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Living in the Interim



*Following and Serving the Lord Jesus
in the Time of His Rejection*

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INTRODUCTION

What do we mean by the expression 'living in the interim'¹? It intimates that we, as Christians, live in the time between Christ's first coming to this earth, as a humble Man, and His coming again in might and majesty². We live as strangers and pilgrims, following the rejected and crucified Lord, all the while waiting for His glorious return. The 'interim' is therefore the period of time between Pentecost and Parousia; between the coming of the Holy Spirit to gather the Church into one body and the coming of the Lord *for* the Church, followed by His appearing *with* all the saints.

In the gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus presents Himself to the nation of Israel as the promised King. Sadly, His own people rejected Him, which becomes clear through the course of the gospel. In chapters 11 and 12 the great turning point occurs, and the Lord pronounces woes upon the Galilean cities that refuse to repent in response to His preaching. The Lord would be arrested and put to death just like John the Baptist, the herald of the King.

¹ In this booklet the Interim stands for the era between Christ's first and His second coming. There are more things that are special for this dispensation, such as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer, the mystery of Christ and the Church, the truth of the rapture of the saints etc. In our passage in Matthew 11 and 12 the Lord does not touch upon these things, because we are still before the cross and the descent of the Spirit.

² It may be useful for some readers to clarify: there will be no Christians on earth during the time between the rapture and the Lord's appearing in might and power, i.e. during the tribulation period (there will be saints in the tribulation period, but not Christians).

The Kingdom of heaven would take on a new and hidden form during the time that the Lord Himself was absent, 'hidden' in the heavens (cf. Matt. 13).

We find the expression 'at that time' *twice* in these chapters (Matt. 11:25; 12:1). Let us consider this short passage (Matt. 11:25 - 12:8), where the Lord connects this with some important instructions regarding:

- (a) Life during the interim, between Christ's two advents, while He is still rejected.
- (b) Our present blessings flowing from the knowledge of the Father and the Son, as revealed by the Holy Spirit.
- (c) The character of our service and our discipleship as followers of an absent and glorified Christ.
- (d) The great principles of the new dispensation.

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1. I THANK YOU, FATHER

'At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.'

Matthew 11:25-26

1.1. Giving thanks to the Father

The Lord Jesus had come to His own people as the promised King, but (as John records) His own received Him not. Therefore, the King could not set up His Kingdom in its public form at that time. From then on He was the *Sower*, sowing the Word of God in the field of the world (cf. Matt. 13). Not until the end time, at Christ's return, will the Kingdom be established in power and majesty. Israel will be the centre of the coming Kingdom of peace, where the Son of Man will sit upon the throne of His glory (Matt. 25:31).

However, here in Matthew 11, when Jesus addressed the Father with thanksgiving, that coming glory was still a long way off. In the preceding verses, He had pronounced woes upon the Galilean cities where the majority of His miracles had been performed: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. These cities had not repented even though they had witnessed the power of the Kingdom of heaven.

There is no doubt that the Lord was disappointed about the lack of understanding of His own people, the fact that He was not

recognized as their promised Messiah. Nevertheless, there was nothing that could disturb His inner peace. He laid it all in the hands of the Father, and could discern His wisdom. God's plan included the fact that the leaders of the nation, the 'wise and prudent', had no eye for Christ's glory and would deliver Him up to be crucified. This pathway would indeed bring salvation to *the nations* as well. As the Son of the living God, Christ would begin to build His Church (Matt. 16:16-18), and it would consist of believers out of Israel as well as out of the Gentiles. This secret would be revealed to 'children'. Only believers, people that become as little children, can be led to the revelation of the Father through the Son. Together they form the new family of redeemed children of men, Gods household, the Church of the living God.

Jesus even began with a word of praise: 'I thank You, Father'. That is a lesson for us when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances. Perhaps you sometimes ask yourself: What is the purpose of my life and work? Is there anyone that really understands and appreciates me? Yes, if you can call God your *Father* through faith in the finished work of Christ, you may also know that there is One who completely understands you. Then you may also raise your voice in praise: 'I thank You, Father' (Matt. 11:25).

1.2. Lord of heaven and earth

Our heavenly Father knows what is good for us better than we do. Isn't He the Lord of heaven and earth? Doesn't He direct all things? Doesn't He have the whole world in His hands? Do not His eyes scan to and fro throughout the whole earth? This description of the Father as *the Lord of heaven and*

First we would like to consider the Lord's prayer 'at that time', as we find it at the end of Matthew 11. It was a remarkable giving of thanks that Jesus expressed in that crucial time.

earth reminds us of Abram's meeting with Melchizedek, which is mentioned in the first book of the Bible: an event of deep prophetic significance. At that time, God revealed Himself as the Creator (or: the Possessor) of heaven and earth. Melchizedek the priest came out to meet Abram with the words: 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth' (Gen. 14:18-20). God, who possesses heaven and earth, is the Most High. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. In the millennium, this will be visible to all.

However, to us who are the children of God, He is now in the first place our *Father*. This is how we may cry out to Him, because the Son has come to earth to declare Him and make Him known as Father. By faith, we may bless His name, and very *personally* we may echo the words of Christ: 'I thank You, Father'. But we may also bless the Father *collectively*, in the Assembly of the redeemed. However, in some situations we must also reverently say, 'Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight' (Matt. 11:26). That is not an objection, nor is it a forced resignation, but a conscious *assent* to His holy will. May we also lay everything that befalls us, including all our disappointments, in the Father's hands. This is what Christ wants to teach us, because He allows His disciples to share in the knowledge of the Father. The Son loves to reveal the Father to us (Matt. 11:27).

There is only one condition that the Lord makes: we must become disciples, or followers of Him. We must come to Him and learn from Him. This is further illustrated in the figure of *bearing a yoke*. In effect, it means that we acknowledge Him as our great Leader and Teacher and walk the way together with Him. He alone is the Way to the Father. To walk the way with Him, under the yoke that He places upon us: *that* gives true rest. He is not a hard Master, because His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

1.3. For so it seemed good in Your sight

Christ was the Beloved of the Father, the One in whom He was well pleased. He was that as the eternal Son, but also as a Man here on earth. God found His delight in Him even before the foundation of the world (Prov. 8:30), but also *after* He became Man and had taken on the form of a Bondservant. In the gospel of Matthew we find a twofold witness of God the Father, that the Son was the beloved One as a Man, in whom He was well pleased. Both at the opening of Christ's public ministry here on earth, and near the end, a voice from heaven declared: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). In both of these situations, *He was distinguished from other men* (i.e., all others that John baptized, and men of God such as Moses and Elijah). That was necessary to show that Christ was absolutely *unique*. In addition to this, we find the witness of Isaiah in this gospel, regarding the Servant of the Lord. The Lord Jesus was the chosen Servant, the Beloved in whom the LORD was well pleased (Isa. 42:1; Matt. 12:18). While the nation of Israel had failed to serve God, Christ came as the perfect Servant to fulfil God's good pleasure (Ps. 40:8 JND).

It is noteworthy that we find a similar expression in Matthew 11:26 (cf. the Darby translation: 'For thus it has been well-pleasing in Thy sight'), especially since this passage speaks about *the consequences of the rejection of the Messiah*. God not only knew beforehand that His Servant would suffer and be rejected by Israel and the nations, but in that way of sore reproach, God's good pleasure would be fulfilled at the same time. The Servant of Jehovah, who had spent Himself in vain to re-gather Israel and bring Jacob back to Himself, would be given as *a light to the nations* (Isa. 49:4-6). God's salvation would extend to the ends of the earth. God is well pleased to offer His salvation to all people, that is to say, to all who labour and are heavy laden and therefore seek refuge with Christ. The rejected Messiah thus became the object and centre of attraction to all that He would gather together in one. The first

part of Matthew 11 clearly shows that the Lord Jesus – like John the Baptist – was rejected by the nation of Israel. Therefore, He had to pronounce judgment over the cities where He had laboured without fruit. However, as a proof of the perfect manhood of the Lord, we find not even a hint of protest concerning the path of rejection and humiliation that He had to go. On the contrary, He submitted Himself entirely to His Father's will and in these difficult and disappointing circumstances could even praise Him (Matt. 11:25)!

The Lord had come to His own (i.e., the nation of Israel), but He inevitably exposed that His own would not receive Him (John 1:11). He accepted even this as the will of the Father and willingly took the path of suffering so that the salvation of God could reach *all peoples and nations*. It was 'at that time', namely the time in which He had pronounced 'woes' over the cities that had not repented, that He *thanked* the Father for hiding these things from the wise and prudent and revealing them to a rather insignificant remnant of the people (Matt. 11:25; 16:17). Those who had received Him are here described as 'little children', that knew the Father, and had an open ear for the things that He wanted to reveal. This portrayal illustrates firstly that they had *the faith of a child* and were born again, and secondly it speaks of their own position of insignificance and contempt in contrast with the mighty leaders of the nation.

The Lord therefore accepted that Israel rejected Him as the Messiah and that, as a consequence, the promised Kingdom was postponed. He did not take this as the work of human hands, but He received it as from His Father's hands: 'Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight' (Matt. 11:26). God's plans would be fulfilled by way of the cross and the resurrection. This is the way in which His purposes would be realized: the Church would be formed from believers both out of Israel and the nations. So the Church of the living God is being built, while it is yet the time of grace, on Christ the Rock, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16-18; 1 Tim. 3:15). The establishment of the Kingdom is postponed for the time being

and it has taken on a hidden form in the time of the King's absence, which is described more fully in Matthew 13. We do not establish the Kingdom by force, for it has a *spiritual* nature and we as Christians fight with *spiritual* weapons (cf. Rom. 14:17; 2 Cor. 10:4). But in a future day, when the Church is complete and has been brought to glory, the Kingdom will come in power and glory. Then the people of Israel will repent and bow to the anointed King who comes in the name of the LORD (Matt. 23:39). God's plans cannot fail and the Lord Jesus will eventually receive the honour that He deserves, also from His earthly people Israel.

2. THE SON REVEALS THE FATHER'S NAME

'All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.'

Matthew 11:27

2.1. All things have been delivered to Me

The Lord added still more to His thanksgiving, namely that *all things were delivered to Him* by the Father – though things seemed to be very different. Through the people's rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, God purposed to give Him even *greater* glory. This thought is embedded in the words of the Lord: '*All things have been delivered to Me by My Father*' (Matt. 11:27). Christ is temporarily rejected as the King of Zion, but He is glorified as the Son of Man at God's right hand and that means that *all things* are put under His feet. See the places where Psalm 8:6 is quoted in the New Testament (1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22-23 and Heb. 2:7-9).

In this second chapter we see the great consequences of the Lord's rejection as the promised King. The Son now reveals the Father to all that come to Him by faith.

In the Gospel of John, the *love* of the Father for the Son is the motive displayed to make the Son the Centre of all things: 'The Father loves the Son, and has

given all things into His hand' (John 3:35). The passage in Matthew agrees with this, because there we read about the Father's *good pleasure*, of which the Son is the Object. Here we sense something about the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son: '(...) and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son' (Matt. 11:27). Thankfully the verse does not end with these lofty words, but it continues: '(...) and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him'. Admittedly, Christ was rejected as the Messiah that came to His people, but now He has gathered together a circle of followers, of 'brethren', children of the Father.

Let us praise the Lord that through His work we have now learned the *Father's name*, and may worship the Father in spirit and in truth! Christ Himself raises the song of praise in the midst of the Church, and leads the song of thanksgiving and worship to the Father (Heb. 2:12). He had already declared the Father's name to His disciples on earth (John 17:6, 26), but after His resurrection He led them into the reality of enjoying the new relationship (John 20:17). He is the Firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). He is the Head of a new generation, the family of God's children.

2.2. The knowledge of the Father and the Son

So we see that Matthew 11 also shows us the Son's ministry in the time of His rejection by His earthly people. The Messianic era is postponed, the time of refreshing and restoration of all things will not dawn until Christ returns (Acts 3:19-21). But in the meantime, God has prepared a place for the rejected King at His own right hand in heaven, and His followers are a *heavenly* people, being joined to the Lord in heaven through the uniting bond of the Holy Spirit. That is why the Lord says that from henceforth things would bear on the revelation of the Father through the Son, on fellowship with the Father and the Son, on true rest for the heart and *not* on Messianic rule.

Because the Son has revealed the Father to weary souls – sinners that come to Him confessing their guilt – we can have true fellowship with God. Our fellowship is with the Father and the Son and it is based on the forgiveness of sins and the possession of eternal life, which is our portion in the Son. This is what gives us fullness of joy (1 John 1:1-4).

In the Old Testament, God dwelt in darkness, in the secret place of the sanctuary. He dwelt behind the veil, and no one could approach Him, with the exception of Moses and Aaron the high priest, who could enter merely once a year and even then, only on the great Day of Atonement. But by virtue of the suffering and death of Christ, there is now free access to God in the Holiest for everyone who believes. The veil is rent, the heavens are opened (Heb. 10:19-22). We know God as our Father in Christ, and He has predestined us to sonship for Himself (Eph. 1:5). We are placed before Him as holy and without blame in Christ. We rejoice in God's ways, in His counsels of eternal love and grace. We have fellowship with the Father and we know His loving heart. And we have fellowship with the Son and share in the good pleasure that the Father has found in His Beloved. The Father has given us to the Son, and we are inseparably joined to Him.

In the Old Testament, God was known as the one true God. But in the New Testament the living God reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has made Himself known in His essential being. The Son already revealed the Father during His life on earth, and He continues to set forth this revelation from heaven through the work of the Holy Spirit. He was not only the King of Israel, but also *the Son of the Father*. We can only get to know the Father through Him. He is the Way, and 'no one comes to the Father except through Me' (John 14:6). This is how we find rest for our souls: through Christ we rest in the Father's love. God has become our *Father* in and through the Son, and now we are God's dear children, the many sons that will be brought to glory. We were bowed down under the yoke of our sins, which weighed us down even more through the law,

which condemned and cursed us on account of our transgressions. But Christ has redeemed us and delivered us from the curse of the law. As His followers, we need only to take on His *easy* yoke and *light* burden. We have an open heaven in view, since He is gone before us to prepare a place for us in His Father's house.

3. WE FOLLOW A REJECTED LORD

'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.'

Matthew 11:28-30

3.1. Coming to Christ

The closing verses of Matthew 11 present a beautiful balance between divine election and the offer of free grace. First we see election in the will of the Son: '(...) the one to whom the Son *wills* to reveal Him, that is, the *Father* (cf. chapter 2 of this booklet). However, the loving invitation follows for souls weary of their sin: '*Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*' (Matt. 11:27-28). Christ's call reaches all those who are weary and heavy laden, all those who are seeking rest for their conscience. We are invited to come with the burdens of our sins and guilt, of our hardships and worries and lay it all at the feet of Jesus who bore our sins on

In this third chapter we see another aspect of living in the interim between Christ's first and His second coming: we follow a rejected King and share in His sufferings.

Calvary's cross. He has made *peace* through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20).

When we thus find *peace* and *rest* in Him, we become His disciples. We learn from Him. We belong to Him, the rejected King; we walk with Him and take His yoke upon us. The figure of bearing a yoke is borrowed from farming. The Israelite was not permitted to yoke dissimilar animals together (Deut. 22:10; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14). In Matthew 11, the Lord uses the figure to teach us that the disciple must walk in step with the Master and become like Him. This is how we go with Him, under the same yoke and learning from Him. We share in His reproach. He is gentle and lowly in heart, and He is waiting for the Father's appointed time, when He shall receive the Kingdom, which is rightly His. We are waiting with Him; we do not demand our 'rights', but bear the yoke that the Master has laid upon us. In the most difficult circumstances, we find rest for our souls and we go on our way rejoicing with His peace in our hearts, because His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

3.2. David became their captain

In connection with this, I would like to point out several parallels with the life and times of king David (see 1 Sam. 22:1-2). David did not receive his throne until a long time after Samuel anointed him as king. In this, he is a type of Christ, who has received the *rights* to the throne but the *kingship* is not yet exercised in a visible way yet. Christ is still the rejected One. The world has cast Him out and lifted Him up on the cross. His own nation refused to accept Him. The Jews did not want Him to reign over them. In the meantime, Christ is exalted to God's right hand in heaven, and placed above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named (Eph. 1:20-22). He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords: this is His rightful place, but the kingly power connected with it will not be shown until His second coming (Rev. 19:11-16).

When David had to flee because the time of his reign had not dawned yet, he became the centre and captain of a number of faithful followers. Likewise Christ, though still the rejected One, has disciples that are closely joined to Him. He is the Centre of all those that He has chosen and drawn to Himself (John 12:32). We find this foreshadowed in the life of David in First Samuel 22. His brothers came to him at the cave of Adullam, but also everyone who was distressed, everyone who was in debt and everyone who was discontented. In the first category, we see a figure of those who know the Lord already, who know that He calls them His 'brethren' because of His finished work of redemption (cf. Ps. 22:22; John 20:17). The second group was composed of those who were driven to David as a result of their need. Here we can see all those who hear the call of the Saviour and respond to the loving invitation: '*Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*' (Matt. 11:28).

It is noteworthy that Christ is shown to be the Centre of all those who seek refuge with Him in the gospel of Matthew, the very same one that portrays Him as the rejected King. He still does have a number of followers and to them He reveals the *Father's name*. He is not occupied with the assertion of His kingly rights, but He gathers a people out of Israel and out of the nations so that He can reveal to them the Father's name: 'No one knows the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him' (Matt. 11:27; cf. John 17:6, 26). This is the work of His grace, which is now being accomplished by the Holy Spirit whom He has sent to the earth. The Spirit shows us the glory of the Father and the Son, and He unites us as God's children around Christ the Lord. We see in Matthew 18:20 that the Lord is the Centre of His followers who are gathered to His name. We form a people separate from the world, a heavenly company, a family of priests. We rest in God's presence and collectively we bow down in worship before God and the Lamb.

Just as David was not only the *centre* of his followers, but also their *captain*, so Christ is not merely the *Centre* but also the

Leader of all those who belong to Him (Heb. 12:2 JND). From our dwelling place in His presence, we proceed to go out for His name. Being with Him is the preparation we need for our mission as His sent ones in the world. Concerning the disciples, it is written that Christ called them to (1) be with Him, and (2) that He might send them out to preach (Mark 3:14). David became the captain, the commander of all that took refuge with him. Likewise, Christ is not only the Saviour, but also the *Lord* and *Master* of all that come to Him. He has authority over us and He wants to lead us in the battles we must fight for His name. The disciples, who had been with the Lord, became courageous heroes and brave witnesses of Him. Their enemies had to admit that 'they had been with Jesus' (Acts 4:13). Living in the presence of the Lord had impressed a clear stamp on them and prepared them for the spiritual battles that they had to carry on. The followers of David learned from *him* and so they were transformed from disheartened people into courageous *heroes*. This is what happens to all who take refuge with Christ in their cares and difficulties: as His learners we are changed into His image and in our battles we go from strength to strength. We form His 'army' down here, sent forth by the glorified Lord, who has overcome the evil one and defeated him with his own sword. We fight our *spiritual* battles in His strength and gain the victory to the honour of Him who has slain His ten thousands. Yes, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37).

We read about David's heroes elsewhere that they came to him day by day to help him, until it was a great army, like the army of God (1 Chr. 12:22). They were valiant as lions, and swift as gazelles on the mountains. They submitted to David's authority and helped him to obtain his kingdom (1 Chr. 11:10). They were the first ones to put themselves under David's authority, even though his reign over Israel had not yet been established. They were also instrumental in causing his authority to be recognized amongst God's people and the surrounding nations. Applying this to ourselves, we belong to the number of Christ's heroes

when we submit to the authority that belongs to Him, even now, in the time of His rejection, and contend for the honour of His name. He wants to guide us as our Lord, through His Word and the Spirit of God, although the time of His public reign has not yet come. Do we follow our heavenly Lord?

4. HAVE YOU NOT READ WHAT DAVID DID?

'At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" Then He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"

Matthew 12:1-4

4.1. The liberty by which Christ has made us free

Is that allowed: plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath? The

In this fourth chapter we see the privileges that we enjoy as believers because we have been joined to a rejected Lord, who has taken His place at God's right hand in heaven. David also enjoyed special privileges in the time of his rejection. That is the example we would like to consider now. Have you not read what David did?

Pharisees wanted to forbid the Lord Jesus' disciples to eat standing grain from the fields, but He defended their actions by pointing to an event from David's life. In the first place, this shows us how highly the Lord regarded

the Old Testament scriptures. He allowed God's Word to lead Him in all things. This is what He lived by and this is the standard that he held others to as well. Christ relied on the scriptures, as He did on other occasions: 'Have you not read (...)?' In other words: the Pharisees could have known better if they had read their Bibles more carefully! Paul reproaches the Galatians, who were also legally minded, in a similar way: 'You who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?' (Gal. 4:21). They could have avoided their problem if they had paid more attention to the law and taken the lessons of the Scriptures to heart. As Christ's disciples, we can live in the liberty by which He has made us free.

Secondly, it is important to notice that the Lord compared Himself to His forefather, king David. He drew a parallel between David and his men on the one hand, and Himself with His followers on the other hand. This is not a coincidence, since in the previous chapter He was portrayed as the rejected Messiah (see Matt. 11:16-25). David had likewise followed a pathway of reproach and suffering, when he fled from Saul and sought refuge in the sanctuary at Nob (cf. Matt. 12:3-4 with 1 Sam. 21). Even though David was the Lord's anointed, his way to the throne was long and wearying. In his pathway of suffering he is a striking type of the suffering Servant of the LORD, and in his followers we see an example of Christ's disciples that join Him in His sufferings.

4.2. The food of the sanctuary

David took care of his men, and so Christ takes care of those who belong to Him. David entered the house of God, and ate the showbread there, as well as those who were with him. That was the liberty wherein they stood; and it is a beautiful illustration of *christian liberty*. The Lord gives us a place in the heavenly sanctuary during the time of His rejection; and there

we possess the priestly portion and position (cf. Heb. 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6).

What David and his men did, was actually reserved for the priests. Every Sabbath fresh showbread was placed on the table in the tabernacle and the priests ate the bread, that had stood in the sanctuary for the week, in a holy place (Lev. 24:5-9). It was *priestly* food, the food of the *holy place*. These loaves, covered with pure frankincense, represented the twelve tribes of Israel. When God saw these loaves, He thought of His people and could look upon them in favour. Likewise, God now looks upon His children with delight, because in Christ they are holy and without blame before Him, accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:3-6). Just as the table bore the showbread in the holy place, so Christ bears us up as a heavenly people in God's sight. In Him we are holy, and kept safely as beloved children of God. Wonderful truth! As a holy priesthood, we should feed on the great truth of what we are in Christ before God, in the Son of Man who was rejected on earth but exalted by God to His right hand in heaven.

This is the example that Christ used to defend the actions of His disciples. They were free to eat the heads of grain on the Sabbath, just as the men that accompanied David had the liberty – very likely also on a Sabbath – to eat the consecrated food of the holy place. However, there is a difference: the heads of grain are not a complete loaf, although they do form the basis of it. The heads of grain remind us of the *life* that is brought forth out of the death of Christ, the grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying (John 12:24-25). He is the Firstborn from among the dead, and we are raised to life *with Him*. His life is true food for our souls and we enjoy the liberty – that the law of Moses did not and could not give – to feed ourselves spiritually with this new life in Christ, resurrection life.

4.3. The sword of the sanctuary



David with the head of Goliath

By: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573-1610).

Art historic museum Vienna.

Not only did David take the *food*, but also the *weapon* that was found in the holy place: the sword of the Philistine Goliath (1 Sam. 21:9). Although the Lord Jesus does not allude to it any further in Matthew 12, I think we can learn another lesson from the rest of David's stay in Nob. After all, it is not only food that sustains the new life, but we also need a weapon to engage with the enemy in battle. It is the weapon of the holy place, a weapon without equal! It is something that completely answers to God's requirements of righteousness and holiness. What does this weapon represent to us? It was David's trophy, the sword that he deprived Goliath of, having slain him with it (1 Sam. 17:51, 54). It had been the Philistine's weapon, but now it belonged to David.

In this way Christ has defeated Satan, who *had* the power of death. Death and the grave were the weapons of His mighty adversary (Heb. 2:14). How did our Lord deliver the deathblow to him? He has done it by entering into death Himself, thus defeating the devil with his own armaments. From now on, the power over death is in the hands of the risen Lord, who holds the keys of Hades and of Death (Rev. 1:18). However, in the spiritual application, Christ allows us to share in the results of His victory and also gives us this weapon in hand (just as David's men were safe behind the sword that he wielded). We

always carry about in the body the *dying* of the Lord Jesus, that the *life* of Jesus also may be manifest in our body (2 Cor. 4:10). Since we have died with Christ, our members which are on the earth – where the power of the enemy is still active – must be put to death (Col. 3:5). On the one hand therefore, we need *food* to sustain the new life, but on the other hand a mighty *weapon* to put to death the works of the flesh. It is good to know that the true David provides for both of these important needs!

5. THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW DISPENSATION

'Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'

Matthew 12:5-8

5.1. A new priesthood

The first eight verses of Matthew 12 contain five principles or rules of conduct for us as Christians in this dispensation, where the Lord is *rejected* by the people of Israel – just as His forerunner John the Baptist was rejected earlier (see the connection with Matthew 11). Let us consider the ensuing principles, the first one having been discussed previously in chapter 4 of this booklet. To review it briefly: Jesus and His followers

To complete our study, we see in this last chapter the rich blessings that we possess as Christians, but also the great responsibilities that go along with living in the interim – the time between Christ's coming in humiliation and His second coming. It's all about the five principles of the new dispensation

serve as *priests* in the heavenly sanctuary during the time of His rejection, just as David and his men entered God's house and ate the showbread (1 Sam. 21:1-9; Matt. 12:3-4). In Matthew 12 we read about the eating of *heads of grain*, which are a type of the Lord in His resurrection from among the dead (John 12:24; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

The believers that belong to the Church have a *heavenly* calling. We have boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. We also have a High Priest over the house of God. The Holiest is our 'refuge' and in God's presence we are to feed on Christ, the risen and glorified Lord. He is the food of the sanctuary. The showbread also speaks of the heavenly position of the Church. The twelve loaves symbolize God's people, accepted in Christ and borne by Him in God's presence.

5.2. A new perspective: God's rest

In Matthew 12:5 we find the Lord touching on a theme that we sometimes refer to as 'the priesthood of all believers'. Again, He compares the disciples with priests, who would serve in the sanctuary even on the Sabbath. They would carry out their duties and defile the Sabbath, but be blameless in spite of it. After all, it was God's will that extra sacrifices be offered on the Sabbath, over and above the regular burnt offerings (Num. 28:9-10). Even though the priests in the temple worked on the Sabbath, they could calmly fulfil their task. In the same way the disciples of the Lord were *guiltless* when they plucked and ate heads of grain on the Sabbath, as long as they did not transgress *His* commandments.

This is an indication that the Sabbath laws do not apply in this dispensation. At the outset of Christendom, there was intense debate surrounding the question if believers from among the Gentiles had to be subject to the law of Moses, but then it was determined once and for all that they did *not* need to bear this yoke (Acts 15:1-29). There is also a spiritual application in this.

We enjoy a Sabbath rest, in that we ‘rest’ from living in sin and are risen with Christ in *newness* of life. The rest of the *new creation* supersedes the original Sabbath rest in the Garden of Eden, which was disrupted by sin. And in the second place: we are *priests* and it is our privilege to enter the Holiest ‘on the Sabbath’. That is to say, we enter into God’s presence by the Spirit and enjoy His rest on the basis of Christ’s finished work (Heb. 4:8-11). We have peace *with* God and we also enjoy the peace *of* God (Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:7). The Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God is also a prophetic reference to the coming rest during Christ’s millennial reign.

5.3. A new temple service

The *third* principle is also very important. The Jewish temple service is superseded by Christian worship, which is not linked to any particular time or place. We worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). We may *continually* offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name (Heb. 13:15).

Since He is God and Man in one Person, Christ could say of Himself: ‘One greater than the temple is here’ (Matt. 12:6). He was also greater than *Solomon*, who built the temple (Matt. 12:42). All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily (John 2:21; Col. 2:9). The temple of His body also speaks of the *Church*, which in this dispensation is His ‘body’ on earth, a habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:20-22). This supersedes any earthly temple, made with *hands*.

5.4. A new guideline: showing mercy

The *fourth* tenet of the new dispensation is: ‘I desire *mercy* and not sacrifice’ (Matt. 12:7a). Legalism always leads to the condemnation of the *guiltless* (Matt. 12:7b). After all, to the pure

all things are pure (Tit. 1:15). A judgmental attitude towards others most often goes along with the self-importance of so-called religious leaders and their claims. We see this in the gospels too (cf. Luke 18:9-14).

This word of our Lord concerning the need to show mercy is a quote from the prophet Hosea: 'For I desire *mercy* and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings' (Hos. 6:6). The Lord quoted it when He called the tax collector Matthew as well (Matt. 9:13). Christ did not come to call the righteous, but *sinner*s, to repentance. We also ought to show mercy towards the people in our surroundings, because it is still the day of grace. We can observe all kinds of rules outwardly and bring our sacrifices, just as the pious Jew did. However, this is without value for God *if it is not done with an attitude of true love, compassion and mercy*.

5.5. Another king: Jesus is Lord

The Lord Jesus spoke with greater authority than *Moses*, the lawgiver who led the Israelites out of Egypt (cf. Heb. 3:3). He laid down yet another principle, which is a *prophecy* as well: He is Lord even of the Sabbath. *Jesus is Lord!* That is the witness of the apostles in the book of Acts too, and those who opposed them realized they had been with Jesus (Acts 2:36; 4:13; 5:31; 10:36; 17:7). The 'Son of Man' is Lord even of the Sabbath, as we read here (Matt. 12:8). *He* sets forth the rules for our conduct as believers – which we find in detail throughout the rest of the New Testament.

The fact that the Son of Man is *Lord of the Sabbath*, is at the same time a reference to the coming millennial Kingdom, where every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is *Lord*, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11). He is Lord of all, the Heir of all things (Acts 10:36; Eph. 1:22). He will appear in majesty at His second coming, and then a true Sabbath rest will

dawn upon God's people and the whole creation. What a prospect!

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