

“The Feasts of the Lord—

Holy Convocations.”

By H. C. A.

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II. 11, 12 ; X. 25.)

IN a meeting of Christians, one should be able to say, "Here is a company of people standing before God in all the good of His delight in the person and work of Christ!"

I am afraid that, as collected companies, we but feebly enter into the fact that God has found His infinite and eternal delight in the person and work of Christ. I am not ignoring (indeed who could ignore?) what *we* have found, but I would insist that God has found His eternal joy and rest in Christ as the Man now before Him, crowned (Heb. ii. 9), the Accomplisher of all His will, and I think that we, though only two or three and in feebleness, should do well to come together more often than we do in assembly with this fact prominently before our souls.

Such assemblies, to me, were these "holy convocations," as seen in Israel, which I want

to look at, because we have the substance of them, I believe, in Christianity. A convocation was a calling together. God's desire for His people was for them to present to Him CHRIST in that which they offered. I desire to make clear this thought, that in convoking His people now God always has Christ before Him (however little Israel was able at that day to apprehend it, for it was written for us, and the teaching contained in it applies to us). Christians should be now in all the full, intelligent apprehension of the object of God in calling them together. The coming together of the saints to "the feasts of the Lord" is, I venture to say, the one least understood by us.

There were two kinds of assemblies or gatherings together of the congregation in Israel, as there are also amongst us. In the one, God is the receiver; in the other, the people. It is only of the first of them that I desire to speak (though I must briefly refer to the other), but I speak of the one designated in these chapters, "the feasts of the Lord," and I desire to point out how these gatherings differed from the other class. In the class of assemblies of which I now speak, God was the receiver. In the other class, the people of God were the receivers. And I think *they* may pass from the one class into the other.

Individually, every saint has learnt somewhat of God's delight and satisfaction in Christ. Each has tasted that “the Lord is gracious.” But I am not speaking now of saints individually, but of gathered companies; what have they learnt?

We “come together,” and these times we call our meetings. We have then the antitype of what was, in Israel, typified when they assembled. We have Christ as substance, that is, we have now made known what was in the mind of God in the type. Whether we enjoy it, and enter into all the good of it, is another question. Christ is the Light and the Object, and the Holy Ghost is the capacity in us to appreciate both. But clearly it is revealed now for us since the Holy Ghost has come.

On special occasions then, these “holy convocations,” they left for the time their work, and their own habitations, in order to have before them God's work, and to be for the time not in association with their habitations but with His, and to be in this association in a spot and place that He had chosen ; they did not come before Him empty for Him to fill them. They left for a moment the thought of their own blessing as receivers, and they brought some one, other than themselves before God ! We read in these two chapters the full detail of that which they *brought*. It was brought in order

that God might receive from His people. “None shall appear before me empty.” Every one brought. They brought, and God (Himself the Receiver) had made known to them that which they had to bring, that which He would accept! Therefore I take it they are called the “feasts of the Lord.” They were GOD’S feast days, days of joy to Him, and not the “feasts of the Jews.” We find this latter name given to them in our Lord’s days on the earth. (See John v. 1; vi. 4; vii. 2, &c.)

If we have no such companies thus together to-day, what does God receive? and have we the full good of these “feasts of the Lord,” which have their *full* place with us now in Christianity? If *we* have the substance of all this, of which Israel only had the shadow, are we not losers when we think (as we so frequently do) only of *our own blessing*? that is, of what we either have received or are going to receive? It is so easy to drop down from “the feasts of the Lord” to seek something for *ourselves*. We may do worse than this. We may go to a meeting where there is no collective vitality, for I think they are not totally unknown in Christendom, these “feasts of the Jews”!

The feasts of the Lord to-day are holy celebrations of God’s unbounded delight in the work

and person of Christ ! God gathered His people together, the redeemed company on earth, in order that this might come before Him. It was written for us, and He gathers them now for a similar object. All the offerings on these feast days set forth Christ in some excellency either of His *person* or His *work* before God ! They are times of joy, and they are no less so (but a thousandfold more so, in all their full meaning) to-day. The people of God were the *offerers*. They were not the *offered*. This in type was Christ. But they were before God on these occasions in all the excellence of what they offered. It was a feast, for God thus to receive from them. They shared in *His* joy. "Ye shall rejoice in all *your* feasts." That which they typically offered, but which we actually offer in the power of the Spirit is *Christ* !

Have we authority to speak thus of the Old Testament types ? We have. (See 1 Cor. x. 11, &c.) God had in view a *heavenly* people in what comes before us there. The Old Testament is like a picture gallery wherein, at the time they were hung, the pictures were in a dim light, or in absolute darkness. These pictures are perfect displays of what was in the mind of Him whose work they are. They are the work of God Himself, pictures painted not in the dark but

in the light, not only of the world to come,—the millennium—but also of eternity, since *Christ* is the theme set forth in them. But until the light comes in, and not before, their meanings and their beauties are not unfolded, nor understood. These have now become manifest. Christ is the LIGHT that has come in. “To them that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, light has sprung up.” John i. makes it clear how and when the light came into this world. And why did it come? Why, that we, beloved friends, might be brought to see, and appreciate, and partake in, this grace of God. The Holy Ghost is the active POWER for effecting this in us. God has come *out*, in order that He might bring *us* into all the rest, and joy, and delight of what *He* has found in the Person and work of *Christ*!

The point on which I should like, God helping me, to exercise every reader, is this—that in “the feasts of the Lord” His people offer to Him and God *receives* at their hands! What did they offer, and what did God receive? They offered, and God received, and at their hands, *that which He had provided for them to offer*. It was no doubt even then, in type, the Person and the work of Christ, and nothing else. I trust that I should delight to go, if a long journey, to attend a “feast of the Lord.”

How often are we set rather upon *receiving* for ourselves, than upon God's receiving! May we seek then that *our* meetings, *our holy convocations* may more often be for Him henceforth *a feast of the Lord*. When we offer to God, and He accepts, it is Christ. (See 1 Pet. ii. 5.) Christ is the overflow from us. This is worship. It is Christ alone, I think, which forms the basis of "a feast of the Lord."

I would say a brief word now on the second assembly of God's people and its object, to which I have already referred. We find this in Numbers x.

Here again we have the company called together—"all the assembly" summoned; but the object for which they came together was very different. It was either to receive some distinct message from God, in view of their approach to the enemy, or it was a message from Him to encourage them to advance towards the place of God's rest—a rest which according to His purpose they should share with Him! (Compare Num. x. 2-10 with what I have just said. As to verse 4, I believe that it also has its significance for us. I think that we have its import in such passages as Acts xx. 17; James v. 14; Acts xv. 6; 1 Pet. v. 1.) It is evident, I think, from Numbers x. that on the occasions here referred to of their coming to-

gether, the object was that God's people might receive from Him. It is not, as I understand this passage, that God receives *from them*. It was to receive this information from God that the enemy was before or around them, and that he had to be met! Or it urged them to move on again, to reach the end—God's thought for them. All this exercise we find in Christianity, as well as the other, the rest. The end is, (as to which WE receive continually messages from God in our meetings) to urge the soul *now* to go forward to reach God's *rest*, that is, to reach *Christ*, and never to settle down without it. As to the enemy, we have to remember Peter's words, “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about.”

Now what meetings (or assemblies) answer to these times, that is, to times when *we* receive? Evidently our lectures do (or exhortations) when we have *come together*, and our reading meetings, and our prayer meetings, each and all are on this line. They are times when we come together to receive from God, and when we do receive from Him. But they must not be confounded, I think, with the other, “the feasts of the Lord,” where God receives from *us*. I think that the people of God often come together to *receive*, and that they sometimes pass from thence to be *givers*! and if they do

not, there is no worship, and that is what the Father is now seeking ! I think that very often we lack *definiteness*, as to the present mind of God (the Spirit) as *called together*. When this is so, this lack in our souls will often display itself in and to the company.

If God calls His people together *now*, I think it is either to minister Christ *to* them, or to receive, in the power of worship, Christ *from* them. I think that we ought to be intelligent, when we are together, *as to which of these it is*. God is seeking worshippers, and we should not always be thinking of ourselves when together, and what *we* shall get (though we do get), as we have said ; but I think some of us have found that we may even in *our* meetings, drop into a mere “feast of the Jews,” where Christ, on one occasion at least, was found to be *absent* (see John vii. 8-37), and where, instead, *thirst* unsatisfied was found (with us it is soul thirst), for how can there be satisfaction, for God or for man, without Christ ? God will not always have *our* blessing to be before us. He will have, in their season, *His* feasts. “Will a man rob God ?” If so, he will rob himself. Give God His *tithes* (the tithes were for the *Levite*, and the tenth of them for the *priests*) and the “windows of heaven ” shall open upon us (see Mal. iii. 10) and the blessing be so great that

"there shall not be room enough to receive it"! The feasts of the Lord are found, because God has found His eternal rest, satisfaction and delight in CHRIST.

Beloved brethren, is not this why God brought Israel out of Egypt, and you and me out of the world (John xv. 19), that we might hold "a feast to the Lord"? That Christ might be presented, both as to His person and work, to Him? (See Exo. x. 9.) Christ in *all* His blessed preciousness to Him? I think that if we know nothing of this, though we may not neglect "the assembling of ourselves together" to break bread, or to listen to lectures, or to assist in reading meetings, or to take our part in the prayer meetings; yet the end that God would have us reach is not reached in our souls. We have not in spirit yet been present at a "feast of the Lord," nor found *God's rest* here below, a rest which is apart from all that *we* are and all that *we* do.

So when *our meetings* have not one of the objects just mentioned, we have the other object, namely, "a feast of the Lord," before us, to which we are privileged to come. I believe *very many* of our meetings, therefore, should be feasts of the Lord, and *have this object in view*. How do we respond to the privileges thus given? These "holy convocations," when afresh from us,

as His people, *all* God's delight in THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST comes before Him, in one and another, as led of the Holy Spirit, each assisting to complete the sum.

These “feasts of the Lord” are evidently seasons of *rest*. There is rest for God, and hence rest for believers. If God is (and has ever been) the only *worker*, what we have before us, both in creation and in redemption, is the *rest* of God! In both man (as a helper) is excluded. As to these “feasts of the Lord”—these “holy celebrations”—again and again it is repeated, “Ye shall do no servile work therein.” Not only “no work” but no “*servant* work.” You are brought into God’s rest, but you have nothing to do as to securing it, and you have nothing to do but to enjoy it with Christ. Doing is over, and all is of God. God having done all can thus rest. When He rested from the work of creation it was because all was *done*, and all was God’s work, and therefore all was “very good.” Then God could rest; sin had not intruded into that rest, and man was in it. Then sin intruded, but the work of REDEMPTION has been taken up. It has been taken up to banish *sin*, and to introduce in permanence that in which God can *rest*. It is because this has been perfectly effected for God (see Heb. ix. 26), that

He can and does *rest*. And man is in it because Christ is in it as man. Christ has around Him a company. Redemption work is finished, and God is at rest as to it. In order to understand this, you must get some sense of the “sanctified company,” of whom Christ is not ashamed, His “brethren,” in the midst of whom He sings praises. Leviticus xxiii. begins with the sabbath, the fact that God is at rest as to redemption, for it is made known to a redeemed people. Moses sang in the midst of that earthly company on the banks of the Red Sea, and similarly, though now in all the good of a perfectly once-accomplished and never-to-fail work, Christ sings praises in the midst of the church! He sings in the hearts of His people, for the “song” comes now from *human* lips! The result of all this is, we have “the feasts of the Lord.”

May we all know more about “holy convocations”—these “feasts of the Lord”! The sum of them all is, God is resting in Christ and in His work. Presently God will display this. But He does not *wait* for display. He is at rest *now*. The gospel always had the object of bringing those who believed it into God’s rest. (Heb. iv. 1-6.) In Israel all this failed. The rest of God is CHRIST, and for us He is the Holiest. We enter morally into this now. (Heb.

x. 19.) Nothing can intrude there to mar God's rest.

I have no wish to stumble any, but for me even the Lord's supper is not *per se* (in itself) a “feast of the Lord.” It may lead on to it, I doubt not (as any other “coming together” of the saints may, of which we have spoken, and to me this end establishes their value). But we may come to the Lord's supper, and go away from it, and have only *received*. We may only have received the deeper assurance in our souls of *our own blessing*, and how in truth the whole question of *our sin* has been met for God! There is nothing for God if it is only what we have received, but all for self, and I could not call that an offering to God, “a feast of the Lord.”

I desire then, in bringing these thoughts before you, that our meetings may more often take the character of “feasts of the Lord.” If there is the apprehension of our privileges this must be so, and as Christ is before us we must see how blessedly He on such occasions gratifies the heart of God and fills the whole scene. No amount of effort could give us “a feast of the Lord,” yet I see that God is resting in Christ, and desires to bring *us* now into all that joy and rest. I am not advocating the establishment of what are called “open meetings,” or “worship

meetings," I am not claiming better things for *us* (I think we could have no better), but better things for *God*, and I think I would fain go a long way to make one of any company which is gathered in faith together, to hold "a feast unto the Lord . . . a holy convocation."

H. C. A.

