

## Chapter 3

### Refreshment

*It is like the dew of Hermon*

I am a city man. I was born and brought up in the heart of London. The city is a part of me and I am a part of the city. Not that I do not also love the countryside. I take the opportunity whenever there is the chance to walk by a river or through the woods in full bloom or to climb a hill or mountain (if it is not too strenuous!). I love the sound of the sea when a full gale is blowing. But I am a city man!

The first time I visited Africa, I was not prepared for just how rural it can be. Within twenty-four hours of arriving in Nairobi I was lying in a grass-roofed mud house listening to the sounds of the night and wondering if I would ever sleep. London was quiet by comparison! I eventually got off to sleep only to be awakened at about 4-00am by the largest and noisiest cockerel that I had ever heard. What a contrast to my familiar quiet home. At least I could look forward to a hot shower – or could I? A bowl of warm water strategically placed behind a hastily constructed ‘bathroom’ of banana leaves with which to wash, shave and brush my teeth! Not that I am complaining. I fell in love with rural Africa and its people. I have been coming for twenty years since. But those early days! I later learned that the cockerel ended in the cooking pot and did not mourn its passing!

Our hosts had managed to hire a vehicle to take us to many churches and open-air meetings. I was to be the driver for many of the journeys, “not that the vehicle is illegal, but it is less likely that the police will stop us if a westerner is driving!” I was told. I was grateful that I had learned to drive in an old Ford Popular with its lack of synchromesh on the gears - needless to say this was an old truck! On one journey I had a rest from driving and we were travelling in Busia close to Lake Victoria. I was sitting in the back of the truck. It was hot! It was bumpy! It was dusty and, with a Kenyan driver, it was fast. By the time we arrived at our sleeping place for the night at Port Victoria we were covered in sweat and dust and probably a few bruises.

A bottle of Coca Cola disappeared very quickly and I was beginning to wonder how I would wash off the parts of the journey that had stuck to me with just the usual bowl of water. Eventually I heard the call, “Your shower is ready!” I was taken to a small cement room about four feet square and on the back of the door were a few nails to hang my clothes... and then I saw it! A showerhead! Could it be true? I had already had several disappointments of showerheads filled only with dust! I turned on the tap. Yes! A powerful stream of cold water hit my hot, dusty body. It was wonderful. I am not sure that I have ever felt anything so refreshing before or since.

It is hard to find anything more pleasing than refreshment to a tired or weary soul. For me, being a true Englishman, a cup of tea at the end of a long day refreshes like a cool breeze on a balmy summers evening. For some a swim in a river or pool; for others a soothing piece of music and yet others find refreshment in some sporting activity or other exercise. I was surprised when I discovered that God himself is refreshed

through rest! “*For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.*” (Exodus 31:17).

It is wonderful that we are made so much in His image. If God Himself finds refreshment in rest then it is only natural that we who are in His image should also find refreshment in the same way. I was really upset when our government allowed Sunday trading. Not because I am a legalist and want to see the letter of God’s law fulfilled. More that I understand the grace of God, and know all His commands are for our good. I am not one who believes Christians should do nothing but go to church and do ‘religious things’ on Sundays. What I do see is that Jesus, when He was accused of breaking the Sabbath said “*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*” A day of rest and relaxation is God’s order for man. It is not a day to be served by man but a day to be used by man so that he might find rest and refreshment just as God did at the end of six days of creating. I see the day to be used as one for leisure activities and not labour – and I believe for the Christian rest and refreshment is found in praise and worship of the Lord and listening to His word. It is no wonder there is so much sickness, depression, breakdown and heart problems; so many families under pressure. People do not do what is natural for man, and take refreshment for one day in seven.

There is another place where refreshment can be found. It is not where one would naturally look. On my first visit to Israel, I had the privilege of visiting and standing on Mount Hermon in the north of Israel. It is the largest mountain in the area, standing over 9,000 feet. The snows at its summit feed many streams that become the River Jordan. To the west the mountain is steep and barren, but as you descend towards Israel you pass through fruitful vineyards and orchards, finally entering the rich fields below. Mount Hermon is the source of many blessings to the land of Israel over which it can be seen for many miles. Refreshing breezes blow from its cold heights. As the winds blow over its snow-covered heights they pick up moisture which is deposited as a life giving dew, which has enabled the nation of Israel to become a fertile and productive land in contrast to the deserts of the north and east.

The presence of Mount Hermon to the north of Israel brings life and refreshment to the land. Without its presence the land of Israel would be like that of its neighbours. Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and nations beyond do not have the rich, fertile and watered facilities that the Lord has provided for His people in Israel. It is just one more reason why the ‘nations rage and the peoples plot a vain thing’ against her. (Psalm 2:1)

As we continue to look at Psalm 133 the Lord talks about the refreshment that comes from Mount Hermon. He says that when brothers are dwelling together in unity there is life-giving refreshment. “*It is like the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion.*”

Living as we did when I was a small boy in a small council flat we had no garden. On fine summer days we were out playing in the parks and grounds around us, but on those cold wet days that London is famous for I am sure our flat seemed small and very noisy. Although they did not go themselves, my parents found the church very useful. Every Sunday afternoon my two sisters and I were packed off to the local Baptist Church to the Sunday school. I am sure that my parent’s motive was to get a little peace and quiet at least for a few hours each week!

I enjoyed it. From the age of three when my theology extended as far as 'Jesus wants me for a sunbeam,' I loved the stories from the Bible. Probably because I am not very tall my favourite characters were Zacchaeus and King David in his battle against Goliath! I must have sat wide-eyed at the stories of the Missionaries going off to Africa. They really excited me. I even put up with some of the boring church services because I loved the Sunday school stories. And we were expected to go to church as well as the Sunday school.

Did you catch that word? *Boring!* I chose the word deliberately. I am grateful for the church that I now attend. The services are varied and there is space and time given for the Lord to speak to us. There is a good mixture of people from different backgrounds and ages. The pastor is on fire for God and the leadership has vision. It is not perfect. I know this because I am a member! But it is not boring. Ask non-church people what they think about church and they regularly answer "*boring*". I understand. I have been to many boring church services. I have seen them on television and listened to them on the radio. The only way they will refresh you is that they will put you to sleep! Why is it that the secular media seem to have a knack for selecting the driest, least challenging, most doctrinally inaccurate churches for their 'God spot'? My mother gets most of her spiritual input from the television and she complained recently that they *never* talk about Jesus.

It is no wonder so many people have an impression of church being boring. Where has the church been going for the last two thousand years? Whatever happened to the church of Acts chapter 4?

*'Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was on them all.'*

Here is a church that is free from Mammon. It was not that they did not have individual possessions, but rather that what they did have they held lightly. It was at the disposal of the church for use by others and even given if the need was greater. The leaders, the apostles, had great power to give witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That does not sound boring to me. Unlike some of the tripe I have heard over the years. I find it hard to consider that someone would find the time to write an article suggesting that the Garden of Eden was not perfect because there would have been dung in it! I am serious. I saw the article in a 'Christian' magazine, but did not waste my time reading it. For centuries, theologians have been wasting their lives debating how many angels can dance on the head of a pin! Whatever happened to the power of the resurrection?

I believe the secret to the success of the early church is also in the text. '*The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul.*' They were still in unity. One heart! One soul! Here there is no division. Several thousand people and in near perfect unity. There was no selfishness, backbiting, gossip or jealousy but one heart; no competition, favouritism, envy or superiority but one soul. The true answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17:23 '*that they be one.*'

No one on the inside or those who were watching the birth of the church were able to say “*It is boring.*”

*Through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord (still!) in Solomon’s Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. (Acts 5:12-12)*

Where brothers dwell together in unity they find refreshment, for themselves and for those around. The signs and wonders were done in the community. When there is unity among the brothers the blessings will flow out into the community around. We pray for revival and wonder why it does not come. We pray for our communities and do not see many breakthroughs.

The blessings of the dew of Mount Hermon fell on the whole land of Israel. Everyone living in the land received the benefits. When brothers are together in unity the blessings too will benefit all those who live in our midst.

The early church continued to grow in numbers we can only dream about.

*And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.*

Multitudes! I looked for a dictionary definition for multitude. The simplest says ‘A large number of people.’ Therefore multitudes must be large numbers!

Is this a part of the blessings of unity?