

“Where?” — A Word Through Scripture

Discipleship, Service, and the Unity of the Spirit

Scripture Readings

“Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” — Matthew 2:2

“Where dwellest thou? ... Come and see.” — John 1:38–39

“Where I am, there shall also my servant be.” — John 12:26

“Where wilt thou that we prepare? ... Behold, when ye enter into the city...” — Luke 22:9–10

“Where I am, there ye may be also.” — John 14:3

“There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” — Ephesians 4:4–6

The Wise Men: Asking “Where?” and Being Governed by the Word

The wise men who came from the East had been acquainted, in some measure, with the word of God. They knew the prophecy that a star should arise out of Jacob. They took a long journey on the strength of it. But we should be careful not to confuse their arrival with that of the shepherds — a confusion that Christendom has long perpetuated in its seasonal celebrations, blending the two into one pagan-tinged scene quite contrary to Scripture. The shepherds came to where the babe lay in a manger. The wise men, by contrast, came to the house

where the young child was — perhaps six months or more later.

When the star ceased to guide them, they did not depend on it. They turned to the word of God. And the word of God directed them even through those who did not believe it — the scribes in Jerusalem who could quote Micah 5:2 without an ounce of faith. That is what the word of God does: it governs. Caesar's decree, issued purely in self-interest to count his empire, brought Mary and Joseph down to Bethlehem at exactly the right moment to fulfill what the prophet had written. God orders all circumstances, even the arrangements of godless kings, to accomplish His purposes.

The star reappeared and brought them to the feet of the King of Israel. The question they asked — “Where is he?” — was not a casual question. It was the purpose and goal of their entire journey. We do well to remember the title of a little tract: “My Lord has not told me to do it.” The seasonal celebrations of the world at year's end have nothing to do with the birth of our Lord Jesus. What the Lord has commanded us to remember is His death — and that is what we do when we gather on the first day of the week around the bread and the cup.

“Where Dweldest Thou?” — Discipleship: John 1

Thirty years after the birth at Bethlehem, John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples when he saw the Lord walking by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The two disciples heard him and followed Jesus. The Lord turned and said to them, “What seek ye?” They answered: “Rabbi, where dwellest thou?” And He said: “Come and see.” They came, and abode with Him that day.

There is discipleship. Not every Christian is a disciple — that is, one who is following the Lord and being taught by Him. The very first lesson He gives these two is: the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. Here was the creator of all things, the Lord of glory, and He took up His dwelling in the place of rejection. They asked where He dwelt, and the answer was: come and see — come and

share it with Me.

When we become children of God, discipleship is the next step. Matthew 28 sets it out: making disciples of all nations, baptising them, and teaching them to observe all that the Lord has commanded. But discipleship means spending time with the Lord, learning from Him by example, before being sent out. Moody made the mistake of putting new converts straight to work. There is the picture of a young man who saw a vision in the sky and read it as “PC — preach Christ,” went out, preached, and nothing happened. He went back to his corn-picking in the fields, saw the vision again, and this time read it rightly: “pick corn.” Wait on the Lord. Be with Him first, and then be sent by Him.

There is also wisdom in the assembly having its young and old together. A brother who worked with horses said that when breaking in a team, you always pair an old horse with a young one. The young one has the energy; the old one has the experience. Left alone, the young one would run away with the traces. Together, they work. That is God’s pattern for the assembly: not separate meetings for the young and the old, but all together, the older ones putting the truth at a level where the younger ones can feed from it.

“Where I Am” — Service: John 12

In John 12, the Lord said: “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” And then: “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”

This is not discipleship now — it is service. And the question for service is the same: where? Where I am. Service is not an independent, self-programmed activity. It is at His bidding, and it is identified with the One who calls us to it. The disciples were with the Lord, then sent out by the Lord, to where He wanted them to go. There are many of the Lord’s people who are content to serve where

God will bless them, and God does bless them. But there is an order: where I am, there shall my servant be. Identification with the rejected One first; service flowing from that.

“Where Wilt Thou?” — The Upper Room: Luke 22

When the time came for the Passover, Peter and John did not go to the Lord with a plan ready-made and ask for His approval. They said, “Where wilt thou that we prepare?” That is the right question. It expresses dependence. And the Lord taught them further — He gave them a limited direction: go into the city. He did not tell them everything at once. He gave them enough truth to exercise them, and then they were to ask.

In the city, they would meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. That was a notable sign, for carrying water on the head was women’s work. It was not men who did this. This man was therefore a special mark, appointed by the Lord. And he points to the Holy Spirit — for the Lord said of the Spirit that He would not speak from Himself, but would speak whatever He heard. The Holy Spirit has taken the place of subjection in this dispensation, just as this man was doing woman’s work. Sovereign though He is — equal with the Father and the Son — He has taken the place of subjection to direct the Lord’s people where they need to go. The water in the pitcher is the word of God; the man is the vessel the Spirit uses. If we are filled with the word, we too can be used to direct others.

They were led to a large upper room, already furnished, already ready. The Lord had seen to it. There was nothing for them to do but prepare the supper. And the Lord said to them with desire: “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” That is the heart of David crying, “O that one would give me a drink from the well of Bethlehem.” The Lord longed to eat that supper with His own. And He said, from now on remember Me in My death — this loaf, this cup, until I come.

“Where I Am” — Our Home: John 14

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” The word “where” runs through all these scriptures, each time pressing us toward the same point: the Lord Himself. The wise men went to where He was. The disciples asked where He dwelt and abode with Him. The servant goes where He is. The disciples ask where He will eat, and He already has it prepared. And now: where I am, there you may be also.

The elder statesman Holland, as he grew old, prayed: “Lord, if You don’t soon come to me, I am soon coming to You.” That is the prospect for us. Our home is where He is. And when we get there, it will not be the sight of our relatives or our earthly connections that engages us first — it will be Christ. We will retain our identity — that is how we were created — but the earthly relationships are for this world. There, we shall be as the angels. We will see Christ in each other; it will be His reflection in our brothers and sisters that we look for, not the physical bonds of father, mother, husband, wife. And there will be no disappointment, because He has said it.

The Target and the Bullseye: Ephesians 4

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” The word “worthy” is like the dart that hits the bullseye. To walk worthy means that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ — and the glory of that name — is connected with our conduct in this world. And the prerequisites that the apostle sets out are the practice without which no such walk is possible.

“With all lowliness.” Not a little lowliness — all. That is strong language. Then meekness, which has to do with my own reputation and self — being ready to let that go for the Lord’s sake. Then longsuffering — lowliness about my

circumstances — for it is in our circumstances that most of our sufferings come from. Not to change our circumstances, but to endure through them for Christ's sake. That is where the power of God is displayed in the saints. And finally, forbearing one another in love — getting down that low and finding that others are already down there, and having to get along with them too. We all offend. The elbow of a brother clips you as he passes, and it hurts. But I can say, "I thank God that brother was so close to me," because that is what fellowship is. We give up our rights, our pretensions that we are something, and in the presence of the Lord we are each nothing — and then we can get to work.

"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This is not the unity of spirits — the scratching of each other's backs in mutual comfort. That is man's unity. The unity of the Spirit is the unity of God the Holy Spirit, which honours the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in verses 4, 5, and 6 it is set out like a target with concentric circles.

At the centre — the bullseye — is the reality: one body, one Spirit, one hope. This is real. Every true believer on the Lord Jesus is a member of that one body, indwelt by that one Spirit, and waiting for that one hope, which is the Lord Himself coming to take His own to be with Him. You cannot enter that centre circle by choosing to, or by inheritance. You must be born again.

Around that is the circle of profession: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Anyone can say they are a Christian. Anyone can profess the faith. The apostle supposes that every true believer does profess these things — but there are false professors too, and this outer ring takes account of them.

And around the whole is the widest circle of all: one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all. He is above the true believer, above the false professor, above the atheist, above the agnostic, above every human being. No one can place themselves somewhere where God is not to be reckoned with. Nietzsche declared that God was dead; God had the last word, because now

we all know that Nietzsche is dead. And that last phrase — “in you all” in Darby’s rendering, or in us all — points back to the bullseye, to the centre, to the reality of the indwelling Spirit in every true believer.

Our walk as believers is connected with our calling. Where we walk, what we do with our lives — these things are connected with these verses. Of all the Lord’s desires for His people, His prayer that they all may be one is the most difficult to answer to in practice. Christendom is in dismal ruin on this question. But there is a bullseye. There is a real, spiritual unity that God has made — the unity of the body of Christ, the Head in heaven, the members on earth, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, waiting with the hope of the calling for the Lord to come from heaven.

“Where I am, there shall also my servant be.” — John 12:26