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# *Living Water*

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## MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES — PHILADELPHIA

**“And to the angel in the assembly in Philadelphia write: These things says the holy, the true; he that has the key of David, he who opens and no one shall shut, and shuts and no one shall open:**

**“I know thy works: behold I have set before thee an opened door, which no one can shut, because thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I make them of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie; behold, I will cause that they shall come and shall do homage before thy feet, and shall know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial, which is about to come upon the whole habitable world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. I come quickly: hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown.**

**“He that overcomes, him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more at all out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven, from my God, and my new name.**

**“He that has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the assemblies.”**

(Revelation 3:7-13)

The name Philadelphia means ‘city of brotherly love’ but it did not get that name because of the christians that were there, but because the founder of the city wanted to commemorate his love for his brother. Nevertheless, it would be a powerful testimony for believers in a place to be marked by love amongst themselves since this is one of the features that is to characterise those who belong to Christ: “By this shall all know that ye are disciples of mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves” (John 13:35).

The Lord presents Himself to this church as the One who has the “key of David”. It is a quotation from Isaiah 22, where it is said of Eliakim: “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (verse 22). Eliakim was to be a father to his people. “He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Isaiah 22:21). It seems, therefore, that if the door was opened by such a one it lead to blessing, preservation and encouragement. Then, too, He who opens is “the holy, the true” so that would characterise all that He opens.

In setting an opened door before those in Philadelphia the Lord gave them the opportunity to enter fully into the things of God. It is not an opening door; there is nothing to hinder and we do not have to push at it. There is the opportunity to move into the things that the Lord and the Spirit would have

us enjoy. The opened door has been given many applications: it has been likened to the door opened for the testimony; all through the Acts of the Apostles you find the Lord setting an opened door for the spread of the glad tidings;

- it has been spoken of as a door into the greater understanding of the truth as it is in Jesus; in a sense, the Lord opened a door to His own when He opened their understandings at the end of Luke's gospel;
- another suggestion has been that it is a door into an activity which the Lord wants the believers in a particular place to undertake; and,
- it has been regarded as an indication that the faithful celebration of the Lord's supper will continue until the rapture of the saints.

All these suggestions are helpful but the underlying thought here is that the Lord saw what He approved of in Philadelphia and rewarded it with His support and the liberty (the opened door) that He alone could give. That is the way for any company to progress

The opened door is spoken of as a favour; those who had this door set before them rejoiced to pass through it. In Psalm 122 it says, "I rejoiced when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of Jehovah" (v.1). If we have lost the desire for the house of God then we have lost a very great deal. The apostle Paul prays in his letter to the Ephesians that they should go through this kind of opened door: "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:17-18). It is also the case that the Lord may close a door. He opens and no one shall shut, but it is equally true that, "he ... shuts and no one shall open". The Lord shuts certain doors so that we do not go that way, do not become entangled or damaged by going through a door that He has locked. We see in Paul's history how the Lord shut certain doors. Nor should we forget that when the time comes for the parable of the ten virgin to be fulfilled (see Matthew 25:1-13) that He will shut the door and no one will be able to open it.

The three things that those in Philadelphia were credited with are most important. They:

- had "a little power";
- had "kept my word"; and,
- had "not denied my name".

One reason why it is a "little power" in Philadelphia, rather than a great deal of power, is because of the failure that had come into the church, even at that time, failure that was seen especially in Laodicea and Sardis, but also

elsewhere. Faithful as they were in Philadelphia, they suffered from the general state of the church. This applies even more in our day when the public humiliation which has come upon the church is a very great hindrance, but there is still a resource to be drawn upon. There is “power from on high”. None of us have any power in ourselves. There is a power provided that will withstand evil and promote what is of God. We should have all had a little experience of confessing the Lord and the divine power that comes with it. That is the first way, perhaps, that we experience a little power but the great thing is to be maintained in it.

Keeping the Lord’s word is all-important. The Lord Himself said, “If any one love me, he will keep my word ... He that loves me not does not keep my words; and the word which ye hear is not mine, but that of the Father who has sent me” (John 14:23-24). The Lord’s word is very wide; it conveys all that God would have revealed to His people. Here it is, “the word of my patience” which has its own reward: “I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial”. There is the present reward and there is the future one.

The word “patience” might be rendered ‘endurance’. There had evidently been difficulties in the place, for the Lord says, “Behold, I make them of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie”. In such circumstances they were prepared to work things out in patience, as the Lord would do with each one of us and in that way they showed the grace that marked Him. We sometimes think of Philadelphia as a perfect locality but there were problems to be faced and worked out in the company, which they sought to do in relation to Christ’s glory. The idea conveyed by a synagogue of Satan implies sustained, organised opposition to the truth. That must have been most difficult to meet and have been a real trial of patience to the Philadelphian believers. The Lord had taken account of it all and here He gives His commendation.

Another aspect of their endurance is given in verse 11: “hold fast what thou hast”. They held on to what was right in difficult conditions. The maintenance of the authority of the word of God is a great guard as we read in Titus, “clinging to the faithful word” (Titus 1:9). Timothy also is exhorted to hold on to what is right, “cutting in a straight line the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Whatever comes up, we can test it by the word of God.

In one way, “hold fast what thou hast” is just the simple line of faithfulness as portrayed for us in this company at Philadelphia. The outcome is a crown. Paul writes of, “patient continuance of good works” (Romans 2:7). It is more difficult than it sounds but it will have its reward in heaven.

The third feature is that they had not denied the Lord’s name. We have an example of this test at its most extreme in the experience of Polycarp, one of

the earliest martyrs after the men of the New Testament. He was a very old man and was called upon by his persecutors to deny the Lord. His reply was, 'Eighty and six years I have served him. He has done me no wrong. Can I deny my God and my King?' He was burned to death. He was someone who did not deny the Lord's name and who held fast to what he had.

Part of the promise to the overcomer is that he will be made a "pillar in the temple of my God". That is very attractive. The temple refers not to the court but to the inner shrine and only what is of God Himself is to be found there. The promise continues, "and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my new name".

The overcomer in each case receives what is proper to every believer. They receive what they have particularly valued and represented. The question for us is, 'What do we value now'. Do we value the name of my God? The city of my God? My new name? They are what the Lord would have us value.

All these messages to the churches were not to be read only by those in the place concerned, they were for all to read. That means that the promises made to each are really exhortations to the whole church and to be an inspiration to the whole group of seven assemblies. When persons in Laodicea read about an opened door set before those in a nearby locality, it was to raise concern with them, to stir them up. Each message of course has a particular bearing on the locality addressed but the promises and exhortations are for all seven. The whole book is addressed to all seven churches.

Based on a Bible reading in Bromley, Kent, February 2003

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Philadelphia, modern Alasehir was an important town in Roman times.

## **OVERCOMERS — NAOMI & RUTH**

**"And she (Naomi) arose, she and her daughters-in-law, (Orpah & Ruth) and returned from the fields of Moab; for she had heard in the fields of Moab how that Jehovah had visited his people to give them bread"**

(Ruth 1:6)

**"And they lifted up their voice and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law but Ruth clave to her.**

**"And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back to her people and to her gods: return after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, 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, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried”**  
(Ruth 1:14-17).

The time of the judges was a difficult time. It says at the end of the Book of Judges, “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). A few years ago a christian told me that statement described the situation among God’s people today. I do not believe that is so. We have a king — the Lord Jesus Christ is God’s king. To us christians “there is one Lord, Jesus Christ”. We have in the Scriptures the teaching of the Lord and His apostles, backed up by the Old Testament. We should seek to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord. The Book of Ruth tells us of this man, Elimelech, who was married with two sons. During a famine in Israel he went from Bethlehem to the plains of Moab. I suppose he thought that there was more bread elsewhere. It does not say he asked God for any direction in this move; he just went. He did what was right in his own eyes and it was a disaster. In the ten years that they were there he died and his two sons who had married Moabitish wives also died. Eventually Naomi hears that God had visited His people in Bethlehem and given them bread and she sensibly decides to retrace her steps and go back to Bethlehem where she had come from and whose name means ‘house of bread’ and seek again to find her part among God’s people in Bethlehem.

Her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, were obviously fond of their mother-in-law. Many daughters-in-law are not! But they were both fond of their mother-in-law and they wanted to go with her. Naomi says to them both, ‘What can I offer you? Would it not be better to go back to your people, to Moab and your gods?’ Orpah thinks it over, kisses her mother-in-law and goes away back to Moab, to her people and to her gods but Ruth is different. We have this remarkable statement of strong clear commitment that Ruth makes.

Why does she make that commitment? What did Ruth see in Naomi that made her want to stick with her? I think that is a very important question for those of us who are older. What is there about us that would make anybody want to go along with us? She must have seen something in Naomi. She must have heard from Naomi about the one true God, the God of Israel.

No doubt she heard from Naomi what God had done for Israel. Maybe she had heard how God had delivered His people from Egypt and had brought them through the Red Sea, how He looked after them as they went through the wilderness, how He brought them into the land. She must have heard about the one true God and about the people of Israel. There must have been



something about Naomi that gripped Ruth and made her want to stay. Naomi was bereft, every thing had gone wrong for her, but there was something in her that attracted Ruth. I wonder if there are qualities with those of us who are older that would attract a younger generation?

When I was young, in this city, I knew older people who took a stand against trade unions and were thrown out of their jobs. I remember too going to listen to a young man who stood before a military service tribunal during World War II, stating his conscience in relation to taking arms and giving a testimony as to what he believed. It was not just talk with them but they were prepared to suffer reproach and material loss for their faith. I could see then that such people held beliefs for which they were prepared to suffer.

I wonder how much people see today in those of us who form an older generation. What do they see in the way of commitment to Christian service, in love for Christ? What do we display that speaks of Christ that would attract souls? I think this constitutes a tremendous challenge for those of us who are older. What do people see in us? The hymn says: 'Let others see Jesus in you'. May it be true: may more people see Jesus in us!

Ruth obviously saw something in Naomi that attracted her and she made this very strong commitment. She turned her back on her people and her gods. The pull of this world is tremendous today. There are plenty gods in this world, plenty of them, the gods of sport, of television, of music, of entertainment, of success. How many other things there are too, creeping into our society, many of them from the East, that are attracting people. What we see in Naomi was something of God that attracted Ruth.

I would encourage any young Christian here to take account of what there is in an older believer. I was told when I was young that there was more spiritual benefit in keeping with christian people older than myself than in merely finding company of my own age. I have proved that true in my lifetime.

It is worth keeping near people with knowledge of God like Naomi. Ruth made this commitment to Naomi. Let us read it once again: "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, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried". It was a commitment to death and to burial that marked Ruth.

God always honours faith. Ruth had faith and followed Naomi back to her land, forsaking her own people and her gods and committed herself to what was outwardly exceedingly unattractive but God honoured her faith.

She came to Bethlehem and despite being Moabitish with no claim on God, not even being entitled to come into the congregation of God, she found

what it was to have part in the inheritance that was in Bethlehem. We sometimes speak of the gospel that Paul preached — remission of sins and an inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in Christ. Ruth, although in the Old Testament, is an example to us of someone coming into the good of that. God blessed her. She did not know what the result would be but moved in faith. Faith takes a step without knowing what the result will be. She commits herself to Naomi, to her people and to the one true God. And the one true God honoured her and she obtained an inheritance among the people of Israel. Ruth comes into the genealogy given in Matthew's gospel, chapter 1. We are told at the end of the book of Ruth that "she bore a son... And they called his name Obed, He is the father of Jesse, the father of David" (Ruth 4:13-17). 'Obed' means 'worshipper'. The result of overcoming is that more is secured in worship to God.

*Ken Hollands*

*Extracted from an address in Glasgow, 8 September 2001*

## **HYMN TO THE FATHER**

**"Giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light"** Colossians 1:12

Not in Jerusalem,  
Nor in Samaria's towered height  
Shall sound Thy holy name,  
By Thine adopted sons in light:  
Father! To Thee our grateful hearts aspire,  
Responding to Thy love and blest desire!  
In heaven and on earth  
All families of Thee are named;  
In Jesus' precious worth  
Thou hast our hearts for glory claimed;  
Endless perspective of eternity!  
Eternal glory in the church to Thee!  
Thy waiting saints can see  
The Son exalted on Thy throne;  
And in their company  
Thy name, our Father, now is known.  
Adoring, as our prayer and thanks ascend,  
Source of all joy, to Thee the knee we bend!

*Edward Bevir*

## THE FATHER'S LOVE

“The Father himself loves you” John 16:27

The Father's love, so full, so free,  
Declared, O blessed Lord, in Thee!  
O joy divine! O perfect rest  
To ransomed hearts supremely blest!  
True worshippers the Father sought,  
True worshippers to Him are brought!  
The Father's name in love so free,  
Declared, Lord Jesus Christ, by Thee!

*Edward Bevir*

## AN OFFERING

Sing aloud, ye heirs of blessing,  
Chant the honours of the Son,  
All the Father's grace revealing;  
Endless praise on earth begun.  
Sweeter than the harp of David,  
Softer than the charmer's flute,  
Sound to God His children's voices,  
Choral tongues that once were mute.  
Not the full orchestral anthem  
Of the mighty Solomon  
Could compel these heartfelt measures,  
Chords the Spirit plays upon!  
Sweeter than the cloud of incense  
Smoke ascending light and blue;  
Fairer still than Canaan's first-fruits,  
Grapes or corn of golden hue.  
Yet more fragrant is our offering!  
Chant again the Father's love!  
Sing the Son's redemption glory  
By the Spirit from above.

*Edward Bevir*

## A TESTIMONY IN STITCHES — 2

The first issue of “Living Water” for 2005 contained a selection of inscriptions from children’s samplers. To conclude the year, here is a further selection from these embroideries that so often expressed the personal faith of those who stitched them, or the longings of their parents that their children should come to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

As in the previous article, references to the location of the samplers are given where these are known.

The first set of inscriptions relate to the life of the Lord Jesus, beginning with the promise of His coming, through to the resurrection.

1      In innocence we two were made  
But soon fell into sin.  
Then God in mercy promised Christ  
And gave us life in Him.

*Mary Allen 1787*

*The sampler shows a picture of Adam  
and Eve*

2      Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour  
Once became a child like me;  
Oh that in my whole behaviour  
He my pattern still may be.

*Margaret Roberts 1832*

*Costume and Textile Study Centre,  
Carrow House, Norwich (Ref:  
152.949.1)*

3      See Israel’s gentle Shepherd stands  
With all engaging charms  
Hark how He calls the tender lambs  
And folds them in His arms

Permit them to approach, He cries  
Nor scorn their humble name  
For twas to bless such souls as these  
The Lord of angels came

*Catherine Cook 1812  
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge  
(Ref: T33-1938)*

4 Behold the Saviour of mankind, nailed to the shameful tree,  
How vast the love that Him inclined to bleed and die for thee.  
Hark how He groans, while nature shakes and earth's strong pillars  
bend,  
The temple's veil in sunder breaks, the solid marbles rend.  
'Tis done, the precious ransom's paid. 'Receive my soul', He cries,  
See where He bows His sacred head, He bows His head and dies.  
But soon He'll break death's sinuous chains and in full glory shine;  
O Lamb of God, was ever pain, was ever love like Thine?

*J. Sellers 1819*

5 Behold the grave, the tombstone rolled away  
And angels sit, where One more glorious lay  
No wonder the bright angels mark the place  
From whence that risen Sun began His race  
*E. B. early 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Ref: T121-1928)*

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The next set of inscriptions contains personal testimonies. Martha Grant's verse is particularly poignant; she died the year after her sampler was completed.

6 Life is the time to serve the Lord,  
The time to ensure the great reward.  
And while the lamp holds out to burn  
The vilest sinner may return.

*Martha Grant (Aged 10) 1833  
Costume and textile Study Centre,  
Carrow House, Norwich*

7 Praise thou the Lord, my soul who hath to thee been very kind  
And suffer not His benefits to slip out of thy mind.

*Mary Ogden (Aged 11) 1783*

In the following samplers, Mary Culley uses a formula that is fairly common and was varied only according to the place where the person concerned lived. Elizabeth Whittaker strikes a more personal note.

8 Mary Culley is my name  
And England is my nation  
Finchampstead is my dwelling place  
And Christ is my salvation.

*Mary Culley (Aged 11) 1790  
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Ref:  
T167-1928)*

9 How free is the air that I breath,  
So free is God's goodness to me;  
Life I from Jesus receive,  
And He my salvation shall be.  
  
His name is like ointment poured out,  
All beauties in Jesus I see,  
The Lamb without blemish or spot  
Is God, and the Saviour of me.

*Elizabeth Whittaker 1809  
Exhibited at Whitney Antiques Exhibition  
2004*

Elizabeth Cooper's contribution presents quite a challenge

10 One prayer I have, all prayers in one,  
When I am wholly Thine  
Thy will, my God, Thy will be done  
And let that will be mine

*Elizabeth Cooper (Aged 13) 1852  
Exhibited at the Whitney Antiques  
Exhibition 2001*

Finally, many samplers were produced celebrating the victory at Trafalgar in 1805. Harriett Perrin followed the trend but also drew a contrast between the victory at Trafalgar and the greatest victory of all time.

11

The foe destroyed with triumph blest  
Victorious Nelson sinks to rest  
Amid the battle's roar.  
And fame to distant times shall tell  
How gallant Nelson conquering fell  
To save his native shore.

Conqueror o'er sin, o'er hell and  
death  
He gave His life in death  
To save a guilty race.  
Stretched on the cross, with briars  
crowned  
While scoffing sinners stand around.  
'Tis finished' the Redeemer said,  
Meekly He bowed His suffering head  
And there for sinners died.

*Harriot Perrin 1805*

Notes:

In some cases small changes have been made to the originals. This particularly applies to the use of capital letters and line layout.

The source of embroideries number 1, 4, 7, 9, 10 and 11 is Witney Antiques, 96-100 Corn Street, Witney OX28 6BU Quotations taken from their exhibition catalogues are as follows:

Noes. 7, 10 & 11 — "When This You See Remember Me" 2001

No 4 — "An Exceptional Endeavour" 2003

Noes. 1 & 9 — "On This Fair Sampler Does My Needle Write" 2004

## **CHRIST WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET**

### **JOHN 13.**

It was on that memorable night when they were at supper with Christ, that Jesus in the deep devotion of His heart condescended to stoop down and wash His disciples' feet. There they all were shut in with Himself, so to speak, from all around, when "He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded" (John 13:4-5). Think of the Lord of glory girding Himself to be servant to His disciples! What condescending grace! He had before Him that death of shame on Calvary's cross where He was soon to suffer judgment from the hand of God, and God's forsaking on account of that awful burden of our sins which He was to bear; and in view of this He stoops to serve His own in this unique way. And He remains a Servant for ever!

We read in the word of that coming day of glory when He will come forth to serve His own. What a dear Lord we have! Then we see that in this action His desire is that we shall follow His example, in our measure, and serve one another. "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master [or Teacher], have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:13-14).

We are always encouraged to consider one another in the light of Christ and to act like Him. The Lord never even exposed Judas until he exposed himself. The Lord knew all the way along what was going to happen, but He was superior to it all.

If you have a taste of the love of Christ and the love of those given to Christ, nothing suits you more than to be constantly in the enjoyment of these things, and if you drop down there is a disappointment until you get back to them again.

We love to look into the faces of our brethren in Christ, knowing that they also share with us in this precious enjoyment of Christ and of the Father, and if any fall below this we love to help such and to encourage them.

One can quite understand Peter saying. "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" He



could not understand the idea of the Lord humbling Himself to stoop down and wash his feet; but we see this act was necessary, for Jesus answered him, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” (John 13. 8.)

There is no such thing in the heavenly circle as will, pride, self-importance, or an overbearing spirit; there is no thought of any one pushing himself forward. Whatever would he want to push himself forward for? He would desire Christ to have the foremost place.

These few verses before us are of great importance in a day like the present, when we see what wonderful privileges are ours as Christians, even here, and thus are awaiting the higher privilege still of “beholding his glory”.

*H. D'A. Champney. (1924)*

## **PRAYER IN PUBLIC AND IN PRIVATE**

**“Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me”** (John 11:41)

How short, in general, are the public prayers recorded in scripture; and on the other hand, what constant reference we have there to long continued private prayer.

The Lord's prayer at the grave of Lazarus (really it was a thanksgiving) was in few words, but it was the expression, as the words themselves show, of a mind always with God in secret. “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people that stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me”. What quietness shines in that utterance, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me”. It was said aloud for the sake of the people that stand by, but such a prayer spoken in the hearing of others — brief and carrying conviction — was the fruit of what had already passed in secret between Himself and God.

Similarly, after being rejected by the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done (the secret exercises through which the Lord passed are not recorded, though prophetically the Psalms may tell us something about them); it is only recorded that “Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father,

Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it has seemed good in thy sight” (Matthew 11:25-26). He answered and said, “I thank thee, O Father”. How blest we should be if we also could give such an answer — an answer of submission and a joyful spirit, and answer of praise and thanksgiving — in the face of every untoward circumstance.

Compared with the Lord’s prayers anything on our part must seem poor, yet it is the simple truth — and this gospel of John shows it no less than the others — that the life and character exhibited in the Lord as Man are to be reproduced in us, according to our measure, if we live of Him. In particular — and this is what is before us at the moment — very strong statements are made about prayer in John’s gospel and epistle. “If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). Such sayings may offer some difficulty at first sight, and even if we come to understand them a little we shall always feel, and especially in reading the writings of John, that there is in the scripture that which is beyond our understanding. Still, at least such words of the Lord show us what is offered to us if we put ourselves in His hands and the Christian should be able to speak in some degree from experience of “the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14).

If, however, we are to learn His will, we must be prepared to listen more than to speak. “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth”. “He wakeneth mine ear morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned” (Isaiah 50:4). If we have listened much in this way, our speaking, especially speaking in prayer before others, will be of a chastened sort and not wordy. “When thou goest to the house of God... draw near to hear, rather than to give the sacrifice of fools” (Ecclesiastes 5:1). This does not mean that we are to refrain from speaking; but if fresh experiences, the matured result of secret prayer with God, preceded and coloured our public utterances, the latter would be briefer and for the hearers there would be greater certainty of spiritual interest and more encouragement, and thanksgiving in the hearts of all.

The privilege of prayer in the assembly is a humbling one. It is a subject that calls for reflection. We have always to remember that, in its primary character,

prayer is that which passes in secret with God. “Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6). The principle is not to be lost sight of, even on the occasions — few compared with the perpetual occasion for secret prayer — on which we pray aloud before others.

This primary character of prayer remains, though whatever is done in the hearing of others should have regard to their presence, and should be for edification: but edification not surely, in the case of prayer, by anything addressed to the hearers, but by the indirect, though not less effectual, influence of a true heart speaking in truth to God. If we keep this true character of prayer in mind we shall not be found saying in the prayer meeting things that ought rather to be poured out to God in our secret chamber, with the door shut and no onlooker even to say, Amen. Certainly we shall not be heard saying things to God about the shortcomings of others — in the guise of general confessions, not first taken home to ourselves — which we ought rather to say to them direct, if at all.

If we think of ourselves as individuals, we start each time in a sense from zero — not exalted, but altitude zero! Saul of Tarsus “fell to the earth”; and though he “arose... and was strengthened” and “Increased the more in strength” (Acts 9:22); though as he went on he could speak of paradise, and of heavenly places, he retained the personal sense of being less than the least of all saints. The altar of earth is compulsory (Exodus 20:24). But prayer in the assembly has rather a different character. True, there may be occasions when the whole company may have to confess its failure, to humble itself in contrition; and habitually any company of believers will be before God in a sense of weakness. But the one who gives expression to such exercises in the assembly has to be very careful, lest he be found confessing the faults of others rather than his own. That would be too easy; “the heart is deceitful” (Jeremiah 17:9).

The normal order is that secret and searching exercises with God lead to prayer in the assembly of a kind that is not far removed from thanksgiving and praise. Here again the Lord Himself is our example, not only in the gospels but in the spirit of Christ expressed in the Psalms. “I cry in the

daytime...and in the night season, and am not silent.” That is in secret. But afterwards, “In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (Psalm 22). Notice how many Psalms that begin with individual prayer close with the mind turned towards God’s interest in Israel centred in Zion. So Paul in 2 Corinthians shows how the deepest individual sufferings and distresses — “without were fightings, within were fears”, so that he despaired even of life — were fruitful in consolation and sympathy and thanksgiving among the many, so that this epistle often rises to the character of a psalm. Thus the assembly gets the fruit of individual exercises.

Thus we are brought back to the word, “Pray without ceasing” — above all in quietness. When we were children we used to ask how this were possible, seeing that we had so many other things to do. Now that we are no longer children perhaps we realise that we should do well to take the injunction rather more literally than we do. Without much prayer in secret any prayer spoken before others must lack character; indeed it will hardly ring true. The more prayer in private, the more refreshing and strengthening to the hearers will be any spoken prayer, and the more, it will be found, will such prayer be marked by a measure of rest, confidence and praise.

*J. B. Crosland (1931)*

## **WORSHIP — PART 2**

The first article in this series appeared in the previous issue. A brief summary of Part 1 is given below.

These are the great foundation truths of christian worship. We are made perfect in Christ, united to Him, brought into the presence of God (whose love and holiness are manifest without a veil) as children beloved of the Father, and objects of the same love with Christ the Firstborn. We worship together, according to the power and affections that the Spirit, who has been given to us, inspires. We worship the God of glory, whose presence is our comfort and support instead of being the terror of our souls. We worship the God of love, whose will it is that we should be perfectly happy in Him, that

He Himself might enjoy our happiness. We adore our Father having confidence in His kindness, which blesses us with all spiritual blessings, and counts the very hairs of our head, being thoughtful of all our present need. We adore Him for that which He is in Himself. We adore Him for that which He is to us, we being the children of His house for eternity. We each have the same Father and we therefore present ourselves in sweet communion as His beloved children, so that brotherly affections for one another are developed, the joy of each being mutually the joy of all. In this way multiplied praises ascend to God.

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We see in the New Testament that each christian must individually be in conscious relationship with the Father. Yet, at the same time, the Spirit constantly uses the words ‘we’, and ‘us’, when speaking of christian affections and feelings. Since the Holy Spirit sheds the love of God in our hearts, it could not be otherwise.

But the effect of the presence of this “one Spirit” goes yet further. He gives us also the consciousness of being but “one body” — “the body of Christ”, and “members one of another”. God has in Christ created the church — that “one new man” (Ephesians 2:15) — composed of the redeemed who have been “all baptised into one body”, and who offer worship in the “unity of the Spirit”. So they necessarily offer it as “one body”, and that “with all the saints”. They are the “habitation of God through the Spirit”; and, that Spirit uniting them all in the unity of the body of Christ, adoration ascends on high towards God, who formed them to be but “one new man” in Christ. Those who render direct worship to God, do so in the unity in which they are all “one body in Christ”. In this worship there is more than brotherhood. There is unity, not of nation, and not only of family, but of the members of one body formed as such, and indwelt by one Spirit. This is the privilege and position of the Church, which is baptised into “one body in Christ”, the Head being ascended up on high, in order that the members of the body may render worship freely and with joy before God, by the Holy Spirit which He has given.

It is evident, then, that worship is the privilege only of the children of God.

Being offered “in spirit and in truth” and being offered to Him who cannot admit sin into His presence, they, and they alone, who are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and who have received the Spirit, can draw near to God to adore Him. That a man who is not converted should render worship to God is simply impossible; for “without faith it is impossible to please God”. Such a one may be blessed in temporal things. He may, perhaps, ask such a blessing, and be heard...but as yet he knows not God, he has not the Spirit, he is not washed in the blood of Christ; and therefore it is utterly impossible for him to worship God.

To render true worship to God supposes that a soul is set at liberty, and is free to draw near to God, in virtue of the efficacy of the work of Christ. To be consciously in the presence of God, purified from all sin by the blood of Christ, “in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7), — such is the position of the true worshipper. This is the standing of the believer in Christ.

How delightful to be able thus to adore God! What a source of joy is He whom we adore! How great the blessedness of finding oneself in His presence, no cloud between Him and us, no tinge of fear, because there is no vestige of sin! For the believer, all has gone in the death of Christ. Being made the righteousness of God in Christ (See 2 Corinthians 5:21), the presence of God becomes an inexhaustible spring of happiness for that new nature which He has given to us, and which finds its enjoyment in Himself. What a joy to be able to express one’s acknowledgments, to render to Him one’s thanksgivings, knowing that they are acceptable to Him! What a blessing to have His very Spirit, the Spirit of liberty and of adoption, as our power of worship, as the inspirer of praise, of confidence, and of adoration! What joy thus to worship in unity, as members of the same family and of the same body, conscious that this joy is a joy common to all; knowing that those in the faith whom we love are infinitely precious and acceptable to the Lord, and that they all find their pleasure in praising Him who is worthy — the God who is the source of all our happiness — the Lord who gave Himself for us, in order that He might be our eternal portion.

The perfection of all this will be known only in heaven but christian worship is the realisation here below — in weakness, without doubt — of that which will be our eternal portion in heaven. We have the privilege now of feeling

ourselves for a little while separated from the world, withdrawn even from the work of faith, in order to enjoy that state of things in which Christ will see all the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. I repeat, worship is now offered in weakness, but it is in truth through the Spirit, and therefore on the principle of the unity of the whole body. It may be that there are but “two or three” present but being assembled in the name of Jesus, He who is the centre and bond of all the members is there; and, being offered through His Spirit, we are necessarily, and in love, bound up with all the other members of His one body. “We comprehend with all the saints” (be the number of those uniting together what it may) “the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge”.

The truth remains that spiritual life is cultivated in private, but it is called into exercise before God in all the common joy of the Church. I believe there will be in heaven itself an individual joy and communion with God, which will be known only to the one who is the subject of it. This precious truth is taught in that which is said to the Church of Pergamos: “To him that overcometh will I give a white stone, and a name written thereon which no one knoweth saving he that receiveth it”.

I add, that the ability actually to enjoy worship in communion depends upon the maintenance of the inner life; for how can we enjoy worship if God is not known and enjoyed in the soul? I add these few words lest any should suppose that the joy of fellowship may lead to the neglect of the individual, secret, hidden walk with God. This is far from my thought; if the latter be not maintained, either the worship will be empty and formal, or the joy will be merely natural and not of the Holy Spirit. The true blessedness of worship depends upon the presence of the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, upon the spiritual condition of those that are present as taking part in it. Of course, God in His sovereign goodness may intervene even where our spiritual state is poor.

These observations lead me to refer to a very important principle, namely, that the Holy Spirit is the energy, the sole living source, of all that takes place in worship so far as it is genuine. The principle, indeed, is true in all matters of spiritual life. We live by the Spirit. We walk by the Spirit. We worship in spirit and truth. It is the Spirit who contends against the flesh. It is

the affection of the Spirit that is the expression of the whole of the inward christian life. But in christian worship (the members of Christ being united together) the Spirit acts in the body. All that which is real and blessed comes from Him. Although sovereign in action, He acts according to the spiritual capacity of each and He uses His sovereign power in order to express the feelings that are suitable to the company as before God, to nourish and strengthen them by His grace. That which takes place ought to be according to the spiritual capacity of the company, raising it up, however, in the tone and spirit of worship, and leading it into the conscious enjoyment of the divine presence. It is thus that the Holy Spirit acts, for He acts in man, but according to the energy and grace of God. When christians are thus met together as members of Christ's body, each acting in his place through the Spirit, the opportunity is presented for the exercise of the gifts of the members that are for the edification of the body. The Spirit, then, acting in spiritual men in order to express the spiritual affections of the assembly, is the mode in which worship is rendered to God.

The sacrifice of Christ is the necessary and fundamental basis of all christian worship. We know that it is by means of this sacrifice alone that we can draw nigh to God, whose demands could only be met by its divine perfection. But this is not the only relation which exists between worship and the sacrifice of Christ. Christ having opened up to us this new and living way through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, we have full liberty to enter, through His blood, into the most holy place. But is that all? Do we forget the precious sacrifice, when once we have entered by virtue of its worthiness? No! It is there that we learn to appreciate its full value. Before entering, we might measure the value of the work of Christ by the need into which sin had plunged us. But now, brought into communion with God, tasting the sweetness of His love, instructed in His thoughts and affections, we measure the work of Christ by the grace of God which it reveals. Instead of seeing in it only that which the sinner sees, we see in it that which God sees in it. In the enjoyment of peace by virtue of this sacrifice we contemplate its value in the eye of God, and are nourished with its entire perfectness according to God's estimate. These thoughts and this vision are given to us by the Spirit to sanctify us — to bring



our hearts into harmony with the mind of heaven. We see also, in the offering He made of Himself, how great the love of Christ is for us.

The death of Christ has such a value in God's sight, as to constitute, so to speak, a new claim which He has on the affections of His Father. Thus, He who was "loved before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24), could say, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again" (John 10:17). By this act His devotedness to the glory of His Father was seen to be absolute. All that mysterious evil, by means of which Satan had sway in this world, and by which misery, death, and condemnation had entered, was turned to the manifestation of the glory of God. The righteousness, majesty, and love of God were, through the intervention of Him who consented to be "made sin for us", perfectly displayed. Then, if we consider the personal perfection of Christ, His devotedness to the will of the Father, His love, obedience, submission, sacrifice of all, even to life itself, His perfect patience, His confidence in God, which never failed even when He was forsaken, all are found united in the cross. Then to think who He was, and that it was for us He did it and suffered all — what a value ought His death to have in our sight! The power of Satan has been overcome, death destroyed — made even a gain for us, the veil removed from before the presence of God and a changeless perfection introduced into the whole universe. This perfection fills that universe with peace and light, and has made us the heirs and, more than all, brought us into the perfect enjoyment of the love of God! Our adoration necessarily links itself with the cross. There the God whom we adore was glorified; without it, His glory could not be fully displayed. At the cross we have learnt what God is.

Christ's cross is the expression of tender affection towards us, of love stronger than death. He loved us even unto the end. He undertook to render us happy in the presence of the Father. He counted nothing too dear to Him that He might accomplish this end. And His heart, perfect in love, rests on those whose cause He has undertaken. He has associated them with Himself. He, who had need of nothing, has need of us. "With desire", said He, "I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I will eat no more thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15). As the passover was Israel's memorial of the deliverance out of Egypt, so the

Lord's supper is the memorial not only of our deliverance, but of the love of Him who has delivered us.

If Jesus attaches value to our remembrance of Him and if He presents Himself to us with so much tenderness in the memorials of His dying love, that love, at the same time, produces in us the very deepest affections — affections which are connected with what is most exalted in the grace of God, and which express themselves in the adoration of the heart. We can understand, then, that although worship is offered in various ways, by hymns, thanksgivings, in the form of prayers, in praise etc., the Lord's supper is the centre of the exercise of worship. The worshipper is thereby reminded of that which is the most precious of all things in the sight of God — the death of His Son. He recalls the act in which the Saviour has testified His love in the most powerful way. The two grand elements of Christian worship are the presence of the Holy Spirit and the remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ, which is commemorated in the supper.

Now, in this worship the affections which are connected with all our relationships with God are developed. God, in His majesty, is adored. The gifts even of His providence are recognised. He who is a Spirit is worshipped in spirit and truth. We present to God, as our Father, the expression of the holy affections which He has produced in us; for He sought us when we were afar off, and has brought us near to Himself, as His beloved children, giving us the spirit of adoption, and associating us (wondrous grace) with His well-beloved Son. We adore our Saviour-God, who has purged us from our sins, and placed us in His presence without spot. His holiness and His righteousness, so marvellously displayed in our redemption, are to us a source of joy which passes not away. Through the perfect work of Christ, we are in the light, as He Himself is in the light. It is the Holy Spirit Himself who reveals to us these heavenly things, and the glory that is to come, and who works in us so as to produce affections suitable to such blessed relationships with God. He it is who is the bond of union between the heart and these things. But in thus drawing out our souls He makes us feel that we are children of the same family, and members of the same body, uniting us in this worship by means of mutual affections and feelings common to all towards Him who is the object of our worship. Worship is exercised in connection with the very

sweetest recollection of His love, whether we regard His work upon the cross, or whether we recall the thought of His ever fresh and tender affection for us. He desires our remembrance of Him.

How solemn therefore ought such worship to be! What sort of life should we be careful to lead in order to render it! How watchful we should be over our own spirits! How sensitive as to evil! With what earnestness should we seek the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, in order to render such worship suitably! Yet it should be very simple and truthful; for true affection is always simple, and at the same time devout. The majesty of Him whom we adore, and the greatness of His love, give solemnity to every act in which we draw near unto Him. With what deep affections and thankfulness should we at such times think of the Saviour, when we recall all His love for us — abiding through Him in the presence of God, far removed from all evil, in the foretaste of our eternal blessing.

There is another observation which the consideration of Scripture would suggest, namely, how much the worship will be affected by all that grieves the Holy Spirit. Every impediment, even in an individual, will make itself felt, if there be spirituality; for there is but “one body”. May God make us humble, watchful, and true to Him, and enable us to bear in mind that His Spirit abides with us, in order that we may be able to render spiritual worship.

God is known in the blessedness of His presence, where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus. If there were thousands of disciples gathered together in one place, there would be great encouragement in seeing such a work of the Spirit but the presence of Jesus Himself — the most precious of all things — is vouchsafed even to two or three of the least of those that are His, if it is truly in His name that they are met. Let it be only His name in which it is done. Let us seek always to avoid the fleshly pride which loves to make much of a gift and would claim lordship over God’s heritage — human arrangements which seek to avoid simple dependence upon God — the narrowness which would extend a welcome upon the ground of holding peculiar views — none of these is in the name of Christ. Nothing but spirituality, subject to the Scriptures and regulated by grace —

in a word, the guidance of the Spirit of God — can, in certain cases, discern between that which is a step forward, and that which is insisting upon some private view. The spirit of the world will stamp with the name ‘particular views’ all that which tends to make our responsibility to Christ deeper and more fully expressed; and a spirit of sectarian narrowness will treat as ‘progress’ all that makes much of its own notions. Then take the case of an assembly of worshippers truly founded upon the basis of the unity of the church of God; if the mass of the assembly is not in a state to bear that which would be a true step in advance, it is useless to insist upon it; to do so would tend to division rather than to progress. Such was the case with the Corinthians. These matters are illustrated in the New Testament. At Corinth the apostle had to nourish them with milk. They were not able to bear anything stronger. Yet when Paul was faced with a judaising spirit, which would compromise the gospel, the apostle refuses to stop (Hebrews 5:12-14, 6:1 & 4). We see in all this how the energetic wisdom of the Spirit of God is needed by the Church. It is not the intention of God that she should be able to do without it, or be exempt from dependence upon Him who gives it.

In relation to worship it is a sweet and precious privilege to anticipate that which will be our eternal employ in heaven! There our worship will be perfect. There, all the church in its completeness will be assembled to render worship in the midst of the general assembly on high. There, without distraction and without fear, worship will be its eternal joy in the perfect favour of God. What a privilege, even here below, to close the door for a moment upon all the distractions of this present world, and by the Spirit to satisfy the desires of the heart in rendering to God the thanksgiving which He is worthy to receive, and which in His grace, He has breathed into our souls.

*J. N. Darby*

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