, and for his spiritual prosperity, while at the same time we can pray that God may grant him all needed mercy and grace. If thus gathered, we are assured that what we agree to ask will come to us from the Father who is in the heavens, and also of the presence and support of Christ. “For where two or three are gathered together *unto my name*, there am I in the midst of them”, Matt 18: 20. His presence gives direction and efficacy to our prayers, and the answer comes from the Father. This coming together is open to two or three saints at any time, if they have some exercise in connection with the interests of Christ. It does not necessarily involve anything of an assembly character, or even a public meeting, though the scripture would apply equally to a public meeting for prayer, *if convened on these lines*.

When the Lord was going away, He spoke of the Father sending the Holy Spirit *in His name*. He is here to represent Christ, to maintain His interests here during the time of His absence. Everything for God and for Christ is maintained here by the Spirit. He is here not in His own name, but in the name of Christ, as Christ had been here in the Father's name. Therefore if we are here in the name of Christ, and for His

service, we are in company with the Spirit, and in communion with Him, and we shall be conscious of His support. We shall be like a ship in the trade winds, that is, in the line of divine power. If saints turn aside from the line of Christ's interests, they lose the power they had previously known, and have therefore to depend upon human means and support.

The interests of the Lord are very wide, there is much to cause exercise, and that calls for prayer. One brother may take them up from one point of view, another from a different point of view, without any repetition, and all may say, Amen. May the Lord help.

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I have recently completed two books of ministry compiled from old magazines and other sources -

A collection of 34 articles, entitled *Memorials of Ministry by James B Catterall*, originally published in the 1920s, before his untimely death at the age of 48.

A collection of over 100 articles, entitled *Fundamentals of Christianity and Other Articles by Dr Frank H Bodman*, originally published from 1882-1932.

These books are available to order online from **www.lulu.com**. They can be found in the bookstore by typing the book title, or the author's name, into the search box. Both these titles are also available from this website as e-books.

If any have difficulty with ordering, they should let me know at burr.andrewlinda@btinternet.com

Andrew Burr