

WORDS OF

Exhortation and Doctrine.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all
wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one
another.”—Col. iii. 16.

REVISED NOTES OF LECTURES
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LONDON :
G. MORRISH, 20, PATERNOSTER SQUARE.

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WORDS OF EXHORTATION AND DOCTRINE.

I.

FAITH AND LOVE.

(1 THESS. III.)

WHAT led me to read this chapter, though I desire to refer to those which precede, is the occurrence several times of the word "faith," and it is that which is before me to dwell upon.

The anxiety of the apostle for these Thessalonian saints *as to their faith* is manifested here. There was a great deal of opposition from Satan, and the apostle feared lest what had been ministered to them should become dim in their souls. The gospel of God concerning our Lord Jesus Christ had been preached to them, and He had become the Object of their faith, and the apostle feared lest their eyes might be dimmed as to this Object; lest they might fail in faith and so be cast down, and thus the light

of eternal things into which they had been brought might grow dim.

It was on account of this that he sent Timothy to establish them, and to comfort them concerning their faith. He wanted them to be strengthened and encouraged in this matter of faith, and that is a great point for us all here to-night. I see how God delights to encourage us from the youngest to the oldest. The Thessalonian saints were young in the faith, and became the mark for Satan's opposition in a special way, but those of us who are older in the faith can testify to the young, of how we have been encouraged from the first moment we believed up to the present. The brightness of all that is revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ has again and again been the comfort and strength of our souls, ministered to us through His care for us.

The special attack of Satan against these young Thessalonian believers has been compared to the attack of Amalek upon Israel when they were delivered out of the land of Egypt. Amalek came behind them, and smote the feeble when they were faint and weary. The Thessalonians had been brought out of the world, but they were young in the faith, and though the apostle had warned them as to the temptation which might beset them through the persecution

of himself, and the hostility of their own countrymen, yet we see his anxiety lest Satan's temptation might have dimmed the brightness of their faith. I would like to ask every one here to-night whether the brightness that first shone in your soul, when Christ was found of you as a Saviour, has grown dim in any way? Is He the light of your hearts to-night, notwithstanding the effort of Satan to cast you down by opposition or temptation? I can understand these Thessalonians being tempted to wonder, whether all that had been put before them was true, when they saw how Satan had prevented Paul being with them. It was the case with Israel, in the moment of temptation, they said, "Is the Lord among us or not?" But it is very beautiful to see how the love of God and the grace of Christ wrought in the apostle as to the Thessalonians, and his consequent anxiety as to their faith, that they should be encouraged, and their hearts be kept in the brightness of what had been ministered to them. It is encouragement for us as to the care of God for our faith in His blessed Son. Not that I want you to be occupied with the work of God in you, but I would desire that even the youngest should be maintained in the light of what has been effected for us by and presented to us in Christ.

Now I would like to refer to the preceding

chapters, in order to shew the relationships in which the Thessalonians had been set. They were a young assembly; Paul had been only with them three sabbath days when he was driven away by persecution, and he could not find opportunity to return to them through Satan's opposition; but young as they were, they had been brought into Christianity. There is no other church addressed in the same way as being "In God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ." These are the two great relationships of Christianity, and young as these saints were in the faith, they knew them; they had been delivered out of the world of heathendom, and brought into these new relationships. It is an immense thing for our souls to be established in the simplicity of these relationships. I quite admit that we are in different circumstances to those surrounding the Thessalonians. We are perhaps more like the Hebrews. They had around them a system of religion in which they had been brought up, and that has been the case with many of us. Most of the religious systems call God "Father," though more often He is addressed as "Almighty God," but with them the name of Father (save with the few) is used more as denoting the beneficent Ruler of the universe, and generally speaking He is regarded as Father to everybody, but the

knowledge of Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is little understood; but in this relationship the Thessalonians were set. Again, Christ is often spoken of as Lord, yet with many there is little meaning in it. Few Christians understand His exaltation as the One who has effected everything for God down here, and that He is at the right hand of God to give effect to all that He has made good in His wonderful work of redemption, so that in calling Him "Lord," Christians speak as those who are in the new order of things which is "by him." The systems of Christendom have perverted these relationships, and we have to contend with that state of things. The opposition the Thessalonians had to contend with was from their own countrymen, and took the form of persecution. Still it is very sweet to see that in this epistle the apostle speaks to them of the blessed and new relationships in which they were set; they are the normal relationships of Christianity, and are not of this world, nor of its course.

If we turn for a moment to the Epistle to the Hebrews, we see that in their souls they had not really quitted Judaism, and the apostle writes to them thus: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles

of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." (Chap. v. 12.) Judaism is looked at in this epistle as a state of minority, and Christianity of perfection. The law made nothing perfect, and at best the Jew was only under tutors and governors, but Christianity is connected with a risen and glorified Man. In a certain way the Jews had in the tabernacle and its services the foreshadowing of the good things to come in by Christ, and when He came to them heavenly things were presented in His Person ; but it was not until He had risen again and ascended that He could reveal the relationships which belong to another world altogether. All that went before—even the knowing of Christ after the flesh—is looked at as the state of those who are under age. But in John's epistle we get what is proper to Christianity, and though there are "little children," they do not belong to the *state* of nonage, but they are regarded as on christian ground : they know the Father. The apostle does not speak to the Hebrews definitely of the Father, nor of their relationship to the Father, he is seeking to lead them into Christianity, and away from Judaism ; and his great point is to put them consciously into association with Christ, and the scene into which He has entered and in which He ministers.

Now if you look at this epistle to the Thessalonians, you see how completely they had been taken out of the world, and set in these new relationships. No one could suppose that the name of Father, or of the Lord Jesus Christ, could be connected with the heathen world out of which the Thessalonians had been converted. The great hindrance to-day is a christianised world. The constant hindrance to the saints in the apostle's day was Judaism, because there was an immense difference between heathendom and Judaism outwardly, but the death of Christ delivered from the one as from the other, so Peter writes, "redeemed . . . from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers, by the precious blood of Christ." We have to learn that though the Gentiles have turned round from heathendom to nominal Christianity, we cannot connect the Father's name with the present course of things; "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world." Nor can we connect the Lord Jesus Christ with the existing kingdom of the world ("My kingdom is not of this world"), though the christianised world may call Him "Lord" in name. Now the Thessalonians had been brought into the light of the glory of Christ as Lord at God's right hand,

and had been brought to wait for His coming again. What was hanging over the world was the wrath to come, and it still hangs over it. Jesus had delivered them from it, and they knew Him as Lord. To them, too, God was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this connected them not only with a new scene but with new affections.

In chapter ii. we see these affections coming out between the apostle and themselves. Paul had gone to them as a total stranger to impart to them the gospel of God, and the tenderest links had been formed between him and them. He and those with him had been gentle among them, even as *a nurse* cherishing her children. After that he says : “ We exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as *a father* doth his children.” First he had been a nurse, then a father, among them. Here again we have new affections formed outside the course of this world.

Now I would ask, Do we know what it is to be in a wholly new circle of associations of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the centre? The effect is, our hearts are drawn to heaven where He is, and to wait for Him from thence. You know in the history of Israel how God brought them out of Egypt with the thought of Canaan before them. That was God’s purpose for them,

and His purpose for us is His own world of glory. The wilderness in the ways of God lay between Egypt and Canaan, but all the way through it what lay before them was Canaan. He led them through the wilderness to prove them, but in it they experienced what He was to them. They learned Him as their salvation, and if He saved them He cared for them : He gave them manna and water from the rock ; He delivered them in conflict, and at the close their feet had not swelled, nor had their garments waxed old. But besides this, they carried with them the tabernacle of testimony, the figurative representation of heavenly things : in it there was the testimony of God's thoughts in connection with Christ and the world to come. They did not understand it, but it was there as light for them, though they were not yet in Canaan, and had not reached the mountain of God's inheritance.

Now the time here may lengthen out for us, but like Israel or the Thessalonians, we learn the care of God for us. The sense of it was conveyed to the Thessalonians, as we have seen, through Paul. He preached to them the gospel, and then cherished them as a nurse, and cared for them as a father, thus they became conscious of new drawings of love which linked them with the outflow of the grace of God ; and the blessed

God has formed links for us also, so that while the Father and the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the source and centre of the new relationships into which we are brought, we are ministered to and cared for while the time lengthens out; and in the assembly we find that which Israel should have learned in the tabernacle, God's mind as to the saints in association with Christ, that which will come out for us in the heavenly Jerusalem, but of which we have the light now; and in the light of heaven and heavenly relationships we are made to increase and abound in love towards each other.

Another word as to the Lord's coming. I am no prophet, and I do not pretend to put events together, but I must believe that His coming is near, and if asked the reason for my saying so, I should point to the awakening of affection for Christ. It is not only that there is a revived sense among Christians that the Lord is coming, but God is awakening affection for Christ. It has been often noticed that the Book of Deuteronomy has a different character from the other books of Moses. It is true that the law was still the rule for the people, but the point of the book is that Moses was instructing them as to the land into which they were about to enter. They had come to the borders of the land

and now it is not details of the tabernacle, or the priesthood, or the camp, or the journey, but they are taught the ways of the land before they go there. It has been said that the Lord's coming is not so much spoken of among us as formerly, but I think the Spirit is instructing us about heavenly things before we go there. The actual moment of the rapture is not of so much consequence to us, as that we should be near heaven in spirit, and in the enjoyment of the relationships that belong to heaven. The Thessalonians were set in them, though they could not have told us much about the church, and the apostle's anxiety was lest the light should grow dim with them. Dear brethren, has the light become dimmed with us?

We do not, like the Thessalonians, suffer from Amalek but from Balaam, that is, we do not get persecution to try our faith; but the opposition of Balaam is to corrupt the simplicity of our faith through complicity with a world that is christianised. I feel greatly for young Christians at the present moment, when I think of all that is around them, and the way in which Satan seeks to get in between their hearts and heaven, with its light for their souls.

Two things are connected with this heavenly light, the believer is introduced into new relationships, and secondly there is a new place.

That place is the place of the glory of Christ made known to us in two ways. He is the Son of the Father's love and also the blessed Man of God's counsels. In Him the love of the Father is made known to us, and that gives us a great thought of Christ's glory. He is known to us as the Son of the Father; when the apostles contemplated His glory, it was that of the Son with the Father. The work of God *in* our souls is that we should know Christ, and so know Him. A work has been done for us which delivers us, as the Thessalonians, from the wrath to come, then the work of God is to stablish us in Christ. The other way in which Christ's glory is made known to us is as the Man of God's counsels. Christ is set over everything at the right hand of God, and not only is all to be put in subjection to Him, but everything is to be blessed in Him. So it speaks of His exaltation in Psalm xxi. 6: "Thou hast set him to be blessings." (Marg.) The first and great thought in connection with all being subjected to Him is, that He ministers the blessings of God. Thus He makes us happy in the salvation of God, and conducts us into relationship with His God and Father.

Now if we were in the undimmed light of this, what an effect it would have. God's Son is in heaven, and the Thessalonians were set to wait

for Him from thence; and in the apostle's anxiety as to whether they were maintained in faith, he could no longer forbear sending Timothy to encourage them. It is as if he had said, I do not want the light of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, and the relationships brought out in Him to be dimmed in their souls. Beloved friends, has the tempter tempted us to turn away from the light of these things, so that we should not enjoy them as we once did? God has given us this epistle, that by it He might encourage our faith. He would have us in the light of what Christ is up there, and of all that is to be brought in at the coming of Christ. He is there in righteousness, He is there as Lord, and He is there as Son of the Father, and if our hearts are in the faith of it, we are ready to be instructed in the truth of the assembly.

Now a word as to love. Two things are constantly before us in scripture, faith and love. See Ephesians i. 15. "Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love unto all the saints." Faith puts us in the full light of Christianity—the light of a God no longer behind a veil, but fully revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. "In him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and He is the Son of the Father's love. Then love is known in a circle of divine affec-

tions upon earth; "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and towards all, even as we do towards you." Now the truth of the assembly depends upon this love in the Spirit one toward another. Here on earth we have a circle of divine love and affection, so that it becomes a shelter for us from the world. Mark the effect of it: "To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." What produces sanctification is being knit together in love with the saints. It is the new company who are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and you may depend upon it, that if your affections are engaged with the new company you will be drawn away from the world. John puts it thus, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." Love flows in love's circle. Suppose we all came together on the Lord's day morning as a company, an assembly in the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ, what is the first thing for us? It is this, that we should all sit down *together* under the shadow of Christ, and *together* taste His love. What knitting of one towards the other there is in this, and what separation from all that is of the world. What

is before us in the bread and wine is His great love. We are together in the presence of His love; there, this one is nothing and that one nothing save that each is the object of Christ's love. One may be young and another old; one rich and another poor; one learned and another ignorant, but each one sits down under the shadow of Christ's love. Christ has loved him if he is a young believer, and the old believer rests in the same love. We are thus together in the circle of Christ's love, and in its presence we realise how the world is outside. What has the world to do with us there or we with the world? When the soul is in the sense of this holy love, it leads to practical sanctification. We could not be led into it apart from the Spirit, but I am not now speaking of the sanctification of the Spirit, but of the wonderful way in which God establishes our hearts in holiness, by exercising our souls in these divine affections one toward the other. The Lord's supper is that gathering point where His love becomes the blessed bond of love to each other, and of separation from the world and unholiness.

In the history of Israel it was the tabernacle which really formed them into a congregated assembly. I know they came up out of Egypt in a certain order as the hosts of the Lord, but it was the setting up of the tabernacle

that gave them a centre and a rallying point. The silver trumpets summoned them to the tabernacle of the congregation, there they had but one interest. Figuratively they were engaged with the interests of Christ. They had their own tents in the wilderness, but the moment they went up to the tabernacle they were all on one ground. God's dwelling place was their interest. His glory dwelt there, though behind a veil. Now we can say that the assembly is the dwelling-place of His love made known by the Spirit. Now if we are in the truth of this, we shall know the Father's love, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and find ourselves connected with the company that has been separated from the world, and know what it is to sit down under Christ's shadow. The coming of the Lord would place us in the full and actual enjoyment of the scene of holy love that we have the light of already.

There is another point; the assembly is the object of Christ's affections and desires, and therefore we see how dear the saints were to Paul. Are they dear to us? Paul lived and laboured for that which belonged to Christ, and he cared that the youngest and feeblest believers should be in all the bright and blessed light of Christ. To the Philippians he said, "To write the same things to you, to me indeed

is not grievous, but for you it is safe." He would go over the same lesson with them in unwearying grace that they might know Christ. It was Christ's grace shining out in His servant. He wanted them to be happy in Christ's love, and to be in the light of His coming.

May the Lord keep us in the brightness of faith and in the circle of divine affections, that so we may be established "unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of the Lord Jesus with all his saints."



II.

THE OBJECT *OF* HEAVEN AND AN OBJECT *IN* HEAVEN.

(MATT. III. 13-17; ACTS VII. 55, 60.)

WHAT I sought to bring before you last week was the faith of Christianity in its simple elements, that which the youngest Christian is privileged to know and to walk in the light of. It is an immense thing in these days for any of us to apprehend in any measure the grace of God in which it has pleased Him to set us. Remark too for a moment, that the grace of God is not merely that which takes cognisance of the whole state and need of man, though it does that, and meets it; but the grace of God is much more, because it comes from His own blessed heart of love. There is our state of need it is true, but there is also His love and the purpose of His love, and grace comes to us to bring us into the consciousness of His love, and of what has been purposed for us in Christ Jesus.

I spoke of the way in which the Thessalonians, when converted, had been brought into relations

altogether outside of the course of things here. They were in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. They had been brought into this blessed circle of divine relationships, to know God as Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ exalted to the right hand of God. I spoke also of the anxiety of the apostle as to their faith, fearing lest afflictions might have dimmed the light in their souls, and I sought to put it to our consciences as to how far we had apprehended in our own souls these simple elements of the faith of Christianity, and whether the light had waned in our souls.

Two other things I sought to bring before you, the hope of the coming glory of Christ, and that we are set down here in affections one to another. Not only is it the privilege of the youngest believer to know the Father, but he is set in the light of the coming glory of Christ. Take the third chapter of John's epistle, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons [or rather children] of God;" then we get further, "we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." I think that with many the title "children of God" has but little meaning. It really means that *we are of God*: as the apostle says, "Ye are of God, little children." A child is morally of its father. I

am not now speaking of mere parentage, but a child is formed in its thoughts, ways and habits by being brought up in the knowledge of its father, and its father's love. It is the fruit of relationship, and we might ask ourselves how far have we been formed according to the relationship in which we are set? As born of God we are able by the Spirit to be formed under the influence of the manner of love bestowed by the Father upon us. The effect of it is that though we have to pass through the world where there is conflict and opposition, yet we carry with us the secret of a relationship which belongs to another world. . . . "We are the children of God." The world does not recognise our secret, "it knoweth us not, because it knew him not"; but we also carry with us another secret: we are going to be like Him. We expect Him from heaven as Saviour, and we shall then be conformed to His image, but also we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. It is the privilege of the believer to cherish this secret while in the world where Satan's hostility is experienced.

I might multiply passages to shew that the hope which is before the believer becomes comfort and strength, where the pressure of sin and death would otherwise greatly trouble, but I only notice one; "If we have been planted to-

gether in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Rom. vi. 5.) The believer, accepting death here, has the assurance that he is going to be *of Christ's resurrection*. It is not merely that he will rise, but that he will be like Christ, of *His* resurrection. Here, in going through this world, we are so to speak as those not treading on solid ground. Many an one feels what it is to be like Peter upon the sea, only with us it is the rolling sea of the course of this evil world, where there is nothing stable, and where sin and death are. Nothing will do for us there but the support of the Lord; but not only do we get His hand to support us, but we carry with us the secret that we shall be like Him. He who supports us is risen, and we are to be of His resurrection, raised according to the power which raised Him, which means that we shall be like Him and with Him in glory. Thus the Lord becomes everything to us, and we give up things here as we are drawn to Him, and our souls do not become dim as to the light of His glory.

Then the way of practical sanctification we saw to be by having love one to another. The hand of Christ supports us and draws us to Himself, and as we increase and abound in love one toward the other, we are established in holiness. God has ordered this way of love for us;

as we are together in love, we are not occupied with the world and its schemes, but with Christ. He is before us, and in the company of the saints we are away from the elements of the world. We are engaged with the things of Christ and His interests. It is in the world that we may well fear lest we sink in its restless sea. We must have to do with it, and we have certain duties to carry out in it, but when we love one another, there is a drawing away from the scene of our ordinary duties to our own company, in the sense that there is no company like the company of the saints. You get drawn into another circle of affections and objects of which Christ is the centre, and thus it becomes to us practical sanctification.

The two scriptures before us to-night present to us this blessed Object, the Lord Jesus Christ, in two ways. In the first He is the Object *of* heaven, and in Acts vii. He is an Object *in* heaven. In Matthew iii. He first comes forth from the retirement of thirty years of private life, to enter on the path of service according to God's will. He had grown up as a tender plant under God's eye unknown of men, but in this chapter we arrive at the point of His definitely taking His place with the repentant remnant who had been prepared by John's preaching and baptism. John's baptism in

Jordan was, I think, very significant. Jordan was crossed by Israel in order to enter into the promises of God, and the remnant awakened by John's testimony go down there confessing their sins. It was really owning that all was ruined according to the flesh. But there the Lord takes them up at the lowest point, and submits to baptism by John. He then fulfilled righteousness in entering in by the door according to God's will. It is wonderful to see the One who subsisted in the form of God, taking the form of a servant. He who was and is God, and all things served His will, becomes man in order to accomplish the will of God; He is here as the obedient One for God's pleasure. I want to engage your hearts with Him, because if we are to walk as Christians, there is only one measure for us, Christ. The Jew had a code of requirements, the law; but that is not the measure for the Christian. It is true that the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled as we walk in the Spirit, that is, we love; but the measure of everything for us is Christ. It is an immense thing to get our hearts engaged with Christ as the blessed Object of God's pleasure here on earth. All those that had failed under law are, so to speak, out of sight in Jordan, and heaven opens to Jesus, God's beloved Son. God's will is not

now expressed by law. There is a feeling sometimes with us that God's will is arbitrary, but God's will is now expressed in Christ, and that will is known thus as God's good pleasure. The two are put together in Ephesians, "the good pleasure of his will." It is a wonderful thing to have Christ for an object for faith. We sometimes say to each other, "How long have you known the Lord?" but Paul's desire was, "that I may know him." Again, there may be a desire for intelligence in scripture, and we sometimes hear of getting hold of the present line of teaching or ministry; but what we want is to know the Lord through divine teaching, to sit at the feet of Christ and hear His words.

What we see here, then, is, that there is a blessed Man upon earth to whom heaven is opened, and the Father's voice expressed His good pleasure in Him, and declares Him to be His beloved Son. In Acts vii. a man upon earth looks up into heaven, and sees the same blessed Man there, and, as it were, stretches out his arms to the Saviour to be received there. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." What a wonderful Saviour to know! He begins the history of man upon earth afresh, taking part in flesh and blood, and taking up in Jordan those in whom grace was working; and Stephen's

history on earth closes in going to be with Him in heaven. Why should we be occupied with the schemes and doings of men, when we have such an Object presented to us? We are too apt to get our thoughts and hearts engrossed with what goes on in the world, but God looked out on that meek and lowly and gentle Man who was fulfilling righteousness, and entering into the pathway of sorrow and suffering occasioned by His identifying Himself with men. Those with whom He identified Himself were not those who were occupied with the schemes of this world, but the upright in heart who were affected by God's testimony. We are upright in heart when we take our true place before God, and that is exactly the place where Christ can take us up. There was the greatest possible contrast between those who took their true place before God, confessing their sins, and the righteous One in whom God found His delight and good pleasure; and yet it was the moment of this One identifying Himself with the upright in heart.

Now in regard to that, two things come before us. We see here the blessed Lord on God's side and on our side, and the two are joined in one Person. On the one side heaven opens to Him God's beloved Son, and God for the first time is fully revealed in the name of

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Father's voice declares that the blessed Man upon earth is His beloved Son, and the Holy Ghost comes down upon a man, *that* Man. Then on our side, Jesus goes down into Jordan, beginning the history of man afresh, but in connection with His repentant people. The wonderful thing is, that the revelation of God should be made to men in a Man, not to angels. He did not take up angels, but He took up the seed of Abraham.

We get also here the dawning of another thing, though it could not be fully revealed until resurrection; that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Man of God's purpose and counsel, and as such the pattern of those who are to be blessed in Him. Here He is alone, owned of God as His Son, and anointed with the Holy Ghost, but He is the pattern Man according to God's counsel. Heaven could be opened to no others then, but when Christ had died and gone into heaven, then the transforming power of Christ is seen in Stephen, as full of the Holy Ghost he looks up into heaven. Now the Holy Ghost is given to believers in that blessed Man who has died and risen again, as the Spirit of sonship, because He is the Spirit of Christ,

I would like you to put these two things together in your mind; the revelation of God,

and the place that man has before God, they are brought together in the Lord Jesus Christ. It needed that the question of righteousness should be settled in the cross, before God's purpose could be effected, but in the blessed Man to whom heaven opened, we do see the pattern of God's purpose for man, that those whom He has taken up should receive the Spirit, as the Spirit of sonship, and know a place before the Father, so that while on earth we should know the love with which our Lord Jesus Christ was loved as Son of the Father, and yet as having the place of man here. It is very wonderful to contemplate a Man to whom heaven could open, and, beloved brethren, that blessed Man is the One who has taken us up and has become the Object of our hearts. Men may search out all the wonderful works of creation from its heights to its depths, but where is there anything like this? Heaven opening to a lowly man in whom God had found His good pleasure, His own Son, the vessel of God's grace, and the pattern of God's purpose for man. It is equally wonderful to trace His pathway here, right through death, so that He might become the way to the Father, and lead His own by a pathway of love and affection of which the world knows nothing, so that the Father's love might be

in those that love Him. He is bringing us to the Father's house that we may be there for ever.

When the Spirit descended from heaven, He did not become incarnate, but he rested upon a man in whom everything was divine in its spring, and in whom all was in perfect love and accord with the Spirit; and now we have the Spirit of that Man, as those delivered by grace from our old history and linked with Christ. You remember the passage in Hebrews where He calls us brethren. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." How could Christ sing praise in our midst, if He had not brought our hearts into tune with Himself? We might be in tune with one another according to the measure of our apprehension of the love of God towards us, but when we look at Christ and see the delight of God in Him, and our hearts are engaged with Him, His Spirit attunes our lips so that He can use them to sing praise.

Here then we see heaven opened to the blessed Man who was the Object of God's pleasure, and we catch as it were the first glimpse of God's purpose in man. Then follows the pathway of divine love here, attaching hearts to Himself, up to the cross where atonement was made, and all that we were was set aside for ever. Finally,

the Spirit is given that we might have the consciousness of the place we have in Him in whom heaven has expressed its delight. In Stephen we see a man full of the Holy Ghost and looking up steadfastly into heaven. As yet, heaven had not been opened to men; the twelve saw the Lord go into heaven and knew He was there, but they were led by the angel to expect Him to return. The full purpose of God was not yet revealed. But now Stephen looks up, and says, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." The Son of man is the man of God's purpose. It has been noted that the Lord invariably calls Himself the Son of man. The full purpose of God did not lie in the titles Son of Abraham or Son of David. Those titles are connected with inheritance of the earth, its blessing and government. The title Son of man comes before us in Psalm viii., "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the Son of man that thou visitest him?" But David there looks beyond Zion and the earth to the heavens. "When I consider *thy* heavens." The earth had been given to man, but David says "*thy* heavens," and sees God's glory set above the heavens; then he looks down on man fallen — What is he? and the answer, though it may be mysteriously unfolded, is found in the Son of man and everything put

under Him. The glory set above the heavens is that in which Stephen saw Jesus. Remark how the two are connected, "the glory of God and Jesus." So in the new Jerusalem, the throne is the throne of God and the Lamb. There is one throne, that of God and the Lamb; and the Son of man is for ever inseparably connected with the glory of God.

The change is everything. The coming back of the Lord was in abeyance for the moment, and the witness of Christ's glory was called to die and to go to heaven. He saw the glory of God and Jesus, and bears witness to the heavens being opened, and to the Son of man being at the right hand of God. He then speaks to Jesus there, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The dying saint goes to be with the Lord, the Man of glory and purpose, after having prayed for Israel ignorant and apostate upon earth. He fell asleep.

Thus we see the Lord Jesus as the Object of heaven, the pattern of God's purpose as to man, leading in the path of faith and marking it out for us. We are to be here in the path of confidence in the love of God. The Leader of our salvation has been made perfect through sufferings, in order that He might bring the many sons to glory, and that we might be in His path without fear. We carry with us the secret of

being the children of God, and “if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.” What then do we want with the world? What can it give us?

In Stephen we see a man sealed with the Holy Ghost, and looking up steadfastly into heaven, and his course finishes there. He saw the glory of God and Jesus, and was so entranced with it that he does not notice the hatred and malice that stoned him, but looks up and says, “Lord Jesus receive my spirit.” How blessed that his spirit was not weighted with the awful ways of fallen man, but entranced with the Man of God’s good pleasure.

Beloved friends, is the Lord becoming dearer to you every day? Do cultivate the knowledge of Christ in your souls. In whatever measure you have apprehended Him, cultivate that measure, that you may know Him better. It is our privilege to look away from earth into heaven, therefore the apostle would say, “Rejoice in the Lord alway.” Whatever is around us we can look away to heaven. Paul counted everything loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. May He give us this desire. And as we cultivate acquaintance with Christ, more grace will be given. “To him that hath shall more be given.”



III.

ENTERING INTO GOD'S PURPOSE IN CHRIST JESUS.

(2 TIM. i. 7-12; ii. 7-10.)

I BROUGHT before you last week Stephen looking up into heaven and seeing the Lord Jesus Christ there, and then saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." All was happy for him when he fell asleep, but what a terrible break up it was here. How the saints must have felt his loss. We know they did, as it says devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. It was not only that they had lost a faithful man in Stephen, but it was a terrible break up as to things here. At the same time it became the way of opening up the purpose of God.

The Lord was with the disciples for forty days after His resurrection, and then He went to heaven. The disciples knew He was there, but all that they witnessed was that a cloud received Him out of their sight, and what they were led

to expect was His return. The angel that appeared to them said, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" We can hardly understand such a saying now, because it is the place where we should look. The angel then adds, "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner," that is, in the cloud. They were led to look for Him thus. What follows in Acts is a beautiful picture, "all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods"; but this was upon earth, it would not consort with the calling as we understand things now: it was millennial rather than heavenly. At that moment they expected the Lord to come back to earth. So in the case of the man raised up on to his feet at the gate of the temple, we have a distinct testimony to the nation of Israel, of the power in a risen and glorified Jesus to raise up Israel. The man is lifted up, and enters into the temple with the apostles, walking and leaping and praising God. Peter thereupon makes the distinct offer to the men of Israel, that if they repented God would send Jesus Christ, and the times of refreshing (the millennium really) would come from the presence of the Lord.

Now the death of Stephen was a tremendous blow: it closed all earthly expectations connected with the then return of the Lord, and instead of

the times of refreshing, the disciples carried one of their number to his burial; and it became apparent that the saints had to follow the Lord in the path which He had gone through death.

In the death of the Lord we see the break up of things here. We must not suppose that the Lord had not earthly affections. He had. He was born King of the Jews, they were His people, and though He could not own the unrepentant and perverse generation, yet we see His affections for Israel in the words, "How often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." These affections were broken in upon. He wept over Jerusalem, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day the things which belong to thy peace. Again, He formed links with His disciples, they were His companions, and he felt leaving them. Again, we read, "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus," and these affections were broken in upon by the death of Lazarus. There was no selfish feeling as with us, but there were affections in a human heart, though their source was divine. The death of the Lord broke up all these links. Did He not realise the words, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me and mine acquaintance into darkness," when the disciples forsook Him and fled? Then we see His tender care for His

mother as He said to John, "Behold thy mother," and to her, "Behold thy son." Do you suppose that it was nothing to the Lord that His garments were parted among Gentile soldiers, and that they cast lots upon His vesture? Could it be a matter of indifference to the Lord that a breach was made by death in all these links and affections? He Himself, as a man here, was the Object of the delight of God, doing all for His pleasure, and yet this fragrant life was taken from the earth by death. There are proper and blessed affections here — family affections — friend with friend — and the affections of the saints to each other, but they are broken in upon here by death, but, blessed be God, there is resurrection. The Lord came back to His disciples when risen, and they were glad when they saw Him; then He led them out to Bethany and was taken from them into heaven, but they were led to look for Him again. It is the power of resurrection that will bring in all the blessing for Israel and the world, but the death of Stephen turned the eyes of the disciples in another direction, that is to heaven. Whatever may be here on earth, we can look up there.

But we have to face things here, and 2 Timothy speaks to us of the things in the last days. The disciples at the beginning saw what

was so fair and beautiful broken up. Great grace was upon them, but the result of Stephen's death was that they were scattered abroad. It is true that they went everywhere preaching the gospel, but they must have felt the break up at Jerusalem. Paul in his day saw the church set up among the Gentiles in the power of the Spirit, but what he anticipates is the corruption and apostasy of the house of God. Already he was in reproach, all in Asia had turned from him, and he contemplates the ruin that would succeed his departure.

The first epistle looks at the house of God as the place where the testimony of God reposes, the place of God's honour and glory. There may be a wilderness condition of things now, but in it our hearts can turn to God's house, in the sense of what it is in the mind of God. David, when in the wilderness of Judah, turns toward God as known in His sanctuary. O God thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my soul longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is: to see thy power and thy glory so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." (Psa. lxiii. 1, 2.) And again, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts, my soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord" (Psa. lxxxiv. 1), and lower down he says, "For a day in thy courts is

better than a thousand." The preceding psalms shew in what difficult times this was spoken, but David's heart turns to the house of God. Now we are not in apostolic days, in days such as those in which Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "In everything ye are enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are in days of failure when the house of God has been despoiled of much of its gift and endowment, but we can look at what it is in the mind of God, the place of the testimony of Christ, just as the ark of testimony was in the temple of old, while we wait for the coming, or rather revelation, of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Revelation" signifies an unveiling. The heavens will open, and all the glory and blessing treasured up in Christ will be unfolded in the day of His revelation, but now the *testimony* of the Christ is in the assembly, and it is there in a living way. The word of Christ dwells in the saints, even as the glory of Christ will be displayed in them when He is manifested.

What a wonderful moment it will be when, instead of the sad scenes of this world, the heavens will open, and all that is treasured up there will be manifested; but amid these sad

scenes we turn to the house of God, His assembly where the testimony of Christ dwells, and await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is immense blessing to look up into heaven and see how everything is being treasured up there. Stephen's spirit is with Christ there, and all the saints who have died, while their bodies are in the Lord's keeping, He has received their spirits into His presence. That is part of His present administration, He is Lord of dead and living, and hence the believer dies to the Lord. The heavens were opened for Stephen to look in, and we expect them to open, and then all those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. They have been treasured up there for the day of His revelation.

Now do we know what it is to look up into heaven, and see what is there? Suppose when you kneel down in your closet, and express your wants, do you know, apart from your need, what it is simply to look up into heaven, and, without saying a word, your heart visits another scene where the Lord is, and where He administers? When the Lord was here the good pleasure of God was expressed in everything that He did, and now that He is in heaven the good pleasure of God prospers in His hand. No breakdown on earth can touch that. Let them stone Stephen, the Lord receives his spirit; let evil mar the testimony

of the assembly, and consequently our measure on earth be scant, we can look up into heaven. The Lord is there, and His hand can support and distribute to His people; the pleasure of the Lord prospers in His hand. When here, He fed five thousand with five loaves. The Lord took the loaves, and looked up to heaven, and blessed and brake, and I think that those who ate must have felt that He dispensed the bounty of heaven. Stephen looked up into heaven and saw the glory of God, but he saw more: he saw Jesus, the centre of that glory, and that makes it also a place for us to look into.

In the second Epistle to Timothy there is as much break up as there was in Stephen's day. In the place where the gospel had won its greatest triumphs, there the departure was most marked. Paul was in bonds, and the flow of the tide which accompanied his service in Ephesus (Acts xix. 20) was setting the other way; all in Asia had turned away from him. Timothy also was in tears. In reading this epistle you will find the continued and increased development of evil. The first two chapters shew what had come in during the apostle's lifetime, and the last two the development of evil after his departure. In chapter i., as we have seen, people were turning from the apostle, and Timothy is exhorted to have an outline of sound

words which he had heard of the apostle. In chapter ii. there were profane and vain babblings which increased unto more ungodliness, of such were Hymenæus and Philetus, who said the resurrection was past already; if that be so, the perfect state is reached and present things become the object. Their word was eating as a gangrene, and overthrowing the faith of some. In chapter iii. we get the christianised world, every form of evil covered with the garb of a form of godliness, and the truth is resisted. Then in chapter iv. we have apostasy, men turn to fables, and away from the truth. They turn really to the myths of heathenism. And we see the beginning of this to-day. Thus we have portrayed a terrible state of things in this epistle.

Now the resource of such a day is the same as in Stephen's day, and Paul directs Timothy's eye to what was in Christ Jesus. You get seven times in this epistle the words "in Christ Jesus." Then the Lord is very distinctly put before us as the known support and stay of the servant. Paul had found it to be so, and now exhorts Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. We have thus two things to encourage us. One, that nothing has failed as to the purpose of God in Christ Jesus, and second that the Lord remains the same.

It is a great thing to look away from earth to heaven and see the Lord there. We can visit the scene where the Lord is, and where nothing has been touched by the rude hand of man. Everything is in His hands, and thus the testimony can be borne to that, and nothing gives way on that side.

There is a great danger of our getting into the swim of things here, instead of our getting the support of the Lord to set our faces against it. If things are broken down here, that is all the more reason we should be true. It is easy to go with the current when there is a very open door for the gospel; but when it is in reproach, and people turn away from the rejection which accompanies it, then we find that the testimony of God in such a world of evil must be in reproach, and Timothy is instructed to suffer evil with the glad tidings. The reproach of the gospel has a double character of suffering, both from the outside and the inside. Persecution came to Paul from the outside, and there was defection within, all were turning from him. We have not persecution now, but all that which bears the name of Christ in the world is no help to us, but only a hindrance. Consequently the apostle throws us, in days of failure, on what is eternal. God's "own purpose and grace, which was given us in

Christ Jesus before the world began.” Salvation is thus seen to be according to God’s purpose and grace. Whatever may be the opposition or defection, God secures His own purpose. John x. shews how the Lord would have His own. We need not therefore be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.

Salvation is not to give us a quiet time here, it puts us in a narrow path, and while the gospel is preached now with great freedom and simplicity, so that souls often escape the difficulties which some of us have had to encounter through law being preached instead of grace, yet the path is as narrow as ever, and you will find a measure of suffering in it. You have to renounce things, and often the most trying part is, that you have to renounce the accredited religious things for the Lord’s sake, but you will have no regret as to this in the day of Christ. The compensation now is, that the Lord becomes more to you, and in His company you realise what salvation gives you. Israel had two things before them when they crossed the Red Sea, and there experienced God’s salvation: (1) God’s habitation, and (2) God’s rest. They sang, “Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed; thou hast guided them in thy strength to thy holy habitation.” As yet the tabernacle

was not built, but God dwelt in the cloud and they were under its shadow. The building of the tabernacle fulfilled this intimation of God, that He had brought them to His holy habitation. The cloud of His presence filled the tabernacle. There is nothing more blessed than to know the shelter of God's love.

The next thing was, "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established." Here we have God's rest anticipated, when the Lord will reign for ever and ever. God will not rest until His love has brought His people to the place where He dwells in the satisfaction of His own love.

The assembly is the place where we realise God's house, where we are privileged to retire from wilderness scenes and sorrows, and sit down under His shadow with great delight. When an Israelite went into the tabernacle, he found, or should have found, a blessed retreat from the weary wilderness march and his own circumstances, to see, as the psalmist says, the beauty of the Lord; and again, Thy power and Thy glory so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. So the assembly is the place where in a special way the saint realises the purpose

of God's love, as he finds himself in the presence of the Lord. It is a blessed thing to realise that God has brought us to the place where we are overshadowed by His presence and love through the Spirit, and where Christ is Head.

It is true that we are on the way to the rest of God, but the Lord Jesus has said, "Come unto me and I will give you rest;" so that there is present repose for our hearts in the company of the Lord, and apart from circumstances here. In that sense Christ becomes the tabernacle for our souls, and this enables us to realise how God's dwelling-place and God's rest are connected. (See Psa. cxxxii. and Rev. xxi. 1-8.) Nothing can be more blessed as to the present, than having part in that which sets forth the purpose of God's love to us. We have been saved according to His purpose, to have part in that purpose, and that is in Christ Jesus. We may see the break up of things, and our own meetings may be feeble, but if we look up into heaven, and see the purpose of God established in Christ there, we have present rest of heart, and can be knit together in love and move on in the sense of what is eternal.

In chapter i. we get God's side, *His* salvation and *His* purpose and love. In chapter ii. we

get our side, the apostle says, "that *they may obtain* the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." There can be no question as to God making good His purpose in the power of His own salvation; at the same time we see the apostle enduring sufferings that the elect might obtain it. Peter speaks of growing up to salvation through the sincere milk of the word. He had referred to Isaiah xl., "All flesh is grass." Everything here was dying, but the gospel revealed the salvation of the Lord, and the glory of the Lord. It did not go farther than millennial glory in the prophecy, but now that Jesus Christ of the seed of David has been raised from the dead, there is the obtaining of the salvation in Christ Jesus *with eternal glory*. Salvation connects the soul with the sphere of Christ's glory. See how the power of resurrection is brought in, "Remember Jesus Christ of the seed of David raised from the dead according to my gospel." As of the seed of David, He could have brought all blessing into this world; but He died, and now in resurrection something entirely outside of seen things is established. The Lord anticipated this when He said, "I will give you rest." He stood, as it were, outside of the distracting scene around in the consciousness of His own eternal relationship with the Father, and said,

“Come unto me.” Now we look up into heaven and see Him there, and there actually is the rest of God.

When the Lord converted Paul, He said, “I will shew him how great things he must suffer for *my name's sake* ;” but here he speaks of enduring all things for *the elect's sake*, that *they* may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. He had suffered in carrying out the glad tidings, and now he was suffering for the elects' sake that they might obtain. He experienced the deadly opposition of the Jews to God's platform of resurrection, on which all His purposes are secured. The whole array of Satan's power was against him, and in his own person he experienced this hostility as none other did but the Lord. Paul was given to stand as a rock against breakers of evil, so that the saints might get the purpose of God in their souls. He could do this because the Lord had been raised from the dead, and thus not only is God's purpose secured, but there is another platform for the saints to occupy. It is crossing Jordan which brings us into purpose. In the Red Sea we see that Christ's death and resurrection has made a way for God to deliver His people. In Jordan Christ was on the side of the people, and the ark was carried by the priests, so that the people knew the

support and priesthood of Christ, and the waters disappeared, and they came up out of Jordan as an elect people in company with the ark. They are, so to speak, in association with Christ.

The Lord came down into the pathway of sorrow, He knew the overflowings of Jordan, but He went there to make a way for His people into the purpose of God, and it was given to the apostle to enter into His sufferings in a very remarkable way, and he endured all things for the elects' sakes, that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Thus eternal things become present realities to the soul, while we realise the support of the Lord in the moments of weakness, and in the sense of the break up of present and seen things. We can look up into heaven, and while we see what is there we get His support here. May the Lord use what has been before us to direct our eyes heavenward, and to lead our hearts into the sense of God's purpose.



IV.

THE NEW STRUCTURE AND THE COMING GLORY.

(1 PET. II. 1-7 ; 2 PET. I. 16-21.)

MOST of my hearers are doubtless aware that Peter writes to the saints as those who are strangers and pilgrims here. He looks at them as down here in the wilderness, and having a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Then he speaks to them of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. He seeks to lead the Jewish saints away from their old conversation, to which they were accustomed, into the truth of Christianity, and in this second chapter he speaks to them of a new structure, in which he desired they might be built up.

When we come to the second epistle, the saints are still looked at as down here under the holy government of God, which is exercised on their behalf according to grace, and Peter brings before them the vision of the Lord's glory which he had seen upon the holy mount, and by which the prophetic testimony was confirmed. That had to do with the world to come, and Peter wanted the light of it, and Christ in heaven—the Harbinger of it, to be in their

hearts. He had before spoken of exceeding great and precious promises as being connected with the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature, that is, by these we are put in association with the scene of holy love where Christ is, and escape the corruption which is in the world through lust. That is a word for all of us, even the youngest, that if we are in association with the scene where Christ is, necessarily we must be separated from the scene where He is not.

It has often been noted that these two epistles correspond to Matthew xvi. and xvii. In chapter xvi. the Person of Christ as the Son of the living God was revealed to Peter, and upon the revelation of that name by the Father, Christ was about to build a new structure altogether outside of Judaism. The Father's revelation was the foundation of that building, Christ's assembly. Peter's solicitude comes out in the first epistle that the saints should grow up in the truth of the revelation as to Christ being the Living Stone. It is a great thing to grow up to that which is God's purpose for us, not merely to know or touch it, but to be built up in it. To taste that the Lord is gracious makes us sensible that God's holy government is in our favour, and God's gracious dealing comes to us through

the Lord ; but further, as God is known to us in grace, the preciousness of Christ to Him is realised, so that we should grow up into Christ.

Beloved friends, it is very easy to grow into the things of the world, I mean the system of this world, to grow up into all its schemes, plans, thoughts and politics, but you may depend upon it that just in proportion as we are in touch with the things of the world, so much the less shall we be in touch with the things of the Lord. You remember what Paul says, "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." Sometimes that is taken as if it meant forgetting the steps we took yesterday, but it means much more ; to use a strong figure, it means that we are not like Lot's wife, looking back at the world from which we have been delivered. It is a great thing to be kept from a backward look. In Psalm xlv. it says, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear, forget also thine own country and thy father's house, so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty." Then we shall be looking on to the things before us, all Christ's coming glory. We are to be like Christ, and with Him. It will be a marvellous day, not only for us, but for the groaning creation when we shall come forth with the Lord Jesus. In Luke vi. we see the twelve brought into association

with the fountain of grace and blessing in the Lord. He was going to send them forth in the ministry of His grace, and He associates them with Himself as witnesses of the virtue that went out from Him to the multitude, who came from all quarters to hear and to be healed. If they were associated thus with the Lord when He was here, what will it be to be in His company when He comes back again ; it will not then be with twelve trembling disciples, but with the whole of the redeemed who have known and tasted His grace, and are like Him, and have been with Him in His own home of holy love before they come out. This should affect every one of us here. Some may be called to special service, but the point I want to press is that we should grow up in that which is of Christ, with the light of that day in our hearts when He will fully display His glory. No doubt it will be a day of wonderful brightness, but the great thing will be, that the church will come out of heaven filled out of the fulness of God, the vessel of God's love in Christ, the vessel of divine grace expressed in Christ, and God's glory will thereby fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. Peter wanted the light of that day to be in their hearts.

Now if we look at Matthew xvi., though undoubtedly the church is for glory in full result, yet there, and also in 1 Peter ii. we see it as a

building set up on earth. It is no part of the system of this world, though man has tried to make it so, just as in his hands the kingdom of heaven has become a great tree, but that is not the mind of Christ as to it. The Gospel of Matthew does not take us outside of earth, there is no ascension of the Lord related in it, but what we have in chapter xvi. is, that though Christ is disallowed of men (some thought Him Elias, and some Jeremias, and the Lord had to leave the wicked and adulterous generation with a sign of coming judgment), yet that He would *here* build His assembly on a rock against which the whole power of the enemy could not prevail. He had to give up Israel as a vessel of no pleasure, but having once brought the grace of God to earth, *Himself the blessed Minister of it*, He builds His assembly as that in which all that was of Himself should be continued on earth. The assembly is all of Christ; it draws its very existence from Him, its foundation lies in the revelation by the Father to souls of Christ as the Son of the living God; it is outside of the knowledge of flesh and blood, and the soul is in the faith of the Son of God: but that means really that all is established in the power of the life that death could not touch, and not in the life of flesh and blood. The Son of God has gone into death to bear our judgment, but how

could death have power if the Son of the living God goes into it? Thus in this world where all the power of death and Satan is, Christ has built His church, so that in a new manner and way where flesh and blood have no place, but the revelation of the Father makes Christ known to souls, the preciousness and grace of Christ might still be maintained.

The cross manifested man in all his guilt and sin, and the very best thing on earth, Israel, is found to be a vessel of no pleasure. The Lord had come to Israel, and this is what came of it, "My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me." (Zech. xi. 8.) Now the church is outside of the range of Messiah glory to be established in Israel. It is built on the revelation of Christ's Person as the Son of the living God. The essential truth is in John: there we find "The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father." The Father reveals the Person of the Son, but if the Son's place is the bosom of the Father, we are assured that He is the Son of the Father's love, and thus we are connected with the holy love in which He dwells. The church thus becomes the vessel of Christ's glory as the Son of God, and in Him God has been declared.

If you know the salvation of God, it is to deliver you from the world of judgment and to set

you in grace before Himself. By the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ we know the way out from the world of judgment, but it is that we may go to where He is. We have the privilege of belonging to the assembly here, but the assembly ultimately is for heaven, and we are bound for heaven. Would not each one here like to say, I am bound for heaven? It oftentimes does not look much like it with us, and I would like that the hope should be brighter in our hearts. If it pleases Him, God leaves us here in the wilderness, and that tests us. It was necessary in the case of Israel to make them wander forty years in order that God might try them. So with the ten virgins, it was the tarrying of the Bridegroom that brought out the true or false character of their profession. All went to sleep, but the awakening cry found out who really through grace were ready for the Bridegroom. In working out His purpose with His people, God has continued their sojourn upon earth, and it has taught them lessons, what they are, and what He is to them, but He has not left us as sojourners here without, what I may call, compensation, and that compensation we find in the assembly. It is a remarkable thing that a structure has been built, a spiritual one, which is here on earth, but which is not of it at all. It is built up in Christ as well as

rooted in Him ; and also it is rooted and founded in love : the revelation of the Son of God is its formative power, and that puts us in touch with the Father's love. That is our compensation while we are down here in the pathway that is leading to heaven.

Let me give you an illustration. Take an Israelite who has known the token of the blood in Egypt, and has been brought by God's power through the Red Sea. It is God's way to bring him into Canaan that he is treading, but he finds it lies through the wilderness, and he soon begins to find that it is a wilderness, that there is no bread and no water, and then there is nothing to look at. Now the goodness of God met all his wants in the journey, but that is not Canaan, and the flesh does not mind speaking out and saying so : "thou hast not brought us into the land that floweth with milk and honey." (Num. xvi. 14.) Now the Lord knew that they would feel the toils and difficulties of the wilderness path, and not only would He sustain them, but He provided great compensation for them in pitching His tabernacle among them. It told of two things, His own portion in His people manifested by His dwelling among them ; and, secondly, of their being in His favour. Besides this, it was the pattern of what was in God's mind as to them, and they might have learned

much from it. I can, I think, understand the Psalmist saying, "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." (Psa. xxvii. 4.)

And what do we find in the assembly? I find that God has given me compensation in the assembly for the wilderness path. Where do we taste Eshcol's grapes of which we were singing? Is it not in the assembly where Christ is everything? It may be said that this does not much characterise our meetings, but have we not faith to look beyond our own weakness, and see what the assembly is in the mind of Christ? If we look at Israel, Moses said of them, "*O foolish people and unwise,*" at the same time that he said, "*the Lord's portion is his people.*" The Lord loves His people. Christ loves the church. Do you suppose His love to the church has failed? What we want is to be in the sense of it. If we had the sense of its being the habitation of God, and the assembly which is dear to Christ, we should count upon the Lord's presence, and upon learning there the beauty of the Lord.

What a compensation the assembly would be to us in our sojourning and pilgrimage here, as Peter speaks of us! I think we there learn

the interest of the Lord in us, because in the assembly He comes to us, and as we learn His love to us, so we learn how we are sustained by His intercession on high in the midst of the difficulties of the way.

A sick person once said to me, "I am too weak to think of the Lord as I would like;" to which I replied, "The Lord thinks of you." If an Israelite visited the tabernacle in the morning, he would know that during the night the smoke of the evening lamb had been ascending to God during the time that he had been in the helplessness of sleep. It would have taught him the favour he was in. "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him." In moments of weakness Satan may try to cast down the saint, but it is here that the grace of the great High Priest is known, and we find that we are sustained by the hand of the same blessed Person, whose heart bears our names before the Lord. So that supposing through sickness I could not go to the meeting, yet the hand of Christ could so help me, that while my brethren were together in His presence, I should feel linked with them, and my desires would be with them—"to see thy power and glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." In the assembly you get the setting forth of Christ. All in the tabernacle spoke of

God's glory in His people, as well as of His faithfulness and grace.

It is great encouragement for us to have this compensation, learning in the assembly that we are in the same acceptance as the great Priest, and at the same time that the wonderful Person who sustains us before God, reaches His hand down to us here. Sometimes things seem too high for some of us to reach, but it is not the question whether we can reach up to them, but that our great Priest can reach down to us, and if He does this we know that we are thus linked with the place He is in, however feeble we may be. You may say, you are not up to it, but I say He is up to it. He is up there, and reaches His hand down to the youngest believer in this room, to lift you to Himself. You cannot climb there. Do you suppose any servant that has ever spoken to you from this desk could do without the hand of Christ any more than the youngest here? If he has been able to speak to you more about the things of Christ, it is because he has found out more of his own nothingness, and become more dependent upon the hand of the Lord reached down to us. Christ has been made higher than the heavens, and we are told "such an high priest became us." We read also that He has passed through the heavens

to reach that place. He has traversed the whole distance from death to the place of the purpose of God, and from thence He reaches His hand to us. Thus we see that He can keep the feeblest saint linked with His own place, and the assembly is where we now realise it. The assembly is not heaven, but it is a heavenly thing, and hence, as knowing that it is the object of Christ's love, it would be the place where you would be found in the company of the saints. According to Peter, the preciousness of Christ is to those who believe, the living stones chiselled and formed by divine workmanship are built up in His preciousness. The saints are built up that they may be a spiritual house, a holy priesthood Godward, and then they shew forth the excellencies of Christ manward.

Moses was bowed down with the condition of the people when he turned to the Lord about them, but after he had been with the Lord his face shone, though he did not know it. And however we may feel what we are, our faces ought to shine with what we have found in Christ. It is in the assembly that we are peculiarly occupied with the Lord, and as the Spirit teaches us of all that Christ is, so that His love is enjoyed, and there is the flow of love in the saints gathered together, we get

great compensation for the wilderness path. On the one side we know that God cares for us, the hairs of our head are all numbered, and on the other side we have the gathering together of the saints, and it is there we are in the atmosphere of God's love to us, and Christ is the expression of that love. He is the Object of the Father's delight, and we are taken up in Him.

In his second epistle Peter encourages the saints, by seeking to carry their souls forward to the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He does not address them here as sojourners, but writes to them as those who had "obtained like precious faith with the apostles through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." My impression is, that he regards them as in the light of all that glory which results from the divine satisfaction, of which Christ is the expression and centre. It is true that Peter was not given, like Paul, to be the witness of Christ's glory, nor does he open out the subject of righteousness as Paul does, but he touches very closely the doctrine of Paul; he does not develop it but brings us up to it. The righteousness of God is a sure rest for faith, both as to the purpose of God, and His faithfulness to His promises made to Abraham and David,

but it seems to me that we are carried beyond these when Peter speaks of "exceeding great and precious promises" as given to Christians. What is put before us is more what we find in 2 Timothy, "the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus;" and again, "eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Tit. i. 1.) Peter here touches the purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus. There were certain things purposed of God in Christ, and through the knowledge of God and the call to glory, or rather by glory, the precious promises of these things are given to us. They are all in Christ, the yea and Amen of all that God has purposed. But Peter adds "that by these ye might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." It is as our hearts are associated with these promises of God in Christ, that we become partakers, that is, that we become practically in communion with the divine nature. Peter always speaks practically; the exceeding great and precious promises put us in touch with a scene of holy love, and thus we are practically formed in the divine nature. "Partakers" here does not mean that this holy love is first made known to us, but that we are in association with Christ. When the Lord was going away, Peter heard Him say, "Ye believe

in God, believe also in me;" and this was the like precious faith of which Peter spoke. Then Peter heard the Lord speak of the Father's house and of a place there, and that means that God is bringing many sons to glory, though that is not taken up, but we get two things, association with that scene of holy love, and consequently escape from the corruption that is in the world through lust. The world simply follows the desires of the flesh and of the mind, but we are delivered from it and associated with the sphere of Christ's glory.

Afterwards the apostle urges them to bring in all diligence into their energy of faith, and "add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge," &c. The word "add" here hardly gives the meaning, it means to have everything in supply, and where is the supply? Where do you think you are going to get virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, &c., except as you are in touch with Christ and the divine nature? He speaks in verses 2 and 3 of the knowledge of God and of divine power, that is not human energy, but the energy of what is of God in our souls. God is known in love, and Christ is the One by whom it has reached us. The apostle goes on to say, "For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in

the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Why are these things connected with the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? Because as we come under the yoke of Christ, all that is of Him becomes practical in us, divine power is on our side, and we are governed by the knowledge of the Lord, so that practically we grow in these moral characteristics of His kingdom. "He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." If the energy of divine power which makes these things present and practical in our every-day history is absent, the danger is lest we forget that our old history of sins was purged away—this was by the death of Christ. Are we going back to that old history, looking back to Egypt, and blind to what is before us? Looking back is dangerous. May God keep us all from it, walking in the light of the coming glory, and not groping about in the darkness of this present age. As we are warned of the danger of not being practically under the yoke of Christ, so we are exhorted to make our calling and election sure, that so an abundant entrance may be furnished to us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is a great thing to know the present administration of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be

under His gentle yoke, so that we may learn the lessons of Him which He in grace teaches us. We are looking for the display of the glory of His kingdom, but are formed in the moral characteristics of it now. By faith we are in the light of the everlasting kingdom, and soon all will be changed to sight. The apostle assures them as to the coming kingdom and glory, that it was no cleverly-imagined fable; but he says, "we were eyewitnesses of its majesty." So, "we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour." The vision of the holy mount is an actuality now at the right hand of God, and the voice which proclaimed "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," reveals the inner circle of divine purpose. God's purpose is set forth in Him. God is bringing many sons to glory. The introduction of the Morning Star, and the desire that it may arise in our hearts closes the chapter. The morning star is the harbinger of the day. The fact that Christ is crowned with glory and honour is the pledge that all is to be subjected to Him.

May that blessed Christ be the Morning Star of our hearts, may we be under His yoke, and find in the assembly the compensation for the wilderness path, and then may our feet hasten on to the place where He is gone.