

WRITINGS OF HUGO BOUTER

by Hugo Bouter

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Hugo Bouter, compiled for study and devotional reading.

48 Chapters

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00.01. Christ, The Wisdom Of God

"A Cottage in a Vineyard, a Lodge in a Garden of Cucumbers"

(Isaiah 1:8) Christ, The Wisdom Of God Divine Design, God's plan of salvation from eternity to eternity Reflections on 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 By Hugo Bouter New edition - 2004 "But we preach Christ crucified, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God".1 Corinthians 1:23-24

01.03. The Depths Of God's Wisdom

The Depths Of God's Wisdom In 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 we find some remarkable teaching in connection with God's eternal purpose for His children, for "those who love God". This term is also used in Romans 8:1-39, and in that chapter we get a glimpse of God's eternal plan of salvation, as He purposed it in Himself for His own. They are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. As Christians we have been brought into this particular relationship of love with God as His children and as brethren of the Lord Jesus, and so we are the special objects of His plans and purposes. God - in His love - takes care of us in a perfect way, assuring us that we shall reach the glorious goal. Our assurance is that God is for us, and that nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:28-31). In 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, however, Paul does not treat the subject of God's eternal plans from the point of view of the divine care and certainty, but from that of the divine wisdom. Because of the poor spiritual state of the Corinthians and their reliance on worldly wisdom, he can, in fact, only touch upon these things. As part of his struggle against their worldly wisdom, he can only mention these things in passing. Moreover, God's plans and counsels are not his specific subject here, as for instance in the Epistle to the Ephesians. In First Corinthians, man's responsibility is emphasized, as well as his failure in his responsibility.

Yet in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 the apostle speaks about God's eternal plans and thoughts in a very striking way. These plans are indeed the result of God's wisdom, they originate in a wisdom which far exceeds the wisdom of this world and its rulers. But there is more. These plans of God's wisdom spring from His heart. They are the result of God's love for His children. They are eternal plans of love on behalf of the objects of His love, God's children who are so closely linked with Him that they are those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9). The character of these plans, of this intimate divine wisdom, is described here as follows:

It is a wisdom completely unknown to this world (1 Corinthians 2:6, 1 Corinthians 2:8).

Being God's wisdom, it is a hidden wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:7 a).

It is the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory (1 Corinthians 2:7 b).

Then we find what this wisdom embraces:

All the things which God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

The deep things (or, depths) of God (1 Corinthians 2:10).

The things (or, thoughts) of God (1 Corinthians 2:11).

The things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Spiritual things (or, thoughts) communicated by spiritual words or means (1 Corinthians 2:13).

01.04. The Mysteries Of God

The Mysteries Of God So here we have the depths of God's wisdom, the deepest thoughts of His heart, which could be made known only through revelation. While already existing before the ages, these deep things were hidden in God's heart - even in Old Testament times. They were the great secrets of God's heart concerning His own children, the special objects of His love. Originating before the foundation of the world, they are still hidden from this world and its rulers. God has especially prepared them for His children, and He has kept them hidden in His heart until He could reveal them in His own time.

We know that Paul's ministry in particular related to these secrets of God's wisdom, which God has revealed to His children, and not to the world. Altogether, the New Testament mentions a mystery or mysteries twenty-seven times: three times in the Gospels, four times in the book of Revelation and no less than twenty times in Paul's letters. It was particularly the mystery of Christ and the Church (that is, Christ in His special relationship with His people, His union with the Church) that had been confided to Paul. This mystery is extensively discussed by him in the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians.

There are mysteries in connection with God Himself, such as "the mystery of God", and "the mystery of His will". Others relate to Christ's Person, His incarnation and the results of His finished work, like "the mystery of godliness". There are also mysteries which deal with the Gospel, and with the Kingdom. Several mysteries have to do with man's responsibility and his failure to keep that which had been entrusted to him, such as "the mystery of lawlessness", and the mysteries connected with Babylon the great. For more details see the Appendix.

Here in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 the apostle speaks in general terms about "the wisdom of God in a mystery" (1 Corinthians 2:7). The subject of this passage is the wisdom of God, which was marked by the communication of mysteries. In 1 Corinthians 4:1 Paul calls himself a steward of the mysteries of God. He was entrusted with the stewardship of these treasures of God's wisdom. His task, as well as that of the other apostles, was to handle with care the divine riches of wisdom and knowledge that had been confided to them. In Luke 12:42 the Lord speaks about the responsibility of the faithful and wise steward. Such a steward is not only responsible for his master's possessions; he also has to take care of the other servants. They receive a certain portion of their lord's goods. They eat from his table. The same principle holds good for the house of God. God has established a dwelling place on earth, in which He dwells by His Spirit. For the Church is the temple of the living God. He has also appointed stewards to handle the spiritual goods of His house. These stewards bear a special responsibility for the well-being of the other members of the household, "those who are of the household of faith", "those who are members of the household of God" (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19). This ensures that the members of God's family have their share in the spiritual goods of His house. For they are not only God's servants, but also His beloved children. They are entitled to the possessions of God's house, since these are the legitimate portion of the saints. The task of the stewards is to take care of their spiritual well-being,

to feed them with the goods of God's house and to inform them of the riches that God has reserved for His own.

01.05. Spiritual Maturity Required To Know Gods Wisdom

Spiritual Maturity Required To Know God's Wisdom

Now the members of God's household have to meet a practical requirement to be able to take this food. They need to be spiritually mature to digest the solid food that God has prepared for His children. In the case of the Corinthian Christians the apostle Paul was unable to exercise His stewardship properly. He could not give them the portion that was to be theirs - the solid food of the knowledge of God's mysteries. From a spiritual point of view they were still babies, and had to be fed with milk (1 Corinthians 3:1-2). The Corinthians were blind to the riches that were piled up in the house of God, the treasures of knowledge and wisdom that until then had remained hidden in God's heart, but that He now wished to share with the members of His household, through the service of His stewards. They could not yet digest this food for their souls, as they were so impressed by the wisdom of this world - all the riches of human wisdom and philosophy. They were lending their ears to this world rather than having them tuned to the things of God. Since their attention was focused too much on the world and on themselves, they were not yet mature enough to hear what God had prepared for them. So Paul was a steward or caretaker of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God's house, but he could not display all these riches to the Corinthians; since they could not bear that yet. Still being babies in Christ, they had to be fed with milk and not with solid food. They had not yet grown up to mature young men, who have overcome the world and for whom the wisdom of this world has lost its charm; let alone to mature fathers in the family of God's children, to whom Christ and the wisdom that is found in Him are everything (cf. 1 John 2).

Paul spoke wisdom among those who were mature (1 Corinthians 2:6), that is, among those who were spiritually mature; who had grown up in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same word can be found in 1 Corinthians 14:20 ("in understanding be mature"), Ephesians 4:13 ("to a perfect man"), Php 3:15 ("as many as are mature"), Colossians 1:28 ("that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"), Colossians 4:12 ("perfect and complete in all the will of God"), and Hebrews 5:14 ("solid food belongs to those who are of full age"). So because of the spiritual food that they take, the members of God's household will grow spiritually. The goal of this is that Christ will be formed in them, that they will grow up to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that Christ will be everything to them, and that His image will be clearly seen in them. The solid food of the riches of Christ and the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Him belong to this spiritual maturity. Such is the right food for mature people. For in Christ all God's wisdom is displayed, and Christ is the Centre of all God's mysteries.

01.06. Divine Wisdom Versus Worldly Wisdom

Divine Wisdom Versus Worldly Wisdom

These riches of God's wisdom are intended for those who love Him, for the children of God. They are not intended for the world, which has alienated itself from God, but rather for those who have been brought near to Him. As Christians we have been brought to God, and it is God Himself who enables us to understand the secrets of His heart.

True enough, the world too has its wisdom, but this wisdom is foolishness in the sight of God. Compared to God's wisdom it is just nothing. The wisdom of this world is idle and useless, because it does not originate in God's heart but in a creation which was subjected to futility because of man's fall. Moreover, it is not only the wisdom of the created cosmos, a groaning creation, which is subject to transiency. It is also the wisdom of this present evil age, i.e. the world in its present order under the dominion of Satan, God's adversary, the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4). So it is not surprising to find a huge contrast between divine and worldly wisdom. The wisdom of this world and its rulers is marked by the thinking of the ruler of this world. This was highlighted at the cross, when the rulers of this world - under the influence of Satan - abused their God-given authority by crucifying the Lord of glory. At that moment it became perfectly clear that the world and its ruler were in overt rebellion against God and His Christ. Within the framework of the wisdom of this world it was justifiable to nail Christ, in whom all God's wisdom was revealed, to the cross of shame. But in doing so it was really disgracing itself. God - in His wisdom - used the cross to triumph over the world and its ruler, and to set aside the wisdom of this world completely.

Here in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 we find several important contrasts between divine and worldly wisdom. First of all, we see how these forms of wisdom differ in character:

The wisdom of this world is transient: it belongs to the present age, and will come to nothing like the rulers of this age (1 Corinthians 2:6; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:19).

The wisdom of God, however, dating from before the ages, has as its object an eternal, incorruptible glory for the objects of God's love: it originates in His eternal will and finds its consummation in His eternal glory (1 Corinthians 2:7).

So worldly wisdom is limited by time and transience, whereas divine wisdom is from eternity and will last for all eternity. The wisdom of this world will disappear, but God's counsel will stand. In 1 Corinthians 2:7 God's wisdom is related to His election. It is a wisdom "which God ordained before the ages for our glory", a wisdom which God, so to speak, especially devised for His elect. In Romans 8:29 we see that the saints themselves are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son. Here in 1 Corinthians 2:7 we see that not only persons are predestined, but that there is also a predestined wisdom with regard to them. Therefore this wisdom too, is eternal in its character. It is based on God's eternal purpose.

Now what is the goal of this eternal wisdom? It aims at "our glory". Its objective is to bring the objects of God's love to the glory for which He has predestined them. It grants the objects of God's love a place in the eternal glory of God's Son. Therefore Paul calls Him the "Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). He is the second Man from heaven. Having come down from glory He has, as Man, acquired this glory in order to share it with men. He has been glorified in heaven in virtue of His finished work. It is His legitimate portion (John 17:1-5). But He does not want to be alone in the glory, His desire is to have His companions with Him. This is also the purpose of God the Father, who grants His children a place in the glory of His Son. The next major difference between divine and worldly wisdom is the method of observation, the way in which wisdom is obtained. 1 Corinthians 2:9 first of all mentions the three main fields of human knowledge:

Things that the eye sees: this refers to the major part of the wisdom of this world, which is acquired through sensory perception, notably that of the eye.

Things that the ear hears: the field of history, those things that we know from oral or written tradition.

Things that enter into the heart of man: the field of philosophy, of man's thinking about things visible and invisible.

Divine wisdom, however, is the opposite of this worldly wisdom, for it embraces the things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man; the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. That which man was unable to observe with the eye or the ear, or to grasp with his limited mind, God has prepared for those who love Him. The wisdom of God far exceeds human wisdom. It is immeasurably higher than human wisdom, because it grants the new man in Christ a place in God's glory. It is infinitely older than all human knowledge, because it is based on God's eternal purpose with regard to the objects of His love. Dating from eternity, it will last eternally. It is the lasting, unchanging wisdom of God, which surpasses all human thinking - true wisdom from above, which does not originate in this world but in the heart of God.

God has prepared this wisdom for those who love Him. He has laid out the mysteries of His wisdom for those who, in and through Christ, have been brought into a special relationship of love with Him.

01.07. Christ As The Preacher Of Gods Wisdom

Christ As The Preacher Of God's Wisdom But how can we become partakers of this divine wisdom, which surpasses human thinking? How can we ever come to know this eternal wisdom of God, if it is incomprehensible and imperceptible to man? This obvious question is dealt with in the following verses (1 Corinthians 2:10 ff.).

God has revealed the mysteries of His wisdom and the secrets of His heart through His Spirit. These things have been communicated to us by divine revelation. But before saying more about this, we should like to point out that, in the first place, God's wisdom has been revealed in Christ. This has to do with the first chapter of the letter to the Corinthians, which portrays Christ as the incarnation of the wisdom of God.

Without Christ it was entirely impossible for us to come to know the wisdom of God. Man has alienated himself from God, he has turned his back upon God. Being in such a state, how could he ever be able to acquire God's wisdom? Man needed a Messenger from God to give him a clear insight into God's wisdom, a Person coming from God to preach this wisdom to him. This is hinted at in the book of Job, where Elihu speaks about the need of a Messenger, a Mediator, to mediate between God and man and to pay the ransom that is required to reconcile fallen man with God (Job 33:23-24).

Now who could act as God's Messenger to redeem man's sin and to open his eyes for the riches of the wisdom of God? It had to be Somebody who was with God and who knew all the mysteries of God's wisdom and who, at the same time, was able to meet man's needs. He had to represent God in the right way, and to have acceptance with man.

It could not be an angel, for how could angels (ministering spirits) gain an insight into the secrets of God's heart? Angels obey God's commandments, but the secrets of God's love are hidden from them. Angels cannot come down to fallen man's level in order to provide for man's greatest needs and to deliver him from sin. Having been created by God, angels have to keep their proper domain, their own original state. They are unable to pay a ransom for any of God's other creatures, just as man himself is unable to pay a ransom for his brother (Psalms 49:7-8). Therefore no angel could lower himself to man's level in order to lift him up, so that he would be able to understand the riches of God's wisdom.

Scripture teaches us that the right Messenger from God could be none other than the Son of God, the beloved One in whom God is well pleased. Christ is the perfect expression of God's thoughts, and the full revelation of God's nature. He is the eternal Word, and He was in the beginning with God. He is God the Son, and all things were made through Him. All things were created by Him: the angels, the cosmos, as well as man. He alone could reconcile all things to God, whether things on earth or things in heaven. For the whole creation had been alienated from God by the fall of Satan and of man himself. So Christ was the only One who was able to pay the ransom for fallen man and bring him back to God - redeemed. Only He was able to come down to man's level,

without losing His Godhead because of this, in order to lift man out of the misery into which he had sunk. Only the Son could explain the Father to us and reveal the secrets of the Father's heart. Only the Word could become flesh in order to suffer for us and to unite us with Himself as redeemed children of God in the glorious results of His work (John 1:1-51, Colossians 1:1-29, Hebrews 1:1-14). And God sent forth His Son, when the fullness of the time had come (Galatians 4:4), after the 'trial period' of the first man was over. Then the time had come to put aside the first man and all his wisdom, and to replace him by the second Man and the wisdom of God as displayed in Him. Divine wisdom can be known only in and through Him. Christ is both the power and the wisdom of God, and He became for us wisdom from God (1 Corinthians 1:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

01.08. Wisdom Is His Name

Wisdom Is His Name The fact that Christ is the wisdom of God is also indicated in the book of Proverbs. There wisdom is sometimes personified, and then we easily recognize in it the eternal Word, the Wisdom of God (Proverbs 8:22-31). Christ is presented in a threefold relationship there:

The relationship with God the Father: He was with God and He was the Father's joy and delight from eternity, before the beginning of creation.

The relationship with the universe: He was present when everything was created, and He was the master workman or craftsman - which is another translation of little child or nursling (JND) - by whom creation came about (see also Proverbs 3:19). He was the wise Master Builder who rejoiced in His creation.

The relationship with mankind: He, who was Himself the delight of the Father's heart, had His delight in the sons of men. The result of Wisdom being well pleased with the sons of men was its incarnation. Eternal Wisdom personally descended to the earth.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Christ has declared the Father and He has glorified Him on the earth (John 1:14; John 1:18; John 17:4). He came down to save the sons of men in whom He delighted. His coming in the flesh proved His genuine and intense interest in man as the crown of His creation.

Since the children partake of blood and flesh, He took part in the same on our behalf to deliver us from the power of death and of Satan, and to bring us to glory (Hebrews 2:10-15). Small wonder that when the Son of Man was born the angels rejoiced: "(...) good will toward men!" (Luke 2:14). He who was the Father's delight became Man in order to redeem the sons of men and to show them the Father's heart. He who was the Wisdom of God found ways and means to deliver the objects of His delight, and to show them the secrets of God's love.

01.09. Christ Crucified

Christ Crucified So God's wisdom came to us in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has not only preached the wisdom of God to us, but He is God's Wisdom. Nor did He only reveal the Word of God to us, but He is the Word of God. This is a very important point indeed. In Him, God's wisdom took shape: in the One who became Man, who was crucified, raised and exalted at the right hand of God. In Him God's wisdom was revealed, in the One who descended into the deepest depths and who was subsequently exalted by God to the highest heights. So Christ is the wisdom of God. That is how the apostle Paul presents Him in 1 Corinthians 1:1-31 : first as the crucified One, then as the risen and glorified Lord. Paul did not speak only about the cross of Christ. He preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified. So he spoke about the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, but because of the spiritual state of the Corinthians he had to emphasize the meaning of His cross. The Corinthians boasted in the first man and in man's wisdom. But the cross of Christ has judged and removed the first man, and his wisdom too. It proclaims this world and its wisdom to be dead. It has rendered this wisdom foolishness, so there is no reason whatsoever to boast in worldly wisdom. A new kind of wisdom has been brought to light, not man's wisdom but God's. God has revealed this wisdom in the Second Man, who descended from heaven and ascended into heaven again. Thus Christ, in His great accomplished work, is the revelation of the wisdom of God. He is the personal manifestation of this wisdom.

Now how can we become partakers of this wisdom? We are partakers of it because we are linked with Christ, the wisdom of God. We know God's wisdom because we know Him. To us Christ is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). God purposed to link us with this Person in whom divine wisdom is manifested: "But of Him (i.e. God) you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). In accordance with God's purpose we are now in Christ Jesus, the One who was crucified by the world, but then exalted to the right hand of God in heaven. What does this mean, being in Him? It means that we are united with Christ. Rather than viewing us as natural people, as sinful descendants of the first Adam, God now sees us in Christ. God has established us "in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:21). He has united us with Him who is the Head of a new generation. The position of Christ is our position, and the life of Christ is our life. The place where Christ is now before God indicates what our place is. With Him we died, and with Him we were buried, raised and placed in the heavenlies. Thus God has linked us with the One who is Himself the wisdom of God, so that we are now partakers of this wisdom, as revealed in Him. We are in Christ, who became for us wisdom from God. Between Christ, the wisdom of God, and His people unbreakable ties have been established. While we are His, we may also call Him ours.

Therefore the wisdom of God can be seen in the saints as well. For the manifold wisdom of God is made known by the Church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10). The angels are amazed at the Church and its wonderful union with its Head in heaven. To them this proves the riches of God's wisdom. They saw the wisdom of God already, as expressed in Christ. They watched His incarnation, His humiliation to the death of the cross and His exaltation

at the right hand of God. But now they are amazed at the fact that the Church, a company of children of men, is linked with this glorified Man. This offers them surprisingly new aspects of God's wisdom. The manifold wisdom of God is revealed in this new creation, which is the fruit of Christ's finished work.

01.10. The Spirit As The Preacher Of Gods Wisdom

The Spirit As The Preacher Of God's Wisdom

Now God has sent yet another Messenger from heaven to proclaim His wisdom to us. While 1 Corinthians 1:1-31 shows us Christ as the wisdom of God in person, 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 presents us the Spirit as the One who makes the secrets of God's wisdom known to us. The treasures of God's wisdom, which God has prepared for those who love Him, are now revealed by the Spirit of God. The Spirit thus continues the revelation of God's wisdom in the Person of Christ. This is the divine order. Christ had to come first and to finish the work which God had given Him to do. Because of this He Himself was exalted at God's right hand in heaven, whereupon the Holy Spirit was sent to this earth as the Witness of Christ's finished work. Now the Spirit takes of that which belongs to the exalted Christ, and discloses it to us. As the Lord told His disciples: "He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13-15). The Holy Spirit shows us all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Him. He acts like Abraham's servant, who took a bride for Isaac and adorned her with his riches (see Genesis 24:1-67). Thus the Holy Spirit speaks of the heavenly things of which Christ Himself had already borne witness (John 3:11-16; John 3:27-36). He adorns the bride of Christ with the riches of heaven. Here in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 these heavenly things are called, "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9), "the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10), and "the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). The Holy Spirit knows all these things perfectly. He searches them and He came to this earth especially to disclose them to us (1 Corinthians 2:9-12). So in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 the Spirit is the Bearer of the wisdom of God. The secrets of God's wisdom and the hidden depths of God's heart have been revealed to us through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10 a). The apostle then compares this with our human spirit: only the spirit of a man himself knows his deepest thoughts. Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). But since we have received the Spirit who is from God, we also know the things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Having the Spirit of God is the key to understanding the wisdom of God. We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God. The spirit of the world gives an understanding of the wisdom of this world, but the Spirit of God teaches us what divine wisdom is. We have already mentioned the contrast between the two forms of wisdom. The world is full of the things that are not from God. An unbridgeable gap exists between the Father and the world, between divine and worldly wisdom. For all that is in the world is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

It is only by the Spirit "who is from God" that we can understand the things of God. The Holy Spirit was sent to this world by the Father and the Son to tell us heavenly things, the things which God has prepared for His own. The Spirit enlightens the eyes of our understanding, that we may know these things - the depths of God's wisdom. This is the purpose of the mission of the Spirit: to communicate to God's children in this world which does not know God, the things that God has given us in Christ even before the world was.

01.11. The Wisdom Of God Disclosed By The Spirit

The Wisdom Of God Disclosed By The Spirit

How can we obtain this divine wisdom? Is it something mystical? Does one need to descend into the depths of one's own heart in order to reach this divine wisdom? No, the Spirit of God has descended from on high, and has revealed the secrets of God's heart by means of the written Word. The wisdom of God has been imparted to us by the Spirit-breathed Scriptures.

Here in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 the apostle Paul discerns several steps in the communication of the hidden wisdom of God. These steps could be summed up in three words: revelation, inspiration, and enlightenment. So we see the following stages in the disclosure of the hidden wisdom of God:

The Spirit revealed the deep things of God to the apostles and the prophets of the New Testament (1 Corinthians 2:10-12).

Inspired by the Spirit, the apostles spread them through the spoken and the written word (1 Corinthians 2:13; cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The same Spirit enlightens those who are spiritual to receive these things (1 Corinthians 2:14-16). Paul emphasizes that taking part in God's wisdom is a matter of the Spirit of God, who plays a decisive role in each of the three steps of the communication of God's wisdom. Its revelation and proclamation, as well as its reception, are all the work of the Spirit.

First of all, the Spirit worked in the apostles in order to initiate them into the wisdom of God. He not only brought to their remembrance all things that the Lord said to them during His life here on earth, but He taught them all things and guided them into all truth. And He told them things to come (John 14:26; John 16:13). The Spirit showed them the glories of the heavenly Head and the results of His redemptive work, by which the redeemed become partakers of heavenly things.

Secondly, the Spirit used the apostles for the proclamation of God's wisdom. They spoke these things, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing or combining spiritual things with spiritual words (1 Corinthians 2:13). God being a Spirit, the things of God are spiritual things, for they refer to spiritual blessings and spiritual realities. Therefore, these things had to be made known too by spiritual words. Just as the words of Christ Himself were spirit, and were life, so the words of the Spirit are of a spiritual character, marked as they are by the breath of life of the Spirit of God (John 6:63; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

Thirdly, the reception of these inspired words is also the result of the Spirit's work. The natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God; only the spiritual man can, because the Spirit dwells and works in him. Having been born of the Spirit, the believer possesses a new nature which is spirit (John 3:6). He has received a new spiritual life, a resurrection life, which is ruled by a new principle, namely the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:2). Besides, he is indwelt by the Spirit Himself, who bears witness with his spirit that he is a child of God (Romans 8:16). So the believer is made a spiritual man by these two blessings: the life of the risen Lord and

the indwelling of the Spirit Himself. Thereby we obtain insight into the things of God and are capable of assessing the words of the Spirit - the words of Scripture. We ponder them in our hearts, and understand the mind of God. Because we have the mind of Christ, i.e. the feelings, and the thoughts of Christ, we have insight into the thoughts of God and His eternal purposes, all the riches of His grace. So we know the wisdom of God for these two reasons:

Because we are partakers of Christ, who is Himself the incarnation of this wisdom.

Because we are enlightened by the Spirit and because the Spirit, who knows and searches the depths of God's wisdom, governs our lives.

01.12. Appendix: The Mysteries Of God As Revealed In The New Testament

Appendix: The Mysteries Of God As Revealed In The New Testament Matthew, Mark, Luke

Matthew 13:11 "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven".

Mark 4:11 "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God".

Luke 8:10 "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God".

Romans

Romans 11:25-26

"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written".

Romans 16:25-27

"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith - to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen".

1 Corinthians 1 Corinthians 2:7

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory".

1 Corinthians 4:1 "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God".

1 Corinthians 13:2 "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge".

1 Corinthians 14:2

"For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries".

1 Corinthians 15:50-52

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all

be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed".

Ephesians Ephesians 1:9-10

"Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ".

Ephesians 3:3-5

"How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets".

Ephesians 3:8-10

"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all people see what is the fellowship (or, administration) of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the Church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places".

Ephesians 5:30-32

"For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church".

Ephesians 6:19-20

"(...) that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains".

Colossians Colossians 1:25-27

"(...) of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory".

Colossians 2:2-3

"(...) that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge".

Colossians 4:3-4

"(...) meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak".

2 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8

"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed".

1 Timothy

1 Timothy 3:9 "(...) holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience".

1 Timothy 3:16

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory".

Revelation

Revelation 1:20

"The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches".

Revelation 10:6-7

"(...) and swore (...) that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets".

Revelation 17:5-7

"And on her forehead a name was written: Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marvelled with great amazement. But the angel said to me, 'Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns'".

Hugo Bouter Ere God had built the mountains

Ere God had built the mountains,

Or raised the fruitful hills,

Before He filled the fountains

That feed the running rills,

In Thee from everlasting,

The wonderful I AM

Found pleasures never wasting,
And Wisdom is Thy name. When like a tent to dwell in,
He spread the skies abroad,
And swathed about the swelling
Of ocean's mighty flood,
He wrought by weight and measure;
And Thou wast with Him then,
Thyself the Father's pleasure,
And Thine, the sons of men. And couldst Thou be delighted
With creatures such as we,
Who, when we saw Thee,
sighted, And nailed Thee to the tree?
Unfathomable wonder,
And mystery divine!
The voice that speaks in thunder,
Says, "Sinner I am thine". And art Thou, Lord, delighted
To call us now Thine own-
The love no longer slighted
Which Thou to us hast shown?
Oh, way of purposed blessing
In death told out to man!
The fruit we're now possessing,
Of Wisdom's wondrous plan.

02.01. Divine Design

Divine Design by Hugo Bouter

02.02. Preface

Preface God's plan of salvation, presented in five steps from eternity to eternity

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified".

Romans 8:28-30

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02.04. Divine Assurance

Divine Assurance And we know

God's plan of salvation spans the ages, in fact it stretches from eternity to eternity. It has been unfolded in a nutshell in a few Bible verses in Romans 8:1-39 (Romans 8:28-30). But this plan does not include all mankind, it aims at a special class of people, namely "those who love God". Who are they? They are His people, God's own children, born of Him and of His Spirit. They enjoy the divine promise, the divine assurance: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). The apostle Paul bases the assurance of which he speaks on the firmness of God's eternal plan of salvation for His own, as it is explained in the following verses of this chapter (Romans 8:29-30). This remarkable passage we will now study. The apostle's purpose in writing these words is that we should learn to see everything in the light of God's plan of salvation, that we should learn to view everything from the heights of His own plans and thoughts. That is the basis of the joyful assurance: "And we know (...)". Our assurance is based on the consciousness of all that God is, and does, for us. The expression "we know" occurs very often in the New Testament, both in the Epistles of Paul and those of John. It suggests the spiritual insight of God's children into the things of God, because of their anointing from the Holy One ("...and you know all things", 1 John 2:20). Here in Romans 8:1-39 the words, "And we know" of Romans 8:28 are in contrast with the expression, "For we do not know" of Romans 8:26. This divine assurance which directs our eyes upward and focuses our attention on God's eternal counsels is opposed to the uncertainty of our feelings in the midst of a groaning creation.

All things work together for good

Now what do we know? Our assurance here is that all things work together for good to those who have a place in these eternal counsels, and who have been called accordingly. For it is God who determines the course of all things. He holds all things in His hands. Nothing can happen which would change His plans or would detract from His counsels. He transcends all things visible. He uses the things that surround and, perhaps, frighten us, as the stage for the fulfilment of His plans. His eternal purpose will be established, and all things serve to realize this. All things cannot but work for good, even though everything might seem to go wrong. With Christ, God will also freely give us all things (Romans 8:32). They are ours, they are at our disposal. Whether God's servants, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come - all are ours (1 Corinthians 3:22). And none of these things can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39). Nothing can thwart God in the execution of His eternal plans of love, and nothing can rob us of the assurance of His love.

Beyond that we are not merely the passive objects of His love. It does not say here that all things work together for good to those who are loved by God (although this is true as well). It is rather the opposite that is stated: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God". So here our love of God is emphasized, while at the end of Romans 8:1-39 God's love for us

is emphasized (nothing can separate us from the love of God and of Christ). For God's love cannot but awaken a response in the hearts of His children. He expects us to be aware of the riches of His love and to love Him in return. He expects us to take the place of loving children and sons.

There is nothing artificial about that. We do not need to produce this reciprocating love ourselves, for the love of God has been poured out in our hearts (Romans 5:5). In this way we have been brought into this relationship of love with Himself. Nothing can change this. But we can make this love flourish by immersing ourselves in the riches of His endless love for us. So when we are true Christians, all things do work together for good to us because we enjoy a place in His plans of love. This fact cannot be changed in any way by the practical level of our faith. But God expects us to have an increasing awareness of the place that He has given us, and of the precious relationship into which He has brought us. As we gain a clearer understanding of the position to which God has raised us in Christ, our hearts will be filled more and more with love and gratitude. We shall increasingly respond to the relationship with our Father, and to His love. And so we shall realize better that God orders all things in such a way that they work together for good. All things are subordinate to the divine plan of salvation, which began with His election and which ends in His glory. This will strengthen our faith, increase our assurance, and quicken our hope.

02.05. Gods Way Of Salvation

God's Way Of Salvation Those who love God When we were sinners we needed a fundamental change in our relationship with God. The Bible calls this the new birth (John 3:1-36). We had to be transformed from being God-haters into God-lovers. We had to be reconciled with God, and to be placed into a wholly new relationship with Him. Since we were saved our relationship with God has been that of children and sons of God, and at the same time that of brethren of the Lord Jesus. The expression "those who love God" characterizes this new relationship which believers have with their God and Father. To that end they have received a new nature, the divine nature which is characterized by love. So both our position before God and our relationship with Him had to be radically changed. When this change has been effected, and we are called sons of the living God, we may wonder, What is God's purpose in all this? What are God's plans for those whom He has brought into this new relationship with Himself and with His dear Son? For why should we assume that we have been brought to God by chance? No, God has a clear purpose which He has prepared beforehand with regard to those who love Him. There is a certain plan that God has purposed by Himself, because He first loved us.

God's purpose

Romans 8:1-39 informs us about this plan of God. Christians may see everything from an eternal perspective. They are on their way to glory, and everything that they encounter along that way works for their good. It contributes to their reaching the goal. In the light of God's eternal purpose everything looks different. All emphasis is laid on the divine plan of salvation. When the apostle speaks about "those who love God", he is quick to add that they are those "who are the called according to His purpose". The one goes with the other. If we love God and can call Him "Abba, Father", then this is not our achievement but God's work. It has to do with His purpose and His calling. It is an eternal initiative on the part of God Himself. For His plan of salvation to be fulfilled, God needed not only a purpose that was His own, but also a calling that was His own.

Now what exactly is this divine way of salvation? What are the stages in this divine plan? Romans 8:1-39 gives us the following five stages:

Divine foreknowledge

Predestination

God's calling

Justification

Glorification

It begins with God's eternal election, and ends with His eternal glory. God has chosen His own from eternity past, and through His calling and the essential work of justification He brings them to glory, where there is fullness of joy for evermore!

02.06. Divine Foreknowledge

Divine Foreknowledge His delight was with the sons of men So these verses in Romans 8:1-39 allow us a glimpse into God's counsels, although these counsels are not the main subject of the Epistle to the Romans. What is highlighted in Romans is man's responsibility (first as living in sin, then as alive to God in Christ Jesus). But it seems that the apostle Paul wants to lift a corner of the veil here to allow us a glimpse of God's side of the matter. We are confronted with the eternal counsels that God has decreed independently of man's position, and irrespective of man's responsibility. Further on in the New Testament - in the letter to the Ephesians - we find a more detailed exposition of these eternal counsels which God carried out in and through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Foreknowledge is the first part of God's purpose. God's foreknowledge is an aspect of His omniscience. Man has to acquire knowledge, and he does so by means of the information which he obtains. We have knowledge only after having been informed by others or by the media. But God knows already beforehand, before events take place and people are there. God's knowledge is not limited by time - it transcends time just as God Himself transcends time. He knows beforehand what will happen. He declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done (Isaiah 46:10).

Chosen in Christ

God's foreknowledge has an active character as well. It is not only knowledge of what is going to happen, but also knowledge that determines what is going to happen. This foreknowledge leaves its mark on the course of events. It is linked with God's sovereign, free election. In 1 Peter 1:2 we read about the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father". God has foreknown and chosen His own, to make them accepted in the Beloved:

God's deep eternal counsel Chose us in Christ the Son Before the earth's foundation Or time had yet begun; That we might all the nearness Of the Belovèd know, And brought to God as children Our children's praises flow.

Therefore the Scriptures show us that God's foreknowledge is also connected with the Saviour Himself. It is closely tied up with the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. For He was delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God. He indeed was foreordained as the Lamb of God before the foundation of the world (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20).

Here in Romans 8:1-39, foreknowledge is connected with the predestination of the saints: "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Predestination goes a bit further than election, as we shall see from the study of these two expressions in Ephesians 1:4-5.

02.07. Predestination

Predestination Men on whom God's favour rests In Ephesians 1:1-23 we find election in Ephesians 1:4, and predestination in Ephesians 1:5. In electing us before the foundation of the world, God had in mind to place us "holy and without blame before Him in love". We needed a new nature that was in keeping with His essential being, His holiness as well as His love. For God is light, and He is love. This privilege is given to us in the new birth. Next we have predestination, which is aimed at our "adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will". This makes it clear that predestination relates to an additional blessing. As election was with a view to becoming God's children, predestination was with a view to obtaining the privilege of sonship. Christians are not only children of God, but also sons of God. While being in the flesh, we could not be recognized as His children. Being a child of God is a prerequisite, so to speak, for appearing in His presence. But in addition to this, God has also granted us the position of sons, the special blessing of sonship. We are now companions of the Son of God, who became Man to redeem us and bring us to God. By Jesus Christ we have been placed before God as sons, sons to Himself, sons in whom God is well pleased. This clearly links up with what we read in Romans 8:1-39 : God has predestined us "to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). These brethren bear His image and reflect His glory. This special blessing could be ours only as a result of a divine predestination, a decision to be destined for blessing before the foundation of the world. The vessels of wrath, on the other hand, prepared themselves for destruction during their lifetime (Romans 9:22).

Called into God's glory

We understand that this particular predestination was necessary also because man's natural place is in the earth. For the heavens are the LORD'S, but the earth He has given to the children of men (Psalms 115:16). Now, however, a Man is placed in heaven, in the glory of God, because He glorified God on the earth (John 13:31-32; John 17:4-5; Acts 7:55-56). But this Man, the Man Christ Jesus, is not alone there. He has companions, He has brethren. He is united with a company of sons, and in their midst He is the firstborn. This means that He takes the first place among them; He is united with them, yet distinguished from them. This is God's purpose. He grants us the blessing of sonship. He wants to conform us to the image of His beloved Son, and to place us with Him in the same heavenly glory. God has placed us in this entirely new position, which far exceeds Adam's blessings in the garden of Eden. Therefore we now have the privilege of addressing God as "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). This relationship with the Father is the fruit of the redemptive work of the Son, who calls us His brethren as the Risen One (Psalms 22:22; John 20:17). But we shall not be fully conformed to the image of God's Son, until He appears as our Saviour to transform our lowly bodies that they may be conformed to His glorious body (Php 3:20-21). That is why at the present time our sonship is still linked with a living hope. We are eagerly waiting for (the full extent of) the adoption, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23). So the ultimate goal of our predestination is this future glory - although Christ is already representing us there, and we are placed there in Him. Therefore glorification is the last

step of the plan of salvation as outlined in Romans 8:1-39. This thought is confirmed by Ephesians 1:1-23, where predestination is not only mentioned as the basis of our sonship, but also as the foundation of the future glory which we are to inherit. We are both sons and heirs. For in Christ we also "have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11).

What a position is ours as a result of this divine predestination! In heavenly glory we shall surround the Father and the Son throughout all ages, as children and sons of the Father, and brethren of the Lord Jesus. Moreover, we shall share in the public manifestation of God's glory when Christ as Head over all things will assume His millennial reign.

02.08. Gods Calling

God's Calling Called into His marvellous light

We now come to the means of entering into these blessings, the change that had to be effected in the present time to qualify us for these privileges. To raise us to the position of sons and heirs, much had to take place. God's purpose was to bless us, but our fallen state prevented Him from doing so. We had gone astray, we were far from God. We were without Christ, having no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). We all like sheep had gone astray, and God had to call us back. God had to call us to Himself if He wished to realize His plans. We had to be brought to God (1 Peter 3:18). That is the substance of the calling.

God calls us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9). He calls us out of the spiritual and moral darkness, in which we walk by nature, to bring us into the light of His presence. The Father has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light, and He has delivered us from the power of darkness (Colossians 1:12-13). This calling is also life-giving. We have not only been called out of darkness into His marvellous light, but also out of death into life. Like Lazarus, who was called out of the tomb, we have been raised out of our spiritual death-sleep. The miracle of the calling is that the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and are brought to life (John 5:24-25). The portion to which we are called, is eternal life (1 Timothy 6:12). In the Bible more of these contrasts can be found. We used to be slaves of sin, but we have now been called to Christian liberty (Galatians 5:8; Galatians 5:13). We used to be unholy, but now we are called saints (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2). We used to live in impurity, but God has called us in holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7). We were at variance with God and with one another, but now we are called in one body to the peace of God (Colossians 3:15). We had no part with Christ, but now we are called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9). We fell short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), but now God calls us into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12). God is the God of all grace, who calls us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus (1 Peter 5:10).

Broadly speaking, the positive aspect of the calling is the most important thing - not the state out of which we have been called, but the blessing to which we have been called. The following Scriptures illustrate this. We have been called to receive the promise of the Spirit (Acts 2:39), to gain the prize (Php 3:14), to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:14), to receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15), and to inherit a blessing (1 Peter 3:9). The call of God enables us to receive the blessing which He had laid up for us from eternity past. His calling takes place at a certain time, whereas the purpose is eternal. The aim of the calling is to fulfil the eternal purpose (cf. Ephesians 3:11). For God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began (2 Timothy 1:9). Romans 8:1-39 also says that we are the called according to His purpose. So our calling is necessary to carry out God's predestination (Romans 8:28; Romans 8:30). It is an indispensable link between God's eternal

purpose and the eternal glory for which He has predestined us. Nobody is entitled to the heavenly blessings which are given by God in Christ Jesus, unless he is called by God to inherit them.

Called to heavenly blessings This calling by God is a necessity, irrespective of man's Fall. For it implies the inheritance of special heavenly blessings, which far exceed Adam's portion in the garden of Eden. It is the upward call of God, the heavenly calling (Php 3:14; Hebrews 3:1). Adam was innocent and he had a paradise on earth, but he was not called to come into God's presence in heaven. His calling related to the earth; he had not been made fit for heaven. The first man Adam was not marked by the characteristics of the new creation either: true righteousness and true holiness, leading to a complete separation from evil (Ephesians 4:24). Adam was a creature who bore God's image, but he had not escaped the corruption that came into the world through lust. He was not a Christian, he was no partaker of the divine nature which refuses and rejects evil (2 Peter 1:4). Although he bore God's image here below, he was unable to enter the heavenly glory and bear the image of God's Son above. This is exclusively the fruit of "so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:3), which grants us more blessings than Adam lost by the Fall.

Therefore the calling is not without the redeeming and renewing power that is needed to qualify us for this heavenly portion. The calling is not something optional; it is living and powerful. God's voice is life-giving, and brings about the new birth. The New Testament nearly always speaks about the calling in this way, and it includes both the calling of the Gospel on the one hand and the work of God in our hearts - by which we obey God's call and believe in His Word - on the other hand. These two go together. Our calling is God's work, resulting from His gracious predestination (cf. Romans 8:28-30, and also 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2 Peter 1:10). A well-known exception to this rule is the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-46, where obviously the outward character of the calling is emphasized. There the calling is not linked with an earlier predestination, but rather rendered in contrast with it ("Many are called, but few are chosen").

So, first of all, the calling is God's own work. It is God who calls us; this is mentioned about fifteen times in the New Testament. It is His calling (Ephesians 1:18). But God's voice comes to us through His Son. God sent His Son, the Word who was with God. That is a second aspect of the calling. It is the call of God in Christ Jesus (Php 3:14). We have been called in the Lord, and in the grace of Christ (1 Corinthians 7:22; Galatians 1:6). Christ came to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). A third aspect of the calling is the means which God uses to make His voice heard. God calls us by the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), which is preached as a result of the finished work of the Son.

02.09. Justification

Justification How can a man be righteous before God? The next step to prepare us for glory is justification. Sinful man had to be cleared of all charges, and to be declared righteous. He must be made righteous in order to be fit for the glory for which God has destined His chosen ones. For no unrighteous person can be allowed to enter into God's glory, into the pure light of His presence. So with regard to the subject of justification, the same principle applies as noted in connection with the calling: it is a necessary link between God's eternal purpose and the future glory in which this purpose will be fulfilled. Our Lord had not come to call the righteous (i.e. people who considered themselves to be righteous), but sinners, to repentance (Luke 5:32). But these repentant sinners cannot remain sinners once they hear God's call. They have to be made righteous.

Justification is dealt with particularly in the Epistle to the Romans, from three different points of view:

In the first place, justification means that guilty sinners are acquitted of their sins because of the atoning blood of Christ. It is a matter of God's grace, and we receive it as His gift. Justification is not by our own works, the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. We are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:20-31; Romans 4:1-8).

In the second place, justification has a more positive aspect, because Christ was raised from the dead. He was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification. His resurrection proves that God has accepted His work and found full satisfaction in it. So we put our trust not only in the value of the death of Christ, but also in the power of His resurrection. On the one hand the object of our faith is the One who died to sin once for all, on the other it is God who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him at His right hand in heaven. As a result of this we have peace with God, we have access into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 4:24-25; Romans 5:1-2).

In the third place, justification is "justification of life", based on our union with the risen Christ. He is the Head of a new generation of men, and we have been made righteous by His obedience - just as by one man's disobedience we were made sinners (Romans 5:18-19).

Justification of life This last point is very important. God does not only declare us righteous because our sins have been blotted out, but also because we are new creatures in Christ. God does not see us as children of Adam, as natural men and fallen sinners any longer. He regards us as those who are united with Another, the risen Lord, the Head of a new race. We died with Christ, and this finished our link with the first Adam. And now we are in Christ: in the risen One we have an entirely new position, and an entirely new life. So justification not only has to do with our evil actions, our sins (in that they are not held against us), but also with our life, the very nature from which our actions originate. Therefore Romans 6:7 tells us that we have been freed from sin: "For he who has died has been freed from sin". The word is singular, indicating the sinful nature, the evil power that produced the sinful actions, or sins. We died with Christ, and so we are dead to sin.

God regards us as alive to Him in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the risen Lord we have a new position before God and also a new life, and both are marked with a perfect righteousness. For that reason, because we are in Christ, because we are united with Him who is the Head of a new generation, there is no judgment, no charge against us. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Who is he who condemns? If God Himself is the One who justifies us, who shall bring a charge against us (Romans 8:1; Romans 8:33-34)?

Justification is based on Christ's death and resurrection. We are not justified by Christ's perfect life on the earth, or by His perfect obedience to the law. We are made righteous because of our union with the One who died and rose again. For by His death Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). The death of Christ has put an end to our life in the flesh, and His resurrection has granted us a new place and a new life! So with our resurrection life, we also possess what one might call a "resurrection righteousness", a positional righteousness based on Christ's own resurrection and subsequent glorification.

God acted in righteousness on behalf of His Son in that He raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him to His right hand in heaven. God could not leave Him among the dead after He had finished the work of redemption and had glorified His God and Father on the earth. God raised Him, and crowned Him with glory and honour. This was an act of God's righteousness. Christ's glorification in heaven was God's righteous answer to the work that Christ had done here below (cf. John 13:31-32; John 16:10; John 17:4-5). And we share in the place and the position which Christ received as a result of God's righteous intervention on His behalf. That is the essence of our justification. We are united with Him in His resurrection and glorification. God has granted us the same place that Christ has won rightfully. God views us as one with Him, God views us in Him. Christ is our Head and our Representative. His place is our place, and His life is our life. As Paul puts it: "But of Him (i.e. God) you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us ... righteousness..." (1 Corinthians 1:30). "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

02.10. Glorification

Glorification These He also glorified This also shows us how justification is related to glorification: justification rightfully grants us a place in the glory of God. Justification entitles us to the heavenly glory for which we, by nature, were not fit at all. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Therefore it is not surprising that the Epistle to the Romans emphasizes this contrast with our present position so strongly. Formerly, we fell short of the glory of God, it was unattainable for us. But now, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1-2).

Romans 8:1-39 even puts it in the past tense: "...and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:30). Glorification is not just a hope, it is something we already possess in Christ. The glorified Christ is the pledge of our own glorification. God views us in Him, and it is in Him that He has given us the glory which He, the Man Christ Jesus, obtained for us.

Let us now turn to Romans 9:1-33, where we are called the vessels of God's mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory (Romans 9:23). Here a line is drawn to the past, to God's eternal purpose. It was His purpose to unite us with His beloved Son, and to bring us to glory. It was His desire to introduce us into His own presence in heaven. So the result of God's eternal purpose for the objects of His mercy is an eternal, abiding, heavenly glory. His plan is to transform us into people who bear the image of His Son in glory. And for this He has prepared us beforehand, that is, before the foundation of the world. As for the implementation of this purpose, there are two aspects to be discerned, an outward and an inward aspect. God's purpose will be fulfilled in the outward glory with which He will fill creation. The glory of God's Name will be seen in all the earth when Christ, as the last Adam, assumes His millennial reign (Psalms 8:1-9). Then the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. And we ourselves shall receive the redemption of our body, and be glorified as well (Romans 8:21-23). The redeemed will be revealed with Christ in glory after first having been taken up in glory, and having their lowly bodies transformed and conformed to His glorious body (Php 3:21; Colossians 3:4). His glory will then be seen and be admired in them (2 Thessalonians 1:10). As the first Adam was not alone, but was set to reign over the first creation together with Eve, likewise the last Adam will have His bride, the glorified Church, and will reign with her over the world to come.

You have set Your glory above the heavens In the last Book of the Bible the glory of the Church as the bride, the Lamb's wife, is called "the glory of God" (Revelation 21:11; Revelation 21:23). This is the outward manifestation of God's glory in the creation. The Church is the heavenly seat, the heavenly centre of this glory, for the glory of God illuminates it, and the Lamb is its light. It is the Jerusalem above, while Jerusalem which now is - after its restoration - will be the centre of this glory on earth. This glory of the New Jerusalem will be observed by the creation.

We find this aspect of our glorification also in John's Gospel, where it is mentioned by the Son Himself in His prayer to the Father: "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them..., and

that the world may know that You have sent Me" (John 17:22-23). This is an outward, manifest glory, which causes the world to recognize Him. This is immediately followed by the inward aspect of our glorification - that part of the glory which is hidden from the world and can be seen only by God's children, by those who are members of God's household. In John 17:24 we read: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world". This is the glory of the Father's house, where Christ has prepared a place for us upon His return to the Father (John 14:2-3). In the Father's house we shall see and admire Christ's glory. It is there that He enjoys a particular portion, a special glory, for He is the firstborn among many brethren.

We shall be like Him in the public manifestation of His glory, when He appears in glory (Colossians 3:4). But this does not hold good for the inward aspect of His glory. In His Father's house we shall see Him, and admire His unique glory. So there is a glory of the children of God which can be observed by creation, and the liberty of this glory will be shared by it (Romans 8:21). But there is also a glory which remains hidden from the world, limited as it is to the household of the children of God. In the outward realm of glory we shall be like Christ (1 John 3:2). This is the sphere where God's glory will be revealed in the entire creation. The inward realm of glory is the glory of the Father's house where the Son has a unique place, for it was His place before the foundation of the world. We shall be brought into this intimate sphere of glory, since we are the many sons whom God purposed to bring to glory. And the Son Himself has prepared a place for us in this, the Father's, house with its many mansions. But we shall be brought there in order to behold and admire the unique glory of the Son! We shall be brought there in order that the Father may look on us with favour because we bear the image of His Son, and reflect the glory of His Son!

Hugo Bouter

03.1. John, The Beloved Disciple

John, The Beloved Disciple As We Find Him In The Gospel According To John

Hugo Bouter "Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved".
John 13:23

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03.3. Preface

Preface

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, enjoyed a very special place among the disciples as the Lord's friend and confidant. His example stimulates us to be better followers of Christ, and to live in daily fellowship with Him. There are at least five things which we can learn from John's position in close communion with the Lord:

- (1) We love Him because He first loved us.
- (2) Christ has gone into heaven and we see Him crowned with glory and honour. He shares His riches with us and cleanses us with the washing of water by the Word.
- (3) Because He loved us to the end, we side with Him here below as the crucified One.
- (4) We also walk with Him in newness of life in the power of His resurrection.
- (5) We wait for His return while working for Him as fishers of men.

03.4. Introduction

Introduction John's character and calling

Although the Lord appointed twelve disciples or apostles, three of them were especially privileged: Peter, James and John. They were among the first disciples and were called by the Lord to have a special place in His presence. He allowed them to follow Him into the house of Jairus, to watch His power over death and the grave (Mark 5:37 ff.). He took them with Him on the mount of the transfiguration, to see the kingdom of God present with power (Mark 9:1-13). He answered their questions concerning the destruction of the temple with a discourse on the last days (Mark 13:3 ff.). These three disciples were also with Him in the garden of Gethsemane, where they should have watched with Him in prayer (Mark 14:32 ff.). Thus they witnessed special events, and were in more than one respect "eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). They beheld His glory (John 1:14). James and John were brothers, sons of Zebedee, to whom the Lord gave the name Boanerges, that is, "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). This tells us something about their character. Always ready to defend their Master's honour, they were even prepared to command fire to come down from heaven on the Samaritans who did not receive Jesus into their homes (Luke 9:49 ff.).

Apparently, these disciples had strong, ambitious characters. This is also evident from their wish to occupy the first places on the right and left hand of the Lord once the Kingdom would be revealed in glory (Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:35-37). These incidents do not exactly arouse our sympathy for James and John. The meaning of John's name - "the Lord is gracious" or "the Lord has shown grace" - seems a complete contradiction of his character as a "Son of Thunder". Yet, the Lord loved him and taught him in the school of grace. It is safe to assume that the beloved disciple changed in the Lord's presence. His eyes must have opened more and more to the greatness of God's grace and love as these were so uniquely brought to light in the Son of God's love (John 1:14-18; John 3:16). Among these three disciples whom the Lord took aside so often, John enjoyed a very special place as the Lord's confidant, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Thus this beloved disciple is a model for all who follow the Lord. All have to learn from Him to become gentle and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29), in order to display a disposition totally different from our natural one. The disciple whom Jesus loved

Let us, therefore, reflect on this disciple who always kept a low profile, and here - and also elsewhere - simply called himself the disciple whom the Lord loved (John 13:23; John 19:26; John 20:2; John 21:7; John 21:20). What the Gospel says of John, is basically true of each follower of the Lord. All of us are objects of the love of Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Although this love reaches out to all His own (Ephesians 5:2), and to the Church in its entirety (Ephesians 5:25), it is also very personal indeed. Therefore the apostle Paul could say: "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). So in this general sense we are all disciples who are loved by Jesus. However, practice shows that we need a certain measure of spiritual growth to be able to speak about our relationship with the Lord in this way. We must learn to keep a low profile and to efface ourselves and our own weak love for Him. In doing

so, we shall discover more and more of His abundant love for us. The only thing that really counts is His love for us, for our love for Him is imperfect and changeable, while His love for us is stable and unchangeable. It is as strong as death (Song of Solomon 8:6). The death of the Lord Jesus proved the strength of His love for us. For He loved us to the end (John 13:1). We rejoice in this love now, because it has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:5). We know that His desire and His love are for us in spite of what we are. This enables us to say: "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me" (Song of Solomon 7:10). In the light of this divine love, everything else becomes insignificant. In this respect it is also good to observe that the Greek word "agapao" is used for the love of the Lord for John. This word always indicates divine love, which originates in God Himself rather than in something attractive in us. God loves us because He is love. The same thing can be said of the love of the Lord Jesus for His own. He has shown the full extent of this love by going to the cross, by loving them to the end. In spite of the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples, He persevered in His love, fully proving it by delivering Himself up into death. In the Gospel of John there are five instances where John is called the disciple whom Jesus loved. In only one of them the Greek word "phileo" is used, which indicates attachment, or affection (John 20:2). The Lord was indeed attached to John, the beloved disciple. The contrast between Peter and John in each of these Scriptures is noteworthy, since it accentuates all the more the unique position of John as the Lord's confidant. We shall see the beloved disciple in the upper room, then by the cross and by the empty tomb, and finally at the Sea of Tiberias. The first scene, in the upper room, depicts our union with Christ in heaven, and the permanent need for cleansing by the water of the Word. The following events - by the cross and by the tomb - mark our union with Christ in His death and in His resurrection, and the last incident at the Sea shows the risen One to be the true Leader of all His disciples till He comes.

03.5. In The Upper Room

In The Upper Room

John 13:23 Reclining close beside Jesus

John 13:1-38 brings us to the upper room, where the Lord washed the feet of His disciples and celebrated the Passover with them. Here we see Peter's impulsive and impetuous behaviour - as well as the utterly sad betrayal of Judas - contrasted with the worthiness and peace of John's leaning "on Jesus' bosom" (John 13:23). The expression "on Jesus' bosom", or "on Jesus' breast" (John 13:25), indicates that John took a place of honour at the Lord's right side. He reclined close beside Jesus, in the immediate presence of the Lord, in the place of trust and intimacy. John 13:23 reminds us of John 1:18, where we find the same phrase in the Greek text and in many translations. Christ was in the bosom of the Father, nearest to the Father's heart (NEB). He was the eternal Son, and being in the bosom of the Father, He was able to declare Him. Now just as the Son Himself is the object of the Father's love, the disciple is the object of the Lord's love (cf. John 17:26). We too can enjoy a place with Him, very close to His heart, just like John.

It will change our lives, for the awareness of the love of the Lord gives us both peace and understanding. Thus John could remain calm amidst the turmoil caused by the Lord's remark that one of His disciples was going to betray Him. Besides, John was in a better position than Peter to ask the Lord of whom He spoke, and to gain insight into this difficult situation. He had direct contact with the Lord. John 13:1-38, by the way, is a chapter of big contrasts. The love of Christ caused Him to take the place of a Servant among His disciples, thus correcting their selfishness and self-love. The light of Christ revealed Judas' heart full of darkness, and he went out immediately into the night (John 13:30). In Peter we see the impetuosity and, later, the weakness of the flesh. In Judas we see its utter corruption. Peter did not understand the Lord, and was unable to follow Him in the strength of the flesh on the pathway of suffering and death. But later on he repented and wept bitterly. Judas could not be brought to repentance and became a pawn in the hands of Satan. In the midst of this disarray, just before His suffering, we see how Jesus quietly reclined at table to eat and speak with His disciples. John, the beloved disciple, shared this peace, and felt happy in the Lord's presence. Although the sufferings of the Son of Man were casting their shadows, nothing could disturb John's peaceful fellowship with the Lord. The place occupied by John in the presence of the Lord Jesus is an illustration of our own position as united with Christ in heaven (cf. John 14:20). In the midst of a hostile world that has rejected the Master, we still have a place in His presence - separated from the world and lifted up above the turmoil of our circumstances. There we are with Him "in the upper room", enjoying happy fellowship with Him as He gives us peace of heart and mind and insight into His own thoughts. In the same way as John enjoyed peace and received insight into the Lord's thoughts, we can possess true peace and knowledge of God's will. As beloved disciples, we know that we have a better portion than can be found in this world - a part with Christ in heaven after His departure from this world to the Father (John 13:1; John 13:8). For in Christ we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the

heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3). May we enjoy undisturbed fellowship with our Master in heaven:

O Lord and Saviour, we recline on that eternal love of Thine. Thou art our rest, and Thou alone remainest when all else is gone. The need for cleansing
The chapter begins, however, with the scene where Jesus washed the disciples' feet. This was a prerequisite for having part with the Lord, as He told Peter in no uncertain terms: "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:8). This washing is an illustration of the cleansing with the water of the Word of God (cf. Ephesians 5:26). It is necessary to be cleansed of that which defiles us in this world - which is a wilderness wide to the believer - if indeed we wish to have fellowship with the Lord and to know ourselves united with Him in the place that He now occupies with the Father. In addition to the one-time, complete washing that we receive in the new birth (John 3:3; John 3:5; John 13:10; John 15:3; Titus 3:5), we find three examples in Scripture of continual, repeated cleansing:

(1) The washing of our feet as we have it here in John 13:1-38. This is a daily duty and it is necessary in order to have part with the Lord in heaven, to recline as His disciples at the table that He has prepared for us.

(2) In order to stand as priests in the sanctuary, we must wash our hands and feet at the laver in the court, like the sons of Aaron (Exodus 30:17-21). This means that, before entering into God's presence with our sacrifices of praise, we need to submit all our doings and dealings to the cleansing power of the water of the Word of God.

(3) In order to properly walk as believers on our way to the Promised Land, our heavenly home, we need the application of "the water of purification", just as the Israelites needed this in the wilderness in order to be separated from evil and uncleanness (Numbers 19:1-22). So let us be convinced of the necessity of being cleansed by the water of the Word, and willingly submit ourselves to it. It is a real must, for as the Lord said to Peter: "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:8).

03.6. By The Cross Of Jesus

By The Cross Of Jesus

John 19:26 The cross and its results

After the Lord Jesus was taken prisoner and sentenced to death, we meet the beloved disciple again at the cross. A mere handful of the Lord's followers was left there - the others had fled. The Lord found no comforters in His agony (Psalms 69:20). John, however, was among those few faithful ones standing by the cross (John 19:25-27). Unlike Peter, who denied being a disciple of this Man of sorrows, John faithfully followed his Master in the path of suffering. At first after the Lord's arrest, Peter had followed Him with John - who in John 18:15 is simply mentioned as "another disciple" (according to some expositors this must have been Nicodemus or someone else). Apparently Peter lacked spiritual power and perseverance to follow the Lord in His humiliation. He showed his weakness. And this confirmed the truth of the words the Lord had spoken to him, that he could not follow Him now (John 13:36-38). John remained faithful, however, and sided with the Lord even in this hour of unspeakable reproach and deepest suffering. What made him do so? Probably it was the happy hours spent with the Lord in the upper room that gave him the strength to meet the test of suffering.

Now it became apparent how strong the ties between the Lord and His beloved disciple really were. Of course, John's example contains an important lesson for ourselves as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. It teaches us that a life in intimate fellowship with the Lord is an absolute necessity for His followers in this world that has rejected Him. Our fellowship with the Lord who ascended on high - "in the upper room" - enables us to follow the rejected Saviour in His footsteps here on earth and to stay close to Him by the power of the Spirit. Indeed, it is very important to take our place by the cross of Jesus, for there we learn a great deal. There we see Him hanging as the Sinbearer, the One who died for our sins and bore them in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). There too, He was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). The big questions of our sins and of our sin-nature (indwelling sin) were settled there. For by Christ's offering for sin, God condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3). Our sinful flesh was condemned in the death of Christ, and met its end there. Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (Romans 6:6). So by the cross we were delivered, both from our sins and from the power of indwelling sin.

Now, set free from the law of sin and death, we do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. This means that the cross determines our position as Christians to a large extent. Did you take your place beneath the cross of Jesus? Do you realize that your old self has been crucified with Him? And there are more lessons to be learned here. Standing by the cross we also learn that we have been freed from the law. We have become dead to the law, and are now married to Another, to Him who was raised from the dead (Romans 7:4-6). This does not mean, of course, that a Christian is a lawless person, for he is under law toward Christ, and he fulfils the law

of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2). Our rule of life is Christ, and by the Spirit we are enabled to meet this high standard. The law of Sinai demanded from the Israelites to love their neighbours as themselves. The law of Christ - the law of love - asks us to follow in His steps, and even to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16).

Reading Galatians, we see that the cross has brought a fundamental change in our relation to the law, to our own sinful flesh, and to the world. We have become dead to the law, to sin, and to the world (Galatians 2:19-20; Galatians 5:24; Galatians 6:14). These important lessons are all to be learned by taking our place in true faith beneath the cross of Jesus. By the cross the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. By the cross the world and the powers that rule it were completely judged (John 12:31; John 16:11; Colossians 2:14-15). The cross also laid the basis for the reconciliation, not only of the redeemed but of all things in heaven and on earth (Colossians 1:20-22).

New family ties

Standing by the cross we also learn that, as disciples of the crucified One, we are not left alone in this world. We are linked with one another, and united into one body, one family. As members of the household of God we should support each other. This is clearly shown by the example of Mary and the beloved disciple. On the cross, Christ created new ties of fellowship between His mother and John: "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:26-27). This third saying of our Lord on the cross reminds us of His words to Mary at the outset of His public ministry. How different these were: "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). On that occasion He had to admonish her, because in His service He could solely depend on the will of the Father.

Now, having fulfilled His task and having reached the end of His life here on earth, He wished to comfort her and to alleviate her sorrow. While going through the most severe sufferings Himself, He yet paid attention to her and eased her pain. The consciousness that death was going to part them must have pierced through Mary's soul like a sword (cf. Luke 2:35). Therefore the Lord desired John, the beloved disciple, to take the vacant place. By taking care of Mary from that hour on, he fulfilled the wish of the dying Saviour. These new family ties illustrate our mutual ties as disciples of the Master. Believers are linked with each other by the finished work on Calvary's cross. There the Lord Himself knit us together in love and created very close ties of fellowship between the redeemed. He proclaimed these glorious results of the cross after His resurrection from the dead (cf. John 20:17). We make up one family, one household, for the Father calls us His children, and the Son calls us His brethren.

It comes as no surprise that John, in his first Epistle, has so much to say about the household of God and the relationships within the family of God. As children of God, we are born of God and we have to reveal Him in this world that does not know Him. Our mutual relationships should be marked by the divine features: God is light, and God is love (1 John 1:5; 1 John 4:8; 1 John 4:16). Within this household of faith there are different relationships, both with one another and with the Lord. John speaks of all the believers as "children" of the Father, but he also distinguishes between "fathers" in Christ, "young men" and "little children" (1 John 2:12-27). We should be

aware of the relationships that the Lord has given between the members of His household, and take care of one another and help and support each other. We should always remember that in dying, the Lord not only united us with Himself but also with one another.

03.7. By The Empty Tomb

By The Empty Tomb

John 20:1-10 Witnesses of Christ's resurrection

John, the beloved disciple, witnessed not only Christ's crucifixion but also His resurrection from the dead. By the empty tomb of Christ we meet him again, together with Peter. Mary Magdalene had come to them with the alarming message that the body of the Lord had been taken away out of the tomb. This news prompted Simon Peter, together with the other disciple whom Jesus loved (John 20:2), to set out for the garden tomb. Peter, I assume, did so timidly, for his relationship with the Lord, whom he had denied, had not yet been restored. This was to happen later (possibly in the afternoon of this first Easter Sunday), when the Lord appeared to him privately (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5). Some time after that he was also publicly restored before the disciples as a servant of the Lord (John 21:1-25). Therefore Peter was slower than John, although both of them, curious as they were, ran together to the tomb. John - driven by his love for the Lord - was the first to arrive (John 20:4). Stooping down and looking in, he saw the linen cloths lying there (John 20:5). The Greek wording suggests that he looked sharply to see whether he could discern anything, as there might be something important to be seen (cf. James 1:25; 1 Peter 1:12). Yet, the only things he saw were the linen cloths; the body of the Lord was gone. John, however, did not enter the tomb but waited for his companion. As soon as he had arrived, Peter - ever the impulsive man - entered the tomb. He saw not only the linen cloths lying there, but also "the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself" (John 20:7). This was a clear proof of the Lord's resurrection. As someone else remarked: 'After His resurrection the Lord rolled up the linen cloths and the handkerchief that had been around His head, and laid them in separate places, not hurriedly but calmly and deliberately, just like a person neatly folds away his nightclothes after a good night's sleep'. And yet this was not sufficient to convince Peter of the fact that Christ had been raised from the dead. He departed, "marvelling to himself at what had happened" (Luke 24:12). Once again, we see the contrast between Peter and John, for of John it is said that he saw and believed after entering the tomb (John 20:8). But then even John failed in clinging to the Lord, for he did not stay and wait to meet the risen One. Leaving the tomb, he and Peter went away to their own homes (John 20:10). Here Mary Magdalene surpassed even the beloved disciple in her dedication to the Lord, for she stayed by the tomb. She did not go home, but stood outside by the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the tomb (John 20:11). She longed to see the Lord, although she could only think of Him as the One who had died. Her dedication was rewarded. She first saw two angels in white sitting at the place where the body of Jesus had lain, and they tried to comfort her. Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. She was the first to have the privilege of meeting Christ as the risen Lord, as is clearly confirmed by the account in Mark's Gospel. "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons" (Mark 16:9). She came to know Him in this new capacity, this new character: as the One risen from the dead, who would soon ascend to the Father (John

20:17). And she had to pass on the important message about His departure and the new relationships that had come into being within the family of God. The importance of Christ's resurrection

It is important to consider these experiences of the disciples as they plainly present the resurrection as a historical fact; they also paint a picture of the disciples' spiritual growth. Their growth in the knowledge of the risen Lord is an illustration of our own growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). It is one thing to see Christ as the crucified One and to side with Him. It is another to know Him as the risen One and to be aware of our union with Him in this new capacity. In order to be saved I must first focus my eyes on the crucified Christ and accept in faith that He died on the cross in my place, bearing the judgment that I had deserved. Secondly, I must believe in my heart that God has raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9). What is needed is faith in His atoning death, and in His resurrection from the dead. Both elements are essential to the Gospel message: Jesus our Lord was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification (Romans 4:25). That is why Paul says, "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore (or, 'more than that', NIV) is also risen" (Romans 8:34). Now what made Christ's resurrection so outstanding? What was the superiority of the resurrection, compared to the importance of the cross? The cross was necessary to put away our sins and to judge sin in the flesh. This was, in fact, a negative thing, although the cross also had the positive end of manifesting God's loving-kindness in the gift of His Son. The resurrection, however, was clearly positive, since something unknown came to light: an entirely new order of things came into being. Leaving death behind for ever, Christ entered into this new world of the resurrection. Having solved the problem of sin by His death, He now rose as the great Victor over Satan, sin, and death. He became the Firstborn from the dead, the Head of a new creation of which we are the firstfruits (Colossians 1:18; James 1:18). Christ is the Firstborn from the dead, but we are united with Him as the firstfruits of a new creation. Our old man was crucified with Him, we died with Him, we were buried with Him. With Him we were also raised to a new life, and God even made us sit together in the heavenly places in Him (Romans 6:4-6; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 2:11-12). Believers are the fruit of the travail of His soul, the yield from the fruitful Grain of Wheat that fell into the ground and died. We can say as new creatures: "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

One spirit with the Lord In the light of these things we can, so to speak, take our place by the empty tomb with those disciples, Peter and John. We do this in the consciousness of our union with the Lord, who was buried there. The two disciples even entered the tomb, which is exactly the truth expressed by Christian baptism: "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death" (Romans 6:4). Baptism is a burial rite. Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus is baptism into His death. We have put off the old man and we leave it behind in the water grave. This means that we have been made one with a dead and buried Saviour. And yet this is not the full truth about the Christian position - there is more. Like Mary Magdalene, we have to learn to know the Lord as the risen One, who defeated death and the grave, and who has now returned to the Father. We are also united with Him in this wholly new position, across the river of death, across the grave. We belong to the family of the last Adam, the risen Christ. He calls us His brethren, and we call the Father our Father (John 20:17). What a tremendous privilege! Newly converted people who put

their trust in the Lord Jesus will not immediately realize the scope of these things. And we all need spiritual growth to understand how closely we are linked with the Lord. The story of these disciples illustrates this. How much did they experience with the risen Lord, and how fast did they grow during those fifty days between Easter and Pentecost! First, they learned to know Christ as the true Paschal Lamb, by God appointed. Then they knew Him as the true Sheaf of the firstfruits, to be offered to God on the day after the Sabbath. For He rose from the dead on the first day of the week, the day on which the sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest was brought before God (cf. Leviticus 23:1-44). After many appearances of the risen Lord, they witnessed His ascension forty days later. They realized that He had taken His place at the right hand of God - as the Man in the glory (Acts 1:1-26).

Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, they learned to know Him as the One who baptized them with the Holy Spirit, thus building His body, His Church (Acts 2:1-47). Reading further in the Book of Acts, we can only be amazed at the powerful testimony of the apostles concerning the risen and exalted Christ. They knew that they were united with this heavenly Lord, and they had accepted the clear consequences of this. Thus they had come far in the knowledge of His Person and the great results of His work. Even though they had known Christ according to the flesh, yet now they knew Him thus no longer (2 Corinthians 5:16). Christ had entered a heavenly sphere, a new order of things, the basis of which He had laid through His finished work on the cross. In his ministry, Paul explains to us these new and heavenly things, and teaches us more about our union with the risen and exalted Lord. But all this begins by taking our place in genuine faith - just like John - by the cross and by the empty tomb of Jesus. I have died and have been buried, Did descend into Thy grave. To a sheltered haven carried, Now I'm one with Thee, and safe.

03.8. At The Sea Of Tiberias (part 1)

At The Sea Of Tiberias (part 1)

John 21:1-25 I will make you fishers of men

Christians are closely linked with their risen and glorified Lord in heaven. As His followers they are serving Him here on earth till He comes. He is our Leader, our Captain, and the great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 2:10; Hebrews 12:2; Hebrews 13:20). This is clearly shown in the closing chapter of John's Gospel, which portrays John again as the beloved disciple. While John 19:1-42 focuses on the union of Christ's followers with the crucified One, and John 20:1-31 on their oneness with the buried and risen Lord, John 21:1-25 shows us our relationship with the Lord who ascended on high, and gave gifts to men (cf. Ephesians 4:7 ff.). He is the One who distributes spiritual gifts as He wills, and He leads us in our service for Him until His return. The fourth and fifth mention of John as the beloved disciple teach us important lessons about our present position as disciples and followers of the Lord Jesus (John 21:7; John 21:20). John 21:1-25 is obviously an epilogue. John 20:31 states the purpose of John's Gospel: "(...) but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

John 21:1-25 describes in a typical way how the Lord prepared His disciples for their task as fishers of men. He told them to cast the net on the right side of the boat, which resulted in a miraculous catch of fish (John 21:6). In this way He led them in their future service by revealing Himself in His resurrection power and His absolute command of all things. Peter's initiative to go fishing at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:3), meant a return to his earlier profession. Apparently he had forgotten that the Lord expected him to be a fisher of men. Years earlier He had told him so, when He called His first disciples (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11). Peter tried to resume his old profession, but his encounter with Jesus changed everything. The Lord used the miraculous catch of fish and the following breakfast on the beach as the means to Peter's public restoration among the disciples. He wanted to re-establish him in His service, and to indicate the special place that Peter had in His plans and purposes with respect to the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. Thus the closing chapter of this Gospel reminds us of the original calling of the disciples, and sheds new light on it. The risen Lord made a new start with His followers, and they definitely learned to follow Him as their Master.

Resurrection scenes In this context it is interesting to note that Jesus' appearance at the Sea was now the third time He showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead (John 21:14). This would speak of a divine fullness, a complete confirmation of the truth of His resurrection. On this occasion we see a group of seven disciples to whom He presented Himself alive (John 21:2). In the previous chapter we find the first two appearances to a somewhat larger company of disciples - the first time Thomas being absent, the second time Thomas being with them (John 20:19 ff.). Besides these three occasions, there were more appearances between the time of His resurrection and His ascension (Acts 1:3), once to over five hundred brethren (1

Corinthians 15:6). The Lord also showed Himself on a more private basis to some of His disciples: first to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18), and then to Mary's companions, the Galilean women and other women with them (Matthew 28:9-10; Luke 23:55; Luke 24:1; Luke 24:10). After that He appeared to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5), and later on that same first Lord's day to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13 ff.). He was also seen by James (1 Corinthians 15:7). So there is enough evidence that the risen Lord manifested Himself more than three times. Chronologically, this third appearance at the Sea of Tiberias, may have been the seventh or eighth appearance of the Lord since He was raised from the dead. It is significant that this appearance took place in Galilee and not in Jerusalem, the city where He rose and appeared to the eleven on the first day of the week. In Galilee He had spent most of His years. This part of the land was despised by the Jews (John 1:46; John 7:52), and it was called "Galilee of the Gentiles" by Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 9:1-2). In this region full of darkness and of the shadow of death, the Light of the world had shone. But now, after His resurrection and ascension, this great Light would continue to shine to the Gentiles and extend God's salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). The risen Lord would do so from heaven in the power of the Spirit and by the ministry of His disciples. But here another picture is used, namely that of the great Captain and His fishermen. The apostles would cast their nets into the sea of peoples and nations, and draw it up again with many converts. Galilee was also the place where they received the Great Commission, as it is commonly called (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18). The Lord even went before them into Galilee - this place of grace to the Gentiles. The disciples were to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Another important lesson of this passage in John 21:1-25 is that we are fully dependent on the Lord's instructions in our work for His name's sake. Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5), and all our efforts will be in vain.

What a painful lesson this can be! Headed by Peter, the disciples fished a whole night without catching anything (John 21:3). Then, in the morning mist, on the beach, they saw a Man they did not immediately recognize. He asked them whether they had any food (John 21:5). Some translations use the words "meat" or "anything to eat", while others read "fish". What is meant is fish, of course, that could be eaten with bread to make it tasty (cf. John 21:9). In short, the Lord asked them whether they had caught anything that night. They had to admit that all their efforts had been in vain. They still did not recognize the Stranger, but He spoke with so much authority that they obeyed His command, and cast the net on the right side of the boat. Once before they had cast out their net at the word of the Lord (Luke 5:6-7). And again the result was miraculous: they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish (John 21:6).

It is the Lord The dénouement followed immediately, for John, who knew the Master so well from being close to Him, understood intuitively that this Man could be none other than the Lord. He said to Peter: "It is the Lord!" Once again, Peter showed his impulsive character by jumping overboard to reach the Lord as quickly as possible (John 21:7). He had shown the same desire before, when the Lord walked on the sea (Matthew 14:28). It is good to long for the Lord's presence! But the other disciples came in the little boat, dragging the net full of fish (John 21:8). In contrast to what had happened in Luke 5:1-39, the net was not breaking and the boat did not begin to sink. Peter was the one who dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three (John 21:11). When the first disciples were called, he was casting a net into the sea (Matthew 4:18). This miraculous catch of fish portrays the work which would be done, in dependence on the Lord,

among the nations. The disciples were to cast out the Gospel net and to gather God's elect, as many as had been appointed to eternal life. In contrast with the parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13:1-58, where we find both good and bad fish, we have only good fish here - a net full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three. John has no nominal confessors in view, but only genuine believers. The mention of the exact number suggests that the Lord knows all His own by name. None of them shall perish. The Book of Acts confirms that the apostle Peter held a very responsible place in this great work of fishing for men. He was, so to speak, to cast the Gospel net into the sea of peoples and nations. When he drew it ashore, it was full of converts, both Samaritans and Gentiles (Acts 8:1-40; Acts 10:1-48; Acts 11:1-30). Peter and John acted together in Acts 8:1-40, in the same way as they had done in Acts 3:1-26; Acts 4:1-37, where we find God's work among the Jewish people. They had been partners in their old profession as fishermen (Luke 5:10). In their new activities, they were also good teamworkers - although they had distinct ministries. The Lord alluded to this after Peter's restoration.

They personally had to follow Him wherever He would lead, but John's ministry was to extend until the end time. It is not always easy to serve the Lord and to act as fishers of men. We see in this chapter that the Lord wanted to train the disciples for this purpose. When we pay attention to His commands, the results will be remarkable. But service in self-will ends in failure (John 21:5). Probably the miraculous catch of fish is also an allusion to the great response among the nations to the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom in the end time. In a coming day this Gospel will be preached again by converted Jews, and a great multitude of Gentiles will be saved (cf. Revelation 7:1-17). This Gentile multitude will come out of the Great Tribulation and enter the full millennial blessing of the Kingdom. This will happen after the rapture of the Church, which is composed of those who have not seen and yet have believed; and after the conversion of the remnant of Israel, who will look on Him whom they have pierced, and then will mourn for Him with bitter weeping (Zechariah 12:10). The Church is typified in John 20:1-31 by the gathered disciples, and the believing remnant of Israel by Thomas who touched the pierced hands and side of the Saviour.

03.9. AT THE SEA OF TIBERIAS (PART 2)

AT THE SEA OF TIBERIAS (PART 2)

John 21:1-25 Do you love Me?

Divine love, however, has to be the motive for our service as fishers of men. After Peter's denial he had to be brought back to this most important source of ministry. The catch of fish was followed by a breakfast on the beach, and Peter's public restoration. The Lord Himself had already prepared everything for the meal. When the disciples had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread (John 21:9). As their Host, Christ invited His disciples to eat with Him: "Come and eat breakfast" (John 21:12). This He had done so often during His life here on earth. They were with Him, before He sent them out to preach (Mark 3:14). They enjoyed His presence, and ate with Him. This fellowship was here resumed at the Sea of Tiberias, before they were to go out as His witnesses into all the world. By now, all were convinced that it was the Lord. Is this not a valuable lesson for us as we follow Him? We should be active in His service, but it is also important to "come and eat" with Him, to rest a while and have fellowship with Him. We need to strengthen and refresh ourselves with all the good things which He Himself has prepared for us. "Come, for all things are now ready" (cf. Luke 14:17). In His presence we enjoy His fellowship and we are impressed with His greatness and glory. This fire of coals will have reminded Peter of the fire in the courtyard of the high priest. There he had stood with the servants and officers while warming himself. There he had so seriously denied the Lord (John 18:18; John 18:25). The Lord's asking him the same question three times must have been a painful reminder of his threefold denial. This is also shown by the nature of the questions. When the Lord had predicted that all of His disciples would be made to stumble because of Him, Peter had protested. "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Matthew 26:35). "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be" (Mark 14:29). But he could not follow the Lord then (John 13:36-38). As it turned out, Peter was not any more faithful than the others. They all forsook Him and fled, and Peter denied Him three times. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). Therefore the Lord asked him this searching question: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" (John 21:15). Peter could only acknowledge his failure and answer very timidly: "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You". But he used another word for "love" than the Lord had used, who had referred to divine love. Peter had to acknowledge that his affection for the Master was no greater than that of the others. Yet, he did love Him and he was truly attached to Him. But the Lord repeated His question in a slightly different manner, and Peter gave the same answer (John 21:16). Then He said to him the third time, borrowing the word Peter had used twice to indicate his affection for Him: "Do you love Me?" Now Peter was so grieved that he totally bared his heart, saying, as it were: "Lord, You know me thoroughly. You look all the way to the bottom of my heart, and You know that I really love You". But he had to admit that only the Lord's omniscience could assess this: "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You" (John 21:17). This confession was sufficient for Peter's rehabilitation. The Lord gave him a threefold assignment in confirmation of this. The whole company of the disciples should understand that He

wanted to use him again. We find special tasks after each reply. Peter was to feed the lambs of Christ's flock (John 21:15). Further he should both tend and feed the sheep of the flock (John 21:16-17). Notice that the lambs come first. That which lambs need most is food, while sheep also need corrective action to be guided on the right track. Just as we read in the Shepherd's Psalm: "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalms 23:3). In the miraculous catch of fish we saw an allusion to Peter's task with regard to the Gentiles. But in this commission to tend the sheep we have a description of his care for the Jewish flock (cf. John 10:3-4; Galatians 2:7-9; Galatians 1:1-24 and 2 Peter). Love for the Lord Jesus was to be the motive for such service, as it is for all service. "Through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13). Do we really love the Lord? Well, then He would like us to take care of His flock, to feed the lambs and to tend and feed the sheep.

Peter and John, and their ministries

Then Peter was told about the price he would have to pay for being a disciple of the crucified One. Now he would go with Him, both to prison and to death (Luke 22:33; Acts 12:3 ff.; 2 Peter 1:14). This had been his ardent desire in the upper room, but he could not follow Him then (John 13:36-38). In this pathway of discipleship - full of sufferings - he was going to be like his Master, for he was to glorify God by his death (John 21:18-19). Then our attention is drawn again to John, the beloved disciple. The Lord told Peter to follow Him, repeating as it were his original calling as His disciple: "Follow Me" (Matthew 4:19). Peter, however, turned around and looked at John (John 21:20). Seeing that the beloved disciple also followed the Lord, he became anxious to know what would happen to him. What about this man (John 21:21)? Would he also have to die a martyr? Jesus' answer to this question was: "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me" (John 21:22). Discipleship is first of all a personal matter. John followed the Lord of his own account, he did not need a special order to do so. In this context, the Gospel writer reminds us of what had happened in the upper room (John 21:20).

Because the beloved disciple had occupied a place of confidence with the Lord, he had no trouble to understand His will, and following Him was a matter of course for him. It is clear from this passage that - although we have a common Master - each disciple has to follow Him personally. My interest in my brother can easily degenerate into meddlesomeness. Therefore the Lord exhorts each of us separately: "You follow Me". Each disciple has a particular place and a particular task. The Lord is the only One to decide what will happen to my brother or my sister, and the way in which He leads is good. That does not mean that we are to be independent of each other. This is shown by the beautiful example of Peter and John working together in the Master's service (Acts 3:1; Acts 4:13; Acts 8:14). Yet, these two apostles had their own special ministries; this is clear from the inspired Scriptures they left to the Church. We have already seen that the apostle Peter was entrusted with the care of the flock that Christ would lead out of the Jewish sheepfold. But there were other sheep to be added, which were not of this fold - Gentile believers (John 10:16). God also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life, as we can observe in the Book of Acts. For them Peter was to open the door of faith (Acts 10:1-48; Acts 11:1-30).

He was to cast the Gospel net into the sea of peoples and nations and to draw it ashore, full of good fish. The apostle John, however, received a different, less eye-catching task. His ministry was more concerned with the Person of the Lord Himself, whom he knew so well. This was already

suggested by his place of intimacy on Jesus' bosom. Therefore John wrote about true knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of life, that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us (for the eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us). This knowledge of Christ's Person is life-giving and results in spiritual fellowship with the Father and with the Son (John 17:3; 1 John 1:1-4). The truth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is the firm foundation that will remain (1 John 4:1-6). It remains in spite of all decline and serious failure to answer to our heavenly calling. While Peter's ministry relates to the beginning period of the Church, and Paul's to the prime of its life, John's ministry relates to the end time. To this the Lord alluded by saying: "If I will that he remain till I come". These meaningful words imply that John's task was to span the whole period till the second coming of Christ. Just think of the last Book of the New Testament, the Revelation that gives an insight into the things of the end time, the things which will take place after the Church period (Revelation 1:19). Also think of John's Gospel and his Epistles, which deal with the truth which was from the beginning and will be with us for ever. These writings contain truth that cannot be affected by human failure. For they bear witness of that eternal life which was manifested here on earth, and is now our sure portion in the Son. When the Lord called His first disciples, Peter was casting a net into the sea, whereas John was busy mending nets (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). These different activities are typical of the distinct ministries of these two apostles. Peter was the one to cast out the net: he started the work of the gathering together of the Church. John, however, was the one to mend the nets. That is, John's ministry provides what is needed to continue the work when it is threatened by corruption, when decline has begun, when evil has come in. We see this in his battle against the false teachers who did not abide in the doctrine of Christ. He wrote about the many antichrists who denied that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 2:18; 1 John 4:1-6; 2 John).

Till He comes

Finally, John's example teaches us that we are to look forward to the glorious return of our Lord. One disciple may have to lose his life for the sake of his testimony - like Peter. Another servant may remain until the coming of the Lord - like John. We do not know which path the Lord has mapped out for us. It all depends on His will: "If I will that he remain till I come" (John 21:22). Each one of us must personally follow the Lord and serve Him while waiting for His imminent return. We are to act as watching servants. This is also shown by the Lord in the parable of the ten minas: "Do business till I come" (Luke 19:13). Perhaps the Lord will leave us here till the moment of His coming. Then we who are alive and remain shall be changed and caught up together with the raised dead to meet the Lord in the air (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

John represents the first category, the people who will remain until Christ's coming. Peter represents the second category, those who have died but will be raised at the word of command of the Lord. The final verses of John 21:1-25 confirm that the beloved disciple is the author of this Gospel: "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24-25). How thankful we should be for the glad tidings he has written that we may believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). May the example set by John, the beloved disciple, stimulate us to be better followers of Christ. May we, like he, learn to have fellowship with our Lord on high, to side with the crucified One, to live on earth in the power of His resurrection, and to wait for His return while working for Him!

Hugo Bouter

04.1. Reflections On The Greatness Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Reflections On The Greatness Of Our Lord Jesus Christ As King, Prophet, Priest, Shepherd And Saviour By Hugo Bouter New edition - 2004 "He will be great". - Luke 1:32 "Therefore, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus". - Hebrews 3:1

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Preface In order to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we must follow the apostolic injunction to “consider Him” (Hebrews 3:1; Hebrews 12:3). Therefore the object of these studies is to meditate on some facets of His greatness and glory. They deal with five places in the New Testament, where it is expressly stated that Christ is great or will be great. He is the great King, the great Prophet, the great Priest, the great Shepherd and the great Saviour. In His great Name we find help and strength for our course as Christians.

04.4. The Great King

The Great King

Luke 1:32 The Son of the Highest When the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Saviour to the virgin Mary, he used the words: “He will be great”. It is always good for us to consider the greatness of Christ, because He is absolutely unique. Mary was a favoured woman, because she was the chosen vessel for the birth of the Messiah. But her Son was greater than she because He was begotten by the Holy Spirit, and for that reason “that Holy One” who was to be born, would be called “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Christ was also greater than His forerunner John the Baptist, of whom it is said in this chapter that he would be great in the sight of the Lord (Luke 1:15). John was a great prophet indeed. The Lord Jesus Himself testified of him that among those born of women there was not a greater prophet than John the Baptist (that is, until the coming of the King and of God’s Kingdom) (Luke 7:28). But, of course, the greatness of the forerunner was not comparable to the glory of the One whose messenger he was. John frankly admitted this to his disciples. He said he was just the friend of the Bridegroom, and he rejoiced to hear His voice. Christ must increase, but he must decrease; for He came from above and was above all (John 3:28-31).

Now what constitutes this greatness of our Lord? What is it that makes Him so unique? Of course, His glory is seen in many aspects, but the angel points to His greatness as Son and King in particular: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). Nobody can be compared to Him because He is “the Son of the Highest”.

Christ’s glory as the Son of the Highest has to do first of all with His dominion over all things. God Most High is the Creator of heaven and earth, the supreme Ruler (Genesis 14:18-20; Deuteronomy 32:8; Daniel 4:2-3; Daniel 4:17; Daniel 4:34). As the Son of the Highest, Christ will inherit dominion over all things. His Sonship is related here to His dominion, His Kingship, as is shown by the second part of Gabriel’s announcement. The title “the Son of the Highest”, or “the Son of the Most High” is found only in the Gospels. In the Epistles we usually find more intimate titles, such as “the only begotten Son” (1 John 4:9), “the Son of the Father” (2 John 1:3), or “the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:13). This corresponds more with the nature of the full New Testament revelation, for God has been revealed as Father by His beloved Son. “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18).

Apart from the verse now under discussion (Luke 1:32), the expression “Son of the Most High God” is found only in the story of the healing of the demon-possessed man in Luke 8:28 and Mark 5:7. The demon acknowledged Christ’s supreme authority by saying with a loud voice: “What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!” For He had

commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. Even in His humiliation here on earth Christ had authority over the evil spirits, and this Scripture shows that they acknowledged His authority (cf. Acts 16:16-18). The term is used only once in the plural (“sons of the Highest”) as a promise to the disciples: “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Highest. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35). Here emphasis is laid on the care of the Most High God for His creatures, even if they have turned away from Him. As sons of God, we should follow Him in this respect and reveal His nature. But it goes without saying that Christ’s Sonship is absolutely unique. Although believers are the many sons who shall be brought to glory, He is the Son, the Author of their salvation. We are creatures and we partake of flesh and blood, but He took part in the same (Hebrews 2:14 JND). Manhood was not His natural condition, because He existed in the form of God (Php 2:6). The eternal Word became flesh and “dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Creator Himself entered into His creation. This is the miracle of the incarnation, as described in such a touching and lovely way in Luke’s Gospel. God has found His good will, His good pleasure in man (Luke 2:14). The clearest proof of God’s love and grace towards man is the fact that the Son of God became Man Himself. He lived and walked among us, and in the end He even took our place in the judgment that we had rightly deserved. The path of Christ led from the manger to the cross. There we see Him lifted up as the Son of Man, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. The mystery of the incarnation is explained by the angel announcing Jesus’ birth to Mary as follows: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Christ is God and Man in one Person. He was born of God in a unique way, and therefore He is the Son of God — even in His manhood. He was begotten by the power of the Highest, and so He can be rightly called the Son of the Highest. How great He is! How near has the Most High God come to us! How deep has He bowed down towards us in His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord! And of His Kingdom there will be no end As we have seen before, Christ’s Sonship is here particularly related to His Kingship. As the Son of the Highest, He has supreme authority. In this passage the period of the coming Kingdom is referred to as follows: “And the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). This is not the throne where Christ is now seated, at God’s right hand in heaven, but the throne that He will establish on earth after His Second Coming (cf. Revelation 3:21). It is the throne of His glory as Messiah and as the Son of Man (Matthew 25:31). Jerusalem, the city of the great King, will be the centre of that reign which will extend to the ends of the earth. He will be honoured as the great Son of David, His father according to the flesh (Romans 1:3). He will be recognized as the true Prince of Peace, a greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42), for the Son of David also proves to be none other than the Son of the Highest! The prophetic perspective of this verse reminds us of the predictions of the Old Testament, mainly those of Isaiah and Micah. These prophets both refer to the divinity of the Messiah, who will sit on the throne of David: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”; “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2).

Then they both continue to speak about the greatness of His government, which will be marked by justice and peace: "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His Kingdom"; "For now He shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this One shall be peace" (Isaiah 9:7; Micah 5:4). So both passages speak about the greatness of His Person, and then about the greatness of His government over the earth. The Messiah is not only a Man, the Man Christ Jesus, but also the eternally blessed God. He is the Eternal Son, the wonderful I AM. Therefore it is appropriate for Him to receive a universal and eternal government; this is in accordance with His dignity.

It would seem that the words of Luke 1:32 ("He will be great") are quoted literally from Micah 5:4 ("He shall be great to the ends of the earth"). He is greater than David and Solomon, from whom He descended according to the flesh. He is the true King and Priest, the Branch of righteousness who would be raised to David (Jeremiah 23:5; Jeremiah 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; Zechariah 6:12-13). His greatness surpasses that of all other kings, for even the great of the earth will bring presents and bow down before Him (cf. Psalms 72:1-20).

It is wrong to spiritualize this earthly perspective and to confuse the present dispensation of grace with Christ's millennial reign. We should bear in mind that expressions like "the throne of David" and "the house of Jacob" have a concrete and literal meaning for God's earthly people. In explaining the Scriptures they should be related to the future restoration of the people of Israel. Otherwise these terms are rendered powerless, and God's promises are not taken seriously. The throne of David is the throne that will be established in Jerusalem; it is not God's throne in heaven. And the house of Jacob is the literal offspring of the patriarch; it is not the Church, which has a heavenly origin rather than an earthly one as it consists of all those who are born from above.

If we love Christ's appearing, we will also rejoice in this earthly aspect of His greatness and glory. He who once was rejected by this world will reign with power. From His coming will ensue a sabbatical rest for Israel and for all the nations. In fact the whole creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Lord's reign will be visible for all men, and the government of Christ will be the consummation of the theocratic reigns of David and Solomon. According to 1 Chronicles 29:23 these kings sat on the throne of the LORD in Jerusalem. The LORD, who is a great King (Malachi 1:14), will reign in the Person of His Son. He will be great indeed!

Great among His brethren

While thus considering the greatness of Christ's reign, one cannot help thinking of what is said about Mordecai at the end of the book of Esther. There we read of "the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him", and also that he was "great among the Jews" (Esther 10:2-3).

Just as Mordecai ruled over all the world at that time on behalf of king Ahasuerus, so the Son Himself must reign on behalf of God the Father till He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. Then the eternal state will begin, and everything will be in harmony with God, that God may be all in all (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Finally, we have to ask ourselves to what extent Christ is great in our hearts and lives today. Indeed, He will be great, there is no doubt about that. He will receive the honour that is His due, for the Father will exalt His Son in the whole creation. But the question that we have to face is whether

we are exalting Him now in our lives. The apostle Paul strived after this continually, for it was his earnest expectation and hope that “as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (Php 1:20). Christ should be formed in us (Galatians 4:19). His life and His character should be seen in us. This is the practical application of Luke 1:32 to us as Christians. Is the authority of this great King, who will soon fill the world with righteousness, a reality in our lives today? Do we enjoy His peace? The Prince of Peace, who will soon proclaim His peace on earth, is able to let it rule it even now in our hearts and lives by the power of His Spirit.

04.5. The Great Prophet

The Great Prophet

Luke 7:16 No man ever spoke like this Man

During the time of Christ's service as the Servant-Prophet here on earth, as He is depicted by Mark in particular, opinions on His Person varied widely. Some people rejected Him as a prophet. The Pharisees did not accept Him, for in their view no prophet had arisen out of Galilee (John 7:52). Simon the Pharisee said to himself that He simply could not be a prophet, for in that case He would never have allowed a sinner woman to touch Him (Luke 7:39).

Others, however, were more favourable in their judgment and did regard Him as a prophet. The Samaritan woman admitted: "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet" (John 4:19). Even large multitudes acknowledged Him as such. They considered Him to be a prophet, as there had been so many in Old Testament times (Matthew 16:14; Mark 6:15; Luke 9:8). But Christ was more than one of the old prophets. He was a very special prophet. Many people acknowledged this and spoke about Him as the Prophet, the One whom Moses had already announced in Deuteronomy 18:15 ff. So they recognized Him as the long-anticipated Prophet, and said: "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14; John 7:40).

John the Baptist was absolutely right in not claiming this honour for himself when people asked him: "Are you the Prophet?" (John 1:21). He was honest and told them that he was not. Then John told them of the One who was to come after him but was preferred before him. John himself was just the forerunner, the herald who prepared the way for Him. Christ was superior to him, and John effaced himself and said: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Indeed, Christ was the Prophet. He surpassed all other prophets, for "He who comes from above is above all" (John 3:31). He had descended from heaven and told them heavenly things, the things that He Himself had seen and heard with the Father (John 3:12-13; John 3:32).

Christ was also superior to Moses, who announced His coming as the Prophet: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear" (Deuteronomy 18:15). This verse refers to Christ's manhood: He was to be raised up from among the people. He took part in flesh and blood, for in all things He had to be made like His brethren, yet without sin. Although He came from above, He became truly Man, and in this humble form He addressed Himself to the people, speaking the words that God gave Him to speak. As a Prophet He was unique, for He was the Word incarnate, the personification of God's message to mankind. Previously God had spoken by the prophets, but now He has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, or literally "in [His] Son" (Hebrews 1:1). This means that God Himself has spoken to us as a divine Person, and that Person is the Son!

He spoke the words of God

Therefore Christ is an unequalled prophet. He is the Son Himself, the Creator of all things and moreover, the Redeemer who is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:2-3). He is exalted above the angels, those mighty ministers of our God. He is superior to Moses, the man of God by whom the law was given to Israel (John 1:17). So it is good for us to consider Him, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Hebrews 3:1). By faith we see Him at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honour. His voice is no longer heard on earth as it was at the time of His sojourn here. He has now spoken from heaven (cf. Hebrews 12:25). The Lord has done so by the Spirit of truth, who has led a number of apostles and prophets to write the various books of the New Testament.

Whenever we pick up our Bible, we are sure that we have the complete Word of God before us. God's Word was fulfilled, or completed by divine revelation to the apostles and prophets of the present dispensation of grace (cf. Ephesians 2:20; Colossians 1:25). In the Gospels we have the words which Christ spoke to His disciples here on earth, and which were brought to their remembrance by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The Acts and the Epistles present us with the ongoing testimony of the Spirit, the teaching of "all [the] truth" (John 16:13 a), or "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). As John told us in his Gospel, the Holy Spirit did not speak on His own authority or initiative. The Spirit declared and disclosed the things that He heard from the exalted Christ (John 16:13-15). The Spirit, who descended on earth after Christ was received up in glory, disclosed these heavenly things to the instruments which He used for the completion of the Word of God. In this way He told them even "[the] things to come" (John 16:13 b).

These things to come are largely found in the book of Revelation (cf. Revelation 1:19), which in many respects fits in with the prophetic books of the Old Testament which discuss God's dealings with Israel and with the world. Of course the Scriptures are linked together in other respects as well, for the Old Testament points in many ways to Christ, while the New Testament shows the fulfilment of many prophecies concerning Him and His finished work. However, this falls outside the frame of our subject. But what a tremendous assurance it is to have the complete Word of God in our hands, and to know that the Scriptures provide us with everything we need on our pathway to heaven. All this we owe to our great Prophet, the heavenly Man Christ Jesus. Through the Spirit He has revealed to us the deep things of God, the secrets of God's heart, and has given them to us in the Scriptures of the New Testament in spiritual words (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). A Prophet mighty in deed and word The account in Luke 7:1-50 tells us how Jesus was honoured as a Prophet. This is a lesson for us that we might also honour Him as such, for we have every reason to glorify Him as our great Prophet. We should be perfectly aware of His greatness, even more than the people of Nain. For them the raising of the young man was proof of His mission: "Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen up among us'; and, 'God has visited His people' " (Luke 7:16).

If we just take these last words literally, they testify to the fact that God has come to man in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Christ is truly God. God visited His people when Christ came into the world. But He is also truly Man. His human nature is indicated by the first remark of the people: "A great prophet has risen up among us". God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4). So this verse in Luke 7:1-50 testifies to Christ's greatness as God and Man in one Person. As the Son of the living God, He gives life to whom He will (John 5:21). The young man who had just been raised from the

dead was the living proof of this. Along with the daughter of Jairus (a child) and Lazarus (an adult), this young man is sufficient proof of Christ's power over death. And is this not valid in a spiritual sense as well for all those who have heard the voice of the Son of God? For He has authority to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him (John 17:2-3). And we know that He has raised us from the "grave" of our sins and our guilt, to enable us to walk with Him in newness of life. He has given us everlasting life, and we have passed from death into life (John 5:24-25). How great He is, our Prophet and Saviour, the Son of the living God! We are sure about His greatness, as we personally experienced His power in delivering us from the bonds of death.

Responding to the miracle that had happened, the inhabitants of Nain "glorified God". This will also be our reaction, as we see the quickening power of Christ at work in people who are dead in trespasses and sins. Christ is indeed the great Prophet. Both His words and His actions show His unique mission and His lifegiving power, reaching beyond the grave. Along with those two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus, we can say as believers that He is a Prophet "mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (Luke 24:19).

There is just no one like Him, the Prophet confirmed to the people by God with the accompanying signs and wonders (cf. Acts 3:22-23; Acts 7:37). The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Therefore let us thank God for sending His Son, His Prophet, His Spokesman. For as we worship Him, we see the Father's image in Him, full of grace and truth.

04.6. The Great Priest

The Great Priest Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 7:4; Hebrews 10:21 The letter to the Hebrews offers us a picture of the greatness and the glory of the Lord Jesus, particularly with regard to His unique, perpetual priesthood. What an encouragement it is to have such a great High Priest! He is our great High Priest in connection with three fundamental needs:

(1) in order to make propitiation for our sins, (2) to sympathize with our weaknesses, and (3) to support our priestly service in the sanctuary.

High Priest with regard to our sins As far as our sins are concerned, we know that Christ as a merciful and faithful High Priest has made propitiation for the sins of His people (Hebrews 2:17). With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. Under the old covenant the prescribed sacrifices had to be always repeated, and the blood of atonement had to be carried into the sanctuary every year (cf. Leviticus 16:1-34), but the work of Christ has accomplished the atonement once for all. When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son. And the Son accomplished a unique work in accordance with the counsels of the Father. On the basis of this work He is now seated at God's right hand on high, while the Holy Spirit has been sent down to testify to these things. For the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us. And what an assurance it is to know through faith in Christ and in His finished work, that He has perfected us for ever and has cleansed us from all our sins (Hebrews 10:1-18)!

High Priest with regard to our weaknesses

After His atoning death and His glorious resurrection from the dead, Christ took His place "at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man" (Hebrews 8:1-2). There He is now ministering in the sanctuary, appearing in the presence of God for us.

Just as Aaron carried the names of the sons of Israel on his shoulders and his breast whenever he entered the holy place to appear before God, Christ now represents us on high and continually intercedes for us. He is not dealing with our sins now, but with our weaknesses, because our sins were removed for ever by His redemptive work. For by His sacrifice we have been sanctified once for all, so that the relationship between God as the Creator and Judge and ourselves as His creatures is fully restored. This is the fundamental aspect of the truth, which is different from the practical side, that is, the daily relationship between God as our Father and ourselves as His children. The practical enjoyment of our fellowship with the Father is, alas, daily disturbed by sins, and then Christ acts as our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). His intercession with the Father — together with His work in our hearts and consciences — leads to restoration, as is so clearly illustrated in the story of Peter in the Gospels (Luke 22:31 ff.; John 21:1-25). But Christ's present task as High Priest with God has to do with the weaknesses, the shortcomings and the needs of all those who by His sacrifice for sin have been reconciled to God once for all. Hebrews 4:1-16 is very clear about this priestly task of the Lord: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize

with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16). As the holy and sinless Son of God, Christ could not sympathize with our sins. Indeed, He came to suffer for our sins, and to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. But He does sympathize with our wants and weaknesses as pilgrims who are on their way to glory. We are surrounded by all kinds of dangers on our way to heaven, and in view of this our Lord is always active as the great High Priest to help in time of need. He is able to save to the uttermost, to protect and keep us and bring us safely to the end of our pilgrimage, since He ever lives at the right hand of God to make intercession for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

High Priest with regard to our worship As our heavenly High Priest, Christ is also active with regard to our worship as a holy priesthood in the presence of God. We are not only a people of pilgrims needing a compassionate High Priest on our pathway through this world, but we are also a people of priests following the steps of our great High Priest in the sanctuary.

We can draw a parallel between ourselves and the Israelites in the wilderness: on the one hand they were on their way to the Promised Land and needed priestly intercession in order to reach the end of their long journey, on the other hand they could daily meet God at the door of the tabernacle of meeting and appear in His presence with the appointed sacrifices. God’s purpose for the Israelites was to be to Him “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6).

However, we know that the law could make nothing perfect because of man’s weakness, and that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest. It was, in fact, closed (Hebrews 7:19; Hebrews 9:8). It is only on the basis of the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ, accomplished once for all, that man has free access to God in the present dispensation of grace. Having been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we are free to enter the sanctuary with a good conscience and follow the steps of our great High Priest. As sons of God, wholly sanctified by the work of Christ and anointed with the Holy Spirit, we are called to enter the Holiest, to draw near to God with our sacrifices of praise: “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Christ, the great and chief Priest, is the Head of this New Testament family of priests who draw near to God with their sacrifices of praise, and the precious incense of their worship (cf. Revelation 8:3). He leads and directs our service in the sanctuary, like Aaron, the old covenant head of the priestly family, led the service of his sons in the house of God.

Contrasts with the Old Testament

All these three aspects of Christ’s priesthood show stark contrasts with the Old Testament dispensation, when weak and mortal men were appointed as high priests. We now deal with better, permanent and heavenly things. Since Christ is much greater than all the high priests of the old covenant, the results of His priestly work are also richer and more glorious. As to His priesthood in connection with our sins, the contrast has already been mentioned. Whereas in Israel the high priest had to enter the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another, to sprinkle

it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat, Christ with His own blood entered the Holiest once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. Before the throne of God His blood testifies for ever to His finished work that met all God's holy demands. But under the old covenant everything was partial and temporary; the atonement was always limited and incomplete.

There is also a great difference between the effectiveness of the Old Testament priesthood and the present priestly service of our Lord Jesus Christ in connection with our weaknesses. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. He entered into the heavenly sanctuary, where He ever lives to make intercession for us. And His strength is not exhausted by this task. He does not need to be replaced by someone else: night and day He carries us on His strong shoulders and on His loving breast.

Because of His intercession we are protected so as to reach our destination safely. The heavenly Canaan, the heavenly Jerusalem is our hope. How great is Christ as our High Priest! Having linked us with Himself as a people of priests, He grants us free access to God's holy presence even now. He supports our priestly service in the heavenly sanctuary. It is there that we can serve (for instance, "to burn incense"), and that continually.

Since we have access with confidence we need not wait, like Zacharias the priest, for our turn to be chosen by lot to go into the temple of the Lord and worship (cf. Luke 1:8-9). What a privilege it is, always to be able to dwell in the house of the Lord and to behold the beauty of the Lord, to be impressed by God's glory as it has been revealed in Christ. In the light of the heavenly sanctuary we see everything on the level of God's thoughts.

Therefore it is good and necessary to reflect on the greatness of Christ as our heavenly High Priest. The letter to the Hebrews is, in fact, one passionate plea to behold His glory, to consider Him attentively and to see how great He is in every aspect of His Person and work. He is superior to the angels, to all men, to Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and even to Abraham. For He is the Creator of all things, the Redeemer and the Heir of heaven and earth. He is the Son Himself, who became Man and passed through the sufferings of death into the glories of heaven. There He is now seated at the right hand of God, and with the eye of faith we see Him and consider Him, the great Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Hebrews 3:1).

It is a tremendous encouragement to have such a High Priest, and it will stimulate us to run the race that is set before us. We rest in His redemptive work, by which we have been sanctified once for all. We also rely on His help and strength in all the needs and trials of life. Our help is from above, from the sanctuary! It is the Lord in heaven who supports us, our "great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (Hebrews 4:14).

Since we have such a High Priest, who is exalted far above men and angels, and seated at the right hand of God, we can draw near with confidence. We come boldly to offer our prayers and supplications: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest (...) let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:14-16). Because this sympathizing Priest intercedes for us with God, the outcome is sure. His presence at God's right hand and His intercession guarantee the right answer to our need. So we have enough reasons to consider His greatness as our heavenly High Priest. He is much greater than Aaron, whose priesthood was earthly and temporary. Christ is a

Priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek. According to this entirely new order He continues for ever and has an unchangeable priesthood in heaven. The appeal of Hebrews 7:4 to consider “how great this man [Melchizedek] was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils”, is also an indirect appeal to consider the One of whom the king of Salem was just a type. Let us consider Him who is now seated at the right hand of God, and admire His greatness! And the assurance that we have such a great High Priest should also encourage us to come boldly to the throne of God as a family of priests. We should not only come with our requests, our supplications, but also offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 10:19-22; Hebrews 13:15).

04.7. The Great Shepherd

The Great Shepherd

Hebrews 13:20 Christ is superior to Moses

Christ is not only the great High Priest (cf. Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 10:21), but also the great Shepherd whom God brought up from the dead (Hebrews 13:20). No doubt this verse in Hebrews 13:1-25 (a chapter which, among other things, deals with the role of those who rule over God's people), alludes to the fact that the Lord Jesus is superior to Moses, that great leader and shepherd of the people of Israel. Although the letter to the Hebrews emphasizes Christ's priesthood and, as a result, extensively deals with the contrast with Aaron the priest, the contrast with Moses the lawgiver is not forgotten. The subject of Christ's superiority to both Aaron and Moses follows on the introductory chapters, which present the Lord in His deity and humanity. Although He is the Son of God (Hebrews 1:1-14), He is also the Son of man who entered into the glory of heaven along the pathway of suffering and utter humiliation (Hebrews 2:1-18). This twofold character is the basis of both His unique priesthood (the role of Aaron) and His leadership, His task as the Apostle of our confession (the role of Moses).

Therefore Hebrews 3:1 exhorts us to consider Christ Jesus, "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession". With the eye of faith we see Him crowned with glory and honour, the true Moses and the true Aaron. He is superior to Moses, who indeed was faithful as God's servant here on earth (Hebrews 3:3-6). Our Lord is more than a Servant. He acts as Son over God's house, and He has spoken now from heaven (Hebrews 12:25).

Moses tended the flock of God by giving instructions to the people of Israel concerning their worship and their journey through the wilderness (cf. Exodus 3:1; Exodus 3:12; Psalms 77:20). But Christ is the great Shepherd of a heavenly people. He has delivered us from the power of darkness, from the power of the Prince of this world. And He has brought us into God's own presence, just as Moses delivered Israel from the hand of Pharaoh and led them to the mountain of God. He gathers His own from Jews and Gentiles alike, and He leads us as one flock in green pastures. He goes before us and He shows us the way by His Word and His Spirit. In this way He leads us all the days of our life — in order that we might even now enjoy God's presence, and "dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalms 23:6). He is coming quickly to take us up and introduce us into the glory of heaven, which He has won for us by His death as the good Shepherd (John 10:11). From Egypt to Canaan

Hebrews 13:20 hints at Israel's passage through the Red Sea. The bringing up of Moses as the shepherd of God's flock out of the waters of the sea serves as an illustration of Christ's resurrection. Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, has been brought up from the dead (cf. Isaiah 63:11-13). By the power of God He was brought up from the waters of death, that bitter death which He really tasted for us to grant us new life.

Moses, having come forth out of the sea, led a large throng of Israelites who followed him. Likewise, Christ is the Leader of a heavenly people who are linked with Him in His resurrection from the dead. Delivered from the power of sin and death, we sing the song of salvation together with Him (cf. Exodus 15:1). Thanks to His guidance we shall safely reach the end of our pilgrimage, the holy hill of Zion (cf. Exodus 15:17). He is the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). He is our Leader who has delivered us from the power of the enemy and now guides us towards our heavenly home. As the good Shepherd He once laid down His life for the sheep so that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly (John 10:10-11). After having been brought up from the dead, He acts as the great Shepherd of the sheep. In connection with this subject we should compare also the order of Psalms 22:1-31; Psalms 23:1-6. While Psalms 22:1-31 shows us Christ laying down His life for His own, and receiving a glorious answer to His sufferings by His resurrection from the dead, Psalms 23:1-6 then shows us how He leads the sheep on their way through the wilderness.

Although our Lord was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead, this is not what is emphasized here in Hebrews 13:20. It is the point that God the Father raised Him up again. It was the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead. Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father (Romans 6:4). God is presented here as the "God of peace", a title that is used in the New Testament in connection with sanctification and complete victory over the power of evil (cf. Romans 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Php 4:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). In Hebrews 12:14 peace and holiness go together. Christ's resurrection from the dead by the God of peace created a new situation of peace and harmony, a state of holiness which cannot be disturbed by sin or by the power of the evil one.

Christ died to sin once for all, thereby solving the problem of sin for ever. The life that He now lives, He lives to God in the holiness of heaven, in the presence of the Father by whose glory He was raised from the dead (Romans 6:10). The glory of the Father, the inner excellence of all that the Father is, demanded that Christ, who died to glorify the Father and to bring all His excellence to light, be raised from the dead and be received up in glory. So here the activity of God the Father is emphasized. It was the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep. And it is added that God was able to do so "through the blood of the everlasting covenant". The resurrection was founded on the blood of the Lamb, the blood of atonement which met all God's righteous demands once for all. The Lamb who was slain was the good Shepherd, who gave Himself for our sins. And He was slain to redeem us to God by His blood, to protect us from judgment. This is yet another reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt on the basis of the blood of the paschal lamb that protected the Israelites from the destroyer. Both the death of the paschal lamb and the passage through the Red Sea typify the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The blood of the lamb safeguarded Israel from the wrath of God — the righteous Judge who demands the sinner's death. At the Red Sea, however, God acted as the Saviour, the Deliverer of His people. He brought to light His full salvation in that He delivered His people and destroyed the enemy.

Thus the blood of the paschal lamb constituted the basis of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the bringing up of the people out of the waters of the sea. In the same way, the blood of Christ on the one hand shelters us from God's righteous judgment, while on the other hand it is the basis of our deliverance from this present evil age and the power of the evil one. The latter aspect is shown in

type in the passage through the Red Sea. We have been brought up out of the waters of death together with our great Leader, and so we have been delivered from the power of the adversary and from the world of which he is the ruler. We should walk now in newness of life, and follow Him wherever He goes as the great Shepherd of the sheep.

One flock with one Shepherd For the believing Hebrews it was not all that easy to walk in the footsteps of Christ, as it involved breaking away from Judaism and separating themselves from the religion of their fathers. Henceforth, their place was with Christ, “outside the camp” (Hebrews 13:13), outside the established religious system which had cast out the Messiah. They were to share with Him a place of reproach and rejection outside the Jewish sheepfold, and to dedicate themselves to the Christian worship around Christ Himself as the new Centre of attraction. In John 10:1-42 the Lord had already announced that He was going to lead His sheep out of the fold, the fence of Judaism. He also had other sheep which were not of this fold — Gentile believers — and them also He was to bring. And there would be one flock with one Shepherd (John 10:3-4; John 10:16). The Church that is gathered from the Jews and the Gentiles is one flock, led by one Shepherd.

All former distinctions have disappeared. Christians make up a new fellowship with Christ as their only Leader. He gives rich blessings to His sheep: salvation, life in abundance, true liberty, protection from the enemy, guidance, and green pastures. So He leads us on our way to the Promised Land.

It is important to know this Shepherd very personally: “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalms 23:1). We also know Him as the one Shepherd, and the good Shepherd (John 10:11; John 10:14; John 10:16). Besides, He is the great Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd of the flock of God (Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4). He uses others to tend His sheep, but all these shepherds are under His authority; He is the Chief Shepherd. When He appears He will reward all those who cared for the sheep, by giving them the crown of glory that does not fade away. My Shepherd is the Lamb, The living Lord, who died: With all things good I ever am By Him supplied.

He richly feeds my soul With blessings from above; And leads me where the rivers roll Of endless love.

04.8. The Great Saviour

The Great Saviour

Titus 2:13 The Saviour of Israel and of the world

It is a well-known truth that God is the Saviour of His people. He was the Source of salvation for Israel of old, and they had to put all their trust in His divine deliverance. Already in the exodus from Egypt we see how God brought about His help, “the salvation of the LORD” (Exodus 14:13). And this caring and saving love of God, who time and again delivered Israel from the hands of their enemies, can be traced throughout the history of God’s chosen people. It is particularly in the book of Isaiah that God is called the Saviour of His people (Isaiah 43:3; Isaiah 43:11; Isaiah 45:15; Isaiah 45:21; Isaiah 49:26; Isaiah 60:16; Isaiah 63:8). But this “salvation of the LORD” should not only be understood in military terms, as a complete deliverance from hostile oppressors. God is also the Saviour who delivers from far greater hostile powers that are threatening man, namely Satan, sin, and death. He saves His people from all their uncleannesses (Ezekiel 36:29). He opens the wells of salvation for them, and clothes them with the garments of salvation (Isaiah 12:3; Isaiah 61:10). It is obvious that in these Scriptures the word salvation has a deep spiritual meaning, and implies much more than a temporary deliverance. The New Testament fits in with this, as is obvious from Matthew’s explanation of the meaning of the name Jesus: “And you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The name Jesus means “the LORD is salvation”. Here the evangelist clearly links the meaning of this name with the salvation of God’s people from their sins. Christ was the promised Saviour, who was born in the city of David (Luke 2:11). And Zechariah prophesied about His entry into the city: “Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation” (Zechariah 9:9). But He is more than that. For He is also the Saviour of the world — as the Samaritans rightly acknowledged (John 4:42). Although salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22), it is not limited to the Jews. Since the Messiah has been rejected by His own people, God’s salvation has been offered to both Jews and Gentiles.

There is no longer any difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But there is also free grace for all through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood. He is the true “mercy seat”, or “throne of grace” where sinners can find a refuge (Romans 3:23-25). Salvation is to be found in Him alone: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12; Acts 5:31; Acts 13:23). As Christians we are looking forward to Christ’s Second Coming as our Saviour, while at the same time we look back upon His first coming in humiliation. The apostle Paul makes this clear in his letter to Titus. We are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:13-14).

Christ will return. But what is He to us? He is our Saviour, who gave Himself for us — and the cross clearly showed how far He went in this respect — to redeem us from our sins. In Him we

have found full salvation, purification of our sins and deliverance from the power of sin. In Him the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). We can rightly say that He is our Saviour, our Redeemer, if we confess our sins and believe in Him. The Saviour of 'the body' But Christ is also at this present time the Saviour of His own, for we are kept by Him on our way to heaven. Of course, His work of redemption is finished. His sacrifice is perfectly sufficient and needs no repetition. When He died for us once for all, He obtained eternal redemption for His own (Hebrews 9:12; Hebrews 10:10-18). What I want to say is that we have a mighty Helper in heaven who never forgets His own, who intercedes night and day for us to see us through until the end.

Therefore Christ is also called "the Saviour of the body", that is, the Church (Ephesians 5:23). He takes care of all those who are His own, and have been made members of His body. The Church is the special object of His love, and He provides us with everything we need. In a more general sense this divine care is also exercised towards all men, for "God is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:10).

However, Christ is also our Saviour with regard to the future. We are kept through faith for the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5). Christ will appear as "the Saviour of the body", also in the literal sense of the word. Although we belong to a new creation, we are still living in the old creation that was subjected to futility as a result of Adam's fall. The whole creation groans and labours under the curse of corruption, and God's children, too, groan within themselves. We are eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body (Romans 8:23). For that purpose Christ will appear as the Saviour, the Redeemer: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Php 3:20-21). So at the Lord's coming we shall experience the power of His resurrection physically as well (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Corinthians 15:55; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). We owe the salvation of our whole spirit, soul, and body to Him. How great He is as our Saviour! Our God and Saviour

We should also note the fact that He is called our God and Saviour in Titus 2:13. Without any doubt, it is very important for us to know the Lord as our personal Saviour and Redeemer. Yet this is found but once in the New Testament, in the magnificat: "And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:47). It is much more common to describe God or Christ as our Saviour, which indicates that as redeemed persons, we are not alone but linked with all those who will inherit salvation.

Moreover, Christ is called our great God and Saviour here. We have already seen a few aspects of His greatness as the Saviour, but in this verse we are told explicitly that He is great. This is confirmed by the subsequent words "God and Saviour". This verse is one of the many proofs of Scripture that Christ is truly God. There is no need to doubt His greatness, for He is the eternally blessed God Himself (Romans 9:5). In 2 Peter 1:1 we find an almost identical expression: "Our God and Saviour Jesus Christ". In this letter He is twice called the "Lord and Saviour" (2 Peter 3:2, 2 Peter 3:18). Christ is Lord, and He is God: God the Son, the Creator, the eternal Word, which was in the beginning with God, and through whom all things were made (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2). But He is the Son of God incarnate. The Word became flesh; He was manifested in the flesh; in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (John 1:14; 1 Timothy

3:16; Colossians 1:19; Colossians 2:9). He is the true God and eternal life (1 John 5:20). He is God and Man in one Person. Although He was in the form of God and did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, He took the form of a servant and came in the likeness of men — yet without sin. He took part in blood and flesh (Php 2:6-7; Hebrews 2:14; Hebrews 4:15). How great is our Lord, who is called our God and Saviour here. He is the true God, and He became Man in order to be our Saviour! The divinity of Christ is not only asserted in the New Testament; it is also found in the Old Testament (cf. Isaiah 9:6 and Micah 5:2). The Messiah is no less than the LORD Himself. The words “God and Saviour” go together, and it is a striking combination that occurs also in the Old Testament (Psalms 106:21; Isaiah 43:3; Isaiah 45:15; Isaiah 45:21; Hosea 13:4). The LORD is a great God, and there is no Saviour besides Him. In the New Testament we meet this Saviour God in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is called by the same names: He is “our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). He is the humble Man Jesus, who is at the same time the Christ, the Anointed of God. God has made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). He is the One through whom God carries out His plans, God’s Anointed who accomplishes His counsels. In this respect it is noteworthy that the expression “God our Saviour” (or, “our Saviour God”) is very characteristic of the letter to Titus and the first letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:1; 1 Timothy 2:3; Titus 1:3; Titus 2:10; Titus 3:4). This significant title shows us God’s special relationship with man in the present time. In the Old Testament He had already revealed Himself as the Creator and Judge, and also as the Lawgiver of Israel. But the present dispensation has a different character. We are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14). In Christ God has revealed Himself as our Saviour, and He has stretched out His hands not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles.

God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14). Man has proved himself to be an inveterate sinner (both without Law and under Law). In this respect there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. Yet, God has revealed Himself now as our Saviour on the basis of Christ’s finished work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. He has brought to light His salvation, and He offers this great salvation to all as long as the day of grace lasts.

It is not only forgiveness of sins that is offered freely, but also a complete inner renewal, a new birth for people with an evil nature, a quickening of dead sinners, full deliverance from the power of sin and death, a wholly new relationship with God. Who would neglect so great a salvation (Hebrews 2:3)?

Another remarkable thing in the letter to Titus is that both God and Christ are alternately called our Saviour. This occurs in every chapter: “God our Saviour”, “Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 1:3-4); “God our Saviour”, “our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:10, Titus 2:13); “God our Saviour”, “Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:4, Titus 3:6). This proves again that Christ is one with the Father. In Him, God has revealed Himself as our Saviour, and has come down to man. God stooped low in order to redeem us. Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people. When He appears He will give us the full enjoyment of His great salvation according to spirit, soul and body. That is why we look forward to His coming (Titus 2:13-14).

05.1. The Healing Of Naaman

The Healing Of Naaman Lessons from 2 Kings 5:1-27 by Hugo Bouter "Go and wash...and be clean"2 Kings 5:10; 2 Kings 5:13 "He who is bathed...is completely clean"John 13:10

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05.3. Preface

Preface The healing of Naaman is not simply a miraculous story from the distant past. It is also of great interest for us who live at the beginning of the twenty-first century after the birth of Christ. In this booklet, we look at Naaman from a New Testament perspective. His cleansing is a wonderful illustration of the way of salvation, of our purification from sin, of the complete inner renewal that results from faith in Christ. Naaman was fully cleansed and, from that moment on, he dedicated his life to the living and true God. The unfortunate end of Gehazi, on the other hand, is a serious warning not to neglect so great a salvation.

05.4. Naamans Leprosy

Naaman's Leprosy

2 Kings 5:1 In this booklet, we shall consider Naaman's leprosy and its cure from a New Testament perspective. His cleansing provides a clear illustration of the purification of the sinner from sin. After first becoming briefly acquainted with the main characters of this Bible chapter, we shall deal with the question why leprosy is a figure of sin. The main characters

Actually, this well-known story is a masterpiece of narrative power. A number of persons are portrayed here in a way that is sharper and clearer than in the most fascinating novel. That is not amazing since it is the Word of God, which is living and powerful. Let us first introduce the principal persons:

(1) Naaman, commander of the Syrian army: a very esteemed and loved man, in the eyes of both his master and his servants (2 Kings 5:1, 2 Kings 5:13). Yet he had an unsolvable problem: he was a leper.

(2) A young girl from the land of Israel. She lived as an exile in a foreign country, but remained faithful to the God of Israel. She had a great faith and she loved her enemies (2 Kings 5:3). This young girl remains anonymous, but she is quite remarkable because of her spiritual qualities.

(3) The king of Israel. His name is not mentioned either, but we suppose it was Jehoram, the son of the wicked Ahab. He was characterised by unbelief, despair, and suspicion (2 Kings 5:7).

(4) The prophet Elisha, the spokesman of the living God. He is the central character in this chapter and is noted for his simplicity and decisiveness towards both the earthly rulers and his own servant Gehazi.

(5) Gehazi, the servant of the prophet. He stands here in sharp contrast to his master because of his greed, ignorance, and worldliness. The deepest stirrings of his heart are laid bare, just as later a Judas was to be exposed by the Lord Himself. The chapter finishes as it begins: with a leper! Naaman's leprosy would cling for ever to Gehazi and his descendants (2 Kings 5:27).

Naaman, commander of the Syrian army

Naaman was a very esteemed and popular man. His name also means "pleasantness" or "friendliness". The respect others had for him may have been due to his high-principled character. Both his master and his servants seem to have been sincerely sympathetic towards him (vv. 4-5, 13). However, in verse 1, the favour he had is connected with his military success, "because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria". This last statement is a revealing one. It says, in fact, the Lord reigns! God governs not only his own people, but also the nations of the earth. And that is still the case, although His government is often unsearchable and His ways past finding out. This is the first lesson we learn here. God is not a local god, a mountain god or a god of the plains, or of one of the elements. That is what the Gentiles thought; that is what the Syrians also thought (1

Kings 20:23 ff.). But that was a mistake. God is the living God, the Lord of heaven and earth. He holds the whole world in His hands.

Secondly, however, He uses the nations, if necessary, to judge His own people. Aram (Syria) was such a disciplinary rod in the days of the wicked Ahab and his successors. And Assyria, the world power that was then emerging, would be that to an even greater extent (Isaiah 10:5). Aram had already been threatening Israel from the north since the time of Solomon (1 Kings 11:25). There were not always wars going on between the two small states, for sometimes they would make peace treaties (compare the treaty between Ahab and Ben-Hadad in 1 Kings 20:34). The relation between Syria and Israel at that time looked more like an armed peace. The same was the case here, since the king of Israel saw a pretext for a new war in this letter from the king of Syria (2 Kings 5:7). God, therefore, used this northern enemy as the rod of His anger. Aram means "high", or "elevated". In Aram we see a picture of the world as the proud adversary of God's people, an enemy that is convinced of his own excellence and that speaks in a self-satisfied way about his own possibilities (compare Naaman's attitude in 2 Kings 5:12). If the people of God find themselves in a bad condition, they must taste defeat in their confrontation with the world. And today, that is still the case. Are we aware of that? We assume that the victory of Naaman was indeed gained over Israel, although that is not said in so many words. There is an interesting Jewish tradition that says that Naaman was the archer that wounded King Ahab in the battle near Ramoth in Gilead (1 Kings 22:34). Others think of a victory of Aram over Assyria. The second book of Kings, however, makes it clear that Elisha played an important part in the wars between Aram and Israel. The prophet even appeared in Damascus and was involved in the appointment of Hazael as king of Aram (2 Kings 8:7 ff.). All this belonged to God's plan to chastise His people that had gone astray, and to call them to repentance. Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, was therefore a great man. Everyone was favourably disposed towards him. He had even been an instrument in the hands of the Lord. We would say that he was successful in everything. Yet, it was all show, it was only the outward side of his life. Naaman had a hidden problem. His leprosy. The beautiful portrait of 2 Kings 5:1 is marred by a serious "but". It is said in such a striking way, "but he was a leper". He had an incurable disease, and nobody could help him. It is possible that the disease was still in its early phase, for 2 Kings 5:11 speaks of the affected "place" on his body. But the illness would spread insidiously and increasingly affect various parts of his body. That was a terrible prospect. What lay ahead for him? How could he go on living with this problem? What does the Bible mean by leprosy? It seems to have been a comprehensive term, which also applied to clothing and houses (Leviticus 13:1-59; Leviticus 14:1-57). According to some expositors, it comprised all sorts of rash and skin diseases. But the law concerning leprosy itself already makes a distinction between "the leprous plague" and "a harmless rash" (Leviticus 13:39 NIV). When it concerns people, we will have to think specifically of leprosy, certainly so in the case of Naaman and Gehazi and in that of Miriam (Numbers 12:1-16).

We see other examples of it in the lives of Moses (Exodus 4:6), King Azariah or Uzziah (2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chronicles 26:16 ff.). We know that sickness and death, sorrow and sadness are all the consequences of sin (cf. Genesis 3:16 ff.). Death entered the world through sin (Romans 5:12). The connection between sin and sickness is, however, a very complex matter. But concerning leprosy, it can be said that this illness gives a very striking picture of sin and its deadly, destructive consequences. The following arguments can be mentioned to support this:

(1) Leprosy was an infectious disease, that continued to spread insidiously and affect the entire body. Similarly, we know that nothing good dwells in our sinful flesh (Romans 7:18).

(2) The leper was regarded as living dead. Aaron spoke about his sister "as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed" (Numbers 12:12). As sinners, we are dead in our trespasses and sins, and alienated from the life of God (Ephesians 2:1; Ephesians 4:18). Only God can make us alive (cf. 2 Kings 5:7).

(3) The leper was considered unclean. He had to tear his clothes as a sign of mourning, and to cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" (Leviticus 13:45). In the same way, the uncleanness and the shamefulness of sin cling to us, by nature.

(4) The leper stayed outside the camp because of his uncleanness, outside the place where a Holy God dwelled in the midst of His people (Leviticus 13:46; Numbers 5:2; Numbers 12:14; 2 Kings 7:3; 2 Chronicles 26:21). We once lived without God in the world, being alienated from Him.

(5) The leper was not cured by a physician, but was cleansed in the presence of the priest. The ceremonial cleansing on the basis of the prescribed sacrifices (among them a trespass and a sin offering, to make atonement for the healed leper), prefigured the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only His redemptive work was able to take away the defilement of sin. Furthermore, as people who have been cleansed by His death, we are to walk in newness of life by the power of His resurrection. The anointing with the Holy Spirit (the "oil") will enable us to do so. Therefore, when we look at Naaman the leper, we really see a picture of ourselves. We may have all kinds of talents. We may be successful. People may appreciate us. Yet, in everyone's life there is a serious "but", i.e. the problem of sin. The "sickness of sin" affects us all and ruins us. We ourselves cannot solve the deadly problem that ruins our lives. But what is impossible with men is possible with God.

Questions

In which of the five main characters of this story do you recognize something of yourself?

Are you perhaps a proud worldly person like Naaman?

Do you admit that, because of your sin, you are incurably ill? Do you realize that you are undone and lost, and that you are unable to save yourself?

05.6. Naamans Baptism In The River Jordan

Naaman's Baptism In The River Jordan

2 Kings 5:10-14

We now see that Naaman humbled himself and immersed himself seven times in the river Jordan. He did not stay, however, in the water grave, but came out as a new person. That is a splendid example for us as Christians, for we also have experienced a complete renewal by putting on the new man.

Go and wash in the Jordan

Elisha did not find it necessary to speak to Naaman personally. He had his wise intentions for acting in that way, as would quickly become evident. For Naaman had to learn to humble himself. His pride had to be broken. So the prophet himself did not come out of the house, but simply sent a messenger to him with the order: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times" (2 Kings 5:10 a). At the same time, he added the clear promise: "(...) and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean" (2 Kings 5:10 b). Literally, it says: "(...) and your flesh shall come back to you" (cf. JND; KJV). After all, one of the terrible consequences of leprosy is that the sick person's flesh is eaten away, as it were. The powerful commander of the Syrian army, however, did not like this command. He interpreted the message of the prophet as a personal insult. He had expected a completely different treatment, a complicated ritual, as he was probably used to with the heathen magicians in his own country (2 Kings 5:11).

Surely he was deserving of an honourable treatment. After all, he was not just somebody. Surely he was able to reward Elisha nicely for his services, wasn't he? What an order: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times!" What a humiliation! Were not the clear and watery rivers of Damascus, the Abanah (or, Amanah) and the Pharpar, better than that narrow and muddy Jordan? Couldn't he have taken a bath at home? Naaman could have thought up that remedy himself (2 Kings 5:12). However, he did not want to give up the rivers, nor the gods of Damascus. Only later would he recognize that there was no God in all the earth, except in Israel (2 Kings 5:15). Naaman was angry and felt deeply hurt. There his command to the charioteer could be heard: Turn the reins! Go back home! It must have been a quiet procession that started back in a northerly direction and descended from the mountains of Samaria. Maybe it happened at a resting place not far from the Jordan that Naaman's servants had the courage to address their master (2 Kings 5:13). They did it very tactfully and with the necessary respect. They honoured their commander as a father. They gave advice that was not asked for, but it was very sober and sound. If Naaman had been commissioned to do something difficult, he would have done so! He would have employed every possible means to become healthy again. Now, however, the prophet had given a simple order: "Wash, and be clean." Why not then listen to those simple words of the man of God?

New life in Christ

It is to Naaman's credit that he was prepared to listen to the words of his servants. He did not act in a superior way. "So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God" (2 Kings 5:14 a). Yet it must have been very difficult for him to humble himself so much in the presence of his inferiors. He had to come down from his high chariot, put off his clothes, and to sink into the Jordan, so to speak. But he did it, although nothing was left of his pride and nobility. Furthermore, he did not do it just to please his servants. He not only listened to them, but he complied with the saying of the man of God, as our verse says. He obeyed God. This is a beautiful illustration of the way of salvation. We must become conscious of our fallen state, our sinfulness, our leprous condition before God. We must humble ourselves before Him and descend from the "high chariot" of our natural pride and own importance. We must follow the path that He points out to us in His Word. The divine remedy is that we confess our sins, put off the old man and descend into the "river of death". In other words, we must identify ourselves by faith with a Christ who died for our sins.

There is no other way to be saved and cleansed, to receive new life. "No one comes to the Father except through Me", says the Lord Jesus (John 14:6). Naaman was obedient and immersed himself seven times in the river Jordan. The name Jordan means "going down" or "flowing down". This river rises between the Lebanon and Mount Hermon and flows to the Dead Sea, situated far below sea level. This is a wonderful type of the death of Christ, for He descended from the heights of heaven and made Himself of no reputation. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death. The number seven speaks of perfection. Naaman had to immerse himself seven times in the Jordan. He had to go down completely. Nothing of the old man should remain visible. Likewise, we as believers were buried with Christ through baptism into death. We have been united together in the likeness of His death (Romans 6:4-5). But Naaman did not remain in the water grave. He came out a new creature: "(...) and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (2 Kings 5:14 b). That is a picture of the new life that we have received as Christians. We have not only died with Christ, but have also risen with Him to a new life. A sevenfold blessing This part of the text (2 Kings 5:14 b) sheds light on a number of important truths from the New Testament. More or less by coincidence, I have come up with seven points. Naaman's baptism in the Jordan illustrates that:

- (1) We have been cleansed from the sins and iniquities that clung to us, and defiled us in the eyes of a holy God (John 13:10; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 1:22).
- (2) We have been delivered from the power of sin that ruined us and spread insidiously in our lives (Romans 8:2).
- (3) We have been born again (John 3:3; John 3:5).
- (4) We have been made alive together with Christ (Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13).
- (5) We have entered a new world. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17; Titus 3:5).
- (6) We have put off the old man and have put on the new man (Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10).

(7) From now on we should live in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Here too, it appears that Scripture usually speaks of the cleansing of the leper, and hardly ever of his cure. Likewise, sin makes us unclean before God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil. The promise of the prophet was: "(...) and you shall be clean" (2 Kings 5:10 b). In keeping with this, we read here: "(...) and he was clean" (2 Kings 5:14 b). We too, as disciples of Christ are "completely clean" because of the word which He has spoken to us (John 13:10; John 15:3).

Questions

Are you willing to humble yourself before God?

Have you by faith been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, and have you expressed that in baptism?

Do you also walk in newness of life?

05.7. Walking In Newness Of Life

Walking In Newness Of Life

2 Kings 5:15-19 In this fourth chapter, we see how Naaman, after being cleansed, only wanted to serve the God of Israel. This is an important lesson for us, for as Christians we also desire to serve and worship the living and true God.

Naaman's new life of gratitude

What was Naaman's reaction to his healing and cleansing? He returned to Elisha in order to express his gratitude (2 Kings 5:15 a). In this respect, he showed great resemblance to the Samaritan in Luke 17:1-37, a stranger who also returned to thank God after being cleansed from his leprosy. We should also do that as the redeemed of the Lord. We should fall at our Saviour's feet and honour Him for our salvation. After our conversion we should also show a new obedience. And we see a type of this here. There was not a trace of pride left in Naaman when he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides. He did not remain sitting in his chariot, as he had done at their first meeting, but he went into the prophet's house. Very humbly, he spoke about himself as Elisha's servant: "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift (lit. "blessing") from your servant" (2 Kings 5:15 b). Naaman had come to know the true God, the God of Israel, Creator of heaven and earth.

He recognized that all other gods were idols, and were entirely powerless to save (cf. Isaiah 45:20). He wanted to show his thankfulness to the true God, and therefore offered a gift to the man of God. It was done with good intentions, but he had to learn the lesson of free grace. That principle holds true for us as well. We cannot pay anything for our salvation. Salvation in Christ is entirely free. Divine blessing is only from above, it comes down from the Father of lights. That is why the prophet decisively turned down a reward. He was just a servant of the living God and could not accept anything for the miracle of Naaman's cleansing. Although the latter insisted that he must accept something, he kept on refusing (2 Kings 5:16). This principle also holds good for us: "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). It is a corrupt way of thinking to suppose that godliness, i.e. the service of God, is a means of gain (1 Timothy 6:5). Gehazi, however, was such a person who had lost the way of truth, as we will yet see.

Living in God's presence But Naaman's heart was in the right place. No matter what, he wanted to serve the God of Israel. Although he could not pay anything to the prophet for his cleansing, he could ask him for something. For Naaman really wanted to start a new life. That is also true for us. After we have been raised with Christ to a new life, we should walk in the good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). The commander of the Syrian army had the following wish: "Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD" (2 Kings 5:17). Here we have a clear proof of his conversion, a beautiful fruit of the new life that he had received. When we have turned to God from idols, we only desire, from that moment

on, to serve the living and true God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:9). And we should serve Him according to His revealed will, on a basis that answers to His holiness - just as Naaman wished to serve Him on holy ground.

Probably he made from these loads of earth "an altar of earth" for the Lord and sacrificed on it his burnt offerings and peace offerings (cf. Exodus 20:24). The patriarchs of Israel had acted in the same way. They frequently made an altar of earth, as we see in the book of Genesis. The service of the true God takes shape in our personal worship, our personal conduct, but also in our public worship. Do we have such an altar at which we call on the name of the Lord? As Christians we do have an altar, as Hebrews 13:10 clearly tells us. Not a literal altar of earth, or a bronze or gold altar, but an altar in the metaphorical sense of the word. We have a place to meet God, or to express it even better, a Person through whom we draw near. Christ Himself is the true Centre of our worship, and by Him we have access to God and freedom to enter the Holiest (Hebrews 10:19; Hebrews 13:15). Do we serve our God with a thankful heart, personally and together with others? Do we draw near to Him as priests? Do we offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name? Do we pay tribute to Him for His great salvation? Do we realize that we owe our cleansing to Him alone?

Living without worldly compromise But we see something else here. Such a life in the presence of God will certainly bring difficulties, for we cannot serve both God and the world. The people who surround us will insist on making a compromise. Naaman also had such a problem. He was immediately aware of it, and mentioned it in all honesty to Elisha (2 Kings 5:18). His master, the king of Syria, would probably remain a servant of idols. Should he enter the idol temple as the servant on whose hand the king leaned (cf. 2 Kings 7:2)? Would the LORD forgive him if, as part of his duties, he were to bow down before Rimmon? Note: Rimmon was the god of the Syrians, and the Assyrian god of thunder. He was the same as Hadad, from whom the name of Ben-Hadad has been derived. Sometimes both names occur combined in the order Hadad Rimmon (Zechariah 12:11). He did not get a complicated answer. The prophet simply said, "Go in peace" (2 Kings 5:19). That does not imply that Elisha approved of such ambiguity. It was impossible to serve both God and Rimmon, even if the latter only happened for tradition's sake. God does not allow a believer to have communion with idols (1 Corinthians 10:14 ff.). But He would solve this difficulty in His time and in His way. Elisha was convinced of that, and therefore he could ease Naaman's mind. Naaman could go on his way rejoicing, as it is so beautifully said of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:39). Nobody could take from him the peace that he had found. Thus it was also a very wise response. People who have only recently been converted must not be confronted with a long list of rules and regulations. They must learn to walk by faith. God Himself will lead them in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, and He will help them to solve their problems.

Questions

Are you cleansed from your sins, and are you thankful for your salvation?

Are you a worshipper? Do you have "an altar" to serve the Lord (cf. Hebrews 13:10)?

Is your new life as a Christian without worldly compromise?

05.8. The End Of Gehazi

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06.5. An Unexpected Advice

An Unexpected Advice

2 Kings 5:2-9

We saw in the first chapter that leprosy is a figure of sin. We now see how a young girl from the land of Israel showed the way of salvation to the leprous commander of the Syrian army. It also appears here that no man could help Naaman: neither the king of Aram, nor the king of Israel. The gods of Damascus could not bring relief either. Salvation could only be found with the God of Israel. That is why Naaman had to go to Elisha, the representative of the living and true God. A young girl from the land of Israel

Humanly speaking, Naaman's problem was unsolvable. But, fortunately, his healing makes it very clear that salvation was to be found with the God of Israel. He alone could cleanse Naaman from his leprosy. Yes, He even saves us from the sores of sin. But then we have to come to Him in faith, and not expect our salvation from the "magicians" of this world (cf. 2 Kings 5:11). It is the living and true God who can help us. It is so touching that a young girl from the land of Israel showed the way of salvation to the powerful commander of the Syrian army. In the face of her mistress, she testified very simply to her faith: "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:3). Bands of Syrian raiders had kidnapped and sold her at the slave market in Damascus. In fact, that was one of the curses that had come upon God's people. Moses had already predicted this: "Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, and your eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all day long; and there shall be no strength in your hand" (Deuteronomy 28:32). In this way, this young girl had come to find herself in the household of the commander of the Syrian army (2 Kings 5:2). Naaman's wife had become her mistress. God had permitted this and He had also led it this way, for He had His own reasons for it. Fortunately, this girl did not allow herself to be led by feelings of hatred in her new surroundings. Despite her young age and despite the difficult circumstances in which she found herself in the foreign country, she testified to the God of Israel and even loved her enemies. Likewise, we as believers are representatives, ambassadors for Christ and we should be pleased to give an account for the hope that is in us (2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Peter 3:15). Are we aware of this high calling? This young girl had great faith in her God and in His prophet. How did she know that Elisha was willing and able to heal Commander Naaman of his leprosy? It was only her faith that whispered this into her ear. Elisha had performed all kinds of miracles, but not yet healed a leper. We can read that in the New Testament. Although there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, none of them was cleansed (Luke 4:27). After all, God had to punish His people because they served idols. Not one of the Israelites was cleansed in those days, except Naaman the Syrian. God's grace thus extended to the Gentiles. On the way to the king of Israel

Naaman's wife believed the words of her little female slave, and she passed them on to her husband. And Naaman passed them on to his lord, the king of Syria (2 Kings 5:4). The illness of the commander of the army had meanwhile become known publicly. One thing led to another, and

the matter was dealt with in a diplomatic way (even in medical matters, this was not uncommon in the ancient world). The aim of this was that the king of Israel would subsequently approach "the prophet in Samaria" who, after all, was his subordinate according to worldly standards. Naaman had a letter from his king, as well as a generous gift. The king of Syria was willing to personally share from his own wealth in order to help out one of his best subjects. The gift consisted of a quantity of as much as three hundred and forty kilograms of silver, seventy kilograms of gold and ten sets of clothing (2 Kings 5:5). That represented an enormous fortune. The gold and silver had a value of millions of pounds. Naaman arrived in Samaria, with the letter which said, "Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:6). His arrival caused quite an upheaval at the court of the king of Israel, since he saw this letter as some kind of pretext, a provocation of war (2 Kings 5:7). In despair, he tore his clothes. Such a pessimistic reaction could be expected from king Jehoram (cf. 2 Kings 3:13). The king knew very well that he was not a son of the gods to whom healing power could be attributed (that is how the heathen nations all too often looked at their kings). But he took God's name in vain by saying: "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy?" Actually this marked the seriousness of the situation: only God who had sent the mortal ailment could give relief and make the dead one alive. To Elisha

It seemed that king Jehoram did not think of Elisha at all, although in those days the prophet was the channel of God's blessing. God reached out His saving hand to Israel by means of His servant. But Elisha was not honoured in his home town. Apparently, he lived again in the capital (cf. 2 Kings 2:25; 2 Kings 6:32). He had to take the initiative himself. So he sent the following message to the king: "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5:8 b). So Naaman finally came to Elisha the prophet, who is presented here as "the man of God" (2 Kings 5:8 a). Now he had come to the right person, for "the man of God" was the representative of the living God, who indeed had the power to kill and to make alive. There was still, however, another problem. Naaman was conscious of his high position. He came in his own dignity, "with his horses and chariot" (2 Kings 5:9). Full of pride he stood at the door of the house of Elisha. But we cannot come to God in that way. Naaman could not be helped on his own conditions, but only on the conditions that God offered to him. He had to learn that, as we shall see. But that is precisely what every sinner has to learn: to approach God, in the awareness of one's own unworthiness. There is no sense in trying to improve myself or to earn salvation by my own merits. I must come as I am, as a lost sinner, and that is how God will accept me. He does so by free grace.

Questions

Are you also, like this young girl, a representative, a witness of the true and living God among your acquaintances?

Do you expect help and salvation from man, from the rulers of this world?

Or are you convinced that only the great Prophet, the true Man of God, i.e. Christ, can bring salvation?

S. Overview of 1 Thessalonians

Overview of 1 Thessalonians

Hugh Bouter

Part I

(1) Greeting: senders and addressees, blessing (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

(2) Introduction: profound gratitude and thanksgiving because of the exemplary faith of the Thessalonians, their turning away from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10)

Part II What unites the senders and the addressees of the epistle (1 Thessalonians 2:1-20; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13)

(1) Paul's conduct and service in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

(2) A second prayer of thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 2:13-16)

(3) Paul's wish to come sooner, and his desire for the believers as the crown of rejoicing at the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20)

(4) Timothy's mission to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

(5) Timothy's return to Paul (1 Thessalonians 3:6-10)

(6) Paul's prayer for reunion as well as for growth in love and holiness at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)

Part III

Main subject of the epistle, dealing with questions about pleasing God in our lives, about the Coming of the Lord and the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:1-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)

(1) A plea for purity and for a brotherly and orderly life (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12)

(2) Christ's second coming, the resurrection of the deceased Christians, and the transformation of the living who will remain until the coming of the Lord – the Rapture to meet the Lord in the air and the introduction into the Father's house (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

(3) The Day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night for the unbelievers, whereas the believers have been appointed to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)

Part IV

(1) Final instructions (1 Thessalonians 5:12-22)

(2) A last prayer with an extra reference to the essence of the epistle - complete sanctification at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

(3) Greeting and blessing (1 Thessalonians 5:25-28)

S. Remarks on Eternal Punishment

Remarks on Eternal Punishment

Hugo Bouter

What does Scripture say concerning the nature of eternal punishment? Christians who take the Bible seriously believe in the everlasting nature of eternal punishment. However awful it may sound, punishment in hell is without end. The Bible also clearly outlines the characteristics of eternal punishment.

Those who advocate the doctrine of Universalism detract from the meaning of eternal punishment as regards both its length and content. They state, for example: "It is not literal punishment about which Scripture teaches. Rather it describes hell simply in a metaphorical sense, since it uses words such as fire, worm and darkness, which are only images and should not be taken literally. Where there is fire, there cannot be darkness at the same time".

Nevertheless, Scripture makes use of these images to bring the nature of eternal punishment clearly before us: unquenchable fire, the worm that does not die and outer darkness^[1]. We will consider each of these characteristics in turn. The Everlasting Fire

There are several names used for this: "the furnace of fire" (Matthew 13:42; Matthew 13:50; cf. Revelation 9:2), "everlasting fire" (Matthew 18:8), "hell, ...the fire unquenchable" (Mark 9:43). The everlasting fire of hell (Gehenna^[2]), the lake of fire, is prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41; cf. Revelation 20:10). The fact that it will not only be angels but also people who will be cast into this unquenchable fire - eternally in the company of the fallen prince of angels - will be because, during their life here on earth, they didn't turn away from the prince and god of this age who blinded their minds (2 Corinthians 4:4). This first picture describes how the godless will be tortured by the everlasting fire of judgment. Fire is a symbol of the wrath of God, who is called "a consuming fire" and the "everlasting burnings" (Deuteronomy 4:24; Deuteronomy 9:3; Isaiah 33:14; Hebrews 12:29). It is questionable, though, whether we should be thinking here of a personal attribute of God, rather than its outward expression that will strike the godless through all eternity. Indeed, are we able to imagine the "lake of fire"? This is also called "the lake of fire and brimstone", which suggests that this picture is partially derived from the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, when God rained down brimstone and fire out of the heavens (Genesis 19:24 ff.; cf. also the word "furnace" in Genesis 19:28).

Although it is right to say that Scripture uses figurative language to describe the reality of heaven and hell, this does not in any way alter the fact that we are dealing with the real existence of real things and places. These pictures are borrowed from our earthly reality in order to give us some understanding of another, supernatural, reality. For example, the name Gehenna (hell) was derived from the valley of the sons of Hinnom (in Hebrew "Ge-Hinnom"), near Jerusalem, where children were burned as sacrifices to Molech and where, after Josiah's reforms, all sorts of rubbish was collected and burned (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Jeremiah 32:35).

The Place Where The Worm Dieth Not

Hell is also the place where the worm does not die. A comparison with Isaiah 66:24 and Acts 12:23 shows that this indicates the decomposition process of a corpse in the grave. This process started with Herod even when he was still alive, being a judgment of God because of his pride. He was eaten by worms and died.

Whereas the decomposition process in the grave normally comes to an end, this is not the case in the second death. In hell their worm (singular!) does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:48). This is often given a spiritual meaning, being connected with the never ending remorse of the lost. The gnawing of the worm would then refer to their being consumed by remorse and fear, in the agonies suffered. Since the expression "their worm" is in the singular, it would be easy to identify the worm with the individual conscience.

Although this is a very plausible explanation, one might object that it seems to ignore the "consuming" of the body. If we consider that after the end of the reign of Christ the lost will be raised and judged and then cast into the second death with spirit, soul and body (Revelation 20:5; Revelation 20:11 ff.), this suggests that even the body will be subject there to an endless destruction, to a never ending "decomposition process". The lost themselves are referred to as "the dead", and will be assigned to the realm that is called "the second death". Here everything is marked by death; death has power over the "dead". According to Revelation 20, this second and ultimate death is "the lake of fire". The realm of death, where the worm does not die, is therefore a place of torment in a physical sense too. This idea is confirmed by the words of the Lord Himself: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). The Outer Darkness The third picture given is that of the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30; 2 Peter 2:17; Jude 1:13). This picture too is taken from the earthly reality. Inside the banquet hall there is joy and light, but outside it is night and those who are there do not share in the joy of those inside. This picture depicts the sharp contrast with the atmosphere of joy and light in the house of the Lord, in His kingdom. For this is the banquet hall where the wedding feast is held and where fellowship with God is enjoyed, who is light and in whom is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). The unbelievers have been removed from this realm of light and love. Just like the foolish virgins, they are out in the darkness, faced by a closed door (Matthew 25:10 ff.), and just like Judas, they have gone out into the night (John 13:30). They are separated from God for ever and live on in darkness, far from His kindly face. In this place of outer darkness there is not even one ray of light to be seen and there is neither hope nor expectation anymore. There is only an impenetrable darkness. It is a place of weeping, of eternal grief. There is also gnashing of teeth. This may refer not only to remorse, but also to anger; an eternal rebellion against God. Weeping and gnashing of teeth are certainly characteristics both of the outer darkness and of the furnace of fire (Matthew 13:42; Matthew 13:50). This clearly indicates that the two pictures, that of the fire as well as that of the darkness, are about the same terrifying reality.

Though shocking, it is beneficial to ponder these things, since it helps us to realise to some degree how much the Lord is to be feared (2 Corinthians 5:11), and this awareness prompts us to persuade others. As has already been mentioned, this third picture of eternal punishment raises the question of how the outer darkness can be combined with the unquenchable fire of the first

picture.

Fire spreads light and where fire burns it cannot be pitch dark. However, we are not to draw hasty conclusions from the physical reality around us and apply them to supernatural realities that lie beyond our understanding. On the other hand we should certainly take the concepts indicated by these pictures seriously, for example, not limiting darkness to simply "moral darkness". Scripture clearly uses these seemingly contradictory pictures in order to give us an impression, from different points of view, of the seriousness of eternal punishment.

Lessons from Luke 16:1-31 Luke 16:1-31 speaks of the state of those who have died, from the time that they die until the resurrection. When the rich man was in torment in Hades^[3], he said: "I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:24). He was in the fire, but we don't read anything here about darkness or the outer darkness. The torment he was suffering did not impair his sight, for he looked up and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom (Luke 16:23). Thus he was even allowed to catch a glimpse of the place where the blessed were: Abraham's bosom, that is, the place of the father of all believers and therefore also the place of his "children". The fact that the rich man saw Abraham (and how Lazarus was blessed) must have intensified his pain and sense of separation from God. This refutes the theory that this story is merely about the difference between the rich and the poor. It really portrays the difference between believers and unbelievers, as well as the consequences of that difference. Of course, we are told that Lazarus was poor and the other was rich. A person such as Lazarus who is a real "child", a follower of the believing Abraham, will inherit the heavenly blessing that is granted to him on the basis of faith (cf. Romans 4:1-25).

Since the death of Christ the place to which deceased believers depart is called Paradise (Luke 23:43). The focus moves from Abraham to Christ Himself: "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise". For there, of course, He is the central figure for all those who belong to Him, whom He has bought at the price of His precious blood.

Although the rich man was separated from God for ever, he was still able to see. What was the nature of this "sight"? Did he simply see the brilliance of the heavenly reality from out of his surrounding darkness? This may have to do with the difference between the intermediate state (the state of the deceased between death and resurrection) and the eternal state; and between Hades (the underworld) and Gehenna (hell). Gehenna, the ultimate place of torment, is without doubt the place of outer darkness. From there, any communication with the heavenly reality, a glorious reality of light and life, will be impossible.

Another possible answer to our question is that the rich man was allowed a glimpse of "Abraham's bosom" as an exception. Luke 16:1-31 does not mention the "darkness" that reigns in the place of ultimate torment, but this does not necessarily mean that there is no darkness in Hades at all. It seems quite improbable that it is a normal privilege of the dead to communicate with the heavenly reality. Indeed, what would be the purpose of this? Might this communication have been allowed in order to confront the lost still on earth with the seriousness of their position as seen against the background of the joy in heaven?

Perhaps we cannot say anything with certainty about this, though we can consider these things in the light of Scripture and compare Scripture with Scripture. We should, however, be careful about

drawing human conclusions solely on the basis of Luke 16:1-31. The most important thing, in any case, is the warning nature of this story for those who are still living on earth and whose eternal destiny might not yet have been decided. Our state after death is described here in such a way that we can take these things to heart in time and obey the call of God coming to us through His Word. For the rich man's family this was "Moses and the prophets", whereas we now have access to the completed Word of God. In the passages in Matthew's Gospel that speak about both the outer darkness and the furnace of fire (Matthew 13:1-58 and Matthew 25:1-46), we find that the lost will be cast there immediately after the establishment of the Kingdom. However, in Revelation 20:1-15 we read that they will be cast into the lake of fire only after the completion of the Millennium and the last judgment before the Great White Throne. Hence no difference is made between the intermediate state and the eternal state, at least with respect to the severity and the nature of the agony in both states being equal (just as the heavenly joy of the interim state will not differ in nature from that of the eternal state: immediately after his decease the Christian is with Christ, and that is what determines his joy).

What a blessing it is to know that true Christians have already been transferred spiritually from the realm of death and darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of God's love. They are able to live and walk in the light that will shine upon them through all eternity. With the second coming of Christ they will enjoy the fullness of salvation; then their bodies will also be snatched from the power of death. At the same time it remains a solemn matter for those who do not yet believe and who have not responded to God's call, to seriously consider the realities of heaven and hell, and of eternal punishment. As a poem puts it:

"Where, for eternity, will you stay? –

Serious question of our day".

Hugo Bouter

[1] Other pictures used are those of an abyss and a prison (Luke 8:31; Romans 10:7; 1 Peter 3:19-20; Revelation 9:1-2; Revelation 9:11; Revelation 11:7; Revelation 17:8; Revelation 20:1; Revelation 20:3 cf. Revelation 20:7). The Greek words are *abyssus* and *phulakee* (1 Peter 3:19). The word in 2 Peter 2:4 translated "hell" in the King James translation and "the deepest pit of gloom" in the J.N.D. translation is the Greek word *tartarus*. This is the only place where it occurs in the New Testament. It is a term used by heathen writers for the "deepest abyss of the infernal regions". However, these are mainly references to the punishment in an interim state; of the deceased unbelievers, of angels who have sinned and are kept until the judgment of the great day, and of Satan himself during the millennium. According to Vine's Expository Dictionary the abyss (*abyssus*) or "bottomless pit" is a description of an immeasurable depth, the underworld, the depths of sheol. In Romans 10:6-7 the abyss is contrasted with heaven, the present dwelling place of the exalted Christ.

[2] The Greek name *Gehenna* occurs twelve times in the New Testament (Matthew 5:22; Matthew 5:29-30; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 18:9; Matthew 23:15; Matthew 23:33; Mark 9:43; Mark 9:45; Mark 9:47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6). It is translated "hell" on each occasion in both the King James and J.N.D. translations.

[3] The Greek word hades occurs ten times in the New Testament (Matthew 11:23; Matthew 16:18; Luke 10:15; Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27; Acts 2:31; Revelation 1:18; Revelation 6:8; Revelation 20:13-14). In the King James translation it is rendered "hell" on each occasion and the J.N.D. translation gives "hades" throughout. Some manuscripts have "hades" in 1 Corinthians 15:55 : "O grave, where is thy victory" (KJV).

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