

***No. 62***

# *Living Water*

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## THE ASSEMBLY OF GOD

<b>Matthew</b>	<b>16: 13-18</b>
<b>Ephesians</b>	<b>2: 18-22</b>
<b>1 Peter</b>	<b>2: 4-9</b>
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I read these verses having in mind to say something about what Scripture speaks of as the assembly. I am conscious that there are some true believers to whom the word of scripture concerning the assembly is less familiar than is required if we are to be preserved here from day to day, let alone to play an intelligent and feeling part in the life of the assembly. So I venture to read these scriptures and say a few words about them.

You will know that the word 'assembly' is translated into English in different ways. The old way of translating it was 'church', but as Mr Darby and others before him have pointed out, 'church' has come to have certain ideas connected with it which tend to be misleading about what the scripture has in mind. I have been reading recently about William Tyndale, one of the great translators of scripture into English. We give thanks for these men who brought the word to our forefathers at times when it was a much greater burden to do so than it is today, in this country at least. Tyndale paused in the same way over the word 'church' and he thought it would be better to use 'congregation', which in some respects it was. Yet to translate a scripture such as Ephesians 5 as Christ 'loved the congregation' does not convey the fulness of what such a scripture has in mind. So we have now the word 'assembly'.

Matthew 16 is the first time that the New Testament speaks of the assembly. Matthew's gospel speaks twice of the assembly, but these verses provide a good deal of detail. They begin with the Lord asking His disciples very specifically, "Who do men say that I the Son of man am?" The disciples had been with the Lord for some time and they had contact with other people. The Lord asks them what had been going on in their conversations with others and they say, in effect, 'Well, there are various different thoughts'. One was that John the baptist had come back. Another was that Elijah or Jeremiah had come back or one of the prophets. Distinguished as these men were in the service of God, it is a very poor view of the Lord Jesus Christ to identify Him with any of them, One who is so much greater than any other man.

It shows, really, how little the glory of the Lord had penetrated the heart of those who spoke like that. Indeed, it shows how impossible it is for any thing as to the glory of the Lord to reach our own hearts apart from the work of God. So

the Lord turns to what was also in His mind, to test where His disciples stood. They had kept company with Him; what had they learned? “But ye, who do ye say that I am?” Peter steps forward and on this occasion he is right to do so, for the Lord commends and confirms what he has to say. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”. It was gain for Peter’s soul in having kept company with the Lord that he had come to this.

I greatly desire that that might be something we each come to for ourselves as to the Lord Jesus, “Thou art the Christ”. If we read the Old Testament we get a sense that godly souls were looking for the One who is to come, the Messiah. Peter says here, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”. Notice how full and exclusive a title it is.

I have simply in mind to recall that this is what Peter had come to and it is what the Lord would have each of us to come to. Dear younger ones here, if I may speak to you for a moment: you will hear all kinds of ideas about the Lord Jesus Christ. The schools are full of ideas, none of which make any moral demand upon you. People can accept that the Lord Jesus was a great moral teacher without coming under any obligation to do what He said. They can set Him alongside other teachers and see what they said and think they can make up their own minds as to what they will do, but if you acknowledge Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, then you are obliged to do what He says.

The way of life of the christian is not optional although we sometimes try to make it so. If we have come under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ let us remember that He is Lord. Let us remember that as we preach, and as we walk, and as we pray to Him as Lord, remember that He is Lord and that His authority is supreme and that I do not have the right to go off and do my own thing. Every believer gave up that right, if it ever existed (and it never really did) when we came under the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Here the Lord Jesus says, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in the heavens”. I trust you will see confirmed in this verse what we were saying about John 3 earlier today. There the Lord is saying to Nicodemus that no one can see, let alone enter, the kingdom of God without the work of God going before. Here, the Lord is saying to Peter that the light he has got as to who Jesus is and the authority that He now has over Peter’s soul is solely the work of the Father in Peter’s heart.

I connect these verses in a certain way with the verses in John 6 where the Lord says several distinct things. He says first that “All that the Father gives me shall come to me”. Then He says, “No one can come to me except the Father who has sent me draw him” and He says, “Every one that has heard from the Father

himself, and has learned of him, comes to me” (John 6:37, 44, 45). Those are three very precious verses all tending to expand on what we have here as to the work of God in Peter’s soul.

Now the Lord says, “I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly”. Why does the Lord begin to speak this way and why should He bring the assembly in at this point? What is it of which He is speaking? He does not say very much to explain His thoughts. He may have spoken to His disciples more than is recorded, but all we have here is this simple, short reference to building “my assembly”. Evidently it is something which is constructed, something substantial; it is not, of course, a church hall or a meeting room — that is not the kind of building that the Lord is speaking of here. He builds but what does He build upon? He builds upon what Peter has just said. Never imagine for a moment that the assembly is built upon Peter! That is an old and sad error for which there is no authority whatsoever in Scripture. What there is authority for is what the Lord says here, that based on the acknowledgement and confession of Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of the living God, there is the foundation to be built upon. All true material for the assembly is built upon that foundation.

Let us take comfort from words that the Lord then adds. I do not have in mind to occupy you with the trials and failures of those who have sought to be identified with the assembly down the years, but to any who do feel things, and I trust we all do, it is just as well to remember what the Lord added here before there was any evidence of apparent failure or trouble here on earth, He just says, “and hades’ gates shall not prevail against it”. What is of God’s building and the Lord’s own work is bound to endure. We take comfort from that. Do not confuse it with our own work about which Paul has something to say to the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 3:12-15). This is the Lord’s building and death itself is not going to prevail against it. There will be what is Christ’s at His coming and we look forward to that and we give thanks that it will endure to that time.

What is the assembly for? How is it built? Let us look at some other scriptures. The epistle to the Ephesians speaks of the assembly in more than one way: it speaks of it as being the body of Christ: “the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all”. It speaks of it also in relation to the Lord and the bride. In the fifth chapter we read, “Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it ...”. Those I think are bridal thoughts. In chapter two we have some more about the building, what is being built with a view to the assembly becoming the habitation of God Himself.

Paul is writing to largely Gentile Christians in Ephesus, such as you and I are here in Gardenstown and the places around. He tells them to remember that they were not always part of the assembly of God. They all had a history as away

from God “but now in Christ Jesus ye who once were afar off are become nigh by the blood of the Christ”. What about the converted Jew? Well, the Lord has broken down the middle wall of enclosure; He has annulled the enmity between Jew and Gentile. That enmity is very real even to this day. The Lord says, for those who have come to Him as Saviour and Lord, that is all gone. How is it gone? Because through His death there is one new man and one body.

The Lord has wrought all that so that there might be a response to God Himself: “through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father”. It is a very full verse, that one, setting out essential christian truth but in a very simple way. You may say, ‘I do not understand it very well’. That does not matter so much as the fact that it is all contained there. Very simply it means that the people of God, brought together in one body, and all the fruit of the death and rising again of our Lord Jesus Christ, have through Him access by one Spirit to the Father. The Lord, the Spirit and the Father are all brought together in one verse. We are able to see what God has in mind in the way of salvation and that there should be this response.

Paul works inwards. He says first, “ye are no longer strangers and foreigners”, “ye are fellow-citizens of the saints”; ‘you all belong to the one city’. That is another way in which the assembly is spoken of. Then he works inward again, “the household of God” where the family is enjoyed. Then he says, “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone”. That is a firm and solid anchor point.

“In whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord” — yet another way that the Spirit speaks of the assembly: a temple in the Lord — “in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit”.

There is an interesting note to these verses in the Darby Translation which speaks of this building growing and it continues to grow. Every time a soul comes to Christ as Saviour and Lord and receives the Holy Spirit, it is built into this great company. Paul says that those in Ephesus were being built in as well. It gives us a lovely sense of fellowship with these believers in Ephesus. It saves us from any sense in which we might treat this as all ancient history. We have all seen the photographs of Ephesus in its ruins but you and I, as believers, belong to that same company as the believers of Ephesus belonged to. That is one of our links with each other, and links with others of the people of God around the world, and of our links with those who have left this scene. If we are left here, we will have a link with those who may yet come into the testimony of our Lord; all is one building, to be “a habitation of God in the Spirit”.

I read the passage in 1 Peter because he is speaking about something very much the same as Paul is speaking about. In 1 Peter 2 two sides of the truth are

brought together. I would like you to take note of both sides. One side is again God's work. We come to Christ the Lord as a living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God. And, he says, this work is going on, the same work that Paul said was going on. "Yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". You see the same line of thought as is before Paul in writing to the Ephesians. But the saints are being brought in; they are alive themselves, "yourselves also, as living stones," every one there alive and a contributor. That is God's view of how it should be. He expects that where His work is, quickened souls will be living stones, contributing to this spiritual house where there is to be a service that is acceptable to God.

Peter gives scriptural authority for what he is saying. These inspired writers did not hesitate to draw on other scriptures to confirm what they were saying and show that it was in God's mind long before. "I lay in Zion a corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believes on him shall not be put to shame". Peter adds, "To you therefore who believe is the preciousness". All that is to be enjoyed by believers rests on the work and present worth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in verse nine he quotes again from the Old Testament, (from Exodus 19). It helps here to bear in mind that he is writing to believers of the Jewish dispersion, scattered saints around the near East. He is speaking to them about what they had inherited from the promises of the Old Testament and that they should make them their own. And we, through grace, while not finding our place in the book of Exodus are, I think, privileged to take up these verses and seek to make them our own as well. I suggest that in verse nine we have not only God's view of things but what He is looking to see from our standpoint as well. It speaks of "a chosen race, a kingly priesthood", "a holy nation" and "a people for a possession".

"A chosen race". Well, among other things, that means that if I am among those that God has chosen I am among those that are precious to Him. So I will treat them, and the company of which they form part, with godly respect. A "kingly priesthood" would point to the manner and bearing of believers. They should act with a royal dignity and constitute a priesthood, all of whom are to play their part in the service of God. Any suggestion that there are those of a company who are its priests to the exclusion of others is not one that is found in the New Testament. What God looks for in His assembly is a priestly company where all are priests, all are priestly in outlook and all seek to function as priests. You might ask me, "What do you mean?" Well, I have not in mind to go into detail about that but rather to lay upon us and challenge ourselves as to whether we are seeking to function at all.



Thirdly, “a holy nation”; thankfully we are not part of the kingdoms of this earth. We are a nation that God sees, a holy nation. But is it good enough for us to say we are part of a holy nation so therefore we are holy, and then just to go on as we please? That is not a mark of actually being holy. It is not good enough to say that we are what we are by divine appointment, and therefore I can lead my life as I please and I shall still be holy. That will not do at all!

Peter has a good deal to say about holiness. In the first chapter he says, “Be ye holy, for I am holy”. It is necessary for any true believer to seek to be set apart for the Lord, separate from the world, and to govern their lives accordingly. I say that as one who often breaks down about it. But I trust, by grace, I have a conviction about it. I greatly desire that we should all have a personal conviction, not that we should avoid things which would offend other believers if they knew of them, but that we should be concerned before the Lord as to what pleases Him, personally, and that therefore governs what I do or do not do.

“A people for a possession” implies a company that actually belongs to the Lord for the purpose of setting “forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light”. I think there is a challenge in this. I do not think it is enough just to read it as God’s gracious appointment and provision and leave it there. This is a verse about which we should have exercise of soul as to the measure in which we fill it out and whether we set forth the excellencies of God Himself. Is that something that I convey? Paul said to the Corinthians, “yet shew I unto you a way of more surpassing excellence” (1 Corinthians 12:31). He spoke of it as something that he knew and experienced for himself. We want to be setting something forth of what we know of God and His grace towards us in Christ.

I move on to Hebrews. Here we have, again, God’s view of things, “For both he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one”: a very precious verse and I trust it carries heart conviction with us all. It is a view of things which is given a good many times in Scripture. Mr Darby speaks several times of his early labours; he was a true believer but he sought to labour in the things of God without much joy and without much progress. And he says — and I think this would be an example of light given from God — he says that there came a day when the truth of this verse dawned upon him, “In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you” (John 14:20). He realised, for the first time, that he was wholly identified with the Lord and that was how God looked upon him. And he says, ‘I found peace and I have never, with many shortcomings, lost it since’ (J.N.Darby “Collected Writings” Vol. 1 p.36). I greatly desire that for myself. It was great light to me when it first registered with me. I trust it has registered with us all. You do not have to be very old to register that God does not just look upon you as a forgiven sinner or just tolerate

you; the best robe is meant for those who come to Christ — the best place too that He has for we are, “taken us into favour in the Beloved”.

Here we have that concept put yet another way, “he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one”, nothing to come between them. The Person and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ are to be maintained in their distinctness — the first chapter of the Epistle would guard that — but here it is, “all of one”. “For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name to my brethren”, This would remind us of what the Lord said to Mary, “go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God” (John 20:17).

Then we read, “In the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises”. That is what I understand as the chief object of the assembly. Yes, the assembly is to be a comfort to Christ Himself, to be His bride, to be His fulness. All of that is true. Yet the final thought at the end of Ephesians three is that there should be glory to God in the assembly throughout all generations of the age of ages. Here, in Hebrews, the words that the Lord Jesus Himself takes up are, “in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises”. In that verse we are given wonderful light as to the place that the Lord Jesus has taken as Man. It is as Man that the Lord is exalted and sings praises to God in the midst of the assembly.

The epistles to Timothy are written to a young man that Paul trusted. If we read what Paul has to say to Timothy we might wonder at the sovereign choice of God in putting Timothy in Paul’s way, because it seems he was a rather shy and timid man. I am not trying to elaborate on Scripture; it is what Scripture says. He did not enjoy the best of health. Yet Paul had a commission for Timothy to take responsibility and to care for the believers among whom he was. Oh, we might say, it is easy for Timothy with apostolic authority; he only had to lay down the law and it would have to be obeyed. No, I do not think it was as easy as that. Paul’s exhortation to him includes, “in meekness setting right those who oppose” (2 Timothy 2:25). There were those who opposed. Even in this first epistle, “Those that sin convict before all, that the rest also may have fear.” I do not think Timothy had an easy task.

Where we began to read, Paul says that he would like to be able to come and speak to Timothy face to face but that he may not be able to do so. “Hoping to come to thee more quickly; but if I delay, in order that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God’s house”. He did not say so that you might know how to conduct yourself. I think Timothy was already sufficiently formed in the truth that he would know how to conduct himself. But there might be others who needed help about it. We all need help about how to conduct ourselves.

I have sought, largely, to be occupied with God's side of things and the assembly as Christ's building and what will endure because of the One whose building it is. Yet it would not be right to leave an occasion of this kind without an appeal to my brethren as to the responsibility that we take for the maintenance of godly order, and not only order but also life down here, so that there may be service to God in the assembly, the maintenance of the truth in the assembly and readiness to take up responsibility. Sisters may be tempted to say that is a particular word for brothers. As to public service that is true, but it is a good thing to see every soul in the company taking responsibility. It might be put another way, not so much taking but accepting responsibility as something which love for the Lord would lay upon us. I see a need, in these days, when not too many are found together and the responsibility of local companies often falls on those who were perhaps not expecting it, to take responsibility out of love for Christ, out of love for the One whose praises He sings in the assembly, and out of love for those who make up the company for which He gave Himself: for His name's sake.

*David Burr*

*An address in Gardenstown, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2003*

## THE MORNING

**“...his compassions fail not; they are new every morning...”**

(Lamentations 3:22-26)

This scripture from the Lamentations of Jeremiah gives us a sense of the loving kindness and mercy of God. We read in Malachi, “I Jehovah change not” (Malachi 3:6). God does not change nor does anything that has to do with God fail. The passage in Malachi adds, “Ye, sons of Jacob, are not consumed”. It is a wonderful evidence of grace that we can live our lives in the sight of a holy righteous God and not be consumed. So we read here in the Lamentations: “It is of Jehovah’s loving kindness that we are not consumed”. Then as we read on we find these wonderful words, “his compassions fail not”. As we learn the compassions of God, so we become compassionate in regard to one another.

The compassions of God fail not. “They are new every morning”. The widows amongst us and those that live alone can take particular comfort from this. It is a most blessed thing to understand that we have come to a God of compassion. It is in His ways that we are in the circumstances in which we are and in those circumstances He delights that we should learn His compassions as new every morning. It does not mean that they are the same every morning; His compassions will suit our circumstances for each day and they do not fail!

Nothing fails with God. We fail and we fail Him often but He never fails. So we can depend on the compassions of God. Verse 21 adds: “great is thy faithfulness”. It is a wonderful thing to understand by experience that God’s faithfulness is great to you and to me. So it says in verse 25, “Jehovah is good unto them that wait for him”. If we seek God in our circumstances how often we find other avenues of help and compassion.

**“...morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed...”**  
**(Isaiah 50:4)**

In Isaiah it is said prophetically of the Lord, “that I should know how to succour by a word him that is weary”. There are many things in this world that can weary us yet the Lord is ever ready to succour by a word him that is weary and to bring in encouragement. Ministry would encourage us to keep near the Lord and to the truth.

It is a blessed thing to take account of the humility and lowliness of the manhood of Jesus. He had His ear opened each morning to receive a word from the Father. As we go through the gospels we see how He succoured the weary and how He showed the compassions of God. I think the first word of compassion in Luke’s gospel is to a widow; how uniquely He could make known the feelings of God. The Lord Jesus had sympathy and pity, but more than that He was able to

help in the circumstances. So, today, we would find encouragement and succour through the word of the Lord.

**“And they gathered it every morning” (Exodus 16:20)**

In Exodus we read of the manna that, “they gathered it every morning, every man as much as he could eat”. For the children of Israel it was physical food that they had to gather each day, but it speaks to us of the way that our minds are to be fed on Christ day by day. It is important in our christian life to have our minds occupied with Christ every morning. It does not mean that we have to read chapter after chapter of the Bible; the Israelites had to gather just as much as they could eat. There is plenty of time in the 24 hours to study the Scriptures in depth but in the morning it is important to gather something of Christ for our immediate help. The gospels especially are generally made up of smaller paragraphs; to absorb a paragraph about the Lord in the morning is sufficient to keep us going through the day.

The manna speaks of the blessed humility of the manhood of Jesus. There are many details in the life of the Lord that you can find in no other man. His Person and what He means to God is a wonderful subject to start the day, gathering just as much as we need. It was manna that sustained the children of Israel in the wilderness. At times they rebelled and said that they loathed the manna, but the more you gather of Christ and, indeed, the very gathering of impressions of Christ and then allowing ourselves to be formed by them, provides a support to help us through the wilderness of this world. There is nothing to compare with focusing our minds and our affections on the glory of Christ.

**“But on the morrow of the sabbath, very early indeed in the morning, they came to the tomb...” (Luke 24:1).**

I just read this scripture in Luke because if you get a look at the tomb in the morning you will see that death has been swallowed up in victory. As the hymn puts it:

‘We love to look within the tomb,  
Robbed by Thy death of all its gloom.  
The stone for ever rolled away.  
Thy death the power of death didst slay.’

The women came to the tomb early in the morning with aromatic spices which they had prepared; they were thinking of embalming the body of the Lord. We are at an advantage compared with them, because we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and we know that the Lord Jesus Christ is risen. The tomb is empty! In Luke’s account we are told that the women entered and “found not the body of the Lord Jesus”. Death has been swallowed up in victory! My sins, the penalty

of them, has been paid by the One who lay in that tomb, but, thank God, He is risen. He is now a glorified Man, sitting at the right hand of the Father. We are waiting His coming again!

He came out of that tomb in the power that was innate in Himself. He arose from amongst the dead. We read, "I lay down my life that I may take it again...I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again" (John 10:17). It brings out the glory of the Person and we see such a One out of death a victorious glorious Saviour, sitting at the right hand of God. When you come to the epistles we read that He is raised by the glory of the Father (see Romans 6:4); it is all glory. We feed on His humble pathway here in the gospels. In the epistles we see the glory of God and the God of glory; it is the Spirit of glory, the Lord of glory ; it is all glory. Everything is glory in the epistles. What glory there is in the unfolding of the purposes of God.

May we enter more fully into what is available to us by the Spirit in the church in giving glory to God, for His name's sake.

*Campbell Stephen*

*Word at a meeting for ministry at Peterhead, September 2003*

## **"MY LORD"**

### **Introduction**

I want to speak about Mary, Thomas and Paul and the way that they each spoke of Jesus as "my Lord". I want to bring out some of the characteristics that caused them to have such a link with Jesus so that they could speak of Him like that and I want to show how you and I can have a personal link with Jesus so that we too can say "my Lord" to Jesus.

Mary of Magdala

**"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him" (John 20:13).**

Mary really loved the Lord Jesus. That is the first thing I want to bring out. She refers to Jesus as "my Lord" because of her affection for Him and it is something that the Lord appreciated. It made way for the wonderful message that she received and took to the other disciples on the morning of the resurrection.

Mary of Magdala had once been possessed by seven demons. The Lord healed her, casting out those demons. The Bible does not describe that time of her life,

but we know from other Scriptures that those possessed by demons had a miserable existence. We read of a young boy who had been possessed by an evil spirit and it would sometimes take him and cast him into fire or water to destroy him (Mark 9:26). Imagine this person, Mary, possessed by seven demons, completely taken over by what was evil. Then the Lord intervened and cast them out and changed her. Mary must have really come to love the Lord Jesus as a result of that. She had such affection for Him because He had so completely changed her life. It must have been a dramatic, visible change that everyone who had known her was able to see. Mary found that this blessed Person, Jesus, had the power to do what no one else could do and so she became very attached to Him. One of the things that the Bible says of Mary is that she ministered to the Lord in His pathway (Mark 15: 40-41). She followed Him along with several others. She was always there.

What had happened to her is somewhat akin to what happens to every one who comes to Jesus. We might not all be possessed by demons but we all need to be cleansed of our sins and delivered from the power of Satan. Jesus is able to do that. He has power to forgive our sins and to cleanse us.

Mary became very attached to Jesus. She was one of those who had stood and watched the scene at Calvary; she had seen the way Jesus had been so mistreated and seen something of the grace that was also expressed on the cross and that must have further attached her to Him.

She knew where He had been buried and the first day of the week, very early, she comes to that place. She saw that the stone had been taken away and that He was no longer there. She did not understand what had happened. She thought someone had taken Him away and hidden Him somewhere. She runs and comes to Simon Peter and to John and she says, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him" (John 20:2). She did not say "my Lord" at that point.

Well, that caused Peter and John to go running to see for themselves. As we know, they found it just exactly as she had said. They saw what had happened and it says John "saw and believed". I think he understood what had happened but he went home and Peter too. Mary was left there, none the wiser; no one had explained to her what had happened. She still thought that someone had taken her Lord away. So she remained there, weeping.

This is when Jesus starts to give her some understanding. Two angels were there and they asked her, "Woman, why dost thou weep?". This is what brings out that wonderful statement. She says to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord". She no longer says "the Lord". She was so distressed in her heart, her

affections so stirred within her, that she confesses Him as her Lord. “My Lord”. It is at that point that Jesus comes into the scene. Jesus had risen from among the dead; He is there in a form that she did not recognise. Jesus speaks to her, “Woman, why dost thou weep? Whom seekest thou?”. She thought it was the gardener. She thought that perhaps the gardener had taken Him away. She says, “tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away”. I do not know how she thought she was going to do that but such was her affection and her longing to do something for Jesus that she said those words. Then Jesus says to her, “Mary”. That was the point when Jesus revealed Himself to her.

It reminds me of what the Lord said earlier in the gospel, “My sheep hear my voice”. The sheep know the Shepherd because of His voice. Here, when Jesus called her, Mary, it must have been the voice that she was familiar with and she knew it was Jesus. She turns round and says to Him, “Rabboni”. The title Rabboni is only used in the gospels twice. Here, and in Mark’s gospel where the blind man Bartimaeus calls Jesus, “Rabboni”. Rabbi indicates a teacher who is held in respect but Rabboni goes far beyond this. It could be translated ‘my great teacher’. Mary, at this point, realises that it is Jesus, that He is no longer in the grave but alive. We often comment about Mary that she had little understanding at this point. But you can sense in her cry “Rabboni” that she is saying to Jesus, ‘I know I do not understand what has happened but Rabboni, my Teacher, teach me!’ Here she is, in front of her Lord, the One she had just confessed to the angel as “my Lord”. There He was; He had come to her just as she was and she responds, “Rabboni”.

It appeals to my heart – the affection that she had for Jesus causing her to claim the Lord Jesus as her own Lord. She recognised that He was the One who was the answer to all her questions, all her misunderstandings, all the things that confused her. The disciples had gone away and left her none the wiser but here, Jesus Himself had come to her and she recognised that He could give her that understanding. And He did! He gave her a message to take back to His brethren: “go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God”. He broadened her understanding well beyond what she had. So she not only had One that she could call “my Lord”, but One was revealed to her that she could know as ‘Father’ and ‘God’.

Thomas

**“My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).**

Thomas was able to say, “My Lord and my God”. If it was affection with Mary, with Thomas I think it was all about believing. We see in Thomas one who was certainly devoted but there was something that caused uncertainty. He had doubts



and he could not quite believe the message that he was hearing that Jesus had risen and that He was alive.

Thomas is a good example for all of us. Many times have I wanted my belief to be strengthened, like the man in the gospels who could cry out, “help mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Thomas was one who was unbelieving but in the end he came to truly believe and it was the strength of his belief that gave him that link with Jesus that enabled him to say, “my Lord and my God”.

He suddenly realised that standing in front of him was Jesus his Saviour, his Lord, and his God. He expresses something of deep and true worship as before the Lord and it was because he fully believed that Jesus was risen from among the dead.

Thomas’s history is interesting although we do not read too much about Thomas in the scriptures. I think probably John’s gospel tells us more about him than any of the other gospels. It was on the occasion of the death of Lazarus that Thomas first declares his devotion to Jesus. The gospel account is simple: “Jesus therefore then said to them plainly, Lazarus has died”. And then He adds, “And I rejoice on your account that I was not there, in order that ye may believe. But let us go to him. Thomas therefore, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go that we may die with him” (John 11:14-16). That brings out Thomas’ devotion. He was prepared to go with Jesus and he even goes as far as saying, “that we may die with him.”

Then, later you find Thomas referred to again in chapter fourteen of this gospel. He is the one who asks the question when Jesus speaks about going to “prepare you a place” (referring to His going to heaven). Jesus says, “And ye know where I go, and ye know the way”. Thomas speaks up then. He is full of doubts and he says, “Lord, we know not where thou goest, and how can we know the way?” That is when Jesus says those blessed words to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”.

I just refer to those two incidents because they give a little bit of background to Thomas. It helps us to understand a little more of his character, confirms his devotion to the Lord and shows that he was a little bit unsure. He had heard these words from Jesus, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”, but he had not really believed them in his heart. It was not until this incident here where the Lord in resurrection makes Himself known to Thomas, where He graciously says to Thomas, “Bring thy finger here and see my hands; and bring thy hand and put it into my side; and be not unbelieving, but believing” that Thomas changes. What grace the Lord showed to Thomas. He could have said other things to him. He could have said, ‘Why did you not stay with the disciples?’

Why were you not there the first time I appeared?’ But the Lord did not say any of that.

Jesus would, in grace to us tonight, remind us that He is, “the way, and the truth, and the life”. If any one here is a little bit unsure or has not fully believed that these things are real, that Jesus died and that He is alive today, then maybe the Lord would speak to you personally tonight and show Himself to you as the risen One. He is in glory now, that is where He is. It is a link with Him in glory that you need. That is why Jesus would delight just to show Himself to you as your Lord and Saviour tonight.

He is available; Thomas accepted immediately. It says, “Thomas answered and said to him, My Lord and my God”. What a wondrous expression, what a wondrous evidence that Thomas really came to know Jesus personally as his Saviour, fully believed in Him, trusted in Him, and fully accepted that everything about Jesus was for real. There were no doubts left in his mind at all.

We do not know any more about Thomas from the Scriptures though secular history records that Thomas went to preach the gospel in India where he was martyred.

Paul

**“But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8).**

In this chapter in Philippians, Paul goes over his history a little and comes to the point where he says, “But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”. Paul could say that because he had been given a glimpse of the glory of Jesus.

With Mary it is affection and with Thomas it is belief and committal. With Paul, he goes even further; he counts everything loss that he might gain Christ. When Paul says “my Lord” I think he really had gained Christ for himself. Everything else was counted as filth that he might gain Christ. I feel I cannot say much about it. It shows the intensity of what was in Paul’s heart and in his affections in relation to the Lord Jesus so that when he speaks about “Christ Jesus my Lord” he was conscious of having gained something that was infinitely precious.

Paul had plenty to boast of in the flesh. He had been circumcised according to the law, an Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin; he was a Hebrew of Hebrews; he was, as to the law, a Pharisee. He probably did everything according to the letter of the law. He probably lived a life that anybody could have pointed at and said, That is how a Pharisee should live, how someone should live who keeps the law. He thought it was his right to persecute those who followed Jesus. We know from Acts 9 just how much he was engaged in that activity and how

wicked he actually was. So much so, that in his letter to Timothy he calls himself the 'chief of sinners'. It says, "Faithful is the word, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief" (1 Timothy 1:15 [AV]).

Yet he learned a lesson that was to be for his salvation; all that he thought that he was, all the things that he counted as gain, when he came to know Jesus they became to him loss. It is like a bank statement; you have got one side that is profit and the other side that is loss. Before Paul met Jesus he thought that his profit side was stacked up with all the good things that marked him out as a Pharisee. When Jesus shone into his life on that road to Damascus, everything changed. He saw the glory of One whom he spoke to immediately as Lord; he said, "Who art thou Lord?"

He could not say "My Lord" at that point. He did not know that but he recognised the authority, the power that was there in Jesus. That completely changed him. He was blind for three days and that time allowed Saul to understand the death of Christ. Jesus was buried for three days: Paul was blind for three days and I think he came to an understanding of what Jesus had done for him. It completely changed him so that, like the profit and loss account that I was talking about, all the things Paul thought were gain he counted as loss. The balance completely tipped because what became his gain was Jesus Himself. It says, "surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord". Well, that is Paul and that is what he came to appreciate: the knowledge of Jesus. We sing sometimes: 'It passeth knowledge, that dear love of Thine'. That was Paul's experience. It is for each of us to know in a personal way.

We often refer to the various titles of Jesus, but knowing Him as Lord is a very precious thing. It means that I have accepted Him as Lord to me, so I must order my life according to Him. He has all authority and all power over my life. It is wonderful to know that as a practical reality in our lives.

May it be so for His name's sake.

*Phil Coldrick*

*Address at Croydon, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2003*

## **“WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME”**

Lord Jesus, when I take account  
Of Thy descending love  
It makes my heart rise up to Thee  
On that bright throne above.

I do delight to trace Thy path,  
Down from the heavens on high,  
Down to this scene of sin and death,  
To suffer and to die.

'Tis this, O Lord, that touched my heart,  
That Thou did'st come to die  
That I with Thee should now have part,  
With Thee in glory high!

To know that Thou did'st die for me,  
To free me from my sin,  
And then to think that I shall be,  
Ever with Thee, my King!

O Lord, Thy love's exceeding great  
Which Thou hast shown to me;  
Help me Thyself to imitate  
While here I wait for Thee!

*Charley Fowler*  
*29<sup>th</sup> April 1924*

## **THE GLORY OF THAT GRACE**

Blest Lamb of God, we're sheltered by  
That precious blood of Thine;  
We are, O Lord, to Thee brought nigh,  
By grace we are made Thine.

We were in distance, far from God,  
And wanderers in the night,  
Deserving of God's judgment rod.  
God looked and saw our plight.

Yes, Thou, O Lord, our place did take  
And did our judgment bear;  
Thyself Thou gavest for our sake  
That we with Thee could share

A place before the Father's face  
And know the joy of sons,  
At home with Thee in that blest place.  
Joy of the firstborn ones!

Thou art indeed the Firstborn there  
For there is none like Thee!  
Though we with Thee that place will share,  
Thou only art adored!

*Charley Fowler*  
*7<sup>th</sup> April 1935*

## **A LETTER FROM HIGHPOINT PRISON**

September, 2003

My name is Chris and I am thirty-nine years old. I arrived at Highpoint last February. My offences were attempted bodily harm and threat to kill. My drug habit was costing me £500 per month. Sitting in my cell, I asked myself how it had come to this and realised that it was a mixture of things in my life. The final straw was the breakdown of my family. I really wanted to change my life. Inside I was feeling really empty and lost.

The first thing I did was to pray to God like I'd never prayed before. I found myself asking Him to forgive me. I could not stop the tears flowing. I cannot explain what happened, but I felt something that night which touched me not just mentally but physically. The next morning I felt like a weight had been lifted

from me. It was as if God had said, 'Right, I will take that away from you, now you are free'. The first three days were hard, going through withdrawal, but I felt that God was with me, saying, 'Don't give up, you will make it'.

I started going to the chapel on Sundays. The first few months of going to the chapel, singing and praising God, I found I was very emotional, but as time went on this changed. I began to learn what it was to have faith in Jesus and to know that all is possible. It is now seven months later and I am learning more every day. I feel my life has changed so much. I have never been so positive in myself. As I write this I am only two days from release. I know my real test is just about to begin and I am really looking forward to being able to do something for God.

For me, coming to Highpoint Prison has changed my life. I know I will always look back on my time here and know it was truly a 'high point' in my life.

(This was a letter sent to Mark Hunt, Chaplain at Highpoint. In making it public he has asked for prayers for Chris facing life out of prison.)

## **THE MAINTENANCE OF THE TESTIMONY IN OUR HOUSEHOLDS**

### **Acts 18:1-11**

There is a good deal said as to households in Acts 18. In verse 7 the apostle enters into a man's house which was by the synagogue and the chief ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord with all his house. In chapter 16, too, the house of Lydia is referred to and also the house of the Philippian jailor. In the epistle to the Corinthians the households of Chloe and Stephanas are referred to. The households of the saints obviously have a great place in connection with the testimony.

It is often in the houses of believers that Satan sees a weak point and he gets in, but our houses should be descriptive of God's house. The epistles to Timothy show that most clearly: "If any widow have children or descendants, let them learn first to be pious as regards their own house, and to render a return on their side to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God" (1 Timothy 5:4). What a lesson for us all. Our home is where we first learn to work things out. It is often said that if you want to know a man you must live with him and see how he acts in the home. What testimony do you give in your home, as a brother, a daughter, a son, a father, a mother, a husband or a wife? We are to show piety at home. The home is the first region in which we learn to exercise piety.

Then there is the order of the house. Many a house is ruined because the husband does not take his place as head. Another house may be ruined because a wife seeks to be head. The whole thing should be ordered according to the divine pattern; it is in that way the scripture is fulfilled which says, "Ye are the salt of the earth;...ye are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13, 14), that is, testimony. But we are also the salt of the earth. In this world everything natural is violated. There is a heartless disregard of affection and violation of the most sensitive feelings. We only need to look round and see what is going on to observe how awfully corrupt things are becoming. Affections are violated and engagements snapped. Is that christianity? We need not go into the intense and awful forms things have taken in this world. What is natural is preserved in the christian circle in its right features. "Ye are the salt of the earth". There is the recognition of every divinely ordered relationship; it is held in a right way and God supports it and what is natural is preserved.

Then, too, the houses of christians are the avenue by which the house of God reaches the world. A worldly person cannot see the house of God, because it is a spiritual house; they have no means of knowing it in its spiritual character, but they can see you and me; they can note our houses. What is that person's house like? Is it different from other houses? Are acts of grace shown there? Is it marked by liberality and hospitality? Does the kindness of God shine out in that house? It is most important that there should be in our houses the expression of God's house, that there should be the maintenance of the testimony in the household sphere.

How honoured the house of Lydia was. The apostle not only went there once but he went back there. Then the Philippian jailor's household was baptised and brought under the rule of the Lord. In the first epistle to the Corinthians we read of the household of Stephanas devoting themselves to the saints for service; we see thus how the testimony is maintained and defended through the households of the saints.

But how easy it is, alas, for worldliness to get in. Satan sees his opportunity in our weaknesses. How easy for us to allow for our children what we would not sanction for ourselves. He gets in through the most tender affection of a parent to a child. So Satan with all his cleverness gets in through the natural affections and the world enters the home of the christian. What is the next thing? It enters into the christian company through the houses of the saints and the testimony is gone.

Timothy refers very largely to the houses of the saints. Look at 1 Timothy 2. I think that refers primarily to the christian household. Prayer marks it. Prayer is to be made "for kings and all that are in dignity, that we may lead a quiet and

tranquil life in all piety and gravity; for this is good and acceptable before our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (vv.2-4). I believe that is particularly applicable to the household.

I would like to ask every head of a house what his household prayer is like. Are you reading the Bible together as a family and praying in the morning? What a terrible thing to let the household start the day without the public recognition of God! Supposing you had to have a business associate to stay with you. Look at the effect it would have on them if you did not have family prayer and Bible reading. They would get a wrong impression of the house of God. We are to pray for all men; we may also pray for God’s care over our households. I believe household prayer is particularly in view in the epistle to Timothy.

I believe the household is referred to primarily in 1 Timothy 2. In verse 8 we read: “I will therefore that the men pray in every place, lifting up pious hands, without wrath or reasoning”. What a lovely position for a man — dependence marking him characterised by the feature of Christ. Then the women “in decent deportment and dress adorn themselves with modesty and discretion” (1 Tim. 2: 9). There is the preservation of what is natural in the christian circle.

We need to be very definitely set against the worldly attire of the present day. One’s spirit is extremely pained to see the worldliness of dress of some believers. Worldly fashions, whether in women or men, are a denial of the rejection of Christ and the cross. There is a tendency to adopt the fashions of this world and if we are doing that we are not setting forth the character of God; we are not defending the testimony; we are letting the enemy in. The women are to adorn themselves with modest apparel.

Our houses are to be the channels for the exhibition of the features of the house of God. Unbelievers should see in our houses what the house of God is like and they should be attracted. The Lord would greatly encourage us that we might be found true to Himself in our households that there might be the setting forth of the character of God in our whole deportment, our hospitality, and the general upkeep and style of our houses, so that they may say, ‘Yes, this house belongs to a different kind of person’. Where else can an unbeliever learn these things?

*Malcolm Biggs*

*Extract from an address at Basingstoke, August 1929.*



## RESURRECTION

### (Extracts from the notebook of Frank Purday)

The resurrection of Christ is the proof that God has accepted this work as satisfaction for our sins, and assuredly for His own glory. He has raised Christ, on account of the work done by Him for us, an ever subsisting proof that God has accepted this work as fully satisfying His glory.

*J. N. Darby (Collected Writings Volume 33:329)*

Resurrection is the great expression of His glory. I think it is the complete satisfaction which God has in triumphing over all the power of evil.

*F. E. Raven (5:211)*

The resurrection of Christ is the expression of God's pleasure, while His death is the expression of God's love...the veil of the temple is rent in twain from the top to the bottom when Christ died, not when He was raised. The resurrection sets forth God's pleasure.

*F. E. Raven (5:292)*

Now I come to the necessary consequence of the death of Christ -if He goes into death, He must come out of death; resurrection was in His case a necessity; He was the resurrection; He could not be holden of death. That God raised Him from the dead is God's testimony when it is a question of His having been put to death by wicked hands; but when the question is of what He is personally - He is the resurrection. Now, two things are consequent upon His being raised - first, He must be exalted; and secondly, He must send the Holy Spirit. Christ goes to the right hand of God and that attests that He is the Son of God.

*F. E. Raven (19:337)*

References (given only so that any extract may be considered in its context if desired) relate to the "New Series" editions of the ministry of the individuals named. The reference for the last extract in this article is expressed as 19:337, i.e. the extract is taken from the "Ministry of F. E. Raven" (New Series) Volume 19 page 337. All the books from which these extracts are taken are published by the Kingston Bible Trust, Wembley Avenue, Lancing, West Sussex BN15 9LX, UK

## THE CRISES OF LIFE

While some lives are comparatively uneventful there are, in every life, moments of importance which become landmarks in its history. The records in scripture of the remarkable crises in the life-history of saints of God are worthy of our careful consideration.

## **The Soul's Awakening,**

This is the first crisis in our spiritual history, when God is pleased to bring to the conscience the reality of eternal issues. The ways of God to effect this are varied for He is pleased to use an earthquake in one case; in another He will cause that a little child shall lead them.

Perhaps the outstanding instance of a great awakening recorded in the Old Testament is that of King Manasseh. After a life of appalling wickedness, he was taken among the thorns, bound with fetters and carried into Babylon, before his soul awoke. Then “when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him.” What a crisis to reach! Yet how graciously God pardoned his iniquity, and brought him again to his kingdom (2 Chronicles 33:12)!

Is not this a voice to every one who has never turned to God in repentance? He would have you experience the same welcome that He gave to the returning prodigal when He ran to meet him and covered him with the kisses of forgiveness (see Luke 15). He is a just God and a Saviour and still says, “Look unto me and be ye saved” (Isaiah 45:22).

## **The Confession of Christ**

The next great crisis arises when the soul is brought to the confession of Christ, which is so intimately connected with salvation, for, “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10). Joseph of Arimathea reached this great decision at the most remarkable moment in the history of christianity. He was “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews”. He had not yet confessed Jesus as his Lord but at the moment when the whole world had combined against Christ and Jesus had died Joseph came out boldly and “besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus”.

A secret disciple cannot be completely happy nor does he enjoy salvation practically. Hence it is of great importance that this moment should not be delayed. Let Christ have the honour due to His name and confess Him with your mouth before men!

## **Overwhelming failure**

Another great crisis is experienced when, encompassed with failure, we find ourselves in a position of peril. It was thus with king Jehoshaphat who, though a God-fearing man, had in unfaithfulness to God joined affinity with Ahab, saying

to him, “I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war” (2 Chronicles 18:3). The battle had scarcely commenced when Jehoshaphat found himself in a most perilous position, for the captains of the chariots surrounded him. It was a moment of great fear, but he cried out and the Lord helped him and God moved them to depart from him.

How gracious of our God to deliver us even though we are in danger on account of our own folly! The Psalmist said, “they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses”. Let those who may be passing through such a crisis be encouraged that our God will hear their cry, for “there is no other God that can deliver after this sort”, and He will grant recovery.

### **Crises in business and work**

Many are the crises that arise in the life of a christian through experience of work and business, but it is encouraging that in that sphere it is possible to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Titus 2:10). Daniel’s experience in the business of the court of Babylon is most edifying, for it proves how the support of God is given in the most testing circumstances. He was preferred above the presidents and princes, yet all his colleagues sought to find occasion against him.

It is not unusual for a follower of Christ to find himself the object of scorn or hatred, called to stand alone against opposition. It will be well if he or she perseveres in prayer, as Daniel did, and proves God’s great support and deliverance. Prayer is the great resource in business and employment, for God honours those who trust in Him.

### **The shadow of death**

The greatest of all our crises in life are those moments of sorrow and bereavement when the shadow of death falls upon the spirit. It was through this experience that the sisters in Bethany passed when Lazarus died, yet they knew how great their resource was in their knowledge of the love of Jesus. Mary, when she heard that Jesus had come, arose quickly and came to Him and, when she was come where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell down at His feet. This is the sweetest story of sympathy ever told! It has been the comfort of His own through all generations that have been called to pass through this vale of sorrow, that “Jesus wept” at the grave and walked with them every step of that path of grief.

Such crises can only bring the soul to one great conclusion — that Jesus is indispensable to His own and there is no crisis beyond His wisdom, love and power. Well may we sing:

‘Jesus! Thou art enough  
The mind and heart to fill;  
Thy patient life – to calm the soul;  
Thy love – its fear dispel!’

*F. S. Marsh.*

### **NOTE ON THE LETTERS OF LADY POWERSCOURT**

Some of the early issues of “Living Water” contained extracts from the published letters of Lady Powerscourt. The letters were first published around 1838 and have been long out of print. A reprint by Chapter Two is now available. Orders and enquiries should be made direct to Chapter Two and not to the Stone Publishing Trust.

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