

January – March 2022

# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

---

**BIDEFORD**

## I AM THE DOOR

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which He spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” (John 10:1-10)*

As the tenth chapter of John’s gospel commences, the Lord is speaking to hostile Pharisees who had just asked: *“Are we blind also?”* (John 9:40). ‘You claim to see’, said Christ to them, ‘I am telling you that your sin remaineth; the question of your sin has never been settled’. Then, going right on with the conversation, Christ continues: *“I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door . . . is a thief and a robber”* (John 10:1).

The early verses of this chapter are a parable, as is clearly stated (cf John 10:6), and one has to be very careful in the interpretation of parables. It can be dangerous to press every point, or attach a spiritual meaning to the lesser details of the picture. In understanding the Lord’s parables, the context, or the reason for it having been spoken, is the key. Then, instead of being side-tracked by incidentals, the one central object will be kept in view. It has been said: ‘squeeze parables too hard, and you

will draw blood, not milk'. Concerning this section, John Calvin writes: "It is useless, I think, to scrutinise too closely every part of this parable. Let us rest satisfied with this general view, that, as Christ states a resemblance between the Church and a sheepfold, in which God assembles all His people, so He compares Himself to a door, because there is no other entrance into the Church but by Himself".

A word of explanation concerning eastern shepherding is necessary here in order to get the picture. In the grazing areas of Palestine at this period in human history there were many wild animals that would prey on the flocks. For this reason, every individual flock would have a shepherd in charge. This man would lead the sheep into areas of pasture and take them to water by day, ever keeping his flock together, and watching out for danger. At night, the shepherd would assemble his sheep into a fold, which was an enclosure having stone walls of some ten to twelve feet in height. John 10:16 speaks of 'one fold' and 'one shepherd'. This can mean nothing other than the Church of the Redeemed, with Christ the Great Shepherd and Head of all His people. However, on earth, the Church is scattered; for Christ's sheep are found in many lands and places. They are in local folds, in the care of under-shepherds – and it is **this** aspect which is particularly in view in these opening verses.

God's sheep, being His elect people, are each effectually called – one here, another there. It is not the Divine pattern that these sheep should remain in isolation, but that 'the solitary be set in families' (cf Psalm 68:6). Attention is then drawn to **the door** of this sheepfold. Not 'doors' (plural) – no – there is only one way in. Verse 9 describes this one-and-only entrance: "*I am the door*" says Christ.

This section of God's Word is commonly associated with the analogy of Christ as the Good Shepherd of the sheep. But it must be registered that in the first ten verses, it is Christ 'the door', **not** Christ 'the Shepherd'. What Christ is as Shepherd comes **after** that which He is as door. So at

the outset we are to learn that no man or woman, boy or girl, can enter into the true Church of God, apart from the Lord Jesus. He only is the way. Mere religion will never get a person to Heaven; neither good works, nor living an upright life, can grant admission into the true Church, the spiritual sheepfold. No-one can hope for eternal life who knows not Christ as Saviour, for He alone is the way, the truth and the life (cf John 14:6).

To return to John 10:1 and link it with the follow verse, a further aspect of truth is revealed: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep*”. There are those who endeavour to get into the fold under the guise of shepherds, but who come not through the one and only door. This is the main thrust of the parable, being addressed principally to the Pharisees, or religious leaders of that time. They read and taught the people, but rejected Christ Himself; they had not come through ‘the door’, the only acceptable way, but had got in by other means. ‘Such are thieves and robbers’ says the Lord. The sense of the words is ‘dishonest’. Has not modern Christendom a super-abundance of these fellows? They do not belong in the true Church, because they have never come through Christ by faith; like the Pharisees, their sin is still upon them (cf John 9:41), and like the Pharisees they are holders of religious office amongst God’s people. But they have entered by disingenuous means, and masquerade as shepherds and teachers. Only he who enters by the door is an acceptable shepherd of the sheep (cf John 10:2). Nothing is more offensive to God than a false prophet; none are more scathingly denounced in Holy Scripture. The Lord’s people should never admit, abet or countenance a man in church office who is not wholly true to the Word of God in person, profession and practice.

Whilst this parable was spoken some 2000 years ago, it is as relevant today as it was then. Oh, the wonder of this Book – its teaching is never

outdated; every page has a live application to every generation. The churches today are riddled with such men as the old-time Jewish Pharisees; they are in churches and chapels, occupying pulpits, holding positions of spiritual leadership, admired by the masses – but they have bypassed Christ and have got where they are by ‘some other way’. *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in”* (Matthew 23:13). They themselves have no spiritual sight, *“Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch”* (Luke 6:39)? Only a man who entereth in by Christ the door, is a shepherd of the sheep.

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep”* (John 10:7). Bear in mind that the Lord was speaking to a largely Jewish audience who would have regarded any mention of ‘the sheep’ as referring peculiarly to Israel, and Israel only. The Lord appears to repeat His statement in verse 9: *“I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”*; but this is not mere repetition – there is a great difference. In verse 7 it is ‘I am the door of the sheep’, but in verse 9 the horizon is broadened immeasurably: ‘I am the door... if **any man** enter’. Not only are elect Jews included in the Covenant of Grace, but elect Gentiles also; ‘other sheep’ who were not of that immediate, Jewish fold (cf John 10:16). This truth is more fully expounded by the Apostle Paul: *“Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name. And again He saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust”* (Romans 15:8-12). This door of John 10:9 concerns the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles; all the sheep of God’s choice, taken from every nation under heaven.

Recall again the words of the Lord in His ‘Sermon on the Mount’, for there is a notable comparison to be made. In Matthew chapter 7, Christ’s exhortation to ‘enter in at the strait gate’ and tread the ‘narrow way’, comes in the context, and forms part of a discourse, in which He deals with ‘false prophets’ and ‘ravening wolves’ (cf Matthew 7:13-23). The same combination of themes occurs here in John’s Gospel also. Having condemned those who rob God’s truth of its essential content, and in consequence preach a deficient message, Christ says, ‘I am the door’. *“Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered”* (Luke 11:52) was the Lord’s denouncement – those teachers had removed the very key to right understanding, and therefore could not unlock the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven to anyone! In correction of which errors, Christ says: *“I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved”* – some of the most precious words He ever spoke.

A ‘door’ is indicative of access, and is provided for that very purpose: no hurdles to climb, no walls to scale, no difficult passage, no long trek. Simply a door, through which one step will grant admission. That individual who believes from the heart God’s message of salvation, enters, and is in – inside the kingdom. But we must examine more closely: *“I am **the** door”*. There was only one door into the ark, through which Noah and his family were saved from judgment. There was only one door into the Tabernacle, which was God’s dwelling place. So there is but **one** door into the Kingdom of God: *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12); *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me”* (John 14:6).

Reader – have you entered this door? It is one thing to know about the door, but quite another to go through it. The door is not given in order to be looked at, or admired; it is to be used. It presently stands open,

and said Christ, it is for 'any man'. But note this: one day, the door will be shut; and once shut, never opened again. "*These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth*" (Revelation 3:7); "*When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are*" (Luke 13:25); "*behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Perhaps some, in consideration of these things, are inclined to say: 'I know Christ is the door; the door into the Kingdom of God; yet I am beset with difficulties. I know I am a sinner, and as such, I dare not presume to go through that door; I am defiled; I dare not approach a holy God. I realise my awful guilt; I am a child of darkness; how could I stand in the light of God's presence?' John 10:9 solves all such problems: "*I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved*". Christ does **not** say 'I am the door: if any man enter he shall be saved', precisely because man cannot, indeed will not, enter of himself. Man, in his natural state would never look for the door, nor find it, not even stagger to the threshold; he is so rebellious, helpless and hopeless. If he comes at all, he comes **1.)** by Divine enlightenment, "*Unto you it is **given to know***" (Luke 8:10); **2.)** by Divine power, "*without Me ye can do nothing*" (John 15:5).

Writing to the church at Philippi, the apostle said: "*unto you it is **given in the behalf of Christ . . . to believe on Him***" (Philippians 1:29). Later in John's Gospel, the Saviour says concerning His sheep: "*them also I must **bring***" (John 10:16). The vital counterpart to the text before us is found in Luke 15, where the Great Shepherd is depicted searching for a lost sheep, which, "*when He hath found it, He layeth it on His shoulders, rejoicing*" (Luke 15:5), carrying and bringing it to the fold. Oh sinner, outside of the door; you tremble and hesitate; you feel it impossible to

enter in. Then cry unto the Saviour, and He will immediately carry you through; for it is by Him that you must enter.

Those who are thus brought in are not only safe for all eternity, but will also ‘go in and out’ – an expression suggestive of liberty and freedom; a situation enjoyed by those in a happy and secure home. Still more, ‘they find pasture’. All who pass through the door that is Christ are superbly nourished, wonderfully provided for, made to lie down in green pastures, led beside still waters, their very soul is restored, they are caused to walk in the paths of righteousness, goodness and mercy follow them all the days of their lives and they dwell in the House of the Lord forever. Does not every Christian heart respond in a glad Hallelujah?!

In conclusion, “*The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10). In verse 8, thieves and robbers were in the plural, analogous of false prophets and teachers. Here, it is ‘the thief’ singular, who comes not only to steal (that is, to rob men of the truth and the essential elements of the gospel), but also to kill and destroy (his ultimate design). Who is this? The opinions of commentators vary, but the language is strongly suggestive of Satan, the Great Adversary himself. The arch-thief and father of lies, who robbed man of life at the beginning, stole the blessed communion that man first had with his Creator, and continues in his efforts to deprive humanity of the gospel, also sends forth a brood of thieves and robbers with his pernicious propaganda; and by so doing destroys and kills eternally (cf John 8:44).

Then let all who read take warning, for he continues in the pursuit of his diabolical purposes to this present hour. But let all who read also take comfort in this: Christ, the Saviour of sinners, is come that ye may have life, and have it more abundantly – even life everlasting. And let all who read be instructed in how that life is to be received: it is through Him alone, who says, “*I am the door*”.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)



# THE CONGREGATION OF SAINTS

*“My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:  
when shall I come and appear before God?”*

(Psalm 42:2)

Those who have once enjoyed the presence of God in the public ordinances of religion, will greatly desire, if deprived of them, to be favoured with them again. Such was the case with the Psalmist, as is evident from the expressions: *“when shall I come and appear before God?”* (Psalm 42:2) – expressions used in Scripture to designate the worshipper’s presenting himself in that place where God was peculiarly present, whence he is said to ‘appear before God’. Thus, Exodus 23:17 *“Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God”*.

## THE PECULIAR PRESENCE OF GOD

But it might be asked, ‘Did not David know that God is present in the wilderness as well as in the Tabernacle? Wherefore then should he lay so much stress on **place**?’ A sufficient answer to this question would be – that God bade him so to do. Yes, David was indeed well acquainted with the great truth of God’s omnipresence, as his own words bear witness: *“Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me”* (Psalm 139:7-10). But while he knew that God is in all places at the same time by His universal presence, he knew also that He had promised to be peculiarly and graciously present in one place especially. He knew the divine injunction: *“Unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, even unto His habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come”* (Deuteronomy 12:5). He knew also the gracious promise: *“In all places where I record My name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee”* (Exodus 20:24).

Knowing therefore that where the instituted worship was performed, and that where the ark, the symbol of the Divine Presence was (cf 1 Chronicles 13:10, 2 Samuel 7:7), there God was indeed peculiarly present, and there He had promised to come to His people and to bless them; no wonder that he should long to be restored to that place, and that he should breathe the fervent desire “*when shall I come and appear before God?*”

But as David was providentially, and therefore lawfully, hindered from attending at the appointed place, might he not have expected that God would be graciously present with him in his banishment? Assuredly he might. And – blessed be God – so also may all others in the like circumstances. God will never be wanting to His people in this respect; for though He has commanded them ‘not to forsake the assembling of themselves together’ (cf Hebrews 10:25) and has connected with their so assembling some of His richest promises; yet, as He “*dwelleth not in temples made with hands*” (Acts 7:48, 17:24) if they be lawfully hindered, He will come to them in their retirement also, and bless them. But then, in order to their warrantably expecting this, it is necessary that the hindrance should be indeed a **lawful** one: that is, such as God Himself will allow and approve; such as the conscience, guided by the Word of God, testifies to be so.

### **DANGERS OF NEGLECT**

But if the Psalmist knew that he might confidently expect the Divine presence and blessing, though absent from the public worship, why does he so greatly mourn his absence from it? Doubtless, because, though he had the relief of that expectation, he could not but remember that he was still deprived of an inestimable privilege. And, viewed in this light, the fervent breathing of David after the public ordinances, is a lesson of instruction to all other servants of God, teaching them how they also should value those ordinances. If they prize them as he prized them, they will suffer no light reason to prevent their attendance on them; they will seriously and anxiously enquire whether there is in truth a lawful

prevention, and they will not rest satisfied till they are quite sure that there is. Carelessness in this matter is a fearful symptom. He who trifles here, trifles on the brink of a precipice, down which many a professor has fallen. It is therefore immensely important that a jealous watchfulness should be exercised over the state of the heart in this respect. If an insufficient excuse for absence be allowed, it is an ill sign; still worse if the excuse be a frivolous one. But it is possible that the reason for non-attendance may be undoubtedly lawful, and yet the heart feels a secret sense of relief at not being obliged to attend. Let him who feels this, take heed. He has taken the first step on a dangerous road, and if he proceeds, every added step will be swifter than the former – until he comes to the end, which is **ruin**. Many a fall has begun in a secret undervaluing of public ordinances; this has led to indifference about attending on them or not attending; then trifling, and, afterwards, evidently unlawful excuses have been allowed; then has followed a very infrequent and careless attendance; and lastly, hardness of heart and avowed contempt.

### **THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC ORDINANCES**

It should ever be remembered that it is scarcely possible too highly to value the public ordinances of religion, provided they are viewed in their true light, and used to the right end. Everywhere in the Scriptures we are taught to regard them with eminent esteem; since they are the chief means appointed by God for the salvation of men. It is true, that the Word of God read in private may be the means of awakening or sanctifying – and has been the means in many instances: that is, many, when considered apart; but when compared with those instances of which **preaching** has been the means, they will be found to be few. *“It pleased God”* says the Apostle *“by the foolishness of **preaching** to save them that believe”* (1 Corinthians 1:21). Again, he says, *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and **hearing** by the word of God”* (cf Romans 10:14-18) where his striking interrogations plainly show that he regarded the preaching of the Word as God’s appointed, ordinary means through which faith is to be obtained by mankind.

And facts have ever accorded with this doctrine; for, in all ages, the great majority of believers have become so by means of the gospel preached. And the appointment of this order of means is not merely arbitrary; but much of Divine wisdom and goodness is to be perceived in it. Most evidently there is in the means prescribed a natural fitness to accomplish the end proposed; which is that of informing the mind and impressing the heart. Now, we know, from the law of sympathy, common to the human nature, that no means are so well adapted to produce this end as the living voice of a speaker, himself informed and impressed by his subject, and roused by the deep interest that he feels in it, to reason, and persuade, and warn, and expostulate, and beseech. “*The words that I speak unto you*”, said Christ, “*they are spirit and they are life*” (John 6:63). Not indeed without the Spirit who quickeneth; but, made effectual by Him, they are the means of life, and the fittest means. It follows, then, that to esteem lightly the public ministration of the Holy Word, is to esteem lightly God’s chief instrument of spiritual good to men; and that to withdraw from an attendance on it, is to withdraw from that mercy and that grace which it exhibits. An awful consequence, which should be well considered by those who are ready for light reasons to absent themselves from the preaching of the gospel.

In like manner, with regard to **worship**; it is most true that we may worship God in private and be accepted of Him there. But all our duties are to be observed in their due time, and order, and proportion. If, when the public assembly is convened, we **ought** to be with them, having no just and lawful reason of absence, then our absence is an act of disobedience, and we have no warrant to expect the blessing of God in the path of disobedience. The command is express: “*Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is*” (Hebrews 10:25). The promise is great – oh, how great! “*Where two or three are gathered together in My name, **there am I** in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20).

“Though private prayer be a good design,  
Yet public hath more promises, more love:

And love's a weight to hearts; to eyes, a sign.  
We all are but cold suitors: let us move  
Where it is warmest. Leave thy [lone condition];  
Pray with the most; for where most pray is heaven."

It was where He recorded His name, the place of public congregating, of common worship, that God promised to come, and to bless His people; it was "*there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore*" (Psalm 133:3). Well then might David long for that place – well might he pour out the ardent desire, "*when shall I come and appear before God?*"

### **PUBLIC ORDINANCES LEADING TO GOD**

...But surely it was not merely from his clear and correct views of the means and of the end [of public ordinances] that the Psalmist was led so ardently to desire that he might come again to the tabernacle of God? No, there was another and more powerful impulse that stirred within him – the motive of the affection as well as of the intellect, of the heart as well as of the head. Never was man more distant from the cold speculatist than David. His religion was eminently of the living and experimental kind. He had "*tasted that the Lord is gracious*", and therefore he now so ardently desired "*the sincere milk of the word*" (1 Peter 2:2, 3). Hear his chief request: "*One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple*" (Psalm 27:4). Here we are told for what purposes especially he sought thus earnestly the privilege of dwelling ever in the House of the Lord.

1.) That which he mentions first, and with good reason, is that he might "*behold the beauty of the Lord*". The Tabernacle itself with its hangings and its furniture, would to some have been the chief object of attraction: but that which he sought to 'behold' was not the beauty of the place, but of the Lord. There, where His word was published, and His will made known, by faith he had often been favoured to "*see the King in his beauty*" as he himself records in the 63rd Psalm, where, longing to

be restored to the temple of God, he thus expresses the end for which he desired it: “*To see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the Sanctuary*” (Psalm 63:2). In the Sanctuary then especially had he enjoyed those spiritual apprehensions of the divine character which constitute the soul of all religion and all worship, and on which is founded all holy delight in God. There, ‘the eyes of his understanding being enlightened’, he saw the power and the glory of God as they were represented in His word and in His ordinances. His power he saw manifested in the record of His past doings, which were ‘marvellous in his eyes’ (cf Psalm 118:23), and in the effects of its present influence on the hearts of His worshippers. His glory he saw as the result of all His attributes illustriously displayed in harmonious combination. He saw ‘a just God and a Saviour’, ‘mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace embracing each other’ (cf Isaiah 45:21, Psalm 85:10). He saw, in the slain victim, Righteousness expressing its abhorrence of sin, and the sinner’s desert of death; but ‘the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things’ shewed him the throne of judgment changed into a mercy-seat (cf Hebrews 12:24). Yet of all the views of the Lord which he was favoured to entertain there, none surely was dearer to him than that in which he saw Him as “*the Living God*”. When he contemplated Him as the Fountain of all spiritual life to his people; inexhaustible though ever flowing; it was then that, in the most affectionate and delightful sense, he beheld “*the beauty of the Lord*” (Psalm 42:2, 27:4).

2.) But there was another great object that he had in view, when he desired and sought after that ‘one thing’ – which was, that he might ‘**enquire**’ or ‘**seek**’ in His Temple. Thither he would go that he might seek the counsel of God, that he might learn His will. Hence in that same Psalm he prays, “*Teach me Thy way, O Lord*” (Psalm 27:11). So also in the 25<sup>th</sup> Psalm, with remarkable earnestness he entreats: “*Shew me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me*” (Psalm 25:4-5). And where should the knowledge of the divine will be sought, if not in that place where faithful ministers of God ‘read in the

book, in the law of God distinctly, and give the sense, and cause the people to understand the reading' (cf Nehemiah 8:7-8)? Enquiring there, doubts are resolved; perplexities unravelled; unbelief removed. When the faith of Asaph was staggered at beholding the wicked in prosperity, so that his 'heart was grieved' and his 'steps had well-nigh slipped' – "*when I thought to know this*", he says, "*it was too painful for me; until I went into the Sanctuary of God; then understood I their end*" (Psalm 73:16-17). And how remarkable was the happy effect produced on his mind by the satisfaction to his doubts which he there obtained: "*Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel ... it is good for me to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works*" (see the whole of that most instructive Psalm 73). The faithful servants of God can still bear the like testimony: they have enquired in His Temple and have been answered there.

How eminently are the wisdom and goodness of God displayed in His appointing public means of instruction. Of all the religious knowledge communicated to mankind, immensely the greater part is communicated by public teaching. Indeed, without it, a great multitude of persons must, almost necessarily, remain ignorant of divine truth ... vast numbers are so entirely occupied with the daily labour requisite to procure a subsistence, that, but for the public instruction of the Sabbath day, they would be nearly cut off from all sufficient means of saving knowledge. Oh, how many a poor man – who loves to dwell in the House of the Lord, to see His beauty and to enquire there, when wearied in body, and perhaps dejected in mind, stooping beneath the pressure of his week-day toils – pours out with David, the fervid breathing, "*when shall I come and appear before God?*" And when the wished-for morning of the Lord's Sabbath returns to smile upon his soul, how gratefully and joyously does he burst into the song:

"Come bless the Lord, whose love assigns  
So sweet a rest for weary minds,  
Provides an antepast of Heaven,  
And gives this day the food of seven." (Stennett)

Blessed Sanctuary! Thou art the home of the Christian's heart! In thee 'God is known for a Refuge' and a Rest! Who that knows the Lord does not know this? How often has the afflicted saint gone up to His House 'in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord', speaking 'out of the abundance of his complaint and grief' – and He who said 'I will come to you and I will bless you' has been present to fulfil His word, and to whisper 'go in peace'! So that, the same who came mourning and oppressed, has dropped his burden, and has gone his way with his 'countenance no more sad' (cf 1 Samuel 1:9-18, Exodus 20:24). Aye, and if there has been 'any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit' (cf Philippians 2:1), was it not in the House of the Lord that these joys were chiefly experienced? Truly it was there; for, "*they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy House; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures: for with Thee is the Fountain of Life: in Thy light shall we see light*" (Psalm 36:8-9). These were the words of David; of him who was now driven by his enemies far away from the privileges of the Sanctuary; but who, remembering still the enquiries that had been answered, the doubts that had been solved, the fears that had been quelled, the sorrows that had been relieved, the expectations that had been realized, the desires that had been satisfied, the promises that had been fulfilled, the glories that had been seen, and the joys that had been tasted there – longed again to return thither, again to 'appear before God'.

3.) There was yet another, and far higher, motive that influenced the desire of the Psalmist to be restored to the public service of God, which was, that he might honour Him; might "*give unto the Lord **the glory due unto His name***" (Psalm 29:2). A motive this, which, from its spiritual and holy nature, very greatly transcends those that have already been mentioned. Yet are those other motives spiritual and holy also; though not in the same exalted degree. The desires after public ordinances which especially refer to our own edification in knowledge, our own growth in grace, and our own spiritual comfort, are not only lawful, but,



as has been shown, when proceeding from the right source, are excellent and holy, having a divine origin. But when, through a superior influence, we can rise to a forgetfulness of ourselves, to that sublime height where, contemplating and adoring the wonders and the glories of the Divine Character, we ‘lose ourselves in Him, in light ineffable’; then have we attained to a disposition of mind as far surpassing those lesser motives, as the cloudless ether of the upper regions exceeds in purity the mingled atmosphere of our lower world ...

Oh, how excellent and lovely, how sublimely spiritual is the glorying in God of the holy Psalmist! His soul made her boast in the Lord, and felt her selfish cares and sorrows, her lower aims and all her meaner joys absorbed in Him, beheld and adored ‘in the beauties of holiness’. *“The Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens. Honour and majesty are before Him: strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come into His courts”* (Psalm 96:4-8). How many come into His courts, but bring no offering! Not so David. A careful examination of his Psalms will shew that though, from his circumstances, he was often led to pour out his complaint before God, to tell his wants, and to beg relief and consolation; yet the prime joy and glory of his soul was to *“go into His Tabernacle”*, that he might *“worship at His footstool”* (Psalm 132:7), that there, *“in the congregation of saints”* (Psalm 149:1), he might fulfil that vow of his heart: *“I will extol Thee, my God, O King, and I will bless Thy name for ever and ever ... I will speak of the glorious honour of Thy majesty, and of Thy wondrous works”* (Psalm 145:1-2, 5).

Certainly, of all the privileges vouchsafed to the redeemed on the earth, not one is so exalted as that of giving glory to God in His Sanctuary. And be it observed, that to **this end** are they redeemed: *“Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s”*

(1 Corinthians 6:20). And let it be considered how little honour the Blessed God receives from His creatures in this world; and what abundant reason there was that our Saviour should teach us to pray ‘Hallowed be Thy name’. Sunk in selfishness and sin, they praise one another, and they praise themselves, but not the God who made them. If then the Lord of Life were not to receive a revenue of honour from His own servants, no offering would ascend to Him at all from our guilty world. Let the thought of this, while it serves to admonish and rebuke past omissions, kindle in the souls of the faithful an ardent flame of zeal to magnify the name of the Lord. Let this be the vow of each: ‘the world forsake their Creator, dishonour His sabbaths, and renounce His praise, *“but as for me, I will come into Thy House in the multitude of Thy mercy: and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple”* (Psalm 5:7)’.

### **GOD GLORIFIED IN HIS SAINTS**

If there be a spectacle on earth which has more of true grandeur and beauty than all others, surely it is that of ‘the congregation of the saints’ when they ‘stand up and bless the Lord their God’; when, as with one heart and one voice, they raise the adoring hymn: *“blessed be Thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise”* (Nehemiah 9:5). In their so doing, they render to God the highest honour which it is in their power to render. They publicly acknowledge Him to be God; they do homage before Him as their God. In the face of the world they avow their belief in Him, their veneration of Him, and their love towards Him; and they give to Him ‘the glory due unto His name’. This is a sight at which, if at any, Infidels turn pale, Deists are abashed, and fools who come to scoff – awed into reverence – remain to pray. To worship the **Most High God** is the highest dignity of a rational creature; while to His saints it is also the highest happiness. It is when engaged in this noblest act of immortal beings that they feel their true elevation, and regard themselves as making the nearest approach to the employment and blessedness of the world above. Nay, they feel that it is heaven begun on earth; for though between the earthly and the heavenly

worshippers there is still the great difference of perfection and imperfection, of spotless purity and the remains of defilement; yet the object of their adoration is the same; one also is their theme, and one their song, "*Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*" (Revelation 5:13).

### **SPIRITUAL APPETITE QUICKENED**

[And yet, even] prevention from attending the public ordinances of God's House may be made the means of great benefit to the soul. From what has been shewn of the benefits, privileges and enjoyments of public ordinances it might almost be supposed that, whatever else He might deprive them of, God would never deprive His people of these – since in all His dealings with them He chiefly intends the welfare of their souls. But reasonings on the subject such as these would immediately be met by the fact that God **does** thus deprive his people, and that frequently. Now, since He does, it must be certain that He is guided in this conduct by reasons infinitely righteous, wise, and good. Doubtless the reason for it, which exists in them, is that they are fallen creatures who need the hand of correction and discipline; because in Heaven where there is no sin, the holy inhabitants enjoy a worship which is uninterrupted and eternal. It is an affecting proof of the degeneracy of human nature, that even in those who are partly renewed, the relish for the provisions of the Lord's House, so soon, and so often, palls. Those provisions are always, in themselves, alike excellent. Prayer and praise and the word preached, are ordinances always alike important; and the discoveries of the Gospel – the power of Christ, His offices and work, His great salvation, with the vast realities and wondrous prospects of the eternal world – are at all times equally valuable, and equally glorious. But they are not always felt to be so, even by those who know somewhat of their worth; but who are still subject to the influence of remaining corruption. It belongs to the perfection of Heaven to feed on those rich provisions with a relish which grows by what it feeds on.

Another proof of human degeneracy is found in the proneness to value things less, however excellent in themselves, because of their being common, or plentiful, or of easy attainment. This is the case even with the means of grace. Of two converted persons, commonly, he who can hear the gospel but seldom both values and enjoys it more than he who can hear it constantly. And sometimes in the same individual, a difference of feeling is known to exist at different times. How commonly has it happened that a person who has been hindered from a frequent attendance by derision or reproach, or by the direct prohibition of relatives or superiors, and has stolen now and then a precious opportunity, has enjoyed that rare and stolen opportunity with far more relish than the abundance with which he might afterwards be favoured? Yes, **favoured** – for however little abundant opportunities may sometimes be improved or enjoyed, they are immensely valuable in themselves; and God will bring His people to know, and feel, and acknowledge this. And for the accomplishment of this purpose, it is that He so frequently withdraws the privilege; of which a most striking and interesting example is presented to us in the case of David. He was a man who possessed by nature an ardent mind and warm affections, and who probably on that account engaged in the public ordinances of religion with more lively feelings than many others. But it is not to be supposed that, when favoured with the privilege of a constant attendance at the Tabernacle, he should often, if ever, have experienced that keen appetite for spiritual good, and those earnest longings after the Living God which he now possessed.

The language which he employs is the strongest that could well be used to express the fervency of his affections and desires: ‘my soul thirsteth for God’. Now, it has been observed by those who have suffered from the extremes both of hunger and of thirst, that extreme thirst is greatly more distressing and intolerable than extreme hunger. Hence by expressing himself as thirsting for God, David would shew that the longings of his spirit were intensely great: and that he would intimate his thirst to be extreme seems evident from his using the very beautiful

simile of the hart panting after the water-brooks. It is said by some that animals of that species are naturally more given to thirst than others; but be this as it may, if one of them be imagined to have lost his accustomed track (perhaps having been pursued by hounds) and to have wandered long in some sandy desert, fainting beneath the burning heat of a mid-day sun, and meeting with no drop of water to slake his raging thirst – an image will present itself to the mind highly adapted to convey a lively conception of the Psalmist’s fervid pantings after God. But an ardour equal to this he had probably never known until banished from the public service. Hence it is plain that his banishment was made subservient to his spiritual welfare; was overruled for good. For, unquestionably, it is better to have an appetite for the provisions of the House of God, though absent from it, than to be there and to have no appetite. What are the richest [delicacies] to a sick man? What is a table spread with dainties to them who are already full, or who have lost their relish for food? It is better then, to hunger in the wilderness, than to loathe in the Temple.

O for the holy, happy place,  
Where faithful souls the Lord adore,  
And taste the riches of His grace,  
And see His Glory and His Power!  
When shall I from these wilds, oh when,  
To that dear home return again?

The hart, astray from fertile lands,  
That faints beneath the sultry beam,  
And roams athirst o’er burning sands,  
Intensely panteth for the stream.  
So do I pant, O God, for Thee;  
So do I long Thy face to see.

How happy they who with Thee dwell,  
And all their life in praise employ,  
And from salvation’s flowing well  
The living waters draw with joy!  
But I, in wretched exile rove,  
A stranger to the joy they prove.

Fountain of Life! To Thee I turn,  
And seek my solace all in Thee;  
In mercy hear Thy suppliant mourn,  
And bring me where I long to be.  
For Thee, for Thee I thirst, O God;  
When shall I come to Thine abode?

Henry March (1791-1869)

From the book *Sabbaths at Home – A Help to their Right Improvement*, a commentary upon Psalms 42 and 43. Poetry quoted within the text is by the author.

## EDITORIAL

The foregoing articles have a theme in common, namely: the state or condition of being **within** the Church of God, both spiritually (through faith in Christ), and practically (by attendance in a local congregation). It follows that those who enjoy the former by grace, will always strive for the latter, to the utmost of their ability. The plainest New Testament injunction to regular gathering is Hebrews 10:25, to which is added an important motivating factor: “*and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*”. ‘The day’ in view is evidently that Great Day of the Lord, for which believers are taught to be in a constant state of readiness.

In what ways is the imminence of eternity an incentive to corporate worship? (1.) The prospect of the Day of Judgment and the eternal state is a great antidote to sin; and forsaking assembly is undeniably sinful. (2.) The meetings of saints upon earth are a foretaste of what shall be hereafter, and spiritual desires for Heaven can find some satiation in the earthly precursor. (3.) The congregational worship of God by His gathered people is a feature common to the life which now is, and that which is to come; the opportunities for the saints to practise and rehearse themselves for glory are limited, and should always be taken. (4.) There could be no clearer indication that a person is destined to join “*the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven*”, than that they belong to such a company upon earth. It is a witness to the world, and an assurance to oneself. (5.) What better place for a believer to be found by his returning Lord, than in a worship service, with their brethren? Those who hope, on that day, to stand amongst the sheep of the Saviour’s right hand, should abide in a fold at the present.

*Preliminary Announcement*

**ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> & Lord’s Day 5<sup>th</sup> June 2022 D.V.**