

2/3/14

Exhortation: Hymn of praise & victory

Reading: 1st Corinthians 15

We have come once again to remember our Heavenly Father's faithfulness as exhibited in the emblems before us upon the table. Our fellowship together in **remembrance** is not only of our Heavenly Fathers and our beloved Master's sacrifice. But it is, also importantly a visual reminder to us of the certainty of the fulfilment of the purpose of God, because of that sacrifice, we are shortly to remember.

The emblems of bread and wine upon the table before us brethren and sisters are there to encourage us to endure unto the end. For as we read elsewhere, "*for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*". The coming of our Lord then is to be upon our minds' brethren, for our hope is ultimately, like Israel bound up in his return.

Philippians chapter 3 and verses 20 – 21

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself".

For as Romans declares "*even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*". Indeed it is to the redemption, the release of the body from the bondage of sin and death that the Apostle speaks in the 15th chapter of Corinthians. For as Hebrews declares we who through fear of death are all of our lifetimes subject to its bondage.

Death is the great leveller; it comes to all men, to the great and the small, to the good and the evil man alike, as the preacher states "*one event happeneth to them all*". None of us brethren and sisters should underestimate this fear of death, which is common to all humanity.

Yet the scriptures comfort us for we who are in Christ - death is but a rest a sleep. For our Heavenly Father is not the God of the dead, but of the living and all live unto him.

For “*God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things, which be not as though they were*”. It’s not death we must fear, brethren and sisters, rather we like Paul ought to see the possibility of our death as a release for our next waking moment will be with our Lord, should that occur. But rather let us fear him even our Heavenly Father who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

The Apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians makes it abundantly plain, that we need fear death no longer, because our Lord, the one we look for has already overcome its power. As is expressed elsewhere concerning his victory. “*But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*” Death has been abolished brethren and sisters in that death hath no more dominion over him, in this we should rejoice.

This Greek word translated “*abolished*” means, “*to cause its power and influence to cease*”. Now if that is true for him, it shall also be true for us, as the Apostle John states “*we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*”.

2nd Corinthians chapter 5 and verses 1 - 4

*“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this **we groan, earnestly desiring** to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, **that mortality might be swallowed up of life**”.*

Whilst we groan and sigh at these vile bodies of death, which are indeed bringing us mercilessly down to the grave day by day, as our outward man perishes. Nevertheless we must resolve to faint not looking too the eternal. In longing for the redemption of our bodies that we might be clothed with eternal life and that our mortality might be swallowed up of life.

Such is our great hope brethren and sisters to no longer be burdened anymore with the weakness and the frailty of our flesh, neither with its defiled nature, which brings us into conflict with our God, because of sin.

Thus the Apostle at the end of 1st Corinthian chapter 15 presents us in the closing words of the chapter verses 51 – 57 with a hymn of praise to our Heavenly Father. This is a hymn brethren and sisters of victory, even the victory of the resurrection of our Lord. That victory we shall shortly remember in the bread and the wine.

These verses present to us the outworking of that victory in that - our Master will not be the only one who will be raised. For we read elsewhere in the chapter – “*Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming*”.

Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 11

“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities”.

This section of 1st Corinthians chapter fifteen is a celebration and these verses contain within them a sense of sustained excitement. Excitement for what yet shall shortly be a reality for us brethren and sisters in the mercy of our Heavenly Father in Christ.

1st Corinthians chapter 15 and verses 51 – 57

“Behold, I shew you a mystery (a secret); We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”.

These verses build to an incredible crescendo thanking our Heavenly Father for what he has achieved in the Lord Jesus Christ. Take note brethren and sisters of verse fifty-five “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*” Here the Apostle provides us with a couple of rhetorical questions, which are actually taunting and mocking death the last great enemy. Note carefully these taunts that are in the present tense, because the surety of what will yet come to pass, nothing can stop the reality of the new creation and its victory in Christ.

For this once seemingly invincible enemy has now been rendered toothless and feeble.

Like a scorpion whose sting can cause death, yet now it has no sting and no venom, it is harmless and need no longer be feared. Our Lord brethren and sisters has not only overcome death and the grave, but also the world, as we read elsewhere – therefore we have nothing to fear.

As Romans chapter 8 and verses 35, 38 – 39 & 37

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us”.

Now these verses in 1st Corinthians fifteen show to us that although our redemption may appear to tarry, as we await it brethren and sisters. That redemption when it comes will come speedily. For we are given two descriptions of the speed in which our Lord shall transform our vile bodies to be like unto his glorious body. In verse fifty-two we read *“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”*.

The word for *“moment”* in the Greek is where we get our word *“atom”* from and it indicates the smallest possible amount / unit of time, something that cannot be divided. Now this second expression *“in the twinkling of an eye”* is normally equated with the concept of our eye *“blinking”*, but this is not necessarily the case. Two possible ideas can be presented here:

- 1) The speed a person blinks – apparently 3-4 tenths of a second
- 2) The time it takes for light to go from the iris to the retina – which apparently 1/6th of a nanosecond

If I understand this right a microsecond is 1 millionth of a second and a nanosecond is 1 thousand of a microsecond or a billionth of a second. So 1/6th of a nanosecond is a lot faster than the blinking of an eye.

The change is therefore effectively instantaneous for us brethren and sisters and what a comfort this is to us. That it will not be a long drawn out process, but one which will powerfully show the power of our Heavenly Father to us. Just as was nearly always seen in the healing miracles performed by our Lord.

As the verses continue we are presented with this change described as simply as the removal of the old set of clothing and the putting on of the new garment. This is exactly the same language used to speak of us putting on Christ and of the character of the new creation in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Most importantly here though brethren and sisters – the picture is one of investiture, such as took place at the appointment of the priests or of a king at the time of their coronation. For we in the mercy of our God are to be kings and priests after the order of Melchizedek and we are to reign with our Lord in the age to come.

Psalm 132 and verses 9 & 16

“Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy”.

Now the timing of these wonderful events is to take place as verse fifty-two states as “*at the last trump*”, which must correspond with 1st Thessalonians chapter four.

1st Thessalonians chapter 4 and verses 15 - 17

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”.

At this point whether asleep in Christ or alive and patiently waiting – we all shall be gathered unto our Lord, for he will have come and even so come Lord Jesus is our desire and prayer.

The last trump to us brethren and sisters indicates to us the end of gentile times and the judgement seat of our Lord and on the other hand it announces the coming kingdom for which we all long.

It is thought that the last trump may be based upon the breaking up of a Roman military camp. One commentator says that the **last trumpet** was a figure of speech that came from the Roman military, when they would break camp. The **first** trumpet meant, “*strike the tents and prepare to leave.*”

The **second** trumpet meant, “*fall into line.*” The **third and last** trumpet meant “*march away.*” The **last trumpet** Paul speaks of describes the believer’s “*marching orders*” to judgement.

Twice we are told that our Heavenly Father in Christ has given us the victory, where as the enemy thought it had gained the victory, when the Master died upon that cruel Roman stake. Being bruised in the heel; yet our Lord delivered if you pardon the pun a deathblow to the enemy at the time of his resurrection in fulfilment of the promise of Genesis three. So we read elsewhere in Romans:

Romans chapter 16 and verse 20

*“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan **under your feet shortly.** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”.*

Our Heavenly Father has performed the impossible in that he has totally vanquished our greatest enemy through the agency of his beloved son, who we are here to remember. Therefore we like the Apostle ought to burst forth into praise.

Verse 57

“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”.

It is our faith in the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father in Christ, which will overcome. For as we read elsewhere, “*this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*”. We must believe and accept the grace of our God, as the Apostle Paul modelled for us brethren and sisters.

Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith (or the faithfulness) of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”.

Here is our response to live by faith and to manifest that faith in being truly crucified with Christ. As we read elsewhere in Galatians, “*they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*”.

From that passage in Galatians chapter two we see the Apostles motivation for his life in Christ, it was the love and the faithfulness of Christ, which energised his walk in the truth. Brethren and sisters the crucifixion of the Master must elicit a response from us after all he has and continues to love us and give himself for us day by day.

No wonder then we read this great “*therefore*” passage in verse 58 of 1st Corinthians chapter 15.

Verse 58

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”.

On account of understanding all that has been achieved for us in Christ and this great hope which shall shortly come to pass in the redemption of our bodies. Then surely it is our reasonable service or worship to apply the Apostle’s exhortation here.

The great doctrinal truths of scripture are meant brethren and sisters to bring out of us a living active sacrificial response. “*For because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*”.

See the affection and the association the Apostle extends to these first century Corinthians and by extension to our selves in this phrase “*my beloved brethren*”. An appeal out of love for us to show that the truth we have espoused means something personal to us and that we will be a living witness to its power.

A witness firstly to our God that we have not despised the blood of the covenant. Secondly to one another as an encouragement and example to imitate, as Paul does here for us. Then finally a witness to those outside the truth that there is something better, a hope and another way to live in this present evil age.

The Apostle gives us three exhortations:

- To be steadfast
- To be unmoveable
- To be always abounding in the work of the Lord

He states to them in that fifty-eighth verse “*be ye*”, the Greek here means, “*to become be fashioned or made*”. Now in the Greek this is a present imperative, so it is a command. The Apostle is saying if you want to be a partaker of the divine nature and to escape the corruption that is in this world through lust. Then this is what you must do! It is in the middle voice indicating to us that it is our choice, whether we follow the instruction or not and that both we and our God in Christ has a part to perform in their fulfilment.

Firstly we are to become “*steadfast*”, the word means to be “*firm*” and is best illustrated with one of its other uses:

Colossians chapter 1 and verse 23

“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister”.

We are to be firmly attached to the truth and not blown about by every wind of doctrine. Secondly we are instructed to be “*unmoveable*”, which means, “*to be persistent, to remain in place*”. This reinforces and emphasises the idea of having stability to our faith and to our practice. The Greek word is related to where we get our English word for cinema or moving pictures, although this is the negative form of it meaning something, which “*never moves or is completely unmoving*”.

Then finally we are to be at work – “*in the work of the Lord*”, which the Apostle does not specify at this point although this phrase only occurs elsewhere in today’s reading in chapter sixteen and verse ten. Now note carefully brethren and sisters the two descriptors for this work of the Lord? Firstly we are to be involved “*always*”, at all and every time; in other words it is to be a continuous feature of our life in the truth. So whatever our circumstances, our health and our age we can do something, even if it is only to pray.

Then secondly we are to “*abound*” in this work of the Lord. The sense of this superlative expression is of “*excelling and exceeding*” in that work, as we are able. Brethren and sisters in the light of the resurrection of our Lord and in the light of what great hope is ours, because of that sacrifice, which we shall in a few moments, remember. What other response could we give?

Is this the measure of your service and indeed my service for our God? We ought to be lovingly constrained into service and ever more excelling and exceeding in that service, as our understanding, insight and appreciation of our Lords victory grows.

This fifty-eighth verse ends with an assurance that our labour, our toil, will not be in vain, worthless in the Lord. We can rest assured that it will have value and be meaningful, because of the sacrifice of our Lord, as evidenced in these emblems before us.

Quickly and finally I think the Apostles mind here is in Isaiah's prophecy:

Isaiah chapter 49 and verse 4

“Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with Yahweh, and my work with my God”.

This is one of the servant songs, which speaks of Hezekiah's life, particularly of our Lord's ministry and then by extension of the Apostles who continued his work. Yet in all three cases – at the time, it seemed as if all their efforts had achieved very little to show for it all.

The same is likely to be true with regards to our work in the truth and that likewise we might become despondent and weary, but brethren and sisters. As this verse teaches us face value is not a good indicator of results for our Heavenly Father's ways are not our ways. As that verse in Isaiah ends “ *yet surely my judgment is with Yahweh, and my work with my God*”. Let him be the judge of our work and let him give the increase as he pleases.

Adversity appears to be a great purifier of motive and so our Heavenly Father uses such to try us that in due course we might come to know that results are: “*not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith Yahweh of hosts. So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*”.

Let us recall that the Lord's initial work up to his death appeared to convert very few, but some weeks later at Pentecost some three thousand were added in one day! And the impact of his life has since only been increasingly incredible!

On the day of judgement there will be many surprises about the effectiveness of the work of individual saints that presently none of us could ever imagine? Let us resolve therefore to continue steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of our Lord. Committing our selves to him that judgeth righteously for our judgement too is with our Heavenly Father and our work and our reward is hid with Christ in our God.