

## “My brethren”

### “My brethren”

***“Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God” (John 20:17).***

In the whole range of revealed truth there is nothing higher or more blessed than that which is declared in these words of the Lord Jesus. Those men whom He called “My brethren,” were the sons of men when He found them—Simon son of Jonah, and James and John the sons of Zebedee, and so forth,—sinners every one of them; lying under the judgment of death, for death passed upon all men, and so upon these men, for that all have sinned. And yet here is this glorious resurrection chapter, they are sons of God, and to them is given the life, nature and power proper to that exalted relationship. They stand associated with Christ in this relationship which none could claim but He, a relationship which He enjoyed to the full in all the perfection of His own worthiness. No angel knows it, or ever will, but those men knew it; it was theirs, according to the purpose of divine love, and it is ours also, according to the same unalterable purpose, it is the place and portion of all who are of Christ’s assembly or church—each one of such can say “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons [children] of God” (1 John 3:1).

This is the relationship into which the risen triumphant Head and Leader of His church brings all His own. We do not now speak of the church as the body of Christ, that is but one aspect of it. As the body, the church has been formed for the manifestation of the graces of the Head of it now, and of His glory hereafter. It has this special relation to Christ; it is the vessel in and through which He displays the fullness of His wisdom and knowledge to every created intelligence; there is more in it than this, but this we believe is the chief thought in it. As the body of Christ, Christ presents through it all the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge man-ward and creation-ward so that they will eventually be filled with the glory of God, and unto Him will be glory in the church in Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.

But under that wonderful designation “My brethren” the assembly appears in another aspect. It is collective and not corporate, it is not in the first place for the display of glory before the universe, though that will have its place when the sons who are joint heirs with Christ come into the inheritance with Him (Rom. 8), but it is for the joy and satisfaction of the Father’s heart. The Father comes first. He must ever be first.

It may be said that here we ought to speak of the family and not the assembly, but as we proceed with the subject we think it will be clear that the truth of the assembly has its place in this connection. In that wonderful 8th chapter of Proverbs, wisdom speaks,

and we have no difficulty in seeing that wisdom can be none other than the Son of God, for He is God's resource, the One by Whom every problem in the universe is solved—Christ, the power and the wisdom of God. "The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old" we read, bringing to mind the opening of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," and Hebrews 1, "by Whom also He made the worlds." But there was something deeper, fuller and more blessed than that which was displayed in creation. Before any of these things in which God's power and divinity are displayed existed, wisdom says, "Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight rejoicing always before Him." "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world," are the wonderful words that were addressed to the Father by the Lord in John 17. They explain this passage in Proverbs 8. What joy and what delight, what love, surpassing all human comprehension, do these words unfold! But wisdom continues, "Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and My delights were with the sons of men." Again one must turn to the New Testament, and there we learn that the Father and the Son are one. Their object, work and joy are one. That which delights the Father delights also Jesus Christ, whom He sent into the world; and the sons of men in whom wisdom delighted before there were any of them are the subjects of communion between the Father and the Son, and of the intercession of the Son with the Father. Hear His own words.

"I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee. For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them."

These wonderful statements made first about the first disciples of the Lord are true also of all who have followed them, they were all "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world."

But notice that not only are the sons of men spoken of as the Lord's delight, but the habitable part of his earth also. Evidently there was to be a suitable dwelling place on earth where the Father and the Son could delight in and with these who were brought to know them.

Creation was not this. Adam was made in the image and likeness of God, and most wonderfully endowed, and he was placed in a garden made habitable for him by God's own goodness, but God's delight in him was soon spoiled, nor was that garden a

habitable place for man and God for long, for sin came in, and the trail of the serpent defiled that Paradise, so that it was impossible that God should dwell there, and the man also was turned out of it.

It is helpful to see that wisdom does not say my delights are with man, had the passage read thus we might have supposed that Adam unfallen was only meant, and that when he fell Satan had triumphed over God and for ever robbed Him of His delight in men, but it is the sons of men in whom wisdom delights. God would take up the sinful sons of that fallen head and by His own power and wisdom make them such as He could delight in.

Nor did Israel and the land of Canaan yield any truer satisfaction than Adam and Eden had done. That land was surely made a habitable place for the chosen people, for it was a goodly land, flowing with milk and honey, but they did not make it a habitable place for God. "Israel" we read, "was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of His increase." Yet God said to them, "I brought you into a plentiful land, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered ye defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination" (Jer. 2:7). But when Israel failed and Canaan became an abomination God was not defeated, hence we read, "How shall I put thee amongst the children and give thee a pleasant land?" Here are these two things again—the sons of men brought into relationship with God, and the habitable part of His earth—but the question is asked how could these wayward men of Israel, how could any of the wayward sons of men be brought to answer God's thoughts in a place where He could dwell with them? God's own answer is, "Thou shalt call Me, My Father; and shall not turn away from Me" (Jer. 3:18). It is evident that God could only secure men for Himself according to His own desire by bringing them into this wonderful relationship with Himself. In the knowledge of Him as Father their hearts would be satisfied, and so they would be secured for ever for God's own satisfaction. It is this that seems to be hinted at in this remarkable statement.

If we come back to John's Gospel we find the way in which this is brought about. First we hear the Lord Jesus saying to the woman of Sychar, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him" (John 4:23). We cannot worship One Whom we do not love, and we cannot love One Whom we do not know, and we cannot know God unless He is revealed to us. For "no man hath seen God at any time." So that none could tell his neighbour what He is in the full blessedness of His nature, but, "the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). And now being fully revealed, all may know Him from the greatest to the least, and this knowledge is eternal life.

It is as the Father, name of infinite grace and love, that God desires to be worshipped,

and as neither angels nor men knew Him in this way they could not worship Him. But the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, came to reveal Him in all the fullness of His love, and in Christ we see the Father seeking worshippers, not among angels, but among the sinful, unhappy sons of men.

Three great steps had to be taken by the Lord if God's end had to be reached, and it is interesting to see that these three steps were first revealed to women.

1. He must come into the world.
2. He must go into death.
3. He ascend again to the Father.

### **The First Step**

That the first of these great steps had been taken was revealed to the woman of Sychar (John 4). What a need was hers! She was a woman with a sinful past, an empty heart, and a hopeless future; true picture of all who are outside the blessing that Christ has opened up. The Lord met her where she was and revealed Himself as the Giver of the living water, which should not only be in her a well of perennial satisfaction, but should spring up to its Source, the Father, and so yield satisfaction also to Him.

There had to be a probing work to fit her for this, as there must be with us all, and this work the Lord accomplished until He had brought her to the point where she confesses that Christ was her only hope. "I know" said she "that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ; when He is come He will tell us all things." The Lord's response, "I that speak unto thee, am He," changed her life, and sent her to witness to the men of the city that Christ had come. "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did, is not this the Christ." He searched the sinner and revealed Himself as the Saviour. So the men of the city say, "We have heard Him ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

We become familiar with the great truths that are revealed to us in the Word, and consequently they often lose their greatness in our eyes, yet how wonderful it is that the Son of God should come into the world, and should come as the Saviour. Two things made this necessary, first, that God might be revealed, second, our need of salvation. It was God who sent Him not to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved. More than thirty times in the Gospel of John the Lord speaks of Himself as being sent into the world by the Father. He glories in it, and so shall we if we understand it. No angel could have fulfilled His mission, He only could make the Father known, and the Father sent Him to do this. The only begotten Son

shone as the light in the darkness, He came near to men full of grace and truth, seeking for them in their misery, to take them out of it and lead them to His Father. David cried: "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me . . . Then will I go unto the altar of God, my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise Thee, O God, my God." But David could never have imagined that God's light and truth would come forth in the person of God's Son, in order to lead multitudes to the Father Himself. But this has happened, and in it our souls do greatly rejoice.

## **The Second Step**

But the revelation that He made of the Father would have been in vain, if He had taken no other steps than this. He must die. This was the second step. This fact was plain to Mary of Bethany. She alone of those who followed the Lord had perceived this. The disciples thought that they were following Him to the throne and kingdom, and to the outward senses it looked like it when multitudes of Jews followed Him because He had raised Lazarus from the dead. They were carried away by the temporary enthusiasm of the Jews which led them so far as to meet the Lord with loud hosannas. But Mary understood, and brought forth her alabaster box and poured its costly contents upon His feet. For His burying she had kept it. How long she had kept it we know not, but there it was to be brought out at the right moment. She honoured Him, owning His kingly glory by her act, but she knew that notwithstanding all that glory, He Himself was going into death. The relationship in which His own were to stand with Him before the Father could not be after the order of natural life, that life was forfeited by every sinner, none could abide in it except Christ who was sinless, and if He had chosen to live He must have lived alone, for "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone." Even Lazarus, who was raised from the dead into the old natural life, must die again. If death were to be removed Christ must die; if those who were under its power were to be delivered from it He must pass into the depths of it, for only by coming where we were could the Lord come into definite contact with us, and this He has done. His love to us, and His Father's will carried Him into death in His search for those whom He would bring forth out of death to be His brethren and worshippers of the Father.

## **The Third Step**

But the third step had to be taken, He must go to the Father; and for this He was constantly preparing His disciples from John 13 onwards.

We come now to our resurrection chapter, in which to Mary Magdalene was revealed the full and glorious truth. When she realized who He was she thought that the old relationship, that of an earthly Messiah in the midst of an earthly people, was to be resumed. Hence His words, "Touch Me not." He must ascend to His Father. The new

relationship was to be a heavenly one.

Psalm 22 records for us the path of sorrow that the Lord trod in the fulfilment of the will of God and also of His triumph. And there we learn what was foremost in His mind; for when heard from the horns of the unicorns and brought out of death He exclaims, "I will declare Thy Name amongst My brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise unto Thee." These very words of the Lord are quoted in Hebrews 2 where we learn that the congregation in the midst of which He sings is the Church, and in the Church His brethren also are. The Church is the habitable place for God upon the earth today, in it He can rejoice; those who form it "are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22); and the brethren of Christ are the sons of men in whom He delights. So that at last He has His habitable place on the earth and the sons of men in it.

But the Church is here only for a while, the brethren that form it are partakers of the heavenly calling, but in the fact that it is here, we see the triumph of Christ. Oh, that we understood it better. Consider that wonderful description that is ours—"Holy Brethren." Two words are found in Psalm 22. There, in giving the answer to His own question, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" the Lord says, "But Thou art holy." This is the very nature of God, and this is the nature that is ours as those who are sanctified and one with the risen Christ, our Sanctifier; and we are His brethren, those of whom He spoke when He said, "I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren." Nature and relationship all according to God! And this is His assembly, His Church, that which is of Himself. Where the Father's name is known, where Christ triumphs in His own, and sings the praises of God. If God of old inhabited the praises of Israel, how much more will He dwell in this higher and perfect praise! How blessedly habitable must that place be to Him in which His Well-beloved, raised up from the dead, sings in the company of His brethren.

Think of those men who for fear of the Jews had hidden themselves in the upper room in Jerusalem, they possessed neither dignity nor renown before the world. And they cannot have been proud of each other, but we read, "Jesus came and stood in the midst." What a change that made! He had called them His brethren. What a dignity that gave them! How honoured, how honourable in this new relationship and association with Christ were these sons of men, now the sons of God! And Jesus was supreme in that new circle. And where He is supreme there the assembly is. He is the great Leader of the many sons, the Firstborn amongst many brethren. He has so blessedly accomplished the will of God that even now He can present to His Father those in whom the Father can delight.

Surely there is in this side of the truth that which ought most blessedly to engage our hearts and minds, and make us with purpose of heart to seek to enter into the joy of it,

and seek to be in the state of our souls just that which we are in the thoughts and purposes of God. No higher place could be given us than this, we cannot by effort enter into it. It is ours, given to us in sovereign grace, and the Spirit has been given to us also that the place may be known by us experimentally and in power.