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Living Water

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Recent Ministry

THE LORD ASSURING HIS OWN REGARDING THE TIME OF HIS ABSENCE

John 13: 1-5, 12-15, 31-35

14: 1-6

15: 1-8

16: 32-33

I have read from these passages having in mind the way in which the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples in a private way before His departure. I suppose that we can have some understanding of how the disciples must have felt when they knew they were going to lose the One they had been with for about three years. They had enjoyed His company, experienced His love and known His compassions; now He was going to leave them. So John, who was very near to the Lord, is the one used to give us an insight into the feelings of the Lord Jesus towards His own at such a time.

We are in the time of the Lord's absence. We have not seen the Lord. It is by faith that we are living our Christian pathway. Yet He is very near and I think it is good to go over how the Lord feels towards us and how He would assure us of His love for us. So the very first thing that we get in this farewell message (if I may so call it) from the Lord to His disciples, is that He reminds them, as departing out of this world, that He had loved them, *"Having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end"* (John13:1). Now, that word *"end"* here is not in relation to time. It means that the Lord was going to love them through whatever they were going to have to face. What an encouragement that is to us. None of us knows what we may have to face as we are in the last days of this day of grace.

We do not know when the Lord is coming; the timing of it is known to the Father alone (see Acts 1:7). We may have a sense that the Lord's coming is near but those at the beginning of this dispensation also had a sense, and rightly so, that it was near.

Now 2000 years have passed and yet the dispensation is continuing. It is not going to be extended; the time is fixed when the day of grace will finish.

In the meantime, in whatever time may be left to us we can be assured of His love. How great the Lord Jesus is. He knew *“that he came out from God and was going to God”* (John 13:3). Then what follows immediately on that is that He lays aside His garments and He serves His own. So the very first thing is that the Lord is assuring His disciples of His love for them; secondly, that great as He is as coming from God, at the same time He is prepared to serve them. He does that as an example of the way we should serve one another. In the present day the devil is set to rob us of the joy of our salvation and bring in division and break up among Christians. What I want to remind you of tonight is that we are brought into a company where we can know the One who loves us, One who will serve us and as we experience that, we can then serve one another. Jesus set an example: *“if I...the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet”* (John 13:14).

Now, what does it mean to do that? In actual fact, in the time of the gospels it was a literal washing of feet, but in the present day it refers more to the way in which we can encourage and refresh one another in spirit. We might bring a word of comfort, draw attention to a passage of Scripture, or speak of what we ourselves have enjoyed of the Lord. All those kind of things come into feet washing. Oh that we might be able to bring encouragement, cheer and help to one another. That was the first thing that the Lord laid on His disciples in relation to His going away.

Now it seems to me that it was because of that lowly service of feet washing that Judas had to go out. It says that he went out and it was night (see John 13:30). What an awful thing to have been in the presence of the Lord and yet never to have a living link with Him, and to go out. Now it is at this point, once Judas had gone out, that the Lord Jesus brings in something that is

**comfort ... is in the
Christian company.**

very important in relation to our being held together. It says, *"When therefore he was gone out Jesus says, Now is the Son of man glorified"* (John 13:31), then the

Lord goes on to speak about a new commandment, *"A new commandment I give to you"* (John 13:34). Now that Judas has gone out, the disciples that are left are those who, whatever their failings, truly loved the Lord. He gives the commandment to those who love Him, *"A new commandment I give to you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you"*. We might ask, 'Why does He do this?' Well, He is leaving them. They are going to be left in a hostile scene, as we are in a hostile world. So where is comfort going to come to any of us? It is as we are in the company of one another – it is in the Christian company.

So He tells the disciples that they are to love one another as He has loved them. Then He adds *"By this shall all know that ye are disciples of mine"* (John 13:35). Others are to see the expression of that love amongst believers and in that way, *"know that ye are disciples of mine"*. What a testimony there is in companies of Christians where you can see that love is working between one and another. It can be seen, it can be taken account of. It is not by what is said that disciples are to be marked out but *"by love amongst yourselves"*.

Well, that is what the Lord leaves with His disciples – His greatness and glory as the One coming from God and going to God, then His love for them, His readiness to serve them. We should be ready to serve one another and in doing so the love we show becomes a testimony to others. I think in the day in which we are living it is most important that we set a testimony to others in how we act and re-act with one another.

Now in chapter 14 the Lord takes account of the fact that the hearts of the disciples were troubled. He says, *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe on God, believe also on me"* (John 14:1). Then He tells them that He is going away to do something

for them. I think it is a wonderful encouragement to us. The Lord Jesus has gone away to prepare a place for us. He said to the disciples that they believed on God, *"believe also on me"*. We can absolutely depend on the One who is our Saviour and Lord. Do not let us try and look to anything else to depend on. There is One alone that we can put our full dependence and trust in.

The Lord has gone away but He has not forgotten us. He has gone to prepare a place for us. This place that He has prepared is in the Father's house. It is a place where everything speaks of God, everything reflects Christ, and everything is restful and marked by peace. The Lord tells His own, *"I go to prepare you a place; and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be"* (John 14:2-3). What a wonderful outlook that is.

There are many problems here, difficulties in employment and in families, problems in Christian companies, and in some parts of the world there is severe persecution of believers. Let us remember that our Lord Jesus is the Same. He is *"the same yesterday, and today, and to the ages to come"* (Hebrews 13:8). We have something to look forward to. The Lord Jesus twice makes the statement *"let not your heart be troubled"* (vv 1 & 27 of chapter 14). The Lord knows about our hearts and He would assure us that He has got things under control. He is coming again and He is going to receive us to Himself that where He is we shall be as well. What a glorious matter to look forward to.

Then Thomas (one of the twelve) asks about *"the way"* (John 14:5). There is not a lot recorded in Scripture about the words of Thomas, but what is recorded is very interesting and the answer that he gets here is very important. The Lord says, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father unless by me"* (John 14:6). That is a passage of the Bible used many times in the preaching of the gospel, but how important it is to all of us as we go through our daily pathway. Christ is *"the way"*, He is *"the truth"*, He is *"the life"*. Everything we need is to be found in Him. May that encourage us.

Now when we come to chapter 15 of John, the Lord speaks of Himself as the true vine. In other words, He is the One from whom we are to derive sustenance so that there might be fruit for God. The Lord encourages us to abide in Him, *“Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, thus neither can ye unless ye abide in me”*. (John 15:4). What does it mean to abide in Him? It means keeping near to Him. I feel this very much for myself, the need to keep very near to the Lord. If we are not abiding in Him there will be no fruit. If we know what it is to abide in Him we will bear much fruit (see John 15:5).

Then the Lord follows on with the words, *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall come to pass to you. In this is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit and ye shall become disciples of mine”* (John 15:7-8). Now I think that the secret of this is connected with abiding in Him. If we are keeping near to the Lord, we shall know His will and ask according to it and it will come to pass. I trust that this will be an encouragement to us because there are many things that need to be worked out today. Many have various concerns and problems to work out in relation to things here. Let us seek to keep near the Lord, abide in Him and not be afraid to ask. I have had to learn this for myself. There is nothing so simple that the Lord is not prepared to hear about it. There is a beautiful hymn:

***I need Thee every hour,
Most gracious Lord.***

How true it is.

Then in chapter 16, the Lord Jesus tells them again that the hour has come that the disciples are going to be scattered. He says, *“Behold the hour is coming, and has come, that ye shall be scattered, each to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me”* (John 16:32). The Lord continues: *“These things I have spoken to you that in me you might have peace”* (John 16:33).

This is something that we need at the present time – a sense of inward peace. There is a lot of scattering going on. Scattering has gone on over the years but all will be brought together very soon. There will be a great assembling shout and the whole church will be brought together. We shall be together for ever with the Lord. In the meantime let us have inward peace, peace and contentment. Peace in the knowledge of what has gone before – those things that we have read that the Lord said to the disciples. Then the Lord adds *“In the world ye have tribulation”*(John 16:33). Think of some of our brethren in Christ and what tribulation they are going through in various parts of the world. We feel for them. We can be very thankful for the way that we can meet together without difficulty, but let us remember those who do not have that favour and those that are in prison – *“In the world ye have tribulation”*. The Lord adds here a word of comfort: *“be of good courage: I have overcome the world”*.

May we all be held as trusting in Him. Let us be comforted by the words that the Lord Jesus spoke to the disciples as He was leaving them. They mean just as much in our day as at the time when He spoke them.

The chapter that follows (chapter 17) really finishes this line of teaching from the Lord to His disciples. It finishes in a prayer. It is one of the greatest passages of Scripture. When we read John 17 we see that the prayer of the Lord to His Father expresses His love for His own and is to the end that they may be held and kept. They are not going to be taken out of the world; they are to be kept as they go through it. We are included in that prayer. The Lord says, *“I do not demand for these only”*, that is for the disciples, *“but also for all who who believe on me through their word”* (John 17:20). What grace there is in that.

Well, may we be encouraged and be more committed to the Lord and to one another, for His name’s sake.

Arthur Coldrick

An address at Basildon,

Poetry Selection

A SONG FOR THE DAY OF ADVERSITY

*I know it, I believe it, I say it fearlessly,
That God, the Highest, Mightiest, for ever loveth me.
At all times, in all places, He standeth at my side,
He rules the battle fury, the tempest and the tide.
Through all the way's dark waters, His Spirit keeps me still,
He guards me in all sorrow, from terror and from ill:
In me He works and blesses the life-seed He has sown,
From Him I learn the power of the prayer of faith alone.
And if in lonely places, a fearful child, I shrink,
He prays the prayers within me I cannot ask or think:
The deep unspoken language, known only to that Love
Who fathoms the heart's mystery from the throne of light above.
His Spirit to my spirit sweet words of comfort saith,
How God the weak one strengthens who leans on Him in faith –
How He hath built a city of love, and light, and song
Where the eye at last beholdeth what the heart has loved so long.
The world may pass and perish, Thou, God will not remove,
No hatred of all devils can part me from Thy love;
No hungering, no thirsting, no poverty or care,
No wrath of mighty princes, can reach my shelter there.
No angel and no heaven, no throne, nor power, nor might,
No love, no tribulation, no danger, fear, nor fight;
No height, no depth, no creature that has been or can be,
Can drive me from Thy bosom, can sever me from Thee.*

*My heart in joy upleapeth; grief cannot linger there;
While singing of His glory, amid the sunshine fair:
The source of all my singing is high in heaven above,
The Sun that shines upon me is Jesus and His love.*

Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676)

*Extracts from "A Song for the Day of the East Wind" as translated by
Mrs Frances Bevan (1827-1909)*

THE TIME WE AWAIT

*Perhaps when the morn is dawning of some glorious autumn day,
When the sun's bright light is gleaming along the darksome way,
When the birds begin to twitter from the shelter of the tree,
Perhaps, then, our own dear Saviour will return for you and me.*

*Perhaps in burning noonday when the morning's toil is o'er,
And the sun with noon-day brightness its rays on earth does pour.
The workmen rest from their labours under the shade of a tree,
Perhaps in the heat of the noonday, He may come for you and me!*

*Perhaps on a Sunday service, when the gospel note is clear,
And God's servant preaches "Jesus", that the Saviour may appear;
While the word is being spoken the archangel's voice may sound,
In an instant with the Saviour, the blood-bought church is found.*

*Perhaps when I'm in the schoolroom, in the midst of busy life
Teaching the children their lessons or meeting petty strife,
Yes, occupied with my duties with the children all around;
In the very midst of a lesson, the trumpet note may sound.*

*Perhaps on a Sunday morning with heart and mind set free,
We keep His own sweet commandment, 'This do, remember Me';
As around Himself we gather, then our loving Lord may come
To receive His blood-bought people, to His happy, heavenly home.
Then remembering will be over, we shall see Him face to face,
We shall praise Him then for ever for His boundless love and grace.
We shall be with Him for ever and never grieve Him more,
Then we'll worship and adore Him, who all our sorrows bore.
Oh, surely it does not matter, the moment or the hour
When the Lord will gather His loved ones, then reign in strength and power.
But until that moment cometh may we ever faithful be
Daily and hourly watching His own blessed face to see.*

D. A. Y.

This poem was first published by Miss M Fuller of Lewes, Sussex

THE SPRINGING WELL

"Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it" (Numbers 22:17)

*Blest Holy Spirit, "Well" divine,
With joy we sing to Thee,
We thank Thee for that grace of Thine
Which sets our spirits free.
We bless Thee for that upward spring
Which in our souls we know,
That links us with the realms above
Whence living waters flow.*

To glorify the Son of God
Is e'er Thy blest employ,
To take His things and show them us
And fill our hearts with joy.

What praise and thanks we owe to Thee
We render worship now,
The glory of Thy Person see,
In love before Thee bow.

In adoration deep and full
We would Thy service own,
'Glory to Thee!' our hearts exclaim,
And glory to the Son.

William Chesterfield

Testimony Section

SUMMER IN THE SOUL

Elizabeth Rundle Charles (1828 – 1896) was a prolific author. Her most well-known book is "The Chronicles of the Schonburg-Cotta Family", an account intended to bring the times of the Reformation vividly to life. She lived near Tavistock – her father, John Rundle, being for many years the Member of Parliament for the town.

She came to trust in Christ in her early twenties but prior to this she had been very much under the influence of the High Church Oxford Movement and was likely to become a Roman Catholic. She was converted, through the service of Cesar Malan who was staying at Buckland Abbey, Devon at the same time as she was. At first she was not at all impressed by Malan's teaching but here Mrs Charles takes up the story:-

At last, one sunny Sunday morning Cesar Malan walked home with me from the village church. We came to the beautiful avenues of beech trees intersecting each other, below which the river Tavy flowed through the woods.

Then, putting controversy aside, he spoke to me simply of the immeasurable and unmerited love of God; of the burden of sin borne away by the Redeemer, the Lamb of God; of the gift of undying life; of the deep meaning of the expression, 'child of God'; of faith in the Saviour as the sign of this blessed and eternal relationship. 'We cannot', he said, 'love before we live. We cannot ourselves be authors of our own life. God loves us, not because we are worthy; but His love will make its object worthy'.

Then, very solemnly he said, 'I am no priest; no consecrating hand has been laid upon me; but if you believe in Jesus, I say unto you, as He said to the penitent who washed His feet with her tears *"Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee"*.'

A strange power came with those words and silenced all controversy. I returned to my own room. For the first time I seemed to forget and lose myself altogether, my struggles, my sufferings, my good and evil works and could only fall on my knees in an agony of tears and say, 'My God! Guide me'. I felt I was speaking to God, and that He heard me. Still the fetters were not broken, though they were loosened. I thought it a fearful danger to reject light once received. And that night I repeated the Roman devotions that I had repeated every night for many months.

Many conversations followed, some of which did not affect me in the least – as if to show that it was not man's voice but God's that could touch the heart. Still the light increased slowly. I began to see that the work of our redemption is not ours but God's, that Christ has borne away our sins, has redeemed us with His precious blood, has reconciled us to God – until, one night, in the solitude of my own room, I came altogether back, like the prodigal, to the Father's heart. I had scarcely dared to seek the wages of

a hired servant; and now God Himself had compassion on me from afar, and the Spirit bore witness with my spirit that I was His child. I loved Him because He had first loved me! For hours I was conscious of nothing but the absorbing joy. 'My Father! I am Thy child'.

**I had been toiling
to build a tower,
whose top should
reach unto heaven.**

I was reconciled to the Creator, and could seek His presence, instead of flying from it; I could labour for the sake of Him who died for our sakes; life was a feast of thanks giving to Him; death was but the rending of the last veil of separation. All things were restored to harmony because they were restored to their true centre. It seemed as if I had never known what love was until I knew what the love of God was.

Then all ecclesiastical questions sank naturally into their right places. God was infinitely nearer to me than any being He had created, any society even, which He continually creates, could be. What could be nearer to God than His own Son? Or what could be nearer to us than He who is Head of the body? Himself the Way and the Truth; Himself the Sacrifice and the Priest; Himself the door of the fold and the Shepherd of the sheep. All things are ours in Him; and in Him none of us belongeth to himself but each through Him to all. The true church was the band of the redeemed who own no Master but their Redeemer.

From a weary labourer, worn with slavish and ineffectual toil, I had become as a little child receiving from God the free gift of eternal life and of daily sustenance. Prayer, from being a weary spiritual exercise, had become the simple asking from the Heavenly Father of daily bread and thanking Him.

I had been toiling to build a tower, whose top should reach unto heaven, and in a moment all my laborious constructions were scattered, and I found that they had only been prisons. God Himself came down into my heart and drew my heart to Him.

If at any time this life grows feeble or low, I know no other remedy but to return to its eternal source, to God Himself and through Him all becomes living again and true.

*Autumn was on the earth
When Summer came to me;
The "Summer in the soul",
And set the life springs free.*

*Darkness was on my life,
A heavy weight of night,
When rose the sun within
And filled my heart with light.*

*Ice lay upon my heart,
Ice fetters still and strong,
When the living spring gushed forth
And filled my soul with song.*

*That summer shall not fade,
That Sun it setteth never;
The Fountain in my heart
Springs full and fresh for ever.*

*Since I have learned Thy love,
My Summer, Lord, Thou art
Summer to me, and Day,
And life springs to my heart.*

*Thy blood can cleanse from sin,
Thy love casts out my fear;
Heaven is no longer far,
Since Thou, its Sun, art near.*

Elizabeth Rundle Charles (1828 – 1896)

A Voice from the Past

MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS

There is an imprint of wisdom and power on all the works of God, which evidently distinguishes them from the feeble imitations of men. Not only the splendour of the sun, but the glimmering of the glow worm, proclaim His glory. The structure and growth of a blade of grass are the effects of the same power which produced the fabric of the heavens and the earth.

In His word likewise, He is inimitable. He has a style and manner peculiarly His own. What He is pleased to declare of Himself by

the prophet may be prefixed as a proper motto to the whole revelation of His will in the Bible: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

This superiority of His thoughts to ours causes a similar difference in His manner of operation. His ways are above our conceptions, and often contrary to them. He sometimes produces great effects, by means which, to us, appear unsuitable and weak. Thus He gave Gideon a complete victory, not by providing him with an army equal to his enemy, but by three hundred men armed with earthen pitchers and lamps (see Judges 7:19-20). At other times the greatness of His preparations, intimates that there are difficulties in the case, insuperable to any power but His own, where our narrow apprehensions, until enlightened and enlarged by His teaching, can scarcely perceive any difficulty.

It is eminently so with respect to the salvation of fallen man. We have but slight thoughts of His holiness, and therefore are but slightly affected by the evil of sin. But though He be rich in mercy, no wisdom but His own could have proposed an expedient, whereby the exercise of His mercy towards sinners might be made to correspond with His justice and truth, and with the honour of His moral government. His gospel reveals this expedient, and points out a way in which mercy and truth meet together, and His inflexible righteousness is displayed, in perfect harmony with the peace of sinners who submit to His appointment; and thus God is not only gracious but just, in receiving them to favour.

This is the greatest of all His works, and exhibits the most glorious discovery of His character and perfections. The means are equal to the grandeur of the design and are simply expressed in the text from Isaiah: *“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”* (Isaiah 7:14).

John Newton (1725-1807)

ELIJAH

“Elias was a man of like passions to us, and he prayed with prayer that it should not rain; and it did not rain upon the earth three years and six months; and again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to spring forth” (James 5:17 – 18).

Elijah loved God’s people and laboured to bring them into the greatness of what was in the purposes of God for them. To get the rain, Elijah had to put his face between his knees; that is what we learn from the account in the 1st Book of Kings about this incident that James refers to. James says that Elias was a man of like passions to ourselves, meaning that he was not a superman. He loved God’s people, he loved Israel; he loved the twelve tribes. At one time he thought that he was the only one who did so, but God corrected him on that.

God can correct us. He may have to do a lot of correction. He will correct us in order to keep us useful to Him. Elijah was useful, and he was a prophet, a bold one; and we need to be bold, we need to have courage. Do not get frightened at the difficulties. Many get frightened by the difficulties, for they seem beyond them; but Elijah was not like that, he was a courageous man, yet he fled from queen Jezebel. You might say, ‘Where was his courage then?’ But still God protected him.

God does not expose us unless He has to. You can look back over your life and see that, can you not? It is good to look back over your life and see how God has acted towards you and in you too. Not only has He saved you from many disasters, but He could have exposed you, but He did not do so. God in His patience kept on with us and brought us round to His judgements and to His viewpoint and brought about a state of contrition in our souls too. How good it is to be kept in a state of contrition and to be lowly! As soon as we get anything but lowly, then we are in danger; but we

**He could have
exposed you, but
He did not do so**

want to keep lowly, committed to God, to His interests and to His people.

In the incident recorded in James Elisha was not acting on his gift because we do not need any special gift to pray. We need right, clear relations with God. The best way to serve God's people is to be able to get to God. According to the record in the first book of Kings, when Elisha prayed he "*put his face between his knees*" (1 Kings 18:42). Such was the power that was required to move God that the rain might come. But he went through it seven times. Seven times he sent his servant to look and for six of those times there was nothing. Then on the seventh occasion the servant saw "*a cloud, small as a man's hand, arising out of the sea*" (1 Kings 18:44). Well, that is Elijah. How many are there who are marked by the spirit of Elijah?

Many Elijahs are needed. I suppose there is an Elijah needed in every Christian company, one who prays to God for His people here. What needs there are! You may say that Christ is in heaven to keep God in touch with His people, but then God rejoices in those that go to Him, praying for the needs of His people. Have you been to God today to speak to Him about the needs of the believers in the place where you live?

Get accustomed to going to God in relation to the welfare and spiritual prosperity of the people of God in the locality in which you are. Pray for those who are growing cold. Pray for those who are enthusiastic in regard to the testimony. Keep Him informed about it and move Him so that He might do more and more.

James says of Elijah that he is a "*man of like passions to us*". So you cannot excuse yourself and let yourself out of this at all. If you are just the same as he, then why do you not do the same as he did? If you are no way stronger than he and no weaker than he, and your circumstances are not more difficult than his, but lighter, then you can do just the same as he did. And what did he do? He kept God well informed about the current needs in Israel and urged God to come in with blessing in giving rain; and God did so too.

F. W. Trussler

Extract from an address in Wellington, New Zealand

A word for Today

SERVING GOD

Everyone who genuinely from the heart is trusting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ will have some sense of obligation to serve God.

There are three aspects to the service of God:

- Firstly, we want to serve Him by offering a continual sacrifice of praise (see Hebrews 13:15).
- Secondly, we want to take our part in His work, to serve in His cause, in the interests of His name.
- Thirdly, we are to serve God at all times in all that we do. We are to do all things, whatever they are, whether we eat or drink – for His glory (see 1 Corinthians 10:31).

We must be careful about these categories since they are in fact inter-linked. Examples from the Bible will show that the same spiritual character and nearness to God that leads to praise is required for the second and third aspects of service if it is to be undertaken in a way that is pleasing to God. Let us look at each of these aspects.

Serving God by offering the sacrifice of praise continually

This is the highest sense in which the people of God are occupied in His service. In the Bible the Greek word “latreuo” (serve), is used to denote direct service to God. Such service may be purely and directly in worship, thanksgiving or prayer, or it may be associated with beneficent activity towards others; but in the latter case it is viewed as carried out in immediate nearness and communion with God.

One of the simplest references to this character of service is the Lord’s words at the temptation, asserting the first duty and highest blessedness of man: *“It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve”* (latreuo) (Luke4:8).

What is said of Anna in Luke 2:36-38 is a further illustration. We read that *"she departed not from the temple, but served (latreuo) God with fastings and prayers, night and day"*. The references to *"fastings"*, *"prayers"*, and the *"temple"* illustrate the character of this highest service; God Himself is its object. Just as in the passage quoted in the preceding paragraph, such service is associated with worship, so here it is connected with *"prayer"* and *"the temple"*, and again with the temple in Revelation 7:15: they *"serve (latreuo) him day and night in his temple"*.

Such being Anna's unceasing employment, it is not surprising that, coming in at the moment when Simeon was blessing the Child Jesus and His mother and Joseph, her mind was in tune with the occasion and she *"gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem"* – spiritual ministrations to others followed from habitual communion with God.

Scripture is full of examples of this order of service. We have a very clear one in the woman, who brought an alabaster box of ointment, very precious, and poured it on the head of Jesus. There were those then, as there are many now, who would write down as waste such expenditure of time and substance in the service of God alone; as if the resulting benefit to man were the measure of value of any service. *"There were some that had indignation among themselves, and said, Why was this waste of ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whenever ye will ye may do them good; but me ye have not always"* (Mark 14:3-9).

If we are taken up to be a people for God, our service is not to stop short of this highest character of devotion. The command of God to Pharaoh was, *"Let my people go, that they may serve*

All believers are priests

me" (Exodus 8:1); it would be Israel's highest blessedness thus to serve God. *"Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation"* (Exodus 19:6), and this is carried into our day by John in the opening of the Revelation (see Revelation 1:6). All believers are priests and the principle of it is within the reach of the youngest believer, for it is of vital moment that everyone should be marked by prayer and thanksgiving.

If we are to *"serve (latreuo) God acceptably with reverence and godly fear"* (Hebrews 12:28) we must learn what it is to be priests to God. We find our place in spirit in that priesthood, if having *"tasted that the Lord is gracious"* – which is the first great step in blessing. We come to Him as the One rejected of men but chosen of God. This is the second great step: *"To whom coming, a living stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious, 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"* (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Serving God as having part in His work

It is open to us to serve God in the sense of engaging ourselves in His specific interests, to be soldiers in His cause. In the sense we are now speaking of, the servant is a soldier, and a soldier has a special allegiance; *"no man going as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of life, that he may please him who has enlisted him as a soldier"* (2 Timothy 2:4).

Some examples from the New Testament may help us to see the distinctiveness of this second form of service to God. In Luke we read that Jesus *"went through every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene...and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance"* (Luke 8:1-

3). The Lord was Himself here the great Servant; and it is characteristic of His ways with His servants that He associates both men and women, in His service.

how did the members of the house of Stephanas serve?

Paul writes of Timothy: *"Ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he served with me in the gospel"*. And he calls Epaphroditus not only *"my brother"* but also my *"companion in labour and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants"* (Philippians 2:22 & 25). Again, to the Corinthians Paul writes: *"I beseech you, brethren (ye know the house of Stephanas... that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) that ye submit yourselves unto such and to every one that helpeth with us and laboureth"* (1 Corinthians 16:15-16). Here we have a whole household engaged in service, and the blessing extended to everyone who is prepared for the sacrifice required for so helping and so labouring, with the remarkable exhortation to the saints generally to submit themselves to such.

This passage is worth considering in connection with the question sometimes asked, 'In what way can I serve?' Well, how did the members of the house of Stephanas serve? Apparently by attending, according to their abilities and opportunities, to everything that might be for the welfare of their brethren, spiritually or otherwise. Not a bad starting point! But we need simplicity of heart and faith in God.

It is in connection with the preaching of the gospel that Paul says: *"God is my witness, whom I serve (latreuo) with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing, I make mention of you always at my prayers"* (Romans 1:9). And in chapter 15 he speaks of carrying on his work among the Gentiles as a sacrificial service, *"ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of*

the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:16).

Service of such kind in furthering the Lord’s interests in the church or in the gospel in the widest sense, is referred to generally at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, the long chapter about the resurrection of Christ and its consequences for us: *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:58). It does not say, ‘always abounding in your service’, but *“in the work of the Lord”*. It is in His work, not ours that we are engaged. If at times the work seems difficult or discouraging, we are to be steadfast, and prepared to endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (see 2 Timothy 2:3). If we do the will of God from the heart we can always be sure that our labour will not be in vain. Time will be on our side; eternity will be on our side, for *“he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”* (1 John 2:17); nothing of that doing will fall to the ground, or be lost; its fruit will remain; it will be raised up at the last day.

Sometimes we may labour patiently, and in the wise ordering of God it is given to others to do the reaping. If so, how glad we should be! But the converse is certainly true: others have laboured and we have entered into their labours. We stand on the shoulders of others, generations who have served God in hard conditions, and have ploughed the earth in patience and sown the seed of which we, with something less of suffering, are now reaping the harvest. Mindful of their hard lot we may well take up the tasks we find to our hand, looking on to the day when they that sow and they that reap shall rejoice together (see John 4:34-38).

Serving God at all times

The Thessalonians who had believed the gospel – which had come to them *“not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost”* had *“turned to God from idols to serve the living and true*

God" (1 Thessalonians 1); and the same is true of every believer, though the idols from which we have turned may be different from theirs. In this sense our whole life is to be lived in the service of God; we are no longer to be the servants of sin – we are to yield ourselves to God (*"as free...but as servants of God"* [1 Peter 2:16]). We are to *"learn to maintain good works"* that we be not unfruitful (Titus 3:14). Slaves as obeying their masters with singleness of heart were to do so, *"as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart"* (Ephesians 6:6).

As we have opportunity we are *"to do good unto all men, especially them who are of the household of faith"* (Galatians 6:10); and we are to do this as serving God. It is in the sense that our whole lives are to be lived in the service of God that the apostle Paul in writing to the Romans in chapter 6 speaks simply and generally of yielding ourselves to God for the service of righteousness (see Romans 6:13). Then in chapter 12, after the outburst of worship which closes chapter 11, he brings forward this practical exhortation with a more intimate appeal: *"I beseech you, therefore, brethren,, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (latreuo)"* (Romans 12:1-3).

An interesting example is found in the narrative of the shipwreck in Acts 27. Paul, brought into contact with soldiers and sailors, among whom he was a prisoner, is able to take a practical interest in their welfare in circumstances of much distress; yet however considerate and helpful his action towards his fellow-travellers, he is, first and always, serving God in his spirit, so that he can speak naturally to them, and in a way that must have carried conviction, of the *"God whose I am and whom I serve (latreuo)"* (Acts 27:23). And when he encourages them to take food for their bodily needs it is deemed worthy of record that *"he took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all."*

A few words of application

We can see from these examples that all service to God should be marked by the same spirit and closeness to God that marks us as worshippers.

Many other passages in both the Old and New Testament, while throwing light on the ways in which the *"bondman of God"* may unaffectedly serve Him, indicate clearly that the idea of service as set before us in the Scriptures,

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starting as it does from a definite acknowledgement of the will of God – is by no means that which is current in the world. It is well therefore at the outset to be candid with ourselves as to the influences under which we are moving in anything we may desire to undertake in the service of God. Is it God we are out to serve, or only men? Paul writes, *"Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ"* (Galatians 1:10). The answer will make all the difference to the mind in which we serve; for God wants fit vessels, *"fit for the Master's use"*; only thus can we be *"prepared unto every good work"* (2 Timothy 2:21). It will affect the whole character of our activity, and of course it will greatly affect the end we have in view in it.

If we are to serve God we must, in our thoughts and aims, put Him first throughout. If we put man first (and nothing is easier) we shall move in our souls insensibly but none the less surely, downhill, away from God, even though what we do we may call by the name of service.

Jesus said, *"If any man serve me, let him follow me"* (John 12:26). Often the question is whether we are minded to go our own way in what we may suppose to be doing good, or whether we really hold ourselves as disciples of Christ, following Him, learning from Him. The apostles were chosen by the Lord and

had to learn from Him. There were twelve that were appointed *“that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach”* (Mark 3:14). It was from Him that they went forth (see Mark 6:7), and to Him they returned: *“the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught”* (Mark 6:30). To be in His company and to learn from Him, besides being an end in itself, is an essential preliminary to any task on which He may send us. If He is our Lord and Master we do not want to rush off, like impatient children, without first being attentive to His commands: and we are always to return to Him.

We need to have our minds progressively informed by the Scriptures, that we be not as those who missed their way, having *“zeal for God, but not according to knowledge”* (Romans 10:2). The Lord has Himself shown us the way; He *“went about doing good”*, but as *“One anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power... for God was with him”* (Acts 10:38). He was the obedient and dependant One; He pleased God; He served God. He only looked to God and not at all to man. The point is not whether we are doing something that men will recognise as service, but whether in faith we are obeying and pleasing the Lord. Without faith it is impossible to please Him.

This is a motive beyond the world's understanding, yet it is of paramount importance, and the point at which real sacrifice of self is tested. And while we may be able to help each other with suggestions and opportunities for giving practical expression to our desire to serve, each of us must look to the Lord Himself for direction. *“The Lord give thee understanding in all things”* (2 Timothy 2:7)

The apostle Paul sums up the outward conditions of his life as a servant of God as *“For this we labour and suffer reproach, because we hope in a living God, who is preserver of all men, specially of those that believe”* (1 Timothy 4:10). *“Labour”* and *“reproach”* are two things that, in whatever different ways or varying degrees, mark the life of every servant of God.

A man of the world, seeing only the outside, might ask if such a life is worth living. Paul's answer is clear and confident, and every true servant of God will follow him in this confidence: *"We trust in the living God"*. No one can find, in heaven or on earth, any firmer basis of hope than that. With such a hope his soul was securely anchored. It was no question of the formal assertion of a creed merely; his hope was in the living God, and he knew that his life of labour and reproach was one of abounding blessedness. He could wish nothing better for others than that they too should be in it.

Alone and a prisoner, he could say to King Agrippa, *"I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds"* (Acts 26:29). The superior good fortune, as many would see it, of Agrippa, surrounded by pomp and splendour, aroused no envy with Paul; despite his prisoner's chain he could take up the language of the Psalm, *"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea I have a goodly heritage"* (Psalm 16).

To serve God by His will is the only worthy purpose of a man's life, the only aim which can sanctify it and make it eternally fruitful, the only central and commanding interest that can leave behind it no regrets. Whether we are young or old may we respond with decision of heart to the exhortation to *"no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh to the lusts of men but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles"* (1 Peter 4:2-3).

May God help us to find true blessedness by serving Him with all our heart.

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This article is formed of extracts from a longer paper by J. B. Crosland on the same subject