

Healing in Days of Defeat (1)

—Ministry given by L. Chaudier in Paris, France, in 1947

Introduction

Living, as we do, in the last days of the Christian testimony, there are many difficulties that seem virtually insurmountable to us. Yet it is still true: "Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and today, and to the ages to come." In Him is power and strength. Often one wonders: Where does weakness among us come from? Why do we so often suffer defeat? The lessons of Joshua 7 give a clear answer to this. May the following thoughts stir us up so that we give glory to God. Only uprightness before Him leads to healing of all harm.

R. M. G. S.

Joshua 7

It has often been said that the Book of Joshua is the counterpart of the Epistle to the Ephesians. Since this epistle is doubtless a much-used book among us, it is hard to overemphasize that brothers and sisters ought to occupy themselves intensively with the Book of Joshua. It presents to us truly spiritual lessons that are easily understood, for the situation in which the nation of Israel found itself corresponds accurately to the position presented in the Epistle to the Ephesians. When we remark that we have been seated with Christ in the heavenlies, it is to be feared that we think that we have said it all. However, we should not be satisfied with such a statement and lazily rest upon it. Of course, it is true and it is for us, but still, this statement of Scripture is not yet all. There is also the battle.

The Book of Joshua shows us the situation of the people of God about which the Epistle to the Ephesians speaks to us, especially in chapter 6. The nation passes through the Jordan, which means it goes through death. It does so behind the ark, that is: behind Christ. We see how the people enter the land of promise and take possession of Canaan. In the Epistle to the Ephesians we are told to take possession of heaven, that is to say, to enjoy our position in Christ: to be spiritual Christians, heavenly Christians, Christians who in faith salute their fatherland. This is a remarkable thing; though we are certain of entering one day into the heavenly Canaan — and a Christian has the assurance of entering there — yet God never tells us that we must wait till we have died before entering there. God demands from us that we, even now, enter there above, and precisely in doing this certain Christians distinguish themselves today. Surely, in the failure to do so lies the source of all difficulties and confusion among Christians.

On this point one should not deceive oneself. All deviations and divisions that characterize the history of God's people stem from this: *their failure to take possession of their heavenly blessings, their position in Christ.*

We see how from the outset Joshua was told by God to be strong. The prospect of crossing the Jordan and entering the promised land is not a trivial matter. The Red Sea speaks of Christ's death *for* the Christian, but the Jordan signifies our having died *with* Christ. In the Jordan a Christian finds death with Christ but he has also been raised with Christ and has a new life.

One who has death behind him is another person. After the passing through the Jordan the water flowed as before over all its banks. Christ has gone through death and death has thereby exhausted its power, while before, all its power was still unimpaired. The Lord Jesus, the ark of God, has gone through death and, following Him, the believers have by faith passed through death. This is so true that when the Lord Jesus comes, all living believers will go with Him without suffering death.

"Be strong and courageous," Joshua is told, "...only be strong and very courageous, that thou mayest take heed to do according to all the law that Moses My servant commanded thee. Turn not from it to the right or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:6-7).

One could have thought that when God goes before His people all will run by itself; it would be sufficient for Joshua to wave a banner in God's name and all will proceed smoothly. Not so! After the passage through the Jordan the people had to come to Gilgal to be circumcised. The ones who came there were a new generation. The older ones, except Joshua and Caleb, had all died during the forty-year wilderness journey. The young ones had to be circumcised in Gilgal. Death had to pass over everything that stemmed from the natural man. That is a lesson we have to learn our whole life long. God has

no connection with the natural man. God does not give His strength to what is of nature; He gives His strength to the new man; He gives His strength to faith, never to the old nature.

The people have gone through Jordan and immediately thereupon, even before they begin their conquest of the land, God occupies Himself with them. Before God occupies Himself with the enemies, He occupies Himself with His people. That is very remarkable. The people must be in a suitable moral condition before they can think of a far-from-simple conquest. God thinks of this moral condition of the people before the battle can be begun. Gilgal was established as the starting point of all Joshua's campaigns. Reading the Book of Joshua, we find again and again: "Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp, to Gilgal" (Josh. 10:15,43). What is the significance of this? It means that we must — in all our battles, in our personal life, in our family life, in the assembly life — return to Gilgal. Wherever we have to do battle — we will later see which battles — we must return to Gilgal if we want to conquer. This means that we must apply the death of the Lord Jesus to our hearts and to our wills.

Paul did continually apply Gilgal; this we see more than once in his epistles. The secret of power is to be dead with Christ. The best weapon in God's arsenal is death, the death of Christ. Do we want to be strong Christians? Then let us not be afraid of death, death to self-will, and let us apply the death of Christ to ourselves. One only has to try this to experience that it is not so easy. Yet, without being dead with Christ there is neither strength, nor freedom, nor testimony.

On the banks of the Jordan rose Jericho, a strong fortress, a picture of the enemy's power. Upon entering the promised land, the people saw a city with walls rising to heaven. That was the first thing the people found after they had gone through the Jordan. Humanly speaking the people found themselves in a terrible situation. Behind them the impassable Jordan, before them the enemy. God's people have always been in extraordinary circumstances. The Christian who walks in faith finds himself always in exceptional circumstances. If we do not understand what it is to walk on water, we cannot follow the Lord Jesus. One must walk on water to follow the Lord Jesus: one must walk through faith in His Word. If we are scared of exceptional circumstances, we cannot follow the Lord Jesus.

Here the nation of Israel, too, is with the Jordan behind and the whole land filled with terrible enemies in front. There were giants and fortified cities. Our situation is exactly the same. With this difference, we know how Jericho fell. This impregnable city fell without weapons. Not a single battle was needed for the walls to fall. It fell in a laughable way, absolutely ridiculous in the eyes of men. God received the glory, not the people. So it is always. Jericho fell quite simply. We all know the story of Jericho. The Christian world knows it too, but faith finds here rich lessons. Yes, perhaps the easy victory made the heart of the people fat, darkening its discernment and hardening their conscience. That may very well be!

To be cont'd

All deviations and divisions that characterize the history of God's people stem from this:
Their failure to take possession of their heavenly blessings, their position in Christ.

Keep and Lead us, O Lord.

Saviour, lead us by Thy power
Safe into the promised rest;
Choose the path, the way whatever,
Seems to Thee, O Lord, the best;
Be our Guide in every peril,
Watch and keep us night and day,
Else our foolish hearts will wander
From the strait and narrow way.

Since in Thee is our redemption
And salvation full and free,
Nothing need our souls dishearten
But forgetfulness of Thee;
Nought can stay our steady progress,
More than conquerors we shall be,
If our eye, whatever the danger,
Looks to Thee and none but Thee.

In Thy presence we are happy,
In Thy presence we're secure;
In Thy presence all afflictions
We can easily endure;
In Thy presence we can conquer,
We can suffer we can die;
Wandering from Thee we are feeble;
Let Thy love, Lord, keep us nigh.

W. Williams

The Prophecy of Micah (10)

—R. Been, Sr.

Chapter 7 (Continued)

"As in the days of thy coming forth out of the land of Egypt, will I show them marvellous things. The nations shall see, and be ashamed for all their might: they shall lay [their] hand upon [their] mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick dust like the serpent; like crawling things of the earth, they shall come trembling forth from their close places. They shall turn with fear to Jehovah our God, and shall be afraid because of thee" (vv. 15-17).

In verses 15-17, with the exception of the latter part of verse 17, the Lord Himself speaks. He reminds of the exodus from Egypt, when He showed Pharaoh all His wonders. Then it was a matter of the salvation of the *whole nation*, but in the last days it will be a matter of the salvation of the *remnant*. Yet, at that time things will go just as wonderfully in Egypt as in the past. Just like Pharaoh, the Assyrian will be slain in a miraculous way. Those nations that have not yet been judged at that time will see this miraculous deliverance — for instance the parting of the Mount of Olives. Just like the Canaanite nations in the days of Joshua, they will be filled with fear and trembling. Robbed of all their strength, they will lay the hand on their mouth and have no ear for the idea of resistance.

The description of the fear and trembling of the nations given here agrees with Psalm 18:43-45 where the Messiah says: "Strangers come cringing unto Me. Strangers have faded away, and they come trembling forth from their close places." Yet, the heart of many persons from among the nations will not be changed; they will subject themselves only outwardly to the power that they cannot resist. It will be a power that, at the least sign of resistance, will crush them as pottery (Ps. 2:9). The revolt of these hypocrites after the glorious thousand-year reign of the Messiah will show up their hypocrisy (Rev. 20:7-10). Whether man is without law (as he was until Moses), under law (from Sinai till Christ), under grace (from Pentecost till the Rapture), or under the glory of the coming kingdom, every time again it is demonstrated that the heart of man is only evil continually. In Psalm 18 the *hypocrisy* dominates, in Micah's prophecy *the fear*. These two characteristics are always found together when the heart remains unchanged.

It is clear that this is not the case with all from among the nations. That becomes obvious when we think of the innumerable crowd out of all kindred, tongues, and nations who will bow before the Lord in uprightness, honouring Him (Rev. 7:9-12). These persons are not among the ones who subject themselves in hypocrisy.

"Who is a God like unto Thee, that forgiveth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in loving-kindness. He will yet again have compassion on us, He will tread under foot our iniquities: and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform truth to Jacob, loving-kindness to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers, from the days of old" (vv. 18-20).

Previously we have shown how, after the first working of the Holy Spirit in the conscience, the remnant will, through repentance, self-judgment, faith, and conversion, come to trust God fully (6:6; 7:1,7). It also accepts the tribulation as a result of the sin that the nation, of which it is a part, has committed against the Messiah. In the midst of that tribulation, whereby two-thirds of the two tribes will be wiped out, God will keep the remnant which will enjoy the care of Israel's Shepherd (7:9, 14; Zech. 13:8). From the mouth of the Messiah it will receive the assurance that, upon the destruction of the land by the Assyrian, Israel will be restored and enjoy peace. Even before that time the remnant will, through faith, rejoice in the fact that the nations will be subjected to the reign of their King (7:9,15,17).

Now the prophet puts a song of praise in the mouth of the remnant whom he had first comforted, admonished, and strengthened in view of the trials. It will sing of God who forgives iniquity, and passes by the transgression at the least sign of repentance and conversion. It will call itself "The remnant of His inheritance." The great mass of the two apostate tribes has by then received the wages of its idolatry and apostasy: it will have been wiped out. Terrible judgment! With the remnant, however, there is joy because of the forgiveness of sins. In all dispensations such joy can only be fully valued and tasted by hearts who have experienced the immense load of the burden and guilt of sin before God. Forgiveness! Precious word! God remembers their sins no more!

The remnant continues to say that the Lord does not keep His anger forever, *because* He delights in mercy. It even says this before the restoration of Israel has become a fact, because in faith it lays hold of this mercy. It is well to realize here that the reason for the Lord not keeping His anger forever is *not because a change for the better has taken place in the conduct of men*. There is a much better, a higher motive, namely His delight in showing mercy. This motive is far better than if the mercy would depend upon the conduct of men. Just one sin by itself against the perfectly holy God suffices for God's wrath to press on us eternally. It is, however, the mercy, grace, longsuffering and loving-kindness of the Lord, who will not always chide, nor makes the wrath to remain forever. For He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities. The extent of this escapes us because we do not know how high the heaven is above the earth, and how far the east is from the west. Yet, precisely such notions that are far above our ability to imagine are given by God to teach us the greatness, the power of His mercy (Ps. 103:8-12). The prophet Isaiah speaks of a *day* of vengeance, recompense, wrath of God, but of an acceptable *year* of the Lord (Isa. 61:2).

Through faith the remnant will, therefore, say that the Lord will have mercy upon them. They even say this while still enduring the tribulation. The Lord has pleasure in mercy, not in judgment, no matter how needed that judgment may be in view of the maintaining of His holiness. With God there is not mercy at the cost of His holiness and majesty. When we put this ahead of all else, we get some idea of the tremendous value of Christ's sacrificial death, of the value of His blood.

On the basis of these mercies of God, the apostle Paul admonished the believers to present their bodies a living, holy, God-pleasing sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). This then is a *power* for the whole earthly life of the believer.

The Lord would tread upon the iniquities of the remnant. He does not restrict Himself to granting forgiveness, the not-putting-on-one's-account, but He also removes the iniquities entirely, treading them under foot (7:18). Jerusalem, as centre of the godless, apostate two tribes has been trodden down by the wrath of the Lord like the mire of the street (7:10). Regarding the remnant, however, the *unrighteousnesses*, not the *unrighteous ones*, will be trodden under foot.

In another picture, used by the remnant, it is said that the Lord would cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. If those sins would be simply cast into the sea, then already nothing would be found of them again, the waters would close over them. How much more will the sins be done away now that they are cast into the *depths* of the sea. What a beautiful picture of a complete doing away with sins. This truth is one of the characteristics of the new covenant that soon will be established with Israel (Heb. 8:10-13).

This song of praise of the remnant ends with a reminder of the *Lord's faithfulness*. He will show faithfulness to Jacob, mercy to Abraham, as He had sworn to the fathers in days of old. Of course these names, Jacob and Abraham, have special meaning to the remnant, the new Israel. It is remarkable that Jacob is mentioned here first. He was the patriarch who seldom stood on the level that fitted one who had received such promises. It is to such a Jacob, to such a people, that God proves His faithfulness. To Abraham, the hero of faith, mercy is shown.

The remnant will think of the unconditional promises, confirmed by an oath, that are without repentance. It will do this while it, with remorse and repentance, has returned to God; when it has, also in practice, turned away from iniquity. When they have again returned to the Lord in humbleness, self-judgment, and repentance, then the time has come to think of the faithfulness and mercy of God. The great mass of apostate Jews does not think of this.

Once Israel, delivered out of Egypt, stood guilty before God, due to their failure to keep the law given at Sinai. That whole story will then have passed. Then the new Israel will know a God who has proven to be faithful to His once-given promises. To this end He will lead them to the blessing based on the judgment that once came upon Christ, whereby He can show grace to them.

In connection with this, the new Israel will serve God with greater devotion than might have ever been the case under the law. The laws and precepts of the first covenant, that of Sinai, had been in the heads of the people. Then, however, it will be so, under the new covenant to be established with restored Israel, that the good and acceptable will of God will be laid *within* them and be written in their *hearts*.

With these words this beautiful prophecy ends. Micah has in a very special way caused the grace of God to shine forth, a grace that will triumph over judgment. Through God's work in the consciences of the remnant, it is brought to repentance. In the midst of the tribulation, that has to bring it to greater self-knowledge, it is the flock of Israel's Shepherd. There are no wolves found among them. The Shepherd leads, feeds, and comforts that flock, thereby keeping it perfectly.

Micah takes us, so to say, to the threshold of the gospel, be it that these glad tidings remain limited to the remnant out of Judah. Step by step he takes this remnant to the blessing of the new covenant, to the dawn of the Millennium of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The End

Outline for Bible Study (83)

167. Paul Journeys to Jerusalem. His Detention. — Acts 21:1-22:29.

Outline

1. The prophecy of Agabus Acts 21:1-14
2. Paul seized in the temple Acts 21:15-40
3. His defence before the people Acts 22:1-30

Explanation

1. Paul had told the brethren from Miletus, that they would see his face no more (Acts 20:19,22-25). He was well aware of the danger of Jewish hatred awaiting him in Jerusalem. Yet, he wanted personally to bring the gifts from the brethren in Greece and Macedonia, and once more to bring the gospel to the blinded people. At the start of his ministry God had told him that they would not accept his testimony (22:18). Paul himself had told the opposing Jews at Corinth: "Your blood be upon your own head: I am pure; from henceforth I will go to the nations" (Acts 18:6). Yet, his great love for his people remained. He once even expressed his readiness to be separated from Christ under a curse, if only thereby they would be saved (Rom. 9:1-5). Now this love drove him back to Jerusalem, although the Holy Spirit warned him, through Agabus and others, not to go. Love caused him not to heed this voice; his reply was, "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." However, he was not put to death at Jerusalem but was taken prisoner and remained in detention for many years.

The apostle James (the Lord's brother) and the believers in Jerusalem, being Jews, still kept the law. They wanted Paul to demonstrate to the Jews that he still kept the law of Moses. Paul followed the counsel of James and the elders and, because he stood in freedom, became a Jew to the Jews. His natural affection for his people caused him to do so. Paul had hoped his act would make him and the gospel acceptable to the Jews. It turned out differently: he became a prisoner. Paul, who had made a vow himself (Acts 18:18), joined four poor Jewish Christians who had made a vow and paid for their purification offer. Since the expenses were considerable, someone who paid them for a poor man was esteemed faithful and pious. The idea was that thereby Paul would prove to be subjected to the law; it became the cause, however, of his being taken by the enemy.

2. No uncircumcised person was allowed to enter the temple's inner court which was separated with walls and gates from the outer court. Anyone trespassing would be put to death, since the Jews considered this to be profaning the holy place. To gain the favour of the Jews, the Romans honoured this severe law. The Jews, supposing that Paul had brought Trophimus, a Gentile Christian, into the temple, considered him guilty of death. They shut the doors of the temple so that the temple might not be profaned by his blood and perhaps, too, that Paul, in looking for a refuge, would not take hold of the horns of the altar (1 Ki. 2:28).

Behind the temple towered the Roman fortress Antonia, built by Herod the Great in honour of his patron, the Roman Tribune Antonius. A stone stairway linked it to the temple area. Roman troops stationed in the fortress kept the temple court under surveillance during the Jewish feasts. Thus the tumult was quickly reported to the chiliarch (a commander over 1000 soldiers). Under God's providence this saved the apostle's life.

3. To prove that he had not denied his Jewish birthright, Paul addressed the people in Hebrew and informed them of certain facts to gain their confidence (vv. 3,12,14,17). The result, however, was an outburst of terrible hatred against the

idea of God's grace presenting salvation to the Gentiles. Their boundless pride and enmity against the nations revealed itself. Paul narrowly escaped a scourging by the soldiers by referring to his Roman citizenship. A Roman citizen could not be bound and scourged without a legal hearing and also had the right to appeal to Caesar.

Lesson

In his love for his people, Paul resembled His Lord. He was willing to suffer death, if only some of them might come to believe in the Lord Jesus. Christians ought to be ready to lay down their lives for their brethren (1 Jn. 3:16). Paul's love prepared him to go beyond the call of Christian duty.

Though Paul's actions were honourable, they were not as directed by the Spirit. Though God in grace did not forsake him and protected him, none of Paul's actions had the intended result.

168. Paul before the Sanhedrin and before Felix. — Acts 22:30-24:27.

Outline

1. Paul before the Sanhedrin Acts 22:30-23:11
2. The murderous plot Acts 23:12-22
3. The journey to Caesarea Acts 23:23-35
4. Paul's hearing by Felix Acts 24:1-23
5. Paul and Felix Acts 24:24-27

Explanation

1. Paul scolded the high priest, but he recognized his mistake. It probably was also prompted by human wisdom rather than the Holy Spirit that Paul called himself a Pharisee. It caused the hypocritical Pharisees to choose his side against the liberal Sadducees, who deny both the existence of angels and the resurrection. The Lord, however, watched over His servant (Ps. 35:7; 56:2-4; 34:19) and encouraged him in a night vision (cf. Acts 18:9).

2. How deep were the elders and chief priests fallen to agree with the murderous attempt against the apostle (cf. Dt. 16:18,19; Isa. 5:18,20).

3. As so often, the Lord gave the solution by something or someone of which man thinks disparagingly (e.g., 1 Ki. 17:14, 2 Ki. 5:2). The chiliarch, Claudius Lysias, carefully saw to it that no harm came to Paul, the free-born Roman citizen.

4. Felix, the Governor of Caesarea, to whom Paul was transferred, was a greedy, cruel, and immoral man. Tacitus, a Roman historian, said about him: "With a most cruel arbitrariness he exercised his royal authority slavishly; supposing that he could do all infamous deeds without punishment." A bad testimony for a judge! The merits mentioned by Tertullus, the Jews' lawyer, were flattering lies. He accused Paul unjustly of stirring up riots and profaning the temple. Paul quietly denied these false accusations and applied himself emphatically, without respect of persons, to the consciences of those present. The prisoner, set free by Christ, announced to his judge, bound by Satan, God's judgment over evil. His judge, trembling with fear, sent him away.

5. Since Christianity had come to Caesarea years earlier, when Cornelius had become a Christian (Acts 10), Felix knew "accurately the things concerning the way." It was his hour of decision. God came in grace to Felix. Though Felix was convicted, he did not accept Christ. He deferred his decision, and probably never made it! How serious are the words of God: 2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:7! Felix could have acquitted Paul, but his love for money (1 Tim. 6:10) and his guilty conscience (on account of the cruelties and injustices) prevented him from doing so. He rather obliged the Jews, to keep them from accusing him before Caesar, which they did later anyway.

Lesson

Compare Paul's words before the Sanhedrin with the meekness of the Lord in John 18:22-23. Only our Lord is perfect (Jn. 8:46; Jas. 3:2). Paul's words were not of grace but of judgment, and were not worked by the Spirit.

In being faithful before the judgment seat, Paul in his testimony displays the character shown by the Lord Jesus before Pontius Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13). Others before him had shown a similar faithfulness. Think of Elijah before Ahab (1 Ki. 17:18), of Jeremiah before Zedekiah (Jer. 32; 38), of Daniel and his friends before Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:4).

To be cont'd

Fellowship

—A. E. Bouter

Mutual fellowship with Christ

I and you — you and Me

'Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me' (Rev. 3:20).

The Lord Jesus directed these words to the assembly at Laodicea. Of the seven assemblies mentioned in Revelations 2 and 3, the spiritual state in Laodicea is the worst by far: a lukewarm, blinded, wretched condition. The Lord Jesus stands outside, and He knocks at the door. Would there be anyone to let Him in? The Lord sets His hopes on individual believers. Even if the church in Laodicea as a whole would keep the door closed to Him, perhaps, there would be one who would open the door. To such a person the Amen, the faithful and true Witness of God, gives a promise: "I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with Me." At first glance these last words ("and he with Me") seem to be a needless repetition. When the Lord Jesus dines with someone, it does not seem necessary to add that this one, conversely, also dines with Him, does it? That goes without saying, doesn't it? Yes, but in the Word of God words are never used in vain. The promise of the Lord has a twofold character:

1. The Lord Jesus wants to sup with us, which is to say, have fellowship with us, enter into our circumstances. He wants to share with us, provide our needs, and be part of our life, so to speak, sharing our concerns.
2. He also wants us to sup with Him, to have fellowship with Him; thus He puts us into His "circumstances" bringing us up, as it were, to His level.

Usually we only think of the first aspect, and there is indeed a special blessing connected with that. But the second aspect is at least as blessed as the first. We could follow the development of this thought of mutual fellowship, throughout the Scriptures. However, in this article we limit ourselves mainly to a number of verses from the Gospels according to Matthew and John.

Matthew has as its subject the Kingdom of God in this world. Immanuel, "God with us," is the special name by which the Lord Jesus is presented. Thus, this book of the Bible speaks to us about the fellowship that the Lord Jesus wants to have with us in His Kingdom on earth. But we also have fellowship with Him! In this world He is an outcast (Heb. 13:13), and we share that place of rejection with Him. A razor-sharp division runs through this world: on the one hand, those who are "with Him"; on the other, those who are "against Him" (Mt. 12:30).

John speaks of the family of God, the fellowship of God's children. The Father and the Son come to us and make abode with us, if we love the Son and keep His Word (Jn. 14:23). The Holy Spirit, too, abides with us and will be in us (Jn. 14:17), but we also have fellowship with Him! Like Lazarus we may "recline with Him" (Jn. 12:2); "have part with Him" (Jn. 13:8). What that means is further elaborated in the discussions in the upper room (Jn. 13-17). In John it is especially this second aspect that is emphasized.

Matthew, therefore, discusses mutual fellowship on the level of earthly matters, emphasizing Christ's fellowship with us (without ignoring the other aspect). John discusses it at the level of heavenly matters, emphasizing our fellowship with Him (again without ignoring the other side).

The Gospel according to Matthew

Immanuel, God with us

Right at the beginning of the New Testament we read how the attention of those who had confessed their sins and had been baptized was drawn towards the Son of God. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" (Mt. 3:17). He joins those who will be obedient to the Word of God and who want to keep the laws of God in their lives (cf. Mt. 3:15). This also determines the place we occupy in this world once we have confessed our sins and, through baptism, have been identified with Him and placed under His authority. Then we, as disciples in the kingdom of God, have also found Him who is called Immanuel: God with us (cf. Mk. 3:14). However, since disciples always find themselves in an evil world, they are in need of teaching (Mt. 5:1-2). The teaching they receive is very special: the King Himself is their Teacher, and the principles of His kingdom taught by Him are wholly expressed in Himself. It is His desire that His disciples learn those principles from Him to then practice them under His authority (Mt. 5-7, "the Sermon on the Mount"). In the kingdom of God He is our great example: "It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master" (Mt. 10:25 NASB). We may learn from Him, who was gentle and humble of heart (Mt. 11:29). What a contrast with the kings of this world!

Rejected in this world

After we have come to Him (Mt 11:28) He wants to go with us through this evil world where He is rejected. We travel the road with Him, under his yoke, as His companions. How instructive it is that the once-rejected King David is presented as an illustration of the Lord Himself. And notice that it is not just David himself, but also "those who were with him" (Mt. 12:3f). Do we want to share the place of rejection of our Lord and thus be with Him, just as David's companions did when they endured his persecutions with him? There are only two possibilities: "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters" (Mt. 12:30).

God and us

We are here as disciples in the Kingdom, subject to the Master, to the glory of God, and for His pleasure (cf. Lk. 2:14). God trains and educates us so that He may possess us for Himself in this world, just as He had His beloved Son while He was here on earth. So we may be convinced: God is with us — "Thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4). After the Lord Jesus has been rejected by His people (Mt. 11 and 12, cf. Jn. 1:11), He praises His Father and speaks to Him about the revelations that the little children receive from Him (Mt. 11:25). God's Spirit uses the rejection of the Lord Jesus to give the following testimony: "Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased!" (Mt. 12:18). Today God desires to find His pleasure in His people on earth, who in a sense take the place of the Lord Jesus. Then He divulges to His disciples (Mt. 12:50; 13:52) what is precious to His heart, a treasure He has found in this world.

A greater glory, and we with Him

His rejection prompts the Lord to reveal Himself in a new glory, such as had not been seen before (see Mt. 11:25; 16; 17). As the Son of man — who is also God: blessed mystery! — He is linked with all mankind, the whole human race. No longer is He only for and with Israel, which had rejected Him as the Son of David. The Lord set His Church as a joy before Himself during the time of His rejection (cf. Heb. 12:2). Yet, if this joy, which was a joy to the heart of God the Father as well, was to be fulfilled, He had to pass through the deepest sufferings. In the same chapter (Mt. 16) He relates this to His disciples. What a privilege it is for us today to belong to His Church and so to enter this living relationship with Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt. 16:16). His death and resurrection form the foundation for the fulfilment of all His promises.

Again: suffering and glory, and we with Him

Matthew 17 further explains that suffering is the foundation for the glory thereafter. So we read: "Moses and Elijah talked with Him" (Mt. 17:3) about His departure (His sufferings and death) that He would accomplish in Jerusalem (cf. Lk. 9:30). Today we may, in a similar way, receive insight in His sufferings and speak with Him about them, provided we are not sleeping, like the disciples.

Here the Lord shows Himself to His disciples in the glory in which He will establish His public rule on earth (Mt. 25:31f). The glorification on the mountain reinforced the disciples' faith, so that they could stand firm, even when their Master and Lord would be delivered and killed (Mt. 17:22). Is this not of great importance to us as well? As disciples and slaves of the Lord we live in a world where, practically speaking, no consideration is given to the laws of God, and where Christ's future, glorious reign is not understood either.

The Lord knows our needs in these circumstances. In His mercy He bows down to us, and provides what is lacking. Symbolically we find this in the account of the temple tax that follows: "Take that and give it to them for you and Me" (Mt. 17:27). In a very special way we find His condescending goodness and mercy in Matthew 18:19-20. There the Lord speaks of the only place on earth where He is not rejected, where He has authority as being there in person: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20). He with us! He has fellowship with us; therefore He wants to be present in our midst. But also: we with Him. We have fellowship with Him, when we openly and explicitly connect our gathering with His Name.

His Rights

The Lord may expect that we give Him what He needs, just as the owner of the donkey did at His entry into Jerusalem: "The Lord has need of them; and immediately he will send them" (Mt. 21:3). He may expect that we acknowledge His rights out of love to Him and accept them wholeheartedly, as did Mary (Mt. 26:6-13), the disciples (Mt. 26:17), and the master of the house in the city (Mt. 26:18). From His side the Lord will want to come to us (even "with My disciples," Mt. 26:18). In His heart lives a great desire to be amidst such company: "I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you, before I suffer" (Lk. 22:15).

The bread and the cup in the Kingdom now

Thus the Lord is present: He is among us, and yet He is absent. This seeming contradiction we find represented in the two accounts of the storm at sea. At one occasion the Lord sleeps while He is with them; and at another He comes to them during the storm after He has prayed for them on the mountain. These stories prefigure and describe what the Lord is and does for us now "simultaneously." The Lord is not visibly present, but He is in the glory making intercession for His people. But He is also our Lord and Master (Mt. 10:25), who is gentle (Mt. 11:29, 21:5), whom we follow, and from whom we learn as long as we are here on earth (Mt. 28:18).

The bread and the cup He gave to His disciples, speak of this symbolically. So are we, as disciples of the Lord, allowed to partake of the bread and the cup. When we sup with Him, occupying ourselves with Him, not just in an outward, literal sense, but also in the spiritual sense and in truth, we will ever more become like Him, as He was on earth. He maintained the laws of God in this world where everything was against Him. When we do that, some characteristics of the kingdom of heaven, indeed of the King Himself, will become visible in us. I feel free to suggest this application, because only in Matthew do we find a reference to the eating of the bread (Mt. 26:26); eating stands for a process of assimilation.

With us on this earth

The disciples had to learn that the Lord could not always be with them in the way they had enjoyed Him till then (see Mt. 26:11 and 31). Nevertheless, on the foundation of His finished work, His death and resurrection, there is now an invisible, unbreakable bond between the Lord and His disciples here on earth (cf. Mt. 26:32 and 28:18). We are left here on His behalf, and we should remember His words: "To Me has been given all authority in heaven and on earth." To that the Lord adds: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Let us meditate upon each word of this promise, and thank Him!

The gospel according to John

Fellowship with Him - the Upper Room

The apostle John speaks especially of the "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." We may take our place on His level as it were. He has brought us into the upper-room in order to have a part with Him where He is now, though we are still in this world. The Lord has brought us to a new place, and with Himself, to the other side of death (cf. Col. 2:9-3:11). We are still on earth, but we belong to the Lord in that new world. Is there not a desire in us to recline with Him (as Lazarus did), to serve Him (as did Martha), and to anoint His feet (as did Mary)? When we do that, we will also worship the Father in Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24). The meal that is described in John 12 is the introduction to chapters 13-17. Applying this to ourselves, I would say: When we prepare a meal for Him, then the Lord will lead us also to Himself in the upper room. Thus, in spirit we may enter into the Father's House, we are allowed to see His glory and experience what He said to Philip: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

The feet washing

We belong to the Lord Jesus as His disciples who are in this world, though as anointed ones of the Father, bound up with the Son of the Father. Yet it is necessary for us that He washes our feet, merely because we are still in this world. "If I do not wash you[r feet], you have no part with Me" (Jn. 13:8). Only after He has cleansed our feet, can we have fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 Jn. 1:3f), as well as with each other (1 Jn. 1:7). In view of this mutual relationship, the Lord asks from us that we, too, wash one another's feet (Jn. 13:14). How challenging are these simple words!

Our position before God

We are in the world, but not of the world. In this age, we are as pilgrims on our way through the wilderness to our promised land. We are here as witnesses to this world, and as strangers who don't belong here. In this setting the Lord wants us for Himself, here and now. Meanwhile God has given us a position as sons for Him, so that it is possible for us to have fellowship with Him. At present this is through faith; soon it will be through beholding. In John's Gospel, however, this goes even further. The Lord Jesus has glorified God the Father here on earth (Jn. 17:4). For that reason He (as Man) asks to receive the glory that He had as the Son of the Father before the world existed (Jn. 17:5). As the One so glorified, He now can and wants to share that glory with His people (Jn. 17:22). In this, no doubt, the Father is glorified as well (cf. Jn. 17:1). When He shares His glory with us, it does not diminish His own glory. No, He ever remains exalted above those with whom He shares that glory.

Thus, already now, we have been prepared to be with Him in Spirit and in truth, and to have part with Him through faith: "In order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me" (Jn. 17:24). The final realization is still future, but in principle this is the position that we may take before God even now (cf. Col. 1:12!), in an atmosphere of light and love, where the Father and the Son dwell forever.

His Fellowship with us: Eternal Life

Even while we are still on earth, the Lord wants us to be with Him. To that end He leads us into "the upper room," to share the glorious results of His work with us in true and sublime fellowship, in "having part with Him" (Jn. 13:8). That aspect of fellowship is greatly emphasized in John's Gospel; we have fellowship with Him.

But there is also a different side: He wants to have fellowship with us. Thus we read in John 14:18: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (cf. Jn. 14:28; 16:16). The Holy Spirit has been given to us, so that we may contemplate the glory of the Lord Jesus, as He was and as He is now. Therefore we can already behold Him now (Jn. 14:19; see also Jn. 16:14f, Col. 2:9, Heb. 2:9). He comes to us in and through the mission of the Holy Spirit. Then He continues: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (Jn. 14:23).

In Summary

1. The Son elevates us to His own level ("with Me"), so that we may have fellowship with Divine Persons, the Father and the Son;
2. The Father and the Son come to us to make their abode with us here.

I suggest that these things are summarized, as it were, in the expression "eternal life" found in the John's Gospel. On the one hand, eternal life indicates the realm into which we will be led later (which can already be a spiritual reality for us in "the upper room"). On the other hand it is the new life granted us through faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the life that dwells within us. Eternal life can never be separated from Him in whom we possess that life (1 Jn. 5:20), who is its source and fullness, called "the Word of life" (1 Jn. 1:1).

Partnership

Having part with the Lord means that He grants us His peace (Jn. 14:27), that we abide in His love if we keep His commandments (Jn. 15:10), and that His joy is in us (Jn. 15:11). All that the Father has, the Lord Jesus has; and it is now available to the Holy Spirit, who has been given us in order to reveal and communicate it to us (Jn. 16:15). Still, also the

Lord works through the Word and His Spirit: "All the things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:15b). That is the reason He says to the Father: "And I have made Thy name known to them, and will make it known; that the love wherewith Thou didst love Me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:26). It is His final goal for us to be "true worshippers" (Jn. 4:23), now, and for all eternity.

Revelation 3:20

Opening the Door

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me." This is very personal and individual: "I with him" and "he with Me." In the introduction we have already clarified the double aspect included in this concept of mutual fellowship.

What grace on the part of the Lord! If it should be a question of the condition of His assemblies, no-one would be entitled to have fellowship with Him. Yet in His love to His people who are still here, He presents Himself to them in a very personal way. Everyone's heart and conscience are addressed, but only the overcomer responds to His call. The Lord Jesus awaits the response of "first love," not only in Ephesus, but in Laodicea as well. It is precious to hear Him lovingly and patiently asking us to pay attention to Himself (cf. Song 5:2; Mk. 6:48; Lk. 24:28).

Sup with Him

"I will come in to him, and will sup with him." There is a clear connection with John 14:21 and 23 here. The Lord, the true Overcomer (Jn. 16:33b) joins His people, as they trust in Him, and provides for all their needs on earth. Here we see that He even uses these needs as a door to give us the practical enjoyment of fellowship with Him as the Son of the Father. What value it is to the Lord to have fellowship with us now, during the time of His rejection! He expresses His appreciation in the promise to the overcomer: "He who conquers, him I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I have conquered also and have placed Myself with My Father on His throne." This is still future, but that moment will soon arrive. Our sitting on His throne with Him will be revealed to all for whom it is now hidden (1 Jn. 3:2; Col. 3:4), yet our intimate fellowship with the Lord will remain a mystery to the world.

A pure virgin

Even though we are part of a Christian profession that is subject to the judgment of God, we are here for Him like a betrothed virgin (2 Cor. 11:2) and like a lily among the thorns (Song. 2:2), like blameless children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). When we give ourselves wholeheartedly to Him, as Ruth did to Boaz, He will lead us to the treasures of His own heart and of the heart of the Father. Then He will lead us into His own glory, as He did with His people in the very beginning of Christianity.

The service of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit constantly occupies Himself to bring us to (the restoration of) fellowship with the Lord, and to prepare us for our Bridegroom. Again and again the Holy Spirit portrays the glory of the Lord Jesus to us, so that we more and more rejoice in Him. As long as that service is required we see that the Holy Spirit speaks to us (in Rev. 2 and 3). With His service He intends to rekindle our first love. The Lord cannot be satisfied with less! If that first love is found in us, if we "sup with the Lord," we will be ready to say with the Holy Spirit to the Lord: "Come!" (Rev. 22:17). So that He will have us with Him, forever, undisturbed. What a prospect!

The End