

PREFACE

“Dear pastor, the best times reach their conclusion very swiftly. We’ve enjoyed a succession of precious moments of fellowship, of singing the Psalms, of sitting together to pore over the Scriptures and especially of savouring thy messages together. Thank you for allowing the missionary pastor, Zephaniah Soh, to come in advance of the approaching Europe mission trip and thank God for his intensive labours to minister to us in Providence, Broadstairs, here and there in London, and here in Philadelphia.

*Our seasons of blessedness really began last Saturday, as the US and Ulster brethren successively joined the throng in Hananiah and Hadassah Chew’s place. Although only an interim solution, this rented house has been a blessing to God’s people well exceeding its rather snug proportions. We fled from a long, hot, dry day of family obligations (a garden party celebrating Daniel’s parents’ wedding anniversary) and we sped down the motorway towards gathering storm clouds and a huge rainbow. We alone arrived too late for the first night’s feasting. Most of the brethren retired to a nearby hotel that night, but we had a very cheerful reunion with Zipporah Lee, Hadassah and all the children. We were very tired, and grateful for the generous sleeping arrangements. Thank God we were a quorum for the much-anticipated Sabbath worship. **Zephaniah conveyed your recent message from the book of Job. It helped me to appreciate what you have tried to teach me about the central importance of Justification By Faith among the subjective facets of the Gospel. It is amazing how these ancient seekers after God understood so much about this doctrine, constantly recurring to it in their discussion. Job’s eventual justification is the culminating event when, in chapter 42, God accepts his prayer and returns his captivity. I recall you previously wrote that justification is not simply something to be understood (intellectually) but something to be experienced. This statement came alive to me. Although God justified Job, and perhaps also his erring friends, in the sovereign dispensation of His mercies, the point of Job’s justification is so clearly linked to the process of humbling whereby he came to experience the attributes of God and to truly know his own vileness and corruption. Job’s attaining to the salvation of God couldn’t be separated from his coming to know the God of his salvation. Just as there must be the exercise of faith before justification, I was much enlightened and encouraged to see that there can be a relative measure of assurance even before conversion, if, like Job, I am diligent to ‘order my cause aright’. When you were last in Broadstairs, you said that effectual waiting upon God is actually something beautiful. I was very attracted to Job’s upright and conscientious response to the dealings and questionings of God, although he had to learn his place and to justify God rather than himself. In contrast, I am superficial and facile, lacking in capacity to partake of the doctrines of Grace.***

On Monday morning, there was time for a further instalment from Psalm 143, before Israel Thomas set off for his graduation with Zipporah Lee, Ruth-Mary and OT. The deeply experimental character of David, who could give vent to the utterances of his soul, stood out in obvious contrast to Job who, although righteous from man’s perspective, had as yet only heard of God by the hearing of the ear. Although we all had to admit that our own souls are failing and that our spirits not good in His sight, as westerners we are most devoid of the spirit of prayer. I was brought to see that it is related to my want of genuine experimental religion. I cannot feel with the feelings of God. I am a far cry from some of my countrymen of old. My enthusiasm for ‘Grace Abounding’ is a sham because I am listening to a story in a foreign language- as John Bunyan once did when he met the poor old women in Bedford. Although my prayerlessness is a constant inner indictment and sorrow, thank God for the direction to continue to seek for the things of God, and to place due premium on every visitation of His Holy Spirit.” Sarah Harper, Part 1, Philadelphia, Grange, Ulster, UK; 27th July 2015 AD