

*The Assembly;*  
*and its*  
*Heavenly*  
*Relationships.*

---

“Jesus (came) and stood in the midst.”  
John xx. 19.

“JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH.”—(The  
Lord is there.) Ezek. xlviii. 35.

---

By G.J.S.

SYDNEY :  
Tract Depôt, 249 Castlereagh Street.



THE ASSEMBLY ; AND ITS  
HEAVENLY RELATIONSHIPS.

(John xx. 11-23.)

THE last two chapters of John are pictorial ; they set forth the results of Christ's work, first, for the present or Church time ; then for the Jewish remnant, and after that the millennial haul of fishes. The passage at the head of this paper opens out Psalm xxii. 22 into two parts. First, " I will declare Thy name unto my brethren." So the Lord declares the Father's name to Mary and the new and heavenly relationships into which He ushers His disciples. Then the picture

of the assembly as set up on earth is presented, where the Lord produces worship by the sense of His presence, fulfilling the last part of the verse, "In the midst of the Church will I praise Thee with singing."

The way into the assembly on earth is thus round by heaven ; that is, in the recognition of entirely new and heavenly relationships.

Mary is led out of the old relationships into the new, but she has to pass in spirit through

### THE SORROWS OF DEATH.

She loved her Lord ; she had lost Him in death ; she was inconsolable without Him. The whole world was like one vast tomb to her. Mary wept ! She did well to weep ! She had lost her all ! Others had, perhaps, lost those in nearer relationship, but

Mary had lost a perfect Object : One who had cast out seven devils from her, and in Whom she had never seen a flaw since that time, though following Him always. Doubtless, there was nature in her weeping, but Mary's heart was thus weaned from earth. He was not here ! Evidence might satisfy mere intelligence, but Mary's heart could not be satisfied without Himself and she lingered around the tomb, where she had seen His body deposited.

Then she hears His voice calling her by name, "Mary." In her answering "Rabboni" her tears are dried ; she has again received her Lord, she can begin afresh. Ah, yes ! but how little she knew what that was she was about to begin anew with Him. Still she had found her Lord and was prepared to go with Him where He should lead. The sorrows of death were passed, but

she had gone through them ; Oh ! how really !

Now, she would have renewed her relationship with Him upon the old footing, that is, an earthly relationship, but His, "Touch me not for I am not yet ascended to my Father," prohibited that for ever. A separation as real as that produced by death must come between her and the Object of her heart, henceforth His actual, bodily presence would no more be known to her. Ah ! No ! Yet it was *not* death, but

#### HEAVEN CLAIMS HIM NOW.

Willingly does she give Him up, to be the joyous bearer of a message to His loved disciples, the reception of which would make their hearts also glad. Heaven should receive Him, the conqueror of death and the winner of a place in heavenly glory and relationship for His own.

Christ is ascended ! This is not a Christ for earth, but a heavenly Man—the Son of the Father, back in the place whence He came ; having laid deep the moral foundation upon which God can accomplish all His purposes. Mary's affections, weaned from earth, cease to linger around the tomb, and are knit to Him in the new sphere, which His ascension opens up to her.

There is, thus, first a new position, Mary exchanges earth for heaven as the sphere of her hopes. He whom she loved was not now to fulfil the desires of an earthly people, but to engage the affections of a heavenly company with Himself, in that place into which He would in due course usher them also.

A change of state had accompanied all this in Mary ; her heart, weaned from earth, was set upon Him whom she recognized as the One

who would do for her, and for His own glory, far more than He had already done in casting out the devils. He would even usher her, upon the basis of the same work by which He was righteously able to cast out the devils, into His place in heaven, a place into which He *alone* could go in His own right. "I go to prepare a place for you."

But not only would He introduce His own to that place to be the home of their spirits now, and eventually, actually their home for ever, but the relationships which were His should be their's also. "Go tell my brethren that I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Both of these relationships are new, and never could be entered into but in resurrection. First,

#### MY FATHER AND YOUR FATHER.

It is not to His Jewish brethren as



such that He now sends Mary (that is referred to in Matt. xxviii 10), but to those whom He introduces for the first time into community of relationship with Himself, with His *heavenly* Father. "My Father and your Father!" Wonderful relationship for those who had been children of Adam's fallen stock! But as real as wonderful! He introduces His own into the family of God, they are His brethren and His Father is their Father. This must be understood in order to enter into what the Church of the first-born ones means.

This involves sonship; but present relationship as children with the affections of the Father, becomes at once the portion of those to whom the Lord thus addresses Himself. There is a distinction between the family of God and the assembly on earth, but each is composed of the same company, and the one is necessary to the other.

The family aspect is most important as bearing upon the assembly. We get origin in "All of one ;" that is we all spring from the same source, the death of Christ. But "Brethren" and "My Father and your Father" sets forth community of relationship, and then comes the assembly, where, in the spirit of sonship we worship.

Blessed indeed to enter in spirit into the reality of this new relationship, "My Father and your Father," but it is well to remember that this could not be until after the Lord's resurrection. But this is not all ;

### TO MY GOD AND YOUR GOD.

It was as new a thing that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ should be our God as that the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ should be our Father. God had been the God of Adam, an innocent being ; the God of Abraham, a

fallen but chosen being; now He was the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, a holy being. As the God of Abraham He had sustained His people for forty years in the wilderness, but Christ was the centre of blessing and sustenance to all with whom He came into contact. Now He ushers His own into this relationship, He is our God in that sense. It is not simply that He supplies all our need—how far short this is—but He makes His assembly the vessel of all His spiritual munificence here; His people the earthly administrators of His bounty to a world of sinners. “My God and your God.”

All this is instruction for the Church, a weaning of heart from earth to heaven. All is new here, a new sphere, new relationships, a new company, but all must be learnt individually, as Mary learnt it, alone with the Lord.

This garden scene stands in marked contrast to that of Paradise of old, where the woman and the devil were alone together. There he unfits Eve for earth, drawing her downwards. The Lord here equally unfits Mary for mere earthly things, but by giving her a heavenly object and drawing her affections upward to heaven. The Lord can instruct anyone who has affection for Himself. This is produced by the Spirit in us, acting upon the new nature, the spring of all right affections. Mary was attached to Him in His lifetime here, but death had seized Him and her breaking heart testified to her affection to Him ; when she had seen Him risen her tears were dried, and although she has again to give Him up, it is to the Father this time, and her heart *firmly attached* to Him in the new sphere, she becomes the intelligent messenger to the disciples of the risen Lord, and of what He has earned for them.

Now we are prepared for the opening up of the latter clause of the verse,

“IN THE MIDST OF THE ASSEMBLY  
WILL I SING PRAISE UNTO THEE.”

It presents a picture of the assembly on earth in its great characteristic features. This, alas, cannot be found together now, yet the principles set forth in the picture become of immense importance for all time, to any who seek in faith to own the truth of the assembly on earth. There can be no true remnant—nothing morally of it, that does not *seek* at least to exhibit all the features of the original; while all must be considerably circumscribed and enfeebled by the present broken condition of things.

Mary went and “told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her.”

It is not merely the fact that He was risen that brings them together as a picture of the church on earth, but that He had told her these things, which, entered into, prepares the heart for the place He gives on earth. And although the disciples did not at the time enter into all that is here set forth, yet the Spirit of God indicates that, when we are firmly established in our souls individually in these truths, we are prepared to find that the Lord has a church organization and endowment, which, while not an establishment *for* earth, is here for the moment to hold for Him.

The disciples are, therefore, gathered together on the first day of the week, a suited day for those who love Him to gather together, as being *that* which celebrates His victory over death. But they gathered with shut doors, lest the storm to which Christ

had succumbed should burst upon and sweep them away also.

They were in circumstances of fear and distress, a poor and afflicted remnant, with no peace for them on earth. But they are a picture of the assembly, for which the wind is never fair, it has always to beat against it. Peter in Matt. xiv. illustrates this, the waves are rough and the wind contrary. Christ was disallowed of men and so necessarily the assembly. If circumstances seem to be congenial they are more deadly than if adverse.

Jesus came into their midst and said unto them,

“PEACE UNTO YOU.”

This was not peace on earth for it had been rejected and there was no peace here. It was peace in heaven! Christ had made peace by the blood

of his cross and came and preached peace to and for His own. At the same time He shewed them His hands and His side the proofs of His accomplished passion. It was as when David appeared with the head of Goliath in his hand ; he says, as it were, Peace, I have overcome every foe ! The heart of every true believer is knit, as Jonathan's heart, to this mighty Victor, and enters into the peace which has been thus settled in heaven for it.

It is not peace of circumstances. Doubtless His peace, amidst the circumstances, will follow the understanding that all things are under His control, to whom all power in heaven and earth is committed. But this is Peace with God, accomplished by His death, His hands and feet the tokens of it, and this, with His presence, forms the basis of worship. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord."



It is the sense of the Lord's presence and of His love in having met the claims of God's holiness by an accomplished atonement; the proofs or tokens of this before them, with the enjoyment of the peace thus purchased, that constitutes the holiest for us to-day, and we enter in with glad hearts, as worshippers purged once for all. This is the spring of

### WORSHIP.

When we come to remember the Lord, the great thought presented to us is His love; His death has proved this and has closed our history before God as of Adam's race; we make a new start. We begin with the Lord in His death, and this cannot be disconnected entirely from His sufferings, but we go on to His resurrection and ascension with their results. We may linger too long around the grave,

though if there is true affection, intelligence will follow and we pass on, as Mary did. Affection is directed and fed by intelligence, which is not much worth alone. If these are divorced, love is best. Mary, of Bethany, was far and away beyond the others in intelligence at first, her affection had been instructed by the risen Lord.

If we keep wholly to the sufferings, this produces sorrow of heart, not gladness, and gladness is the spring of worship. The efficacy of His work puts us into a new scene and sphere, and by faith we enter into it and our new relationships. We reach the Father through Christ as an instrumental means, in the power of the One Spirit. (Eph. ii. 18.) The first few verses of Ps. xl. may be applied here. Christ had waited patiently on Jehovah, who had inclined unto Him and heard His cry. He had brought Him up out of the horrible pit and put His feet

upon a rock and established His goings. Then He says, "He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto *our* God. Many shall see it and fear." This is the remnant, but we also enter into the joy of His victory and sing, with Him, praise unto His Father and our Father. It is impossible to reach the Father's presence and not worship Him!

Other characteristics of the assembly are here indicated, which are true in the measure in which they can be applied, right on to the end. The assembly on earth is not only a company of worshippers, but it is imbued with

### AN EVANGELICAL SPIRIT.

No company is morally of the spirit of the assembly if it shuts out the gospel. No fragment of the assembly is right without it. The risen Lord

now, therefore, charges His disciples as a picture of the assembly with this blessed service. "Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace unto you, as my Father hath sent me even so send I you." He had Himself made peace, had come and declared it to them and now He sends them on this mission of peace in the gospel to others. Happy mission ! It delights Christ's heart and gives His own to share in His delight.

Christ is the head of creation, and He holds the door open, securing thus the gospel to the whole creation which is under heaven. The assembly is viewed as imbued with an evangelical spirit, and although as such, it does not preach or teach, it is interested in gospel work, and each saint as an individual seeks to spread it. Evangelization cannot cease until the assembly is complete, and any company which neglects it is bound to die out, as in

the ways of God, it is the means of renewing the assembly continually while on earth. Moreover, an unevangelical company cannot count upon the Lord's presence, for it is contrary to His mind.

Of the ministries committed to Paul, two come prominently forward in this connection, the ministry of the gospel and the ministry of the church. He devoted his life to the assembly, and he was a prince among evangelists, recognising that the gospel was the means of the growth of that assembly. The mischief has been in divorcing these two ministries, whether on the one hand or the other; this has ever been a great object with Satan, with a view to destroying the truth of the assembly on earth.

All gift for the church dates from the descent of the Holy Spirit, fruit of the victory of an ascended

Christ, and is "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."—Eph. iv. 12. And all provision is made that we should be here for him, having the same object and motive, even as He was here for the Father. "As thou has sent me into the world even so have I also sent them into the world."—John xvii. 18. This Scripture is indeed primarily applicable to the apostles, who were specially called to the setting up of Christianity upon the earth. But inasmuch as Christianity continues after the apostles have completed their work, it descends to others to maintain it in their measure now. Gift continues from an ascended Christ for this purpose until the end, feeble it may be, but it will meet need under His hand and blessing, where there is a recognition of Himself and dependence upon Him. The gospel, therefore,

must surely be recognized as a necessity in the ways of God for the existence of the assembly on earth.

Further, verses 22 and 23 present two things distinct but connected, "When He had said this He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye (the) Holy Spirit. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." In order to understand this it must be remembered, that, as in all pictorial passages, it has a double interpretation. It is historical, and has its own teaching in this view. It is pictorial also and has another bearing as such.

Historically it may be noted that the Lord says—

"RECEIVE YE (THE) HOLY SPIRIT."

In this view Christ does in resurrection, what God did at creation, when

He breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life. The risen Christ breathes into the disciples resurrection life, the life more abundantly of John x. in a way the Jews did not dream of. It is the Spirit as life, as in the first eleven verses of Rom. viii., where God, the Holy Spirit, creates in those who are His, a new moral being, a new life and a new spirit. Further on in the same chapter, He is spoken of as a Person dwelling in those who have been the subjects of His operations, so that we have "the Spirit witnesseth with our spirit, &c."

But, pictorially, it sets forth the Holy Spirit as dwelling in the assembly; they were fitted now to receive the Holy Spirit thus. This was accomplished at Pentecost, and He became the Vicar of Christ in the assembly, the power by which the Lord's will is carried out, and all the blessings He has entered into for man,



become realities to our spirits. Surely no company, or fragment, could be said to be morally on the ground of the assembly, where the presence and operations of the Holy Spirit are not recognized. Important beyond measure is this to our souls! The Lord in the midst, and the Holy Spirit to carry out His will. This entirely sets aside all the will of man and throws us upon the Lord personally, who will guide us to all the necessary adaptation of the characteristic principles of the assembly to any special case, in any time of brokenness, where faith counts upon Himself.

But this great truth is here specially connected with administration. The assembly is

RESPONSIBLE TO KEEP A CLEAN PLACE  
FOR THE LORD.

This was beautifully carried out in

early days by the assembly. As to principle, it receives or rejects upon competent testimony. God's law is, "The testimony of two men is true." Upon such a testimony the assembly receives. It is plainly evident that the witnesses should be such as carry the confidence of the assembly. One witness, however, may be enough, if covering the demands of competency, as in the case of Saul, where the testimony of Barnabas was accepted and Saul received.

In days of brokenness this becomes, like all else, much more difficult, but the responsibility has never been lifted from those who wish to retain the *Lord's presence*. This is no warrant for ecclesiastical pretension, nor could it be allowed that it is as *the* assembly it is carried out, for this now is not to be found together anywhere, alas ! But the few who may covet, in weakness, the presence of the Lord, are

thrown by this very fact more upon the Lord Himself and the Holy Spirit. No acting in agreement together will make up for this. He may be surely counted upon to give direction in all cases, each one specifically, as to how to act for His own glory, and for the good of any who wish that glory and presence.

In effect, what is presented here, is that all that is morally of the assembly should be received with open arms; and all that is not morally of it should be kept out. In any case it is in no sense judicial, it is but administrative. Forgiveness of sins judicially is with the Lord alone! The assembly as such administers this on earth, that is, gives effect to it by receiving or rejecting such cases as present themselves; or dealing with cases that may arise from within. In order to this, much spiritual discernment is necessary and much *dependence on the LORD*. If this

was so in early days how much more so now ! Even then the responsibility was with the assembly—the whole company, not with the officials, or those who had gift only. The need of spirituality and dependence was clearly manifest, as it was easy otherwise to receive those who should not be received, or to refuse those who should ; to put away such as should not be put away, or to refuse to deal with those who should be dealt with.

Apostles were there to help in those days, we have none such now. How alarmingly increased, consequently, are these dangers to-day. The will of man may rule ; or a brothers' meeting may act for the already diminished few, which is the beginning of clerisy. Or one large meeting may dictate to a smaller, which is metropolitanism. In many other ways the evils which swamped the assembly at the first, may again do their deadly work and deprive

any fragment of the assembly of the presence of the Lord. Assumption as well as laxity will accomplish this, and where one is allowed, the other will soon be found in combination.

What is there but His presence and guidance to help in every case as it arises? Would God the beloved saints of God were more simple and sought more and more to Him as difficulties increase! Is anything too hard for the Lord? If we but recognised that the *greatest of all* the characteristics of the assembly on earth is, "THE LORD IS THERE." That the "JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH" of the earthly millennial city is anticipated spiritually in the assembly to-day, and may be known by any feeble few, how careful we should be to retain that presence on the one hand and to refer everything to Himself on the other.

How much more prayer is needed in

days of brokenness in such cases !  
Alas ! how is it diminished ! Whilst  
everything else must necessarily be less  
full than at the beginning, prayer  
should be increased. Is this the  
case ?

G.J.S.





