

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE FOOD WHICH ABIDES

Robert Taylor

John 6: 27-29, 51, 53-58 (to “heaven”)

I count on the Lord's help to speak a little about “the food which abides unto life eternal”. We are all very conscious of the need of food for life, but the Lord would bring it home to us in His word, “Work not for the food which perishes”.

It says of the people of old that they “all ate the same spiritual food” and then it says that “God was not pleased with the most of them”, 1 Cor 10: 3-5. There is the need for appropriating and making room for the heavenly food that there may be something formed in us that abides unto life eternal. There is a quite remarkable link in this section between food and life eternal. There has been an abundance - and there is an abundance of food - and yet there may be and is a lack of the enjoyment of eternal life. These things would exercise us; as it is recorded there was no lack of food, no lack of the waters; it says, “the rock” that followed them “was the Christ”. There was everything there to bring them quickly into the inheritance and yet they perished, perished in the wilderness. It says that these things are written for us, that we may learn to appreciate them and appropriate the food which abides; it has come to us as never before in this dispensation, in the Person of Christ. He says, “I am the living bread”. He would attract our hearts to the kind of food which would build us up to the enjoyment of this life eternal. It goes on in the passage to bring out that it comes down out of heaven; it comes from another area altogether, “the living bread which has come down out of heaven”. The Lord would freshly encourage us as to the substantiality of the food that there is available to us that He may attract our hearts to go in for it.

Peter asks if we have “tasted that the Lord is good”, 1 Pet 2: 3. He came in for you when you were lost: David says, “Taste and see that Jehovah is good”, Ps 34: 8. We would all have tasted that, the initial appreciation in our hearts of Christ as we came to appreciate Him as our Saviour, troubled about our sins and the condition that we were in that no other could help us; there was Someone! It says, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”, 1 Tim 1: 15. The world was lost, the world was going on, and is going, on to eternal judgment, and “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”. It means He came for you; He came for me! He came to where we were, He came and

touched the condition in which we are, that He might bring us to an enjoyment of a life that is eternal. Well, that is tasting and seeing that the Lord is good.

You had no doubts then as to His goodness, His ability to save you from your sins, and to meet the judgment under which you lay. But now He would seek to wean your affections; He would not only save you to relieve you, but He would save you to build you up in view of coming into the enjoyment of this food that abides to life eternal. Food is meant to create some movement in us: food would produce exercise - that is food that is material; and too much food and not enough exercise we know what happens. But food is to create exercise, and you see that in the very beginning of the history of the children of Israel. The first food that they had was that lamb, in view of moving out of Egypt. The lamb was there in the house from the tenth day to the fourteenth day (Exod 12: 6); no doubt it endeared itself to their affections, but that lamb was to be appropriated and the eating of it was in view of moving out of Egypt. That is what this food would be meant for: it creates movement, stimulates exercise; otherwise they would become ensnared in Egypt. But that first food that they had in their history was the lamb that was slain. They saw there that that precious one was going to meet and end forever the bondage under which they lay, but they had to move, they had to eat it.

And so the Lord would create movement with us that this food would cause us to have less occupation with, and be less being drawn into, the system of things of which we are naturally part, which is going on to death. But it says, "the food which abides unto life eternal, which the Son of man shall give to you"; what grace! He would "give to you"! That involved Himself coming in; it involved Himself coming to touch our condition and the circumstances in which we were. It is like that lamb that they had in Egypt; it would lead them out, lead them out of the bondage that would hold them, and all the pressures that were coming upon them from the Egyptians: that lamb as dying, that blood as being shed, that lamb as eaten was going to give them a constitution to leave Egypt. They left it in their footsteps, although alas many not in their hearts! May we be attracted to leave it in our hearts! To leave the power of Egypt, to leave the circumstances of Egypt. "Which the Son of man shall give to you; for him has the Father sealed, even God": what a beautiful touch that is! The One who has come here, the Son of man, come to those conditions, "him has the Father sealed". It means very simply that the Father has put everything on Him. He has left it to Him to

work out the great matter of redemption that these people had to face. He has left it to the Son of man to work out how persons can be extracted, extracted from the bondage and the power of the world; “him has the Father sealed, even God”. A Man has come to fill our affections.

This chapter is bringing in that there is a Man who has come in to win our hearts that we may be attached to Him. There as they journeyed the manna came in; it came into the wilderness, Exod 16. It is beautiful in Exodus how God met their murmuring. They were very slow to appreciate the food that abides! They longed for Egypt, showing that they had not really appropriated that lamb that was there in the house for those days. But God answered their murmurings time after time, and in that morning, they went out and there was that manna on the ground, v 14. You see that was Christ come down to those circumstances to sustain them. They did not get the good of it. Some did! There was no lack of the manna; it says, “Your fathers ate the manna ... and died” (John 6: 49) because they did not really appropriate it. But there were some who did. I love to think of Caleb; he must have appreciated that manna, and it brought him into an inhabited land. That is one thing it says about the manna, they ate of it “until they came into an inhabited land”, Exod 16: 35. The psalmist speaks about it; he said it was “the corn of the heavens”, Ps 78: 24. It came down into those circumstances in which they were to attract them. They said, “What is it?”, Exod 16: 15. To begin with their hearts were filled with the sweetness of those cakes; it tasted “like cake with honey”, v 31. They could not encompass it, but they could not deny the sweetness and the blessedness of it; the Son of man who has come down, come down out of heaven, John 3: 13. He has come Himself; He came in His own Person. He came down to show us the kind of Man that is to be our food, “him has the Father sealed, even God”. Think of Him in those days of His flesh, the way that He moved, tempted of the devil, but not overcome. Whatever circumstances He was found in He was perfect in His humanity, eternally divine. He was the true Manna, the Bread of God, and much more. He was like those cakes in Leviticus, the cakes that were made and anointed with oil and mingled with oil, Lev 7: 12-13. There was a Man there of an entirely different character. He was there to be this food; He was the food for the disciples. We can see that in this chapter: at the end of it there was someone who said, “thou art the holy one of God”, v 69. There was somebody there who appreciated the Man who had come down, appreciated the One who had come in such

grace into their circumstances that they may have food which abides to life eternal.

This whole chapter and the previous one are taken up with the food question. He fed five thousand; there was enough there to feed all that were there, but how few there would have been that would appropriate “the food which abides unto life eternal”. The Lord would encourage our hearts to have an appetite for it, to be attracted to this kind of food. The great feature of food is its presentation. It is made attractive to us, to give us an appetite for it so that we want it. As you read of the Man of the gospels, would we not want this kind of food? We would want to eat this kind of bread, the living Bread. It has power in itself to bring us into the enjoyment of this eternal life. Well, it has come down out of heaven; it is fine to see where it has come from! It is an important thing to see where the food has come from. It bears the mark of where it has come from, out of heaven. It says, “the living bread which has come down out of heaven: if any one shall have eaten of this bread he shall live for ever”: that is the power of it!

But then He says, “the bread withal which I shall give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”. The food in this chapter is leading us on to death: that Man had to die. If He had remained alone, appreciated by heaven, if He had remained as He was in this condition, He would have remained alone, but He came down out of heaven to die. Marvellous statement, that He came to die! We come to live, but death lies upon us, but here was One upon whom death had no claim and He came into a condition that He might die. He took part in that condition and here He is giving that flesh and blood for the life of the world; “which I will give for the life of the world”. What atonement was made in the laying down of that life so precious! It made atonement to God, satisfied God; as John puts it, He is the propitiation for the sins of the world, 1 John 2: 2. That flesh and blood, He laid it down; He laid it down that the whole sin question may be met to God's eternal satisfaction and to give peace to your conscience and mine. We can never eat if we are not at peace. We can never enjoy the food if we are not at rest. The Lord would do that in the way He has gone in shedding His blood and giving His life, He would make us at peace. Is the sin question settled for us all? Is it settled for us? There is a Man who came from heaven, came and touched these circumstances that we may be able to feed on Him, and He would lead us to where that food is eternally at home, and be built up. The scripture goes on to apprehend Him as “the holy one of God”. The Lord would graciously encourage

our hearts to appropriate this kind of food. There is more given than we appropriate or assimilate.

I would like to speak of Moses for a moment. It says he was in that scene in Exodus 3, at the burning bush, but he turned aside to “see this great sight”, v 3. It is the way we get the good of this food; there is a need for turning aside. Moses saw a bush burning and it was not consumed. It might well have just been an incident in his life that he would historically refer to and be the subject of many conversations, but he says, “Let me now turn aside and see this great sight”. The bush was burning and yet it was not consumed. It says God “saw that he turned aside”. We need to make time for this kind of food; we need to make room to turn aside. It says God saw, and He gave Moses some beautiful disclosures. He says, ‘I know all about it’; He says, “I have seen assuredly the affliction” (v 7), and He says, “I am come down to deliver them”, v 8. Moses appreciated the bread, the One that had come down out of heaven. Bringing it to our scripture, he apprehended that One had come down and was going to give life to the world; the thorn-bush burning was not consumed. Let us make room for this kind of food. So many things harass us, press on our time and would demand our attention, but there was Moses; he turned aside to see this great sight. Here it is in John 6, a great sight, well worth turning aside to see. The people made light of it; some said they could not hear it (v 60), but God seeing Moses turn aside was ready to give him a further disclosure. It became very precious to him. He speaks later on in his life of “the good will of him that dwelt in the bush”, Deut 33: 16. That was the Man that came down here from heaven; “the good will of him that dwelt in the bush”. It says about Moses that he “was very meek”, Num 12: 3. That man was feeding on that scene; it says, “he persevered, as seeing him who is invisible”, Heb 11: 27. I call attention to that to show the importance of making room for this kind of food. It is not just something you eat and leave; it is a continuous thing. The Lord goes on in this section; it is not only “have eaten”, but He says, “He that eats”. It is a continuous matter, feeding on this Man; you will find it is inexhaustible. The food that has come within our reach, it “abides unto life eternal”.

The Lord would encourage us to eat this food; it attracts us and attaches us. You can see how Moses became attached to that One who had come down, speaking typically, to dwell in the bush. Through all the journeys and pressures and exercises of the wilderness he speaks about Him being our dwelling place: “Lord, *thou* hast been our

dwelling-place in all generations”, Ps 90: 1. You can see how he had been feeding on the One who had come down with all the resources of heaven into a weary scene beset by foes and snares, but He has come down into those circumstances to sustain us and to give us this bread that leads us into life eternal.

Well Moses enjoyed it; there are others who have enjoyed it; they came into power in the circumstances of life that we are in through feeding and appropriating, and appropriation leads on to attachment. That is what happened to these persons. Moses became attached to Him and there are many others like that. You can see that with Ruth very beautifully. She too faced these exercises, a young girl facing the sorrows that came into her life very early, difficult circumstances, but she came to appreciate a kind of food that was going to abide unto life eternal. The Lord would encourage persons who turn aside and make room for it. It says about Ruth that there were “handfuls of purpose for her”, Ruth 2: 16 KJV. Another time she was invited to taste of the parched corn, v 14. How ready is the variety of food the Lord is ready to give and dispense to persons who show themselves interested in the food that has come down out of heaven.

May it attract us as it did Ruth. She was very soon attached; very soon she not only enjoyed the food but typically became attached to the one who was the food; she came into those arrangements of divine love that had been provided. She became attracted to the giver too! The Lord would say that, and how attractive these persons who turn aside and who have acquired a taste for this kind of food are to Him. The Lord would encourage us to be stimulated in the eating. It says, “As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father”; it makes us dependent. It does not puff up like the foods of this world but it makes us dependent. There He was, “As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father”. We come to it that we cannot do without Him! He is there as our food for every circumstance whatever it may be; at school, or at work, or in the family or the sicknesses of this life, He is there as this food that we cannot do without. Sometimes we see the result of it when we are put to the test. God works that way too; He brought in famines time and again in the history of the people to bring them to their senses, as we speak! But to show them that there was something that they could not do without. The Lord says, “without me ye can do nothing”, John 15: 5.

Jacob came to that; he got discouraged, he had enjoyed it

earlier, but he was there in that far country, and he heard that there was bread elsewhere. It is food that revives too if there has been departure as we have all known in varying degrees; there is food there to quickly hasten our steps. He says, "Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him", Gen 45: 28. Joseph is alive! What food, what tidings coming to that weary man who God had set His eye upon, and He was not going to lose him, and leave him dying in sorrow or leave him dying in weakness; so he says, "Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die". What did he find? He found waggons ready to take him. O the grace of divine love that has come down, come down as food, come down in supply to bring us into the circumstances of life eternal. Well, Jacob very quickly came: it says, "he saw the waggons that Joseph had sent to carry him. And the spirit of Jacob their father revived", Gen 45: 27. That is like God speaking to us in the circumstances we may be in and He would quickly encourage our hearts to make a move. I said food involves movement, and it was so with Jacob. He came into the best days of his life, he came to touch something in the sphere where Joseph controlled everything, and he was never for a moment without what he needed and he rose in those circumstances to the peak of his life, blessing Pharaoh, worshipping God.

Well, there is how God would meet the exercises of our pathway, and how varied they are! And yet the food comes in to help us, to adapt itself to those circumstances, to change us, to change us that we may be brought into the sphere where He lives. It meets us to give us power to leave the food that does not abide, to lay hold of the food that does abide. It leads us from a realm of death into a realm of eternal life. The Lord would encourage us to be brought into it. He goes on and says, "*he* also who eats me shall live also on account of me". We get our affections bound up with the Lord's; it is all conducive to where this food would lead us. It brings us into the area of eternal life when our affections are bound up, "I live on account of the Father, *he* also who eats me shall live also on account of me. This is the bread which has come down out of heaven". You see how these persons became attached to the Father; that is where the Lord and this food leads us, to our heavenly Father. He is One who becomes well known to us in the practical circumstances of life; it leads us to have confidence and to be at home in the Father's presence. When we come to the Father as having eaten this food, we come as sons. We come into the enjoyment of sonship, to know His embrace and to know His love and His thoughts in purpose for us; that is what this food would bring us into

so that we become enriched. Peter shows at the end of the chapter how he had been feeding on it. It says many went away - they did not turn aside, they turned back; how easy it is! We think things are hard; we do not understand them. Paul says, 'If you do not understand them' "Think of what I say, for the Lord will give thee understanding in all things", 2 Tim 2: 7. Well, there were some here who turned back, but there was Peter, and he says, "we have believed and known"; you see how much he had eaten. He had not only appropriated it, but it had made him a different character; that is what it does. This food produces character according to God. He says, "we have believed and known that thou art the holy one of God".

Well, dear brethren, the Lord would encourage us, and I trust would attract our hearts that this food is available now. He not only died, He shed His blood, but He is alive and leads us into this realm where life is: "I live on account of the Father". If we are dependent on Him, we will be led into this sphere where this life is enjoyed and we ourselves become persons who are characterised as having eaten this kind of food. We will be able in our measure too to dispense something about it. These persons who are eating it like this are very satisfied. They are enriched in their own soul, and they are able in the simplicity of life to speak a word to him that is weary. It is almost a gift, dear brethren, to be able to be satisfied like this and be able to go and speak to another saint, someone who is weary, to encourage "by a word him that is weary", Isa 50: 4. It needs to be persons who have fed themselves. There is no sense of being able to help a person who is down if you are down yourself, but if you are going to visit someone you look for something to take, something that you have enjoyed yourself, something that you have been enriched by, so it is persons who have been eating, who have been enriched who are able for the circumstances and the exercises of this life.

Think of Abigail; David was in very difficult circumstances and she came to meet him with everything prepared, 1 Sam 25: 18. That is a very beautiful touch there, the things she brought were all ready for eating; David did not need to go through the preparations, she had done it all, she had been exercised how she would meet it. She came with those raisin cakes and she said, 'Here you are'; a time of urgency it was, but she brought in a great supply of food that met the emergency and more. She saw beyond the circumstances, she saw beyond all that was there, and she was able to lift David back on to sure ground. What a thing it is to be able to speak a word to him that is weary.

Another time there was a man came from Baal-shalishah - another emergency - he comes laden, he had been living on the true bread, 2 Kings 4: 42. He had been feasting typically on this One who has come down out of heaven, come down into our circumstances to be food for our souls to lead us into His circumstances. That would encourage us to follow Him, to be filled with this food as that man was, more than he could carry, but he brought it all there and it says, "and they ate". How much there is around; may we be exercised to appropriate, to assimilate and be formed by what has come within our reach that it may produce in us these kinds of affections that are at home in the Father's presence; everything settled, food that has nourished us. One thing that is said about the Lord's service to the assembly, is that He nourishes it, Eph 5: 29. That would involve the food supply and much more, but it would involve what is flowing from Him above in the circumstances in which He is: He is nourishing and cherishing the assembly. It happens at our gatherings, it happens in our individual lives, but it happens in our gatherings, the Lord touches our hearts; may there be exercise to appropriate it, to eat it, make it our own. It is enjoyed by us and we are able thus to be a succour to one another in the days of testing that we are passing through.

May the Lord encourage us to have a taste, to have an appetite to be formed by all that has come within our reach so abundantly; let us gather it all, let us think it over, let us assimilate it so that it becomes part of our being so it helps us with what we have been speaking about that our minds and our lives are hid with Christ in God, Col 3: 3. It produces affinity. The eating produces the character, it produces persons who become like Christ and so they are at home in the Father's presence.

May it be more known by us for Christ's name's sake.

Havering

11th December 2004

This address was not revised by the author but has been carefully reviewed by the editors.

Ministry by our brother now with Christ is being collected with a view to publishing it in book form.

THINGS THAT NEVER FAIL

Ephesians 1: 15-23

PAG It is good to be occupied with things that never fail. The apostle Paul had heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus of these brethren; the Lord Jesus is never going to fail. What brought me to this is particularly those things mentioned in verses 18 and 19 - the hope of God's calling: that is never going to fail; "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints": that will never fail; and "the surpassing greatness of his power": that will never fail. So as believers in the Lord Jesus, we have access to hope and glory and power, and none of these things fail.

What God has done will not fail. He "wrought in the Christ in raising him for among the dead". Christ *is* raised: that is not going to change. It is a fact, and God "has set him down at his right hand in the heavenlies": that is not going to change either. We read in Hebrews, "sat down in perpetuity" (chap 10: 12); that just means forever. And then He "has put all things under his feet"; that is not going to change. We know that the time is coming when everything is subdued, and the Lord Jesus, of whom we are speaking; "gives up the kingdom to him who is God and Father ... that God may be all in all", 1 Cor 15: 24, 28. In relation to man's responsibility, there is what needs to be subdued, but what the Lord will put in the hands of His God and Father is something to which no failure can attach. And then God "gave him to be head over all things to the assembly"; that is unchanging. We may say as to the church publicly, of which we as believers form a part, that failure attaches to that, but there is no failure attached to Christ's headship. I wondered if we could be encouraged in considering that as believers in the Lord Jesus, as having faith in the Lord Jesus, we are put in touch with a system of glory, to which no failure attaches. I trust that there will be liberty to contribute to the enquiry.

ARH That is very encouraging, because the Lord in the prayer in John 17, says, "not one of them has perished", v 12. You think of the all-securing power of Christ that kept His own.

PAG That is right, and in John 10 Jesus says, "no one can seize out of the hand of my Father", v 29. God is not letting go of His purpose, and believers form part of His purpose. Indeed, the fulfilment of His purpose requires the saints. In the opening prayer our brother spoke about us being encouraged. That is my exercise, that we should be encouraged that God is going on with His thoughts. There is turmoil in

the world, financial, economic and political uncertainty, and moral degradation. None of that is affecting what God has in His mind.

WMP These things are sure and certain and will never fail. Why, then, does the apostle have to pray about the matter for the saints?

PAG The simple impression I have is that the apostle is saying here that he knows these things, and is in the good of them, and that he would like his brethren to be in the good of them as well. One of the wonderful things about Christianity is that we can give everything we have to everyone else, and we do not lose any of it. If I have a sum of money in my pocket, and I give it to you, then you have it and I do not. But if you give me an impression of Christ, you still have it, but I have it as well. And that is the great thing about Christianity. Paul says, 'I have this'. Think of all the difficulties Paul faced. He wrote epistles when he was in prison, for example, and yet he says, I still have all of this, and nobody can take it away from me.

WMP I was thinking of what you said about all contributing, and that is because we would have that desire that all might grow in an appreciation of all that God has for Himself, and all that has been secured in such a full way in the Lord Jesus.

PAG It is as well to remember that the apostle here is writing to brothers and sisters. The sisters are contributing too in what they bring in their spirit by way of exercise. It may be said that they cannot share their exercises out loud in the meeting, but as they bring them, and as they bring impressions, the Spirit is able to take them up and to make them valuable to everyone.

TRC During your opening remarks, I thought of last chapter of Hebrews, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and to the ages to come", chap 13: 8. It is a wonderfully assuring scripture about the One that does not fail. Could you give us your impression of these two titles? There is "Jesus Christ" in Hebrews, but it is "the Lord Jesus" in Ephesians.

PAG The Lord Jesus is the name that the saints of the assembly know and appreciate because it directs us immediately to the Person. Jesus Christ is a name of the same Person and is generally found in scripture as the name of the One who did things for God. Christ Jesus embraces Christ where He is at the right hand of God, in whom everything is secure. Therefore "Jesus Christ" is connected with "by

whom”, and “Christ Jesus” is connected with “in whom”. It is all the same Person, but the Person we know is the Lord Jesus. He has authority over us. That is why we call Him “the Lord Jesus”, but it is the authority of love.

TRC I was thinking along these lines. All that He has accomplished cannot fail. It is particularly attractive that our faith is in the Lord Jesus, that particular name that the assembly appreciates, and the recognition of His headship.

PAG Yes, Paul gathers the matter up when he speaks of “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory”. It is the fulness, you might say, of the Lord's divine title. And yet, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ reminds us that He has taken a place in manhood. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of glory; He is the source of glory. The God of glory is the One whose operations are glorious. But here it is the source of glory. We are coming to the source of the glory, and when we come to the source of the glory, we see that He has a whole system of glory, and it is centred in Christ.

TRC Very confirming; we had that impression this morning, as to God, the Father of glory, being the source. It entered into our hymns -

Father, spring and source of blessing Hymn 136

Another hymn (Hymn 49) used Source as a title of the Father. What you are bringing before us is confirming.

CAS Paul uses an expression here: “being enlightened in the eyes of your heart”. Is that an Ephesian expression? I do not know if it is anywhere else, but it does speak of the seat of our affections: the heart. I wondered whether if these things enter into our heart, rather than just our minds, we would become stabilised in relation to things that do not fail.

PAG That is good: “the eyes of your heart”. We are instructed in the Old Testament to keep our heart, “Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded; for out of it are the issues of life”, Prov 4: 23. What the enemy wants is our heart. He may reach it through our minds, but what he wants is our heart; he wants our affections. And we know that “Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it”, Eph 5: 25. The apostle Paul speaks of “the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me”, Gal 2: 20. John says, “To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood”, Rev 1: 5. The appeal

of love is to bring us into the fulness of God's thoughts. We may rightly connect the love of Jesus with the forgiveness of our sins, but His love would take us much further than that, and that is why we need to be enlightened in the eyes of our heart. It would raise a question as to what I am looking at and what I am occupying myself with. And it must be by faith. Paul has "heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus", which was in the Ephesian believers. The eyes of our heart are really the eyes of faith.

CAS "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be", Luke 12: 34.

REW 1 Corinthians tells us that "love never fails", chap 13: 8. He has loved us with a love that is unfailing and He still does. It is something that we can put our faith and confidence in, to know that we are loved.

PAG Love cannot fail because it is God's nature. You could not think of it failing. God's nature cannot change. And another thing is that "love has long patience", v 4. Think of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, waiting for over two thousand years so that we could come into this. The assembly was seen in a pristine glory at Pentecost. God could have taken that to glory. But He has waited all this time, and He has waited in patience. And it also says, "Love has long patience, is kind". It has been said that if I find my patience running out, I should try kindness. God, of course, never loses patience; but when the Scripture tells us about love, every attribute of that is seen in Christ and seen in God. "Love has long patience, is kind". Think too of the patience of the Holy Spirit, all the things that have happened over the whole of the time that He has been here, and yet He has gone on in patience and kindness, in order that we might be held and kept in relation to God's great thoughts for us,

REW The hymnwriter also says as to the Holy Spirit -

Patient, gracious is thy love,
Linking hearts to Christ above (Hymn 21).

PAG Exactly; patience and grace do go on together. It is good to draw that out.

NCMcK We generally link that lack of failure to the purpose of God, because it does not fail, but it brings in the saints here, does it not? "The riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints"; God has purposed that, and what God has in mind for the saints will go through.

PAG In the first day of creation God brought in light to deal with failure. He said, "Let there be light. And there was light", Gen 1: 3. But "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all", 1 John 1: 5. He stands over against all that is related to darkness. But when we come to the holy city in Revelation 21 we are told of "**Her** shining", v. 11. God's light will shine forever. I know that the shining is brought out in the millennial setting. Scripture tells us that there is "no need of the sun nor the moon, that they should shine for it; for the glory of God has enlightened it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk by its light", Rev 21: 23, 24. So God intervened in light, but He will sustain that light forever. There will be no failure. That light will not get dim; just as the love will not fail, the light will not fail either.

ARH How is this to affect us now? If God takes a person up, He has something in mind for that person to work out. And that might go on in patience, working it out. But how is it going to affect us?

PAG One way I hope it might affect us is that we do grow to realise as we go on that God has nothing but the best in mind for us. We have referred to "the hope of his calling". Well, that is a heavenly calling. God has nothing less than heavenly things in mind for us, and "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" has nothing less than glory in mind for His saints. That is why the Lord Jesus says in John 17, "the glory which thou hast given me I have given them", v 22. That has in view the glory of sonship; nothing less than sonship is in His mind. And then, "according to the working of the might of his strength, in which he wrought in the Christ in raising him from among the dead, and he set him down". But then, when we come to Ephesians 2, we see that He has "raised us up together, and has made us sit down together", v 6. So He has nothing less in mind for us than that we should be seated, restfully and unchangeably, in heavenly places. And then we find that there is to be glory to God "in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages", Eph 3: 21. God wants everyone involved in that. It is not just some people. So we should see that not only does God have the best in mind for us, but that it is possible.

NCMcK It is our faith in the Lord Jesus. We often find our faith wanes somewhat, but we are never asked to have our faith in ourselves. What the passage shows us is that we are to have an attachment to a great system of things. Paul is praying here, that we should be able to see and recognise that God's system of things is not marked by failure or transience at all.

PAG What you say about not having faith in ourselves is found in what Paul says to the Philippian brethren. “For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in flesh”, Phil 3: 3. Not only does he say that we do not have faith in ourselves, he more or less says that there would be no point in trusting in the flesh, because whereas God's things never fail, the flesh will *always* fail. However refined and excellent it may be, it will always fail. But we have access, not only to a system of glory that never fails, but to divine Persons who never fail. The Spirit is indwelling; the Lord is our Head in heaven. It is very encouraging that John says, “I write to you, little children, because ye have known the Father”, 1 John 2: 13. You might think that is quite an advanced thought. No, even the smallest child knows the Father who gives you your food and clothing, the Father Himself. We have direct access to divine Persons and we have a direct access to divine power.

NCMcK We are connected with things that belong to purpose. But the purpose of God does not only relate to what is future. The purpose of God relates to the present time as well, does it not?

PAG Well, that is made clear in the first part of Ephesians 1. We find there, “having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will”, Eph 1: 5. So that is God's purpose as it was. And then further on “having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for the administration of the fulness of times”, Eph 1: 9,10. That is God's purpose as it will be. But then in verse 11 “according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will”. That is God's purpose as it is now. It is all the same purpose, and the thing to note is that the will of God applies to the past and the present and the future, and so does the purpose of God. My own will can do no more than apply to the present. God's will applies to the future and it applies to the past. The only point in time I can exercise my will is now. I cannot change something that happened yesterday, and I may, in my actions, affect something that happens tomorrow, but I cannot make it certain. The purpose of God makes me certain about what will happen, not about the detail of my life down here, but it makes me certain that what He says will happen.

Abraham trusted God, that what He had promised He was also able to do. In that sense, Abraham demonstrated confidence in the purpose of God. What the apostle is saying is that these things that we

are speaking of are not all future; they apply now. He is not saying that you should know what is the hope of His calling once you get to heaven, or the riches of the inheritance later, or the power of resurrection after you die; these are to be known now.

PJM Are these like anchors in the soul, steps of faith? I wondered whether as we come into the appreciation of these things, our hearts expand. Paul says, “making mention of you at my prayers”; he was not asking how God was going to answer these prayers, but he is looking for the fulness to be filled out in these steps and anchors in the soul.

PAG The fulness is generally the expression of something. The assembly is spoken of as “the fulness of him who fills all in all”, Eph 1: 23. The assembly will be the expression of the purpose of God, and she will be the expression of the glory of Christ. God “all in all” is God “all in all” eternally. “The fulness of him who fills all in all” is Christ administratively. The assembly will be the vessel through which the administration takes place, and she will be the fulness. She will be the full expression, having the glory of God, her shining. She will be the demonstration publicly in the millennium of the fulness of Christ. He will be, of course, personally active, but He will be active through the saints of the assembly. And then the glory of God will be seen eternally. “The tabernacle of God is with men” (Rev 21: 3); that will be seen in the assembly. The assembly brings God's thoughts and His workmanship into demonstration. As I would understand it, the saints of the assembly now can each, in their measure, be a demonstration of the work of God.

PJM The apostle is delighting in the measure that the Ephesians have already arrived at, but desires expansion.

PAG When the Lord speaks to the Father in John 17 as to the matter of oneness, He says, “that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”, v 21. That is the present time. There is an expression in testimony “that they may be all one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”. That is the expression of oneness in testimony. And believing is what marks the time of faith. But then when you come to verse 23 the Lord says, “I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me”; that would include public testimony to the work of God in the millennium - “perfected into one” - when the church comes in all its completeness,

and the world “knows”. That is what we are speaking about. It is in view of the world believing at the present time, and knowing in the millennium, which we speak of as the day of display, that God's work has achieved what He set out to do.

CJMCK When Paul speaks of “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints”, is he really referring to the work of God? The riches of it suggests great wealth. Does it encompass every believer and what is being formed in them? God can take account of the glory of it as after Christ.

PAG Yes, so “the riches” is plural. It involves variety, “the riches of the glory”. Consider the hymn book that we use, and look at the variety of riches that are available in the hymn book. We come together on Lord's day morning to break bread, and we look round and see the saints. We see “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints”. And you think about believers who served the Lord in their measure in the past, and are now with the Lord. They were added to the riches of the glory, and none of that will ever change. We should be encouraged that in each one believer, God is adding to the riches of His glory. There is nobody missed out.

PJM It is God's inheritance, because God has a claim on it. It might have read, 'what the riches of the glory of His work in the saints', but “His inheritance” seems to me to make a divine claim on it, because it is His work.

PAG It certainly does, because it tells us as to the Beloved (that is the Lord), “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences”, Eph 1: 7. So the blood of Christ is given to secure God's inheritance in the saints. Another feature of an inheritance is that it is something you did not have before. Scripture says of the Lord that “he inherits a name” (Heb 1: 4): He took a name that He did not have before.

God did not have this inheritance in the saints before. Before today, He did not have as much as He has today. If one person in the whole world is saved today, God has more today than He had yesterday; so His inheritance is continually growing until the time when the Lord comes to claim His own. It should encourage us that each believer is adding something to what God had, and it is more today than it was yesterday.

CJMCK The work of God never deteriorates and never fails.

PAG That is what John emphasises. “Whoever has been begotten of God does not practise sin”, 1 John 3: 9. Well, what about me? John covers that when he writes, “if any one sin, we have a patron with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”, 1 John 2: 1. What I allow in myself, contrary to the will of God, is not the work of God: it is the first order of man. That is why we are told that “if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8: 13): because that line of things needs to go. It was dealt with at the cross, but we need to be in constant exercise, that “every one begotten of God does not sin”, 1 John 5: 18. I am glad you mentioned that, because it would be good if we could all carry that away. There is something in each believer that cannot fail.

LAH We spoke about what is unfailing. It speaks here of the power towards us. Why does Paul use the resurrection of the Lord as an example, that God wrought in Him?

PAG It is something I have been thinking about. It might lead me to inquire why resurrection power is emphasised here rather than creatorial power. I hesitate to make a comparative statement, but the apostle could have spoken about the creation and he did not; he chose to emphasise resurrection power. He says, “according to the working of the might of his strength, in which he wrought in the Christ in raising him from among the dead”. We know that that is the power that is towards us here, but then in chapter 3, it is the power that works in us. So all of us will need that power. We may or may not go through death itself, but we will all need that power, because we will all be changed, and we will all be given bodies of glory. I have been thinking about this expression, “in which he wrought in the Christ”. Death has a power. Indeed, we are told that “The last enemy that is annulled is death”, 1 Cor 15: 26. But God has a greater power, and that power is towards us. When we preach the gospel, we are, so to speak, directing the power of God towards the persons who hear it. And it is resurrection power, because we are dead in offences and sins, so we need that resurrection power.

LAH That is helpful. You have spoken of hope. Our hope is connected with the Lord as raised from the dead. Our hope is in what has been accomplished.

PAG Yes; the scripture speaks of “Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim 1: 1): that is what we have as individuals. “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col 1: 27): that is what we have collectively. Christ is our hope. Whether we are on our own or together, we have one hope, and it is

Christ, and He is the One who is raised.

NCMcK Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.

PAG The glory of the Father suggests His love. And what greater power is there than the love of God? There is no greater power in the universe.

SAF In relation to the previous question, these verses contain things in which God has particular pleasure. Paul seems to be praying to the end that we might have the same enjoyment in them.

PAG That is a very good way to put it. God wants us to enjoy the things that He is enjoying. Mr Darby conveys his impression of that in hymn 14.

All the Father's counsels claiming
Equal honours to the Son;
All the Son's effulgence beaming
Makes the Father's glory known.

The Father is enjoying what He finds in the Son, and the Son is enjoying what He finds in the Father. Divine Persons want us to come into that; so that is why the Lord says to the Father, "I in them and thou in me", John 17: 23. He wants us to enjoy the same love that He is enjoying.

GJH I was just wondering about the hope of the calling. Do you think that when God starts a work in a believer, He will never lose sight of them? He knows us even before we are saved, because God's grace is towards all. Does it help us that once God has started working, the believer is forever linked with God and Christ?

PAG The Lord says that "no one can seize out of the hand of my Father", John 10: 29. God is not going to let us go. A gospel chorus has the lines,

O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee (George Matheson (1882)).

Love will not let me go: God is not going to do that. Our faith may weaken; we may lose the joy of things, and yet we find that God has never let us go. He has never let us down. We are told in John's first epistle, "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things", 1 John 3: 20. I may have to say that I have failed and I am no good. But God gave His Son to die for us. He is not bringing us home to Himself because we are good. He is bringing us home to

Himself because He wants us to be in His presence and He gave His Son to die for us.

TRC “He who has begun in you a good work will complete it”, Phil 1: 6. If God begins something, He always completes it.

PAG He certainly does. That is it is another feature of what we are speaking about, things that do not fail. God never starts anything without knowing the end from the beginning. And in relation to what we have been saying about His purpose, He knows what He is going to do. We might not know how He is going to do it. That is a completely different matter, but He is not going to fail. When the Lord said on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19: 30), He had done everything that was required. He could speak anticipatively of what would be secured, not only through His death, but the shedding of His blood and His resurrection.

WMP Does it help us to just lay hold of what you have said earlier about what God is securing for Himself? The expression “to the praise of his glory” comes into the earlier part of the epistle, Eph 1: 12. So all of this is to yield something from our hearts for God, not to be content merely with the blessing, wonderful though it is. There is to be a return, is there not?

PAG That is exactly right. God is looking for something from us. When the children of Israel were captive in Egypt, He did not say, 'let my son go so that they should not be slaves'; He says, “Let my son go, that he may serve me”, Exod 4: 23. He wanted us to be set free in view of serving Him. He is looking for a service of love.

GJH It has been said that a believer who has been buried has been an honourable vessel for the Spirit. There would be something missing if that person were not taken to heaven. I was thinking of what goes through. There are many things we can occupy ourselves with today that might shake us, but there are scenes that do not fail and things that go on to eternity.

PAG I think so. We may read some scriptures and you wonder why they are there. As an example, in 1 Chronicles 8 there are forty verses that are in essence a list of names. Most of them are not heard of again. Why is that? They are recorded because they are important to God, and these names will be meaningful in the day of display. Nobody need think that they are not important to God; even if nobody else knew who

they were, they were still important to God. If they were not there, there would be something missing, and God is not going to lose anything.

PJM Another thing that is unchanging is His calling. No-one called will be omitted from the gathering.

PAG Yes. In Luke 14 we read of persons who were invited and did not come. That was because of their own will. But if God has called us, Paul tells us in Romans 8 what God thinks about that. “But we *do* know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to purpose”, v 28. That calling will not fail, but He wants us to come into it, because the apostle tells us, in that same chapter, that “whom he has called, these also he has justified; but whom he has justified, these also he has glorified”, v 30. The gift of the Spirit is given in order that we might enter into the joy of the heavenly calling.

PJM It is the very best calling that there ever could be. “So that ye should know what is the hope of His calling”; I think that would give direction to anyone's life.

PAG It would give you a focus.

SW How do we know these things do not fail, or will not fail? I was thinking that it is good to prove them, to go in for them. Scripture speaks about, “an incorruptible ... and unfading inheritance”, 1 Pet 1: 4. We need to have exercise to prove these things, the reliability and unfading character of them. What would you say?

PAG It is a good question. How do we know? John tells us how we know some things. He says, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren”, 1 John 3: 13. Ministry is worth reading, and it is worth giving time to. But you do not know that you have passed from death to life by what you have read; you know by what you experience, particularly among your brethren.

John writes in his first epistle, “And this is the witness, that God has given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son”, chap 5: 11. “These things have I written to you that ye may know that ye have eternal life who believe on the name of the Son of God”, v 13. Well, do you believe in the Lord Jesus as your Saviour? Then you do have eternal life. That is what he is telling you, so you know. Paul says, “to know him, and the power of his resurrection”, Phil 3: 10. You might wonder how you can know it, if it has not happened yet. But one point

about this chapter is that the power of resurrection is towards us now. How do believers get through? They get through because they have the power of resurrection working in their souls by the gift of the Holy Spirit, keeping them out of the level of this world. It is not something we are doing for ourselves.

CAS When Paul goes to Ephesus, that is the first question, “Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye had believed?”, Acts 19: 2. Paul speaks here about being “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”, Eph 1: 13. You have been speaking about the gift of the Spirit. How else could we get through? Because our tastes change completely.

PAG The Spirit helps in our understanding. It is important to recognise that we can ask the Spirit things directly. If you read a scripture and you are not sure what it means, you can certainly ask the Holy Spirit to help you to understand what it means.

Nehemiah was in the presence of the king. He was the king's cupbearer and the king asked him a difficult question, and he said, “I prayed to the God of the heavens”, Neh 2: 4. You might be in a situation and you do not know what to do. Maybe you are surrounded by other people; maybe they are asking you questions: you can speak directly to the Spirit, and ask Him to help you. Perhaps an opportunity comes up to do something or to go somewhere, and you would like to pursue it, but you know that you should not. You can ask the Spirit to help you to overcome the temptation; He will and He does.

NCMcK The bent of this section is that believers should be fortified with knowledge and an understanding of the power that is towards them. This is going to help us in regard to that. Paul's prayer was that we should know. Then God has set Christ down at His right hand in the heavenlies in this age: that must be the present time. Believers recognise that there is a Man in glory who has been set down over every adverse power, and we are to understand that He is our Lord. He is over everything.

PAG Yes, and the power He has is heavenly power. In the opening chapter of Ezekiel there is a description of living creatures and wheels, which may on the face of it appear complicated. One of the significant features of these living creatures in Ezekiel is that when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them, “And when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the Spirit was to go, they went, thither would their spirit

go; and the wheels were lifted up along with them: for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When those went, they went; and when those stood, they stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up along with them: for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels”, chap 1: 19-21. I remember that passage being read when I was a child, and I wondered what it meant.

One of the things it suggests is that the power of the Spirit is here on the earth, but it is not constrained by the earth. When the Spirit was lifted up, the wheels were lifted up: there was no necessity to worry about what was happening on the earth. The Holy Spirit is here, but His power is heavenly power, and He can lift us up out of the earth, and there is nothing the earth can do about it. That is the power that is towards us, the power that works in us. It is a power that can lift us up out of the earth. That is what resurrection can do: lift you up out of the earth.

It may be said that the body is buried; it is in the earth. Resurrection lifts us up out of the earth. Job said, “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and the Last, he shall stand upon the earth”, Job 19: 25. He will stand on the earth, the earth that claimed the dead. He will stand on it as raised out of it. That is the power that is towards us, power that can lift a dead person out of the earth. And that power is not going to fail. As we have noticed, “The last enemy that is annulled is death”, 1 Cor 15: 26. So the power will go on when death is gone; it would strengthen us.

WMP That is very helpful and encouraging. When Paul says, “to know him, and the power of his resurrection”; that was the power that enabled him to go on, because he speaks then about being in the race and continuing, but his eye was on the goal. He was looking to what was heavenly. That power being towards us is to enable us to be like that, to continue.

PAG What you say is very important. “To know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings”: Paul knows the power of His resurrection before he knows the fellowship of His sufferings. This is a suffering time. We know it. But it does not say, “the fellowship of his sufferings” and then, the power of resurrection comes after. We are to know the power of His resurrection first. Hence you know that the sufferings are not the end of the matter. The end of the matter is glory.

NCMcK God has raised Him up and sat Him down at His right hand in the heavenlies. That is Ephesian ground, is it not?

PAG The right hand involves power and authority. So all authority is vested in Christ and it is coming from heaven. At His right hand, then “**above** every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in that to come”. In that sense, all the unrest and opposition of the millennium and what immediately precedes it, the man of sin, the beast, the false prophet, however they may be described, even Satan himself whose name is Apollyon, Abaddon, the ancient serpent and Satan and the destroyer. It has all been anticipated, and there is One who is above all of that, and will subdue all for God's eternal glory.

Glasgow

19th January 2025

List of Initials -

T R Campbell; S A Falconer; P A Gray: Linlithgow; A R Henry; G J Henry; L A Henry; W M Patterson; P J Metcalfe; C J McKay; N C McKay; C A Seeley; S Walker; R E Wallace

BELONGING

Stephen T Eagle

John 17: 6; 9; 24

Ruth 1: 3 4, 14 18

1 Samuel 22: 1, 2

Psalms 100: 1 5

There are plenty of examples in the world around us of people aligning themselves with clubs and other societies to give them a sense of belonging. But, beloved, we belong to Christ. It is a wonderful privilege that the believer can have a true sense of belonging.

The more you read the verses in John 17, the more you see the preciousness of the relationship between the Lord Jesus and the Father. You can put yourself into those verses, in that conversation, in that prayer, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus. You can read about yourself in the words that come out of this wonderful chapter. It is an absolute privilege to have it recorded for us. It is one of the few records of a conversation directly between the Lord Jesus and the Father in private circumstances being conveyed to us through scripture, which is very precious. The verses I have read contain the words, "the men whom thou gavest me out of the world. They were thine, and thou gavest them me". You think of those precious words confirming that we belong to Christ. We have been bought with a price and those who belong to the Lord Jesus are part of a company that is the greatest company on this earth. That is not making anything of ourselves or making an assumption as to it: we are seeing that from heaven's view. The assembly is the greatest company that has ever walked this earth, because it belongs to Christ. These verses struck a chord with me in the sense of belonging, the Lord saying, "thou gavest them me". He is speaking to the Father, and it gives us a sense of predestination that we were known before the foundation of the world. I find that beyond me fully to understand. I find the concept of what existed before time very difficult to grasp as my capacity is limited; however, these verses give us a sense of the greatness of divine thoughts in relation to the Lord Jesus Himself, and also in relation to each one of us, if we belong to Him. How great these things are; how wonderful these scriptures.

The Lord is speaking to the Father with His eyes fixed on heaven. He says, "the men whom thou gavest me out of the world. They were thine, and thou gavest them me". Do you feel a sense of

belonging? Do you feel a sense in your own heart? I am challenging myself, as to who I belong to and why I belong there? Maybe we find it challenging to say why; perhaps being known before the foundation of the world tests us as to how much we really know of God's ways and God's thoughts - again I am challenging myself. However these scriptures make it unequivocal: "They were thine, and thou gavest them me". How the Lord loves His people and loves each one personally. Those who belong to other groups and associations are held in a collective view - the individuals may be only a small part, not really known. Some might wear some kind of a badge or an emblem. When you belong to Christ, it is in your heart: that is where it is embedded. If you belong to Him, you could never be lost or forgotten by Him, as you are His and His for ever. Being a believer in the Lord Jesus should give us the greatest sense of belonging, because we belong to Him.

The Lord goes on: "I do not demand concerning the world, but concerning those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine". I had a simple impression as to that. God has His eyes on this world in every way, and He has His dealings with humanity. The gospel is available to all who may come under the sound of it. God's disposition is that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. I love the preciousness of what the Lord says here "concerning those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine". The Lord takes care of His own. The Lord takes care of His own absolutely and completely on the pathway, and there is no deficiency from the Lord's side.

When you get to the end of the chapter, He says, "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me". You think of the longings of the Lord Jesus for those who had been with Him in His life here on earth, but also for us today, in view of the eternal day. It is confirmation surely that the Lord wants our company. That is wonderful; it is good when someone wants your company. Sometimes we might feel a bit of an outcast, and someone might seek us out for company, which we find a precious thing. The Lord loves our company. I feel very tested to say that as my behaviour or the conditions in my soul could be in a low state; maybe I would not even want my own company, but the Lord never neglects His own. It is not a short-term view; it is an eternal view. It is not just that the Lord wants to help us in our lives here; He wants us in view of eternity.

Ruth is a book that starts with a famine and ends with a harvest,

and I encourage us all to read it. Oh, that there were more Ruths amongst us, and I challenge myself in that regard. Ruth's circumstances at this moment of life were testing and trying; she seemed to have reached a low point. She had become attached to Naomi, and yet here were circumstances like a crossroads in her life; she had a decision to take. I do not think Naomi at this point was necessarily great company, as she was down in her own circumstances. You can understand that her spirit was cast down by everything that had gone on in her life. But despite this Ruth desired to stay with her because she saw that what was amongst God's people was so precious, it was greater to her than everything else. It did not matter about circumstance or that this was naturally a low point in Ruth's life and in everything around. She was not going to let go of that blessing, even though the fulness of that blessing had not even been fully opened up to her. She only had a glimpse of it, she only had a part of it, but she was not going to let it go. She was steadfast and she had affection for the people of God. She loved what Naomi loved. Ruth would say, "Do not entreat me to leave thee, to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people". What a company to belong to, the people of God. What a privilege to be numbered amongst the people of God. Do we value enough where we have been placed. Do I lay hold of God's view of His purposes in this earth in relation to Christ and to the eternal day? Ruth suggests someone who was not going to let that go. As you read through Ruth you see her steadfastness, her committal, her desire and her love for God's people. Maybe my love for the Lord wanes, and my love for God's people wanes. Mercy and grace would bring us back. I commend steadfastness to everyone: hold steady on the path to which we have been called. There are brighter days ahead.

If, as we find in 1 Samuel 22, persons feel "of embittered spirit", and they are in debt; their circumstances make everything around seem to be pressing upon them, hold fast. Hold fast to Christ; keep the view of the heavenly Man always in your sights. You belong to Him. In 1 Samuel, we get the cave of Adullam and people escaped there from the pressures of what was around them. They needed safety and David became a captain over them. Friend, never be far from the Captain of salvation; never be far from Christ. Whatever circumstances we may face in our lives, He is the Captain of our salvation. That refers not only to our eternal salvation through

reception of the gospel. If our faith and our trust is in Him that refers to our need for current salvation. We need preservation; we need someone over us. David became captain over them, and he would have given them the nurture and the encouragement and the help that they needed. He knew, as the Lord knows everything about us. He knows our problems; He knows our worries; He knows everything. He is able for it all, and if we belong to Him so He will take care of everything. I emphasise this as I believe it to be absolutely true, that we should have no doubts as to what the Lord can do for each one of us, whatever our trials and circumstances are. This period in Samuel would have been traumatic, but David would have put them at ease. They recognised that David was there, and he became a captain over them. Have we allowed the Lord to be captain over our lives, to take care of everything?

I was really helped earlier today by the reference to faith. Do I really allow the Lord to take care of my life? Have I got absolute confidence in Him? I want to be simple as to it, but am I utterly dependent upon the Lord for everything? We read the gospels and see the Lord was never far from the disciples. When He went to pray, He was not out of sight, He was just a little way off. The Lord is never far from us. We might be far from the Lord; that is a different matter. The Lord is never far from us. Why? Because we belong to Him. He is not going to let us go. We could have read in Luke 15 where the one sheep goes off. When it comes to the Lord and His people it is every single one that matters. He would go as far as He could until that one was brought back. It is wonderful to belong to Christ.

Psalm 100 is a psalm of worship; it is a call to worship. The heading says it is, "A Psalm of thanksgiving". I seek help to speak as to worship, that there might be a stirring in our hearts to divine Persons. There seems to be an appeal at this point from the writer that the people should be praising. They were to be recognising the greatness of the One to whom they belonged: "Serve Jehovah with joy: come before his presence with exultation". We should never be far from worship. Worship is in relation to divine Persons and we only worship divine Persons. Paul and Silas, under the oppression of the jailor's regime in prison, were still in a state of praise and worship despite awful circumstances, Acts 16. Whatever state we are in in our circumstances, remember we belong to the Lord. I seek that we should never be far from a worshipful state in our souls.

Reference was helpfully made earlier to the power of the Holy Spirit: what a resource we have in our lives here in Him. Again, we should emphasise that there is no deficiency in relation to the divine side, the supply in relation to our path here. If we belong to someone, they should take care of everything for us. “Know that Jehovah is God”. That would surely draw out a response.

We often refer to the Supper in relation to worship and the opportunity to be part of such a great occasion. I suggest we look at Ruth as an individual, and at the cave of Adullam as a company. When we are brought together there should be that in appreciation for what we are brought through that would pour out as a result. The Lord knows every pressure, circumstance, all the things that burden us day by day in our natural lives. They should not stop worship being formed in our hearts. “Know that Jehovah is God: it is he that has made us”: we belong to Him; we are His creatures. Have you ever thought of the greatness of creation? The pinnacle of creation is humanity and the great end in view is for those that belong to Christ. We are His, and that should surely bring out worship. We have no qualification of our own to become His people, but this verse says, “we are his people”. That is because He has brought us here, and spoken of His desires in relation to each one of us. The psalmist writes of “the sheep of his pasture”. If there are sheep there is a shepherd. That Shepherd, the all-the-way-home Saviour, will take care of us.

Enter into the gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise; give thanks unto him, bless his name”.

Something surely wells up.

The world of corporate business does not care about people, which is the opposite to Christianity. The Lord takes care of His people first in relation to everything. That is because we belong to Him. It is not a question of everything else being fixed, and then the people are considered. It is His people that are primarily in mind, because His people form His assembly. They form the great love of His heart. Does it form the love of my heart toward Him? That would bring out worship. It would bring out an expression of the greatness of what we have been brought into and draw out a response. Not for our glory, but for His:

... give thanks unto him, bless his name:

For Jehovah is good; his loving-kindness endureth for ever; and his faithfulness from generation to generation.

The Lord has been faithful right through time. Surely, we have proved in our own lifetime, the faithfulness of the Lord to each generation that has gone on. His faithfulness is unfailing: may there be a committal in our faithfulness to Him. As believers, we belong to Christ; be assured of that. John 17 shows us the greatness of divine thoughts and divine purposes all being worked out in this scene in relation to eternity; and, beloved, you belong there.

How great these things are; may we be in the enjoyment of them, for His Name's sake.

Birmingham

11th January 2025

