

Collected Writings of T. AUSTIN-SPARKS (3)

“Even Barnabas”	1
The Holy Spirit in the Life of a Child of God	3
The Spirit of Glory	6
The Strategy of God	9
The Wondrous Ways of God	12
“According to Christ”	14
Followers of the Lamb	25
From the Wilderness to the Land	42
Prophetic Ministry	54
Revelation of Jesus Christ	90
“The Holy City, New Jerusalem”	124
Christ Our All	146
Glorying in the Lord	154
The Mission, the Meaning and the Message of Jesus Christ	168
“The Law of the Spirit of Life in Jesus Christ.”	200
Convincing Evidence	231
Power with God	238

“Even Barnabas”

“...even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation.” (Galatians 2:13)

What a pity that such painful and unhappy incidents should have been placed on record for all time! What a still greater pity that they should ever have happened at all, and that right at the heart of the Apostolic circle in those most vital and crucial of all days! The Holy Spirit, as Custodian of the Divine records, must have had some very justifying reason for causing or allowing such things to be in the Bible. And there are — sad to say — not a few of such things.

When Paul wrote this in his letter there must have been a distinct change in his tone at these words — “even Barnabas”.

This is, perhaps, the most vehement of all his letters. He is truly on the war-path in white-hot jealousy for the truth and purity of the Gospel, and he says some very strong things.

But at this point we can discern the mingled tones of surprise, grief, disappointment. “Even Barnabas” — Barnabas: the one who had befriended him when, being under suspicion, he stood alone, the other Apostles fearing him and “not believing that he was a disciple”! The one who had sought him out at Tarsus as the man needed for the hour! The one who had been committed with him to the work and had laboured and travelled far with him! The one who had seen and shared and gloried in his ministry to the Gentiles! Barnabas, the “good man” (Acts 11:24)! Can it be true?

When certain from James came to Antioch Peter withdrew and others also. Paul does not emit surprise over Peter, only condemnation (Gal. 2:11). But for race-prejudice and discrimination to approach in his dear friend Barnabas, that shocks him, and he says in astonishment, “Even Barnabas”! Was this the betrayal of something in Barnabas, which, although for some time it was covered over and they worked on together for a while, yet eventually came out again in another connection and resulted in their permanent separation in the work?

What are we to make of it? Can we, without wrongly judging Barnabas, put our finger on that flaw, that something which so painfully spoiled a relationship? What is it that we are intended to learn from this being put into the glorious story of the first years? What did Paul call it? — dissimulation. What is dissimulation? It is hypocrisy, play-acting; literally it means ‘from behind a mask’: pretence, unreality, falsehood.

There is a Scripture that touches this very directly — “the fear of man bringeth a snare” (Prov. 29:25). Perhaps in other ways Barnabas was not afraid of men, but the weakness — the fatal weakness — that shows itself here is allowing his natural temperament to govern him when most serious issues were in the balances. Barnabas was evidently a very sociable man: that was his temperament. The feature of that temperament is that it does not like to be unpopular; out of standing with people whom it wants to please or who can affect its interests. This, therefore, is the tragedy of compromise for the sake of pleasantness and popularity. This is the disastrous leaning to policy instead of standing firm on principle when serious matters are on hand.

Yes, we know that it was no simple matter for Barnabas. This very incident brings out into clear definition the terrible strength of a system and tradition. All the holy vehemence of the greatest Apostle is drawn out in wrath by the strength of this system. This judaising element was going to die hard. It had taken the devastating power of a personal appearing in glory on the part of the Lord to break Paul clear of it. It was going to be the everything-or-nothing question from then onward. If a mask of insincerity, prevarication, equivocation, and disguise was being put on, then Paul tore it off with no light hand. He saw too clearly the disaster of both the old system, and of trying to be two contrary things.

In this same chapter verse 20 occurs. Everybody knows Galatians 2:20. There it is shown that the Cross of Christ puts ‘Finish’ to this kind of thing. Later in the letter, reference will be made to “the offence of the cross”. That offence in this context is in relation to compromise in order to save our face, our standing our advantage, and so on.

It is a sad revelation, and fact, that a “good man”; one who has seen great service for God; and has had association at close quarters with so much of God’s work, can fall into the snare of ‘safety first’ rather than stand by truth and principle at all costs. This has much to teach us, but it is all summed up in the cry — ‘Be true!’ ‘Be honest!’ ‘Be transparent!’ Do not walk with men first, but walk before God. May it never be that all that may be so good and creditable eventually falls under this verdict — “...even Barnabas was carried away.”

So, a great friendship and a vital colleagueship was threatened and then disrupted by — what? Was it a secret jealousy of the outworking of the sovereign choice and using of that ‘vessel’, the vessel over which Barnabas rejoiced until some personal interest or temperamental weakness was touched? Paul may have been a rather strong and sometimes overbearing man in the utterness of his abandon to what had come to him “by revelation of Jesus Christ”. What he had to be AGAINST, still marked him as FOR Christ. One thing Paul could not countenance on any account was compromise. He was capable of being both very forceful and forbearing, but he was not capable of being double.

Barnabas may have wanted peace, and would do ANYTHING for it. But that ANYTHING might lead him into ‘sitting on the fence’ or trying to agree with two irreconcilable positions, and the end be that for all time a “good man” made a terrible mistake, so that the potentialities of a great friendship and partnership were lost.

But the work must go on. Barnabas had an overwhelming amount of evidence as to where his friend stood, and how utterly he stood on this, the greatest dispensational, issue, and he allowed himself to be influenced by James and his strong leaning to the Jewish complexion. So, in the transition, which was making distinctions very clear and putting men on this side or on that, Barnabas EVENTUALLY fades out. Silas (Silvanus) fills the gap, and even John Mark who brought the relationship to a crisis becomes — at length — ‘profitable’ to both Peter and Paul.

Turning corners is always a perilous time, and in the turning of the dispensations, in which these early saints were involved, there were not a few casualties.

The Lord help us to be true to all the light available.

The Holy Spirit in the Life of a Child of God

“But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature... And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he is keeping the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him; for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward” (1 Sam. 16:7,11–13).

“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall over-shadow thee; wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

“And Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41).

“And... Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:67).

“Simeon... was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple” (Luke 2:25–27).

“He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 3:16).

“The Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22).

“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led in the Spirit in the wilderness... And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Luke 4:1,14).

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because, he anointed me to preach... to proclaim... to set at liberty... to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18).

I feel it very much on my heart that the Lord would have me to say a little to you about the Holy Spirit. To some of you what I shall say will probably be very elementary, but it may be helpful to others, and we never get beyond the place where we need to be reminded of things which are, after all, the greatest things in the life of a child of God. It is not my intention to take up the above passages and speak about them in particular. They have been read in order to bring this matter before us with one object — at least to indicate how large a place the Holy Spirit has in the bringing in and the carrying through of God’s purposes and God’s instruments.

Some False Ideas Associated with the Spirit

Let me say at the outset one or two things about the negative side of the Holy Spirit and His presence, that is, what the Holy Spirit does NOT imply — for it is necessary for us to adjust our thoughts in this matter so that we have not wrong ideas which will lead to disappointed expectation. Many people seem to have the idea, more or less vaguely or certainly, that should anyone really be filled with the Holy Spirit and live in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, certain things are sure to result.

One is that of course such an one will never come up against any difficulties which to him are completely insurmountable. He will, by the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit dwelling within in fullness, surmount his difficulties and solve his problems very easily. Or again, such a life ought to be very largely free from suffering and adversity; being sealed, owned of God, it could hardly be set aside and rejected and driven out, and, amongst men, made a thing of nought; God would see to it that it was not so. Such ideas do exist, and when experiences to the contrary come, a good deal of perplexity and questioning arises. After all, is the Lord with us? Is the mighty power of the Holy Ghost amongst us and in us? If the Lord were mightily with us, surely we should be carried right on and all our mountains would go down and our difficulties would be swept aside, our sufferings would be as nothing? And so on. Well, from the moment of the Spirit’s descent upon the Lord Jesus at the Jordan, there followed the wilderness and the devil. By the direct action of the Holy Spirit it was so. He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tried by the devil. So with David; from the day the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon him his troubles began. Almost immediately he found himself a target of the devil. From that day he was a marked man and an outcast, and we know the long periods in which he was hunted, “as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains” (1 Sam. 26:20). This man, upon whom the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily, was hunted for his very life. Yes, he was completely rejected and set at nought, and even, at one time at least, despaired in his own heart of survival. So much for a man upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests mightily. Let us adjust ourselves to this matter and not entertain false ideas of what life is going to be if only we are filled with the Spirit and the power of the Spirit of God rests upon us.

The Basic Fact in the Life of a Child of God

That is the negative side very briefly. Come now to the other side and get right back to the beginning of Christian life — for the sake of anyone who may have an insufficient understanding of what happens when you become the Lord’s. Here again we need to correct ourselves, for many think that when you become a

Christian, you just adopt a certain line of procedure: you are expected not to do many things that you have been in the habit of doing before, and you begin to do other things that you have not been in the habit of doing. You go to meetings, you associate with Christian people, you begin to pray, and to read the Bible, and do all sorts of things which are regarded as proper to a Christian. That all may take place and then life become one continuous struggle to keep it up. You have taken on something and you have to live up to it, and it is a struggle, and there does not seem to be very much in it more than that. Perhaps you enjoy the fellowship of God's people. You sometimes enjoy the meetings and sometimes you do not! It is a very unsatisfactory experience from your own personal standpoint in an inward way. After a while you get very weary and you wonder whether there is anything in the Christian life at all.

Well, there is a great deal to be said to correct this point of view. We must understand exactly what does happen when we really become children of God. Let us consider the case of the Lord Jesus, because in everything, from first to last, He is the exemplar, the representation of the whole Christian life. If you had looked upon Him as an ordinary person in this world in the days of His flesh, you would have seen nothing that marked Him out as essentially different from any other man — that is as a person in the world. You might have noted that He was a fine type of man and have been impressed by certain things about Him, as in the case of any other man; but apart from that you would not have noticed anything different. In outward appearance He may well have been like David, a splendid specimen of a man. I do not know what He was like physically, but David was that. The Lord had said to Samuel, "Look not on his countenance"; and almost immediately afterward the Word says of David "he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon." The implication is this, that, while you are not making the outward the criterion, there may be something quite good there; that is, ugliness is not at a premium. But that is not the point — "God looketh on the heart." Don't you look at the outward appearance; and even although the Lord Jesus may have been amongst men exceptionally fine in physique and appearance, His essential difference from other men was not in that fact. The difference lay deeper, hidden, quite out of sight. Even those in the closest association with Him physically, living with Him all day and every day, week after week, month after month, were not able to discern that difference until long afterward. They had suspicions, perhaps — fleeting impressions; they were often bewildered; but the vital factor lay hidden from them. "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip?" (John 14:9). The difference lay deeper. What was the reality, the great difference, in the case of the Lord Jesus? It was a link between His inner being and His Father God. Those two were in perfect oneness, and out of that perfect, hidden, secret, spiritual oneness of His spirit with the Father, everything in His life took its rise. All His guidance came by that, and He did not act on any of the other lines of guidance common to men — advice, counsel, coercion, custom, expectation, even sympathetic appeal. He put back appeals that were made to Him out of the best of motives and desires for His good and well-being — even a mother's appeal. He had an inner union with God, and out of that He took His guidance, the yea and the nay for all His movements and for everything else. He lived on that, and that was the great inner difference between Christ and every other person. And that is the thing which distinguishes a child of God. No one who has not been born of God has that, but everyone who has been born of God has it — doubtless in a very elementary and infant form to begin with, because it comes by birth.

Here is the Lord Jesus again as example. He could have come and occupied the body of a man fully grown, and done the work which He really took up only when He was thirty years of age; but He started with birth because we all start there in our relationship with God — new birth; and the new birth is just the bringing about, by a miracle of the Spirit of God, of a union with God which was never there before, and it is out of that that everything of the Christian life takes its rise. It is by reason of that that you begin to do things that you never did before and you stop doing things that you did before. There is no question of strain about it, of compulsion, of law. From the beginning it is just the work of that Spirit's law of life, and you act spontaneously, you, do not stop to think about it. In the physical realm you never stop to ask yourself if you are going to take another breath, you just do it. That is living, and it is because you are alive that you do other things. You do your thinking because you are living, but you do not have to think in order to live. It is like that in the life of a child of God. You are alive, and then because you are alive, you become conscious that you are no longer drawn to certain things, but you are drawn to certain others.

The Basis of Spiritual Education

Now what is the outworking of this great fact of being thus alive unto God? As we go on, that factor of life-union is the basis of all our education. It is the nature of our life and it is the basis of our education. David, as an Old Testament saint, was not on the ground of a "born again" believer, but his life was lived under the government of the Spirit and therefore can serve our present purpose by way of illustration. Why, after the Spirit of the Lord had come mightily upon him, did David have the history which was immediately subsequent — adversity, expulsion, suffering, perplexity, bewilderment, even despair? It is a common experience of those who have the Spirit. Even the Apostle Paul — who unquestionably had the Spirit — said at one time that he "despaired even of life" (2 Cor. 1:8). Why that? For this reason, that this nature of our spiritual life has to be perfected. The way of spiritual joy is through natural sorrow. The way of wisdom is through utter confounding. And that is not done once and for all; that is repeated again and again, and the process becomes more severe as you go on! You are brought more and more to an end of any possibility of understanding the ways of God naturally, and more and more to the place where a Divine revelation is absolutely necessary to survival and emergence.

We have said, through sorrow to spiritual joy. We are talking about SPIRITUAL joy. It is different alto-

gether from mere optimism and suchlike things. Oh, it is so different! You ask the question, how can certain people rejoice over against such and such circumstances? Well, there is the mystery. It is not something that you can explain naturally at all; it is supernatural, it is Divine, it is a miracle. And so it is with everything — joy, wisdom, strength. Spiritual strength is an altogether different thing from natural strength. Natural strength ebbs and comes to an end. Spiritual strength comes in and even vitalises the physical and the mental. But the position is this, when that work is advanced — should the Spirit of God leave you for a moment, you are utterly weak; that is, for all practical purposes you are useless. But now, for the demands laid upon you physically and mentally, you are living upon another energy, though in the natural world you are weak and a fool. You might be otherwise; if you had not been brought on to this level, you might be amongst men other than a fool, but you have come under the hand of the Spirit of God, and He is making all things to be out from God and nothing out from yourself, physically or mentally or in any way. It is “by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6), and the education is going on in order to develop our spiritual strength to be the energy of mind and body, the wisdom and the understanding of our lives. It is developing another entity in us, or, to put it more correctly, it is the growth of Christ in us over against ourselves.

Dependence on the Lord and Spiritual Responsibility

Now this further word. The point you and I have to watch carefully is this, that we do not get into the habit of expecting the Lord to do everything objectively to us and for us. If we do that, the inevitable result will be the stultifying of our spiritual life. You do everything for little children: you hold them up on their feet to start with; if they begin to fall, you at once save them; and you explain everything, you tell everything, and do everything objectively to them and for them. What would you think if you had to do that to a grown person? It would be altogether abnormal and wrong. And it is no less wrong in the spiritual realm. But this is where many become confused; for they realize that they are utterly dependent upon the Lord — and of course that dependence is necessary essential and right — and then they mistakenly collapse on the Lord because they are so utterly dependent and wait for Him to do everything. They expect Him to carry them, to support them, and to provide them with a life of continuous miracles. That is all wrong, and it is just there that we have to harmonize these two things — dependence upon the Lord, and spiritual responsibility; by no means an easy task.

That brings us to a more advanced point. We have got away from the beginning now. We are told we have to be utterly dependent on the Lord; on the other hand, we have to be responsible people. How do we reconcile these two things? How is it going to work out? In actual experience we often find that the Lord simply does not do the thing for which we had been waiting. He wants us to come into intelligence, where we recognise whether He says yes or no about the matter. When He says, Yes, we move forward and act, trusting Him of course for the necessary resource. We do not wait for Him to do it. If we have any witness of life and peace in our heart that that is the Lord’s mind after sufficient testing of it by the Word and by prayer, then the responsibility for acting is ours. If, on the other hand, we have any reason whatever to doubt that that is the Lord’s way, we must take the opposite course; however much we may want to do it, we must say, No; we must refuse to be moved in that direction by any kind of coercion or personal preference or desire. Let everybody say that is the direction in which we ought to move — that of itself is not a sufficient ground for moving. But here we must add a word of caution. What we are saying is based upon this — that the one concerned really has a life with the Lord, really does know the Lord, and that a sufficient breaking has taken place in the realm of natural will and natural likes and dislikes. The Lord Who lived on this basis and moved according to this law had been to Jordan and in type had there renounced the entire ground of self. There are many people who take an independent attitude on the ground that they have received their guidance from the Lord and therefore they are not going to take any notice of what others may say. But they are unbroken people; that is stubbornness, self-will, natural strength. We have to go through discipline, through testing, and through a measure of breaking, to be in the place where our interests are not governing, where what we would like is not dictating and where our natural thoughts and judgments are not the criterion. But given a true walk with the Lord inwardly, then there is a place of responsibility which we must recognise and accept and where we move or do not move according to what we judge to be the Lord’s way after testing the situation.

It is then that the Lord comes alongside. We have been waiting for the Lord to come and act apart from us, and the Lord has been waiting for us to come to a place of spiritual intelligence where we move in that intelligence. As we move He begins to move alongside of us, and we find that things do happen, they do open up. It is wonderful how the Lord comes in and we find that is just what we have been praying for all along — for the Lord to do it; but the Lord has been waiting for something also. The Word speaks about the “set time.” David said, “Thou wilt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for it is time to have pity upon her, yea, the set time is come” (Psa. 102:13). Yes, the Lord may have His set times, but in His infinite wisdom and perfect foreknowledge He makes His set time synchronize with a set condition. We cannot explain that, but there it is. The truth is that when the Lord’s time comes and the thing happens, it is not just by an act of God unrelated to other conditions; you will find that that synchronizes with the end of a preparation, the arrival at a state on the part of those concerned, and the set time is in effect the time when they have reached a certain spiritual position. It may be a position of complete disinterestedness, where they are out of the picture — the last vestige of self-interest has gone and the set time has come. Or it may be any one of a number of other things. Whatever it may be, remember that the Divine activities are intimately linked up with a work in us, and that although it will be God’s working alone that accomplishes anything, yet that working is delayed until we are ready to take our place of responsibility and to act in faith.

The Spirit of Glory

“These things spake Jesus; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee” (John 17:1).

“If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are ye; because THE SPIRIT OF GLORY and the Spirit of God resteth upon you” (1 Peter 4:14).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of glory. All the Holy Spirit's interests and concerns and activities have glory as their object and have nothing else in view by which to satisfy Him. Glory is the object and the end of all God's works and ways — numerous, various and largely unsearchable and inexplicable as they are. His object in everything is glory — and moreover that glory has to do with us. The Scripture precisely states that we are ‘called into His kingdom and glory’ (1 Thess. 2:12); and many other like statements affirm the same thing — that God's concern for us is glory.

The Source and Ground of Glory

Let us look first of all at the source and the ground of glory, the glory, which concerns us and with which, through the grace of God, we are concerned. The source and the ground of the glory can be simply stated as being Christ glorified. Christ glorified is the source of glory for us and the ground of glory for us.

When He was here on the earth He was not here in glory. He was here in humiliation, and humiliation for Him meant voluntary self-emptying. “He emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7). In this very chapter in John's Gospel we have that wonderful utterance of His: “Father, glorify thou me... with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). Humiliation meant voluntary self-emptying. It meant no self-fullness. “I can of myself do nothing” (John 5:30). It meant voluntarily accepting a life of complete dependence. The fact of the Holy Spirit coming upon Him and taking charge, immediately leading Him into the wilderness, and all the way through to the end, when He “through the eternal Spirit offered himself” (Heb. 9:14), means that He was dependent, He became dependent; there was no self-sufficiency.

It meant voluntary self-weakness. We are told that He was “crucified through weakness” (2 Cor. 13:4). He accepted that weakness — which meant that He drew every bit of strength from another source. There was no self-strength.

And then it meant voluntary acceptance of shame and dishonour — and what shame, what dishonour! They degraded Him according to their own mind. No self-glory, no self-esteem. “He humbled himself” (Phil. 2:8), He was not here then in glory. For one brief moment on the Mount of Transfiguration He was glorified. But it passed. John says: “Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39).

The fact that He lived such a life of prayer is the proof, the inclusive mark, of all this. He had to draw everything from outside Himself. These opening words of John 17 are very remarkable words, far too profound for our fathoming, altogether beyond us; they would take us completely out of our depths. He was God, very God, and He is praying to God. Something has happened, for God does not pray to God, God does not ask God for things. You see the point. It does not mean that He was other than the Divine Son, the Son of God, very God; but He had for the time being taken a place in which all that was suspended.

But when God raised Him and took Him back, He reversed all that. When Jesus was glorified, it was in every respect just the opposite of His humiliation. That is, He is now no longer emptied — He is full. God has filled Him with all things. Paul speaks of God's “riches in glory” which are “in Christ Jesus” for us (Phil. 4:19). He is filled with all the riches of glory for His own people; full, sufficient — yes, self-sufficient; all sufficiency is in Him. Paul says that in the Colossian letter. He, being filled with all things, has all sufficiency, and we are made sufficient in Him. He is made powerful — “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5). No longer weak, but mighty with all the might of Heaven and God. And no longer in shame and dishonour and reproach, but in Heaven “crowned with glory and honour”, says the Word (Heb. 2:9). God gave Him honour and glory (2 Pet. 1:17). This is the Scripture. He gave Him “the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). Jesus glorified is the source of glory, the basis of glory.

Glory for Us on the Basis of His Completed Work

But then what does that mean? What does this circuit from the glory to the shame, and back to the glory, mean for us? It means that glory for us is upon the basis of His completed work. The glory springs spontaneously out of His glorification, and His glorification is because of the completeness of the work which He did. That means that He has put away everything that is not glorious and that cannot be glorified, in order to make glory for us possible and actual. His completed work is embodied in His own glorified person.

You have probably noted in this rich seventeenth chapter of John how frequently He makes the affirmation — “I have...”, “I have...”. The ‘I have's’ of John 17 are the basis of glory. “I glorified thee on the earth” (vs. 4).

There has never been another man on this earth who has glorified God in this way, who has satisfied the requirements of the glory of God as He did. In man-form He has glorified God perfectly. “I glorified thee... having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do” (vs. 4). “I manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me” (vs. 6). “I manifested thy name”. Not merely ‘I spoke Thy name’, ‘I mentioned Thy name’, ‘I gave them a title for God’, but “I manifested thy name” — quite a different thing. To manifest the

Name, make manifest what God is — that was His life.

“The words which thou gavest me I have given unto them” (vs. 8), and “I have given them thy word” (vs. 14); and they live for ever because He gave them the Word and the words of God, just as we do. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). “I have given them thy word”. We live by the Word of God. If we do not lay hold of the Word of God and believe it, if we do not have faith in the promises of God, we die very quickly. It is one thing or the other. Those words are going to be our life or they are not, according to our attitude toward them. He gave them the foundation of life with God in giving His words and His Word. “The glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them” (John 17:22). All these “I have” — if we got inside of them, opened them up, analysed them, we should find that they are the perfect basis of glory.

But inclusively they mean that the basis of glory is His full mediatorial work — His work as Mediator between God and man. That is inclusive. First of all, His work in relation to SIN. Sin is the thing which makes glory impossible. Sin is the thing which covers the glory. We know it. The glory fades where there is sin. God can never be glorified or give glory where there is sin. But, blessed be God, the Word is full of the affirmation that God intends that there shall be glory, and that He has secured His intention by what His Son has done in relation to the thing that is in the way of the glory. Sin is dealt with — has been dealt with completely and utterly. Then SELF is always in the way of the glory; we know that. What we are in ourselves — that is always hindering the glory, spoiling the glory, driving out or shutting out the glory. Christ has dealt with it. He has taken us, as to what we are in ourselves, and put us out of God’s sight. And more, it is the works of the DEVIL that have covered the glory in this world, got in the way of the glory; but He was “manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8), and Satan’s works were taken up by Him and destroyed. Blessed be God!

And all human helplessness was compassed by that helplessness which He voluntarily accepted. Yes, I know there are two sides to the whole story. He is laying down His life and no man is taking it from Him (John 10:18). He is perfectly deliberate in what He is doing. He is fulfilling the predetermined counsels of God when He goes to the Cross. Nevertheless, in a certain sense He is in the hands of those men. There is weakness, helplessness. “He was crucified through weakness” (2 Cor. 13:4). They appeal to Him to come down, and they deride Him. “He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Matt. 27:42). How true those words were. He could not save Himself because He was saving the whole world. It is a law. You will never save anybody if you try to save yourself. But that was so in His case in a deeper sense. All human helplessness was compassed in the weakness of that beloved Man. All this human helplessness of ours is in the way of the glory. You know it well enough. If you begin to sink down into your own weakness and helplessness, into what you are, in that way, and say, ‘I cannot’, where is the glory? It departs. While conscious always of dependence and emptiness and weakness in ourselves, there is another attitude which we may take, which lets in the glory.

‘Glory crowns the Mercy-seat’ — that is the point; and spell Mercy-seat with a capital M, for it is the Lord Jesus. ‘Glory crowns the Mercy-seat’. Go back to the Old Testament again. It was there in the Most Holy Place, at the Mercy-seat, that the glory had its focal point. They were called the “cherubim of glory” (Heb. 9:5) as they overshadowed the Mercy-seat. It is the place of glory. But what is the Mercy-seat? It is the Throne of grace, the blood-sprinkled meeting-place between God and man. Look at what Israel were in themselves: what a story of everything dishonourable, as to all that they were in themselves. But this perfect God meets them in His Mediator at the Mercy-seat — ‘and glory’, not shame, ‘crowns the Mercy-seat’. His work accomplished, in all these respects and much more, is the basis of all glory for us. We need to get a firmer hold on it and keep our hold on it, or else the glory will go out. The measure of our faith-hold on Christ glorified is the measure of the glory in our lives. No matter how much we may believe and hold to the doctrines of our redemption, atonement, justification, and all the rest, unless we have an inward hold on the truth of Christ glorified, the doctrine counts for nothing so far as the glory is concerned.

The Mediator of the Glory

Then come nearer. The Mediator of the glory. “The Spirit of glory... resteth upon you” (1 Pet. 4:14). The Holy Spirit has come as the Spirit of the glorified Christ. “The Spirit was not yet given: because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). Putting that round the other way, we might say, ‘Well, the Holy Spirit could only come on the ground of Jesus being glorified, and Jesus could only be glorified when He had finished His work: so the Spirit comes on the ground of Christ glorified, in virtue of the perfected work of our redemption, of our sanctification, and of our glorification.’ He has come as the Spirit of Christ in glory, as the Mediator of all that it means that Christ is in glory; and let us remember that glory is not a place but a state. When we receive the Holy Spirit, as we do when we are born from above, we receive the Spirit of glory. He is called “the Spirit of glory”; that is the capacity in which He has come: so that we receive Him as that, and if we live and abide in the Spirit, the Spirit of glory rests upon us. If we get out of the Spirit, the glory gets out of us. Any of us, at any time, getting out of the Spirit, gets out of the glory. When we are out of the glory, in some way or other, for any reason, we have got out of the Spirit. We know that to be the case all too well. When we are in the Spirit there is glory.

Let us turn to our friend John Bunyan. ‘After these things the Interpreter takes them apart again and has them first into a room where was a man that could look no way but downwards with a muck-rake in his hand. There stood one over his head with a celestial crown in his hand and proffered him that crown for his muck-rake, but the man did neither look up nor regard but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, the dust of

the floors.' Oh, our muck-raking amongst the rubbish and filth and pollution of what we are in ourselves, turning it over and sorting it out, looking no way, but downward! Where is the glory? There is no glory in that.

Let us regard the statements of the New Testament seriously and in a practical way. He has 'borne our sins in His own body on the tree' (1 Pet. 2:24). We were "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). God has "raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him" (Eph. 2:6), has given us to share His place in heaven. He has "called (us) unto his eternal glory" (1 Pet. 5:10). We are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2). It is all there as accomplished fact. It is the way of the glory, the only ground of the glory. No one muck-raking in human depravity, can ever be in the Holy Spirit. That is a solemn and serious thing to say. You are not in the Spirit if you are muck-raking. The Holy Spirit takes away the muck-rake and gives you a crown of glory in its place — not hereafter, but now. He is against all muck-raking.

Let us remember that whatever the Holy Spirit ministers is intended for glory. A ministry by the Holy Spirit is a ministry which ministers glory. We may have to preach Romans 6 and preach Romans 6 forcibly. We were crucified with Christ. But that truth was never intended to bring us under condemnation and depression. It was intended to bring us to glory. The ministry of any one truth, unbalanced and unrelated, will bring a heavy burden upon us, will weigh us down and make us depressed people. Such is not Holy Ghost ministry. There are times for us to be convicted of wrong, but the Spirit would lead us at once to the place where the wrong is put right in the Cross of the Lord Jesus, to get it out of the way to make room for the glory. Yes, solemn words, serious words, if necessary: the Lord will make real to us what fallen human nature is, but always and only to get it all out of the way and to lead at once to the glory.

The Pathway to the Glory

There is a final thing to remember. The pathway of glory is the pathway of suffering. Look at Peter's letters, and you have three outstanding things. What are they? The Holy Spirit, suffering and glory. John 17 is just that. The pathway to the glory is suffering. "If ye are reproached for the name of Christ" — then you ought to be as miserable as possible? — no, "blessed are ye; because the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you" (1 Peter 4:14).

The Lord give us grace to keep our eyes on the positive side of all His dealings. It is our attitude toward His dealings that makes so much difference. There will be suffering — yes; but the attitude toward the suffering determines whether it is going to be shame or glory, darkness or light. Our attitude of faith toward our sufferings will let in the glory. That is a very practical matter with the Lord and for us. We are so often asking the Lord to change things, to deal with things which stand in the way of glory. If only the Lord would just deal with this and that, change it, move it out of the way, then we could glorify Him. It would be so much more to His glory if He did that.

The Lord says. 'No, not that way.' This glory is something very much more than being cheerful in happy circumstances. This glory is born out of the utmost depths of agony and suffering. This is real glory, which is much more than the glory of this world and the glory of favourable circumstances. The Lord says, 'You get into the place where there is glory in your sufferings and your adversities, and if I think it good, then I will change circumstances. I am waiting for you to climb on top: let the glory in, amidst your adversities, and then perhaps we will see about other things.'

That is very practical. We get down under our troubles and sufferings and begin to get depressed and to complain to the Lord; we want the Lord to do something about it. But we do not get anywhere along that line at all. Sooner or later the Lord comes and says, 'Real glory shows itself against a dark background: when the glory is there, whatever I see fit to do in the situation I will do; but first of all glorify Me in the fires.'

The Lord give us grace!

The Strategy of God

Reading: Job 23:8–14.

“He hideth himself” (v. 9).

“He knoweth the way that I take” (v. 10).

“He performeth that which is appointed for me” (v. 14).

The Initial Move with God

This is one of the most remarkable books of the Bible for quite a number of reasons, and we may well be thankful that God had it written, placed it in His Book and has preserved it throughout all these generations. It has a very great purpose to serve in His thought, and when you come to the remarkable things in it, the first is that in this whole drama — for it is nothing less than Divine drama — God took the initiative. It is important and helpful to remember that. I think a lot of people have thought that the Devil took the initiative, but it does not say so; it says, “When the sons of God came to present themselves before Jehovah... Satan also came among them. And the Lord said unto Satan... Hast thou considered my servant Job?” (1:6,8). God took the initiative; God drew the attention of Satan to this man; God drew out what Satan thought about Job. It was the initiative of the Lord, not the initiative of the Devil. I say that is a very remarkable and forceful thing when you see all that follows. Evidently to the Lord Job had a very great significance, and He drew Satan’s attention to that significance and then allowed it to be submitted to Satan’s onslaughts.

I am not going to follow that in any full way, but I do believe that in some measure it is true of every child of God and of the saints as a body who stand upon true spiritual ground, that there is a great significance to the Lord bound up with them, and that He allows — I was almost going to say submits them to — the onslaughts of Satan for the bringing out of that significance to His own glory.

Before we come to the particular phrases which we have underlined, we might just indicate one or two aspects of the great significance of the life of Job.

God’s Object in His Strange Dealings with His Children

First of all, God was intending to establish and reveal a ground upon which Satan is undone and worsted and brought to the end of his power. It is interesting to note the disappearance of the Devil from the book of Job. He is very much in evidence in the beginning. You hear no more about him after a while and in the end, while he is not referred to, everything indicates that he has been completely put to flight and to shame.

Now I have said I am not going to follow that through, but that is absolutely true with regard to the Church. The final issue of the Church after its time of tribulation, trial, suffering, affliction is this, that Satan is cast out; and the object of God’s strange, mysterious, deep and sometimes almost unbearable ways with the Church (the true Church, His people) is to bring about that issue. Some people think that when you come to the book of Revelation, Chapter 12, Satan is cast down from heaven in order to make room for the saints. That is just the wrong way round. The saints reach there and he is cast out; he is never cast out until the saints get there. When the Man-child reaches the Throne, Satan is cast out. That is the point. That chapter is a chapter of travail, the culmination of suffering. The Church comes to the glory and Satan is forced out of the heavens. And that is one of the big issues here in this book of Job, explaining everything.

God Deals with His Children According to His Knowledge of Them

As to Job himself — and this brings us very much nearer to this chapter — God is clearly seen here as dealing with His servant according to His Own deeper knowledge of the man, a knowledge deeper than the man had of himself. Job had a certain conception of himself, and outwardly he was right. God’s summing up of him to Satan was that he was not wrong so far as outward things were concerned. He was a perfect and upright man (Job 1:8), there was none like him in all the earth if it were a matter of outward righteousness and good acts, and that was the realm in which Job lived. But God knew him inwardly in a way in which Job did not know himself, and dealt with him according to that deeper knowledge. All that I am going to say about that for the moment is this, that when the Lord really does get us in hand and deal with us, when He does allow Satan to assail and almost torment us, the result will be seen, not only finally in one great ascent, but in this — that progressively and from time to time we recognise and acknowledge that the Lord has dealt with us quite rightly and in the only way suitable to us, and that we have been coming to see what we did not know or believe about ourselves. He does not standardize His methods and deal with all His people in exactly the same way. What to one would be acute agony, to another would be very little trouble at all. The Lord knows us, He knows the secret pride of our hearts, the conceits about us which we would never believe about ourselves and would never allow anyone else to point out — and if they did, we would be untouched. He deals with us according to His knowledge; and in the end, in honesty of heart we have to say, The Lord’s way with me was the only way in which He could deal with me and get me where He wanted me. That is, we have come to see that we had certain tendencies, propensities, certain perils in our makeup, and these had to be met and dealt with in a peculiar way. The way in which the Lord has dealt with them was the only way in which they could be dealt with.

That is one of the secrets of this book of Job. Job did not know himself inwardly, good man though he was, and you notice as the Lord puts him through the fires he is beginning to acknowledge things that he would never acknowledge before. In the end, this man, who had earlier told the story of his own goodness, and stood so strongly on the ground of all the kind things he had done — how he had never failed to answer to need

where he saw it — in the end he says, “Wherefore I abhor myself” (Job 42:6); and although it is not so stated, it can be concluded that Job would have said, The Lord has taken the only way by which He could bring me to the place where He wanted me. The Lord had to deal with him according to His Own knowledge of him. That is what He is doing with us all.

I wonder how many of us here are now able to say, with a little knowledge of ourselves, as we begin to know our own peculiar makeup and perils and peculiarities and weaknesses, that the way the Lord has been dealing with us is the only way in which we could be dealt with effectively? It is a very great thing as we are able to come to that position, because the heart acknowledgment is just this — He is faithful and true! He is faithful with us because He knows us, and He is true to us because He knows us. That is, in faithfulness and truth He is dealing with us according to what He knows of us which we do not know of ourselves, and which we can never accept from anyone else. That is an issue of this book, and it is a great issue to come to the place where we justify God even against ourselves.

God Working to Produce Eternal Spiritual Values

But then one other thing in general. God was making something of tremendous spiritual value for posterity in His dealings with Job. The story of this book is the story of God’s producing something which for all ages was going to be of great spiritual value. You cannot fail to recognise how universal this book is, and how almost timeless it is. It is evidently a patriarchal book — that is, it belonged to the time of the patriarchs, probably the time of Abraham. Job was a Gentile living away somewhere by the Euphrates. He is a mysterious man. How did he come to know God and offer sacrifices? Those sacrifices were never on the Levitical basis. He offered sacrifices lest his sons should have sinned. This is not the mediatorial sacrifice of the Lord. There is no reference whatever to anything like the law of Moses and the sacrifices we have later. It is much earlier than that, it goes right back to the beginning of things. How universal and continuous it is! This scene in the heavens comes into view again and again. Right up to Ephesians you have it, warfare in the heavenlies, an interest in this earth in the heavenlies; and that great universal, spiritual realm, covering all time — not just the life of a man in some remote place on the earth — God was doing something to produce values for His people right on to the end. Who is there among the Lord’s true people who has never been helped by this book? The more you look into it and think about it, the more powerful is its ability to help you spiritually. This book of Job is of tremendous value to the Church. All I mean to indicate by that suggestion is that in these dealings with us by God, He is producing something of lasting spiritual value to serve others. It may be that some of us are going through something in a spiritual way like that through which Job went — disappointment, deprivation, so that God seems to be against us and the language of our hearts is Job’s — “Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would set my cause in order before him and fill my mouth with arguments” (23:3,4). This is the common complaint of the heart under trial. What is the Lord doing with us when He handles us like that, so deeply, so terribly? He is producing something spiritual to be of service to others. This is to be stock in trade for the saints — and not only in the short duration of this life here on earth. “His servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face” (Rev. 22:3). There is work to be done, and the spiritual measure to which we attain here is the measure in which we are going to be of use to the Lord afterward, and so the fires become very intense for some; but He is producing something of abiding value for others. That is one of the issues of this book.

God’s Hiding of Himself

Now right in that setting come these words which we hardly need to dwell upon. Firstly, “He hideth himself.” I doubt whether there is one of us who does not know something of the poignancy that lies in that statement. “He hideth himself.” That is one of our greatest occasions of suffering, the fact that the Lord hides Himself. Our cry all the time is that He will show Himself, come out into the open, let us see Him and see what He is doing. But “He hideth himself.” He was enshrouded in the mystery of His ways with His beloved servant. In all the values of this book, this is not one of the smallest, that God could say of a man that he is perfect and upright and there is none like him in all the earth, and then could hide Himself from that man. You see the point. Oh, the misrepresentation of God and of Job which this book brings out! This is one of the things which God set Himself to destroy out of hand. This misrepresentation came through Job’s friends. They were pious men, in their way godly men, who said some very lovely things — and yet they were used by the Devil as instruments against this choice servant of God. A problem arises here, which we make no attempt now to answer. Were the things spoken by these men Divinely inspired utterances? Can we take them as Scripture? “Lay thou thy treasure in the dust... and the Almighty will be thy treasure” (Job 22:24–25) — is that an inspired utterance, can we take our stand on that? That is something to be fulfilled as the Word of God, and yet that — and many another equally lovely thing — was uttered by men of whom God said in the end “Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right” (42:7.) Here is a man of whom God can say that he is perfect and upright. NATURALLY He can never say that about you and me, or about any one of us — though thank God He can say it of us IN CHRIST. Yet He could say it of Job naturally as to outward life. He could say finally of Job that he had said the thing which was right. “Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.” God could speak so at the beginning and at the end about this man, and draw Satan’s attention to him as the most perfect man on the earth, and then hide Himself from him in the time of his anguish. I say the precious thing about that is that God’s hiding does not always mean that God is against you; it does not mean what these men interpreted it to mean, that God had a controversy with Job and that there must be some deep, awful, secret sin in his life which he was hiding or to which he was blind but which the eyes of God could see. That is all false, says God: this man is perfect and upright; and yet under the accusation of pious men, un-

der the assaults of the devil to this man's anguish, God hid Himself.

Have you had one boil? You know the misery and the pain. Job was a man covered from head to foot with these things. That was only one phase of his suffering. Children gone, flocks and herds gone, camels gone, his home gone, his friends gone, and his wife turned against him saying, "Renounce God, and die." Job was left like that. And God, affirming this man's perfection and integrity, still hides Himself. "He hideth himself." What is our case compared with Job's? The Lord deals with us in the same way; He hides Himself. He must have an object which far outweighs all the dangers of the possibility of His being misunderstood and misinterpreted. His servant was given plenty of occasion to say, God is unfaithful, unloving, unrighteous; He has turned against me; and so on. But God ran the risk of it because He saw something of value which far outweighed all that. He knew that in the long run He would be justified and not condemned. "He hideth himself." Do not think, my beloved, tried, pressed brother or sister, that the fact that Satan assails and things are so difficult and hard means of necessity that you are under judgment. Even if you are standing on the ground in Christ of righteousness from God, and are not persisting in a known course of wrong over which the Lord has a controversy with you; even if you are able to say, I stand not on any ground of my own, but on the ground of His righteousness through faith, and I repudiate all known, habitual sin: even then it does not mean that God is necessarily coming out to you to show Himself always very wonderful. He may hide Himself, and those who mean well may interpret that fact the other way. It is one of the most difficult things to bear when calamity falls; people will come along and say, The Lord must have some cause for judging you, you must lie under some condemnation for Him to allow that. "He hideth himself."

God's Knowledge of our Way in Spite of His Hiding

The verses with which we began suggest a picture. Here is Job, as it were, going along a road. It looks to him like a road through a forest, and the Lord is somewhere in the vicinity and Job is looking for Him. He says, The Lord has hidden Himself somewhere in this forest, He is deliberately keeping out of my way; I sometimes seem to see an indication that He is doing something, and I immediately turn first in this direction and then in that, but I cannot find Him. He is hiding in the wood and He will not be found by me, but He is watching from His hiding place. "He knoweth the way that I take." While He is hiding, He is not disregarding; while He is hiding, He is not ignoring; while He is hiding, He is not forgetting.

God's Sovereign Working

Nay, more; He is not only hiding and looking out and knowing all about me, but He is instigating it all. "He performeth that which is appointed for me." He is not only a hidden watcher, He is a hidden actor, the prime actor, because the cause, the author, the perfecter. "He performeth that which is appointed for me: and many such things are with him." Oh, the faith of Job in the sovereignty of God through it all! "He hideth" — yes; but "He knoweth" — yes; but more, "He performeth." Let us take all the comfort these words should bring to us as individuals and as the Church as we pass through the time in which God is doing things of which we have no knowledge. He is answering a whole universe in His dealings with us, getting through to issues of tremendous account. May our faith be sufficient to believe it and to hold on to this — that "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

The Wondrous Ways of God

“Thy way was in the sea, And thy paths in the great waters, And thy footsteps were not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock. By the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Psalm 77:19,20)

What a strange juxtaposition of similes! It would be difficult to have a greater contrast than is presented in these two verses — the pilot through the sea, and the shepherd with his flock. The sea in a rage and an uproar, the tempest and the storm — and, right alongside of it, the shepherd and his flock. One a picture of unrest, disturbance, anxiety, stress, mighty forces in action; the other of tranquillity, restfulness, calm. What a contrast! — and yet brought together in one statement as to what the Lord is to His people — a pilot, a shepherd.

You need to read the whole psalm to get the full value of that. The first part of the psalm is a record of distress, perplexity, bewilderment, a crying out in trouble, reaching the agony of “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” “Is his lovingkindness clean gone for ever?” — questions about the Lord. And then the writer recollects and says, “This is my infirmity... I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High”; and the whole tone changes. Recollection and review, as to how it all worked out in the long run, brings reassurance, leading finally to this summary at the end. And yet it is only an introduction — because undoubtedly the last two verses of this psalm are an introduction to the next one, that great historic record of the Lord’s dealings with His people — Psalm 78. What a long psalm it is, recounting the movements of the Lord’s people and the Lord’s guidance and dealings with them. The psalmist has worked up to that in this way. With all there is here for most helpful, encouraging, reassuring meditation, we can at the present time only look at the gist of the matter.

I am going to change the metaphor again, from the pilot through the storm, and the shepherd with his flock, to the mountaineer. There are three peaks which every child of God has to master — peaks that are suggested by this psalm. We are not really qualified for the service of the Lord, nor for life itself in relation to the Lord, until we have mastered these three peaks. They will challenge us; they may challenge us again and again; but somehow or other we have got to be the masters of them and they have got to be things that have lost their terror for us, have lost their dread, have lost that which makes them for us things that defeat and weaken.

Divine Purpose Governing All

The first of these peaks which arises out of this psalm so clearly is Divine purpose governing all. You know how this mountain presented itself to Israel at the beginning of their history. When the psalmist refers to ‘His way in the sea’ and ‘His paths in great waters’, what is he talking about? Undoubtedly about the Red Sea as it confronted them. What a terror, what a dread there was that night! We may picture how the East wind howled and the water lashed. What a dread that sea was to the people — with what fear and trepidation did they approach its bank! The waters piled up as a wall on the left and the right served little to abate their terror. It was a terrible night, the passing through the Red Sea. It was, in a sense, a veritable mountain to be negotiated — and a mountain of, for them, terrible possibilities. But do you notice what the psalmist says? He says (Ps. 77:16) that these waters were — well, our translation does not give us the exact word. They were troubled, they were in anguish, they were groaning, and the original word which is used to describe the state of the waters suggests that they were in travail, the sea was in travail, and the nation was born in that sea that night. A nation was born in the Red Sea that night, and the waters were in anguish. It is a picture.

You see Divine purpose working in the tempest: behind the fear, the terror, all that seemed so awful that night, Divine purpose was governing, producing a nation, bringing a nation to birth — “paths in the great waters”. That is one thing that we have sooner or later to settle, that the raging, the terror, the dread, the threatening, the thing that seems to mean our undoing, is being governed by Divine purpose to produce something of very great value to the Lord. The recollection of this saved the psalmist when he was crying out with those questions — “Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Is his lovingkindness clean gone for ever?” The psalmist was in a state of distress. I think he was expressing the state of the people at that time, and wondering whether the Lord had not forsaken His people altogether and left them. Then he says, ‘Let us look back — let us go back to our beginning as a nation. Were we not born in a threat? Did we not begin our history in what seemed to speak destruction? Was it not in the most terrible tempest that we, by the mighty power of God, came out His people, delivered, saved, set apart?’ That recollection saved the psalmist in his hour, and we too have to reach the place where we say, with every new tempest, raging, threat, dread, fear, onslaught, whatever it is — God has something in this; purpose governs.

But then that involves something else, carries something else with it.

Divine Wisdom Dictating

The second mountain peak is this — Divine wisdom dictating. It is not only that there is purpose which is the end, but that there is wisdom dictating the way to the end. The psalmist looked back and saw, and said to himself, ‘Ah, at the time we could see no wisdom of God at work, the way we were going seemed to be such a confused way, a contradictory way, everything seemed to be anything but the dictating of Divine wisdom; but now I can see: God chose the way, the method, the means which He knew would most effectively reach His end, and we have to negotiate that mountain.’ It does seem so strange, the way the Lord goes. What is the Lord doing? Why? All the questions come up. But wisdom is dictating the way to the end.

Divine Love Controlling

And then, Divine love controls. It controls the end, the way, the motive — yes, the Pilot; but He is not a disinterested detached pilot, just doing his job without any heart-relationship to the people in his care. The metaphor changes at once, as though to say, ‘Ah, there is something more in it than that. God is not just negotiating through difficulties in a cold, detached way. He is a Shepherd.’ And if there is one picture in the Bible of a heart-relationship to others, it is the picture of the shepherd. God’s heart is bound up with His people, and the psalmist says an interesting thing here. “Thy way was in the sea, and thy paths in great waters, and thy footsteps were not known.” What does he mean?

Go back again, after it is all over, to the other side of the Red Sea. The wind has quieted down, and the tempest has come to rest. You look to see where His ‘footprints’ are, and you cannot find them. You cannot say, ‘He did it like this and that’. You cannot find out just how He did it. The fact is that He did it, and that is all; you cannot explain, define, mark it out. The psalmist is saying — ‘That is how God does things’. He does the most wonderful things — things which involve the whole question of life and death for us; and when He has done them, you just cannot see any trace of how He did it — but it was done. Do we not have to say that? We come up against a situation like the Red Sea, and say, ‘How are we going to master this? What is the Lord going to do with this one?’ He just does it. We look back, again and again, and say, ‘The Lord has done it, but how, I do not know’. “Thy footsteps were not known.” You cannot trace out how the Lord does things, but He does them. He brings the mighty tempest to serve His end, by His wisdom, in His love, because He is the Shepherd of His flock — because His heart is bound up with them. It matters to Him about us.

“ACCORDING TO CHRIST”

Editorial One

(NOTE: During the many years of this spoken and printed ministry, very much has been said regarding the Church. This has led to not a few enquiries for advice from many who are in difficulty over this matter. Many of the enquirers are in responsible positions in the Lord's work. It is a sign of the times that there is such a very considerable revival of concern in relation to the Church. Many conferences on the subject are being held, many 'church' movements are afoot, and a very considerable literature is being published.

It is not our intention to enter the field of discussion and controversy in relation to this matter in general. The questions which reach us are almost entirely to do with the essential nature of a 'New Testament church': how such a church is formed, what are the principles which govern it, and similar questions.

There is a good deal of dissatisfaction and unrest among many sincere believers and servants of God, due largely to the poor or even bad state existing in so many churches. In not a few cases it is due to error in teaching, or disorder and sin. Many complain of spiritual starvation, and still many more are tired of mere formalism and spiritual death. While the perfect church has never yet existed on this earth, and while there always have been, and always will be, faults and weaknesses, or worse, there really is a need for a reconsideration, and a recovery, of the essential nature and function of the Church; and therefore, while making no claim to be expert in this matter, we feel constrained to offer what we feel we may have of light in this direction. This we propose to do in one or two editorials.)

Question: What is the Church, and what are the churches?

Have we in the New Testament a clearly defined and completely set-out plan of the Church, its order, constitution, methods and work? Is there a concise and worked-out system in the nature of a 'blue-print', which is ready for copying and reproducing everywhere, and can be recognised as true to type in every place? The answer is decidedly No! But if we mean: Is there in the New Testament a revelation of God's mind as to the Church, in its nature, constitution, and vocation? it is no contradiction of the above when we say: Yes, decidedly Yes!

It is possible to take parts of the New Testament, as to doctrines, practices, work, methods, and order, to piece them together, and to frame them into a system to be adopted and applied. This is the mechanical or 'ecclesiastical' method, and it is capable of an almost endless variety of presentations, resulting in a very large variety of organized bodies, every one of which claims the New Testament for its authority. This in turn issues in rivalries, competitiveness, controversy, and, eventually, in the presenting to the world of a Christianity divided into a vast number of independent and unrelated parts, far removed from 'all speaking the same thing'. The external and objective approach to the New Testament, with a view to studying it as a manual or text-book of Christian life, teaching and work, is a false one, a dangerous one, and — so far as any real spiritual outcome is concerned — a dead one. If God had meant successive generations of Christians to IMITATE the first and proceed on the mass-production principle, surely He would have seen to it that in some way a precise and unmistakable prototype existed, with adequate safeguards against all the confusion and misapprehension which has actually eventuated.

When men, Christian men, contemplate a project which is intended to last for a considerable tenure, they set down precisely their 'Principles and Practice', consisting of their doctrines, their purpose, their practices, their methods, and so on. God did not commission or allow His first Apostles to act in this way, so that we might have a Jerusalem or Antioch Blue Book or Manual for Christian churches. In the Divine mind it is all definite, fixed, precise, and permanent, but when we come to the New Testament, and especially the formative period as covered by the Book of the Acts, everything seems so fluid, so open, and so subject to proving. There is the most wonderful and sublime reason for this; but, before we come to that, let us point out that the approach to which we have referred above is the cause of more limitation, stagnation, deadly legality, than can be measured. In doctrine, it means that the doctrinal compass is boxed and no new light is allowed as to God's Word. Of course, this is the peril of orthodoxy. The intense desire to safeguard the Scriptures can lead to a sealing off against any new light from them as to meaning and interpretation, and this makes for a static spiritual position. Spiritual pride, bigotry, exclusiveness, suspicion, are some of the unholy brood of this legalism. If Satan cannot force to the one extreme of superiority to the written Word, he will try the opposite of bondage to the letter without the spirit.

The merely objective approach of which we have written may or may not be characterized by all of the above-mentioned features, but it will most certainly be limited in its spiritual power and results. It may very well result in the responsibility being made to rest upon men, so that all kinds of devices and expedients have to be resorted to in order that the work and institution can be maintained and furthered. Christianity has almost entirely come to be such a thing now, and it is practically impossible for the vast majority of Christians — their leaders especially — to understand or even believe that God can do His work without committees, boards, machinery, advertisement, organizations, appeals, reports, names, deputations, patronage, propaganda, publicity, the press, etc. Unless these things are present with a 'recognised' backing, the thing is not trusted, even if it is believed to exist.

We are aware that the foregoing is mainly negative, but it is necessary in order to lead to the positive, to which we now proceed.

We have said that the New Testament has within it a revelation, precise, definite, and full, as to God's mind for this dispensation, and that in that revelation there is an answer to all the questions of What? Who? and How? in all matters of the Church's constitution and vocation. What is that revelation? The answer is that it is not a system, as such, but a Person. That which in the New Testament is secondary, and a consequence, has now been made primary. That is, the results have been made the first and governing things, whilst that which comes before them as the cause is overlooked. If we will look again, we shall see that anything that came into being under the Holy Spirit's first activity was the result of a seeing of Christ. By that we mean what the Apostle meant, when he recorded the substance of his prayer for believers: "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ... may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened, that ye may know...", etc. It is a seeing of the immense significance of Jesus in the eternal and universal order.

With the Apostles that seeing was subsequent to the days of physical association. During the forty days after His resurrection it was like the dawning of a new day. First, those intimations, as when the uncertain light just passes over the heavens. Then more steady and certain rays, leading to the Day of Pentecost, when the sun appeared in full glory over the horizon dispelling the last shadow of uncertainty. On that day they saw Him as by an opened heaven. The mystery of the past was dispelled. The Bible lay open like a new book. They saw Him in the light of eternity. They began to see that, while He was the glorified, personal, Son of God, He was Himself the embodiment of a great, a vast heavenly and spiritual order and system. This SEEING was absolutely revolutionary. It was a crisis out of which a new world and a new creation was born. True to this fundamental principle, all that vast revelation, which has come down the centuries from and through the Apostle Paul took its rise from that crisis described by him as "It pleased God... to reveal his Son in me" (Gal. 1:16). 'I received it... by revelation of Jesus Christ' (vs. 12). All the implicates were in the crisis; the full content was a progressive and ever-growing revelation.

While there was some initial testimony the Apostles did not formulate in conference an enterprise, a mission, with all the related arrangements and organization. The new life forced off the old leaves and dressed the new organism with a new vesture FROM WITHIN. The might, energy and urge of the Holy Spirit within produced a Way and an order, un-thought-of, unintended by them, and always to their own surprise. What was happening was really that Christ was taking form within them, individually and corporately, by new birth and growth. The believers and the companies were becoming an expression of Christ. Here, we come upon the essential nature of the Christian life and the Church.

What, in the thought of God do Christians exist for? What does the Church exist for? What do local churches exist for? There is only one answer. The existence and the function is to be an expression of Christ. There is nothing less and nothing more than that. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and all between! Let that be the starting-point; let that be the governing rule and reality in ALL MATTERS of life and work, and see at once the nature and vocation of the Church. This vast, incomprehensible heavenly system, of which Christ is the personal embodiment, touches every detail of life, personally and collectively. But remember only the Holy Spirit sees and knows how it is so; hence, as at the beginning, there has to be an utter submission to and direction by the Lordship of the Holy Spirit. What the blood-stream is to the human body, the Divine life is to and in 'the Church which is His body'. What the nerve system is in the physical realm, the Holy Spirit is in the spiritual. Understand all the workings of those two systems in the natural, and you begin to see how God has written His great heavenly principles, first in the person of His Son, and then in His corporate Body. As an individual believer is the result of a begetting, a conception, a formation, a birth and a likeness, so, in, the New Testament, is a true local church. It is a reproduction of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Man cannot make, form, produce or, 'establish' this. Neither can anyone 'join' or 'enrol', or make himself or herself a member of this organism. First it is an embryo, and then a 'formation' after Christ.

So, all talk about 'forming New Testament churches' is nonsense. The beginning is in a seeing of Christ, and when two or three in one place have seen Him by the Holy Spirit, and have been "begotten again by the word of God", there is the germ of a church.

That, then, is the starting-point. But, how drastic that is, in the matter of reconsideration and recovery (see introductory 'NOTE'). If we did not know that, both in New Testament times and in the world TODAY, such churches existed, we should be right in viewing all this as either mysticism or idealism; as unreal and impossible; but it is only when there has not been that vision of Christ, and when there is a weddedness to a merely traditional system, that it can be so regarded.

We shall have to stop looking at the Church and churches, and look again, long and earnestly, at Christ; for to see Him by the Spirit is to see the Church.

Let us summarise what we have said.

1. This consideration is in answer to requests for advice as to the true nature of the Church, and especially of local churches.
2. The objective approach to the New Testament, with a view to formulating therefrom a pattern to be imitated, copied, and reproduced as 'New Testament churches', is wrong. It only

either leads to a variety of conclusions, and therefore ‘denominations’ or results in something fixed, static and legalistic. This in turn leads to rivalries, suspicions, fears of ‘sheep-stealing’ and loss of ‘members’, etc.

3. The origin of the Church, and of churches, was a Holy Spirit revelation of Christ. As truly as Jesus said: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”, so truly, although it does not put it into a similar precise sentence, the New Testament teaches that he that has seen Christ has seen the Church: for, although Christ retains His personality, individuality and distinctive identity, the Church is the corporate expression of Him.

So truly as there was a “mystery” as to Christ, in the days of His flesh, which could not be truly seen and recognised apart from an intervention of God, as giving sight to the blind, the Church as the Body of Christ demands a similar eye-opening work of the Holy Spirit for a potent and dynamic knowledge of its true nature and vocation. (Eph. 1:17, etc.).

The recognition of the Church is an event which is of such a revolutionary character as to emancipate from all merely traditional, historical and earthly systems: as see the Apostles and especially Paul.

4. The Church was not formed by any conference, convocation, organization, council or plan.

The Church, and likewise the churches, were BORN. A living seed — the truth concerning Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit — was deposited. The Word and the Spirit, united with the quickened spirit of believers, formed an embryo, and this produced an organism. The whole process was biological as opposed to mechanical. “Not of blood (bloods), nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). The Church, and any true church, is as much a birth by the action of the Holy Spirit as is any true child of God. “Two or three” in Christ is a local-church nucleus.

5. The function and vocation of the Church, and of the churches, is to bring Christ into any location on this earth. The test is ever and only that of whether, and how much, Christ is found, met with, and ministered THERE. Anything and everything that does not truly bring Christ in, or minister to His increase, has no place in a true church.

IN PURPOSE AND NATURE the Church IS Christ, and so are the churches locally — no more, no less,

Having said that, before we go on to the constructive aspect of this matter, there are two important discriminations and distinctions to be made.

Firstly —

The Church is not co-extensive with ‘Christianity’.

What is called ‘Christianity’ is an enormous conglomeration and mass of contradictions. The Church is no contradiction within itself, and it will not allow its name to cover any contradictions. Christ is neither divided nor contradictory. The thing that now goes by the name of ‘Christianity’ embraces between its two poles almost every conceivable complexion and inconsistency. At one pole it has the complexion of a liberalism which denies every fundamental truth — as to the person of Christ, the authority and trustworthiness of the Scriptures, the atoning work of the Cross, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and so on. But all this is included in the title ‘Christianity’. At the other pole we have hard, cruel, bigoted legalism, which can resort to physical force and the use of lethal weapons for its defence or propagation. We know of instances of actual physical fights between leaders of what would be called ‘evangelical’ (or ‘Fundamentalist’) bodies. This also is included within the term ‘Christianity’. Between the two extremes there are many things which bear a character that is the most violent contradiction of Christ.

No, the Church is not co-extensive with that confusion and Babel of tongues. Anything that refers to the Church in the New Testament shows it to be quite different from what — IN GENERAL — is called Christianity. “Christian”, originally, just meant ‘Christ one’. It is a master stroke of the great maligner and discreditor of Christ, on the one hand to have put that title upon so much that really will not bear it, and on the other hand to have confused the Church with it, so that the word “Church” can apply to almost anything; a building, an institution, a denomination, etc. The Church is holy, sacred, undivided, heavenly, and all of God. Not merely ceremonially sacred, but intrinsically so.

The **second** thing, by way of distinction, is that there is a —

Difference between being in the Church and understanding what that means.

It is not an essential difference, but one that can result either from an imperfect apprehension of Christ or from an inadequate instruction. The bulk of the New Testament is concerned with bridging this gap. That is, it is occupied with making believers understand what they have come into through faith in Jesus Christ. This knowledge is shown to be of VERY GREAT and vital importance. Whatever may be the cheap and frivolous teaching of many, that the only necessity is to be ‘saved’ and everything is all right — a teaching which accounts for no small measure of the present deplorable condition in Christianity — the Apostles most positively did NOT take that view. They ‘laboured night and day’ that believers should know what they had come

into. All the eternal counsels concerning Christ and God's eternal purpose as to Him are bound up with the Church. There are very many and very great values in a true Church life, that is, a true Body relatedness, and there can only be very great loss in not knowing or apprehending this.

That which is called 'Christianity' is not impregnable; the Church is! 'Christianity', so called, is not eternal; the Church is! 'Christianity' is going to be shaken to its collapse. The Church will not be prevailed against by the very gates of Hades. Someone who speaks with knowledge and authority has recently written: 'It takes no particular prophetic gift with a fair degree of accuracy to see what the outcome will be. From some direction harsh reality will strike swift and hard and the millions who have taken refuge under the glass roof of popular Christianity will find themselves without a cover: then, bitter and disillusioned, they will turn in fury against the gospel, the Church and every form of religion. Cynicism, materialism and unbelief will blanket the world again as it did after World War I.' Those are hard words, but they are only another way of saying what is prophesied in Hebrews 12:26,27.

The Apostle Paul had given much time to Asia, and had 'not shrunk from declaring the whole counsel of God' there (Acts 20:27). Nevertheless afterward he placed on record the substance of his fervent prayer for those saints; and that prayer concerned that into which they were called in Christ, the context showing that the Church is the very complement — "fullness" — of Christ, without which He is by no means fulfilled. Although there have been, and are, distinguished Bible teachers who hold that not all born again believers are in the Body of Christ, it is not necessary to hold that view to see that the New Testament not only teaches, but thunders that it is imperative that all born again believers should come to "full knowledge", and THAT RELATES TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH. There is nothing in all the realm of Divine revelation that has suffered such furious and many-sided antagonism from the forces of evil as the knowledge of the true nature of the Church. This Paul has clearly indicated at the end of that immense document on this subject — 'The Letter to the Ephesians'. Nothing has suffered so much confusion and misapprehension. This is itself significant, and indicates how important it is, and how necessary it is, to have a right and true understanding. It would be well-nigh impossible to describe what a tremendous impact would be made upon this world and the kingdom of darkness by a true realisation and expression of the Church. It would be no less an impact than that of the very throne of Christ, as exalted "far above all". There is also made clear that to believers who have their life on a corporate basis there are many and real values, as contrasted with the weakness, poverty, and perils of mere individualism.

In New Testament times all hell rose up to prevent the local churches from coming into being. The significance of the presence of the Apostles in any city was fully recognised by the evil forces, and they — the Apostles — had either to be driven out or killed. The very existence of a local church was a testimony to, and an embodiment of, Christ's victory and authority over the evil powers. When the Church was born out of such travail, its spiritual life must by any means be shortened. Like Moses at the hands of Pharaoh, and Jesus at the hands of Herod, the babe must be slain. Someone or some few will have to travail initially (and maybe, as with Paul, "again") for churches which are a true representation or embodiment of Christ. The significance of Christ in any place is too great to go unchallenged, and no form of opposition will be left unused in order to prevent or to discredit.

To be able to go on 'happily' and tranquilly in worldly favour is no testimony to spiritual significance. The contemplation of 'New Testament churches' must take these facts into account.

Editorial Two

The first part of this consideration has been a general survey and statement as to the nature and purpose of the Church (universal) and the churches (local). We proceed now to look at foundations, but some things already said need elucidating and enlarging, and the matter now to be considered will serve this purpose, and touch vitally the beginnings of the Church in both its aspects, the universal and the local. At a point we made a statement which, if not rightly understood, could lead to a false position and to unfortunate results. It was this: 'The recognition of the Church is an event which is of such a revolutionary character as to emancipate from all merely traditional, historical, and earthly systems: as see the Apostles, and especially Paul.'

How important it is that that should be kept in the context. In other words, how necessary it is that the 'recognition' should really be an EVENT. There are many who 'break away', and become 'free-lance' people or movements, on any other ground or occasion than a spiritual crisis of seeing the POSITIVE way of the Lord. This often leads to more limitation and negation than was found in the position which they have left. It is true that Paul, at one point, came to a definite crisis over Judaism, and as from that day said: "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46b). But that is not how he, or the other Apostles, came into the Church. Something happened inside before it happened outside. Their spirits went ahead of their bodies or reason. They inwardly migrated; the Holy Spirit took them even where they had not contemplated — or perhaps intended — going. It was all a spiritual movement, not something of men. It was the Holy Spirit inculcating the significance of Christ.

We are now brought to those more positive features and principles of a Divine movement. The first of these is far from easy to state without the risk of misapprehension. Even the very words used are open to a false interpretation. This is because we are in the presence of one of the many paradoxes with which the Bible abounds. The paradox here is that of Christ satisfying the heart, and yet the Spirit reaching on and ever on. Nevertheless, when rightly understood, this first feature is perfectly clear throughout the Bible, and clearly

seen in all God's movements. Since the very constitution of man, from his first digression, is always to digress — and history is one long story of human digression from God's way — all God's return movements have been the result of another element powerfully at work. This element is what we may call—

The Divine Discontent

We must very heavily underscore the word DIVINE! While 'The word of the Lord' may have come to Patriarchs, Prophets, Judges, Apostles, resulting in a commission and a mandate, it is very easy to discern that, either before or by that word, there was found in them an unrest, a dissatisfaction, a sense that there was something more in the intention of God. Inwardly they were not settled and satisfied. Maybe they could not define or explain it. They did not know what they wanted. It was not just a discontented disposition or nature. It was not just criticism, or querulousness, or 'disgruntledness', a spirit of being 'agin the government', as of a malcontent. GOD was not satisfied, and He was on the move. These sensitive spirits, like Abraham, and Moses, and Samuel, and Daniel, and Nehemiah, and a host of others in every age — Old Testament, New Testament, and since — have been God's pioneers, because of an inward link with His Divine discontent.

Of course, this is one aspect of all spiritual progress, but it is very true of every new thing of God. We shall yet lay down the basis of the difference between natural and spiritual, human and Divine, discontent, but for the moment we are concerned with the fact and the principle. If this discontent is a truly Divine activity, it will not be a matter of mere human frustration. It will have nothing to do with natural ambition or aggressiveness. It will resolve into a sheer issue of spiritual life or death. It will become a soul-travail.

Personal and worldly interests will fail to govern. What is politic from the standpoint of advantages in this life will fail to dictate the course. There may be a Divine restraint as to time, but the inevitable ultimate issue is known deep down. A crisis is known to be imminent, and the issue is one of obedience to the way of the Spirit, or surrender to policy. If the spirit is pure, and the life in God selfless, there will be a growing sense of 'not belonging', of having already moved on, or being out with the Lord, and it is only a matter of being 'obedient to the heavenly vision'.

How often, when we have come into something new of the Lord, we have been able to say: 'This is what I have been looking for and longing for. I did not know what it was, but this answers to a deep call in my heart which has kept me dissatisfied for years'. So, just as the confession or salvation of an individual is always with the sense of having come home, a local church should be to the company a coming home, the supply of a deep need, the answer to a deep longing; just 'my spiritual home'. The spirit has been on a spiritual journey and quest, and now it has found — or is beginning to find — the answer. This quest will never reach its end until we are all at Home at last; but SOMETHING directly in line with the end, and of the very essence of the full, should be found in the local 'family' representation.

Have we made it clear? Do you see that 'churches' should not be just congregations, preaching places, or places for religious observances? They should be, in their inception, constitution, and continuation, the answer to God's dissatisfaction; that which provides Him with the answer to His age-long quest in the hearts of all concerned. If there is one thing that God has made abundantly clear, it is that He is committed to the fullness of His Son, Jesus Christ. That fullness is to find its first realisation in the Church, "which is the fullness of him". Therefore God will only commit Himself to that which is in line with that purpose. As we have said elsewhere, it can be taken as an axiom that, if we are to find God committing Himself, it is essential to be wholly in line with His object at any given time.

But God MUST have a clear and free way. The Church and the churches are not now the starting-point of God, although they should stand very near to it. Some serious work has to be done before there can be a true expression of the Church in any locality. So, a cursory glance through the Bible will make it clear that the very door to the House of God was the altar. It barred the way, and at the same time led the way, to the Sanctuary. In the New Testament, of course, it is Christ crucified in direct line with Pentecost, the Church, and the churches. The Cross bars the way and points the way.

But when the Church is reached (so to speak), that is not the end of the work of the Cross. When we have come in, the Cross still governs. Thus it comes about that, in the New Testament, we have a very great deal about the Cross IN the Church and the churches. It is quite clear that, when spiritual progress toward the ultimate fullness of Christ was arrested or impeded, or when things became defiled or disordered, the Holy Spirit, through the Apostles' letters, or by a visit, brought in the Cross with fuller meaning or stronger emphasis. This can be seen immediately, when we read such letters as those to the "Romans", "Corinthians", "Galatians", "Ephesians", "Philippians", "Colossians", and "Hebrews", with the Cross as the key. It is back to Christ crucified that the Spirit invariably leads or calls, when purity, truth, life, power, and liberty are in question.

What, then, is the particular relationship of the Cross to the Church, and to the churches themselves?

Undoubtedly, the Cross says that in any true expression of Christ, individually and collectively (which is the sole object of their existence), there is no place for man by nature! Christ crucified goes beyond the door, which is atonement, justification, righteousness as acceptance through faith. Christ crucified is, in representation, the devastation of the whole race of the old creation, with its nature. The agonized cry of God-forsakenness, the accompanying signs in a darkened sun, earthquake and rending rocks, all comprised the

mighty 'NO' of God and of Heaven to that creation. That was the all-inclusive climax of every pointer by death through the past ages.

The death of Christ was infinitely more than the martyrdom of Jesus. It was universal and eternal. In that all-comprehending veto was involved every realm affected and infected by Satan's corrupting influence and touch. To bring back into any sphere of God anything that lies under that ban is, on the one side, to deny and contradict the Cross; and, on the other hand, sooner or later to meet certain devastation. This was very early demonstrated, as a sign-instance, in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), as well as by others in 'Acts' and at Corinth who intruded natural reasoning, passions, and behaviour into the realm of the Holy Spirit's jurisdiction. It is as though the Holy Spirit took hold of the Cross and smote them to death, or, in some cases, very near it.

There is very much tragic history contained in what we have here said; not least the weakness, reproach, confusion and ineffectiveness of the Church and the churches. The natural man serves himself of the Church. In it he displays his importance, his lust for power, his craving for self-expression (very often in ministry itself), and many other aspects of his selfhood — that Satanic thing which was begotten in the race when the supreme 'I' gained man's will for an act of spiritual fornication; for that is what it proved to be.

In the churches, it is all too often — and too much — that we meet people themselves, and not supremely Christ. At the beginning, the essential thing, as we shall see more fully presently, was SPIRITUAL men, as standing over against the 'natural man'. As the Church universal rests solely upon the foundation of Christ crucified, buried, and raised, so the churches must take their character from the foundation. Every member must be a crucified man or woman. Every minister must be a crucified man, and EVIDENTLY so. No man should preach on any other ground than that he is compelled by the Holy Spirit. He should have no NATURAL liking for preaching. Preaching ambition should be crucified! We verily believe that before a true church-expression can emerge, the foundation of the Cross must be deeply and truly laid with devastating effect upon all 'flesh'.

But, if the Lord means to have such an expression, the applying of the Cross will explain the meaning. This will not, and, in the nature of things, cannot, be all done at once. The movement toward fullness is progressive. So, again and again, that movement is marked by the fuller adjustments, releases, cleansings, of new and deeper works of the Cross. For greater fullnesses of Christ, there must be deep despair of any virtue, ability, resource, other than Christ risen and present in the Holy Spirit. We cannot 'form' or 'found' churches like this, but the Lord can bring into being a nucleus of well-crucified leaders, building therewith and thereon. If we put together Matthew 16:18 and John 12:24, we shall see that the first is a declaration of purpose and intention; the second is the way in which it would come about. That way is the organic way, i.e. through death and resurrection, in which every grain shares, and to which all the grains, severally and corporately, are a testimony.

Editorial Three

The occasion of these editorials is a widespread and serious exercise concerning the nature of the local expression of the Church. As we pursue this enquiry we are getting ever nearer to the heart of the matter. The fragment at the head is, we trust becoming clearer as to its real significance for every local representation, from the "two or three" gathered into the Name, to whatever greater number there may be. Let us, then, bring it right back to this: it is not an expression or representation of some THING, even be it called 'The Church', as extra to or apart from Christ, but the presence and expression of Christ Himself. To this essential reality we now apply ourselves along one more of the lines which meet in Him.

Peter as Representative

We shall all agree that, while the full revelation of the Church has come through Paul, Peter was the point at which both the intimation was given (Matt. 16:18) and the actuality broke in (Acts 2). While much — too much — has been made of this by historic ecclesiasticism, we do agree that Peter was in an outstandingly significant place in the beginning of the Church in this world. So we are going to look at Peter with a view to getting to the most fundamental factor of all in the Church and the churches.

When Peter sat down to write his circular letter to "the elect, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia, and Bithynia", he began with a doxology. That doxology hinged upon the living hope springing up with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Peter, perhaps more than all men, had cause for a doxology over the resurrection of Jesus!

But we take Peter as representative of all those who had become followers of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh; not only of the twelve, but evidently quite a large number beyond the twelve. There were the seventy; and, beyond the seventy, many more who followed Jesus, and had some attachment to Him. Peter can be taken as, in a very real sense, representative of them all.

The Devastation of the Cross

We are thinking at this moment particularly of the EFFECT of the Cross upon him, and upon them all. The utter devastation, and then the despair, that the Cross of the Lord Jesus brought upon them. For we are told they were 'all scattered abroad'; and we know how, even before the Cross became an actuality, any refer-

ence to it brought a terrible reaction. From time to time the Lord did just make some mention of His coming death, and, as He did so, many went away, followed no more with Him (John 6:66). Then again, others said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" (5:60). Apparently off they went as well. The very thought and prospect of the Cross was impossible of acceptance. When it came, Peter, as the very centre of that whole company, is found most vehemently denying, with a terrible denial, any association with Christ — just because of the Cross; and they all shared that, even if not in word and in the same form of expression, for we are told that 'they all forsook him and fled' (Matt. 26:56). And He had said to them: 'You will all leave Me' (John 16:32) — and it became true.

Then we meet them after His crucifixion. We meet those two on the Emmaus road, the very embodiment of despair. For them, everything had gone, was shattered. All their hopes, and their hope, were eclipsed — 'We had trusted...', or 'We had hoped that it had been He that should redeem Israel' (Luke 24:21). Now, everything was gone, and the hope laid in His grave.

From time to time we meet Thomas, and we know what Thomas thought about the Cross. He again was in the grip of an awful despair and hopelessness — loss of faith, loss of assurance. As we move through those forty days after the resurrection, we find the Lord repeatedly having to upbraid them, rebuke them, because of their unbelief. 'They believed not', it says (Mark 16:11,13,14). 'Some doubted' (Matt. 28:17). We can see what a shock the Cross had been. I have not used too strong a word when I have said that the Cross was nothing less than a devastation for every follower of the Lord Jesus. And right at the heart of them all was Peter; we could say that it was all concentrated in him. It must have been, in view of what he had done. Put yourself in his place, if you can, and see if you would have any more hope for anything, or for yourself. No!

The One Supreme Essential

Now, there were forty days of this: forty days of appearances, disappearances, of coming and going; a build-up, steadily, of the fact that He was risen; overcoming day by day that despair and that unbelief; building up a new hope. But even after forty days of all that, the most vital thing is still lacking. You might think, 'Well, given all that, they have enough to go on.' But no: the most vital thing, even at that point, is still lacking. What is it? It is CHRIST WITHIN! All that — yes! but not CHRIST WITHIN — yet. Hence the restraint: 'Tarry ye in Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high' (Luke 24:49). 'Don't move yet. With all that you have, you really have not yet got the vital thing, the essential thing.' And that thing is Christ IN you, the hope of glory. Christ IN you!

That is why the apostles were so particular as to converts receiving the Holy Spirit before ever they felt assurance about their conversion. Thus, there were all the reports — there was no reason to believe they were false reports, mere rumours — about things happening in Samaria. Had not the Lord said that they would be witnesses unto Him in Samaria (Acts 1:8)? The report comes back of things happening, of people turning to the Lord, real conversions taking place in large numbers. Why not be satisfied with the report? It is a good report, and there is surely no reason to doubt it. But no; the apostles are not just satisfied with that. They sent down from Jerusalem, and when they were come down, they laid their hands upon them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–17). We see again and again, how that happens. For them, things were not really settled until they were sure that Christ was on the INSIDE — that Christ was IN them; which is saying the same thing as 'receiving the Holy Spirit', the Spirit of Jesus. That, I say, is why the Lord said, 'Tarry; don't move yet!' And that is why the apostles were so meticulous on this matter of 'receiving the Holy Spirit'.

That, too, is why the Holy Spirit gave evidences, in those times, that He had come within. We believe that this book, the Book of the Acts, is a book of fundamental principles for the dispensation. When principles are being laid down in the first instance, God always bears them out with mighty evidences that they are true principles — that these are governing things for all time. God puts His seal upon them. So, when they received the Spirit, there were the evidences of the Spirit. They spoke with tongues; mighty things happened. It was clear to all, without any doubt whatever, that the Spirit was on the inside; Christ had entered in. That universal Christ, transcending all human language; that Christ of Heaven, transcending all earthly things — He had come in, and the evidences were given.

There is no mistaking this, that the matter of CHRIST WITHIN is the fundamental essential of Christianity. You may have the mightiest facts — the mightiest facts of His birth, of His marvelous life, His death, His resurrection — and they are the mightiest of facts — you may have them all, and may all be im-potent, non-potent, until He is inside! That is a tremendous statement, but it is borne out by at least this threefold truth: Tarry — don't move yet; the essential has not taken place after all! Make sure; leave nothing to chance let it not be just an emotional revival in Samaria! Whatever there may seem to be on the outside, to prove that something has happened, make sure that it has got inside! Make sure that Christ is IN — the Holy Spirit is IN! Make sure! For, as we shall see as we go on, you may have so much — and then, that vital thing being lacking, there may be calamity, as with them.

This mighty hope does not rest merely upon historic grounds — that is, upon the ground of the historic Jesus. This mighty hope rests upon inward reality — Christ in you! That is super-historic! And for the full, full meaning — the 'mystery which hath been hid from all generations' — it has been there through ALL generations — 'but is now made known, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' — we have to go to Paul.

The Insufficient Foundation

So much for a general approach to the matter. Let us now in greater detail consider Peter, and the others whom he undoubtedly represents.

Firstly, then, as to THE HOPELESSNESS, ultimately, of a merely outward association with Christ, however sincere. There is no question about the sincerity of Peter or of any of those followers. They were sincere; there was a devotion to Jesus; their motives could not be called into question; it was well meant — there is no doubt about it. They had left all and followed Him; and to follow Jesus of Nazareth in those days involved them in a considerable amount of trouble, at least with the high-up people, and the prevailing system. Their association with Him undoubtedly meant something.

Moreover, while perhaps they were not able fully to see and understand; while they were not in the full light of who He was — the FACT of who He was was present with them.

For instance, there is the fact of the INCARNATION — the FACT of it: that this One amongst them was God incarnate, was the very Son of God, was God come down from Heaven to dwell in human form. There is the fact. They were in closest touch with that fact every day of their lives.

Then, there was the fact of His PERSONALITY: and there is no avoiding this, that that was a personality! I mean, there was a Presence where He was, that was different; that made itself felt, that registered. His was a very, very impressive Presence, beyond that of anyone else with whom they had any association, or of whom they had any other knowledge. There is a mystery about this Man: you cannot fathom Him; you cannot explain Him; you cannot comprehend Him: He is more; He is different. And wherever He comes, His Presence has an effect, and a tremendous effect. The FACT of His personality!

And then, although we do not know how far it went, there was the fact of MARY and her secret. We do not know to how many she spoke of her secret; we are told that she 'hid all these things in her heart' (Luke 2:19,51). But we do know that some knew about it. We know that she told Elisabeth all about it; and Zechariah knew it; and John the Baptist knew Mary's secret. She was there with them all. There is the FACT of Mary and her secret — without pressing that too much; but it is there.

Then there is the fact of the MIRACLES — we cannot very well get away from them. Miracles in the realm of the elements — the sea and the wind; miracles in the realm of nature — as our hymn says: 'It was spring-time when He took the loaves, and harvest when He brake'. Miracles in the realm of sickness and disease, and even death: His healing, and His raising from the dead, such as the son of the widow of Nain. These were FACTS. And then, in the realm of the powers of evil — muzzling demons and casting them out, and delivering the demon-possessed. These were all facts present with them. It is a tremendous accumulation of evidence.

Further, the fact of the TEACHING: that, without special education, He bewildered, confounded and defeated the authorities of His time — all the men of information and knowledge, the scribes, the lawyers, the best representatives of the intellect of Jewry. They picked out on occasions their best intellects, to go and try and catch Him in His words; and these very men had to ask the question: 'Whence hath this Man this, having never learned?' (John 7:15). There was the FACT of His teaching.

There is a tremendous build-up. What a situation! They had all that (and how much more that embraces!) — and yet, whilst being in possession of that whole mass of mighty facts and realities about Him, and whilst living in the closest association with Him, it was possible for them to know all the havoc and the despair of the Cross. I venture to say that you and I would probably think that, if we had only a bit of that, we should be safe forever; never have any reason whatever to doubt our salvation. And they had it all, and yet here we have them after the Cross in abject despair. I have not exaggerated; I do not think one could exaggerate in this matter. When it came to the supreme test, all that did not save them; there was lacking the one essential to make it all vital, to make it the very triumph in the trying hour. That one essential is Christ — THAT Christ — in you. So long as all that is still objective, on the outside, though you may be in the closest association with it all, there is yet something lacking. And that lack may spell disaster, for it did with them.

By the resurrection a new hope was born; by the resurrection a new power came into the world and human life; by the resurrection the way was opened for that Christ to change His position from Heaven — from outside — into the inner life of the believer. It has all got to be 'Christ IN you, the hope of glory'. This is just the essential nature of this dispensation in which we live. In the former dispensation, the Spirit moved from the outside UPON. Jesus said: 'When He is come, He shall be IN you.' That is the change of dispensations; that is the character of this present dispensation — the Spirit within. What is the secret of the Church's power? What is the secret of the believer's life, strength, persistence, endurance, triumph against all hell and the world? What is the secret of ultimate glory? It is Christ IN you; in other words, that you have really and definitely RECEIVED the Holy Spirit.

How important this is! — that you and I shall KNOW that our Christianity, our faith, does not rest upon even the greatest historic facts, but that we KNOW that Christ is inside; we KNOW that we have received the Holy Spirit. That is the secret of everything.

Let us carry this a little further, and consider the next thing: the hopelessness of work for Christ without Christ within.

'He called unto Him whom He Himself would; and He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him'

(Mark 3:13,14); and He chose seventy, and sent them forth, and gave them power over unclean spirits, over all manner of diseases, and they went forth, and they returned with great joy saying, 'Even the demons are subject unto us in Thy Name' (Luke 10:1,17). Tremendous! 'Heal the sick' — yes; 'raise the dead; cast out demons; freely ye have received, freely give' (Matt. 10:8). And they returned with great joy: it was done; they had seen it! And you have this picture after the Cross of these same people — the SAME PEOPLE — devastated! You say: Is that possible? Is that real? If you know your own heart, you will know it is possible. But what is the meaning of this?

In the case of the 'twelve' and the 'seventy' we have set forth a strange, wonderful, and almost frightening fact. It is that, within the vast scope of the sovereign rule of God — which is only another definition of the 'Kingdom of God' — within the sovereign rule of God, many things obtain which only EXPRESS that sovereignty. They are not of the essential and permanent essence of God Himself, as in the nature of things; they are the WORKS of God. I say, within that vast scope of His rule and His reign, God has countless instruments of His sovereignty — be it official, be it providential — which He just uses in His sovereignty in relation to His end. There is a purpose to be served, an end to be reached, concerning His Son, Jesus Christ: it has got to be made known in this world that the Kingdom of God has drawn near, and that Jesus Christ is the centre of that Kingdom. And, in order to make that known, God will employ sovereignly even the Devil himself! His sovereignty gathers into it many, many things which are not essentially of the nature of God.

Perhaps you have been amazed sometimes, and perplexed and bewildered, why God should use that, and that and that; and such and such persons. You have been inclined to say: 'It is all contrary to what I believe to be necessary to God for His work. I see that the Bible says that instruments have got to be according to God's mind in order to be used.' But history does not bear that out. As I say, He has used the Devil, and the Devil is not according to God's mind. There is a sovereignty of God spread over in relation to His end.

But when you have said that, it is a frightening fact when you come to the work of God. I mean this — that we may be working for God, and doing many mighty things as employees of the Kingdom of God, the rule of God, and then, in the end, be cast away! In the end, we ourselves might just go to pieces. Here it is — this strange thing, that these men went out, twelve and seventy, with this 'delegated authority' — this DELEGATED authority — and exercised it, and mighty things resulted; and then these same people are found, after the Cross, with their faith shattered; nothing to rest upon. What does it say?

The Deficiency Made Good

Thank God, the book of the Acts transforms the whole situation! Because the book of the Acts brings in this mighty new factor: that Christ, who had delegated the authority, is now indwelling as the authority Himself. And the works now are mighty works, but they are not just works FOR the Lord — they are the works OF the Lord. It all goes to prove this tremendous fact: that it is "Christ IN you" that is the indispensable necessity for life and for work. All that they had in their association with Him, and then all that they were allowed to do by His delegated authority — all fell short of being something that could make them triumphant in the hour of the deepest testing. And that is something!

Paul put his finger on it at Ephesus, if you remember, when he said: 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' (Acts 19:2). It was ever the apostles' question, and ever their quest. They knew afterward, if they knew anything at all, that nothing, NOTHING, will stand up to anything, save Christ Himself indwelling.

Now, we can, of course, take that both ways. There is the negative side — the almost frightening possibility that there should be all that, and then disaster at the end. But let us take it positively. What a marvelous thing it is that we are in the dispensation when the one thing, above all others, that God will make true, is "Christ in you" — Christ IN you! No wonder Peter burst forth with his doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who... hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"! You need to be Peter to be able to speak as he spoke; to have gone through the awful shattering, into that unspeakable depth of despair, loss of hope, to be able to say "a living hope" — a LIVING hope! And what is it? "Christ IN you, the hope of glory."

No; there is no hope for us individually; there is no hope for our companies, our churches, our assemblies; there is no hope for Christianity — unless and until the living Christ, with all the tremendous significance of His coming into this world, of His life here, of His Cross, of His resurrection, has come, by the Holy Spirit on to the inside of things, of people, and churches; until it is "Christ IN you". All the other may be there — the creed, the teaching; you may, with all sincerity and honesty, say: 'I believe in God the Father...' and so on — it may all be there, and yet there may be disaster where that thing is the most frequently declared.

It is the impact of Christ that matters. In those early days He could not be present without it being known; and that is the thing that you and I need; that is the secret of the Church's power. It is the presence of Christ on the 'inside' of you and of me, and of all of us as people together; "this mystery AMONG THE NATIONS, which is Christ in you". You are among the nations; and the deepest, the profoundest, the most inexplicable thing is "Christ in you", as you are amongst the nations, "the hope of glory."

It is a question of HOPE. It can be touched by a deep and terrible despair; it can see disintegration and disruption. What we need is a mighty, mighty hope, a living hope — that is, Christ, Christ risen, Christ Himself! We need to get beyond even the resurrection, to where we are able to say: It is Christ present; to what Christ

means, as WITHIN us.

Editorial Four

In concluding this brief series of editorials, for the time being, we are going to sum up this matter of the Church and the churches by looking more seriously at the great crisis or turning point which we have in the New Testament.

From what we can discern in the relevant literature, it would seem that very few indeed — and some of these only indistinctly — have recognised the tremendous nature of the events centring around Stephen (Acts 6, 7). A more careful consideration of Acts 7 in the light of the whole context of the New Testament will lead to some very deep and far-reaching conclusions.

In the first place, through Stephen there is given retrospective confirmation and explanation of some of the most momentous and critical things said by the Lord Himself in the days of His flesh. Too little account has been taken of those intimations or declarations of His that with Him and resultant from Him an entirely new economy and different order was imminent.

In the second place, with Stephen there was the forcefulness of Heaven breaking in with two mighty meanings. One, shock-treatment to the Church, which, with its first leaders, was settling down to a semi-Judaistic Christianity, with the Temple, synagogues, and Jerusalem as an accepted system. The other, the Divine foreknowledge and prediction that in the approximate period of forty years (a significant period) the whole of that centralized and crystallized order would be shattered, and scattered like the fragments of a smashed vessel over the earth, never again to be reconstituted in the dispensation.

Stephen, in his inspired pronouncement, did some devastating things. He first traced the Divine movement from Abraham, along a SPIRITUAL line (back of all temporal and material instrumentalities), to Christ, showing that what was in the Divine mind throughout was a spiritual and heavenly system and order, culminating in Jesus, the Christ. He next showed that historically the people concerned had failed to recognise that spiritual meaning, that heavenly concept, and had done two things. They had made the earthly and temporal an end in itself, and given fullness and finality to it. Then they had persecuted, cast out, or killed those who, seeking to make the spiritual and heavenly paramount, had rebuked their shortsightedness and condemned their unspirituality. According to Stephen this was a vicious and evil force that was at work even when the symbols and types of the heavenly were being FORMALLY and ritualistically practised.

The effect of Stephen's pronouncement, and the significance of his anointing with the Holy Spirit — as will be seen from some of his clauses — was to wipe out and set aside the entire Old Testament order, as represented by and centred in the Temple at Jerusalem. The significance of the advent of Christ was the displacing of what was — and is — of time, by that which is eternal; the displacing of that which is of earth by that which is of Heaven; the displacing of the temporal by the spiritual; and the displacing of the MERELY local by the universal. The cult of Israel was finished for the age.

One, perhaps supreme, factor in the significance of Stephen was what he saw at the end and said with almost his last breath: "Behold, I see the heavens opened; and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (7:56). Here we have, the central and basic reality of true New Testament Christianity, of the Church and the churches — Jesus on the right hand of God. The government, the authority, the headquarters, vested in the ascended Lord, and centred IN HEAVEN; not in Jerusalem, nor anywhere else on earth. Then, this is the only occasion on which, after Jesus Himself had used the title, He is spoken of as Son of Man. This is NOT the Jewish title, it is the universal designation. In Daniel we have the Son of Man as receiving from God "dominion, and glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" (Dan. 7:14). That is the meaning of Stephen's vision and utterance.

The Jewish rulers and Stephen's accusers were quick and shrewd enough to recognise the implications, for they had no less and no other import than that the 'Temple made with hands' was finished; the dispensation of the Law was ended. There was an implicit call to the Church of Jesus to leave the Temple and all that went with it and to move into the greater, the fuller, and the abiding reality. What startling and impressive significance this gives to two other things immediately related. As we see these, we are forced to exclaim: 'Oh, wonderful!'

The first is that Paul comes right into the picture at this very point. Was Stephen God's vessel for this great heavenly revelation? Was he the spearhead of the heavenly movement? Was he the voice of Heaven, proclaiming, in a crucial and dangerous hour in the Church's history, the true and eternal nature of its constitution and vocation? Did they do him to death, driven by the sinister intelligence of the evil powers who know the incalculable importance of a Church on HEAVENLY ground? Very well then, Heaven answers, and in the hour of Hell's vicious and destructive onrush, brings into immediate view the man who will impart for all time the revelation in fullness of those realities inherent in Stephen's brief ministry. What an answer! What an example of the Son of Man being at the Throne! The same forces of destruction will pursue Paul for his life, but that Throne will see the revelation given in fullness, and destruction suspended until the work is done.

The second impressive thing is that the very work of evil, intended to curtail and end this essential development, was made the very means of effecting it. The Church universal, and its representation worldwide, took its rise from that very hour and event. Peter and James may remain in Jerusalem, and some die-hard le-

galists may circle around the latter at least; but God is moving on, and they will have either to fall in or be left in limitation.

Now all this, with its tremendously searching implications, has much to say to Christianity today.

Because of the close likeness, both of Stephen's position and of his interpretation of the times, to the Letter to the Hebrews, some have attributed that letter to him. There is no value here in pursuing the matter into the realm of authorship or textual criticism, but the identity of position in both is impossible to mistake. Indeed, 'Hebrews' could very rightly be regarded as Stephen's (or, for that matter, Paul's) full presentation of the crisis and change of dispensations.

The tragedy is that, with 'Hebrews' in their hands, responsible leaders of the Church can still adhere to a system and form which is but the extension or carry-over of the Old Testament, with certain changes of phraseology. The IMMENSITY of the change and gap has certainly not been apprehended. Some of the most terrible things in the whole Bible are contained in that letter in relation to the crisis and the two ways and realms. The issue is no less than that of life and death.

All this has much to say regarding the true nature of the Church and the churches. He that hath eyes to see, let him see!

FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB

Chapter One

THE COMPANY ON MOUNT ZION

*“And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth. These are they that were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. **THESE ARE THEY THAT FOLLOW THE LAMB WHITHERSOEVER HE GOETH.** These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no lie: they are without blemish”*
(Rev. 14:1–5).

This passage goes to the very heart of all the divine purpose. There is a sense in which it is the key to everything in the history of God’s thoughts and ways concerning man. If we understood this passage very many of our problems would be solved and our deep questions answered. So vital is the issue that is centred here, that unusual conflict has arisen about it — and not only spiritual conflict, but unspiritual controversy also. We shall not get far until we have our ground clear, and for that is required real honesty, faithfulness, and courage.

There is a phrase here which conveys a very great deal in that realm of conflict and controversy. It is a phrase which is gravely suspect even among evangelical Christians, and, were it not in the Word of God, I, for one, would avoid it for that reason; but we cannot invest the apostle John with the suspicions which have arisen from a phrase which he has used. We must honestly seek to understand what he meant when he used such phrases. I refer to the phrase “firstfruits”. “These were purchased... to be the firstfruits... unto the Lamb”.

Perhaps the most helpful and profitable way of coming to an understanding of this phrase would be to seek to identify the hundred and forty-four thousand to whom it refers. Before we do that, however, that is, before we seek to identify this company, it might be as well if we tackled this adverse attitude, for there may be some justification for it. There is always justification for an adverse attitude when a particular ASPECT of truth is so enlarged that it becomes regarded as the WHOLE truth, and in this matter that has certainly happened in certain circles. Again, when such an exaggerated emphasis is allowed to divide the Lord’s people and to result in an exclusiveness and superiority of mind, then there is justification for suspecting it and taking an opposite attitude, or at least an attitude of opposition. Further, when the emphasis is laid upon the wrong point, resulting inevitably in an unbalanced state, then the matter may rightly be open to question and in this particular matter that is exactly what has happened. Terms have been coined which at once betray emphasis upon the wrong point, such as the term “rapture” and with it that other word “selective”. That is certainly placing the emphasis at the wrong point. When a phrase like that is used, we are off the mark. The conclusion drawn by those who have created it and who use it is that it represents schism in the Body. When the Lord has taken anyone into His presence in the joy and victory of His grace — and He is doing that almost every moment of our lives — we never charge Him with creating schism in the Body. If we did but know it, at this very moment from numerous places all over the world children of God are being called gloriously into His presence — a whole group is going up at once, so to speak. We never think of the Lord creating schism in the Body by leaving the rest a little longer. The emphasis has been put upon the wrong point. Let us get this thing straightened out, because that is a false premise altogether.

I have no intention at all of seeking to give a specific interpretation to this Scripture or to propagate any particular teaching which would have any of these results. I do really want to get to the heart of this matter, because it is borne in upon me that it is of tremendous account to God and to His people at this time — which is the time of the end. Sometimes it is necessary to suspect suspicions. Some of the most vital things in the interests of the Lord have at times been most suspect, and that is itself suspicious; that betrays something else. There is something there, or there may be something there that the enemy is very particularly against. There may be something there of such consequence as to stir up the depths of the human heart, perhaps in fear, or unwillingness, or even resentment, and that sort of thing can easily be passed on under a label, or it may represent the attempt to get out of something of great account to God because of what is involved in it. So I say, sometimes it is necessary to suspect our suspicions, to question our questionings, to sift our reactions. Let us remind ourselves that the popular is not necessarily the true. History is full of that. Lord Lister was very unpopular and had to fight a terribly lonely battle over his “theory” of antiseptics. He has been universally proved true. It has taken time. Florence Nightingale fought a desperate battle with all those in high places. She has been vindicated up to the hilt, although she was practically alone. The popular is not necessarily the true and the right, and these are things which we must remember when we are facing a matter like this,

which as I say has become beclouded by suspicion and opposition.

But let us get closer. Surely all of us are prepared to believe, firstly, that to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” is something of great and solemn importance, and secondly, that it is not everyone who will do it. Does that not settle the whole matter? It is of primary account to God and to us that this should be true: “These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”; and that is something not to be suspected nor spurned.

The Heavenly Zion

But you see this is said to be true of a particular company. They are distinguished from others by this very characterization. Look at them, identify them, a company purchased out of the earth, not just from the earth or in the earth; it is out of the earth. Purchased to be firstfruits unto the Lamb, standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, and you note the position is before the commencement of judgment. This company is in heaven, there is no mistaking that, and therefore it means that this is not the earthly but the heavenly Zion, this Zion is in heaven. This is the Zion of Hebrews 12 — “Ye are come unto mount Zion... the heavenly Jerusalem”. That is the Zion here. It is necessary to say that because there is another Zion in the book of the Revelation with another company out of the tribes of Israel. That is in chapter 7 and it is not this company. This is a heavenly company and they are singing in heaven before the throne. Heavenliness in signal degree is the character of these people. More than all others and before all others, these embody heavenliness.

Overcomers

Notice — and this is a point of tremendous effect — that the promises to overcomers in the early chapters of this book are found fulfilled in this company. The Lord had said concerning certain who would overcome that He would write upon them the name of His God and His own new name (Rev. 3:12). Here it is: “Having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads”. These are the people who have overcome, and they are distinguished from the rest, even in the churches.

Government in Fullness

And then they are mentioned as a specific number, a particular company — one hundred and forty-four thousand. This surely is not to be taken any more literally than is the word “Lamb”. It is a number which carries with it a definition. Twelve multiplied by twelve. It is government, the number of government, and government carried to fullness. But you see again, it distinguishes them. We shall later come on a great multitude which no man can number, but these are numbered. They are a distinct and particular company.

A Virgin People

Notice some other particulars about them. “Purchased out of the earth... not defiled with women; for they are virgins”. In that statement we must not read the literal meaning. It cannot mean that at all. It is in keeping with the whole of that particular meaning throughout the Old Testament and the New where God’s elect people are regarded as a virgin people. Fornication in Israel was that of having spiritual relationship with other nations, the peoples of this world, and this is what is meant — that there has been created and preserved an absolute separateness from that spiritual system which lies behind this world; there must be no link with it at all. That issue is a very live issue today. Go to China and you will see whether it is a live issue, whether you are going to surrender to the great fornication, the great red dragon. It is a life and death issue now, and these are they who have not surrendered, they have kept pure, have not been defiled. They “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”. That is in the present participle, which means they are following the Lamb because they always have been. It has become a habit, it is a disposition which has been born in them, created in them. They did it on the earth and they go on doing it, people who are not spasmodic in following the Lamb, who are not of those who go on one day and go back the next. They are continuously following the Lamb. It is an utterness of devotion to the Lord Jesus. They are the firstfruits unto the Lamb. Note the way it is put — “Firstfruits... unto the LAMB”. The Lamb has in them the first maturity of His Lamb character and work; in them He first sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. It is unto the Lamb, His satisfaction.

“Unto the Lamb”

It means this, that their conception of salvation was not one governed by personal interest, that they would be saved in order to be saved and enjoy salvation for themselves; but their conception was that it was all unto the Lord, it was for Him. That is a higher level altogether, and I beg to suggest that this is a discriminating thing. There are multitudes of people, Christians, who are glad to be saved in order to be saved, because it is a good thing to be saved for themselves; it secures a lot for them and it means heaven and glory; but the primary concern of these others is the glory of the LAMB. “Unto the LAMB”. They follow wherever HE goes.

“The Fellowship of His Sufferings”

Naturally, it might be easier to follow the KING whithersoever He goeth. There were many in the days of His flesh who pursued Him wherever He went. You would always find them there. Oh, He said, “loaves and fishes”; to see His mighty works. But these follow the Lamb, and that means that they have a disposition to respond to the “fellowship of his sufferings”, like the apostle who first used that phrase. For him it was not something to be shunned: “that I may know him and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10); there was a disposition to share the sufferings of the Lamb. That issues in a specific kind of people, a particular company;

and if we look at it in that way surely our suspicions and our fears are dismissed. Identify these people and the other ground gives way.

What all this means becomes clear as we look at it in its relation to all that is said about the Lamb. That is, you have got to comprehend the whole Word of God in connection with the Lamb in order to understand who and what these people are, for undoubtedly they are the people who have embraced, entered into, and become the embodiment of all that that phrase means — the Lamb, His life, His character, His work.

What is here is this: firstly, a company marked out and distinguished by a peculiar fellowship with Christ as the Lamb. Underline the word Lamb, the name Lamb, with all that that means, and then see here a people who are in a peculiar relationship with Christ as the Lamb, and with what He means as being the Lamb. There is little doubt that there is a special honour given to this company. They are mentioned here with peculiar honour; their position is one of peculiar honour. The very tone in which they are mentioned is that of a people of very sacred and precious meaning to the Lord.

A Song Learned Through Suffering

They possess an exclusive secret. They sing a song, and no one could learn that song save the hundred and forty-four thousand. No one else had the faculty. How do they possess this exclusive secret? Oh, the answer goes to the heart of so much in our experience. You know that it is a true principle that you learn secrets through suffering that you learn in no other way. It is in suffering that we learn those things that no one else knows. We cannot explain them, we cannot teach them, or make others understand. We can only say, "When you have been through what I have been through you will understand, you will know; until you have, it is all closed to you". These people have been a way in which capacity for something has been created.

"Firstfruits"

Again, that goes to the heart of things. They are a people with a capacity, which means something very great for the Lord. That is surely explained or contained in the phrase "firstfruits". A first thing is always a determinative thing, and it is a principle in the Word of God that the first mention of a thing in the Bible always has in it intrinsically all that comes out afterwards concerning that thing. These people, this company, have the intrinsic value; the capacity for giving has been created. The figure changes in this book of the Revelation at the end. There is the city, and right out from the throne there goes that which is for the health of the nations. The nations derive their values from what is at the very heart of things. The intrinsic values are capable of reproduction over and over again to the advantage of many more who have their centre in the "city". Firstfruits — oh yes, they are not the only ones but they have the value in the first place, and they have it for the others. It is the power of impartation through capacity created in suffering.

Is that not true to principle? You know it surely, most of you, in your own experience, that if you have been able to help anybody, it is because you have gone through something to create in you the capacity for helping them. It is not that you are passing on information. It has come out of something that God has deeply done in you through experience, and, moreover, painful experience. That is the way in which these first govern. They govern by capacity and ability to give, to impart. They have an exclusive secret, which no one but these can learn. The implication here is that they have gone a very utter way and are in a very utter position to serve the Lord.

God's Satisfaction First

We are not told here what they fully represent as to God's purpose, but we are left to view them in the light of His fuller revelation. When we take up the fuller revelation of the meaning of the Lamb, then we shall begin to understand what this Lamb company is, these who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. We may do something of that later, but here we may mention one or two things. These people, in the first place, represent God's satisfaction in a peculiar way — God's satisfaction first. They have given God the inheritance that He seeks in the saints, they have answered to God, and that is something. It is no small thing that He should have that upon which His heart has been strongly set. God finding His own satisfaction — surely they represent that.

But here is a remarkable thing. They sing — and note how their singing is described. "As the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder". What a volume! "The voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing as it were a new song before the throne". What is there remarkable about that? These are people who have known suffering in no ordinary way. These are people who have gone with the Lamb — always meaning suffering and sacrifice — and they are singing their very heart out in such volume, such impressiveness, that the apostle finds it difficult to discover words to convey this singing. What does it mean? Oh, they have come to see that all the suffering was infinitely worthwhile. They have come to see that after all the Lord was not against them as they were tempted to think. After all, it was not this and that and the other thing which the enemy tried to make out to be the meaning of their sufferings. No, there was something in this of unspeakable value and significance. I know there are some people who sing to keep their courage up; there are some people who sing, well, perhaps, without any specific purpose — but these people here are not singing without meaning and purpose. They sing now because they are wholly gratified with the ways of the Lord. It must mean that. They follow the Lamb, they have gone the way of the Cross in a very deep way, and the people who have gone most deeply into the Cross and the sufferings of Christ are the people who sing loudest in eternity. They have discovered the love of God through suffering, in a very full

way. They sing before the throne. We have often been before the throne complaining, murmuring, despairing, perhaps in bitterness and rebellion. At the end — for those who will follow THE LAMB whithersoever He goeth — is a song which is unique, something altogether beyond the knowledge and understanding of others.

After all, there is no room for suspecting this. It is something very precious to the Lord. As we said at the beginning, it would solve so many problems. One of the problems besetting many of us is why it is that the Lord takes us such a peculiarly difficult way. The Lord does not seem to take other Christians that way, and they seem to have an easy time, comparatively. Why should we have such a difficult time? That is one of our problems. Others can do all sorts of things and still be Christians and be saved, but the Lord will not allow that with us. Others can get away with quite a lot and remain happy Christians, but somehow or other the Lord does not allow that with us. He is leading in a very hard way indeed. Here is the explanation. It lies right at the heart of these verses in Rev. 14, something that the Lord's heart is set upon. If only we could by grace find the right attitude to take toward the peculiar, the unusual dealings and ways of God with us, and the sufferings through which the Lord leads us. If we could take the right attitude, that attitude would be this — the Lord is after something of peculiar value to Himself, we should then see some new meaning in Paul's word — "To you it hath been GRANTED in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf". "It has been given to you to suffer". Perhaps it is a trust with which the Lord cannot trust many. It is doubtful whether the Lord could trust many of His own children with suffering beyond a certain measure.

We must leave it there for the moment. If what has been said is true, if the Lord has something of peculiar value represented in these people, will that not explain all the prejudice, all the distortion, all the fear? May that not be the reason? May the Lord give us grace to accept nothing less than that which will most fully satisfy Him.

Chapter Two

THE LAMB

Reading: Rev. 14:1-5; Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:4-11.

"These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Rev. 14:4).

In our previous meditation our time was occupied with identifying the one hundred and forty-four thousand followers of the Lamb. Without going over the ground then covered, by way of retrospect it does seem perfectly clear that that particular company represents something distinct and different from other companies of the Lord's people mentioned in the book of the Revelation. They are marked out by this characterization, that they "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth", and have consequently come to a place of peculiar value and service to the Lord in glory.

Christ the Eternal Lamb

Now we pursue that matter in order to try to see what it means, or at least something of what it means, to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth", that is, in unreserved utterance. So we allow the very designation to lead us — "the Lamb". And when we look into the Scriptures to find where the first glimpse of the Lamb is given — I do not mean of lambs but the Lamb — we find it here in Rev. 13:8 — "And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain". You will see that there is an alternative rendering — "written in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world", and I think that is the more correct order. "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world". That is really the first glimpse that we have of Christ as the Lamb. A remarkable statement — "slain from the foundation of the world". Probably you know that the word "foundation" there could be more literally translated "the laying down of the world", that is, the setting out of the whole scheme of creation. We speak of laying down a plan, a scheme, a project, and when God laid down the plan, the scheme, the project of the creation, at that time the Lamb was, in intention, slain, which, of course, in the very first instance means that the Cross is no afterthought. The Cross is not something brought in as an afterthought because of certain emergencies. The Cross was in the foreknowledge of God, as we have read in Acts 2:23 — "being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God": "delivered up... by the foreknowledge of God": "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world".

That takes us back to God's counsels from eternity. A purpose, a purpose framed, a purpose projected, initiated. There we find ourselves once more in the presence of those counsels of the Godhead to which Paul so much refers; wonderful, great, glorious counsels. How full, far-reaching, and glorious were those counsels before times eternal. It is a matter about which we can truly be in contemplation and meditation and consideration all our days and never exhaust it. How many times have we come back to those parts of the Word which speak so much about God's eternal counsels, God's foreknowledge, God's predestinating purpose, and still we feel we have not touched the fringe. There is always something more. Yes, it was all there before, and when God, so to speak, drafted His great, universal, eternal plan and purpose, He at the same time anticipated its disruption. He foresaw what would happen as a mighty spiritual reaction against His intentions. He took the whole situation in, knowing that the very nature of the purpose must leave the door open for voluntary obedience and committal and acceptance. The very essence of it all, which is love, must leave the place for option, and He foresaw the side on which man's option would move, He foreknew the tremendous activity of spiritual

forces against His purpose. He foresaw all that has happened since man gave way to the great spiritual foe of God's intentions concerning His Son Jesus Christ. Having projected, and having foreseen, He provided, and redemption was forthwith established.

The Work of the Lamb

It is eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). That is the name of it. It is the timeless Cross because the purpose is eternal. We are brought, then, right into the presence of the timeless Cross and the eternal purpose. This introductory designation, the Lamb, is tremendously impressive when you see that already, before anything has happened, Christ is called the Lamb. Christ is the Lamb; and His being called the Lamb before all that terrible tragedy and havoc had taken place, itself indicates the full nature of the work to be done. The LAMB — the title is an implication. It implies just what will have to be done. We are in the presence of a tremendous thing, if only it would break upon us. There is that vast purpose of God which, in its realization, is to obtain throughout all the ages of ages to come and to give character to His universe. Then there is this terrible, terrible sin, which is so utterly contrary, the disruption of everything through these present ages: And then you say that it is a Lamb that is going to put all that right — what do you mean? Why, you want something more than a Lamb for that! You must have a very limited grasp of the situation if you say a lamb can put it all right! But that is just what the Bible does say, with a significance beyond our comprehension. Because, you see, as we have said just now, it indicates the nature of the work to be done, which is this — an entire and utter reversing of the nature and constitution of things as they are now.

Will anybody look at the world today and man's ideas of running it, and say that it is just like a lamb? You see how absurd that sounds, how ridiculous. Anything and everything but the Lamb is in the present constitution of things. Everything that is a complete antithesis of the Lamb pervades this order of things, in its very constitution. You see the point. The whole constitution has got to be changed. Another constitution needs to be given to this universe and it must be the constitution of the Lamb. Yes, this universe has got to be reconstituted upon the basis of the Lamb-nature, and the wonderful thing is that all these tremendous forces — these simply terrific forces, in this universe, of iniquity, evil, wickedness, sin, hatred and malice — all these forces are gathered up, and the Bible tells how a Lamb can deal with the whole thing. There is something here which is a mystery.

The Triumph of the Lamb

And so you find this whole set of paradoxes and seeming contradictions. In the book of the Revelation there is the book sealed, and the apostle says, "And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon: and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:4–6). Always remember that in the twenty-nine occurrences of the word "Lamb" in the book of the Revelation, it is always the diminutive, "a little Lamb". "Behold, A LITTLE LAMB hath prevailed". Strange contradiction! The Lion, the Lamb — identical! The Lamb is the Lion in strength in prevailing; yet a lamb is the very symbol of weakness. Nothing would speak more of weakness than a little lamb; you would not want to put much weight upon a little lamb.

But look at what it says in this book about the little Lamb. These terrific forces make war with the Lamb and the Lamb shall overcome them (Rev. 17:14). You could believe that, perhaps, of the Lion; but the LAMB shall overcome them — weakness and might in one object. Yieldedness as a lamb to the slaughter, no resistance; and authority. They flee before the face of the Lamb. Strange contradiction: subjection, submission, and dominion, dominion given to the Lamb — to the LAMB.

Meekness: what do you mean by meekness? No standing up for personal rights, no seeking of self-vindication. But what about this wrath of the Lamb? It is terrible. There is a mystic infinite power in the Lamb which is not to be accounted for on any natural ground at all. Take the natural aspect, and you have everything that speaks of weakness and helplessness, submission and meekness. But there is a mystic something about this Lamb that is not natural, it is divine. All the mighty forces of God's heavenly universe are bound up with, centred in and expressed through this yieldedness, this weakness, this meekness, this submission.

That is not just a statement. That is a fact, a thing that can be put to the test by any Christian, and many of you know quite well that it is a working principle. When you have sought the grace of the Lord Jesus to suffer wrong rather than do wrong, to accept joyfully the spoiling of your goods, to restrain natural heat and wrath and reaction and to hand things over to the Lord, you have seen the Lord do things that none of your wrath and none of your strength could have done. You have known the Lord to come in then, when you have let go and have got out of the way. That is the way. That is not natural. No, our constitution is not the Lamb constitution at all. We know that quite well. But when God reconstitutes according to the Lamb, the ground is prepared and the way is opened for the exercise of infinite power; for something that is not natural, something that can only be said to be the Lord. See this Lamb, led to the slaughter, opening not His mouth. Behold Him in His yieldedness to the will of God and see whether God has vindicated that nature. Has He? God has indeed vindicated that.

The Cross the Way of the Lamb

Now let us go back a little. What we mean by the Lamb is the Cross. The Cross is the way of the Lamb, and the Cross, or the Lamb, links the eternities. One arm, so to speak, of that Cross reaches right back over all the ages and beyond the garden into the eternal counsels, and there takes up all the immensity of those counsels of God, the eternal purpose. The other arm of the Cross touches the ages to come; and by way of that Cross, that from the beginning, which has in the meantime been challenged and upset, is realized: so that the way of the Lamb is the way of the realization of the eternal purpose of God, and nothing less than that. That is why I have taken pains to stress the immensity of that purpose. Our conception of the Cross is so small. Our hymns about the Cross have such a limited view of that Cross. Oh, yes, “the burden of my heart rolled away” at the Cross — quite true and good, blessed; but the Cross is infinitely, transcendently more than our conversion. The Cross has come in not just to get people saved from their sin and secured unto heaven and have the blessings of forgiveness and access to God. No, the Cross has come in to lay right hold of that vast scheme of the divine intention and purpose and to realize it, and nothing less than it. We ought to see that the Cross is a very much bigger thing than we have ever imagined.

When the Lord begins to work subjectively by His Cross in a life, He does a very utter thing beyond conversion. In many lives it often comes to this: that a fuller apprehension of the meaning of identification with Christ in death and burial and resurrection is a far bigger thing than conversion, and that is significant. You cannot make too much of the Cross, for this very reason — that there is nothing greater and vaster than God’s eternal purpose in the creation of this universe, and the Cross has to do with every bit of it, touches it at every point. The things in the heavens are purged by the Blood of that Cross (Heb. 9:23). The Cross is an immense thing because of the immensity of that with which it has to do. So the Cross is retrospective — but not merely to the fall, not merely to the entrance of sin. The Cross is retrospective to before the world was, from the laying down of the foundation. It is retrospective to the very purpose of God in having a world at all. If you can understand and grasp why God created this universe, what His thoughts were, what His intentions; if you can really comprehend all the immensity of His purpose in making this a heritage for Himself, worthy of Himself and satisfying to Him, then, and only then, will you be able to see the greatness of the Cross, the magnitude of the Cross. Yes, the Cross reaches right back to that.

A Company in the Good of the Eternal Purpose

What are we to say about these people, these one hundred and forty-four thousand? If what I have said is right and true, surely they must mean this: they are a company standing in the good of the eternal purpose of God, and nothing less. They have “followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth”, not a bit of the way, not more or less, not with reservations, not just so far as forgiveness of sins and no further. Not just that, on such-and-such a day in such-and-such a year so long ago, “I gave my heart to Jesus”. These have come into an apprehension of the greatness of God’s purpose concerning His Son, and have gone right on with it and are standing in it. Surely that is what it means.

I am not saying that these are an elect of the elect. I am not saying that this is not for all, this is only for a few — not at all. But anyone who has eyes to see knows quite well that very few Christians actually do go this way, comparatively few really do go all the way with God’s purpose. Look at Christianity today and tell me if what you see represents all the thought of God; and then enquire into it, investigate it, and see how many are willing to go farther, and you will be surprised. How many care about anything more? It is comparatively few who answer to God in His fuller thought as to His eternal purpose. Indeed, I fear that there are multitudes of Christians who do not know what you mean when you talk about the eternal purpose of God. And so God has to find His satisfaction as to this in a representative company.

Here is the position. Who will accept the fuller meaning of the Cross in order to satisfy God as to the fuller expression of His purpose? That is the issue. And this company has said Yes to the Lord. Not just that I am going to be saved and live a happy Christian life and do a lot of Christian work; no. But I am going to allow God to entirely reconstitute me, from centre to circumference, according to His own Son, conformably to the image of His Son; and that takes a profound work of the Cross, a tremendous operation of the Cross to do that. That is following the Lamb. The figures used may seem strange, but that is what it means, the way of the Lamb — He was made perfect through sufferings. That is, He was brought to completeness through sufferings. We shall come there in no other way. That we should be before Him without blemish, before Him in love. That is what reconstituting us means.

I think the whole matter is clearly before us. Here is a company. (It is clear that, in the book of the Revelation, there are companies of saved people, various and different companies, larger and smaller companies, and here amongst the companies is this one marked out and clearly defined.) It is called the one hundred and forty-four thousand, with symbolic, not literal, meaning, and they stand in a special relationship to the throne, and, as we said in our previous meditation, they are in the good of a special secret that no one else knows or can learn. They have come into something by their walk with the Lamb, by their sufferings together with Him. What do they mean?

Once again, the Lamb takes us back to God’s purpose in fullness before the world was. He does not just say that He by His Blood will deal with the sin that has come in — that is a part of the whole — or with the conditions that have resulted from man’s disobedience: they are all included. What the Lamb does is right at the point where God lays down His whole ultimate plan for eternity: namely, to sum up all things in Christ, to fill

all things with Christ and to make His people the fullness of Him that filleth all things. It is in order to secure that against the invasion of the disruptive forces — to secure that and nothing less than that. So the Lamb relates to the fullness of God's purpose from eternity, and to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" likewise relates to the fullness of that purpose, bringing those who so follow not only to heaven but into that particular position that answers to God's thought in fullness from eternity.

Now you are able to see why it is necessary, before you can come to the Church, to have the Cross. You never can have the Church without the Cross. The Church is that in which God's eternal counsels are to be fulfilled, and the Church is based upon the Cross. All that that means just comes back to one thing. Will we "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth"? In other words, will we accept the Cross in all its meaning for the reversing of everything that is contrary to God's purpose, the reversing of the very constitution that is contrary to God's mind? And the reversing is a very practical thing. It is so practical, it is so terribly practical, that it is most unacceptable to any part of our being. The Lord tells you and me that in opposition and affliction and suffering heaped upon us by other people we are to be perfectly meek, not rising up and reacting in the heat of our own temper and hurt feelings and pride, but in meekness we are to accept it, allow it, commit the whole thing to the Lord and suffer.

That is not our constitution. We have to be reconstituted to do that. But when the Spirit of Jesus Christ, God's Lamb, really does prevail in our hearts and get a victory there, when the Lamb overcomes in us, the ground is provided for God, in His own time and in His own way, to exercise His infinite power in that very situation. It might very well be that these people would come back and say, "Look here, if you had shown resentment, any bad spirit, I should not have thought much of you as a Christian; but because of the way you took it, somehow or other I have had a miserable time ever since!" God has had His opportunity. How many are won that way! Yes, the Lamb WINS.

The Unity of the Company

But let us not get some objective mentality about following the Lamb. It is coming right home to us in a new way, any day that we live it is going to find us out all along. Nevertheless at the end there is this company right in touch with the throne, singing their song in such a oneness that the apostle said he only heard one voice. "I heard a voice... and the voice which I heard..." — singular. One hundred and forty-four thousand singing in unison so that it was like one sound or voice. God has done something. How has He done that? How does God bring about an utter unity and oneness, identity, in a disrupted creation? How is God going to deal with all the divisions that the enemy has brought about in this world and even amongst the Lord's people? Only by the way of the Lamb — and He will do it that way, that is His way.

It is a mighty thing. You may try every other means conceivable to the human mind to bring about absolute oneness between two people, and you find there is always some kind of breaking out. It cannot be done. You think you have nicely patched up some matter, but somehow or other it breaks out again; you can never be sure of it. Yet here is something done where a great company is only heard as one voice, only identified as one person. That has undone the work of the devil; that has destroyed his works.

How is it done? THE LAMB, THE WAY OF THE LAMB. The Lord make us followers of the Lamb.

Chapter Three

THE PATHWAY OF THE LAMB

Reading: Rev. 14:1-5; John 1:29, 35-37.

This is the second actual view of the Lamb personally in the whole revelation. We were seeing in our previous meditation that the first is of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, taking us back to those counsels of God which were secured against all the subsequent eventualities, the breaking in of adverse forces and of sin. Here is the second view of the Lamb personally. In the fullness of the times God sent His Son. Of course there has been typology and prophecy previsioning the Lamb. The features of the Lamb have been set forth in numerous symbolic ways in the Old Testament and prophetic utterances. But this is the second view of Him personally and this is marked by a twofold "Behold!" "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

The first is a fuller utterance — "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world". That seems to have been uttered in public. At that time the multitudes were coming to Jordan to be baptized of John and in a public and general and open way John made his declaration — "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the WORLD!" This is a world matter.

But the second occasion, where the final clause is not repeated, is apparently to disciples, and now it is John looking upon Jesus as He walks and he says to these disciples, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" There is that presentation of the Lamb for the world in relation to sin and sin-bearing, but there is also the presentation of the Lamb to followers as the pattern for their walk — "He looked upon Jesus as he walked, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God!" It was not only as the sin-bearer; it was "Behold the Lamb" AS HE WALKED, and I think that takes us right up to Rev. 14:4. The hundred and forty-four thousand have, of course, beheld Him as their sin-bearer, but they have also beheld Him as One to follow closely all the way, following the Lamb wherever He goes. Whilst we may be rejoicing in the first beholding, rejoicing in the Lord as our sin-bearer, I trust it can

also be said of us all that we are beholding as John beheld on the second day. There was a first day in our experience of the Lamb; there was a first beholding. But there is a second day and a day after for beholding, beholding with a view first of all to seeing how the Lamb walks, and then to following. The one hundred and forty-four thousand were those who had done both.

God's Lamb

“Behold, the Lamb of God!” We will recall the words of Abraham to Isaac — “God will provide himself the lamb” (Gen. 22:8). God’s Lamb. He is God’s Lamb before He is ours, God’s Lamb before He is anything else. God had need of a Lamb, for in His Son, in the great vocation and service, or transaction, of a Lamb, the primary thing was accomplished of God’s rights being honoured. God has rights, and those rights are the rights of His eternal conception of what man and the world, the creation and the universe ought to be — seeing that it belongs to God, seeing that it came from God, seeing that it was conceived in the heart of God. He associated certain ideas and ideals, standards and ways, a certain nature, with His creation, and He has a right to all that, and His rights have been taken from Him. He is not having His rights in man’s nature and in man’s life, in the world and in the creation, since that interference, since that terrible diversion from God. The Lamb of God, God’s Lamb, as the very first thing in His work, recovers and establishes the rights of God.

God has the right to absolute, unquestioning submission. That right has been taken from Him, and we know — oh, we know so well; it is the very plague of our hearts — how in our very constitution there is that lack of submission to God. What difficulties, what battles, what agonies, we go through in coming into absolute submission to God. It is our nature — it is not our deliberate, conscious insubordination, rebellion or will against God, but it is there in spite of ourselves, in spite of all our desires; it is there, this unmanageable something that is in the very nature of the creation which does not submit to God. Utter and immediate obedience to God — that is His right; and disobedience is the very nature of man, it is shot through this universe. Selfhood — we call it selfishness; it is selfhood. It would take a long time to try to compass the whole round of self-aspects. The Lamb — the very designation, the very word, the very idea, is the opposite of all that — it is the very picture of submission, obedience, selflessness. God gets His rights of submission, obedience, selflessness, in the One known as the Lamb.

The Lamb Laying Down His Soul

In Him as the Lamb, as we have previously said, we can so clearly see the complete reversal of the whole course of fallen nature, the thought of God for man recovered, humanity reconstituted on another principle — that of the Lamb; a changed nature. It is not our nature to lay down our lives. Remember that that very phrase about laying down the life can equally well be translated “we ought to lay down our souls for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). We sometimes use the word “life” in that connection so that it means what, of course, it is meaning for many today on this earth — just dying a martyr’s death, laying down our life for the gospel of Christ in a single act. But laying down our soul is a lifelong act, an every day act, a thing which challenges our very disposition, yes, our constitution, for we are immediately affected and influenced by how men of this world will think. They will say it is meek, weak, namby-pamby — you ought to stand up for your rights, you ought to fight for your ends; that is the way of the world. Take a view of the world today and see what that is producing. But the Lamb laid down His soul. When He was reviled, He suffered it, He endured it, He answered nothing. “As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth” (Is. 53:7). That takes some doing, that represents a strength that is not in you and in me naturally. We have another nature. You say that is weak? I say there is no strength like it. You do not know what strength is until you can stand right up against the whole nature of this world and its judgments and standards and take the opposite view and the opposite course. He did that. That is the Lamb, laying down His soul.

To say to these feelings of ours, these uprisings of our souls, these strong hot feelings, these resentful feelings — to say to them, Now then, you get down, you stay under — that sometimes means a real battle when you are taking everything into account, as to what it is going to involve of cost for the time being, until God vindicates that attitude.

“Behold the Lamb”; follow the Lamb. The way of the Lamb may be the way of the Cross and the crucifixion of the natural life continually, but the end of that way is the throne, and the throne is not some merely geographical scene or spot. Do not interpret thrones in the Bible literally. It may not interest you at all to sit upon a literal throne — it does not interest me — but to come to a place of spiritual ascendancy where there are values, where there is wealth, where there are riches, dignity, strength, honour and glory to be dispensed to others, that is something, that is the throne — the end of the course of the Lamb, the way of the Cross.

Beholding the Lamb Every Day

Behold the Lamb walking, today and tomorrow and the day after.

So many Christians have stopped with the first day. They have beheld the Lamb, the sin-bearer, and they rejoice, as we ought to rejoice, in Him as the sin-bearer. We have stopped with that view, and today and tomorrow and the next day and all the days following we still keep our eyes on day one, forgetting that every day there is to be a beholding of the Lamb in very practical matters. It will require that you and I many times have to withdraw from the scene, as being too much for our natures, and get away with the Lord for a little while and fight that battle out — the battle of our souls, of our reactions, of our provocation. We may have to fight it

out and get clear and come out with the Spirit of the Lamb, leaving it in the hands of the Lord to give an answer in His own time. That is following the Lamb. The Lamb repeatedly withdrew to be with His Father because of the situation, because of what He was meeting. He fought out the battle right to the end. He went a little further. “He went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:35–36). The cost was great. He fought it out and came forth serene, with an amazing serenity, resultant from that secret battle with His own soul. “He poured out his soul unto death” (Is. 53:12).

The Lamb at Jordan

So God’s Lamb is one that is wholly unto God. We see here two aspects of that: firstly, as He came to Jordan to be baptized of John, and John said, “Behold, the Lamb of God”. That is the initial and consummate attitude and committal. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world is now declaring publicly, in the world, that that has, from eternity, been His attitude toward God’s interests. “I am come to do thy will”. I have not come to debate it, to question it; I have not come to contemplate it; I have come committed to it, fully, utterly committed. And Jordan was but a declaration; it was not an acceptance of the will of God — that had been done before the world was; the Lamb was slain then. Will you just dwell upon that statement — “The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”. What does that mean? It only means this: that in the counsels of God, when the great design of God, that eternal purpose, was being “talked over” (speaking after the manner of men), and decided upon, then the Father said to the Son, “You know what is going to happen, you know the challenge that is coming, you know the result of that interference, that it will be an utmost cost to secure what we are talking about now — it will cost us everything”; and the Son said, “Father, I will pay the price”. That is the slaying of the Lamb. The Father said, “Very good, we will share it together; it will be My cost and Your cost”. And there it was that “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son”. And when the Son came into the world, He was only taking publicly, on this earth, the position that He had taken then, and declaring it. It was an utmost committal, a consummate attitude, declared at the Jordan.

The Lamb as He Walked

And then again, it was a matter of beholding Him “as he walked”. The position that He had taken was the position in which He remained every day, meeting the cost of it. Every kind of test came to the position that He had taken. The world tested Him, and I do not mean only the world as a sphere and the people in it, but the spirit of this world, the ideas and conceptions and standards of this world, all so contrary to His. The prince of this world betrays the standard of this world when he suggests to Him that, by falling down and worshipping him, He should receive all the world’s kingdoms. The spirit of compromise — “If only you will drop your level a bit and forsake your utter and ultimate standard, if only you will do a little compromising, you can get so much more; do not be so utter, so absolute, so consummate, it is not to your interests”. That is the world. He was up against that all the time. He was tested by the world spirit, the world’s concept, which is so completely different from that of the Lamb.

He was tested by the evil powers. Very often the evil forces come nakedly, not through men and not through things. They seem somehow or other to break right in upon us, apart from other people and apart from other things, and we sense an awful working of evil. It seems as though the evil powers have got inside of us, ourselves. At other times they are in other people, provoking us; now they somehow seem to be working WITHIN. “Christian, do you see them, how they work within?” Yes, they do; that is how it seems. I am not talking about demon possession in the case of Christians, but it seems sometimes as though they have their grip upon our very vitals. He knew soul-travail in conflict with the evil powers; oh, if it were known what a secret history the Lord Jesus had! We only read of His doings and His sayings and see some of the incidents in His life, but there must have been a tremendous secret history, battles and conflicts and sufferings and issues being fought out. He was here for that, but the position taken initially was maintained day by day in His walk, in His going, in His progress, and we must constantly in every situation follow the Lamb.

Thank God, we have not to fight this out alone. The Spirit Himself helps our infirmity, we have One alongside, we have the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we have grace which is sufficient. But nevertheless, it is a bitter fight sometimes — this laying down of the soul, this selflessness. “These are they which FOLLOW the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”.

Firstfruits unto the Lamb

I close by repeating that these are said to be the “firstfruits unto the Lamb”. That is, in them God’s rights, God’s thoughts, God’s desires, God’s intentions have their first full expression. These are they who have met in an initial way the blaze, the heat, of ripening suffering, spiritual suffering, and have responded. These are they who have passed along that peculiar way where others have not passed. I cannot explain this; I cannot tell you why it is that the Lord does this — the operation of the principle of election seems to be here also. Somehow or other God has laid hold of certain people to satisfy Him in a certain way, and He takes them through certain experiences deeper than others. How sorry we feel for people like that. We cannot do anything about it, we cannot help them. We see them going through unusual difficulties and adversities. Somehow or other, if anything can go wrong, it goes wrong with them: if there is any trouble, they are the people who get it. Of course that may not be exclusive to such as we are thinking about. There are a lot of foolish people about who get into all the trouble that there is going. I am not speaking of those. But there is no mistaking

the fact that there are people on this earth who have peculiar and unusual experiences under the hand of God. They are sometimes tempted to cry out against that hand, cry out with the Psalmist, "Is his lovingkindness clean gone for ever?... Has God forgotten to be gracious?" Oh, the agony! Not every Christian goes that way. Multitudes of the Lord's children have an easier way than that. But here are these in our midst who so suffer. What is the explanation?

I think it is the hundred and forty-four thousand — of course, not necessarily that actual number, but a marked out company, to be unto God's satisfaction as a firstfruits unto the Lamb. I do not see any other explanation. Maybe we shall be given more light upon it, but I do feel that this touches many of our questions and problems. It is God's intention to bring near to Himself, by unusual methods and means, some to serve Him and His satisfaction in a peculiar way. That, I think, explains this company, and it may explain something in our experience. The Lord make us in any case those who follow the Lamb — as we have already seen, it is in the present tense — who KEEP ON FOLLOWING the Lamb wherever He goes.

Chapter Four

THE CLIMAX OF THE WAY OF THE LAMB

Reading: Revelation 19:1–10.

As we pursue our consideration of this matter of the followers of the Lamb, we come to the part which relates to the climax of that path, the climax of the way of the Lamb — the climax of the Cross. But here it becomes necessary and helpful to widen our outlook, taking in the whole compass of things. It is a well known and often stated fact that the book of Genesis, being the book of beginnings, contains the first intimation of everything which we find subsequently in the Word of God. We can trace back what we find in all the rest of the Scriptures to some germ in the book of Genesis: that is, the Scriptures as a whole are the opening up and the opening out, the development, of all the beginnings found in that book. The book of the Revelation, being the book of consummations, takes all that up and gathers it into itself in a spiritual way. What we have in the book of Genesis in an earthly and temporal and material way, in a typical, symbolic, prophetic way, we have in the book of the Revelation in spiritual consummation. It is therefore of very great importance to know how to interpret the book of the Revelation, and, although I am quite familiar with the attitude of opposition toward what is called spiritualizing the Scriptures, I nevertheless make bold to affirm that the book of the Revelation has got to be interpreted, if not altogether, almost altogether, spiritually, and you will be entirely in a fog unless you do so. Indeed, you will be occupied with an interminable, impossible task. This is the book of consummations of all things in a spiritual way.

What do we find in the Old Testament beginning with the book of Genesis? We find two kingdoms coming into evidence: the kingdom of God, and a kingdom against God. As we see the development of the kingdom of God, we are able to discern that that kingdom is developing with a very definite plan, and we find that before we are at the end of the first five books it has taken very definite shape. A cameo, a microcosm, of the kingdom of God has been presented — yes, in imperfection, because it is only typical, that is, it is only a type, a figure; but its lines are capable of clear apprehension.

A country is marked out. That country has its distinct frontiers and is in its turn divided up, with inter-frontiers. The whole of that country is apportioned as an inheritance to tribes, and right at the centre — although not literally geographically so — but as the very heart and centre of the whole scheme is a city, and there is a place where God is met. Some of these parts of the kingdom, by sovereign divine appointment, are in closer proximity to the heart of things than others. Some are nearer to, some are farther from, that centre, but that centre — the place where God is — governs all. And then around that inner, special kingdom there are many other kingdoms and nations, and they are learning much from what is going on inside there, deriving a very great deal — according to their attitude, of course, whether good or evil. That is, this kingdom of God is affecting all kingdoms. Being an earthly kingdom, and being set in the conditions of a disrupted world and humanity, and this other, spiritual kingdom being also in evidence, there are both good and evil represented: that is, there are available to the nations that walk in the light thereof both good and evil. That is perfectly clear at the beginning.

But that is only a section. You pass to the next part of the Bible, into what is called the historical section, where kingship is introduced, kingship through priesthood, and you find things are beginning to take another form, come into another realm. You are passing on to a higher level of things. You are moving away from the earth, you are coming nearer heaven, and when you close that combination of kingly and prophetic movements, or when you see the close in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, you begin to see a heavenly country. The end of the prophecies of Ezekiel is a whole country reshaped as an inheritance, and now in a new way it is the temple which governs everything, and it is the ideal temple such as has never been before or since the days of Ezekiel, a heavenly one, a spiritual one; a heavenly temple in a heavenly city in a heavenly country: for things have moved away from the earth, the earthly has been forsaken; now it is heaven. You ought to read those last chapters of Ezekiel again and note these two things — the shaping of the kingdom and the placing of the temple and the city, and then the relationship to the nations around. We just mention that — it is far too big and detailed a matter to occupy us now.

When you come to the book of the Revelation, you are right in the spiritual side of that whole kingdom of God. What I want to point out in connection with the spiritual interpretation of the book of the Revelation is this. In the first place, you have to recognize that the kingdom of God is a very great dominion, but that it is divided up into many regions. You find yourself, in different places in the book of the Revelation, in different places where the throne is governing. There is the earth and there is the heaven, but you speak about earth and heaven as though it were a duality. It is not; it is a multiplicity. There are heavens and heaven of heavens. Paul said he was caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2). So heaven has various regions, departments, sections — upper, lower, perhaps middle.

And then you come to this remarkable thing, that the redeemed are also divided up into sections in different places. The Lord Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many abiding-places” (John 14:2). (Get rid of that word “mansions”. There are not streets of mansions — at any rate, that is not what He referred to.) “In my Father’s house are MANY abiding-places”. There is the first heaven, second heaven, third heaven, heaven of heavens, and people are located accordingly, in relation to the throne. There is this company right in the throne. There is that company around the throne. There is another company and another. The nations, redeemed nations, on the outer circle deriving values, now not good and evil, but deriving their good from what is there in the centre. The kingdom of the heavens is plural, not singular.

A Company in Closest Spiritual Proximity to God

Now you are wondering why all that. For this reason: that we are occupied now with God’s fullest intention for His people, as represented in the hundred and forty-four thousand of chapter 14. God’s fullest intention is to have His people as near as near can be to Himself, in the closest spiritual proximity to Himself. This matter of position, of disposition, of distinction and of inheritance is a spiritual matter. Dismiss your geographical ideas and mentality. We need not worry ourselves to try to decide where heaven is. We could spend the rest of our days trying to find where heaven is and we should not get an answer. Some have tried to tell us which of the planets is heaven, but no one has come to tell us if they are right. But you see this is a matter of spiritual proximity. It is just possible, just gloriously possible, that, wherever we are, with a very gracious visitation of the Lord, we should find ourselves in heaven without leaving our present location, and we would say — “This is just wonderful; nothing could be more glorious and blessed and perfect than this”. Perhaps you have never experienced this. It is possible! Being rid of all that other encompassment and embodiment and impingement that is of the kingdom of death — we need not bother about geographical locations — we may just have a foretaste of divine glory, even in this scene and in these circumstances.

It is a matter ultimately not of going somewhere but of being something. It is not that we are not going to heaven, but mainly and primarily it is not a matter of some PLACE, literally, actually. It is being in a certain state that makes heaven; and the heaven of heavens, the highest place, the most utter place, is that where God has His fullest satisfaction in a life. There is nothing that can surpass the knowledge that God is as satisfied as He can be, being God, in any life; that He has got what His heart has been set upon; and I suggest to you that that can be tested all along the way here, in measure. If you and I ever have a difficulty over God the Lord having His place or His way in relation to something very costly, something very dear to us, something that we hold very precious, that we very much would have and it is so difficult to contemplate being without it, and then we get to the Lord after much battle and conflict and suffering and travail and we get through on that thing, there comes in such a peace and joy and rest, such a sense of the Lord, that it is a touch of glory. God has got His place, and when He gets that it is glory in the heart where He has it. Only in small ways do we prove that now. But let that be complete, final, utter, with no more conflicts, obstacles, struggles, questions, at all; the thing is all over, God has reached His full, final, consummate end: then you will sing as these people here were singing — the hundred and forty-four thousand, who were singing with such a voice that it sounded to the apostle like the sound of many waters. It is the glory of the Lord having His utter place in a people. That is the spiritual interpretation.

So forget henceforth the number one hundred and forty-four thousand in the matter of so many people singing round the throne. I am not saying that it will not be like that, but it is what it means that is the important thing, and it is just going to be the measure in which the Lord gets His satisfaction which will be the measure of our approximation to the heart of things eternally. That means it is the measure in which the Cross has accomplished its purpose, or, to use the other figure, the measure in which we have “followed the LAMB whithersoever He goeth”. That, in other words, means the measure in which the Lamb has overcome in our natures, in our hearts. THAT is the measure of our approximation to the centre of things eternally, and the measure of eternal glory, because it is the measure of the satisfaction of God.

The Spiritual Interpretation of the Revelation

May I touch parenthetically upon this matter of interpreting spiritually. You must go through the book and ask yourself questions. I find myself, as a somewhat questioning kind of person, up against difficulties all the time. I see the Lamb making war and overcoming, and I see saints with Him making war and overcoming. I have asked many questions: what does that mean? I wonder what your mentality is about it. Is it a Doré Bible mentality, with pictures of all these things? You see one picture: Christ literally, personally, coming, with a sword literally in His hand, and a whole host of saints behind, with swords, going literally to slay and make devastation and spill blood all over this earth. Is that your mentality when you read about the wars of the Lamb? Did He do that in the first days of the church? Did He overcome? Did He overcome the Roman Empire which set itself to destroy Him and His testimony in the earth? Did He come out from heaven literally with a

drawn sword and angels and shedding of blood upon the earth? How did He do it?

Well, how has He ever done that sort of thing? He has been making war all through these centuries. It has been a sorry lookout for peoples who have lifted their heads against the Lamb. It is a sorry lookout for those nations today who are deliberately lifting their heads against the Lamb. Do not have any doubt about what the issue is going to be, as to what is going to be the end of the great red dragon. (That phrase, that term, has some meaning now — great RED dragon.) Do not have any doubt. “I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion”; “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Ps. 2:6,4). That is the position; it has been like that. If we could read the spiritual history of nations and kingdoms from Nebuchadnezzar’s day onwards, we should see the wars of the Lamb, something working mightily unto devastation, but unseen; a spiritual force at work. And these wars of the Revelation are spiritual wars. There may be an acceleration of the process, may be sudden things happening in the collapse of these opposing forces, but it will be, so far as you can see, a common explanation. You may say that this and that worked to bring it about. But you have to get to the ultimate. When you get to the ultimate, you see it is in the wars of the Lamb. You see what I mean. It is very important to get your spiritual vision of this book.

Overcoming in Relation to God’s Eternal Purpose

So we are brought here to this matter of the differences and distinctions on spiritual grounds. It is not a thing of a general character, a wider nature, that I want to say. What we have in the book of the Revelation is not something new to the New Testament, it is not really a new order of things at all. I have before pointed out that when you come to the beginning of this book and you have the messages to the seven churches in Asia, you have the risen Lord speaking to the churches that were raised up through the instrumentality of the apostle Paul. Paul was used in Asia for the bringing into being of those churches, either personally or indirectly, and it was through Paul that the full revelation of God’s eternal purpose was given to the churches in Asia. Look at Ephesus, and remember that the letter to the Ephesians was not specifically for the Ephesians, but was a circular letter for Laodicea as well as Ephesus. This full revelation of God’s eternal purpose in its fullness was given to those churches, and then the risen Lord comes back to those churches to bring them to judgment — for what? He is standing in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, those churches, for what purpose?

It is to deal with them on the basis of the full revelation of His eternal purpose. There are plenty of things that are less than the Lord’s purpose, and while He commends everything that is good — He has to condemn much that is wrong, but He commends what is good — in effect He says, “But that is not all I revealed to you, this is not all I have shown you; I have given you to see My eternal counsels in fullness — read the letters that are in your hand. Now to judgment! Not that you are wholly and utterly bad and corrupt, not that there are lacking all signs of goodness, not that there is not something that is quite commendable about you — but what about this full revelation that has been given to you? That is the point and that is going to determine the issue”. “He that overcometh...”; not just he that overcometh certain sins, faults, failures, weaknesses, but he that overcomes everything that gets in the way of full purpose. The hundred and forty-four thousand are the overcomers. And what are the overcomers? They are those who have come into the value and meaning of the whole revelation of God’s eternal purpose, and they are nearest to His heart. It is a spiritual matter.

The Marriage of the Lamb

Does that impress you? If we do not see it in that light, I do not think we have the key to the whole book. This book, you see, stands apart. God is dealing with everything in the light of His full revelation of eternal counsels. Then, when we have seen that, we are ready, prepared, to come to this matter which is the centre-most thing of the whole book — the grand consummation, the marriage of the Lamb. It is like a mighty climax when you come to this — “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” The marriage of the Lamb is the climax, there is nothing beyond that. God’s end is reached in the marriage of the Lamb. God’s heavenly thought about marriage is identity, such a oneness of heart and spirit and constitution that the two are one. “This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church” (Eph. 5:32). It is oneness, utter oneness, with Him as the Lamb. She has come to such identity with Himself. She is like Him, she answers to Him in every way. When that end is reached there will be the supreme “Hallelujah” in heaven, for the Lord will find the satisfaction toward which He has been working all along — “His wife hath made herself ready”.

How? “It was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:8). This is something far ahead of imputed righteousness. Imputed righteousness is for every believer. It is only another phrase for justification by faith. But this is something as to character, as to transformation, as to something inwrought, the practical side of righteousness in the life: “the righteous acts of the saints”. It is conformity to His image. THAT is the bride, the wife of the Lamb, and when the Lord gets that, He is satisfied; He is satisfied indeed, and all heaven is satisfied.

The Bride’s Love for the Lamb

There are, as has been mentioned, approximations to that represented by different companies in different positions in relation to the centre and heart. This one is nearest, that one is not so near, and the other is still less near, and it is all a matter of the measure of Christ as the Lamb. That is, of course, just a statement of

truth. But do note that this discrimination is not an arbitrary one. It is not just that God sovereignly appoints that it shall be so, and that if you are meant to be of the hundred and forty-four thousand group you will be because you are meant to be, and if you are not meant to be it is no use your trying to be — you never will be. It is not like that at all. When you come to the question of the Lamb and His bride it is all a love matter. It corresponds to chapter 12, the great red dragon, the woman and the man child, the man child caught up to heaven, and the great declaration — “And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death”; they loved not their own souls unto the death. FOR HIM they loved not their own souls unto the death. It is a love matter, and you know you cannot force love, you cannot compel love, you have to leave love alone, and if it is not love you can do nothing about it. But if it is, well, it is spontaneous and it will go all the way; it is a love matter. And so it is here. THE BRIDE — it is just this whole question of love for the Lord and how far it will take us, how strong and deep that love for the Lord is, and whether we will just follow Him to the measure of love, unconstrained, un-compelled love, spontaneous devotion to our Lord; self-forgetting, self-denying, self-yielding; all of self being set aside FOR HIM.

Do you not feel that this is something that we must face in a new way? We are so continually weighing things up in the light of how they affect us. We are so governed by the effect that situations and circumstances have upon us and our interests. It is really the root of most of our trouble, if not of all of it. We are so earth-bound, so time-bound; this life does mean so very much to us, this world does mean so very much to us. Heaven and eternity are not as real as this world is. If only we could get the heavenly vision and the heavenly sense! If only it could really take hold of us that eternity is real, that everything is as real in eternity and in heaven as it is here, and far more so, just as spiritual things can be more real than temporal things even now. If only we could get the sense of that, would we not be more ready to let go — to let go those things which take such a large place with us here, in this life; should we not be much more prepared to let them go? It is a matter, after all, of heart-relationship to the Lord, and that is what the Lord is trying to work to all the time, to get us there. Every conflict, every battle that we come into, is really circling round one issue, if we recognized it. Right at the heart of everything is this question of love for the Lord, whether we are going on with the Lord. It is like that.

We have said that this is not some new issue in the book of the Revelation. We are right back in the rest of the Bible, and we are particularly back in those letters of Paul. At the end it is a matter of having reached those counsels, those purposes of God from eternity which are revealed in the letters of Paul. Then, when these have been revealed in the first chapters of the letter to the Ephesians, when we have been taken back there and shown the greatness of God’s purpose concerning this elect people, Paul goes on, not in a sense of an anti climax but as so much a part of the whole: “Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love”. Is not that the Lamb coming in there? Is not that walking in the way of the Lamb in relation to the eternal purpose? It is so clear. “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.”

Now do you see the three movements? There is the revelation of the purpose in chapters 1, 2 and 3 of Ephesians. There is the walk according to the Lamb. Where do you arrive at the end of the letter? “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” “The marriage of the Lamb is come.” That is only saying in figurative language that God has reached that purpose in a company who have gone the way of the Lamb, walked the way of the Lamb, followed the Lamb, and now they are presented to the Lamb as His bride. “The marriage of the Lamb is come.”

And that, may I say again, is the explanation of the particular pains that God takes. It may sound a frightening thing to say that the more we love the Lord the deeper will He take us, the more utter you mean to be for God the more utter will He require you to be. It is like that; that is a fact: and He takes infinite pains with those whose hearts are really set upon Him; He spares them nothing, He works very deeply and very intensely. He has His opportunity when we say that we mean to be all for Him, but do not let us think that the measure of our devotion to the Lord is going to be the measure of His delivering us from trouble. It will work out the other way. All through it has been like that. The most devoted to the Lord have been the greatest sufferers, but God is taking pains. This ought not to discourage us; it ought to explain to us a great deal. If the Lord really gets hold of us, He is going to do a very deep, thorough work, and we shall have an unusual experience of the way of the Cross, the way of the Lamb. It will be applied at all points, but the issue — nearness to His throne. The issue is that which satisfies Him most and serves His interests most, for out from that, as we may see later, is fulfilled a marvellous vocation to all regions through eternal ages.

Chapter Five

THE GOVERNMENT OF LOVE

Reading: Revelation 21 and 22.

We have now reached the end, with this symbolic or pictorial presentation of what constitutes God’s end: and it is surely very impressive, and a very significant thing, that, as we come to the end and are given to see

the city, the phrase “the Lamb” touches everything. Seven times in connection with the city that phrase occurs. Everything is based upon the Lamb. The Lamb gives character and meaning to everything. When the angel said, “Come hither”, he might just as well have said, “I will show you the Lamb”; for it is all the fruit of the Lamb, and that sums up everything in the Bible. As we have been seeing, the Lamb reaches right back to what God purposed and intended — a people answering to the heart and mind of God — and the Lamb has secured it. Here it is, secured, and this is what it is like. That people is here represented as “the holy city, new Jerusalem”, and identified as “the Lamb’s wife” — such a mixture of similes that we are compelled to draw back, and say, “Well, it can only mean that that people is characterized by two things in one: the city ever and always stands for government, the seat of government; the wife, according to God’s mind, always stands for love: put those two things together and you have the sum of the whole history — it is the government of love.” And that is the meaning of the Lamb, the Lamb of God.

Then that inclusive truth, the government of love, is analysed for us, in the sevenfold reference to the Lamb. Without anything like a full or exhaustive study of the content, we just light upon a single point in each reference.

The Foundation and Wall of Love

You notice, then, to begin with, the first mention of the Lamb after being presented in connection with the bride — that is, after the statement, “I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb”. The first reference to the Lamb after that comes in verse 14: “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”. I am not going to touch upon the phrase “the apostles of the Lamb”. The foundations bear the inscription of the Lamb. But what is this wall? What does it stand for? Well, many of you know quite well that a wall is that which includes and excludes and declares that within this demarcation a certain state of things obtains, while a different state of things obtains without. We speak of it as a “testimony”, the wall of testimony. Here is a “wall great and high”, and when you look at the dimensions of this city wall, you find that it is very great in extent, as well as in height. It just speaks of the fullness of Christ in terms of love. It is a big area — there is a lot inside; and it surely does correspond, as we were saying in our previous meditation, to Paul’s words in his Ephesian letter (3:17–19) — “That ye... may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” — “the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ”. That is the wall — “the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ”. This people, then, to pass from the typology and symbolism and imagery — this people, this redeemed people, is the embodiment of the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ.

The length: it takes us back to eternity past, to the Beloved of the Father — so beloved that the Father gave Him a mighty inheritance: through Him, by Him, unto Him, were to be all things created (Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16). He, says the apostle, was “heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2). The Beloved; the first-begotten of the Father; the heir of all things — “that he might fill all things” (Eph. 4:10); and the purpose was to sum up all things in Christ. That is the measure of the Father’s love for the Son. The Father speaks of Him as “My beloved Son”. All the mighty vast extent of the love of God is centred in Christ. That is the length of it — from eternity to eternity. And then “his grace, which he freely bestowed on us IN the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6); that is, He made us heirs of that same love, so that the very love which He has for His Son is transferred to us. We were “chosen in him before the foundation of the world”, and on into the ages of the ages to come. That is the length of His love.

Its depth is seen in its being redeeming love — cutting deep down under and beneath the uttermost iniquity.

The height — “and hath seated us together with him in the heavenlies” (Eph. 2:6).

And the breadth — “Whosoever”: “...his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life”.

You see the mighty, all-embracing love of Christ — and at last there is a people found in that. The foundation of everything is the Lamb, as embodying God’s great, redeeming love, and in the end there will be this great testimony to the greatness of God’s love. It is a strong foundation. Sometimes you may be tempted to despair — and well might we despair of ourselves; and perhaps we might despair of others too. Sometimes we might wonder if ever we shall get through and come out at the end all right. Many questions, indeed, arise in us, forced up by the power that is against us, the strength of everything, of all that we have to meet both within and without. Yes, it is tremendously strong, but His love is stronger. There is a foundation here that cannot be shaken. It is mighty redeeming love, as suggested by this very name — the Lamb: a mighty foundation. Well, if we are there at last in the city — and do not objectify that: we ARE the city, by grace — if we are components of that, we shall never be able for one moment to say anything about it but: Oh, the strength of His love! It is a deep and mighty foundation. That is very simple, but very blessed. It is the beginning.

His Cleansing Love

And then you notice in verse 27 — “There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb’s book of life”. Leave the last word for a minute and get the value of the other. Here is access into the city, or having a place in this: and how do we have a place? Yes, by His love — but oh, by His CLEANSING love! Really there is nothing that can cleanse and purify more mightily than true love. The Lord is dealing with us in chastening, yes, disciplinary

suffering, but we are told quite definitely that it is because He loves us. And here His love must work in a cleansing way. You notice that these are the things that are not according to the Lamb — unclean, abomination, lie. These are the things that the Lamb of God destroyed. The “unclean” — He is a Lamb without spot and without blemish. He destroys in Himself everything unclean and unholy; and by His mighty, mighty work of the Cross He will present this Bride to Himself “not having spot or blemish or any such thing”. — “Abomination”: that is a word that would take us through a very great deal of the Bible, and we dare not stay at the moment with it. It is that which God abhors: an abomination to God. What is it? If pride is an abomination to God, if pride was the thing that commenced all the mischief — when pride was found in Lucifer’s heart and all the trouble came from that proud conception — we can understand that pride is the root-sin and that everything of pride is an abomination to God. And the Lamb is just the opposite — emptied of all self, all pride. You find the Lamb is the synonym for meekness, not pride. He by His own blood would purge us of that abominable thing. — “That maketh a lie”: yes, it was a lie that started the course of iniquity from the “liar from the beginning”. Everything untrue, everything false, everything that is not absolutely clear and transparent, open, capable of standing the searching eyes of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire: all that is dealt with by the Lamb. A state of purity is brought about. “Having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal”; absolutely clear.

So then, this access, this franchise of the city, this right to be there, comes by the sanctifying work, the continuous cleansing, of His precious Blood, and the deepening application of His Cross to all that falsehood and pride and uncleanness that there is in us. It is His sanctifying love.

Life From the Throne

“He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1). Life from the throne. What throne is this? It is of God, yes, and of the Lamb. We have seen through the pages of the book of the Revelation the Lamb in the midst of the throne; the Lamb as the centre of worship, of adoration; the Lamb in the place of supremacy, of dominion. What is this supremacy?

We are dealing with principles, not with figures. Sometimes the figurative and symbolic gets in our way. We cannot help getting a certain kind of mentality which visualizes things. It would be ridiculous to literalize here. To talk about a wife being a city and a city being a wife is absurd. But, you see, you are dealing with principles, and here you have a throne, which speaks of government, dominion, power, authority, victory; and life coming out of that — life coming from the victory of the Lamb.

How can I make that helpful? Perhaps in this way. We are concerned in these meditations with the followers of the Lamb, those who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”. This means that, if we in fellowship with Christ are baptized into His death, as an experience, not once nor twice, but ever more deeply, so that there is being brought about a continuous decrease of ourselves, in painful death-experiences of many kinds, in order that we may know the power of His resurrection proportionately, that is bringing us into a place of great strength, great power, great authority. This power of His resurrection, working in life triumphant over death, does put us in a strong place. If you know what it is to be taken into a very desperate situation where, but for God, it is the end, it is death, and then God comes with the power of resurrection, you have a tremendously strong position. You are able to say, “Now I know: this is no theory with me, no fiction, no mere doctrine: I know beyond any question the power of His resurrection, the power of His life as triumphant over death”. That is governmental. You can never govern in a really spiritual way by just having a doctrine of resurrection. It does not bring you personally into any place of power to believe in resurrection as a matter of truth, but go through it, know it in your own experience through desperate situations, and you are established. That is the principle of the throne — coming to know life as triumphant.

You will recall that Ezekiel saw this river — and wherever that river came, death was overcome, life triumphed. Right down even to the Dead Sea, wherever the river came everything lived. It is the mighty power of life, His life, the life of the Lamb imparted to us, a tremendous thing. Simple as a statement, but not simple when it comes to going through the experience to know it. But it is a very powerful position to be in when you are able to say to other people, “Look here, I have been in your desperate plight; I have more than once been in the place where it seemed to me to be an utter end; and I have known the coming in of the Lord to bring me right up out of that, right back into life”. That is a powerful position to be in. It will have very great influence and weight, be of the greatest value. The river comes out of the throne, and it is the throne of the Lamb; that is, it is the government of a life laid down and raised again. I am only talking about the rest of the New Testament. God raised Him from the dead, and that is something you cannot get over, that is a mighty thing, that is the impact of the throne. “I am... the Living one; and I became dead, and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Rev. 1:17,18, R.V.M.). That is the throne, authority in the power of resurrection life, and that is found here in the people at the end, a mighty thing that God is doing now.

Light Through Suffering

Then we pass back again to chapter 21:23 — “And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb”; the margin says, “and the Lamb, the lamp thereof”. It does not matter which way you put it; it means the same. What we have said about life is also true about light. Light is a governmental thing, it governs. But what is meant here is that you come into light through suffering. You come to possess light and radiate light by way of the Cross. “The Lamb

is the lamp". Light is not a mental thing; that is to say, it is not just a matter of having a store of mental knowledge. That is not light. It is possible to have an enormous amount of doctrine and truth and never be luminaries, that is, never register impact upon darkness. Real light is experimental: that is to say, it is the fruit of experience, the experience of suffering.

How have you children of God come to know what you do know of the Lord, that real kind of knowledge of the Lord which is so precious to us, which means so much and which makes you in that measure of value to others? It is through suffering, it is through the difficult way the Lord has led you, it is through the work of the Cross that He has wrought in you. "The Lamb is the lamp" — suffering leading to knowledge, to light, to understanding. It is the only way. These people at the end will be in the good of a great and wonderful revelation which has come by their fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. It is very true. It may not be too comforting from one standpoint, but it is true; and it ought to help us to realise this: that the Lord, in the way in which He is dealing with us, in the sufferings which He allows to come upon us, is really seeking our education, that we may have a knowledge of Himself which can only come that way, and which is a peculiar kind of knowledge of tremendous value to us and through us to others. We do not learn in any other way. It is the Lamb, always the Lamb-principle, the way of suffering and sacrifice and self-emptying, that brings us into the knowledge of the Lord. "The Lamb is the lamp thereof"; and, just as it is deeper death unto fuller life, so it may often be deeper darkness unto fuller light.

The Lord seems to lead us in a way where we are less and less able naturally to understand Him. He gets us altogether out of our natural capacity, beyond our capacity for interpreting His ways. We just do not know what the Lord is doing, or why He is doing what He is doing; yet it is the way by which we come to a very real kind of inward knowledge of Himself. It may not be capable of explanation in words to anybody, but we know, somehow or other we know, and that is a mighty thing, a mighty power of knowledge. It is light through the Cross.

The Wife of the Lamb

"Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9). These people answering at last to God's deepest desire and fullest intention must be a people in the good of the preciousness of Christ. I think that is what is meant by the wife of the Lamb. Peter puts it this way: "For you therefore that believe is the preciousness" (1 Peter 2:7) — the old version is, "he is precious" — the preciousness of Christ, an apprehension of how Christ is to be desired above all others. And this preciousness has been wrought inwardly. He has, indeed, seen a preciousness in her — "Christ... loved the church, and gave himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25) — preciousness as of a pearl of great price. But somehow or other with these people that has been turned the other way, and they have come to such an appreciation of His love for them that He has become endeared to them unto an uttermost abandonment to Him. "For this cause" — and this is the heavenly law of marriage — "for this cause" to leave everything else for the one, means just this: such an apprehension of the preciousness of Christ that all is for Him, with no reserve whatsoever. That is the principle of the wife. What the Lord would seek to produce in us, in growing measure, is that apprehension of His value which draws us out to Himself ever more deeply and fully, in this wonderful relationship of unreserved abandonment to Him as our Lord.

The Lamb the Temple

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof" (Rev. 21:22). What is a temple for? Well, the temple is the immediate seat of God, just where you expect to find God — and the Lamb is the temple. We shall find God in Christ crucified, Christ offered for us, Christ our Lamb. It is in Him as such that we shall ever meet the Lord. There are many people who are trying to find God without and apart from Jesus Christ crucified, and they cannot do it and they never will. Oh, what pathetic and tragic cases there are like that. We have heard them. "Yes, I believe in God; I pray to God". "What does that mean to you?" "Oh, well, it means a lot to me to believe that God is; it helps me to think about God". "But what is the effect in your character? Does that really mean victory over sin, does it really mean salvation?" "Oh, now you are talking about things that I do not know anything about". "Where does God's Son come in, and His work on the Cross — His atonement for sin?" "Oh, no, I cannot accept that". And so, with all their believing in God, they are walking either in the darkness or in the shadows; for there is no way to God but by Christ crucified. You will never come to God's end in any other way. He is the one in whom alone you will find God. Christ crucified, Christ your atonement, your sacrifice: that is the meeting place of God with your heart and of your heart with God. God's place is there. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19); and you will never find God or reconciliation anywhere else. These people are the ones who have found God, and they have found Him in Christ and they know that the Lamb is the temple.

The Throne of the Lamb

"And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein" (Rev. 22:3). We have spoken about the throne and what it means — governing; but, again, how far-reaching and comprehensive is this truth, that it is Christ crucified who solves all problems, who really governs all the situations. We are carried back to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, back, indeed, to that terrible situation amongst the believers in Corinth. What a deplorable state of things existed there. It was a condition that might take the heart out of any man. You might say, "How can we handle a situation like this? How can this be cleared up?" And Paul had to sit down with the whole situation and think it out and pray it over, and then he arrived at one conclusion. "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him cru-

cified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Then see how he applies that. He applies Christ crucified to their divisions, to their lawsuits, and to the whole situation, and then he resolves it all into one word — love (1 Cor. 13). That can solve it, and that will solve it. Every problem, every situation, can be cleared up by that love of God in Christ Jesus expressed in the Cross. Yes, the Cross governs. It is the throne.

When we have said all that, and it is only so very little, what do we arrive at as the ultimate meaning? I think it is in verse 24 of chapter 21. "And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it". Here we have the secret and principle of service. (And do remember that, when you are dealing with principles, you are not dealing with past, present and future. This picture must not be wholly referred to the future. All this must not be regarded merely as something yet to come. The consummation may be future, but the principles are eternal, they are always present.) The principles of service, of others being ministered to, others deriving profit and benefit — is that it is only possible as the Lord's people are in fellowship with the Lamb AS THE LAMB: that is, in fellowship with Him in His sufferings, in the way of His Cross. That is the only way to be of value to anyone else. You can never really serve other people's spiritual life by study, by the accumulation of knowledge, or by any technical means whatever. The measure in which other people are benefited or helped by you will be just the measure in which you know the Lamb-life, the way of the Cross.

And again I come back to this that has been said so often in these studies. It will be the measure in which we follow the Lamb, as the LAMB, and what that word means in all its content, that will be the measure of our present and eternal value to God in others — just that measure. Therefore, if the Lord seems to be taking you more than ordinarily into sufferings; if it does seem that yours is an unusually hard way, and the Lord's hand seems to be very heavily upon you: do interpret in the light of this ultimate issue in the whole book of God, that others are to get benefit, others are to come into some good through the way He is taking you.

That really is the way of service. The principle of service is suffering: you cannot get away from it. And the measure of value is the measure of your fellowship with Him in His sufferings. I repeat, that we cannot get away from this — it is true. Perhaps some are now able to recognize this, and to see quite clearly that, if the Lord has been able to use them, it has been because of the deep way in which He has led them — and that is the justification of it. It is the Lamb everywhere, stamped upon everything, and ultimately it works out in value. "The nations... walk by the light thereof": they derive their value from this thing which, wherever you look, from circumference to centre, has the Lamb on it. God is going to impress and stamp His people with the Lamb, and so He will secure that instrument, that vessel, that channel of universal blessing, upon which He has set His heart.

FROM THE WILDERNESS TO THE LAND

Chapter One

THE DISTANCE OF DIFFERENCE

"It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea" (Deut. 1:2).

*"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee
these forty years in the wilderness" (Deut. 8:2).*

This is not a new thought. We are familiar with both the fact and the reason of the extension of what could have been in eleven days to forty years, but that meaning and significance has been pressing in on me somewhat more of late, and I feel that so far as I am concerned any word for this moment arises out of this. It is what we might term the distance, not of space or geography, but the distance of difference. If the Lord had been only interested in getting a people to the point where they gave Him some simple gesture of trust in His salvation from the world, its master and its tyranny, its bondage and its conditions, to become His people by desire, then there is no reason at all why He should not have transported them by the short route, the direct course, and have landed them in eleven days in the place which He had already chosen for them. The Lord could do that sort of thing if it were all objective or outward. If today He presented to us the values of the blood of His chosen Lamb and called for that simple gesture of faith in that blood which appropriates its efficacy, and we in our hearts thereby signified that we desired to be the Lord's people; if that were all, then we could enter tomorrow into everything that He had designed for us, everything in His purpose, we could go straight in.

But few, very few, there have been who have gone that way. It has not, in the vast majority of cases, worked out like that. There is a necessity which sets up a barrier of impossibility. While the Lord would have it so, and has provided for it to be so, the actual position is such that it cannot be. The eleven days are extended to forty years, and then — and then a death! No, it is not the distance even of years of time or of measurement in the natural sense. It is the distance of difference and it is the measurement of the difference between Christ and ourselves, and that is a lesson which it takes most of us a very long time to learn — the greatness of the expanse, the long, long way which lies between ourselves as Christians and Christ, between the "spirituality" (?) of the flesh and the spirituality of the Spirit, between being Christians after the flesh and Christians after the Spirit. That lesson is a long one, a deep one, a painful one. Indeed, it is a lifelong lesson. It takes a whole generation to learn it, and when at last it is learnt, the wholehearted acceptance of a necessity is made, and that necessity is to die.

I mean this, that in this way you and I come more and more to the place where we feel it is necessary to die, that the only thing for it is to die. You know what I mean by that, not physically just to abandon everything, but that we die out, what we are in ourselves, the self-life; there is nothing for it but to die. The longing to die in that sense grows.

Transplanting this truth from the Old Testament to the New, you can see it coming up in more than one connection. It came up with the disciples while they were with the Lord, when He was here in the flesh. They were His, they belonged to Him: He said, "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16); they were His. But there is a tremendous distance between them and Him, a distance which it was impossible to bridge. Mentally there was the distance of this great expanse between Him and them and between them and Him. His whole thought, mind, ideas, judgments, His entire mentality was different from theirs and they could not follow Him. Disciples, yes, in an outward way, but in a wilderness. They could not follow Him in mind. He had to intimate some things and at once their mentality revolted. Never! — was their reaction. This shall never be! "Thou shalt never wash my feet" (John 13:8). The mentality of Christian disciples in relation to the Lord is: Never! — only another way of saying: Impossible, it cannot be. We cannot see it, we cannot conceive of such a thing, it is altogether foreign to our idea of things! The distance of difference in mind.

In heart, they could not follow Him. Their desires were so different, so far removed. In will it was just the same. Their whole being was far removed, and although a crisis came and a tremendous change took place with the Cross and the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit, the whole thing was not done then. Years afterwards, Paul has to withstand Peter to the face (Gal. 2:11). You can see there is room yet for approximation, even in the innermost apostles; they are still on the journey, they have not yet arrived, and with their latest breath they will say, "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on" (Phil. 3:12).

Again the truth is seen in companies of the Lord's people. We think of the Corinthian company, not necessarily only of those resident at Corinth, but all whom they represent, a Corinthian kind. They were the Lord's, blessed with many blessings, having the Spirit, but oh, what a gap between them and Christ! So much so, that Paul himself in visiting them resolutely determined to keep utterly to Christ and Him crucified, because of the distance, accounting that to be the only thing that could meet the situation.

And is it not this very thing which arises again in connection with the churches as we find them at the be-

ginning of the Revelation? Here is the Lord Himself presented to them, first of all in that very full way with those symbolic features, and then to each of the churches in a particular way, and both in the general and the particular it is a challenge. It is intended to be a challenge, a challenge to this distance which lies between them and Himself, this difference, the distance which has come about because of difference, the difference which has made a distance.

The Difference Between the Lord and Ourselves as Christians

Well, what does all this amount to, to what does it bring us? I think it brings us to everything. We cannot touch anything but what we find this applies to it. But the one thing which perhaps will help us most now will be this lesson that you and I have to learn, which the Lord is trying to teach us and which we are bound to learn if we are going on with the Lord, and which we shall not escape, namely, the utter difference between the Lord Jesus and ourselves even as Christians. Perhaps we have thought that having reposed faith in the Lord Jesus, in His redemptive work, His atoning blood, and having declared ourselves for Him, that simply opens the way for us to go right on straight away in full acceptance in every sense, and that the next thing to do is to turn outwards and begin to do everything and anything that we can think of, that our minds and our wills and our hearts, our emotions and our enthusiasms can possibly do for Him, and we begin to do it.

Now I do not want you to misunderstand what has just been said. Acceptance in Christ is complete, is utter. In Christ we are accepted from the beginning. But there is another sense in which there is a vast amount that is not Christ which is not accepted, never is accepted, and the lesson of our lives is that of learning what is not accepted by God even though we are in Christ, and it is a terrible, grave mistake for us to think that, because we have become Christians and now belong to the Lord, that anything we may do, anything we can think of, anything that rises as a generous impulse for the Lord within us, and any plan that we can put into operation and any zeal that we can exercise for the Lord, is acceptable. That is a grave mistake.

To be Christians after the Spirit is altogether a different thing from being Christians after the flesh. It is this Christianity after the flesh which has brought into being a vast system of things on this earth today which is not really serving the Lord, which is not really of vital consequence in this world, which is but an outward formal thing, which not only occupies the ground but is a menace to the genuine, the true; for so many say of it, If that is Christianity, I have no room for it! So the true is rejected and refused because of the false thing which is "Christian".

No, that which is after the Spirit is very different even from Christianity after the flesh. This latter can carry us a long way. We can have the very fullness of Christian teaching and truth in words, we can go right on to the fullest presentation of Christian doctrine and truth, getting right into what might be called the deeper things of the Word of God, and it may all amount to nothing more than our own natural interest in spiritual things. It is possible for us, for instance, to take up such a matter as the Scriptural difference between soul and spirit and to have a grasp of that as truth, as doctrine, and be able to analyse and present the analysis of that difference, and for it still to remain our natural mental interest, a fascinating subject, something of interest, and for the thing to be without the unction of the Spirit to precipitate a crisis, to effect something of God. That is only by way of illustration. We can preach the gospel in the flesh and make it of none effect, said Paul, because it is preached in the wisdom of words, in the wisdom of men. (1 Cor. 1:17). The very thing preached is nullified because of the source from which it comes, a natural interest, a natural drawing to that kind of thing, mystical Christianity; it does not get anywhere, it goes round and round in the wilderness. That which is of the Spirit creates a crisis, that which is of the Spirit takes a direct course, a direct route. That which is of the Spirit is a straight way.

Dear friends, what is the Lord doing with us? That is what we want to know. What is He doing with you and me, and with those who are really in His hands? — Is He not doing with us that which He has done with all who have come completely under His hands, that is, leading in a way and realm where human understanding and ability are completely confounded and exhausted, where it is totally impossible to cope mentally with His ways, or to explain Him? We cannot see, we cannot understand; neither is it in us to do, to achieve. We are learning that all our resources are of no avail, and that everything depends upon the Lord Himself; HIS wisdom, HIS strength, HIS grace.

Well, if it is your experience so far and at this time, understand that it is quite right, it is not all a mistake. True, it is very painful, it is testing. It is testing up to that point where your feet have to touch the very brink before you prove God. You have to come to an utter end of one way and to a beginning which is a beginning even to the point of lifting your feet to take a step to prove God, for God to come in. You say that is very utter. Yes, but it is this utterness of the difference between the Lord and ourselves that we have to learn, and that is going to set us over against the colossus of false doctrine, of the iniquitous lie which is being built upon this earth up to heaven, the lie of humanism.

That is the greatest lie that has been brought into this universe, that it is in man to be his own saviour, that it is in man to rise to perfection, it is in man to be God. It is all in man, the roots are in himself. That is Satan's colossus of iniquitous untruth, and God is working out the contradiction of that in a company, in His church. It is being wrought, worked out, in the unseen, and, while it is so difficult to accept it in the day of suffering, weakness and darkness and inability to understand, if we knew the truth, the probability is that it is just this: God is doing with Satan in and through the church what He did with Satan in and through Job, answering his challenge and his lie. Here is a broken, shattered, helpless little vessel of saints, bewildered, stripped, thrown back upon their God, unable to do or to understand, clinging to Him and seeking to prove

Him, and through that the greatest iniquity in this universe is being assailed by God and answered.

The lie! There never was a time when that lie has reached greater proportion than it has today. Of course, it represents the greatest enigma that confronts us, when what is going on shouts at the top of its voice what kind of creature man is after all, yet at the same time men are pinning their faith to humanism as never before. But in you and in me, poor broken ones, God has His answer, and it does mean something to the Lord that we have been emptied out to the last drop, thrown back upon Him, where He is our wisdom, He is our strength, He is our life, He is our very breath. That means something to Him.

The Otherness of Christ

To return to the central issue of this whole matter, namely, the great lesson of the vast expanse, the desert expanse, which lies between Christians in themselves and Christ. Karl Barth has coined for us a phrase which has gained a great deal of strength and place, and it is a very useful one — “the altogether other-ness of Christ”. Oh, that goes much further than we realize, certainly much further than most people are prepared to believe. Even yet in evangelical Christianity there is a clinging to the idea that we transfer every thing to Christ and to Christianity when we are born again. We transfer all our faculties and our powers over to the interests of Christ and then, instead of using them for ourselves and for the world, we use them for Christ. That is the meaning of consecration, of surrender, as the terms are used so largely today in evangelical Christianity — the consecration of ourselves, our gifts, our faculties, our everything, to the Lord and to His service. But that falls short of something, and that is the meaning of the forty years in the wilderness. If that were all, then the eleven days would be enough. But no, it is not. It is not the transference and the consecration of everything that we are to the Lord to be used straight away as it is over on His side, for His interests instead of in the world. Christ is other yet, Christ is still different yet from consecrated natural life, oh, so other! Something has to happen, our entire mentality has to be changed, transformed. The mind has to be renewed, we have to have an altogether different kind of outlook, even about the things of God. It is a constitutional matter, not merely a directional one.

You have heard this many times and I want to emphasize it, I must emphasize it, because this is the meaning of the Lord’s dealings with us, namely, to get a new mentality, a new conception, another, not our old one transferred, but another, and the distance, I said, is not the distance of time or geography necessarily, it is the distance of difference, and we make faster or slower progress spiritually according to how we learn this lesson. It need not be forty years, the Lord has not fixed it at forty years; He never did. It need not be.

The Secret of Spiritual Progress

What is the secret of it? What is the secret of spiritual progress? It is the letting go of our own will and mind to the fact, to the truth, that after all, though Christians at our best, wanting to be a hundred percent for the Lord, it is not in us either to be or do. Our will can never do it, our reason can never accomplish it, our impulses and desires can never get us there. We have to come to a brokenness and yieldedness where nature is laid low in the dust and all our treasure is with the stones of the brook and the Almighty becomes our treasure (Job 22:24–25); the Lord alone our wisdom, our strength and vision, our desire. Until you and I have learned the lesson of that utter brokenness and yieldedness and letting go to the Lord, spiritual progress is delayed.

You look at all that came into the forty years in the wilderness, and you will see it was but the working out of that principle. The Lord was working to keep them close to His Christ, to make His Christ the basis of everything, but they wanted it in themselves, for themselves, and so that generation never attained. The strong word so often repeated in the New Testament about that episode is that they could not, they could not enter in — “So we see that they could not enter in” (Heb. 3:19). Why could they not? It says, because of unbelief. But what is the basis of unbelief? Is it not desire to have it in ourselves, to see it, to feel it, to know it, to have it according to our minds? What is faith? Well, faith has nothing under its feet but God, just God. It is the Lord.

May the Lord just indicate the meaning of the word, show us the great distance that lies between ourselves as Christians and Christ, and give us a heart that yields to the Spirit’s work in teaching that lesson and making it good and bringing us more and more to the measure of His Son.

Chapter Two

THE PURPOSE OF THE WILDERNESS

Reading: Deut. 1:2–3, 8:2.

In our previous meditation, we were almost entirely on the negative side of this matter, namely, the distance which is the difference between ourselves and Christ. Forty years were taken when eleven days alone were necessary from the divine standpoint, because of the great expanse which lies between what we are, even as the Lord’s people, in ourselves, and what the Lord is. This expanse of wilderness was bounded, as we know, at both ends by death; by the Red Sea and by the Jordan respectively. It was a space locked up in death, and, from one standpoint, it is that place in the life of the Lord’s people where death has to be applied and made to operate.

Now we rather desire to strike a more positive note and aspect of the matter. It is true that one of the great

lessons in the life of the Lord's people is that of the other-ness, the complete other-ness of Christ from what they are; a lesson to be learned in every respect, and along the line of undoing so largely, our undoing. But what is the Lord after? What is the positive outcome of it all in the Lord's mind and will? What issued from the forty years, or what issued from this company of the Lord's people? At the end of the forty years of this wilderness journey, what have we really in hand, so far as this particular company and journey were concerned? We have only two men in hand at the end, Joshua and Caleb. We know that another generation went in, but that is another thing. So far as this particular generation is concerned, all that we have at the end is two men; but what two men! Those two men, one of them perhaps in particular, represented and embodied all that there was to be. The future hung upon them. The Lord's interests for His people were bound up with them. And they were the fruit of this school of the wilderness.

The Lord's Need of Men and Women of Stature

But let us come to it immediately, without any further delay or going round. What is the Lord after? This came to me with very real force recently in a time of indisposition, and when it seemed that everything on the outside was being narrowed down and the prospects for anything very much of the Lord seemed to be so limited. I was driven very much on the Lord about the whole situation, to inquire very earnestly what it all meant and what it was the Lord was really after, and I can say to you that it came to me, in the way that things do just now and again in a lifetime, as the Lord's own message to the heart; and it amounted to this: "What I am after at this time is men and women of spiritual stature, I am going to need them". That is how it came to me with great strength. When it so happens, it is as though something has been written inside, and you know when you get something like that from the Lord it is life, it is salvation, it is release. And so it was; there was a new sense of meaning, real meaning, in things. Men and women of spiritual stature — I am going to need them!

The whole of this work in the wilderness for forty years was found in two men. You may say, that is a poor issue. Not when you recognize the value of those men and how many there were afterwards who owed everything to the spiritual stature of those men.

You pass on in the Word and you find that fact coming up again and again. You go to 1 Chron. 21, and you know what you have there. David is in the wilderness. All that in a public way is of the Lord is in the hands of a man who had been chosen — representation. Saul holds the public position, but he is man-chosen, and he embodies everything that is man, man in the things of God. But God's anointed one is there outside for the time being, and he is in the wilderness. In that chapter you have three secessions to David. There is the secession to Ziklag, the secession to the stronghold or cave, and the secession to Hebron; and if you look you will find that those who seceded to David in each and every case are described as men who were able to wield the sword and the spear, men who were able to keep rank and to lead. They of that sort came finally to David at Hebron to turn again the kingdom and make David king over all Israel, and these are they who were needed when the kingdom was turned. When David came to the throne, he needed men of stature for the constituting of the kingdom, for its carrying on. The men of stature had been found in the wilderness. They had come to him, not when all was going well, when there was any appeal to the flesh, when coming to him would have meant popularity, influence in the world. No, everything was to the contrary. They had to leave that realm and come out to the place where everything was in disrepute, in rejection, under ostracism; to be the enemy of what was public religion, the established and acknowledged and recognized thing; to come out and be tested there with David in the wilderness, men of stature whom he was going to need in a coming day.

We need not follow the principle through. You know that it comes up so frequently. The Lord finds a little company, speaking generally, amongst His people and brings them into the difficult school of a spiritual wilderness, to increase their spiritual measure in the light of a need which is coming. We, I think, are not mistaken and wrong in saying that the Lord is not giving a great deal of encouragement in these days to great public movements and efforts and activities in Christianity. That is not His line at the moment. Many who are honestly burdened with the need are straining after something like that, a great movement amongst Christians and in the world, but the Lord has not yet set His seal to anything like that in any very real way. He is not doing it just now.

But I think we are just as right in saying that the Lord is very intensely occupied in an inner, hidden, secret way with many of His children along the line of deep discipline and trial. I do not think there is any doubt about that. This is a time in which the work of God is very much hidden, and is of a very intense kind, with a company within the main company of Christian people. Not all Christian people are going the same way, but there are those who are. To secure men and women of spiritual stature in the light of a need which is coming — that seems to me to be the explanation.

We do not know what that need is. It is useless to try to forecast, to shape, the future. All sorts of things are possible and probable. It is not difficult to imagine — though I think it goes beyond imagination, mere imagination — that the horrors of peace will be greater than the horrors of war. You may say, that is strong speaking. I have used a strong word — horror — but I do not think it is too strong, I do not think it is the wrong word. Perhaps the difficulties and sufferings and trials of peace will be very much greater than those of war. We do not know. I say it is useless to try to forecast the future, but there are such prospects, and if that is so, a very great need is going to exist spiritually. Things are not going to be easy for a long time; they are going to be difficult, hard, tight, perhaps severe. A need is going to arise, and that need is only going to be met by people who know the Lord in a peculiar way, who have proved and come to know the Lord in a wilderness, a spiritual wilderness.

The Measure for which the Lord Looks

What is this stature of which we have spoken? Well, if you investigate the life of Israel in the forty years, you can see something of the meaning of it. Take it, for instance, from the standpoint of reactions, reactions to the situations into which the Lord brought them. The Lord said, I led thee these forty years in the wilderness to prove thee, to try thee, to know what was in thine heart. Really the words there mean more than that; to make thee know what was in thine heart, to bring it to light. It is not as though the Lord did not know their hearts. He knew before the trial was applied, but He put them into a situation to bring it out, to make it manifest. "It was in thine heart"! That could be stated thus, To manifest natural reactions to situations.

Today the situation is one of lack of bread, or tomorrow lack of water, at another time a different situation; and so difficulties, trials, arise along the way of different kinds. What is the reaction? There is nothing wrong with a reaction that is perplexed. There is nothing wrong with a reaction that feels the stress of things. There is nothing wrong with a reaction that says, I do not know what the Lord means by this, I do not know what the Lord is doing with me; I am bewildered! There is nothing wrong with such a reaction at all. But what actually took place was that they were embittered against the Lord. The New Testament way of putting it is, that they hardened their hearts in the day of trial (Heb. 3:8). They were embittered, they allowed themselves to be soured by trial, they turned in their hearts against the Lord. They lost their concern for the things of the Lord. The way was hard, very hard, but the effect which they allowed the difficulties to have upon them was just that — Oh well, if the Lord does not please me, I have no interest in His affairs; if the Lord does not do what I want Him to do, well, I am just going to let go! That is a state that is nature, a state of the human heart. It is a wrong interpretation of the Lord's way, the Lord's dealings and experiences. That sort of thing can drag on until the heart becomes stony and the life is lost entirely as a positive thing to the Lord.

The spirit of grace produces another kind of reaction. It does not take the sting out of trial, it does not prevent the trial being a trial and fire being fire, it does not make us insensitive to difficulty, but the spirit of grace, the spirit of faith, says, Well, it is hard, it is difficult, the Lord is not doing what I expected, what I would like; He is doing just the opposite, and in every way He is emptying me and breaking me, and withholding what I in my heart would like; but He knows what He is doing. "He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." He knoweth! And, beloved, that is stature, that is measure, that is growth, that answers to Joshua and Caleb whose hearts did not turn back, but who wholly followed the Lord.

Oh, I know this must not be a hard word, and it is not said harshly at all. There is not one of us who has not suffered in this way. We have all got confessions to make about our reactions to the Lord's dealings. Maybe there are some here who have lost the flame, the warmth, who have lost zeal, who are letting go, who are not concerned about the Lord's interests so much as they were, because the Lord has not taken them up along the line of their own desires and expectations and ambitions, but has frustrated all that again and again. If you are there, I want you with me to try to recognize the seriousness of the crisis of that position. My dear friend, whoever you may be, if you are in that particular state or peril just now, a coming need is the strength of appeal for you to stand up and seek to trust the Lord in your dark day in a new way when you cannot understand, to have confidence in Him in this time when you feel that, so far as His ways with you are concerned, they are calculated to undermine all confidence. The Lord has a need which is going to arise, and He is going to need men and women of measure, of stature, and He has been trying to make you such in the light of that coming need.

I do believe that the ordinary Christian resource and Christian life and Christian measure of today is not going to meet the need of a near tomorrow. It is already failing. Leaders, if they only would be honest and confess it — and some have already done so — would say: We are failing, our methods have not succeeded, we are not meeting the situation; the need is beyond us, we have not got what is required! That is more or less recognized by responsible people today, and there are many who are deeply aware of that need, but they do not know what to do, where to turn, which way to look: so they just have to stay where they are. If only they knew where to find what they sense to be necessary, they would be there. Is God going to take no account of that? Is He not true to His word, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled"? Is He not going to satisfy the hungry soul? Is there going to be real need, and the Lord be indifferent to it?

But the Lord's way is not to meet it direct from heaven. He needs you, He needs me, but we have to have it to give. We are "stewards of the manifold grace of God." And what is a steward? A steward is one who knows what His Lord has, has an entrée to it, a right to it, and knows what to bring forth for the specific case: a steward, one of understanding and resource. The Lord is needing stewards, He is wanting to make stewards, and that is what He is trying to do with many today. He has cut off a great deal that was good. There was nothing wrong with it in itself, but as the good was the enemy of the best, it had to be cut off. We had to be separated unto something. We are not going to judge anybody who may still be in things we have felt we must leave behind; we thank God for every measure there is of Himself however limited. But the Lord in His sovereignty does so work as to deal with a people in the light of a greater need, and that is His message to us today. I have less doubt about the truth of that than about anything else. If I am speaking in the name of the Lord at all, that is His word to you. A need is growing, it exists, and it is coming into manifestation, and for this a stewardship will be necessary, men and women of stature, Joshuas and Calebs, and such as those who came out to David, such as have wholly followed the Lord.

Trial is Meant to Yield Measure

Well, what is our reaction to the Lord's dealings with us? Are we less concerned than we once were? If we become petulant, peevish, displeased with the Lord, anything like that, that proves beyond any doubt that we have interests of our own: nature was in this thing, it was not all the Lord. And so it has had to be exposed, we have had to know what was in our hearts.

But there are two ways, you see, even of coming to the place where it does not matter to us what happens to us. Under trial we can come to the place where at length we break away, saying, The Lord does not care, does not hear; oh well, it does not matter; if the Lord is not concerned about it, I'll just let it go! We can drop out like that, petulant, disappointed, soured by trial and adversity: it does not matter, we have lost interest. That is one position; and you will acknowledge that is not right, there is something wrong with that.

But there is the other position. It does not matter what happens to me, it does not matter what happens to my interests, it does not matter at all whether I myself am used or not in this thing that the Lord wants to do: all that matters is that the Lord gets what He is after, and gets it in His way. So far as I am concerned, what happens to me is quite a secondary matter! That is stature, that is measure, that is Christ. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life" (Mark 10:45). It does not matter what happens to me, so long as the Lord gets what He is after. Does it matter to you? How does it matter? Why does it matter? The answer to that determines our spiritual measure, and it determines whether the Lord is going to be able to meet His need by means of us when that need is manifested. I do not believe the Lord will ever have spiritual measure in a life without using it, without finding a way for it. But oh, so many of us have come to the place where our one cry is, Lord, do not draw upon me beyond my measure, do not put me into a position for which I am not fitted, do not involve me in responsibility for which I am not qualified!

And what is qualification, what is fitness? It is simply Christ.

The Measure of Christ

Well now, we come back to this wilderness, and you see everything was on that basis; nothing whatever was of man in that wilderness from God's side, nothing at all. Everything was forbidding from one standpoint. Take that tabernacle, the outer court with its curtain stretched right round, and so high; there is no getting through, and no looking over. It all says, Keep out! Everything says, If you come inside here, you die! Keep out! There is but one way in, and that is through sacrifice; and that is your death representatively. You come in here, and your life is taken. It is all so forbidding, from one standpoint.

And yet from the other standpoint, there is the representing of the people in the presence of God. But how could it be? Well, from the first word to the last, it is all Christ. The whole of that structure of the tabernacle came from heaven. Not one idea was allowed to come from man's mind. It was not left with man to produce one thought as to the manner of that tabernacle, or how it should be built; from start to finish, it came from heaven. That is the other-ness of Christ. The ideas are God's, not ours. Though we may be the Lord's people, it is still not a case of our ideas, but God's. Not a single thought from us is allowed. The fellowship, the access, the communion — oh, you cannot come in there save on the ground of Christ. It is by sacrifice. That sacrifice is Christ. It is by priesthood. That priesthood is Christ. The very garments all speak of Christ. It is Christ, only Christ, and you cannot come in except as Christ, so to speak. You are only accepted in the Beloved. You are never accepted in yourself, not even as the Lord's child.

And what of service? "Let my people go that they may serve me", the Lord had said to Pharaoh (Ex. 9:1). But what is the service in the wilderness? It is priestly service. The Levites represent the service of the Lord's people. Priests and Levites — what are they? Why, their very adornment, their very clothes, are all types speaking of Christ. Everything about these priests and Levites is symbolical, representative of Christ. So that service is Christ, and you and I are shut out, even as the Lord's people, shut out in our own natures. Everything is God's thought here. All access in God's thought is Christ. All service is Christ, and only as you and I learn Christ, put on Christ, walk in Christ, and live Christ, have we any place, and the measure in which that is so determines the measure of our value to the Lord, our usefulness to Him.

And for this present moment the increase of Christ in us is by that ruling out, putting aside, thrusting back of our own encroachments and impingements, even in the things of God, the pushing back by the Lord saying, I do not want you! That is how it seems. That is how we feel rebuffed so often. But there is another interpretation. WE are wanting to get in. The Lord says, No, there is no place here for you, keep out; this place is reserved for My Son; your appreciation of Him is the measure in which you come in here; your abiding in Him is the measure of your standing here; your being hidden in Him, covered by Him, is the measure of your acceptance!

And for the coming need the Lord is intensifying the process, taking us deeply and soundly into this in our experience. Presently, perhaps, we shall thank the Lord for it all. We have been able to meet a need which was too deep for anything ordinary to meet. If we had not been that deep way, we could not have met that deep need. If we had not known those bitter fires, we could not have served that divine purpose. Whatever else the Lord is doing — and I am not saying this is the only thing He is doing — whatever else He is doing, He is doing this, and whether it be for this life here or for His Kingdom afterwards, there is no doubt or question about the truth of this principle. For the kingdom now in this life spiritually, and for that kingdom which follows the Lord must have at hand men and women of stature. May we find the grace to follow Him wholly.

Chapter Three

THE ENTRY INTO THE LAND

Reading: Deut. 1:2–3, 8:2; Heb. 3:19, 4:1.

We have been thinking of the distance of difference between Christ and ourselves. In virtue of the shed and sprinkled blood, Israel had been brought out of Egypt and made the people of God; they were the Lord's redeemed ones. But even so a fact existed which could not be overlooked, ignored or made light of, a fact which had to be recognised, and fully so. That fact was, and is, that even when we are the Lord's, in ourselves there is a vast distance of difference between ourselves as ourselves and Himself. Eleven days and forty years — not a fixed period, a period fixed by God; that is, not of necessity forty years. The distance is determined, not by geography or time, but entirely by the appropriation of faith.

Entering into God's Rest

What is the end of the journey, the goal? What is it all unto? God calls it "My rest". Rest, God's rest, that is the end of the journey, and how soon we reach the end of the journey entirely depends upon our apprehension of the meaning of rest, our faith's apprehension of the meaning of rest. You can be out of Egypt and into the end of the journey in no time where faith is large enough for it. But "we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief". The end of the journey is always immediately present to faith. It is not distant. It is nearer or farther according to faith.

Faith's Foundation for Entering into God's Rest

But we want to understand what the basis of this faith is, and therefore what the meaning of God's rest is. We have said that it is the apprehending of Christ. This letter to the Hebrews, which brings the journey and its end so much into view, is entirely given up to laying the foundation of faith unto God's rest. Chapter by chapter or stage by stage, it presents us with that foundation, or those foundations. We might just look at one or two of them, but we begin with the all-inclusive and comprehensive one, the presentation of Christ at the beginning of the letter. There the whole background of all the rest is presented to us, the foundation of all that follows.

a) God given to us in Sonship

It is that Christ is God given to us in Sonship: "the express image", "the effulgence"; to use the words of the prophet, "unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6). Not only "a child is born", but "a son is given." It is God manifest in the flesh, Christ is God. Again, referring to the prophet's words, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Prince of Peace, Father of Eternity" or Everlasting Father. This Son is called that, the Father of Eternity.

What is the value of that for rest, for faith unto rest? Oh, surely it must appeal to our hearts as being of supreme and infinite significance. You see what the apostle is saying here. In the past the great revelations of God Himself were mediated through angels. What mighty and marvellous things were done through angels! The greatest things in that dispensation were done through angels. God came to men through angels. God communicated Himself through angels, revealed His mind through angels, and exercised His power through angels. The angels of God were constantly ascending and descending in that dispensation, to carry on the purpose of God amongst men. The highest form of God's manifestation was through angels.

But here the apostle says: not unto angels, not through angels, but better than angels, higher than angels, Son-wise. God has given Himself in terms of Sonship. It is a great word of the prophet, "Jehovah has become my salvation" (Is. 12:2). Yes, the Name, the highest Name of all, Jehovah, the Lord Jehovah has become my salvation. Not a representative of the Lord, not even an angelic representative, but Jehovah Himself has become my salvation. The Lord Himself has come forth in this matter of our salvation, and if that is true, well, we must believe, our faith must go the whole way and believe either that Jehovah can fail or that He cannot, that Jehovah can do His work or He cannot, Jehovah can see this through or He cannot. If Jehovah cannot, it cannot be seen through. It is ultimate, final. It is no less than the Lord Himself.

That is the significance bound up with this first presentation in the letter to the Hebrews — the effulgence of His glory, the express image of His Person. God in Christ in terms of Sonship (the significance of which we shall note again in a moment) has come forth. That is the foundation of everything. The Lord personally, directly, immediately and absolutely, has taken this thing in hand. He has not committed it to the hands of angels or men, but has said, I Myself will accomplish this thing, I will go down and do it! "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). That is the full foundation for faith that can lead us into rest, and immediately the journey is shorter or longer according to our apprehension of that; whether we are able to stand alongside of the apostle, even when the gale is blowing, the storm is as a blast, and say, I believe God! (Acts 27:25). I say the journey to rest is shorter or longer according to our ability to take that position. If Israel in the wilderness had taken that position, it would not have been forty years; but they did not believe God.

b) God in Christ our Kinsman

Then you pass on in this letter and you find that is broken up, expressed in different forms. In the next place, God is revealed in Christ as having come to us in kinship. Passing into chapter 2 from verse 10, you know that sublime section about “I and the children whom God hath given me”; I and the brethren — “I will declare thy name unto my brethren”. Or again, “Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same.” And then about the sons — “bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” Children, brethren, sons: God has come forth in terms of sonship to bring about a kinship, to be the redeeming kinsman Himself. It is God Who is redeeming in Christ. Heirship — “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17), and so on. He is redeeming the lost inheritance, He is the redeeming kinsman. If redemption is to be at all, it must be by somebody Who Himself has a right to redeem because He is in the family, and Who Himself can and will make the family’s condition His responsibility.

The family has lost its inheritance, has lost its all. Somebody has to take responsibility for recovering, and God in Christ has come down to take responsibility for our lost heritage, to recover it all in terms of kinship. The Father through the Son has done it. The point that I want specially to emphasize is that it is God Who has assumed this form of a kinsman to redeem, and if it is God Who has taken responsibility for it — and He has — that is the basis of faith unto rest.

You see how impossible it would be, because of the utterness of the situation, for anyone to enter into rest and deny God. You cannot enter into rest if you deny God. We are not dealing with truth, we are not dealing with doctrine, we are not dealing with things, we are not dealing even with angels, great as they are. We are dealing with God, and here He is coming to us in and through His Son in terms of kinship, so that in Christ He is to us our brother, our brother to redeem, taking responsibility. Usually even in earthly families, the elder brother is looked up to and trusted. So often he is the most wonderful person in the family for the rest of the family. There is nothing he cannot do. It is not always so, but so often it is. That is the idea brought in here. It is a family of sons that God has constituted, with the eldest Son, Who was able and willing to take full responsibility for the family’s title, the family’s heritage, the family’s destiny, the family’s honour, and to secure it all in Himself. That is what is being said here. He has done that. What could we do? Nothing! But He has done it, and faith apprehending that can enter into rest, God’s rest.

c) God in Christ His own Priest

But then we pass on and find the next phase, God in Christ becoming His own priest. Priests have failed, failed to carry things through to finality. They all failed, they made nothing perfect — that is the argument here. So God Himself became His own priest. It is God in Christ in priestly activity carrying out all the functions of priesthood, and the functions of priesthood are just to satisfy God in all His requirements. This is where the subtle fascination and attraction and power of Rome lurks. The Roman system is built upon the idea of priesthood. The priest stands between you and God, and stands for you, and all you have to do is to pass everything over to him and take no responsibility yourself; you need not take any responsibility, the priest will take all responsibility for you. That, of course, has degenerated into this kind of saying: Do as you like, pay the priest and he will clear it up with God. But behind that there is this fact that man craves to have the responsibility God-ward taken off himself by somebody, to be freed from that responsibility for himself, and to come to that absolute rest where the responsibility is not his at all. The Roman system has provided a false answer to that craving of man and put man in a false position. But the craving remains. You and I have it. Our deepest longing and need is for a priest, somebody to take responsibility for us, so that we do not have to take that responsibility. Oh, that I might be free from an evil conscience, may be perfectly at rest because someone all the time is standing and answering to God for me. And here it is: God has said, I will answer to Myself for you, I will be My own priest to satisfy Myself on your behalf.

We find it such a difficult lesson to learn, just what the High Priestly function and ministry of our Lord Jesus is. “Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25). You notice what the apostle says about His being able to sympathize because He Himself has been here, been where we are, been along our road, knows all about it, been tempted in all points as we are, although without sin. He has been here and He is a sympathetic High Priest, He understands it all. He is not a stranger, and He ever liveth to make intercession in perfect sympathy, and He is there taking responsibility for us before God. Is not that a ground of rest? Ought we not to be at the journey’s end much more quickly if only faith could grasp that. Apart from faith, we shall all the time be trying to put ourselves right with God and be stuck on the road, going round in the wilderness. Progress waits upon faith’s apprehension of this thing. Cast the responsibility for your salvation and sanctification upon the One Who has taken that responsibility.

Listen again to words in this letter about being saved from an evil conscience. How? Through faith (Heb. 10:22). Not cleansing our own consciences, but by faith in Him. God has come in the Person of His Son to be the priest that He requires, that is, to satisfy Himself.

d) God in Christ His own sacrifice

What is true of the priesthood is next shown to be true of the sacrifice. “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I am come” (Heb. 10:5–7). God in Christ has come to be His own sacrifice. You

notice a whole section is given up to pointing out the futility and weakness and failure of the sacrifices of the Jewish system, how they broke down and came short, and how it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin. But then, after the millions and millions of sacrifices offered on Jewish altars, one sacrifice, one for ever, did the work, and God provided Himself the sacrifice. In His Son He became His own sacrifice; and what more perfect than that? That is final surely; one offering for ever. This is the basis of rest, His own sacrifice once for all.

The Journey Longer or Shorter According to Faith's Appropriation

We cannot take all the aspects of this revelation, of this unfolding of the ground of rest, but what I want you to see is this, that this was all present in type in the wilderness for forty years. It was all there in type, and yet they went on for forty years. It was there very early in their wilderness history, and if only faith had grasped the significance of what was present at that moment, the forty years would have been cut down to perhaps eleven days; eleven days' straight journey if faith had grasped what was present all the time.

What I want to emphasize is this, that you and I are not of necessity bound to make a long journey and go over years in this matter. It entirely depends upon our appropriation of what is here today whether we enter into rest. The end of the journey is here now. It was there all the time. Those types that they had of Christ were the end of the journey in spiritual essence and value. There is nothing more at the end of the forty years. When they go over into the land there was nothing more, it was still the same basis. God has not to do anything further, has not to do anything; it is all there right at the beginning. We can come into rest now if we take hold of what God has given us now.

The Power of a People in Rest

But oh, how important it is that you and I should seek to exercise this faith; because you can see quite well that it was not just a matter of entering into a spiritual state of blessing and enjoyment for themselves. Their very vocation hung upon their being in rest. The object of their calling and election was at stake. All God's purposes in them were bound up with their entering into rest. They were ineffective and unfruitful until they were in rest. They were defeated and weak until they were in rest, but when they went over into what typified God's rest, they were mightily effective. You see what can happen by a people in rest. See Jericho's mighty walls going down by a people in rest. They march round the wall, just going round once, and that is the day's work; and again tomorrow; not very hard work. I do not know how long it took them to march round; a good healthy walk, quietly walking round once a day for a week. It was more strenuous on the seventh day, seven times round. And how much energy it takes to shout, I do not know. That was the way; a people in rest in type, and down came Jericho. And as they went on the seven nations mightier than they came down one after another because typically they were a people in rest.

And do you know that one of the great strategies of the devil, in order to hold his own against us, is to get us into unrest. One of the great triumphs of Satan against the church is to get it robbed of its rest, its quiet assurance. Satan can do little against a people in assurance, in rest. He can do anything with people who are not sure, not certain, distracted, restless, fretful, anxious, questioning, doubting. You have no power against him when you are like that, always in the unrest of uncertainty of a tomorrow that never comes, a future that never arrives to keep us from rest today. I do feel that you and I must seek very much to enter every day with a very fervent prayer that that day in itself shall be in the rest of God, so far as our hearts are concerned. Whatever it may hold, whatever storms, in our hearts we are quietly at rest with God, being still and knowing that He is God. There is a tremendous power in that. There is no power in a fretful life, there is no strength where there is doubt, but there is a mighty power where there is a quiet confidence in God; and that is the point. Satan would postpone that and keep us going round in this everlasting circle, a wilderness state, because it is to his gain, and to our loss; it is to the defeat of the Lord in His purpose. "They could not enter in because of unbelief."

Now may the Lord at least lay emphasis in our hearts upon the necessity for giving diligence to enter His rest for every purpose of His glory. Above all things may we seek the rest of faith, because of its tremendous potency against the enemy and in the realization of God's purpose.

Chapter Four

A DECISIVE STEP OF FAITH

Reading: Acts 3:1-21.

This is the first recorded miracle in the history of the church, and parabolically it embodies a good deal of what we have been considering, and I am going to take it in that parabolic form as an illustration of some of these matters.

We begin at the end, that is, so far as this man is concerned, with what God is aiming at, what God is after, what the result of the work of God in a life is. The man leaps up, stands upon his feet, praises and glorifies God, and goes in and goes on with the people of God. That is very simple, but it represents a work that God would do and which needs to be done in the case of so many. What the Lord wants in the case of all of us is to have us on our feet, standing upright, praising and glorifying Him, and going in and going on with His people;

a very different story and a very different situation from what was; no longer a liability but an asset, no longer one to be carried every day, but one who now is at least taking his or her own weight, and going on by the inward momentum of the Spirit and power of God. That is what the Lord wants with us all.

It immediately resolves itself into a challenge, an interrogation. We have each one now to ask ourselves quite honestly and frankly: In relation to the things of the Lord, am I a liability or an asset? Am I counting or am I having to be accounted for? Am I a positive factor or am I negative? Am I amongst those who have to be carried all the time, needing to be borne up, borne along and put where I am, or am I going on in the Lord on my own feet, on top of my infirmities? Am I a responsible one, or otherwise? Well, we must each one answer that question before the Lord now, and see what the Lord would have, what the Lord would bring about. He would have us all in the place or condition of this man as we see him at the end, leaping up, standing on his feet, praising and glorifying God, going on and going in; and more than that as we shall see presently: but that is a good beginning. Are we there?

The Hindrance to Entering in

Well, we must go back and take the man up at the point where we first find him. He is carried and laid at the Beautiful Gate every day. There are those who are going in; but he does not go in, and he cannot go in. "So we see that they could not enter in..." (Heb. 3:19). The man could not enter in. Let that gateway to the house of God beyond represent in our parable that life of rest in the Lord, that entering-in life, that life of attaining unto God's purpose. "And we see that they could not enter in." This man could not enter in, but why could he not? Was it the gate that kept him out? No. Even if the gate had been closed, that was not the inevitable hindrance, and it was a big gate. I understand that it took ten men to open the Beautiful Gate, so massive was it. But even so, if it had been closed, that was not the obstacle.

Let that gate in the story and in the parable as we are regarding it, represent the law, that bond of Judaism which says: Thou shalt not, or, Thou shalt, that forbidding of the law. But that is not the obstacle now. Christ was made under the law, to fulfil the law and put it out of the way. The law is no longer an obstacle.

"Free from the law, O happy condition!
Jesus has died, and THERE is remission.
Cursed by the law, and bruised by the fall,
Christ has redeemed us once for all."

The law is no hindrance now.

But was it the man's infirmities that kept him out? Let his infirmities, all wrapped into one, represent his sins. Was it his sins and his imperfections, his faults, that hindered that entering into rest? Again no. Our sins, our weaknesses, our imperfections, our temperamental and constitutional difficulties, all the infirmities of our fallen natures, these are not the hindrances. The Lord Jesus has dealt with all sin and all sins, and all our weaknesses and infirmities He has borne. All that is dealt with. They are not the hindrance. Oh, you may say, it is this sin and that sin that keeps me out, or it is that weakness, this imperfection; it is the way I am made, my temperament, my constitution, my make-up; I am so different from others; and all this is the thing that binds me in infirmity so that I cannot! If you are saying that, whether as one who has never known Christ or whether as a child of God still needing to know the entering-in life, it is a great mistake to put it down to sins or infirmities and say that it is these things in our nature that keep us out. No, no! That would be to deny the Cross of the Lord Jesus. That would, in its outworking and in its logic, make God very unjust, because it would work out like this, that people who had better temperaments would stand a better chance of getting in, and people who had a worse make-up would be at the end of the queue. God is not like that. We are not nearer or farther from Him because we are better or worse in our natures. Not at all!

Entering in by Faith

What was it that kept the man out? "We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Faith destroys the mightiest gates of brass, faith removes the mountains of sin and human weakness and failure. The easily besetting sin which has to be laid aside is this sin of unbelief, and it was at that very citadel that the Holy Ghost, through these servants of God, directed His blow. Infirmity in itself was nothing, the gates were nothing, closed or open, but the man's attitude and response of heart to a challenge from God was everything. He could have reacted antagonistically or cynically, or with utter carelessness, and stayed where he was. But there is some response, some reaction, which we must interpret as the quickening of faith in his heart: and you know and I know perfectly well that we shall stay where we are, go on in our infirm, helpless state of spiritual liability, until we come to this point where we exercise, deliberately and definitely, faith in the Lord Jesus. Everything waits for that. That is elementary.

We have to come to that response of faith, and then mighty gates, whatever those gates may be in our lives, keeping us out, no longer constitute a hindrance. Infirmities in ourselves, defects and weaknesses, faults and failings, sins and depravities and everything, from inheritance to what we have brought on ourselves, nothing is enough to obstruct our way when once we have come to this point of a deliberate and positive trust in the Lord Jesus. "We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." But the positive is that you can enter in by faith.

Concentration upon a Definite Issue

But then something else was necessary with this man; not in addition to his faith but as a part of it, as heading up to it. Peter and John were going up to the temple and this man saw them coming. I do not know what his look was like, his gesture. We can only imagine, a sort of wonderfully pathetic glancing hither and thither. And Peter looked on him, and said: Look on us. There must have been some reason for that. And he fastened his eyes upon them, of course expecting to receive an alms. But the effect was that they got what they needed and wanted as a necessary factor in this man's deliverance. "Look on us", and he fastened his eyes upon them.

What, in parabolic meaning, does that stand for? It means this: you and I, if we are in any condition like this, needing to be put on our feet, needing to be made a factor that counts, needing to be delivered from this infirm state spiritually, from this state of being a liability; if we are in any need like that, we shall never get anywhere until we have concentrated upon a definite issue. He was expecting to receive an alms. What are you after? Do you want pity, sympathy, to be made a fuss of? Do you want that which is, after all, only going to leave you where you were? Are you looking to be nursed, coddled? Is that what you are after, an alms? Do you really want to get out of that position? Do you mean business? Is it nice to be one of those who are always being carried and nursed, and secretly, down in the deceptive heart, do you really like it, and want to be ministered to? Your infirm condition, you like being there because it draws attention to you, brings you into the sympathetic area. Oh, these hearts of ours, how they play with spiritual things for their own gratification!

He expected to receive an alms. But Peter and John are saying, Look here, we are going to face this issue right out: look on us! We are going to concentrate in this matter. The moment has come for this sort of thing either to end or to be indefinitely confirmed!

May I say to you, dear friends, if you are anywhere in this realm at all, you will never get anywhere until you have come with both eyes to look this thing straight in the face, and say, It is going on no longer; I am going to have this thing settled, I am going to bring this thing to a head; God helping me, it is going to be finished. I am going to play with this no longer, I am going to minister to this no longer, I am going to allow this to cripple me no longer, I am going to allow this to make me a liability no longer; tonight I look this thing in the face, God helping me, and it is going to be settled. So far as I am concerned, not another day shall pass until I have had this thing out to a conclusion with God!

Look on us! That is only saying the same thing as we are occupied with now, and which in Hebrews is put this way "Give diligence to enter in" (Heb. 4:11). We must deal with that want of downrightness with God which allows things to drag on and to rob God of that glory which ought to be there, and that testimony which is to follow. We are now getting to it. Look on us!

I need not say more. God help us if we are there, weakened, put out, not counting, God help us to focus upon this for a swift issue and to play no longer with a state like that for our own pleasure, to get sympathy or anything like that. Not an alms: no, it is not an alms we need; it is a deliverance we need, not a ministry to our infirmity, but a deliverance from it.

Look on us! And he fastened his eyes upon them, and Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none — and after all, that is not what you want — such as I have, give I thee." There is something infinitely more than the treasure of this world. Supposing we had it all and still had our infirmity, what have we? "Such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up."

The Object of Faith

That is the object of faith. It is not that we have somehow to conjure up something called faith. It is the object of faith that is vital, and that is what we have been saying, and as the letter to the Hebrews so forcibly sets forth, even Jesus Christ, Who He is, what He is, the place He occupies, and His capacity. It is all in Him. The focal point of faith is Jesus Christ, and the value, the virtue, the power of faith is derived from its object, it is not in itself. It is not until you get the right object of faith that faith is a potent thing. You can have all sorts of imitation faiths and they do not affect the work of God in a spiritual way. You can have a psychological faith, but it does not affect your Christian life. You can have a Christian Science faith, and it may do something for your physical life, inasmuch as the mind and the physical are related, but it does not make you a spiritual factor in the house of God. To become a positive spiritual factor in the house of God means that there has to come a vital link between your spirit and Jesus Christ, a living union by faith with Jesus Christ, and it is that taking hold on Him in faith that provides the channel, the vehicle, through which the energy of God comes. The energy of God, the Holy Ghost, comes along the line of Jesus Christ as the object: not something that we call faith, which may, after all, be something that we have worked up to make ourselves believe. Oh no, what matters is the object of faith, the Lord Himself. God works on the ground of His Son, and you and I apprehend His Son, Jesus Christ, by faith. The Holy Ghost seals that, everything is related to that.

The Outcome of Entering in

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk"; and he leapt. Simple in its terms, but very, very drastic and very utter in its action. Immediately the man in himself knew the glory of God. He, leaping up, praised and glorified God. He had got it in his own heart, in his own soul. He knew he was changed, he was in the good of God's rest.

Yes, and then he went in and went on with the Lord's people. The corporate element comes in. Hebrews will speak about Christ as a Son over God's house, "whose house are we" (Heb. 3:6); and so on. The house has come into view and he is going with them into the house. He is going to be something in the house with the servants of God, he is going to be part of that corporate body and a factor in it.

A Mighty Uprising of the Devil

Now you will see how he is a factor, for two things arise. Follow through to the next chapter and you will see. First of all he is the occasion of a mighty uprising of the devil; and that is something! Oh, a great storm arises because of what has happened with this man. Things become tremendously disturbed in the spiritual realm; and that is how it will be, and that is how it ought to be. We do not speak glibly or lightly, but the fact is that you and I ought to be factors of disturbance in the kingdom of Satan, and if we are really in the good of a living spiritual experience, that is, if we are really on our feet as accountable and responsible people of God, not having to be borne and carried and nursed and ministered to in our infirmities, but now on our feet, going in and going on, then the enemy recognizes that here is something to be taken account of, and for such there is always a disturbance.

It was so over Lazarus. When he was raised from the dead, you know what a furore there was, how the rulers at once set to work to destroy the Lord Jesus because of Lazarus, because by reason of him many believed. So it is. I wonder whether you and I really do represent a disturbance in the underworld, or whether the enemy can go on without feeling a bit disturbed so far as we are concerned. Every time something like this happened in the New Testament, you very soon find a big reaction from the enemy. You see, when the Lord Jesus comes in in larger measure, it means less measure for the enemy, less scope, less territory for him. He is squeezed out. Are you squeezing the enemy out? Am I squeezing the enemy out? Am I narrowing his province? Do we count in this way? Well, that is one thing that arose.

A Living Testimony

The other thing was this, this man was a testimony which was the answer to every argument. Seeing the man there in the midst whole, they had to shut their mouths. There was no argument. It is all argument if it is doctrine, theory, teaching, interpretation of truth, but a living witness — you cannot argue against that. Your mouth is shut when you have a living person standing there right in the good of things. Are we closing the mouths of people? We shall not do it by the truth that we hold, teach, interpret, but we can do it by what we are, by being in possession of the goods. Are we that? Are you that? Are you going to be that? A real answer to every argument so that people say, Well, look here, it is not the teaching they have taken on, the associations they have made: no, no, look at them; you know what they were, you know how little they counted, you know what cripples they were spiritually, you know what liabilities they were, you know how much they were without rest: but look now; they have the goods, they are in the good of things, they are counting, they mean something, and they are in rest, they are in joy, they are in satisfaction, they themselves are changed! What can you say to that? You cannot say anything to that if you are going to be honest.

Oh, dear friends, we are not to go out to try and pass over some teaching, some truth, to people. That will never convince. You and I are to be here as those who in themselves convince others because we embody His rest, we embody His peace, we embody His strength, and we count for something. We are responsible people, we are positive factors, we are assets, the Lord is getting something by reason of us. That is how it must be. Is it like that? All this can be if we will go the way of this man, and say, Yes, this has gone on long enough and it has to end, and to end, so far as my giving diligence is concerned, at once, and I do most truly by the grace of God take a deliberate and definite faith attitude toward the Lord Jesus for my complete deliverance and the setting of me upon my feet for His glory, for His praise! I think there will be an issue, and I think it will be — he, leaping up, stood upon his feet, praising and glorifying God. May it be so with every one of us.

PROPHETIC MINISTRY

FOREWORD

The function of the Prophet has almost invariably been that of recovery. That implies that his business related to something lost. That something being absolutely essential to God's full satisfaction, the dominant note of the Prophet was one of dissatisfaction. And, there being the additional factor that, for obvious reasons, the people were not disposed to go the costly way of God's full purpose, the Prophet was usually an unpopular person.

But his unpopularity was no proof of his being wrong or unnecessary, for every Prophet was eventually vindicated, though with very great suffering and shame to the people.

If it be true that prophetic ministry is related to the need for the recovery of God's full thought as to His people, surely this is a time of such need! Few honest and thoughtful people will contend that things are all well with the Church of Christ today. A brief comparison with the first years of the Church's life will bring out a vivid contrast between then and the centuries since.

Take alone the lifetime of one man — Paul.

In the year 33 A.D. a few unknown men, looked upon as poor and ignorant, were associated with one 'Jesus of Nazareth' — which very designation was despicable in the minds of all reputable and influential people. These men, after that Jesus had been crucified, were later found seeking to proclaim His Lordship and Saviourhood, but were handled hardly by all official bodies.

In the year that Paul died — 67–68 A.D. (34 years later) — how did the matter stand? There were churches in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Caesarea; Antioch and all Syria; Galatia; Sardis, Laodicea, Ephesus and all the towns on the West coast throughout lesser Asia; in Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and the chief cities of the islands and the mainland of Greece; Rome, and the Western Roman Colonies; and in Alexandria.

The history of generations of missionary enterprise, tens of thousands of missionaries, vast sums of money, immense administrative organizations, and much more on the publicity, propaganda, and advocacy side, does not compare at all favourably with the above. We now find ourselves confronted by the end of the whole system of world missions and professional missionaries as they have existed for a very long time, and still the world is not evangelized.

Is there a reason for this? We feel — nay, know — that there is. The explanation is not in a difference in Divine purpose or Divine willingness to support that purpose. It is in the difference in apprehension of the basis, way, and object of the work of God.

Some proof of this is recognisable in our own time. In much less than the lifetime of one man in China, churches of a deeply spiritual character sprang into being all over that land; four hundred of them in a few years. At the time when Communism overran that country a movement was in progress which was not only covering China, but reaching beyond, and as a result living churches are now found in many other parts of the Far East. This was for years a despised, persecuted, and much ostracised work. But since missionary movements and societies have had to leave the country this work has gone on, and, although with many martyrs, is still going on. The man raised up of God lies in prison, but the work is unarrested.

The same kind of thing is taking place in India, and in only a very few years of the life of one God-apprehended man churches of a real New Testament character have come into being all over the country and beyond. The opposition is very great, but the work is of God, and cannot be stopped.

What, again, is the explanation?

The answer is not to be found in the realm of zeal or devotion to the salvation of souls. Rather is it this: that there was at the beginning the supreme factor of an absolutely original and new apprehension of Christ and God's eternal purpose concerning Him. This revelation by the Holy Spirit came with devastating and revolutionising power to the Apostles and the Church, and, rather than being a 'tradition handed down from the fathers', a ready-made system, all set and entered into as such, it was, for every one of them, as though it had only newly dropped from heaven — which, in fact, was true.

This movement of God, brought about by a mighty upheaving of all traditions and 'old' things by a practical experience of the Cross, was marked by three features: —

- (1) Utter heavenliness and spirituality;
- (2) Universality, involving the negation of all prejudices, exclusiveness and partiality; and
- (3) The utter Lordship and Headship of Christ directly operating by the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

This was all gathered into a tremendous and overpowering initial and progressive realisation of the immense significance of Christ in the eternal counsels of God, and therefore of the Church as His Body. Anything that corresponds to the results which characterized the beginning will — and does — correspond to the

reason, namely, a getting back behind tradition, the set and established system, institutionalism, ecclesiasticism, commercialism, organizationalism, etc., to a virgin, original, new breaking upon the consciousness of God's full thought concerning His Son.

To bring into view this full purpose of God was the essence of the Prophet's ministry, and will always be so. We may not now speak of a special class as 'Prophets', but the function may still be operative, and it is function that matters more than office.

FOREST HILL, LONDON. JUNE, 1954.

T. A-S.

Chapter One

WHAT PROPHETIC MINISTRY IS

Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15,18; Acts 3:22; 7:37; Luke 24:19; Revelation 19:10; Ephesians 4: 8, 11–13.

"He gave some... prophets... for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11,12).

We are going to consider the matter of prophetic ministry. "He gave some... prophets." But we must at once make some discrimination, for when we speak of prophetic ministry, we find that people are very largely governed by a certain mentality associated with what is called 'prophecy'. They immediately relate the very term 'prophetic' to incidents, happenings, dates, and so on, lying mainly in the future. That is, they think instantly of the predictive element in prophetic ministry and limit the whole function to that conception.

Now, for the real value of what is before us we must remove from our minds that restricted idea of the pre-eminence of the predictive aspect in prophetic ministry. It is an aspect, but it is only an aspect. Prophetic ministry is a much larger thing than the predictive.

Perhaps it would be better if we said that the prophetic function, going far beyond mere events, happenings and dates, is the ministry of spiritual interpretation. That phrase will cover the whole ground of that with which we are now concerned. Prophecy is spiritual interpretation. If you think about it for a moment, in the light of prophetic ministry in the Word of God, I am quite sure you will see how true this is. It is the interpretation of everything from a spiritual standpoint; the bringing of the spiritual implications of things, past, present and future, before the people of God, and giving them to understand the significance of things in their spiritual value and meaning. That was and is the essence of prophetic ministry.

Of course, what we know about prophets in the Scriptures is that they were a special function or faculty amongst the Lord's people, but we must also remember that they often combined their prophetic function with other functions. Samuel was a prophet; he was also a judge, and a priest. Moses was a prophet, but he was other things besides. I believe Paul was a prophet; he was an apostle, an evangelist; he was everything, it seems to me! So that our purpose is to speak not so much of prophets, as distinct people, as of prophetic ministry. It is the ministry with which we are concerned, and we shall arrive at the instrument better by recognising the ministry fulfilled; we shall understand the vessel better and see what it is, if we see the purpose for which it is constituted. So let me say that it is function, not persons, that we have in view when we are speaking about prophets or prophetic ministry.

I am quite sure that those who have any knowledge whatever of the times, spiritually, will agree with me when I say that the crying need of our time is for a prophetic ministry. There never was a time when there existed so extensively the need for a voice of interpretation, when conditions needed more the ministry of explanation. One does not want to make extravagant statements or to be extreme in one's utterances, but I do not think it would be either extravagant or extreme to say that the world today is well-nigh bankrupt of real prophetic ministry in this sense — a voice that interprets the mind of God to people. It may exist in some small degree here and there, but in no very large way is that ministry being fulfilled. So often our hearts groan and cry out, Oh, that the mind of God about the present situation could be brought through, in the first place to the recognition of His people, and then through His people to others beyond! There is a great and terrible need for a prophetic ministry in our time.

PROPHETIC MINISTRY RELATED TO THE FULL PURPOSE OF GOD

Recognising that, we must come to see exactly what this function is. What is the function of prophetic ministry? It is to hold things to the full thought of God, and therefore it is usually a reactionary thing. We usually find that the prophets arose as a reaction from God to the course and drift of things amongst His people; a call back, a re-declaration, a re-pronouncement of God's mind, a bringing into clear view again of the thoughts of God. The prophets stood in the midst of the stream — usually a fast-rushing stream — like a rock; the course of things broke over them. They challenged and resisted that course, and their presence in the midst of the stream represented God's mind as against the prevailing course of things. In the Old Testament, the prophet usually came into his ministry at a time when things were spiritually bad and anything but according to the Divine mind; the state was evil, things were confused, mixed, chaotic; there was much deception and falsehood, and often things very much worse than that. Here is the thing to which the prophetic ministry all-

inclusively relates — the original and ultimate purpose of God in and through His people; and when you have said that, you have got right to the heart of things. We ask again, What is the prophetic ministry, what is the prophetic function, to what does it relate? — and the answer all-inclusively is that it relates to the full, original and ultimate purpose of God in and through His people.

If that statement is true, it helps us at once to see the need in our time; for, speaking generally, the people of God on the earth in our time have confused parts of the purpose of God with the whole; have emphasized phases to the detriment of the whole. They are confusing means and methods and enthusiasm and zeal with the exact object of the Lord, failing to recognise that God's purpose must be reached in God's way and by God's means, and the way and the means are just as important as the purpose: that is, you cannot reach God's end just anyhow, by any kind of method that you may employ, by projecting your own ideas or programmes or schemes to get to God's end. God has His own way and means of getting to His end. God's thoughts extend to and spread over the smallest detail of His purpose, and you cannot wholly realise the purpose of God except as the very details are according to the mind of God.

God might have said to Moses, Build me a tabernacle, will you? I leave it to you how you do it, what you use; you see what I am after; go and make me a tabernacle. Moses might have got the idea of what God wanted and have worked out the kind of thing he would make for God according to his own mind. But we know that God did not leave a single detail, a peg or a pin's point, a stitch or a thread, to the mind of man. I only use that illustration in order to enforce what I mean, that prophetic ministry is to present God's full, original and ultimate purpose, as it is according to His mind, and hold it like that for God; to interpret the mind of God in all matters concerning the purpose of God, to bring all details into line with the purpose, and to make the purpose govern everything.

PROPHETIC MINISTRY BY THE ANOINTING

(a) Detailed Knowledge of God's Purposes

This involves several things which are clearly seen to be features of prophetic ministry in the Word of God. First of all, it involves the matter of anointing. The meaning and value of anointing is that, firstly, only the Spirit of God has the full and detailed plan in view and can make everything to be true in principle to God's intention. I say only the Spirit of God has that. It is one of the most wonderful things in Scripture, to find that, when you get back to the simplest, earliest — shall we say, the most elementary — expression or projecting of Divine things in the Word of God, everything there is so true in principle to all that comes out later in that connection in greater fullness. It is simply marvelous how God has kept everything true to principle: you never find later, however fully a thing is developed, that there is a change in principle; the principle is there and you cannot get away from it. When you later take up a more developed matter in the Word of God you find that it is true to the original principle of that matter as it was first introduced.

And God has brought everything into line with those fixed principles. God does not deviate one little bit. His law is there and it is unchanging. The Holy Spirit alone knows all that. He knows the laws and the principles, all the things which spiritually govern the purpose of God; and He alone knows the plan and the details, and can make everything true to those principles and laws. And everything has got to be true to them. We may take it as settled that if in the superstructure there is anything that is out of harmony with God's original basic spiritual principle, that is going to be a defect which will spell tragedy sooner or later. The superstructure, in every detail of principle, has to be true to the foundation, to the original. Most of us are not enlightened as to all that. We are feeling our way along, we are groping onward, we are getting light, slowly, very little at a time; but we are getting light. But the prophetic ministry is an enlightened ministry, and is that which, under the anointing, is to bring things back to that position of absolute safety and security because it is true to Divine principle.

The anointing is necessary, firstly, because only the Spirit of God is acquainted with all the thought of God and He alone can speak and work and bring things about in true and utter consistency with the Divine principles which govern everything; and everything that is from God must embody those principles. The principle of the Church — that which governs the Church — is that it is a heavenly thing. It is not an earthly thing; it is related to Christ as in heaven. The Church does not come into being until Christ is in heaven, which means that the Church has to come, as to Christ in heaven, on to heavenly ground, in a spiritual way. It has got to leave earthly ground and really be a heavenly, spiritual thing, while still here, in relation to Christ in heaven. That is a Divine law and principle which is so clear in the New Testament. It is there from "Acts" onward most manifestly.

But this is not something new which has come in with the New Testament. God has put that law into everything that points in any prophetic way to the Church and to Christ. Isaac was not allowed to leave the land and go abroad to fetch his wife. He had to stay there and the servant had to be sent to bring her to where he was. There is your law. Christ is in heaven; the Spirit is sent to bring the Church to where He is — firstly in a spiritual way, and then later literally; but the principle is there. Joseph passes through rejection and typical death and eventually reaches the throne, and with his exaltation he receives his wife, Asenath. Joseph is a clear figure of Christ. It is on His exaltation that Christ receives His Church, His Bride. Pentecost is really the result of the exaltation of Christ, when the Church is spiritually brought into living relationship with Himself, the exalted Christ. There is your principle in the simple story of Joseph. You can go on like that, seeing how God in simple details has kept everything true to principle; you find His eternal principles are embodied

in the simplest things of the Old Testament, fulfilling this final declaration that the testimony of Jesus is the very spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10). There is something there indicative of a great heavenly truth, which is the spirit of prophecy pointing to Christ.

I wonder whether you have really been impressed with the tremendous importance of Divine principle in things. There is a principle, and the recognition and the honouring of that principle determines the success of the whole. Now, only the Holy Spirit knows all those Divine principles, only He knows the mind of God, the thoughts of God, in fullness. Hence, if things are to be held to the full thought and purpose of God, it can only be under an anointing — which means that the Spirit of God has come to take charge. An anointed ministry means that God the Holy Spirit has become responsible for the whole thing; He has committed Himself to it, I do not suppose anyone would dispute or challenge the statement of the need for the Holy Spirit, the need for Him to be in charge, for everything to be done by Him. But oh, that means a great deal more than a general truth and a general position.

(b) Knowledge Imparted by Revelation

It leads to this second thing in prophetic ministry: By the anointing there comes revelation. We can accept in a general way the necessity of the Holy Spirit's doing everything — initiating, conducting, governing and being the power and inspiration of everything; but oh! that is a life-long education, and it brings in the necessity for everything to be given by revelation. That is why the prophets originally were called "seers" — men who saw. They saw what no other men saw. They saw what it was impossible for other people to see, even religious, God-fearing people. They saw by revelation.

A prophetic ministry demands revelation; it is a ministry by revelation. Later we shall examine that more closely, but I want just to emphasize the fact at this moment. I am not thinking now of revelation extra to the Scriptures. I cannot take the ground of certain 'prophets' (?) in the Church today who prophesy extra to the Scriptures. No, but within the revelation already given — and God knows it is big enough! — the Holy Spirit yet moves to reveal what 'eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard'. That is the wonder of a life in the Spirit. It is a life of constant new discovery; everything is full of surprise and wonder. A life under the Holy Spirit can never be static; it can never reach finality here, nor come to the place where the sum of truth is boxed. A life really in the Holy Spirit is a life which realises that there is infinitely, transcendently, more beyond than all we have yet seen or grasped or sensed. People who know, who have come to a fixed place and cannot see — let alone move — beyond their present position, represent a position that is foreign to the mind of the Holy Ghost. Prophetic ministry under the Holy Spirit is a ministry through growing revelation.

A prophet was a man who went back to God again and again, and did not come out to speak until God had shown him the next thing. He did not just go on in his professional office because he was a prophet and it was expected of him. There was nothing professional about his position. When it became professional, then tragedy overtook the prophetic office. It did become professional through the 'schools of the prophets' set up by Samuel. We must not even confuse these schools of the prophets with true prophetic office. There was a difference between those who graduated in the schools of the prophets and the true prophets represented by such men as Samuel, Elijah, Elisha. Whenever things become professional, something is lost, because the very essence and nature of prophetic ministry is that it is coming by revelation afresh every time. A thing revealed is new; it may be an old thing, but it has about it something that is fresh as a revelation to the heart of the one concerned, and it is so new and wonderful that the effect with him is as though no one had ever yet seen that, although thousands may have seen it before. It is the nature of revelation to keep things alive and fresh, and filled with Divine energy. You cannot recover an old position by just the old doctrine. You will never recover something of God which has been lost by bringing back the exact statement of the truth. You may be stating the truth of the early days of the New Testament exactly, but you may be far from having the conditions which obtained at such times.

Prophetic succession is not the succession of teaching; it is the succession of anointing. Something can come in from God, by the operation of God; there may be something very real, very living, which God effects through an instrumentality, it may be individual or collective, which is alive because God brought it in under His anointing. And then someone tries to imitate it, duplicate it, or later someone takes it up to carry it on; someone has been appointed, elected, chosen by ballot to be the successor. The thing goes on and grows; but some vital factor is no longer there. The succession is by anointing, not by framework, even of doctrine. We cannot recover New Testament conditions by re-stating New Testament doctrine. We have to get New Testament anointing. I am not dismissing doctrine; it is necessary; but it is the anointing which makes things alive, fresh, vibrant. Everything must come by revelation.

Some of us know what it is to be able to analyse our Bibles and present, perhaps in a very interesting way, the contents of its books and all its doctrines. We can do that with "Ephesians" as well as we can do it with any other book. We can come to "Ephesians" and analyse it and outline the Church and the Body and all that, and be as blind as bats until the day comes when, God having done something in us, something deep and tremendous and terrific, we see the Church, we see the Body — we see "Ephesians"! They were two worlds: one was truth, exact in technical detail, full of interest and fascination — but there was something lacking. We could have stated the truth from beginning to end, but we did not know what was in it; and until we have gone through that experience and something has happened in us, we may think we know, we may be sure we know, we may lay down our life for it; but we do not know. There is all the difference between a very keen, clear, mental apprehension of things in the Word of God, and a spiritual revelation. There is the difference of two

worlds — but it is quite impossible to make people understand that difference until something has happened. We shall speak about that ‘something that happens’ later, but here we are stating the facts. By anointing there is revelation, and revelation by anointing is essential to the seeing of what God is after, both in general and in detail.

So, building up, we arrive at this. A prophetic ministry is that which — although much detail has yet to be revealed, even to the most enlightened servants of God — has, by the Holy Ghost, seen the purpose of God, original and ultimate.

(c) Exact Conformity to God’s Thoughts

And then there is the third thing we find connected with this anointing. It is that to which we have already referred in general — exactness.

The anointing brings about that first-hand touch with God, which means seeing God face to face. Was it not that that was the summing up of Moses’ life? “There hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10). And when that happens you come into the place of direct spiritual knowledge of God, direct touch with God, the place of the open heaven — you cannot, under any consideration, for any advantage at all, be a person who compromises, who deviates from what has been shown to your heart.

What is it that the Apostle says about Moses? “Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant” (Heb. 3:5); and the faithfulness of Moses is seen particularly and largely in the way in which he was governed exactly by what God said. You know those later chapters of the book of Exodus, bringing everything back again to the word, again and again and again, “as the Lord commanded Moses”. Everything was done as God said; through the whole system which Moses was raised up to constitute and establish, he was exact to a detail. We know why, of course; and here is that great, that grand, comprehensive explanation of what I said just now about principles. God has Christ in view all the time, in every detail, and that system that Moses instituted was a representation of Christ to a fraction; and so it was necessary that in every detail he should be exact. It is a difficult, costly way, but you cannot have revelation, and go on in revelation, and at the same time compromise over details and have things at any point other than exactly as the Lord wants them. You are not governed by diplomacy or policy or public opinion. You are governed by what the Lord has said in your heart by revelation as to His purpose. That is prophetic ministry.

Prophets were not men who accommodated themselves to anything that was comparative in its goodness. They never let themselves go wholly if the thing was only comparatively good. Look at Jeremiah. There was a day in Jeremiah’s life when a good king did seek to recover things, and he did institute a great feast of the Passover, and the people did come up in their crowds for the celebration of that Passover, and it was a great occasion apparently. They were doing great things there in Jerusalem, but with all that was going on which was good, confessedly good, Jeremiah did not let himself go. He had a reservation, and he was right. It was seen afterward that this thing was very largely outward, that the real heart of the people had not changed, the high places were not taken away, and Jeremiah’s original prophecy had to stand. If the apparent reformation had been the true thing, then Jeremiah’s prophecies about the captivity, the destruction of the city, the complete handing over to judgment, would have gone for nothing. Jeremiah held back. He may not have understood, he may have been in perplexity about it, but his heart would not allow him to go wholly with this comparatively good thing. He found out the reason why afterward — that, although it was good up to a point, it did not represent a deep heart change, and so the judgment had to be.

The prophet cannot accept as full and final what is only comparative, though he rejoices in the measure of good that there may be anywhere. We should, of course, be generous to any little bit of good that is in the world — let us be grateful for anything that is right and true and of God; but oh! we cannot say that is altogether satisfying to the Lord, that is all that the Lord wants. No, this prophetic ministry is one of utter faithfulness to the thoughts of God. It is a ministry of exactness. That is what the anointing means, and we have said why — it is a full Christ who is in view.

That last statement in Revelation 19:10 sums it all up. It gathers up into one sentence prophetic ministry from the beginning. I suppose prophetic ministry commenced in the day when it was stated of the seed of the woman that it should bruise the head of the serpent, and then passed on to Enoch, who prophesied saying, “Behold, the Lord came...” (Jude 14), and so right on from then. It is all gathered up at the end of the Revelation in this thought, that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” That is, the spirit of prophecy from beginning to end is all toward that — the testimony of Jesus. The spirit of prophecy has always had Him in view from its first utterance — “the seed of the woman” — to “Behold, the Lord came” (and how beginning and end are brought together so early on!). All the way through it was always with the Lord Jesus in view, and a full Christ. “He gave prophets... till we all attain unto... the fullness of Christ.” That is the end, and God can never be satisfied with anything less than the fullness of His Son as represented by the Church. The Church is to be the fullness of Him; a full-grown Man — that is the Church. The prophetic ministry is unto that — the fullness of Christ, the finality of Christ, the all-inclusiveness of Christ. It is to be Christ, centre and circumference; Christ, first and last; Christ in general and Christ in every detail. And to see Christ by revelation means that you can never accept anything less or other. You have seen, and that has settled it. The way to reach God’s end, then, is seeing by the Holy Spirit, and that seeing is the basis of this prophetic ministry.

I think that that perhaps is enough to show what I said earlier, that if we see the nature of the ministry, we

at once see what the vessel is. The vessel may be individuals fulfilling such a ministry, or it may be collective. Later we may say something more about the vessel, but let us not now think technically, in terms of apostles and prophets and so on, as offices. Let us think of them as vital functions. God is concerned that the man and the function are identical, not the man and a professional or official position with a title, whatever the title may be. The vessel must be that, and that must justify the vessel. We will not go about advertising ourselves as prophets; but God grant that there may be raised up a prophetic ministry for a time like this, when His whole purpose concerning His Son is brought back into view amongst His people. That is their need, and it is His.

Chapter Two

THE MAKING OF A PROPHET

Prophetic ministry is something which has not come in with time, but is eternal. It has come out of the eternal counsels.

Perhaps you wonder what that means. Well, we remember that, without any explanation or definition, something comes in right at the beginning and takes the place of government in the economy of God, and involves this very function. When Adam sinned and was expelled from the garden, the Word simply says, God “placed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim... to keep the way of the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24).

Who or what are the Cherubim? Where do they come from? We have heard nothing about them before; no explanation of them is given. It simply is a statement. God put them there to guard the way of the tree of life. They have become the custodians of life, to hold things according to God’s thought. For the thoughts of man’s heart have departed from God’s thoughts and have become evil; everything has been marred; and now the custodians of the Divine thought about the greatest of all things for man — Divine life, uncreated life — the custodians of that, the Cherubim, are placed there.

But later we are given to understand what the Cherubim are like: this symbolic, composite representation has a four-fold aspect — the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle; and we are given to understand very clearly that the predominant feature is the man. It is a man, really, with three other aspects, those of the lion, the ox, and the eagle. The lion is a symbol of kingship or dominion; the ox, of service and sacrifice; the eagle, of heavenly glory and mystery. The man, the predominant aspect of the Cherubim — what is that?

We know that throughout the Scriptures the man takes the place, in the Divine order of things, of the prophet, the representative of God. The representation of God’s thoughts is a man. That was the intention in the creation of Adam in the image and likeness of God — to be the personal embodiment and expression of all God’s thoughts. That is what man was created for. That is what we find in the Man, the Man who was God manifested in the flesh. He was the perfect expression of all God’s thoughts.

Where has this symbolism of the Cherubim come from? It is simply brought in. It comes out from eternity. It is a Divine, an eternal thought, and it takes charge of things, to hold things for God. So that man — and we know that phrase “the Son of man” — is peculiarly related to the prophetic office, and the prophetic function is an eternal thing, which just comes in. It is, in its very nature, the representation of Divine thoughts, and it is to hold God’s thoughts in purity and in fullness. That is the idea related to the man, to the prophet, and that is the prophetic function and nature.

THE IDENTITY OF THE PROPHET WITH HIS MESSAGE

But what does that carry with it? Here we come to the most important point of the whole. It is the absolute identity of the vessel with the vessel’s ministry. Prophetic ministry is not something that you can take up. It is something that you are. No academy can make you a prophet. Samuel instituted the schools of the prophets. They were for two purposes — one, the dissemination of religious knowledge, and the other, the writing up of the chronicles of religious history. In Samuel’s day there was no open vision; the people had lost the Word of God. They had to be taught the Word of God again, and the chronicles of the ways of God had to be written up and put on record for future generations, and the schools of the prophets were instituted in the main for that purpose. But there is a great deal of difference between those academic prophets and the living, anointed prophets. The academic prophets became members of a profession and swiftly degenerated into something unworthy. All the false prophets came from schools of prophets, and were accepted publicly on that ground. They had been to college and were accepted. But they were false prophets. Going to a religious college does not of itself make you a prophet of God.

My point is this — the identity of the vessel with its ministry is the very heart of Divine thought. A man is called to represent the thoughts of God, to represent them in what he is, not in something that he takes up as a form or line of ministry, not in something that he does. The vessel itself is the ministry and you cannot divide between the two.

THE NECESSITY FOR SELF-EMPTYING

That explains everything in the life of the great prophets. It explains the life of Moses, the prophet whom the Lord God raised up from among his brethren (Deut. 18:15,18). Moses essayed to take up his life-work. He

was a man of tremendous abilities, “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22), with great natural qualifications and gifts, and then somehow he got some conception of a life-work for God. It was quite true; it was a true conception, a right idea; he was very honest, there was no question at all about his motives; but he essayed to take up that work on the basis of what he was naturally, with his own ability, qualifications and zeal, and on that basis disaster was allowed to come upon the whole thing.

Not so are prophets made; not so can the prophetic office be exercised. Moses must go into the wilderness and for forty years be emptied out, until there is nothing left of all that as a basis upon which he can have confidence to do the work of God or fulfil any Divine commission. He was by nature a man “mighty in his words and works”; and yet now he says, “I am not eloquent... I am slow of speech...” (Exodus 4:10). There has been a tremendous undercutting of all natural facility and resource, and I do not think that Moses was merely disagreeable in his reply to God. He did not say in effect, ‘You would not allow me to do it then, so I will not do it now.’ I think he was a man who was under the Divine discipline and yet on top of it. A man who is really under things and who has become petulant does not respond to little opportunities of helping people. We get a glimpse of Moses at the beginning of his time in the wilderness (Exodus 2:16,17) which suggests that he was not of that kind. When there was difficulty at the well, over the watering of the flocks, if Moses had been in a bad mood, cantankerous, disagreeable because the Lord had not seemed to stand by him in Egypt, he probably would have sat somewhere apart and looked on and done nothing to help. But he went readily to help, in a good spirit, doing all he could. He was on top of his trial. Little things indicate where a man is.

We go through times of trial and test under the hand of God, and it is so easy to get into that frame of mind which says in effect, ‘The Lord does not want us, He need not have us!’ We let everything go, we do not care about anything; we have gone down under our trials and we are rendered useless. I do not believe the Lord ever comes to a person like that to take them up. Elijah, dispirited, fled to the wilderness, and to a cave in the mountains; but he had to get somewhere else before the Lord could do anything with him. “What doest thou here, Elijah?” (I Kings 19:9). The Lord never comes to a man and recommissions him when he is in despair. ‘God shall forgive thee all but thy despair’ (F. W. H. Myers, ‘St. Paul’) — because despair is lost faith in God, and God can never do anything with one who has lost faith.

Moses was emptied to the last drop, and yet he was not angry or disagreeable with God. What was the Lord doing? He was making a prophet. Beforehand, the man would have taken up an office, he would have made the prophetic function serve him, he would have used it. There was no inward, vital relationship between the man and the work that he was to do; they were two separate things; the work was objective to the man. At the end of forty years in the wilderness he is in a state for this to become subjective; something has been done. There has been brought about a state which makes the man fit to be a living expression of the Divine thought. He has been emptied of his own thoughts to make room for God’s thoughts; he has been emptied of his own strength, that all the energy should be of God.

Is not that perhaps the meaning of the fire and the bush that was not consumed? It is a parable, maybe a larger parable, but I think in the immediate application it was saying something to Moses. ‘Moses, you are a very frail creature, a common bush of the desert, a bit of ordinary humanity, nothing at all of resource in yourself; but there is a resource, which can carry you on and on, and you can be maintained, without being consumed, by an energy that is not your own — the Spirit of God, the energy of God.’ That was the great lesson this prophet had to learn. ‘I cannot!’ ‘All right’, said the Lord, ‘but I AM.’

A great deal is made of the natural side of many of the Lord’s servants, and usually with tragic results. A lot is made of Paul. ‘What a great man Paul was naturally, what intellect he had, what training, what tremendous abilities!’ That may all be true, but ask Paul what value it was to him when he was right up against a spiritual situation. He will cry, “Who is sufficient for these things? ... Our sufficiency is from God” (II Cor. 2:16; 3:5). Paul was taken through experiences where he, like Moses, despaired of life. He said, “We... had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (II Cor. 1:9).

MESSAGE INWROUGHT BY ACTUAL EXPERIENCE

You see, the principle is at work all the time, that God is going to make the ministry and the minister identical. You see it in all the prophets. The Lord stood at nothing. He took infinite pains. He worked even through domestic life, the closest relationships of life. Think of the tragedy of Hosea’s domestic life. Think of Ezekiel, whose wife the Lord took away in death at a stroke. The Lord said, ‘Get up in the morning, anoint your face, allow not the slightest suggestion of mourning or tragedy to be detected; go out as always before, as though nothing had happened; show yourself to the people, go about with a bright countenance, provoke them to enquire what you mean by such outrageous behaviour.’ The Lord brought this heartbreak upon him and then required him to act thus. Why? Ezekiel was a prophet; he had got to embody his message, and the message was this: ‘Israel, God’s wife, has become lost to God, dead to God, and Israel takes no notice of it; she goes on the same as ever, as though nothing had happened.’ The prophet must bring it home by his own experience. God is working the thing right in. He works it in in deep and terrible ways in the life of His servant to produce ministry.

God is not allowing us to take up things and subjects. If we are under the Holy Ghost, He is going to make us prophets; that is, He is going to make the prophecy a thing that has taken place in us, so that what we say is only making vocal something that has been going on, that has been done in us. God has been doing it through

years in strange, deep, terrible ways in some lives, standing at nothing, touching everything; and the vessel, thus wrought upon, is the message. People do not come to hear what you have to teach. They have come to see what you are, to see that thing which has been wrought by God. What a price the prophetic instrument has to pay!

So Moses went into the wilderness, to the awful undoing of his natural life, his natural mentality; to be brought to zero; to have the thing wrought in him. And was God justified? — for after all it was a question of resource for the future. Oh, the strain that was going to bear down upon that life! Sometimes Moses well-nigh broke; at times he did crack under the strain. “I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me” (Num. 11:14). What was his resource? Oh, if it had been the old resource of Egypt he would not have stood it for a year. He could not stand provocation in Egypt, he must rise up and fight. He broke down morally and spiritually under that little strain away back there forty years before. What would he do with these rebels? How long would he put up with them? A terrific strain was going to bear down upon him, and only a deep inwrought thing, something that had been done inside, would be enough to carry through when it was a case of standing against the stream for God’s full thought.

With us, too, the strain may be terrific; oft-times there will come the very strong temptation — ‘Let go a little, compromise a little, do not be so utter; you will get more open doors if you will only broaden out a bit; you can have a lot more if you ease up!’ What is going to save you in that hour of temptation? The only thing is that God has done this thing in you. It is part of your very being — not something you can give up; it is you, your very life. That is the only thing. God knew what He was doing with Moses. The thing had got to be so much one with the man that there was no dividing between them. The man was the prophetic ministry.

He was rejected by his brethren; they would not have him. “Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?” (Ex. 2:14). That is the human side of it. But there was the Divine side. It was of God that he went into the wilderness for forty years. It had to be, from God’s side. It looked as though it was man’s doing. But it was not so. These two things went together. Rejection by his brethren was all in line with the sovereign purpose of God. It was the only way in which God got the opportunity He needed to reconstitute this man. The real preparation of this prophet took place during the time that his brethren repudiated him. Oh, the sovereignty of God, the wonderful sovereignty of God! A dark time, a deep time; a breaking, crushing, grinding time; emptied out. It seems as if everything is going, that nothing will be left. Yet all that is God’s way of making prophetic ministry.

A MESSENGER DIVINELY ATTESTED

I expect that Moses at the beginning would have been very legalistic, laying down the law — ‘You must do this and that’ — and so on; an autocrat or despot. When, after those years, we find him coming off the wheel, out of the hands of the Potter, he is said to be “very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3), and God could stand by him then. He could not stand by him on that day when he rose up in a spirit of pride, arrogance, self-assertiveness. God had to let that work itself out to its inevitable consequence. But when Moses, as the meekest of men, the broken, humble, selfless man, was challenged by others as to his office — at such a time Moses did not stand up for his position, his rights; he just handed the matter over to the Lord. His attitude was, ‘We will allow the Lord to decide. I have no personal position to preserve: if the Lord has made me His prophet, let Him show it. I am prepared to go out of office if it is not of the Lord.’ What a different spirit! And the Lord did stand by him marvelously and mightily on those occasions, and terribly so for those who opposed themselves (Numbers 12:2ff.; 16:3ff.).

PROPHETIC MINISTRY A LIFE, NOT TEACHING

Well, what is a prophet? what is the prophetic function? It is this. God takes hold of a vessel (it may be individual or it may be collective: the function of prophetic ministry may move through a people, as it did through Israel), and He takes that vessel through a deep history, breaking and undoing, disillusioning, revolutionising the whole mentality, so that things which were held fiercely, assertively, are no longer so held. There is developed a wonderful pliability, adjustableness, teachableness. Everything that was merely objective as to the work of God, as to Divine truth, as to orthodoxy or fundamentalism, all that was held so strongly, in an objective, legalistic way, as to what is right and wrong in methods — it is all dealt with, all broken. There is a new conception entirely, a new outlook upon things; no longer a formal system, something outside you which you take up, but something wrought in an inward way in the vessel. It is what the vessel is that is its ministry. It is not what it has accepted of doctrine and is now teaching.

Oh, to get free of all that horrible realm of things! It is a wretched realm, that of adopting teachings, taking on interpretations, being known because such and such is your line of things. Oh, God deliver us! Oh, to be brought to the place where it is a matter of life — of what God has really done in us, made of us! First He has pulverised us, and then He has reconstructed us on a new spiritual principle, and that expresses itself in ministry: what is said is coming from what has been going on behind, perhaps for years and even right up to date.

Do you see the law of prophetic function? It is that God keeps anointed vessels abreast of truth by experience. Every bit of truth that they give out in word is something that has had a history. They went down into the depths and they were saved by that truth. It was their life and therefore it is a part of them. That is the nature of prophetic ministry.

A PROPHET, TOLERANT BUT UNCOMPROMISING

Reverting to what I was saying about the change in Moses: you can see a reflection of it in the case of Samuel. I think Samuel is one of the most beautiful and lovable characters in the Old Testament, and he is called a prophet. Do you notice that although his own heart is utterly devoted to God's highest and fullest thought, and inwardly he has no compromise whatever, yet he shows a marvelous charity toward Saul during those early months? (It seems not to have gone much beyond a year, the first year of Saul's reign, during which it seems that Saul really did seek to show some semblance of good.) And yet you must remember that Saul represents the denial of the highest of all things — the direct and immediate government of God. Such government was repudiated by Israel in favour of a king — "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations", they said. God said to Samuel: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me" (I Samuel 8:5-7).

Kingship was a Divine principle as much as prophecy was. The lion is there with the man. The monarch, representing God's thought of dominion, is there. But with Saul it is on a lower level. His coming in represented the bringing down of that Divine thought to the level of the world: "like all the nations" — a Divine thought taken hold of by carnal men, dragged down to the world level; and Samuel knew it. In his heart he could not accept that, and he complained to God about it; he was against this thing, for he saw what it meant. But how charitable he was to Saul as long as he could be!

Why do I say that? Because there is a condition like that existing today. Divine things have been taken hold of by men carnally, and brought down to an earth level; the direct government of the Holy Spirit has been exchanged for committees and boards and so on. Men have set up the government in Divine things and are running things for God. The way of the New Testament, that in prayer and fasting the mind of the Lord is secured, is hardly known. Well, those who are spiritual, who know, who see, who understand, cannot accept that. But they are very charitable. A true prophet, like Samuel, will be charitable as long as possible, until that wrong thing takes the pronounced and positive form of disobedience to light given. The Lord came to Saul through Samuel and gave him clearly to understand what he had to do. It was made known to him with unmistakable clearness what God required of him, and he was disobedient. Then Samuel said, 'No more charity with that!' He was implacable. "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath rejected thee from being king" (I Samuel 15:23). Samuel went as far as he could while the man did the best he could. That is charity.

Of course, types are always weak and imperfect, but you can see the truth there. The prophet Samuel showed a great deal of forbearance with things that were wrong, even while in his heart he could not accept them. He hoped that light would break and obedience follow and the situation be saved. We have to be very charitable to all that with which we do not agree.

The point is this — Moses had to learn that; he had to be made like that. We are better fitted to serve the Lord's purpose, we are truer prophets, when we can bear with things with which we do not agree, than when in our zeal we are iconoclasts, and seek only to destroy the offending thing. The Lord says, 'That will not do.'

In all that we have said we have emphasized only one thing — that prophetic ministry is a function. Its function is to hold everything in relation to God's full thought — but not as holding a 'line' of things, in an objective and legalistic way. You do not take something up. You can only do it truly as God has wrought into you that thing for which you are going to stand, and in so far as it has been revealed in you through experience, through the handling of God — God has taken you through it, and you know it like that. It is not that you have achieved something, but rather that you have been broken in the process. Now you are fit for something in the Lord.

Chapter Three

A VOICE WHICH MAY BE MISSED

"For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning Him" (Acts 13:27).

The above statement as a whole carries a significance which embraces a very great deal of history, but its direct and immediate implication is that if the people referred to — the dwellers in Jerusalem and their rulers — had been in the good of the most familiar things, they would have behaved very differently from the way in which they did behave. Every week, Sabbath by Sabbath, extending over a very great number of years, they heard things read; but eventually, because of their failure to recognise what they were hearing, they acted in a way entirely opposed to those very things, though under the sovereignty of God fulfilling them in so doing.

Surely that is a word of warning. It represents a very terrible possibility — to hear repeatedly the same things, and not to recognise their significance; to behave in a way quite contrary to our own interests, making for our own undoing, when it might have been otherwise.

The point is this — that there is a voice in the prophets which may be missed, a meaning which may not be apprehended, and the results may be disastrous for the people concerned. "The voices of the prophets": that suggests that there is something beyond the mere things that the prophet says. There is a 'voice'. We may hear a sound, we may hear the words, and yet not hear the voice; that is something extra to the thing said.

That is the statement here, that week by week, month after month, and year after year, men read the prophets audibly, and the people who heard the reading did not hear the voices. It is the voice of the prophets that we need to hear.

As you go through this thirteenth chapter of the Acts you are able to recognise that this little fragment is in a very crucial context. This chapter, to begin with, marks a development. There in Antioch were certain men, including Saul, and the Holy Ghost said: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." That was a new development, a moving out, something far-reaching, very momentous; but you are not through the chapter before you come upon another crisis, which became inevitable when in a certain place a great crowd came together, and the Jews, refusing to be obedient to the Word, stirred up a revolt. The Apostles made this pronouncement: "It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (vs. 46); and they quoted a prophet (Isaiah 49:6) for their authority: "I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles." These were epochs in the history of the Church; and the Jews, as a whole, were turned from, and the Gentiles in a very deliberate way were recognised and brought in, because of this very thing — that the Jews had heard these prophets Sabbath by Sabbath but had not heard their voices.

Big things hang upon hearing the voice. Failure to hear may lead to irreparable loss. Very big things concerning Israel have come into the centuries since the time of Acts 13. It is not my intention to launch out on matters of prophecy concerning the Jews, but my point is this. On the one hand, it was no small thing to fail to hear the voices of the prophets. On the other hand, you notice that the Gentiles rejoiced. It says here, "As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God." Well, on both sides, it is a great thing to fail to hear what could be heard if there were an ear for hearing and it is a great thing to hear and give heed. I think that is a sufficiently serious foundation and background to engage our attention.

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Let us now look more closely at this matter of "the voices of the prophets". A fact of very great significance is this, that the prophets have such a large place in the New Testament. I wonder if you have taken account of how large that place is. You will not need to be reminded of how largely the Gospels call upon the major prophets, as they are called. "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet..." — how often that statement alone occurs in the Gospels. It came in from the birth of the Lord Jesus, and in that connection alone on several occasions the major prophets are quoted. But when you move from the Gospels into the Acts and the Epistles, you move largely into what are called the minor prophets — not minor because they were of less account than the others, but because the record of their writings is smaller. It is tremendously impressive and significant that these minor prophets should be drawn upon so extensively in the New Testament; they are quoted over fifty times.

PROPHETS MEN OF VISION

From that general significance, two factors emerge. One as to the prophets themselves: why do they have so large a place in the New Testament? Well, the answer to that will be largely another question. What do prophets signify? They are the 'seers' (I Samuel 9:9); they are the men who see and, in seeing, act as eyes for the people of God. They are the men of vision; and their large place in the New Testament surely therefore indicates how tremendously important spiritual vision is for the people of God throughout this dispensation. Of course, the other thing is the vision itself, but I am not concerned just now to speak about what the vision was and is — that, with other aspects, may come later. At the moment, I feel the Lord is concerned with this factor — the tremendous importance of spiritual vision if the people of God are to fulfil their vocation. It resolves itself into a matter solely of vision unto vocation, and the vocation will not be fulfilled without vision.

VISION IMPARTS PURPOSE TO LIFE

So for a moment let us dwell upon the place of vision — and you will not think that I am talking about 'visionariness'. No, it is something specific, it is the vision, it is something clearly defined. The prophets knew what they were talking about — not merely abstract ideas, but something very definite. Vision is something quite specific, something with which the Lord is concerned and which has become a mighty, dominating thing in the life of those who have it; clear, distinct, precise, specific; taking hold of and mastering and dominating them, so that the whole purpose of existence itself is gathered into it. Such people are at the place where they know why they have an existence, they know the purpose for which they are alive and are able to say what it is, and their horizon is bounded by that thing; they, with their whole life in all its aspects, are gathered into that, poised to that. It is an object which governs everything for them. It is not just living on this earth and doing many things and getting through somehow; but everything that has a place in life is linked with this definite, distinct, all-governing objective. It is such a vision which gives meaning to life.

It is not necessary for me to take you through Israel's history as governed by that very truth. You know quite well that, when Israel was in a right position, that is how things were — focused, definite, with everybody centred in one object. And, before we go further, let us say again that all these prophets — men who were the eyes of God for a people, and signifying to that people God's thought and purpose concerning them, their Divine vocation, God's interpretation of their very existence — these prophets who embodied that are all brought into the New Testament dispensation and into the Church, with this clear implication, that that is how the Church is to be if it is to get through. The Church is to be a seeing thing, dominated by a specific object and vision, knowing why it exists, having no doubt about it, and poised in utter abandonment thereto,

bringing all other things in life into line with that. Our attitude has to be that, while in this world we necessarily have to do this and that, to earn our living and do our daily work, yet there is something governing all else: there is a Divine vision. These things have to bend to that one Divine end.

That is the first implication of the fact that the prophets have such a large place in this dispensation. We cannot now stay to follow that out in detail from the Word, but it would be very helpful to go through the New Testament, and see how the bringing in of the prophets is made to apply to the varied aspects of the Church's life. It is very impressive.

VISION A UNIFYING FACTOR

The prophets are governing this dispensation in this way. This vision, the vision, was the very cohesiveness and strength of Israel. When the vision was clearly before them, when their eyes were opened and they were seeing, when they were in line with God's purpose, when they were governed by that end to which God had called them, they were one people, made one by the vision. They had a single eye. That little phrase, "If... thine eye be single..." (Matthew 6:22), has a great deal more in it than we have recognised. A single eye — it unifies the whole life and conduct; it will unify all your behaviour. If you are a man or a woman of one idea, everything will be brought into that. Of course, that is not always a very happy thing, though in this case it is. People who are obsessed and, as we say, 'have a bee in their bonnet', with nothing else to talk about but one thing, are often very trying people. But there is a right way, a Divine way, in which the people of God should be people of a single eye, a single idea; and that singleness of eye brings all the faculties into coordination.

During the rare periods when Israel was like that, they were a marvelously unified people. On the other hand, you can see how, when the vision faded and failed, they disintegrated, became people of all kinds of divided and schismatic interests and activities, quarrelling amongst themselves. How true is the word: "Where there is no vision, the people perish (go to pieces)" (Proverbs 29:18). And so it was with Israel. See them in the days of Eli, when there was no open vision. What a disintegrated, disunited people they were! That happened many times. The vision was a solidifying, cohesive power, making a people solidly one, and in that oneness was their strength, and they were irresistible. See them over Jordan in their assault upon Jericho! See them moving triumphantly on! While they were governed by one object, none could stand before them. Their strength was in their unity, and their unity was in their vision. The enemy knows what he is doing in destroying or confusing vision: he is dividing the people of God.

VISION A DEFENSIVE POWER

What a defensive power is vision like that! What little chance the enemy has when we are a people set upon one thing! If we have all sorts of divided and personal interests, the enemy can make awful havoc. He does not get a chance when everybody is centred upon one Divine object. He has to divide us somehow, distract us, disintegrate us, before he can accomplish his work of hindering God's end. All those features of self-pity, self-interest, which are ever seeking to get in and spoil, will never get in while vision is clear and we are focused upon it as one people. It is tremendously defensive. The Apostle spoke about being "in diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). Moffatt translates "fervent in spirit" as "maintaining the spiritual glow". Being centred upon an object wholeheartedly is a wonderfully protective thing. Such a condition in a people closes the breaches and resists the encroachments and impingements of all kinds of things which would distract and paralyse.

VISION MAKES FOR DEFINITENESS AND GROWTH

Vision was like a flame with the prophets. You have to recognise that about them, at any rate — that these men were flames of fire. There was nothing neutral about them; they were aggressive, never passive. Vision has that effect. If you have really seen what the Lord is after, you cannot be half-hearted. You cannot be passive if you see. Find the person who has seen, and you find a positive life. Find the person who does not see, is not sure, is not clear, and you have a neutral, a negative, one that does not count. These prophets were men like flames of fire because they saw. And when Israel was in the good of the Divine calling, Israel was like that — positive, aggressive. When the vision faded, they came to a standstill, turned in upon themselves, went round and round in circles, ceased to get anywhere.

This aggressiveness, this positiveness, which is the fruit of having seen, provides the Lord with the ground that He needs for a right kind of training and discipline. It does not mean that we shall never make mistakes. You will see in the New Testament — and I hope you will not charge me with heresy — that even a man as crucified as Paul could make mistakes. Peter, a man so used and so chastened, could make mistakes. Yes, apostles could make mistakes. And prophets could make mistakes. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:9). 'You have no business to be here' — that is what it means. Yes, prophets and apostles could make mistakes, and they did; but there is this about it — because they had seen, and were utterly abandoned to that which they had seen of the Lord's mind, the Lord was abundantly able to come in on their mistakes and sovereignly overrule them and teach His servants something more of Himself and His ways.

Now, you never find that with people who are indefinite. The indefinite people, those who are not meaning business, who are not abandoned, never do learn anything of the Lord. It is the people who commit themselves, who let go and go right out in the direction of whatever measure of light the Lord has given them, who, on the one hand, find their mistakes — the mistakes of their very zeal — taken hold of by Divine sovereignty and overruled; and, on the other hand, are taught by the Lord through their very mistakes what His thoughts

are, how He does things, and how He does not do them. If we are going to wait in indefiniteness and uncertainty and do nothing until we know it all, we shall learn nothing.

Have you not noticed that it is the men and women whose hearts are aflame for God, who have seen something truly from the Lord and have been mightily gripped by what they have seen, who are the people that are learning? The Lord is teaching them; He does not allow their blunders and their mistakes to engulf them in destruction. He sovereignly overrules, and in the long run they are able to say, 'Well, I made some awful blunders, but the Lord marvelously took hold of them and turned them to good account.' To be like this, with vision which gathers up our whole being and masters us, provides the Lord with the ground for looking after us even when we make mistakes — because His interests are at stake, His interests and not our own are the concern of our heart. The prophets and the apostles learned to know the Lord in wonderful ways by their very mistakes, for they were the mistakes, not of their own stubborn self-will, but of a real passion for God and for what He had shown them as to His purpose.

VISION GIVES ASCENDENCY TO GOD'S PEOPLE

And then note that the very ascendancy of Israel was based upon vision. They were called of God to be an ascendent people, above all the peoples of the earth, set in the midst of the nations as a spiritually governmental vessel. The Lord did promise that no nation should be able to take headship over them. His thought for them was that they should be "the head, and not the tail" (Deut. 28:13). But that was not going to happen willy-nilly, irrespective of their condition and position. It was when they had the vision before them clearly, corporately, as an entire people — dominated, mastered, unified by the vision — it was then that they were head and not tail, it was then that they were in the ascendent.

And that brings in these prophets again. (We think now of the later prophets of Israel.) Why the prophets? Because Israel had lost their position. Assyria, Babylon and the rest were taking ascendancy over them because they had lost their vision. It is in the minor prophets, as they are called, that you have so much about this very matter. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). That is a note to which all the prophets are tuned. Why this state of things? Why is Israel now the underdog of the nations? The answer is — lost vision. The prophet comes to try to get them back to the place of the vision. The prophet has the vision, he is the eyes of the people: he is calling them back to that for which God chose them, to show them anew why He took them from among the nations.

VISION NEEDED BY EVERY CHILD OF GOD

All this is but an emphasis upon the place of vision. It may not get you very far; you may wonder what it all leads to. You are saying now, 'Well, what is the vision?' That is not the point at the moment; that can come later. The point is that that is the necessity, the absolute necessity, for the Church today — for you, for me; and let me say at once that, while it is pre-eminently a corporate thing — that is, it is something which is to be in a people, even though that people be but a remnant, a small number amongst all the people of God — while pre-eminently a corporate thing, it must also be personal. You and I individually must be in the place where we can say, 'I have seen, I know what God is after!'

If we were asked why the Church is as it is today, in so large a measure of impotence and disintegration, and what is needed to bring about an impact from heaven by means of the Church, could we say? Is it presumption to claim to be able to do that? The prophets knew; and remember that the prophets, whether they were of the Old Testament or of the New Testament, were not an isolated class of people, they were not some body apart, holding this in themselves officially. They were the very eyes of the body. They were, in the thought of God, the people of God. You know that principle; it is seen, for instance, in the matter of the High Priest. God looks upon the one High Priest as Israel, and deals with all Israel on the ground of the condition of the High Priest, whether it be good or bad. If the High Priest is bad — "And he showed me Joshua the high priest... clothed with filthy garments" (Zechariah 3:1-5) — that is Israel. God deals with Israel as one man.

The prophet is the same; and that is why the prophet was so interwoven with the very condition and life of the people. Listen to the prophet Daniel praying. Personally he was not guilty; personally he had not sinned as the nation had sinned; but he took it all on himself and spoke as though it were his responsibility, as if he were the chief of sinners. These men were brought right into it. There is such a oneness between the prophets and the people in condition, in experience, in suffering, that they can never view themselves as officials apart from all that, as it were talking to it from the outside; they are in it, they are it.

My meaning is this, that we are not to have vision brought to us by a class called ministers, prophets and apostles. They are here only to keep us alive to what we ought to be before God, how we ought to be; constantly stirring us up and saying, 'Look here, this is what you ought to be.' It ought therefore to be, with every one of us personally, that we are in the meaning of this prophetic ministry. The Church is called to be a prophet to the nations. May I repeat my enquiry — it is a permissible question without admitting of any presumption — could you say what is needed by the Church today? Could you interpret the state of things, and explain truly by what the Lord has shown you in your own heart? I know the peril and dangers that may surround such an idea, but that is the very meaning of our existence. It will be in greater or lesser degree in every one of us, but, either more or less we have the key to the situation. God needs people of that sort. It must be individual.

VISION CALLS FOR COURAGE

But remember it will call for immense courage. Oh, the courage of these prophets! — courage as over against compromise and policy. Oh, the ruinous effects of policy, of secondary considerations! ‘How will it affect our opportunities if we are so definite? Will it not lessen our opportunities of serving the Lord if we take such a position?’ That is policy, and it is a ruinous thing. Many a man who has seen something, and has begun to speak about what he has seen, has found such a reaction from his own brethren and amongst those where his responsibility lay, that he has drawn back. ‘It is dangerous to pursue that any further.’ Policy! No, there was nothing of that about the prophets. Are we committed because we have seen?

There will be cost; we may as well face it. There is a little fragment in Hebrews 9 — “They were sawn asunder.” A tradition says that that applied to the prophet Isaiah — that he was the one who was sawn asunder. Read Isaiah 53. There is nothing more sublime in all the literature of the Bible, and for that he was sawn asunder. Was he right? Well, we today stand on the ground, and in the good, of his rightness. But the devil does not like that, and so Isaiah was sawn asunder. There are tremendous values bound up with seeing, and with uncompromising abandonment to the vision, but there is very great cost also.

We will leave it there for the time being; but we must have dealings with the Lord and say, ‘How much have I seen? After all I have heard of the prophets week by week, after all the conventions, the conferences, the meetings I have been attending, have I heard the voice of the prophets after all? I have heard the speakers give their messages and addresses: have I heard the voice?’ The effect will be far-reaching if we have. If we have not, it is time we got to the Lord about it. This must not go on! What happened in Acts 13? Hearing they did not hear; but where there was a hearing, oh, what tremendous things happened, what tremendous values came!

Chapter Four

A VISION THAT CONSTITUTES A VOCATION

“For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him” (Acts 13:27).

We pointed out at the beginning of the previous chapter that the above statement indicates that there is something more to be heard than the audible reading of the Word of God. “The voices of the prophets.” What were the prophets saying? — not, what were the actual words used by the prophets, the sentences and statements, the form of their pronouncements, but what did it all amount to in effect? These dwellers and rulers in Jerusalem could have quoted the prophets without difficulty: they probably could have recited the contents of all the books of the prophets. They were well-drilled in the content of the Old Testament Scriptures, but they never stopped and asked the simple questions: ‘What does it amount to? What really is the implication? What were these men after?’ And because they never did that, they never got further than the letter.

VOCATION MISSED BECAUSE VISION LOST

We are asking those questions now. What is that which is within and behind and deeper than the written and spoken utterances of the prophets? We know that the prophets were dealing with a situation which by no means represented the Lord’s mind regarding His people. I could make it stronger than that, and say the situation was very far from the Lord’s thought; but I have present conditions in mind, rather than any extreme state of things, and so I simply say that the condition did not then, nor does it now, really represent the Lord’s mind and intention where His people were and are concerned. The prophets were dealing with such a situation, and, because it was like that, the real vocation of the people of God was not being fulfilled. They were failing in that for which the Lord had really brought them into being. Whereas they ought to have been a people of tremendous spiritual strength in the midst of the nations, with a real impact of God upon the nations, with a note of great authority which had to be taken account of — “Thus saith the Lord”, declared in such a way that people really had to heed — whereas it ought to have been like that, they were failing. There was weakness and failure. The prophets sought to get down to the root of that situation, to get behind that deplorable condition and that tragic failure. To get there, of course, they had to work their way through a lot of positive factors in the condition. There were all the things to which the prophets referred — sins and so on; but the prophets were solid as one man on one particular thing, that back of these conditions, resulting in this main failure, the cause was lost vision. The people had lost their original vision, the vision which had at one time been clearly before them.

When God laid His hand upon them and brought them out of Egypt, they had a vision. They saw the purpose and intention of God. It became the exultant note of their song on the farther side of the Red Sea. I am not going to stay for the moment with what that purpose was. But they were a people to whom God had given a vision of His purpose concerning them, both as to themselves and as to their vocation. They had lost it, and this was the result; and the prophets, in dealing with that, lighted solidly upon this one thing; ‘Your vocation in its fullness of realisation and accomplishment rests upon your vision, and fullness of vocation requires fullness of vision.’ That means that if your vision becomes less than God’s fullness, you will only go so far, and then you will stop. If you are going right on and through to all that God meant in constituting you His vessel, you must have fullness of vision; God is never satisfied with anything less than fullness. The very fact that

you cannot go any further than your vision leads you is God's way of saying, 'You must have fullness of vision if you are coming to fullness of purpose and realisation.'

Now, that is the very foundation of the thing with which we are occupied just now. The prophets were always speaking about this matter. We previously quoted Hosea 4:6: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me." That is only saying in other words, 'My people go to pieces for lack of vision; you have closed your eyes to My purpose which I presented to you; I have no further use for you'; and that is a very strong statement. It links with another passage: "Israel is swallowed up: now are they among the nations as a vessel wherein none delighteth" (Hosea 8:8 A.R.V.).

If you want to get the full force of that, look at a word in Jeremiah's prophecies. "Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel? is he a vessel wherein none delighteth? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah" (Jer. 22:28-30, A.R.V.). "Israel... among the nations as a vessel wherein none delighteth." "Coniah... a vessel where-in none delighteth... Write ye this man childless." There is no future for a vessel like that. We might well say of Israel as of Coniah, "Write this man childless." That is an end. A continuation, going right through without that arrest, demands fullness of vision.

VISION, NOT KNOWLEDGE OF FACTS, QUALIFIES FOR VOCATION

Do give heed to this, especially my younger brothers and sisters in Christ. The fulfilment of that into which you are called through the grace of God — what you may call the service of God, the work of the Lord; what we will sum up as Divine vocation — must rest upon a vision which the Lord has given you: a vision, of course, that is not just something in itself but is the vision which He has given concerning His Church. You must have that. Then the measure in which you will go right on and through to fullness will be the measure of your vision — the measure in which you have come personally to possess that Divine vision. There can be all sorts of things less than that which lead you into Christian work. You may hear an appeal for workers, an appeal for missionaries, an appeal to service, based upon some Scripture — "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel" — and so on. And with the accompaniments of that appeal you may be moved, stirred up, feel very solemn; something may happen in the realm of your emotions, your feelings, your reason, and you may take that as a Divine call. Now, I am not saying that no-one has ever served the Lord properly and truly on that basis: do not misunderstand me: but I do want to say there can be all that, and in a very intense form, and yet it can be not your own but someone else's vision which has been passed over to you, and that will not do.

'But', you say, 'there is the Scripture — "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel".' Remember, those to whom those words were addressed had all the facts about Christ — the incarnation, the virgin birth, His life, His teaching, His miracles, His Cross, and all the accompanying heavenly attestations. Some of those very men — John's disciples — were there when the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son". Others were on the mountain when again the voice said, "This is my beloved Son". They saw the transfiguration, and they saw Him in resurrection. Is that not enough with which to go out to the world — all that mass of mighty facts? Surely they can go and proclaim what they know? But no — "Tarry ye in Jerusalem".

What was it eventually that constituted them men who could fulfil and obey that command to go? 'Well', you say, 'of course it was the presence of the Holy Spirit.' Perfectly true. But was there not something else? Why the forty days after His resurrection? Do you not think that they were getting through the externals, the events, and seeing something — seeing what no human eye could see, what could never be seen by any amount of objective demonstration? If the Apostle Paul is anything to go by in this matter, he will tell us perfectly plainly that his whole life and ministry and commission were based upon one thing: "It was the good pleasure of God... to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles". "I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ". (Galatians 1:15,16; 11,12).

All the other things may be facts which we possess by reading our New Testament. We have it all and we may believe it as the substance of Christianity. That does not constitute us missionaries to go out and proclaim the facts of Christ — facts though they be. That is not it. How many have done so! How far have they gone? They go so far and then stop. We cannot stay to dwell upon the limitation. Dear friends, there is terrible limitation in the Church just now, limitation of the knowledge of the Lord, even on the part of many who have been the Lord's servants for a long period of years. There are many Christians, even of years' standing, to whom it is actually difficult to talk about the things of the Lord.

THE VISION — GOD'S FULL PURPOSE IN REDEMPTION

But reverting to Israel: you do not find anything concerning Israel that suggests or indicates that they came out of Egypt, and were in the wilderness and later in the land, to declare as their gospel that God brought them out of the land of Egypt. That was not their message. Of course, it is recounted many times, but that was not their message, not what they were proclaiming. What was it that was always in their view? It was what they were brought out for. It was God's vision in bringing them out. So many of us have settled down to preach just the 'coming out' side — salvation from sin, from the world. It goes so far, but the Church does not

get very far with that. It is good, it is right, of course; it is a part of the whole; but it is only a part. It is the full vision that is needed to go right through. Oh, the pathos associated with the lives of many of the Lord's servants! They come to a standstill, in a realm of limited life and power and influence, because their vision is so small. Is that not true?

What am I saying to you? First of all, if you are going right through, to serve the Lord in any full way, you must have revealed to your own heart God's purpose concerning His Son. You will have to be able to say that God has 'revealed His Son in you', in this sense, that you see, not merely your own deliverance from sin, but God's purpose concerning His Son unto which you are saved — the big thing, the full thing. You are only a fragment in it. That is the basis of service, of vocation; and these very Apostles were held back until there broke upon them the full blaze of the meaning of Christ risen and ascended — the vision of the glorified Christ and all that that signified in the eternal purpose of God. Then they went out, and we find their message was always, not the gospel of God concerning personal salvation, but "the gospel of God... concerning his Son", Jesus Christ. They had seen, not the historic Jesus, but the glorified Christ of God; and they had not just seen Him as an objective vision, but His true significance had broken in upon them.

What a change it represented from the old days, when they were always thinking in terms of the coming Messiah who would set up a temporal kingdom on this earth, with themselves seated on His right hand and on His left! They would be notable people down here on this earth, and would oust the Romans from their country! That thing on the earth was their full and only vision — fighting with literal arms, revolting against literal usurpers of their country.

But oh, what a vast change when they saw His kingdom! Now, the thing which had held them in its grip simply went, not to be thought of any longer. Seeing His kingdom! He had said, "There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:28). What is the kingdom? It is Christ, far above all rule and authority, the centre and the goal of all Divine counsels from eternity. That is language, of course — mere words; but the import needs to be apprehended. You must have vision in your own heart before you can be a servant of God who will get very far, and you have to have growing vision in order to get right through. Come back to Hosea. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). What does he say a little later? "Let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord" (Hosea 6:3). It is growing, progressive vision that brings us through to God's full end. It must be like that — not being contented with two or three facts about Christ and salvation, but having the eyes of our hearts enlightened to see Him.

What I am saying, of course, is a statement of facts. I cannot give you anything, I cannot bring you into it; but I can, I trust, influence you a little in the direction of going to the Lord and saying, 'Now, Lord, if Thou needest me, I am available, I am at Thy disposal; but Thou must lay the foundation, and open my eyes, and give me the requisite vision that will mean that I do not only go out and preach things about Christ.' Something very much more than that is needed.

That is the first thing, and it applies to us all, not only to those who are going out into what we call 'full-time service'.

ISRAEL'S VOCATION — TO EXPRESS GOD'S PRESENCE AMONG THE NATIONS

Saying that, I am able to come to the next thing for the moment. What was the vision that Israel had lost and to which the prophets were seeking to bring the people back? The vision was this — the very vocation for which God had laid His hand upon Israel, the meaning of their existence as Israel. What was that?

The movement of God was like this. Here are nations and peoples spreading all over the earth. Out from those nations God takes one solitary individual, Abram, and places him, so to speak, right at the centre of the nations. That is the spiritual geography of it. And then God raises from that man a seed, and constitutes his seed a nation right in the midst of the nations; distinct from the nations, perfectly distinct, but in the midst. Then God constitutes that nation on heavenly principles — a corporate body constituted on heavenly, Divine, spiritual principles, with God Himself in the midst — with the result that all the other nations gather round to look on.

And what do those nations take account of? Not of the preaching of this nation in their midst; you have nothing about their preaching at all — that is, the proclaiming of doctrines and truths. But the onlookers become aware that God, the only true and living God, is there. There is no mistaking it, they cannot get away from it, they have to recognise it: God is there, Because this people is so constituted, God is there, and there is a registration of God all around, wherever these people come. Ah, even before they come, something is beginning to happen. Listen to Rahab! What did she say to the spies? Israel has not arrived yet, but she says, 'We know all about you. We know what you signify. We have heard all about it.' Already the fear of this people is ahead of them. There is something of spiritual power there which does not have to be preached in words. The people are there, with God in their midst — because God has His heavenly thoughts and principles as the very constitution of their life, He is there; the rest follows.

Now I have gathered into that statement the whole of the Bible, Old and New Testaments. As to the Old Testament, what was Israel's Divine vocation? Not primarily to say things about God, but to be as God in the midst of the nations. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved" (Psalm 46:5). 'The Lord is here!' How much that counted for! That was their vocation. You may say that in the Old Testament it was type; but oh, it

was much more than type, it was very real; it was a fact.

THE CHURCH'S VOCATION — TO EXPRESS THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

When we come into the New Testament we find ourselves in the presence of a double development. God is here present in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. His name is Emmanuel — 'God with us' — and all who have to do with Him have to do with God in a very personal and immediate way. He claims that His very physical body is the temple of God. Then, through His death, resurrection and ascension, He returns in the Person of the Holy Spirit and takes up His residence in the Church, which is His Body. Things then begin to happen quite spontaneously, out from the world of spiritual intelligences — not just because of certain doctrines being preached, but because of that Divine presence.

There are conscious intelligences all around, behind men and nations, and the conflict has started; not because of what God's people say, but because they are here. Let that be corporate, and you have God's idea of vocation. This is not the dispensation of the conversion of the nations. I wonder even if this is the dispensation of the full evangelization of the nations. We are hoping the Lord may come any day. Half of this world has never heard the name of Jesus yet, after two thousand years. If the Lord is coming tonight, something has to happen if the world is to be evangelized before He comes! That is not said to stay or weaken evangelization. Let us get on with it and do all that is possible; but, remember, the Lord has given us His meaning for this dispensation. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14).

Look at your New Testament. It was said, "Their sound went out into all the earth" (Romans 10:18). It was said that the whole world was touched. But the world has grown a good deal since then. What happened at that time? The Lord planted nuclei, corporate representations of His Church, first in one nation and then in another, and by their presence the fight broke out. The one thing that Satan was bent upon was to eject that which inoculated his kingdom with the sovereignty of the Lord; to get it out, break it up, disintegrate it, somehow to nullify it; turning those concerned one against another, creating divisions — anything to spoil, to mar, to destroy their representation of Christ's absolute lordship; to neutralise that, to get it out, to drive it out, to do anything to get rid of this thing inside his kingdom. Satan's kingdom has acted in this way, as if to say: 'While that thing is here, we can never be sure of ourselves; while that is here our kingdom is divided, it is not whole: let us get it out, in order to have our kingdom solid.'

God's object is to get into the nations a corporate expression of the lordship of His Son — to have His place there. I am not saying we are not to preach; yes, we must preach, witness, testify; but the essential thing is that the Lord must be there. There are times — and this will be borne out by many servants of God — when you cannot preach, you cannot do anything but hold on where you are, being there, standing there, keeping in close touch with heaven there. You can do nothing else, and the waves break upon you. It has happened many times. Before ever there has been any advance or development there has been a long-drawn-out period in which the one question has been, 'Shall we be able to hold on, to stand our ground?' Satan has said, 'Not if I can help it! You will go out if I can do anything about it!'

The whole question at issue is the foothold of the heavenly Lord in the nations. Israel was constituted for that; the Church is constituted for that. It cannot be done single-handed by units; it requires the corporate — the two, the three; the more the better, provided there is the unifying factor, the oneness, of a single eye. If double motives and personal interests come in, they will undo it all. Are you fighting a lonely battle? You need co-operation, you need corporate help to fight that battle through and to hold your ground. Mark you, the enemy will drive you out if he can. Preach if you can; but if you cannot, that does not mean that you are to quit. Until the Lord says, 'I can do no more here,' you have to hold on. Do we not know the terrific efforts of the enemy to drive us out? Many of you have gone far enough to know what that means. If he could put you out, he would.

But that is the vision — what the Church is constituted for in relation to the Lord Jesus: so that, in the light of the coming day, you are standing as a testimony of the coming day; in the nations for a testimony, "until he come whose right it is" to reign, and "the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15); a foothold unto that time; an altar built, which testifies: 'This belongs to the Lord; the Lord's rights are here: He has purchased this.' But you will find every kind of contradiction to that in conditions, and every kind of assault from the enemy to try to prove that the Lord has not anything there, that He has no footing and that you had better get out.

Do you see how necessary it is to have the vision? You cannot do that on enthusiasm — it will not last; nor on someone else's vision — it will not support you to the end. You must be like this man Paul and those who "endured, as seeing him who is invisible"; not as having seen Him long ago, but living continually in the light of what you have seen and are seeing — a light which is ever growing.

VISION IS THE MEASURE OF VOCATION

Now, if all this is simple and elementary, it is nevertheless basic. Do you see that vision of God's full purpose concerning His Son, revealed in your own heart in its beginnings, but then growing clearer and fuller, is the basis of vocation? I do trust that nothing I have said will have the effect of making you less earnest and devoted in all simple ways of witnessing, or testifying concerning salvation; but do remember that, for fullness, you need to see very much more than that. You will go just as far as your vision takes you; therefore, we all

have need of Paul's prayer that God "may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe" (Ephesians 1:17-19).

That is the vision. And then, as is written in Isaiah 25:7 (A.R.V.): "... he will destroy (lit. swallow up) in this mountain the face of the covering that covereth all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations." What does that mean — "this mountain"? What mountain? Well, it is Zion. But has that literal mountain, Mount Zion, that rocky eminence in Jerusalem, ever been the instrument of taking the covering veil from off all faces? Of course it has not! What is Zion? Zion, in spiritual interpretation, is that people who are living in the good of the Lord's complete sovereignty. It says in the immediate context, "He hath swallowed up death for ever" (vs. 8). It is through His triumph, the triumph of His Cross and resurrection, that He comes to us. "Ye are come unto mount Zion" (Hebrews 12:22). Zion is the realm of His absolute lordship, and a people living in the good of His lordship. Then the veil is taken away. What the Lord wants here and there and there are these nuclei, these little companies of people living in the good of His victory, living in the good of His having swallowed up death victoriously; and where they are, people will see; they will be the instrument for taking the veil from other people's faces. Where such a company is found, there you see the Lord. When you come into touch with those people, you come into touch with reality.

So the final appeal is that everything must be adjusted and brought into line with the vision, and the one question for us is this: Are people seeing the Lord? It is not a matter of whether they are hearing what we have to talk about — our preaching, doctrine, interpretation — but: Are they seeing the Lord, are they feeling the Lord, are they meeting the Lord? Oh, I do not ask you in your different locations to gather two or three together to study certain kinds of Bible teaching; but I do ask you to ask the Lord to constitute you corporately that which will have a spiritual impact, that in which the Lord can be seen, the Lord can be found; of which it can be said, 'The Lord is there!' May that be true of us, wherever we are.

Chapter Five

WHY THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE IS NOT APPREHENDED

Reading: Acts 13:27, 15; II Corinthians 3:14-18; Isaiah 53:1.

The prophets were read, as Paul points out here, every Sabbath. It was the fixed custom to read the law and the prophets every Sabbath, and it may be pointed out that it was not just at one particular time in the day that this was done, but all through the Sabbath day the law and the prophets were being read in the synagogues. And yet it says that although the very rulers themselves, as well as the dwellers in Jerusalem who attended the temple, heard that reading of the prophets so continuously, they never heard the voices of the prophets. And because they failed to hear that inner something, which was more than just the audible reading of what the prophets had said, they lost everything that was intended for them, as this thirteenth chapter of Acts shows. The Apostles left them and turned to the Gentiles, who had an ear ready to hear.

That is a matter of no small consequence and seriousness. It is evident that it behoves us to seek to hear the voices of the prophets, really to know what the prophets were saying. Let us again look at the statement: "...because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets." Why did they not know? Why did they not hear? There is one basic answer to that enquiry which is going to occupy us just now, and which brings us down to foundations, really to the root of things.

THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS

(a) A Suffering Messiah

The answer to that enquiry is this — because they were not willing to accept the Cross. That is what went to the root of the whole matter. Firstly, they were not willing to admit of a suffering Messiah. They had their own minds well made up, both as to what kind of Messiah their Messiah would be, and as to what He would do, and as to the results of His advent; and anything that ran counter to that fixed mentality was not only not accepted — it was an offence. They could not admit into the realm of their contemplation that their coming Messiah would be a suffering Messiah. Yet the prophets were always speaking about the suffering Messiah. Isaiah, at that point in his prophecies which we know as chapter 53, presents the classic on the suffering Messiah, and yet he opens by saying: "Who hath believed our message?"

I think we need not stay to gather further evidence that that was their attitude. Right the way through it was just that. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, was dealing with that very thing. Towards the end of the letter he spoke about the offence of the Cross, and he set that over against the Judaizers, who were dogging his steps everywhere and seeking to prejudice his ministry, and at whose hands he was suffering. He 'bore branded on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus' (Galatians 6:17). Why? Because of his message of the Cross. He said, 'If I were willing to drop that, I could escape all this suffering; it is the offence of the Cross which is the cause of all the trouble' (Galatians 5:11). And all the way through we see the Jews' unwillingness to admit

of a suffering Messiah.

(b) The Way of Self-Emptying

But then it went further than that. It became not only a national issue but a personal one. They would not accept the principle of the Cross in themselves. You find that representative individuals of the nation, who came to the Lord Jesus from time to time, were presented with the offence of the Cross — and off they went again, not prepared to accept it. Nicodemus was very interested in the kingdom which the Messiah was going to set up, which he was expecting and anticipating, but it became a personal matter of the Cross. Before the Lord was through with Nicodemus, He had brought into his full view the serpent lifted up in the wilderness. That was an offence.

Another man, who has become known to us as the rich young ruler, went away very sorrowful because of the offence of the Cross. It was no use for the Lord, at that time, before the Cross had actually taken place, to speak in precise terms about it to other than His disciples, but He applied the principle, which is the same thing. He applied the principle to this young man. 'If, as you say, you are interested in the Kingdom and in eternal life, this is the way: the way of emptying — utter self emptying.' "He went away sorrowful: for he was one that had great possessions" (Matthew 19:22). The Lord said, "How hardly (with what difficulty) shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:24). The offence of the Cross finds them out.

Now here, with the Jews as a whole, they were making the kingdom of God an earthly thing on the principles of this world — and do not let us blame them without blaming ourselves. This is our battle right up to date. It is a matter that finds us all out at heart. Oh, you may not be expecting that through your preaching of Christ a temporal kingdom will be set up and you will get a literal crown to wear and a throne to sit upon — that may not be your outlook or mentality; but are we not, almost every day of our lives, in trouble because the Lord hides from us everything that He is doing and starves our souls of their ambition to see things, to have things? Is that not the basis of a great deal of our trouble? We want to see, we want to have, we want the proofs and the evidences. We do really, after all, want a kingdom that can be appraised by our senses of sight and hearing and feeling — a palpable kingdom, the answer in tangible form to all our efforts and labours; and the opposite of that is a tremendous strain upon faith, and sometimes even brings us to a serious crisis.

Why does not the Lord do this and that, which we think He ought to do? It is simply this soul-craving to have proof and demonstration; and this is why, if there is anything built up in Christian work which is obvious, big, impressive, where there is a great thing being organized and a great movement on foot and all is in the realm of something that can be seen, crowds of Christians flock after it; or if there are manifestations, things that seem to be clear proofs, the crowds will be found there. The enemy can carry away multitudes by imitation works of the Holy Ghost in the realm of demonstrations and proofs. We are so impressionable, we must possess; and that is exactly the same principle as that which governed the rulers. They were not prepared for the principle of the Cross to be applied in this way — an utter self-emptying, being brought to an end of everything but the Lord Himself.

THE PROPHETS' THEME — KNOWING THE LORD

Now you see that does bring us to the matter of the voices of the prophets. What was the one thing the prophets were always talking about? It was about knowing the Lord. The thing that was lacking amongst the Lord's people in the days of the prophets was the knowledge of the Lord. There were plenty of people who were prepared to have the Lord for what He could do for them, but as for the Lord Himself... ah, that was another matter.

What is the Lord after with you and with me? Is He first of all wanting us to do things? The idea of what is of God today is chiefly associated with the things which are being done for Him, the work we are engaged in, and so on — that is, with what is objective and outward. But the Lord is not first of all concerned about how much we do. He is far more concerned that, whether we do little or much, every bit of it should come out of a knowledge of Himself. Any amount can be done for the Lord in Christian work and activities, just as you do other work, but it may not proceed from your own deep knowledge of God. The Lord is concerned above all else that we should know Him. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he hath understanding, and knoweth me" (Jeremiah 9:23,24, A.R.V.).

May that not explain the very principle of the Cross that is being applied to us? The Lord does not satisfy and gratify; along many lines He seems again and again to be saying 'No' to quite a lot that we crave for; and, being denied, we often come to the point where we would almost give up everything and allow the biggest questions as to our relationship with the Lord. And yet what He is after all the time, by His denials and withholdings or delays, is to deepen our knowledge of Himself. What matters with the Lord before anything and everything else is not that we should be in any given place doing a lot of Christian work (do not let that stop you serving the Lord!), but that we should be there as one who knows the Lord. Our opportunities for serving Him will spring out of our knowledge of Him; He will see to that. The Lord the Spirit is arranging His own work. He knows where need exists, and when He sees someone who can meet that need He can make contact.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD BASIC TO ALL USEFULNESS

That is the principle in the New Testament. We see it in the life of the Lord Jesus Himself. That meeting

between Christ and the woman of Samaria was not just a casual happening, a pretty story. No, you have principles. The Holy Ghost wrote those narratives, and involved principles in every incident. Here is One who has water to give that the world knows not of, and here is a thirsty woman. God sees to it that the one in need is brought into touch with the One who has the supply. That is a law. If you have not got the supply, it is very largely empty work that is done for the Lord.

The principle of the Cross works out along many lines, in many ways — testing, trying, emptying us, in order to bring us to the place where we know the Lord, and where our joy in the Lord and our enthusiasm and our Christian life are the result of something deeper than the mere momentum produced by doing many things, running about from meeting to meeting, giving addresses, being occupied on the crest of a wave of engagements in Christian work. The Lord does not want it to be like that. I am not saying that you will never be on the crest of a wave, that you will never have your hands full; but the Lord's way of making us useful servants is so to deal with us as to make us know Him, so that, whether occupied in Christian work in an outward way or not, we are there with a knowledge of the Lord. What is so necessary for us is an increasing measure of the preciousness of the Lord to our own hearts; that, whether we are able to do anything or not, He should still remain very precious to us. That is what He wants.

That is very simple, but it is basic to everything. You are there in some place where you cannot be always talking about the Lord, where you can do very little; but if the Lord is precious to you, that is service to Him, and in you He has available a vessel for anything more that He wants. I am sure the Lord will never bring us out and entrust us with responsibilities until He has become very precious to us in the place where we are, even though many other things that we would like are being denied to and withheld from us. It is the principle of the Cross.

Nicodemus comes with all his 'fullness'. He is a man with a great fullness — a ruler of the Jews, in high standing, in a place of influence, and much more. He represents a fullness of a religious kind. Then the Lord virtually says to him: 'You have to let it all go, and start all over again like a newborn babe. You are concerned about the Kingdom of Heaven, but you cannot bring any of that into the Kingdom.' To the rich young ruler He says, in effect, 'You cannot bring your riches in here.' You may have a lot of natural wealth — intellectual, financial, influential, positional, but that does not give you any standing in the Kingdom of Heaven at all. The wealthiest, the fullest, the biggest here in this world receives no more of the glance of the Lord in their direction than the poorest and the weakest. All are brought down here — you must be born again, you must start from zero in this matter of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, it is a matter of spiritual measure; and you start spiritual measure by being born of the Spirit. The new life is utterly spiritual from the very first breath — something that was not before, something new.

Spiritual measure is just knowing the Lord; that is all. Our standing in the Kingdom of Heaven is simply a matter of knowing the Lord, and if we are going to gain higher place it is not going to be at all by preferences, but by the increase of our spiritual measure. People who count in heaven are spiritual people, and what counts is the degree of their spirituality; and spirituality is knowing the Lord. We may take it that the Lord applies Himself utterly to this matter of bringing us to know Him. That is the thing that really does count.

THE CROSS BASIC TO ALL KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

They could not hear the voices of the prophets because the prophets were talking about a suffering Messiah, and there was something inside the people which had closed the door; they were predisposed against anything like that, and so they could not hear. Even the disciples of the Lord Jesus were in that position. When He began to refer to His Cross they said, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee" (Matthew 16:22). A suffering Messiah? Oh, no! But they did come to the place where the Cross had its very deep application, where it meant an end of everything for them. The Lord precipitated that whole question, and you see them after His crucifixion — they have lost their Messianic Kingdom, they have lost everything, they are stripped and emptied. And then what happened? They began then to know, just began to know, and their knowledge grew and grew; but it was of another order entirely. So you find, in the rest of the New Testament, that, in their own history and in their instruction of others, two things go together. They are like the negative and the positive in an electrical circuit — there can be no current without both. The negative is the application of the principle of the Cross, which says No, No, No: an end: death to yourself, death to the world, death to all your own natural life. But the positive is the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God, mightily present, but always hand in hand with the Cross. With those two acting always together, the negative and the positive — the Cross, and heavenly purpose and heavenly power and effectiveness — you find that there is movement and an ever-growing knowledge of the Lord.

We cannot have the knowledge of the Lord — the most important thing in the mind of God for us — except on the ground of the continuous application of the Cross, and that will go right on to the end. Do not imagine that there will come a day when you have done with the Cross, when the principle of the Cross will no longer be necessary and when you have graduated from the school where the Cross is the instrument of the Lord. Such a day never will be! More and more you will come to recognise the necessity for that Cross. If you are going on into greater fullness of knowledge — I mean spiritual knowledge of the Lord — and therefore greater fullness of usefulness to Him, you must take it as settled that that principle of the Cross is going to be applied more and more deeply as you go on.

Oh, God write that in our hearts! for surely we all know the need of the Cross; and those who have known

most about it are conscious most of its need still. We have seen the terrible tragedy of people who knew the message of the Cross in fullness, and who after many years have been a positive contradiction to that very message — marked by self-assertiveness, self-importance, impatience, irritability, so that other people have been unable to live with them. Are you one of those habitually irritable people? I do not mean one of those persons who sometimes is overtaken in a fault. The Lord is patient with the upsets that come here and there along the way, but are we habitually irritable, short-tempered, difficult to live with? That is a denial of the Cross, and that has wrecked the life and work of many a missionary.

The Cross will be applied right on to the end, and, altogether apart from our faults and the things in our constitution and nature which have to be dealt with, in this coming to know the Lord for still greater usefulness we go from death to death on that side of things. We think of some known to us. We marvel at the way the Lord has been able to use them, the large place into which He has put them, what riches He has given them; but of late they have been plunged into depths of death never known before. It is evidently unto something more, something greater still. It is like that; the knowledge of the Lord requires it in an ever-growing way.

KNOWLEDGE AND USEFULNESS SAFEGUARDED BY THE CROSS

But furthermore, there is no safe place, apart from the constant application of the principle of the Cross. Safety absolutely demands it. Nothing is safe in our hands. The more the Lord blesses, the more peril there is. The greatest peril comes when the Lord begins to use us. You may say, 'That does not say very much for our sanctification.' It certainly does not say very much for 'eradication'! Well, here is Paul. Did that man know anything about the Cross? Would you say he was a crucified man? If he was not, who was? Did he know the Lord? And with all that he knew of the Cross and the Lord, did he know that he needed the Cross to be applied right on to the end? He will definitely place it on record — "... that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me." "That I should not be exalted overmuch"! (II Cor. 12:7). And mark you, he is saying that because of the great revelation that had been given him. He was caught up into heaven. It is a most perilous thing to be entrusted with Divine riches, so far as our flesh is concerned. The only safe place is where the Cross is still at work, touching all that is ourselves, touching all our independence of action.

Take all these Apostles — take Peter, a man who would act so independently, who liked to do things on his own and do what he wanted to do. We find it cropping up constantly. He is the man who acts without stopping to ask anybody. We have no hint that he ever got into fellowship with his brother disciples and said, 'I am thinking of doing so and so; I would very much like you to pray with me about it, and to tell me what you think; I have no intention of going on unless there is one mind among us.' Peter never did that sort of thing. He got an idea, and off he went. The Lord summed him up very well when He said: "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not" (John 21:18). That was Peter before the Cross was in-wrought in him. But see him afterwards. Why, in those early chapters of Acts, do we read "Peter and John", "Peter and John", "Peter and John"? Well, they are moving together now, there is relatedness. Is it an acknowledgment that Peter felt his need of co-operation and fellowship, that he had seen the perils and disasters into which independent action led him, even when his intentions and motives were of the best? These are just glimpses of how the Cross touches us in our impulsive, independent nature, our self-will, our self-strength. The Cross has to deal with all that to make things safe for God, and to keep us moving in the way of increasing knowledge of the Lord, which, as we have said, lies behind all our value to the Lord, all our usefulness, all our service.

THE CROSS OPENS THE WAY TO FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

The Cross is the only way to spiritual knowledge. Important as study of the Word of God may be in its own realm, as laying a foundation for the Holy Spirit to work upon, you never come to a knowledge of the Lord simply by studying the Bible. The Holy Spirit may use what you know of the Bible to teach you much, to explain your experiences, to enable you to understand what the Lord is doing, but you never get this kind of spiritual knowledge by study and by teaching.

You must be prepared to let the Cross be so applied to your life that you are broken and emptied and fairly ground to powder — so that you are brought to the place where, if the Lord does not do something, you are finished. If you are prepared for that way, you will get to know the Lord. That is the only way. It cannot be by addresses or lectures. They have their value, but you do not know the Lord spiritually along those lines.

The full knowledge of the Lord is reserved to us who live in this dispensation, because the latter is governed by the Cross. Peter himself had something to say about this:—

"Concerning which salvation prophets sought and searched diligently; who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them. To whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things, which now have been announced unto you...; which things angels desire to look into" (I Peter 1:10–12).

There you have two orders — prophets and angels — who did not know certain things which are revealed to us. The prophets knew much, but they were searching diligently to know something they could not discover. 'What does this mean?' they must have asked themselves. 'The Spirit of God is making us say these

things, but what do they mean?' They sought diligently to know that which was reserved for us. Why could they not know? Because full knowledge is based upon the Cross, and the Cross had not taken place then. And angels, too, desire to look into these things. Can it be true? We thought angels knew everything! Surely angels have far more knowledge and intelligence than we have about these things? They do not know. "Which things angels desire to look into." Why do they not know? Angels have had no need of the Cross; the Cross has no meaning for them personally. It is on the basis of the Cross that full knowledge is entered into. Does that need any further argument?

THE CROSS SECURES POSITIVE, NOT ONLY NEGATIVE, RESULTS

So then, the Holy Spirit, in order to bring us to the full knowledge of the Lord and by means of that growing knowledge to make us useful to the Lord, must constantly work by means of the Cross in principle; and my closing word is this. The work is not all negative; the Lord works on a positive basis. You may think that the Lord is always saying No, that He is always against you, that the Cross is suppressive; but no, it is a positive instrument in the hands of the Spirit of God. God is working on a positive line. The fact is that, if ever the Holy Spirit brings us into a new knowing of the meaning of the Cross, He is after something more. That is the law of the Spirit of life.

You must remember that the Lord Jesus, in His resurrection, was not left just where He was before. Before He died He was on this earth, and then He died; and Paul refers to His raising from that death in these words: "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all" (Ephesians 1:19-21). The resurrection carries Him through to the "far above all," and the principle of resurrection is always that of rebound — we may go down very deep, more deeply than ever we have known before, but the Spirit of God is intending that that shall issue in our being higher than ever before. So do not be afraid when you are feeling very empty, very finished, very much at the end. Ask the Lord that if this is truly the working of His Cross it shall be successful in what He intends for you; and if it is successful, you will be on higher ground afterward than ever you were before.

THE NEED FOR A DEFINITE TRANSACTION WITH THE LORD

We have said from time to time that the Cross does involve a crisis. For some this may be an overwhelming experience, the biggest thing that has happened in your life, even bigger than your conversion. It was so for some of us as we moved from the apprehension of the substitutionary aspect of the Cross, where we saw only what Christ had done for us, to the apprehension of our union with Christ in death, burial and resurrection. Whether or not you have a big crisis which divides your life in two, you must have a point of transaction with the Lord where you recognise that the Cross is in principle an utter, all-inclusive reality that, sooner or later, is going to run to earth the last vestige of that self-life which is the ground of Satan's power. It is best at some point to have this understanding: 'I rejoice in the fact of Thy death for me, and I am saved on the ground of that death and my faith in it. But I died in Thee — that was Thy thought about me as a son of Adam. I could not bear to have all that that means brought to me at once, but I recognise that it has to be worked out as grace enables, and that sooner or later I have to come to an utter end; and I therefore commit myself to all Thou dost mean by the Cross.'

A transaction of that kind is necessary. Do not begin to kick when the Lord begins to work it out. He takes you at your word, but He is doing it with the definite object in view of getting you to a higher and fuller knowledge of Himself. Out of that growing knowledge of Him, the growing preciousness of the Lord, all real service will issue. It is not what we do, but what we have, that is the secret of service.

Chapter Six

THE KINGDOM, AND ENTRANCE INTO IT

"For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him" (Acts 13:27).

"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"

(Matthew 11:11-15).

"The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and every man entereth violently into it" (Luke 16:16).

I think we can recognise that the common link between Acts 13:27 and Matthew 11:13 is "all the prophets". In the one case they heard not the voices of the prophets; in the other it is said (vs. 15), "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

THE PROPHETS PROPHESED OF THE KINGDOM

First of all, we must understand the meaning of this whole statement in Matthew 11 — “all the prophets... prophesied until John.” What did they prophesy? Of course, they prophesied many things. One paramount concern in their prophecies was that relating to the coming King and the Kingdom. So much was that so that in the New Testament the matter of the Kingdom is taken for granted. When you open the New Testament and begin to read in the Gospels, you find that no explanation is given. The Kingdom is not introduced as something of which people were unaware. You find from amongst the people those who came to the Lord Jesus and used the very phrase, and you find the Lord Himself, although the matter not mentioned by others who came to Him, using the phrase ‘the Kingdom’ without any introduction or explanation.

Nicodemus was a case in point. We have nothing in the narrative to indicate that Nicodemus said anything at all about the Kingdom. He started by saying: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God.” There was nothing about the Kingdom in that. The Lord Jesus interrupted there and said: “Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:2,3.) Evidently that was the thing that was in the mind of Nicodemus, the Lord knew it. You see, it is a thing taken for granted in the New Testament; and although later (as we find in the book of the Acts and subsequently) the true heavenly explanation is given, or there is some teaching concerning its true meaning, the Kingdom is something that is already very much in the minds of the Jewish people, and of course it has come from the prophets. The prophets had much to say concerning the Kingdom, and some of them had something very definite to say about the King. We will not try to prove that. It is a statement which you can easily verify.

What did the prophets prophesy? Inclusively, they prophesied concerning the King and the Kingdom. What was the culmination of the prophets in that comprehensive connection? It was John the Baptist. He gathered them all up; he was, so to speak, the inclusive prophet. What was John the Baptist? He was the terminal or turning point between all that had been and that which was now going to be, between the Old Testament and the New. That is the statement here “all... prophesied until John.” Until John; now — from John. What was the message of John? “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). But alongside that, the great outstanding note of John is, “Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Those are not two different things; they are one. “The kingdom... is at hand”: “Behold, the Lamb of God!”

THE KINGDOM PRESENT IN CHRIST

What was the issue, then, from John’s time — the issue which sprang into new meaning, new force, because it had become an immediate one; no longer that of prophecy but now the issue of actuality? It was the Kingdom of Heaven. “The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached.” The prophets had prophesied it; now it is preached as having come, and having come with “the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.”

What, then, is the Kingdom of Heaven? We have led up to this step by step, and when we answer this final question we shall see clearly what it was that these Jewish rulers and dwellers in Jerusalem never saw, though they heard the prophets week by week.

I am going to press the challenge of this again. I feel that it is a very solemn thing that ever the Kingdom of Heaven should have come near to anyone. You see, the Lord is eventually going to judge everyone on their opportunity. The opportunity has been given — and contact is opportunity. The very availability of the Kingdom is opportunity. What is done with opportunity? The Lord Jesus walked in the midst of the Jewish nation three and a half years. His very presence among them was their opportunity — and what a terrible, terrible consequence followed their failure to make good their opportunity!

Now there may be someone in this category who reads these words. Through reading them, there has become available to you, even if never before (but surely we could hardly say that), the gospel of Jesus Christ — the knowledge of the fact of the Lord Jesus and His Cross. To have ever had that within your reach is enough to settle your eternal destiny. If the Kingdom of Heaven is come near within the compass and range of your life, to your knowledge — that is the ground upon which your eternal destiny may be settled. Of course, there was very much more in the case of these people, and their condemnation was so much the more. The prophets prophesied in their hearing, and yet because of something in their own make-up, because of some reaction from themselves, the rulers and the people never heard what they were hearing; they never recognised that here was something which had very great implications, and that they must find out what those implications really were. They did not take the attitude — ‘If there is something here which concerns me, I must know what it is.’

You could hardly ask for less than that, could you? but the very absence of that kind of reaction to the presence of the gospel, as I have said, may be the ground upon which judgment will take place. It did in their case, and a terrible judgment it was! What a judgment, these two thousand years of Jewish history! “Your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:38). Was there ever a story of more awful desolation than the story of the Jews since then? But, even so, that is only a parable of desolation; something here on this earth. What must desolation in the spiritual and eternal sense mean — forsaken of God, and knowing it? It is a solemn message, and of course it paves the way to this other part, the “violent” entering into the Kingdom. This is something to take seriously, something about which you cannot afford to be careless or indifferent.

What is the Kingdom? The answer to that can be given in three or four quite brief statements. What did the Kingdom of Heaven prove to be? I repudiate that system of interpretation which claims that a literal, earthly, temporal kingdom was offered to the Jews at this time. I do not believe it. It would have been a poor sort of thing for the people of whom we read in the Gospels to have had the kingdom in their hands — not much glory or satisfaction to God in them! Look at Palestine today, and see what kind of kingdom it would be in the hands of those people! What is possible for the world when that kind of thing gets the kingdom? No, I repudiate the interpretation of a temporal kingdom being offered to Israel by Jesus at that time. But what did the Kingdom of Heaven, which was preached in the days of John the Baptist, prove to be and to mean, as the Lord Jesus interpreted it, and later the Apostles?

WHAT THE KINGDOM IS

(a) A New Life

First of all, the Kingdom of Heaven was a new life, altogether other than that which men knew anything about in all their history from Adam onward. That is what the Lord meant in His own first reference to the Kingdom, when speaking to Nicodemus about his soul's need. "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" — because it is another life that has come in, as by a birth. It is not just the energizing of an old life. It is not just the swinging over of an old life into new interests, turning from one line of interest to another, from one system of occupation to another: once you were all out for the world, and now with the same life and interest you are all out for Christianity. No, it is another, different life, a life that never was, given from God Himself. The very essence of the Kingdom of Heaven is that it is a heavenly nature in a heavenly life, given as a distinct gift at a crisis. Another life — that is the Kingdom, to begin with.

(b) A New Relationship

It is a new relationship, a relationship with God: which is not simply that now we become interested in God — that God becomes an object of our consideration and we swing over from one relationship to another because now we have taken up Christianity. No, it is a relationship which is of the essence of this very life itself. We have an altogether new and different consciousness, so far as our relationship to God is concerned. The great truth of the Gospels, especially as emphasized in the Gospel by John, is that a new revelation of relationship with God has come by Jesus Christ. "I manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world" (John 17:6). That name, of which He is always speaking, represented a new relationship — "Father"; not in the sense of a general and universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, but a specific, new relationship which comes about only by the entering of the Holy Spirit into the life in a definite, critical act. "God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6). When did that happen with you? What was the very first lisp of your new life? "Father!" — uttered out of a new consciousness. Not now a God who is afar off, unthinkable, all-terrible, of whom you are afraid; no, "Father!" When we are "born of the Spirit," there is brought about an entirely new relationship.

(c) A New Constitution

Then the Kingdom of Heaven is a new constitution. I am not thinking now of a new set of laws and regulations, but of a new constitution so far as you and I are concerned. We are constituted anew, with an entirely new set of capacities which make possible things which were never possible before. It ought to be recognised — and I would have you lay this to heart anew — that the child of God, the member of the Kingdom of Heaven, is the embodiment of a miracle, which means that there are supernatural possibilities and capacities in every such one. What tremendous things go on in the history of a child of God! When we see fully and clearly at last, we shall recognise them to have been nothing less than Divine miracles again and again. We do not know all the forces which are bent upon the destruction of a child of God, and how much his preserving through to the end represents an exercise of the almighty power of God. Some of us know a little about that: that our very survival is because God has exercised His power over other immense hostile powers, that we are kept by the power of God — and that it takes the power of God to keep us!

The inception of the life of the child of God is a miracle. 'How can a man be born again?' There is no answer to that question except that God does it. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). That is, how can the child of God be supported throughout, without anything here to help, to succour, to nourish? There is no answer to that either, except that God does it; and if He does not, the child of God, because of the extra forces centred upon him or her for destruction, will simply go under. The consummation of the life of the child of God will be equally a miracle. "How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come?" (I Corinthians 15:35). The answer to that is the same — God alone is going to do it.

The whole matter is a miracle from start to finish. It is a new constitution, having in it possibilities and capacities which are altogether above and beyond the highest level of human abilities; that is, above and over the whole kingdom of earth and nature.

(d) A New Vocation

Further, it is a new vocation. It is something for which to live, something in which to serve, something to bring into operation. It becomes the sphere and the means of a new life-ministry and purpose. The very consciousness of a truly born-again child of God is like this — 'Now I know why I am alive! I have been wondering

all along why I was born; I have grumbled about it, and felt I was hardly done by in being brought into this world without being consulted as to whether I wanted to come; but now I see there is purpose in it — I have something to live for!’ A truly born-again child of God goes off and tells people that, after all, it is worth being alive! He has discovered, behind everything else, that which has Divine intent and meaning — it never existed as an active thing until he was born anew and entered into the Kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven is a new vocation, a new sense of life-purpose. It gives to life a meaning. That is the Kingdom.

Is that not altogether a different idea from that which would make the Kingdom a place with certain laws and regulations — ‘You must’ and ‘You must not’ — something objective? “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21), and it is after this kind.

(e) A New Gravitation — To Heaven, Not Earth

It is moreover something from above, and that surely implies that it is transcendent in every way. It is something that lives, and it brings life up on to a higher level. That is, if the new life comes from above, from heaven, it will always gravitate back to its source, and if this new life works in us, it will be lifting us, pulling us upward to God. It will so work that we shall feel first of all that this world is not our home. It was our home; everything for us was here until that happened; we saw nothing beyond. Now we do not belong to it, we belong somewhere else; and in some strange way we are steadily moving further and further away from this earth. We find that we become less comfortable here every day. You are in the Kingdom if you have something like that experience. If you can be comfortable and happy and content to go on here you ought to have grave doubts as to where you are as regards the Kingdom. But if you are increasingly conscious that inwardly the distance is growing between you and all that is here, then the Kingdom is truly at work, the Kingdom of Heaven has come.

THE KINGDOM COME BUT ALSO COMING

Now, another thing: the Kingdom has come, but it is always coming. We have entered, but we ought to be always entering. There is a little word at the end of the letter to the Hebrews — “Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken...” (Hebrews 12:28). The literal sense there is — “being in the course or process of receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken...” It has come, but it is coming; and it is at that point that I think we all need to recognise a difference, to discriminate between two things — between conversion and salvation.

Have you ever made that distinction? There is all the difference between conversion and salvation. Conversion is a crisis, something that happens perhaps suddenly, in a moment, and it is done. Salvation? That is something that has commenced; but you find also that the New Testament speaks about “receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:9), thus indicating that salvation is still future. Some people have built a false doctrine upon this, teaching that you cannot know you are saved until you are at the end, because it is spoken of in the future tense. But we are saved, and we are being saved. We have entered the Kingdom by conversion, but salvation is a far greater thing than conversion. Oh, salvation is a vast thing, and is only another word for the Kingdom — the Kingdom coming all the time. A spiritual babe who has just received Divine life has not got everything, except potentially. It has conversion, it has new birth. Would you say that a little babe has everything it is intended to have? Potentially, in the life, all is there. But how much more there is to be known of what that life implies, of all that it carries with it and may lead to, of all the capacities that are there!

That is the difference between conversion and salvation. The Kingdom is a vast kingdom — “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom” (Daniel 4:3). “Of the increase of his government... there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:7). ‘No end’ simply means eternally expansive. Can you make just a geographical matter of that? Surely not. It must be spiritual — the vast inexhaustible resources of God for His own people. It will take eternity to know and to explore all those resources, the dimensions of His Kingdom.

THE KINGDOM SUFFERS VIOLENCE

Now, having in a very imperfect way considered what the prophets were talking about and what you and I have come into touch with, let us see what can be missed. Let us look at these other words: “The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and every man entereth violently into it” (Luke 16:16). “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force” (Matthew 11:12). It “suffereth violence.” That does not simply mean that it permits of violence. It really means that it calls for violence, and it is men of violence that take it by force. Luke puts it “entereth violently”.

Here is the spirit of citizenship in that Kingdom — “by force”. Why? This is not merely an appeal to be in earnest — though it certainly includes that, seeing what a tremendous thing this Kingdom is, and what an immense loss will be suffered if we do not take it seriously. But you see, the Lord Jesus is speaking as in the midst of things which are constantly opposing. There is a whole organized system, expressing tremendous prejudice. He said to them on one occasion: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter” (Matthew 23:13). There is everything, from devil and men, to obstruct; to enter in requires violence. If you can be hindered, you will be hindered. If you are going to be easy-going, you will give to antagonistic forces all the ground that they want to put you out.

That is why I pointed out that it is not only a once-for-all entering into the Kingdom, but it is a continuous entering. The Kingdom is so much bigger than conversion. Of course, if you are going to be saved at all — I mean saved initially — you will have to mean business for that. You will have to make it a desperate matter, because there will be everything to stop you. But the Kingdom means a very great deal more than merely getting into it, far more than being converted. There is a great deal more in the purpose of God for our lives than we have ever imagined, and if we are to enter into that, violence has to characterize us. We must desperately mean business, and come to the place where we say: ‘Lord, I am set upon all that Thou dost mean in Christ. I am set upon that, and I am not going to allow other people’s prejudices or suspicions or criticisms to get in the way; I am not going to allow any man-made system to hinder me; I am going right on with Thee for all Thy purpose. I am going to do violence to everything that would get in the way.’ It calls for violence, and we have to do a lot of violence to get all that God wills for us.

Oh, how easily many lives are side-tracked, simply because they are not desperate enough! They are caught in things which limit — things which may be good, that may have something of God in them, but which none the less are limiting things, and do not represent a wide open way to all God’s purpose. The only way for us to come into all that the Lord means — not only into what we have seen but into all that He has purposed — is to be desperate, to be men of violence; to be men who say, ‘By God’s grace, nothing and no one, however good, is going to stand in my way; I am going on with God.’ Have that position with the Lord, and you will find that God meets you on that ground.

No men — not even Paul himself — knew all that they were going to know. Paul was constantly getting fuller unveilings of that unto which he was called. He received something fairly strong and rich at the beginning; then, later, he was shown unspeakable things (II Corinthians 12:4). He was growing in apprehension. But why? Because he was a man of violence. God meets us like that. “With the perverse thou wilt shew thyself froward” (Psalm 18:26). That, in principle, means that God will be to you what you are to Him. He will mean business if you mean business. There is a vast amount in the Kingdom that we have never suspected. Do believe that. There is more for all of us to know than anybody on this earth knows — far more than the very greatest saints, the most advanced Christians, know of the purpose of God.

Paul intimates that. In his Philippian letter he makes it clear that, even at the end of his life, he has yet to apprehend, he needs still to know. “That I may know...” (Philippians 3:10). There is far more to know. Do you believe that? Are you going to allow your life simply to be boxed up within the measure that you know, or within the measure of other people? No — it is the measure of Christ that is God’s end. “Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). No movement, no society, no evangelical organization, no church on this earth has come to that yet, but that is the objective in view. But God requires, in order to bring us to fullness, that we be men of violence, that we really mean business, that we say to everything that gets in the way — and oh, the plausible voices, which nevertheless are subtly influenced by prejudices! — ‘Stand thou aside: I am going on with God, I am going to allow nothing to stand in the way.’

“The gospel of the kingdom is preached.” Can you imagine those Judaizers speaking to the people about Jesus? ‘Be careful; mind you don’t get caught! Our advice to you is to steer clear of that — don’t get into too close touch with Him!’ All that was going on. Paul was up against it all the time. He was tracked down throughout his journeys by these very people who, following on his heels, said, ‘Be careful — it is dangerous!’ The Lord Himself experienced the same kind of thing; and He said: “the kingdom... suffereth violence.” It calls for violence; you will not get in to begin with, and you will certainly not get in in growing fullness, unless you are one of those people who do violence to everything that stands in the way of God’s full purpose as revealed in Christ. You will not even know what that purpose is, God will not be able to reveal to you the next part of it, unless He finds that you are one after this kind — entering in violently.

Are you like that? Well, if we are passive, there is everything to be lost; if we mean business, there is everything to be gained. The Lord make us men and women like that, lest we be numbered among those of whom it is said that they “have ears to hear, and hear not” (Ezekiel 12:2).

Chapter Seven

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE OLD DISPENSATION AND THE NEW

“For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him” (Acts 13:27).

In a way, that verse is the key to the whole of the book of the Acts, for this book is really an interpretation and exhibition of the principle that is at the heart of that statement — that is, that there is the Bible with its verbal statements, its record of utterances and activities of God through men, and it can be read and re-read for a lifetime, as it was in the case of the people referred to here, and yet the real significance may be missed. In other words, there is in it something more than the actual verbal statements. You may have the statements, the letter, the volume, the whole record, and you may know it as such, as these Jewish rulers did, and yet you may be missing the way, you may be moving on a plane altogether other than that which God in-

tended. This book of the Acts, from beginning to end, shows that there was something more in the mind of God when He inspired men of old to speak and to write than is discernible in the actual words which they used, and which requires the activity of the Spirit of God if it is to be heard and grasped and understood, and if it is going to work out as things worked out in this book — in power, in effectiveness.

There is much of the Old Testament in the book of the Acts, and in the New Testament as a whole. The prophets are very much quoted, but see the difference between the effect of the words as used in the book of the Acts and the effect upon those who merely heard or read the actual utterances of the prophets. The Holy Ghost has come; and He is not making another Bible, He is using the old one; but it is a new book with a new meaning and a new effect, and you are amazed at times at the way in which He uses Scripture. You never saw that it meant that; it is something altogether beyond a former apprehension, although you knew that Scripture quite well in a way. There is a difference, and it is a crucial one.

So these people in Jerusalem and their rulers heard every Sabbath the prophets, but failed to hear their voice. They missed something — the voice of God coming through, the meaning of God in what was being said, as distinct from the mere statements. It is possible for a company to be gathered together and for one to be speaking the word of the Lord, and for some merely to hear the words and go away and say, 'He said so and so,' repeating what was actually said in verbal statements. It is at the same time possible for others to say, 'I never saw it like that before; I knew that passage of Scripture, but I never saw that!' Something, not only of a fresh recognition but of living value, has been detected. That is the difference between the words of the prophets and the voice of God through the words of the prophets.

So, as I have said, this verse in chapter 13 is, in a way, a key to this whole book. It makes this discrimination, which is so very important, between the letter and the spirit, between the statements and the Divine meaning in the statements. One is death and gets nowhere. The other is life and goes right through.

ALL PROPHECY POINTS TO THE LORD JESUS

Let us now glance at the book of the Acts. We go right back to the first chapter with this principle in mind. It might be well for us to be reminded, in parenthesis, that, speaking broadly, the whole Bible (but for a few verses) closes upon a comprehensive statement about this very matter. In Revelation 14:10, we are told that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." What does that mean? It simply means this — that all the way through the Bible, from the beginning onward, there has been a predictive element in this sense, an element of implication, something implied beyond the actual words said at the time. In it all there has been a pointer onward. It may be an historic incident, something quite local and immediate in itself as to time, place and persons concerned, but in no part of the Bible is only the local and present in view. There is something more — there is an implication, there is a pointer onward; and if you could see where all these pointers point to, you would find it was Jesus. He is implied in everything, everywhere.

When we speak of prophecy, do not let us limit our thoughts to certain times and certain men of the Old Testament. True, we have been, and are very often, occupied with the prophets whose books are included in the 'prophetic' section of the Old Testament, but we have to expand beyond that. Moses was called a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15), and Samuel was a prophet (1 Samuel 3:20), and even David in the New Testament is called a prophet (Acts 2:30). The spirit of prophecy embraces more than a certain class of men whom we designate prophets. The spirit of prophecy goes right back, as far back as Enoch; no, further back than that — to Genesis 3:15, concerning the seed of the woman: that is the spirit of Prophecy. So, if we remember that prophecy is something so far-reaching and all-inclusive, and bearing upon the Lord Jesus, I hope we are able to see something of Divine meaning as being more than verbal statement.

With that parenthesis, let us come to the first chapter of the Acts.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HIDDEN MEANING IN THE SCRIPTURES

"They therefore, when they were come together, asked him saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

We pointed out in a previous chapter how much the prophets were occupied with this matter of the Kingdom. These disciples of the Lord Jesus had their whole idea of the Kingdom from the prophets, and so their question is based upon a certain kind of mental apprehension of the teaching of the prophets. They had deduced certain things from what the prophets said, and they bring this question even at this late hour — "Dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know times and seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had said these things, as they were looking," — He restored the Kingdom, ascended His throne? No — "he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:6-9).

Everything begins there in the way of spiritual understanding, because this statement of the Lord Jesus indicated that a new dispensation was being inaugurated which was different from that which the disciples had expected from the teaching of the prophets. This was the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and they were going to discover that the Holy Spirit had meanings about the Old Testament prophecies which they had never imagined were there. Not until the Holy Spirit took hold of the Word of God did they know the prophets at all. And then we shall see that when He really took hold of the Scriptures and began to apply them and open

them up and give the Divine meaning, things happened which not only were unexpected but were utterly contrary and opposed to the fixed mentality of the disciples, and which required a complete shattering of their mentality, the abandonment of established positions on their part. It is tremendously challenging if the Holy Spirit gets hold of the Word of God and then gets hold of us. There are going to be revolutionary changes in our whole outlook and procedure, and this book of the Acts is just full of that.

THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT — A NEW ORDER INTRODUCED

It is the dispensation, or stewardship, of the Holy Ghost. The words 'dispensation' and 'stewardship' mean an economy, an order; how things are done in this regime. We find that, in this dispensation, when the Holy Spirit came, He began to change things, because He was in charge. You may become a member of the staff of a business, and when you arrive you find things are done in such and such a way. Times are set and fixed like this; this is how things are done in this regime. And then a new Managing Director arrives, and he sees this prevailing order, and he registers at once that it is an imperfect system, that it is not producing the fullest results for which the business exists. He begins quietly but very strongly to take charge, and things begin to change, and the old set people who have been in that regime for years do not like these changes, and they begin to kick. They will not have it; they revolt and begin to fight against this new order. Some, who are more open-spirited, who are not so fixed and settled, begin to see his mind, his vision, and although they stumble on difficulties from time to time, and come up against the implications of this tremendous change — like Peter, over the visit to Cornelius (Acts 10) — and it wants just a little battle to get over the old prejudice, nevertheless, they have their battle, get over their difficulties, and fall into line, and so the great change takes place with wonderful results. Things begin to happen; the original purpose of the business is now beginning, in a wonderful way, to be realised and fulfilled.

That is exactly what happened when the Holy Spirit came in on the day of Pentecost. There was an existing, fixed, established order, but it was not reaching God's end. It was not, as we say, 'delivering the goods'. The Holy Ghost came, with all the full knowledge of the Divine mind; He entered in and began His work of realising the real Divine concept; He took hold. So He divided the people. Some — these that dwelt in Jerusalem, and their rulers — would not have the new order. Well, all right — they lose it all. But others came into the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, "joined unto the Lord... one spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:17), with wonderful results.

A VITAL CONTRAST — THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT OF SCRIPTURE

The point is: first of all, it is a new dispensation; and next, the Holy Ghost is in charge. His being in charge has to be recognised, with all that it means. And, being in charge, by His activities He reveals and evolves the very object of God from all eternity, and seeks to bring it out in this dispensation. As for the cleavage — well, it was an historic cleavage then, but it is a cleavage which spiritually has been going on all through the dispensation. It is a dividing between men of the letter and men of the spirit.

That movement, that tendency, toward a fixed position is constantly recurring, bringing that which is of God into imprisonment, within organized limitations which frustrate the whole counsel of God. I have an article before me — I wish I could quote it all; I cannot — but there are some things in it which express what is in my heart better than anything that I could say myself. It was written by a Member of the British Parliament.

'There are many classifications into which men and women may be divided — as upper, middle or lower class; rich, well-to-do and poor; religious, sceptical and atheist; ... and so forth and so on. But, as I think, the only categorization which really matters is that which divides men as between the Servants of the Spirit and the Prisoners of the Organization. That classification, which cuts right across all other classifications, is indeed the fundamental one. The idea, the inspiration, originates in the internal world, the world of the Spirit... the idea having embodied itself in the organization, the organization then proceeds gradually to slay the idea which gave it birth. In the field of religion a prophet, an inspired man, will see a vision of truth. He expresses that vision as best he may in words. Upon what his disciples understand of the prophet's message, an organization, a church, will be built. The half-understood message will crystallize into a creed. Before long the principle concern of the church will be to sustain itself as an organization. To this end any departure from the creed must be controverted and, if necessary, suppressed as heresy. In a few score or a few hundred years what was conceived as a vehicle of a new and higher truth has become a prison for the souls of men. And men are murdering each other for the love of God.

'One moral to be drawn, it would not be wholly facetious to suggest, might be that the first rule for any organization should be a rule providing for its dissolution within a limited period of time... When we are members of an organization, as such, our attitude to it should be one of partial detachment. We must be above it even while we are in it. We should reckon on being in almost perpetual rebellion within it. Above all we should regard all loyalties to organization as tentative and provisional. We must be Servants of the Spirit, not Prisoners of the Organization. We must keep in touch with the sources of life, not lose ourselves in the temporary vehicles.'

'This world is a bridge. Ye shall pass over it, but ye shall build no houses upon it.'

Is that not just what you have in the Acts and all the way through — the crystallizing of our apprehension of truth, our interpretation, the partial perception, the statement in the letter, something fixed, embodying that which was of the Spirit of God in the beginning, but not allowing it to go beyond those bounds now? Any-

thing more, anything other than that, is called heresy; this is the last word. It may be embodied in an organization, in what is called a church, a sect, a denomination, and if you go beyond that, well, you are said to be all wrong. The great difference between men of the organization and men of the Spirit is what you have here in the Book of the Acts.

THE LORDSHIP OF THE SPIRIT ESSENTIAL TO PROGRESS

The point is this: the fullness of Divine purpose demands that the Holy Spirit be continually in charge, that He be allowed to be completely in the place of government, and that we do not put anything in His place — nothing whatsoever; not a ‘church’, not a fixed order — so that at any point or in any way we could say, ‘That is not what we teach, that is not what we have been brought up to believe, that is not what our church believes and teaches.’ To do that is to put something in the way of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost must be in charge and must be free. It was on those very points that the Apostles themselves had firstly their battles and then their enlargements. We shall see that as we go on. The full Divine purpose is going to take shape when the Holy Spirit is in charge with us.

And then there is something infinitely greater than times and seasons. Be careful about times and seasons; they have a wonderful and pernicious way of bringing you into limitations. Many people are dwelling in times and seasons. But they have done that all the way through the centuries. Let us watch, observe, take note; but be careful. Things have been happening, for example, in Palestine. We were told that the times of the Gentiles ended when General Allenby entered Jerusalem; that a new Caesar had arrived to reconstitute the Roman Empire when Mussolini set up his great empire in Rome! That sort of thing has been going on for centuries, and it is all based upon times and seasons.

The point is this — not that there are no times and seasons, not that there are not movements in the plan of God which have their particular characteristics and can be noted, but that there is something infinitely greater than that. It is the heavenly and not the earthly aspect that is in view in the Book of the Acts. That is why I stayed at that point — “When he had said these things... he was taken up”. From that point it became a heavenly matter. Later the apostle Paul will use a phrase like this: “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (I Corinthians 2:10). “The Spirit searcheth... the deep things of God”: that is something transcendently greater than times and seasons; and if the Holy Spirit really is in charge, there is no fathoming what God has to reveal. “Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man.” It is out there, into that vast realm, that the Holy Spirit would bring us, and we must be very careful that we do not clamp down on the Holy Spirit with man-made, man-constituted institutions. We must keep out in the open with the Spirit, and it is there that our surprises will begin — yes, and our very real discipline.

THE PROPHETS’ ULTIMATE MEANING SPIRITUAL AND HEAVENLY

Those referred to in Acts 13:27, or those of whom they were typical, had a kind of apprehension of the Scriptures. There was no doubt at all about their devotion to the Word of God. They were fundamentalists of a rabid kind, as far as the inspiration of the Scriptures was concerned. They stickled for the Scriptures; they dotted all the ‘i’s and crossed all the ‘t’s. Many among them were particular about the smallest detail in the realm of outward observances, even to the point of fussy fastidiousness. Because the law ordained that a tithe of all the fruit of the land was the Lord’s, they tithed meticulously even their mint and other herbs — but at the same time over-looked the things that were inward and which mattered much more to the Lord, such as judgment, mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23). That was their apprehension, their mentality, their position. They saw everything on the horizontal. It was a matter of the exact technique of Scripture.

What was the result? Well, they were perpetuating an earthly system with the Word of God. Their ‘church’ was the ‘church of Israel’, the ‘Israelitish church’ — and you can put in the place of Israel any other denominational title that you like. That church had its own particular forms, its vestments, its ritual, its liturgy, and all according to the Scriptures. It had its reading of the prophets every Sabbath. It had the whole system; but it was right down here on this earth and as dead as anything could be. It was purely formal; it was not getting through to God’s end at all. Scriptural, in a sense, though it was, it was failing to realise the eternal counsels of God. When the Holy Ghost came, He did not sweep away the prophets, the Old Testament. He took them up and showed that there was something more — something more than all that earthly, perfect technique of the Word of God, with all its accompaniments — without which all that other would have to be set aside. And it is going to be set aside. It fails to reach God’s end, therefore it passes out; and that is the issue of the Book of the Acts — the great transition. There is a Divine meaning back of all that, and when you have the Divine meaning, you can dispense with the other — it can go. If you have the thing in the really spiritual sense and realm, in the living and heavenly way, it does not matter about the other; that just drops out and falls away.

That is what happened in the Book of the Acts. You can hardly see the point at which it happened, but there is such a point. The Apostles did go on attending the temple and the synagogues for a little while, and then they ceased to do so. They were continuing for a time, but then it was as though they were steadily, quietly, moving out, and eventually they were out. Something had happened. They had come into the real thing and the initial thing had gone. The one led to the other, but it had served its purpose. They came into the heavenly good and meaning of it all; it was not a matter of technique now.

There are many who will say about the fixed orders and rituals: ‘Of course, we do not regard this as everything; it is only symbolic. We do remember that it implies and points to something else, and it is that something else we are thinking of.’ Yes, but is it not true that, when the Holy Ghost comes, as He came then, and

gets possession, and you go on with Him, more and more the emphasis of the merely outward and earthly and temporal aspects of Christianity fade away, and you become increasingly occupied with the glory of the reality? The Jesus of history gives full place to the Jesus of the Spirit, of heaven. That is exactly what is meant by “the voices of the prophets”.

So, on the day of Pentecost, you start with Joel. Everybody in Jerusalem was saying, “What meaneth this?” (Acts 2:12). They were all bewildered, without any understanding or perception; and Peter, with the eleven, stood up and said: “This is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel” (vs. 16). “This is that...” What a crushing blow it was to tradition, what an upheaval it created in Israel, this — with its implications of Jesus of Nazareth! And the Apostle went on, quoting freely from the Old Testament. He quoted David. That sermon of his on the day of Pentecost was just full of Old Testament quotations. But who ever saw that — who ever knew that that was the meaning of it!

You see the point. It is something that really needs to come to us with tremendous force, because even New Testament Christianity can be reduced again to an earthly system of exact technique. You can write your manuals on New Testament procedure. You can have it exactly according to the letter — but it is all on the horizontal, it becomes legalistic, it ties up the Holy Ghost. Although the intention may have been to be more exactly according to Scripture, that the Lord might have a fuller way, it does not always result in that. The whole thing must be baptized in the Holy Ghost and lifted clean off the earthly level, becoming something entirely heavenly.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO YIELD TO THE SPIRIT

Now I think we can rightly say that, when the disciples asked, “Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”, they were seriously and genuinely exercised. The Scriptures must be fulfilled; what was written must happen. I think the disciples were very much occupied with this, burdened and perplexed; they wanted to know how things were going to work out. The Lord said, in effect: ‘Do not worry about that. The Holy Ghost is coming and He will take all responsibility for everything — times and seasons and everything else. He is coming with the whole purpose of God in His hands, and He will work it out. You can be at rest — it is all right.’ Those who get this earthly idea and conception of a system become terribly worried and burdened to work it out — burdened with the awful responsibility of this ‘New Testament Church’, of having things exactly as the Scriptures say! If the Holy Ghost were in charge, the burden would go. He is doing it. All that we are called upon to do is to get into the hands of the Holy Spirit, get completely free from all this harness, free to the Spirit of God. Matters will work out all right.

And even if the Holy Spirit comes up against some stones in us and for a time there is some conflict, He is more than equal to that situation. He is more than equal to Peter and his never having eaten anything unclean. When the Lord gave Peter that vision of the sheet let down with all manner of fourfooted beasts and creeping things and said, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat”, Peter in effect quoted Scripture to the Lord; he quoted Leviticus 11, with its commandments concerning the unclean beasts which must not be eaten. ‘Lord, here is Scripture for my position; my position is soundly founded upon the Word of God!’ What are you going to do with that? Now, listen — I am not saying nor even implying that the Holy Ghost will ever call upon us to do something contrary to the Scriptures. He never will. But He will very often show us that the Scriptures mean something that we never saw them to mean. Leviticus 11 had a meaning that Peter had not seen. He had taken the letter and the literal meaning of those things. He never saw the Divine, spiritual meaning at the back of that. Cornelius had never received the Holy Spirit, and therefore an angel spoke to him. Peter had received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and it was the Spirit who was speaking to Peter. The Holy Ghost had this matter in hand, and was dealing with the difficulties in Peter, even in his fundamentalism, to lift him off a merely temporal, earthly ground to a heavenly. Peter was living under an open heaven; and there are tremendous changes when you get there. It does not all happen at once.

THE HOLY SPIRIT ‘UPON’ AND ‘IN’

Just one further word for the present. You notice here that there was a double operation of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 2, the Spirit lighted ‘upon’ them. These cloven tongues as of fire sat upon them; and then it says, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” ‘Upon’ and ‘in’. I do not want to be technical, contradicting what we have been saying about too much technique, but there is a meaning in the ‘upon’ and the ‘in’. The coming ‘upon’ is the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in relation to God’s eternal purpose. That is, the Holy Spirit has come as the custodian and administrator of the eternal counsels of God, of the purpose of God from eternity, and, coming like that, He imposes (I trust that it is not the wrong word to use) the purpose of God upon the vessel. He gathers the vessel into the purpose in a sovereign way. It is as though He circled around and took charge of the vessel in an outward way and said, ‘This is the vessel of the eternal purpose of God.’ He takes charge of it, comes ‘upon’ for that.

But then He entered ‘in’ also, and they were filled, and this had a further meaning. It meant this, that the inward life of the vessel must correspond to the outward purpose. That is tremendous. You see, the old dispensation was not like that, and this is the problem that the prophets were dealing with all the time. The outward form was there. Israel had their temple, they were offering their sacrifices, they were going through all the ritual, but their inward life was far from corresponding to that. God had to say, through the prophets, ‘Away with your sacrifices — I do not want them!’ (cf. Isaiah 1:10–14). The Lord Jesus took that up. “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices

for sin thou hadst no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:5-7).

Formalism never does the will of God; merely external system, however much it corresponds to the technique of the letter, never does the will of God; and the Holy Ghost was having none of that. He did not come in sovereignty to take up a lot of new people in a new dispensation, and give them forms and order, and make them do things in such and such a manner, merely in an outward way. He was going to have the inner life of the Church corresponding to the purpose. You find before long that He very severely comes upon anything that does not correspond. Ananias and Sapphira will know you cannot carry on in an outward way, pretending all is right. The Holy Ghost has seen inside the contradiction, and is not allowing it to pass.

Many want the coming 'upon' because they want to feel the power, feel themselves taken up, manipulated and moved. There has been a great deal of that sort of thing, which has not carried with it an inward correspondence. But the Lord's end can never be reached fully while there is any lack of true consistency between the purpose of God and the life of the people called to that purpose. "I... beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (Ephesians 4:1). Oh, I do beg of you to have continuous dealings with God on this matter of the indwelling Spirit — not just for purposes of service, or power, but for purposes of life.

One of the tragedies of many Christians and many servants of God is this, that they can believe and give expression to things which are positively false, and propagate those things and do harm to other Christians by propagating them, and yet the Holy Ghost never seems to be able to make them aware that they are not telling the truth. I do not mean in Bible teaching, but in relation to other servants of God, and other work that God is doing. The solemn fact that there are such prejudices, suspicions, criticisms, misrepresentations, and so on, ought to drive us to the Lord with earnest appeal — 'Oh, Lord, it is no good my being engaged in Thy work, doing a lot of things for Thee, being prominent among men, perhaps, and well known for my Christian service, if yet, after all, the Holy Ghost cannot correct me within, put me right, give me a bad time when I say something not true. Save me from saying anything that does not correspond with the truth, or of which my inward life is a contradiction.' The Spirit within is to adjust us to the purpose of God. If we habitually, constantly, fall into ways which are not according to the Spirit, so that we become known for that kind of unpleasantness, we had better ask the Holy Spirit to do a deeper work in us. It is no use our having the deep things of God, while people know us as most difficult to get on with, always making life unpleasant for others. It will not do; it is a contradiction of the indwelling Spirit. He does not want us to have the system of things merely outwardly. We must have the inner life to correspond.

So we see that He came 'upon' to possess for the purpose of God, and He came 'within' to see that everything in the inner life corresponded to that purpose.

Chapter Eight

THE CRY OF THE PROPHETS FOR HOLINESS

"For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him" (Acts 13:27).

We were taking note, in our last chapter, of a contrast which is marked between the old dispensation and the new: of how much there is to be missed if there is a continuing in the fixed order of the old, and how much there is to be gained by moving into the essential nature of the new. This is found focused for us in the passage we have read.

Without repeating too much of our previous meditation, may I just say that it is perfectly clear in the New Testament, from the Book of the Acts onwards, that the people in the new dispensation, the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, were required to keep completely free from everything set, from everything of a conclusive position, excepting fundamental facts of the faith. So far as their mentality was concerned — yes, their religious, traditional mentality, the mentality which had been formed by their very birth into Israel, by all that they had received through training and teaching from their infancy upward — they were to be always open to the Lord even for the revolutionary. They were called upon to come into a place where that no longer held them, but where the Lord was perfectly free to do the revolutionary thing in them and make them revise all their thinking — in the light, not of anything contradictory, but of God's fuller meaning in all that they knew of the Word of God; where they acknowledged that the Lord really had 'more light and truth to break forth from His Word' — indeed, so much more as to make all that they already knew seem as nothing.

You find, therefore, that this necessity precipitated crises in their spiritual course, and sometimes brought them to a standstill, where a tremendous conflict was set up; but the Holy Spirit was sufficiently in possession to win, and to be able to carry them further. That happened with Peter, on the housetop at Joppa. It happened with Saul of Tarsus. There is no doubt about it that, in acting as he did, Saul was acting upon the basis of the Old Testament Scriptures. He thought he had the full support of the Word of God for what he was doing. When he met Jesus of Nazareth out from heaven as he went to Damascus, although he capitulated there and then and acknowledged Jesus as his Lord, his great problem was, 'How am I going to reconcile my Old Testament with this?' He went away into Arabia, and probably for two years he was occupied there with the reconciliation of the Old Testament with the fact of Jesus as Christ and Lord. And he got well through, came back

from his desert, and, caught in the resistless stream of the Spirit, became a mighty servant of God.

We want to go on a little further now. We are saying that here, in this new dispensation as represented in the Book of the Acts, the prophets are being re-interpreted, or their inner meaning is being brought to light, with all that that inner meaning implies. We know that the inauguration of the dispensation on the day of Pentecost was accompanied by a quoting of the prophets. It began with Joel — “This is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16) — and went on with other Old Testament quotations pointing to that time. Now, either by direct citation or fulfilment (as clearly seen in the case of the Joel prophecy) or by an unmistakable implication, the prophets are here brought in in many connections.

CHRIST ALONE THE MEASURE OF WHAT IS OF GOD

You pass from chapter 2 of the Book of the Acts, and go on to chapter 5 — the very terrible, dark story of Ananias and Sapphira. Where did the prophets come in in that?

In the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel, you have what was introduced spiritually on the day of Pentecost. There you have that wonderful, though difficult, vision of the living creatures, the wheels full of eyes, the Spirit in the wheels, the Spirit of life going, always going: the Spirit, life, eyes, and the irresistible movement from heaven in relation to the Man upon the throne. “Acts” begins there. The Lord Jesus was received up, out of this world; and in relation to that Man in the throne there is this going on here, touching the earth and yet detached from it; touching, but not fixed here; a heavenly thing. And that is moving with tremendous directness and deliberation. That is like the second chapter of “Acts”. The Man in the throne; the wheels, the eternal counsels of God, the goings of God from eternity; the living creatures, the Church; the life within, the Spirit of life there, with His perfect vision — “full of eyes”. Is that not what is here?

Yes; but that is the beginning of “Ezekiel”. At the other end of his prophecy you have this — away, up from the earth — a vision, a picture, of a temple, a spiritual house, very fully depicted and defined, with every detail marked. The man who leads the prophet round goes measuring, measuring, giving the measure of every detail. This house is all of the Holy Ghost. It is all a measure of Christ, in every part. This thing is not on the earth; it is heavenly measurement. Before you can have the river issuing from the sanctuary, flowing on in increasing volume, deepening and widening, making everything on its banks to live, and swallowing up death in victory as it proceeds, you have to have the house utterly according to God; and then the one overall statement about it is: “the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy” (Ezekiel 43:12). It is all of God; it is all of Christ, His risen, exalted Son. It is out from Him, through a Church constituted on a heavenly pattern, that the life flows; and it is flowing here in “Acts”.

HOLINESS THE LAW OF WHAT IS OF GOD

Now Ananias and his wife violate the very governing law of that house — holiness; and what happens? That is where Israel failed to hear the voices of the prophets. We said, in our previous meditation, that they carried on the external formalities of the temple, the daily services, the ritual and the liturgy, adopted the forms and the vestments, but the inner life did not correspond. It was the cry of the prophets that a system was being maintained and preserved out of relation to the inner life of the people. The prophets throughout are crying for holiness. The trouble lay there. And what does this matter of holiness really mean? When you really get to the heart of it, what is it? “Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (Acts 5:3). That is the unholiness. The act of Ananias and Sapphira implies something deeper — that sinister mind behind; Satan finding an opportunity of getting into these holy precincts, this heavenly realm, corrupting and polluting, and establishing his lie. “He is a liar, and the father thereof”, said the Lord (John 8:44). A lie right in the presence of the Holy Ghost! The life of the Spirit and the Spirit of life do not just go on ignoring conditions. They require that first of all everything shall be constituted on God’s heavenly pattern; that is only saying, constituted on the pattern of Christ His Son; that it shall be really an expression and representation of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

THE SPIRIT SPONTANEOUSLY REPRODUCES THE NATURE OF CHRIST

Now, I am not going back behind what I said earlier. I am not saying that we must take the Bible in its letter and phrases and make a mould, a scriptural mould, which we think is the New Testament order. That is not the point at all. Development did not come about in the beginning in that way. Every fresh reproduction of the Church, in any part of the Roman Empire or beyond, in the days of the Apostles, came about, not by taking thither a fixed mould and trying to pour people into that mould and to reproduce the shape of things that existed somewhere else. It began with life — life from heaven — “the Holy Ghost sent forth from heaven” (1 Peter 1:12). And wherever the believers went, two things were imperative: firstly, baptism, as a testimony to the fact that an old order was finished, and that everything now had to have as new a beginning as anybody must have who has died and been buried; and secondly, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of life, coming to take up residence within those concerned.

When the Holy Spirit comes in and has His way, He relieves you of all the responsibility of New Testament order; you have no more burden and responsibility about that than a tree has in producing leaves and fruit. No tree ever spends hours and hours worrying and fretting, ‘How can I bring forth some leaves? how can I develop my fruit?’ It just lives — it yields to the life process; and the rest happens. That was the glorious spontaneity of New Testament churches — they just came about. And the Lord must have them like that — constituted from heaven by the Holy Ghost; not man bringing his form of church and church government, his

mould, his conception of things, and saying, 'This is our conception of a Bible church.' No, it is the product of life. As that Spirit of life was allowed to work, things took a certain course and a certain form, and that was the form of Christ. The Holy Spirit took responsibility. "I will build my church", the Lord Jesus had said (Matthew 16:18), and He meant it; and He is found doing it here.

THE NATURE OF CHRIST IS UTTER HOLINESS

But remember: Christ, in the innermost expression of what He is, is very holy. "The holy thing which is begotten", said the angel to Mary, "shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35, A.R.V.). He "offered himself without blemish unto God" (Hebrews 9:14). He was "... in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Christ was and is without sin. He is infinitely holy. The great antagonist of Christ, that unholy one, is always seeking to destroy what is of Christ, by introducing a contradiction, a lie, giving the lie to the holiness of Christ; and that is what happened here.

I do feel that this is a very solemn matter for us all. I have not said this without a very great deal of exercise in my own heart. It is not an easy thing to say. Some of us are not ignorant of Satan's devices. Who has a right to talk about holiness? Who is sufficient in holiness to talk to other people about it? Holiness is what Christ is. Who of us could say we are like that?

THE SPIRIT ARRESTED BY CONSCIOUS UNHOLINESS

Unholiness is that which is not consistent with Christ. It is the opposite of what Christ is; it is a contradiction of Christ. The mighty purpose of God, the mighty course of the Spirit of God — all that has come in with this dispensation — can be suddenly brought under arrest, and a tragedy occur, if you or I knowingly dabble with unholiness. "His wife also being privy to it" (Acts 5:2) means that this was conscious. I am not speaking of the unholiness which is ours in general — though we are not going to condone or make light of it. What I am speaking about now is deliberate sin in the very presence of the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira deliberately planned to give to the Lord only a part of the proceeds of their sale, but to represent it as being the whole. If they had been really in the good of the regime of the Holy Spirit, they would have known the Spirit saying to them: 'That is not right — it is a contradiction of Christ.' And may we not confidently conclude that the Holy Spirit did warn them? Were there not two voices which, though perhaps not audible, yet spoke in them, the one warning from evil, the other suggesting this deceit — the voice of the Spirit and the voice of Satan? They were disposed to listen to the tempter's voice, and Satan 'filled their hearts'. That is the kind of unholiness we are speaking about.

We are in the dispensation of the Spirit. If we are really in the good of this dispensation, that is, if the Holy Spirit is in us, He will tell us — He does tell us. If we will, we can know the mind of the Spirit on all issues of right and wrong. But until we yield to the Spirit, everything is in suspense. The whole life of the Spirit is brought under arrest. The Lord was very positive in laying down the principles for the dispensation. He left us in no doubt as to what His attitude is toward this sort of thing. If He does not act in the same way every time, and if we do not fall down dead, it does not mean that something just as tragic does not take place in us. The Spirit is arrested, and spiritual death comes in, and there is no going on from that time. There is a sense in which, spiritually, we also are 'carried out'.

Yes, this is a solemn matter. Forgive me if I seem to be oppressive, but this matter of holiness is so very pertinent, and so very much bound up with all that we are seeking to see — all the wonderful meaning of the Spirit's being here and of His being able to go right on; life and fullness, growing depth, increasing vitality, ever fuller knowledge, the swallowing up of death in victory. That is to be the spiritual existence of the Church, but that can all be arrested by some unholiness, known to be such and not dealt with before God, repudiated and refused. Whatever that may mean to you in its particular application, remember that it is a very dangerous thing to have an unsettled controversy with the Holy Ghost — dangerous not only for you, but perhaps for many others who will be affected.

THE PERIL OF PERSISTING IN UNHOLINESS

Oh, the tragedy of a controversy with the Lord not cleared up! Surely, seeing the setting of a matter like this, we must face the specific things from the standpoint of the great background. You have not an adequate motive for dealing with particular points of outstanding unholiness unless you see this whole matter in its great setting. If it is merely something personal, relating only to us, we may or we may not feel it is worth clearing up. But look! The whole course of God's eternal counsels, coming down our way and gathering us in: the mighty purpose of God to be realised in and through us: the far-reaching range of those purposes of God which would find us as their vehicle and channel: all that God would do of making Himself known to us for the sake of others: all brought under arrest because of that! Yes, a personal ministry, a great ministry which might be very far-reaching, may all be set aside — the Lord, in keeping with His own nature, would have to set it aside — if there were a persistence in something about which He had spoken but which was not dealt with. It is a tremendous background.

The psalmist said: "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me" (Psalm 119:75). What did he mean? Evidently he had gone through some severe handling by the Lord, and as he looked at what his wrong involved for the Lord's people — how many were affected and how it touched the Lord's honour — he said: 'Only the faithfulness of God lies behind His dealing with me: He has to be faithful to Himself and faithful to me, and not let me off; and He has to be faithful to His own nature, His

own righteousness, because so much is bound up with it.' May the Lord show us just what that means, and give us grace. Oh, we need protecting, we need safeguarding in this matter of a holy walk with God; we need to clear up every controversy with Him because there is so much bound up with it.

We see that those that dwelt in Jerusalem, and their rulers and those whom they represented, would not clear up the controversy which God had with them, and they were set aside, and another nation bringing forth the fruits of the Kingdom was brought in. What a loss! And do you think that the Lord will deal with us differently? It may not be our salvation that will go, but surely our vocation is of some consequence! The Lord give us grace!

Chapter Nine

A RECAPITULATION

We have been seeing that in the dispensation of the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was operating as the Spirit of prophecy, making everything a prophecy. He was causing everything within the Divine economy to point onward, to imply something further, which was not clear to those who lived in those times and who were most closely connected with what was being done and said; and that comprehensive work of the Holy Spirit through those ages was all heading up to what would be the nature, character and purpose of the dispensation in which we live. This dispensation is marked by two outstanding features — two aspects of one thing. It is the dispensation, firstly, of Christ enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, and secondly, of the Holy Spirit here within the Church to make good all that that means. That prophetic activity was many-sided; that is, it pointed to various characteristics of the age which lay ahead; and we have been looking at some of those characteristics in the foregoing chapters.

So that now we start here. We have come to and are living in the dispensation of the spiritual fulfilment of what the prophets foretold; but that fulfilment is not merely and only objective, as in the history of the world or of the Church, in an outward way. That fulfilment is an inward thing, and moreover an inward thing so far as every member of Christ is concerned. It is something which must come down to the youngest. Please do not think that this is for older or more advanced Christians! It involves every one of us equally.

SPIRITUAL VISION

The first thing that the prophets were occupied with, and which has its fulfilment in an inward way in the members of Christ in this dispensation, is spiritual vision. Everything in the purpose of God, for its fulfilment and for our attainment unto it, rests firstly upon this — that the Holy Spirit has become to us the Spirit of revelation, and has made us to see, in its grand outline, what God is after. The details are filled in as we go on.

(a) The Faculty of Seeing

That has two sides. First of all, there is the faculty of seeing. The prophets had much to say about this. You know that, because of a certain prejudice on the part of the people of Israel, by which they were not disposed to see what God wanted them to see (because they had their own visions and ideas and were not ready for what God wanted), a double judgment was passed upon them, and the Lord closed their eyes. The word was given to Isaiah for this people: "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes" (Isaiah 6:9,10). That was a judgment, and a terrible one: the very faculty of spiritual sight, of vision, was neutralised. It was a terrible judgment, with terrible consequences; for, as we have seen, the ultimate consequence was that they lost all that God intended, and that was no small thing. It passed away from them. It was given to another nation — a heavenly nation. It is a terrible judgment to have a faculty of spiritual sight nullified; and if that is so, it must be a very great thing in the desire and grace and lovingkindness of the Lord that people should have such vision, such sight.

The faculty for seeing is a birthright of every child of God. Do not think that you have to live the Christian life for a long time, receive much teaching, and reach a certain advanced position, before you begin to see. It is a part of your very new birth. The Lord said to Nicodemus: "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). By implication He said, 'When you are born from above, you will see.' The commission to the Apostle Paul was: "... unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes" (Acts 26:17,18). The very symbolical work of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh, in opening the eyes of the blind, was pointing on to what was going to happen when He went above and the Holy Spirit came, and men saw. It is a part of your new birth to see. I am not saying that you will see all at once, that you will see all that those who have gone far on with the Lord are seeing; but the faculty of sight has been given to you. Are you using it? Do you know that it is just as true of your spiritual life as it is of your physical — that you have spiritual eyes, and that they have been opened? If not, get right down to the Lord about this, because something is wrong.

(b) The Object Seen

And not only the faculty, but the object, of sight; it is a part of the vision. There must be a faculty for seeing before there can be an object seen, but, having the faculty, you must have an object to see; and the object is — what? What was the thing that came to the perception, the recognition, of people, when the Holy Ghost came?

What did they begin to see? They began to see the significance of Jesus Christ, and there is one very familiar phrase which indicates what that is — “the eternal purpose”. They are one and the same thing — the significance of Christ, and God’s eternal purpose. The purpose of God from eternity is concerning His Son — the place that His Son holds in the very universe according to God’s mind; the tremendous comprehensiveness of Christ; the tremendous implications of the very being and existence of Christ; the tremendous consequences that are bound up with Jesus Christ. They did not see it all at once, but they began to see the Lord Jesus. They began to see that this was not just a man among men, not just the man of Galilee. No, He is infinitely greater than that, overwhelming. This mighty impact of a meaning about Jesus Christ is too big to hold, so great that you cannot grasp it. It is overwhelming and devastating. They began to see that; that was their vision. Out of that vision everything else came. Look at them and hear them, recognise what a new and great Christ they have found, what a significant Christ He is, how everything is bound up with Him. All destiny is centred in Him; He is the only consequence.

The prophets had dimly seen something. You will hear a prophet saying: “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Well, that prophet had begun to see something; and there are other things like that. It is but a beginning, but what they are saying is that this One is going to come into full view. ‘We are pointing on to Him’, they say, ‘looking on to the day when this One shall come right out into recognition.’ And this is that day; we are in the day of the prophets’ fulfilled vision.

These are not merely words, great ideas. It has to be true of you, even though it may be only at its beginnings, that the apprehension of Jesus Christ in your heart is tremendous, is overwhelming. He is your vision, and He has mastered you in the sense of His greatness. We shall never get through without vision. We shall break if we have no vision, or if our vision is arrested. If something interferes with the clearness, the fullness, of our vision, we shall begin to go round in circles, not knowing where we are. The vision will carry us on if it is kept clear and full. Have you got it? When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, this tremendous thing happened — they saw the Lord, and in seeing Him they began to be emancipated from everything that was other or less than He. Those who did not see, well, they began to pass out and either became nonentities in the spiritual realm or, because of their prejudices, enemies to those who saw. The instance in John 9 was fulfilled in a spiritual sense. The Lord opened the eyes of the man born blind. What happened? The others cast him out. Those who saw in the day of the Spirit’s coming were excommunicated by many who were prejudiced. They were cut off. There is always a price attached to seeing.

But that is not our subject now. Simply, what the Lord has been saying to us, in the first place, is that He desires to have, and must have — and therefore He can have — in this dispensation a people with their eyes open, a seeing people who have the faculty in themselves.

(c) Vision to be Personal and Increasing in Every Believer Now

the difference between the dispensations is just that. In the old dispensation everything had to be told to the people. They had to get it secondhand from someone else; it was never their own, it was not original. In the new dispensation of the Holy Spirit, the thing was in themselves; the root of the matter was in them. But Christianity has become very largely a system which has reverted to the level of the old dispensation. That is, so many Christians have their lives based upon addresses and sermons and going to meetings and being told by other people. How many Christians do you find today who are really living in the good of a throbbing, personal revelation of Jesus Christ? I do not think that is an improper question. The great need of our day is for the people of God to be re-established on the basis upon which the Church was founded in the beginning, a Holy Ghost basis; and the very beginning of that basis is this — not to have a lot of information given to Christians, but that the Christians should have the faculty of spiritual sight within them, should have the capacity for seeing, and should themselves be seeing. Can you say: ‘My eyes are open; I am seeing God’s eternal purpose, I am seeing the significance of Christ; I am seeing more and more as to the Lord Jesus’? Unless it is like that, we shall leave the Holy Ghost behind, and we shall have to turn round and go back to find Him where we left Him, because a life in the Holy Ghost right up to date is a life of continually increasing vision. Vision is absolutely essential, both as to faculty and as to object.

THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF THE CROSS

(a) Death — the Removal of What is of Man

Still recapitulating, we went on next to see that, in order to keep the faculty alive and the vision growing, the Holy Spirit has an instrument. He always works by an instrument, and that instrument is the Cross; that is, the principle of the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

This means, on the one side, the removal of everything that cannot come into the new Kingdom; getting rid of that which in God’s sight is dead and has to be put away — that is to say, the sum total of the self-life. Call it by other names if you like — the flesh, the natural life, the old Adam, and so on. I prefer this designation — the self-principle — because it is very comprehensive: whether it be the self-principle acting in the outward direction, in assertiveness, in imposition, where the self is the impact; or whether it act in the inward direction, drawing to self. Oh, how many aspects there are of the self-life in both these directions! We may know some of the more obvious ones, but are we not learning how deeply rooted, with countless fibres, is this self? We never get to the end of it. It spreads its tentacles throughout our whole constitution — ‘I’, somehow,

strong or weak. It is just as bad for it to be weak as to be strong. Self-pity is only a way of drawing attention to ourselves and being occupied with ourselves, and it is just as pernicious as self-assertiveness. It is self, all the same; it belongs to the same root, it comes from the same source. It all comes from that false life of the one who said: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13,14). 'I' — 'I' — 'I' —. Truly, we cannot exhaust the forms of this self-life.

Now, because it is so many-sided and so far-reaching and so deeply rooted, the Lord cannot deal with it all at once in the active way. He has dealt with it all at once potentially in the Cross of His Son. But now the application of that must go on. You and I must know continually the application of the principle of the Cross to the various forms of the self-life. We must learn both the need for and the manner of its being smitten, stricken, laid low and brought under the hand of God; and that is the meaning of 'disciple', that is the meaning of training. It is on that side of things that the Holy Ghost is constantly taking precautions against the self-life. Even in the case of a far-advanced and well-crucified Apostle, it becomes necessary, in the presence of great Divine deposits, for God to take precautions and put a stake in his flesh and give him a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should become exalted (II Corinthians 12:7). That is very practical. The Holy Ghost uses the principle and the law of the Cross repeatedly and ever more deeply in order to get rid of the rubbish — that which occupies the ground which must be occupied by the Lord Himself. There has to be a lot of clearing of the ground in order to build the new spiritual kingdom within.

(b) Resurrection — The Expression of the Lord Himself

So, on the other side, the corresponding thing is the power of His resurrection, which can never be known except as we know the power of His Cross; and it is in knowing Him and the power of His resurrection that our education on the positive side is found. Oh, to know Him and the power of His resurrection! It is a wonderful thing when you and I are brought to the place where on the side of nature — and not feignedly, but very utterly — we are compelled to recognise the awful and terrible reality: 'This is an end of everything. I who have said so much, I who have preached so much, I who have taught so much, I who have done so much — I am at an end.' It is the sentence of death; no more is possible; and it is terribly and grimly real. And then God raises the dead! You go on, and there is something more of the Lord than there was before. It is a great thing to see how God does raise the dead again and again. The same person is alive again, and there is more than there ever was, because there has been a greater emptiness than there ever was. It is a very safe position from the Lord's standpoint.

What are we learning, what is the meaning of that way, what is it we are inheriting along the line of such experiences? Just this — we are knowing the Lord, that is all. We are knowing this, that everything is of the Lord, and whatever is not of Him is nothing at all. It must be of the Lord or there is no more possibility, no hope. We are the most ready to say, 'If it depends upon me, there is nothing more possible'; and then the Lord does it. You see what He is doing by the death side of the Cross. He is clearing ground for Himself, and then He is occupying the ground; He is building Himself up as the risen Lord on the ground which has been purged of our old self. The Holy Spirit uses the Cross to keep the way open, to keep the vision clear and growing.

A NEW LIBERTY

Further, we pointed out that when the dispensation changed on the day of Pentecost, from that moment there was a marvelous emancipation into a new liberty. In the old dispensation the whole order was one of bondage, of thralldom; people were in a strait-jacket of a religious system. In the new dispensation, the strait-jacket has gone. There is nothing that suggests a strait-jacket in the Book of the Acts. People are out, they are free. There will still be some things to be taken away, like Peter's remnant of tradition in the presence of the call to the house of Cornelius, and so on. But in the main they are out, released, and it is the Holy Spirit who brings that about and demands that it shall be maintained.

The Lord wants and needs such a people today, just as then. Firstly, a people of vision; and then, secondly, a thoroughly crucified people, giving the Lord full scope for all His purpose — a people who, in themselves, have been removed out of the Lord's way. (That is the meaning of the Book of the Acts — that people are out of the Lord's way, and He can move freely.) Then, the Holy Ghost, having effected this liberation, demands that it shall be preserved. We were pointing out earlier that the constant and persistent tendency of man and effort of the enemy is to bring back again into a yoke of bondage, imprisoning the Holy Ghost in some set, crystallized system of things — a Church system, an ecclesiastical system, a man-made religious order, a formality, an organization, and all such things as so often commence with a Divine idea, and then take charge of the Divine idea and make it to serve them instead of everything serving it.

That is the peril, and the Holy Ghost will have none of it. He can only go as far as He has liberty to go. He demands that we be out in a free place with Him; He demands His own rights as the Spirit of liberty. He will be hampered by nothing. If we try to hamper Him, to put chains on Him, we shall lose His values. He demands that we shall never allow ourselves to be brought into any fixed form or economy or limit of any kind; that we shall be God's free people. That is not licence. That does not give the individual the right to be a free-lance, nor mean that we can go and do everything that our impulse would suggest, and independently snap our fingers at all spiritual authority. It never meant that. But it does mean that the Lord will not allow us to crystallize His things and put them into a box and say, 'That is the limit.' He demands that we should be ready always to receive and respond to new light. If His new light demands that we make new adjustments — revolutionary

adjustments sometimes — we are to be so free in the Lord that we can do it. It is most necessary that we should be like that, as God's free people. It is a very blessed thing to have the expanse of the universe in which to move.

HOLINESS THE CHARACTER OF THE NEW DISPENSATION

Now our next point was that the whole nature of things, characteristic of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit and of all the Spirit's movements, is holiness — that everything shall inwardly correspond to what is outward. Progress can be brought to an abrupt standstill; all this movement of the Spirit of God can be suddenly arrested; there may be an end beyond which there is no advance, if there is some debatable thing between the Holy Ghost and us. We have to keep very short accounts with the Holy Spirit on all matters of question, and He is resident in us for this purpose. Why are there so many things in Christians that are not as the Lord would have them? It is simply because those concerned have not recognised and taken to heart this — that the Holy Spirit is their personal, indwelling Teacher, and they have to listen to Him. How much is lost because of that failure! 'Oh, there is a meeting: I do not think I will go to it — I will go for a walk.' So off you go. In that meeting was the very word God meant you to have! If only you had said, 'I would like to go for a walk, but there is a meeting; I will ask the Lord whether He wants me there.' Something has been lost that you may not recover for yourself, because you failed to ask the Lord.

And so in a thousand different ways. If only we listened to the Holy Spirit, we should make more progress. He talks to us about all sorts of practical matters. For example, we need to be taught by the Spirit in the matter of our merriment — how to be merry without being frivolous, and how to be serious without being long-faced and miserable. We are not going to giggle our way through life, but at the same time the Lord does not want us to be poor, solemn creatures. He does want us to be serious people, but do not think that solemnity is necessarily spiritual life. I read in my morning paper of a poor girl in Australia, who was overtaken of a certain disease which deprived her of the ability to smile. She was brought by air to have an operation in London — and after the operation she could smile! I think a lot of Christians need that operation!

But in this whole matter we have to know the discipline of the Holy Spirit, because spiritual value, spiritual increase, is bound up with it. In matters of holiness, and controversies with the Lord — which may come down to very small points, such as details of dress, the wearing of adornments, and so on — it is remarkable how adjustments are made by many young Christians on these practical matters without anything being said to them by anyone. Who told them to do it? No one; but they came to feel that the Lord would have them do it, that is all. Such people are going on; they are beginning to count for God. I take those points, not to impose law upon you, but to show the principle of the Holy Spirit's being able to speak to us inside on matters where the Lord may not be fully in agreement, and, as He speaks and we respond, we go on. The Holy Spirit adds and adds.

SPIRIT-DIRECTED SERVICE: NO EXCLUSIVISM

As you come into the Book of the Acts further, you find that the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of service. You get to chapter 8, and the movement out from Jerusalem is absolutely spontaneous. Philip goes down to Samaria. Who told him he should go to Samaria? Surely we may say that the Holy Spirit led him there. They moved out under the sovereign control of the Holy Spirit. He was the Spirit of service; He brought it about. And when you come to chapter 10, oh, what a blessed aspect of that development! We find it in keeping with what the prophets, though imperfectly, were made to see. In chapter 10 the Holy Spirit precipitates the whole matter of going beyond the bounds of Israel out to the Gentiles. How do the prophets come into that? Well, what about Jonah? It is a terrible story, that story in the little book of Jonah. It is not the whole life and work of Jonah, but it is practically all that most people know about him — that he had a fierce quarrel with the Lord. "Doest thou well to be angry?... I do well to be angry" (Jonah 4:9). Think of a man answering God like that! Why? Because the large-hearted grace of God had said, in effect, 'There must be no exclusivism; I am not bound up wholly and solely with Israel; my heart embraces the heathen as well; the whole world is the scope of My grace.' Jonah was so exclusive — there could be nothing beyond his own circle, and he came into controversy with the Lord.

The Lord has scattered here and there through His Word lessons and illustrations which emphasize that. What about Ruth? She is a Moabitess, a heathen, outside the pale of Israel. It is the most beautiful romance in the Bible, that little story of Ruth. What is the Lord saying? Look at the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, and you will find Ruth, the Moabitess, there. But if that is impressive, what about Rahab the harlot, the resident in doomed Jericho, who had faith and expressed it by the scarlet cord in the window? And in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Rahab the harlot has a place. What is God saying? He takes up in the new dispensation the principle of that prophetic work of the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament. In Acts 10 He precipitates it, as if to say, 'Go out to all; let there be no exclusivism.' It is impossible to be people governed by the Holy Spirit and not to have the world in your heart — not to be concerned for all the Lord's people, and for all who are not the Lord's people. He will precipitate that issue. Let us allow that truth to search us deeply.

The point of all that we have been saying is this: that when the Holy Spirit comes and really has His way, all these things are spontaneous: they happen: these are the features of His government. Oh, that the Lord might recover a people like that, free from all set, ecclesiastical, religious, traditional limits and bounds — a people in the Spirit! The Lord make us every one to be of that kind.

REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Chapter One

THE INHERITANCE OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation of Jesus Christ. That is to be the object of our occupation at this time and while it will come to us through the book which bears that name, it is not the book, as such, that we are to study but that central, inclusive, underlying theme — revelation of Jesus Christ. We can drop out the article and say ‘revelation of Jesus Christ’.

A subtitle might be:

THE NATURE, THE BATTLE AND THE VICTORY OF THE INHERITANCE OF JESUS CHRIST.

The one, great, triumphant cry which arises at a certain point in the procedure recorded here is ‘now is come the Kingdom’. And in that phrase everything that is in this book is governed: His inheritance, His kingdom, His reign, His rights; His everything. That is the governing thing in the whole book. It is a revelation of Jesus Christ in that sense. We hardly begin to read the book without the consciousness breaking upon us that we are moving into battle — terrific battle — battle with many aspects. But with all the aspects of the battle, one issue: His Kingdom.

We are not, let me say here, going to try to go through this book. I think at most we shall be occupied, and that quite imperfectly, with the first chapters. But I do want to indicate that inasmuch as those chapters particularly concern the people of God, the Church, at this time, that is but one phase of this great question, His inheritance, His Kingdom.

We shall have to say some things about the book in general before we can come to the particular message which I feel the Lord has given for this time together. As to this book there are these things to be said. Of course it is a most bewildering book; and because it is so bewildering, many have given it up and after perhaps chapter five, they can’t find their way any further and it is not, therefore, a book that is greatly beloved of the Lord’s people. It might be necessary to qualify that statement, but I repeat, it is certainly a bewildering book.

Someone said, I don’t know that I agree with them, that if you’re not mad before you start reading the book, you will be when you get to the end! That is only a way of saying it is not an easy book to understand. And there are reasons for that, but I want you to remember that right at the commencement it is stated that there is a particular blessing attached to this book. Indeed, this is the only book in the Bible where it is so stated that there is a BLESSING. I don’t mean that this is the only book that has a blessing; it is definitely stated that there is a blessing to those who read and those who keep what is written therein. This is a blessing that is promised to the servants of the Lord. May the Lord give us that blessing; bring that blessing to us as we dwell in it.

Now there are two main reasons for the difficulty which is found in reading and studying this book; that is, the difficulty is due to two main things, first of all its method, that is its symbolism. There are books in the Bible which have a lot of symbolism in them but there is no book to compare with this, it is one vast system of symbols.

If you want to do some close study you can go through from beginning to end and see how many symbols you can find. What you will find is that every thing in this created universe is taken hold of in some way or another symbolically; that is — and used to symbolize some other thing, some spiritual thing. Heaven, earth, sea. All parts and departments of the creation. Every phenomenon. Far too vast to comprehend in a few sentences. A book full of symbols. It’s not easy to understand always the symbolism. I am not even referring to some of them.

The numbers themselves, if we should touch any one symbolic aspect, are tremendously significant and comprehensive from one through many particular numbers until you get to two hundred million; ten thousand times ten thousand. And all is symbolic and significant.

We pick out number seven. Fifty four times number seven occurs, which must mean something. You see what I mean? But all that constitutes a difficulty; you wonder why that was necessary. Well, for one or two reasons, but for this particular reason, it was a NECESSITY in a time of persecution. You will notice that when the hostile world rulers were in the ascendant over the people of God, symbolism was a particular feature of ministry. Take Ezekiel and Daniel; crammed with symbolism, but nothing to compare with this. For here you have this time of unspeakable suffering for the people of God in which this book was written. And because it was so dangerous to speak in plain language that the enemy could recognize and understand, symbolism was resorted to and only the instructed WOULD understand. That is significant in itself. You see, Rome

was the great hostile power. The people of God were suffering at this time as they had never suffered before, at the hands of Rome, but you don't find the word 'Rome' mentioned. Rome has to be covered up with another name; Babylon. See, it was necessary to speak amongst themselves in a way in which THEY would understand and the world would not. And that should bring a sympathetic note in our approach to the Word. There is a language amongst the Lord's people which only they understand, but they DO understand. The world does not understand.

But then, another difficulty which has arisen since then and is with us today in relation to this book, is the many schools of interpretation. There are at least six different schools of interpretation of this book. I'm not even going to name them; it would only confuse many of you and would not be at all helpful at this time. But there they are, six, at least, different schools of interpretation and very few of them agreeing with each other on more than a point or two. Volumes upon volumes having been written saying 'And THIS is the meaning' or 'THIS is the meaning' and all in conflict with one another. We find ourselves in these days in the midst of that kind of thing and it's exceedingly bewildering. We might well give it up as Martin Luther did; he said this book is all rubbish, nonsense; no one will ever be able to understand it. Well, alright, throw the blessing away! There's a blessing.

However, that is one of the difficulties in our taking up this book and not pursuing it. You will not imagine that I am going to adopt any one of the six and I do trust that you will not think for a moment that I am going to give you an improvement upon them all or think that I can. You will have to go on patiently with me and see whether the way in which we approach it is a way of blessing, a way of spiritual helpfulness. And I would ask you this one thing, that you will believe that I am not seeking to give some private interpretation but seeking to get right through ALL this to the real blessing that is in this book. If we can come out at the end with that, then we shall have been justified in tackling it.

Well now, what about the nature and the purpose of the whole book? It is quite clear that this book contains or presents the consummation of all the ages and the consummation of this age. I use that word carefully. The summation of the ages and the summation of THIS age. This book comprehends the WHOLE Bible and bounds ALL history. It compasses creation, redemption, and perdition. It embraces God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. It embraces man and his history and the purpose of his being. It embraces the history, work and doom of Satan.

It will impress you I am sure, when I tell you that there are no less than four hundred allusions to the Old Testament in this book. There's a bit of study for you. I mention it in order to bear out what I've said, this is a summation this book. This is a gathering up of everything unto the end. But when we have said that and all such things and have recognized it all as true, one question arises; IS there, IS there one thing that interprets and explains everything in this book? And the answer is yes. There is one all-inclusive issue running from beginning to end. It is the Purpose of God as to the eternal government of this universe and this earth in particular.

The issue and question of the government of God's creation through eternal ages. That explains everything that is here. You have to read backward of course, from the end of the book, for all has moved toward that. Steady movement through every phase and aspect unto that one end, "I saw the holy City, new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven". Here you have the metropolis, the center of government; that is the end — the government of everything established, again in a symbolic representation, the holy City. Well that implies government, I say everything in the book moves toward that and you have to read everything from beginning onward in the light of that final, wonderful issue. WHO is going to govern God's created universe through all ages of eternity? HOW is that government going to be reached? And WHAT is the nature of that government? Those are the questions that are answered in this book.

How great it is that when you come to the City, that is the realization of this great divine object; the government of all things as from heaven. You find that that government is just as much a matter of character or nature as it is of power. That is a VERY important thing to remember. It is not only official authority established at last, the iron hand of government in control. It is a government of a certain KIND of nature. The City is the embodiment not only of strength but of character and nature; everything that is precious in the sight of God. And those two things are brought together and they run through this whole book. Those two things are implicit in the first chapters as we shall see in the presentation of the Son of Man Himself and then in the messages to the churches. So they run on. It's a reaching of the place of ascendancy by conformity to a certain nature. It's a tremendous thing to come to that nature, to that character.

It is no less a question, an issue, in the nature of things than the government of this universe. What kind of thing will it be that governs at last? That's the big question. And so page after page is dealing with that. Page after page, phrase after phrase. It is not just the crashing of something against the mastery, it is the getting rid of a certain character and nature and kind, to put in its place another kind. From center to circumference. Remember it is a law always of God and of the Word of God that power is by character and not by office. And so it is here, it is a tremendous question in this matter of ascendancy, the throne, the government, the dominion. I say again, it governs everything through this book. In a word, it is the nature of God's Son as Son of Man, standing over everything. He, in Person and divinely appointed destiny, but He particularly in character. That brings everything under it. This great issue of government.

And is it necessary for me to say here that if ever there was a time in the history of this cosmos when the conflict, the battle for the government of this universe was raging; that time is now. We are all very conscious

of mighty forces at work to get the control of this world and all that has to do with it. Of a tremendous battle raging as to who and what is going to have the dominion here. That only needs to be said to draw out a response and assent of recognition; it's on. And the point of the concentration of this conflict is the Church, the people of God! In some parts from without, in an outward way they're in it, but if it is not by outward persecution, spiritual people are conscious of TREMENDOUS spiritual pressure and conflict in these days which is increasing. Yes, it's quite patent that this is the issue. What is going to emerge, on top at last, what kind of a thing will it be, that is the question to be answered.

For this issue take up the whole book again, this issue is shown to be related to five things, first of all to the very purpose of God IN creation. The purpose of God in creation! There should be something answering to His heart and to His mind, to His thought for His full satisfaction in the works of His hands. Chapter four takes up, as you know, that creational aspect and the great song in heaven which bursts forth in that connection is "for thou createst or didst create all things for Thyself, for Thy pleasure" it is the song of a redeemed creation showing that it's all centred in the throne now. That chapter brings you right up into heaven, everything is up there and the throne is set, and everything is around that throne and the song in the first instance is the song of a redeemed creation. Centred in the throne, that's the meaning of the creation! A kind of creation absolutely grown united with the Throne at its centre. That's the purpose of creation and then the book moves to show that this, this issue, this great issue: government, is God's purpose in redemption.

Of course chapter five carries the theme further, it is still the theme in heaven but here the emphasis is upon redemption and the second great song breaks out "Thou hast redeemed". Thou hast redeemed! And the throne is at the centre of redemption. Redemption has brought the throne to its place, government by redemption. We'll have more to say about this as we go on. In the third place this great purpose of world and universal government is shown to be God's purpose concerning His Son. The place that He occupies throughout is supreme and everything is working toward that end where HE, HE is Lord of all and in all things has the pre-eminence and in the book is seen at the end riding forth in majesty, ruling! As we shall see His very titles indicate universal lordship, God's purpose concerning His Son, the government of this world and of this universe.

In the fourth place this great purpose of dominion is shown to be God's purpose in choosing and raising up Israel as a nation, that in an earthly way Israel should set forth the principles of heavenly government, and all that focused in God's Son. That is why Israel was raised up. And that is touched upon here but Israel put the Son out! And Israel in turn was put out. The place that Israel occupies today, the most tragic place you could think of, is simply this: they failed in the purpose of God concerning His Son, His absolute Kingship and Lordship. And then the fifth connection the book shows that this great issue of dominion is bound up with the Church. The Church! The Church comes in here; it is not Christ in solitary isolation, the Church with Him in government eventually.

Well, you see how comprehensive the issue is, this book gathering all that up is the book of final recovery of God's eternal intention and it shows that it WILL be, it will be done. A large place, as you know, is given to prophecy in this book and right at the end, right at the end, it is gathered up in this way, "The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets hath sent His angel and signified these things." The God of the spirits of the prophets! Then there is this, the keeping of the prophecy of this book. And most of you know that prophetic ministry always had one thing in view: recovery of God's thought. Recovery! And inasmuch as this book has so much of the prophetic aspect in it, it indicates that that's what is in view, it's recovery! Something has been lost. Something has been lost! And that is going to be recovered. Something of divine purpose and intention has been lost and God in this book is seen as set and giving Himself to the recovery of that which has been lost of His intention and will concerning this creation AND the Church. It's a mighty, mighty issue that is being fought out, shall we say, through the pages of this book. Just to take a few minutes on that point alone and we'll leave it for the morning.

A revelation had been given. A revelation had been given by God in the old dispensation, in the Old Testament, and it does not need that anyone be very well instructed to see that as you read the Old Testament from the beginning of Genesis right to the last chapter of the book of Malachi, there is one thing that is involved in the whole story; it is this question of government! Dominion! Rulership! Sovereignty! Control of this world! Isn't that clear? Everywhere it's there. It is one continuous battle raging, the ups and downs, the fluctuations, sometimes it's one power in the ascendant and sometimes another. Sometimes the Lord's people in their right place of dominion and other times they're in subjugation and antagonistic powers are in the ascendant but this battle rages and sways through all those Old Testament generations but God had left no one in doubt as to what His mind about it was and His purpose.

It's all there! The revelation had been given. It had been given in the New Testament. Mark you, we come to the book of the Revelation we're at the end of the first Christian century. The book in all probability was written in the nineties of the first century. And the revelation had been given in the New Testament. What a revelation of God's intention, God's purpose, God's thought for the government of this world. And that revelation had been in a particular and peculiar way concentrated in the ministry of the apostle Paul, had come through Paul in a full and shall we say, a consummate way. For if you want to know about the ages of the ages and God's thought concerning Jesus Christ therein and the Church, it's to Paul you go. It's been given! It's been given; and significantly enough, it was given in the Name to the churches in Asia. To the churches in Asia — we have Ephesians, Colossians — it had been given! It had been lost. It had been let go. Said Paul, "All they which be in Asia be turned from me". It had been let go. God had GIVEN the deposit of a FULL revela-

tion of His intention from eternity concerning His Son, concerning the Church in the government, the ultimate government of this universe. It's there! It's been let go; now the book of Revelation comes in to show God's reaction to that, to recover. And significantly enough He will begin with the Churches in Asia.

There the greatest responsibility rests; where the greatest light has been given, where the knowledge of God's will has been most fully redeemed, there God will begin. He always does, He always does begin there, the point of the greatest responsibility. To recover! To recover! And while I anticipate a little, let me point out to you at this point that He's GOING to have that which does represent His recovery. In the churches He may not find a full, complete response by all the people of God but He will have there that which DOES answer — "to him that overcometh...". What God may not have in the whole He will have in a part.

I'm reading a book by a New Testament scholar this week, not one we would call a spiritually minded person but one of profound knowledge of things as to the Bible and I came on this, I think it's worth reading at this point. He says "We have made reference to the thought of a remnant", he's speaking about the faith of Israel, the history of Israel. "The community as a whole could be narrowed down to a part which could represent the whole and continue its inheritance. This idea of a remnant is found throughout the whole Bible, it is not confined to the prophets, though they say much about it. In the story of the flood Noah and his family constitute a remnant in whom the divine creative purpose is concentrated and preserved. The blessing promised to Abraham and his seed was limited to one of his sons, Isaac. In the time of Elijah we read of a righteous remnant of seven thousand which had not bowed the knee to Baal. This idea is found in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, in Ezekiel, in Amos, in Micah. Sometimes the remnant is thought of as bringing about the sparing of the whole community." Note that: that's tremendous! "Sometimes the remnant is thought of as bringing about the sparing of the whole community. If God could have found ten righteous in Sodom the whole community would have been saved. Sometimes the remnant itself is spared to convey to a future generation the knowledge of God's will. It is always thought of as a corporate body and not just so many individuals. Wherever it appears, the remnant is for that moment, THE people of God. Heirs of the promises and heirs of the revelation of God's purpose." I believe that's magnificent!

Carry that over here and see it gathered into the overcomers at the end. See on one side what a responsibility rests upon them, what a need the Lord has for such! What a tremendous thing is bound up with them, no less an issue than God's eternal intention concerning His Son, concerning the Church in the government of this universe. It seems, perhaps, presumption to think that we here, a little company of insignificant people in this world, might, as a part of others in the larger, be in that line of divine purpose. It might be, dear friends, I put it this way; it might be that that is why we are here at this very time. If we were to speak of the conflict that has preceded this time, the raging of the forces of evil, and all the determinations as are seen to make the continuance of this testimony and ministry possible, we are driven to ask one question: What can it mean? What can it mean? What are we? What do we amount to? And the answer must be this, has God abandoned His intention? And if not, He will STILL seek to have those who know what that is and who come into line with it. And, forgive me, and I know that I'll need a lot of forgiveness in some realms for saying it, but it is just possible that the gathering of just a handful here in these days has no less a significance in it than God's desire to make known to His people that He has not given up His original purpose concerning His Son and the Church. If I should be right, may the Lord give to us a due sense of the tremendous significance of any time like this when He chooses to speak to us again about this matter of supreme and paramount importance; His inheritance in His Son. The Kingdom of His Son. His Son's place in this universe for all eternal ages. And of an instrument to His hand for the expression of His government and the administering of His kingdom. Now I have not said and am not thinking or saying that WE are the people for that. But that is the Lord's thought for as MANY of the Church universal as will give Him the response that He seeks when He says "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches". I venture to say to you dear friends, that we are gathered in no small matter. May the Lord give us eyes to see as we go on how this is to be, how He works it out, on what ground, in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Two

THE VICTORY OF JESUS CHRIST

Quite a large number of you were not with us this morning. The word then was foundational to what the Lord has given me for this conference. I will do my best, without wearying those who were present with a repetition, to help you all into the message.

We are occupied with revelation of Jesus Christ. Or the word can be changed and retain the same meaning — the unveiling of Jesus Christ. I think it is impossible to take up this book which has that as its title and begin to read without very early in our reading becoming aware that a tremendous piece of business is on hand. The impression that very quickly begins to take hold of us is: we're in the settling of some big issue. We are faced with some tremendous and momentous decision. Everything here says: now a long outstanding question is going to be answered. A long standing issue is going to be settled. The time has come when what has been a matter of controversy and conflict for a very long time, is going to be headed up and settled. Surely that is what ought to be the impression as we begin to read.

Anybody who can take up this book and begin at the first chapter and even in the first words and just read

it as something printed without becoming aware that there is something tremendous involved and in view, surely has missed the whole meaning and value of the book.

And that is just what the book is all about. It is the settling of this controversy which has gone on through the ages, this answering of the question, this concluding of the whole matter and writing forever and ever: "FINISHED" to one phase. And that matter, that issue, that controversy, that question, is just "Who is going to govern this universe throughout the ages of the ages?" Who is going to govern? That has been a matter of contention through thousands of years from the creation. All history has circled round THAT matter, THAT question. Now, says this book, we're going to settle it once and for all. And when you have really got hold of that, you've got the key to the book and to everything that is in it. It will interpret all that is in this book, much, as we said this morning, that is difficult to understand in itself, almost bewildering in its detail and the manner and form of its presentation.

But I shall go on to say, well what does that mean? Well, in some way that relates to this ultimate and consummate issue: the government of this universe as God intended when He created it. The issue is: NOW is come the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ — the climax of history. Well now, that helps you right into where we were this morning with a great deal of detail and we proceed.

From that and with that, we're going to look into the part of the first chapter we read earlier and work right to this very matter we have mentioned. Notice it begins with the revelation of Jesus Christ. That's grand! That's fine! All that is coming subsequently, the warfare and the welfare of kingdoms and nations; all the manifold movements, comes back to this. Alright, the revelation of Jesus Christ. That stands over it all, is the answer of it all; the unveiling of Jesus Christ. How HE stands related to EVERYTHING in this universe. It is a revelation of Jesus Christ. The same word is here as Paul used in his prayer in the letter to the Ephesians "That He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ". Spirit of revelation; unveiling in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. That's what it is. And this unveiling or revelation is here said to have been something that God GAVE to His Son. It needs a good deal, perhaps of imagination and quiet thought, to grasp the significance of these statements, but here in the language of men it is said God let His Son see HIS place in relation to all the consummatory movements and activities of the ages. Where HE stands as the ages are brought to their culmination and their consummation. Father God gives to His Son to see His place in it all; "which He showed or gave to His Son".

And then it goes on, "to show to His bondservants". That is general, not particular, not just to apostles, not to some special people, just to His bondservants. You and I come into that category, the bondservants or bondslaves of Jesus Christ. This unveiling is given by God to the Son, through an angel, to John, for us. The point is that any true servant of God ought to be acquainted with all that appertains to the purpose of God in Christ Jesus and He sent and signified it to His bondservant John.

Notice the title John gives to himself; he does not say "John the apostle of Jesus Christ". He calls himself "the bondservant" and then in verse 9 he says "I, John, your brother". John always speaks on the Family basis and level, brings himself into very close relationship with those to whom he writes, as a member of the Family. He brings them right in, not on official ground, but on the ground of Life. We're in this with John, that is what John is saying, we're in this with him on the very basis of family life: "I, John, your brother". Brother!

"In the isle that's called Patmos, for the testimony of Jesus", he says, "for the testimony of Jesus and being there I am your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus". Be patient as we work on through these details: on the isle Patmos... for the testimony of Jesus... partaker with you in the tribulation, kingdom and patience in Jesus. Now the question at once arises, which gets us very near to the heart of the whole matter: Why was John in Patmos? Because, he says, for the testimony of Jesus. But that is not very enlightening. The question is a bigger one than that, why was John in Patmos? And being in Patmos in the tribulation that is in Jesus. And the answer to that question is in this whole book. It takes the whole book really, to answer that question.

And may I say here by way of parenthesis, incidentally, the answer may account for the tremendous battle that has raged over this book. You know, or you may not know, the very great battle raged over the admission of this book into the canon of the Scriptures. Oh, what a battle to have it bound up in the divine library! To allow it to be included in the Bible! A real big battle raged over that, but at last the battle was won for its inclusion. I take that as having some significance. But then what a battle over the book since it's been in! We pointed out this morning the many diverse schools of interpretation, the controversy that has raged over this book through the centuries, the confusion that has been brought about by the way in which the book has been handled, all the divisions that have sprung up and there is no end to them. Only about a year or so, a year, eighteen months ago; a new division sprang up in America over this very book, a fresh split on its interpretation and they're fighting, they're at one another's throats about this quite minor point of interpretation; but there it is. What does it mean? I say, that there is an explanation to all that, it is not just hap.

The answer to our question, I think, may be the explanation of that long, drawn-out controversy around this book. The answer, then, as to why was John in Patmos is in the first place found in that which obtained in the world at that time in the form of emperor worship. You, some of you, will know that the ruling Caesars claimed to be divine and therefore they claimed human worship. Somebody has said they posed as gods and did the work of the devil. That's significant. Julius Caesar was worshiped. Octavianus was called Augustus — "Reverenced". Caligula demanded that his image should be put up in the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jeru-

salem; he was killed before he was able to do it. That carries some significance. And this emperor under whom we believe John was exiled to Patmos, Domitian, was called — actually called — ‘our lord and god’. They usurped the place of God. They claimed the worship of man; they took to themselves deity.

So, the issue is clear-cut. There is no mistaking it, it is Caesar or Christ! For THE apostolic proclamation everywhere was without any mistaking it: Jesus Christ is Lord! That’s the testimony of Jesus for which John was sent to Patmos. The issue is clear-cut, quite clear-cut. It’s a very significant thing that the Jews were dealt with comparatively leniently. Were the Christians? They did suffer under Rome but they suffered nothing like the sufferings of the Christians. I say that’s significant! THEY had crucified the Lord of glory therefore the devil is not so much concerned about them, but THESE people, THESE people who will have no compromise on this matter; the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ as God! As the Son of God! There can be no reconciling Caesar and Christ, Christ and Caesar. That’s the issue. And, dear friends, when John says ‘in the tribulation in Christ’ the implication is that the tribulation or the suffering is ALWAYS proportionate to the place that you give the Lord Jesus. If you give Him a second or a third place, well you will have a comparatively easy time. Put Him where God has put Him, make Him Lord of all and of everything, and you’re in for tribulation. In for tribulation! So it was with John.

All this surely is gathered up into the very titles; Jesus Christ the faithful Witness, Firstborn of the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Say that in the face of the Caesars; the Ruler of the kings of the earth! You’re in for it! You’re in for it when you realize what store the Caesars set by their divine prerogative. The Ruler of the kings of the earth — Jesus! Jesus Christ! You and I, dear friends, never realize the implication of that title, you know that “Christ” is only the Greek for the Hebrew “Messiah”, the whole conception both of the Hebrew and the Greek Messiah and Christ, was His Kingship; Anointed! Anointed. The Kristus! The Anointed of God and that Anointed meant nothing less than absolute Rulership, Supremacy. To speak that Name: Jesus the Anointed, Jesus the Messiah, is at once to throw a challenge at that whole empire of the Caesars. No wonder the apostle said no man can call Jesus Christ but by the Holy Ghost. They knew it. You wondered what that means because you can all call Jesus Christ, glibly, easily and say Jesus is Christ. Ah, but go into that realm, live in THAT day and it would be the most terrifying thing to publicly say “Jesus of Nazareth is the Anointed of God to be the Ruler of the kings of the earth”. You need the Holy Ghost to make you bold enough to say that.

And dear friends, that is not so remote, in the past. There are many, many today who are afraid so to speak of Him and afraid for their lives. You can go into fanatical Mohammedan countries and proclaim Jesus the Christ, the Son of God; you do it with your life in your hand. You need the Holy Ghost for that boldness. So you see, here we are right at the heart of this thing. Jesus Christ... the Faithful and True Witness. That word ‘Witness’ as you probably know, is the same word as ‘martyr’, the Faithful Martyr. Alright, John’s in good company. Jesus Christ the Faithful Martyr, the Faithful and True Witness. It cost Him His life to stand for His Kingdom. It cost Him His life at the hands of every devil-inspired instrument that knew the issue. Knew the issue! The issue of that Man was nothing less than the dominion of this world and the devil knew it. So He would say ‘you are of your father the devil, he was a murderer from the beginning’. They murdered the Prince of life on this one matter — His place in the eternal counsels of God as Lord, as King, Firstborn from the dead, I’ll have something more to say about that shortly, Ruler of the kings of the earth.

Well, these titles just set forth the stages of His progress to the throne:—Faithful Martyr; that was the Way of the Cross. Firstborn from the dead; the Way of the divine Vindication. Ruler of the kings of the earth; that is the glorious End of the Cross and the Resurrection.

Ruler! Ruler of the kings of the earth! Satan, who knew Him, yes Satan’s agents and [powers] betrayed their knowledge of Him when they, the demons, said “I know Thee Whom Thou art, the holy One of God, I know Thee!” Satan knew Him and knew His divine destiny and so he took Him up into a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of this world, the glory thereof and said “All this will I give Thee if Thou wilt...” now here we are, back on this thing, “worship me”! Worship, where worship is to be. You see, here is the Caesars again. Worship me! Jesus refused that dominion at the hand of Satan and took it by the Cross! And here, this book sees Him in possession of it: the Ruler of the kings of the earth! If you have any question about that by reason of the seeming power of world rulers in our time; power, world systems, how they do afflict the Church and the saints... read the book of the Acts again and you will see in that book the Ruler of the kings of the earth wielding His power and Herod learned something of that and others.

We know now, we know now that this wonderful book of the revelation of Jesus Christ has been fulfilled in a very large degree. The very empire that denied Him His place and Lordship and set itself to destroy every trace of His Kingship, has gone to dust. Daniel has a very, very real place here, hasn’t he? Remember then the vision and the fourth kingdom of iron which undoubtedly was the Roman empire, and in the days when that kingdom has been reached from Babylon onward, in the days when the Roman empire has come into being, the vision goes on and I think we’ve lost a good deal of the real point of that vision — the God of heaven, the God of heaven produces a Kingdom. “I saw, I saw in a vision, a stone, cut without hands”. Oh, I would like to dwell upon that for half an hour — a stone cut without hands! And it smote the image and the image, by that smiting, crumbled to dust but the stone itself rolled on and as it rolled, gathering momentum, it gathered volume until it filled the whole earth! We’re [really] IN that, we’re in that! This empire which set itself up against the Lord and His Christ was smitten by that Stone cut without hands, and it has crumbled to dust, there’s no doubt about it, it’s literally fulfilled! But the Stone... the Stone of this other Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, has gone on gathering momentum and gathering volume as it has gone on, reaching to all the

nations. Well, that perhaps doesn't stir you very much, it's so commonplace, you know it. But here we are, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, He came to that position through the suffering of death.

For the time being, as I have said, I am leaving out that section which gives us the revelation of Jesus Christ in person; we come to that again perhaps. Here let us note that we are now introduced at this point to two things — firstly His victory. His victory. And that can be summed up in two or three verses: "I am the First and the Last, the Living One, I became dead, behold I am alive forevermore and have the keys of death and of Hades". That's His victory. The other is His character which we shall reserve for another time. Just a few minutes on this: His victory. "I am the First and the Last". That's victory in a statement by itself! And it's important to recognize the significance, the particular significance, of the use of that title in relation to this book.

Here we are at the end, at the consummation of everything. Now we have come to the culmination of all things and He declares "I was the beginning of all things". Go back to Paul's letter to the Colossians for that — in Him, through Him, unto Him, were all things created, things in heaven, things in earth, He was before all things. "I am the First. As I was at the beginning and as I was the Beginning of all things, I am the Last, I am the End". The end corresponds to the beginning, it is no other, it's no other than Himself, "I am the First and the Last". That's a TREMENDOUS statement! "I am simply gathering up all things into My hands, all things in the end are with Me. Everything has got to answer to Me at the end". In all things He has the pre-eminence. "I am the Living One, I became dead". Now, I want to say a word about that way of expressing in a minute. But first that again, "I am the Living one, I became dead. I am alive unto the ages of the ages". There was a reason why the Lord Jesus said that.

You know, Nero, under whom the apostle Paul suffered and was executed, was regarded as perhaps the most ferocious of all the Caesars up to his time. But there was one who exceeded him and that was the one under whom John suffered, this Caesar Domitian. Do you know what was said about him? This Caesar was said to be Nero come back from the dead. He was called Nero, "Nero Survived", raised from the dead, back again to carry on his nefarious work. John is suffering under the one who is said to have died and risen again. Jesus takes hold of that, right hold of that and says "I AM THE LIVING ONE, I became dead, I AM ALIVE, not for a human tenure but unto the ages of the ages". So we can accumulate all this data, material, on this one great issue: the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus.

"I am the Living One, I became dead". Note, that's really the correct translation, and He did not say "I was killed, I was murdered, I was slain, I was put to death". He had already in His lifetime said "no man taketh it from me, I lay it down of Myself, Mine own Self, this authority that I have received from My Father". Today as we think of all those movements toward the cross, we can so clearly see through men and their counsels and decisions and we can see that the thing is in His hand. He is dictating how it shall be and when it shall be. They are saying "not this" and He is saying "yes this". "Not on the Passover" He says "Yes on the Passover". He is dictating His own death, its time and its manner — in His hands. NOT "they took away My life" — "I laid it down of my own accord. I became dead. I became dead." WHY? There is another great question arises at once; WHY did He Himself, deliberately, of His own accord, of His own decision, go into death? Well, the letter to the Hebrews throws a lot of light upon it doesn't it? That PROVED it, "He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil"! That He might deliver those who all their lifetime were in bondage through fear of death. He tasted DEATH in the behalf of every man. That's why He became dead.

But here it is, here it is in this beautiful statement here "Unto Him that loveth us and loosed us from our sins in His blood and made us a kingdom and priests unto His God and Father". That's why He became dead; this mighty US — this mighty Us — Who loveth US! Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for it. Who loving us, Who loosed us, He might redeem us from all iniquity, Who MADE us a kingdom and priests unto His God and Father. That's why He became dead of His own choice: for US! For you, for me, for His Church. What a mighty US that is. That's the answer. Christ loved! Christ loosed! From death... and alive! Became dead and alive to deliver us from death. Death is the sum total of all human sin. Death is the sum of all Satan's power. Death is the sum of Satan's kingdom. "He plunged in His imperial strength, to cast the darkness down, He brought His trophy up at length, the foiled usurper's crown." That's why He became dead, to do that. That's the answer. "And I have the keys of death and of Hades". Of course keys are authority, we know that. Authority over death and of Hades. Jesus has said "Upon this rock I will build My Church, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I have the keys of Hades". What is that? For all their lifetime in bondage through fear of death... bondage through fear of death — that's the prison of Hades. He has plundered Hades, He has broken its gates and its bars. He has snatched the keys from the usurper, and wears them at His own girdle and His Church is DELIVERED from that bondage of fear! The gates of Hades shall NOT prevail against it.

It is all tremendous, but you see, you've got to place the Cross over this whole book. The Cross stands over everything in this book because it's the book of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every realm and therefore it is the book of the Lamb in the throne. In the throne! The Cross is the explanation of everything.

Well, I trust you catch a vision, the revelation of Jesus Christ in this which comprehends all that follows and all that with which you and I have to do, dear friends. I said this morning, this is the book which is introduced, or in its very introduction, tells us that there is a blessing attached to it. What blessing do you want and do I want? What is the greatest blessing that could come to our hearts? It would be to realize the glorious, triumphant issue of this long, long drawn out battle in which we are, how it's going to end and to realize it's go-

ing to end in glory. In GLORY! It's going to end with us with Christ in the throne. To REALIZE it, not just to be informed. It doesn't have enough wit with us to be told about it, but oh, if it could come to us as a revelation, as it came to John in Patmos, in tribulation, in patience. Suffering... because of this same issue we have made Jesus Lord, we have put Him in His place, we have no other Lord. All things for us are subject to Him. He is over all. And that brings, whether world persecution or not, it brings spiritual conflict, it brings tribulation into the life. It touches us everywhere, in our families, in our homes, in our businesses and everywhere this thing is touching us; if only, if only we would let go something, make some compromise, let down our standard, not be so utter for Christ. We'd have an easier time, it is possible, you can, CAN for the time being! But you cast away your crown.

That is it, to realize that in the tribulation and the patience, the suffering, and the conflict, and the pressure; the issue, the issue is absolutely certain. Jesus is coming out on top and we're coming out with Him. If that could really come into our hearts, the greatest blessing that could come to us... it would explain so much, it really would explain so much. All the problems and enigmas of our lives, all those things which come because of our relationship to this One Who is God's destined Heir of the universe... That provokes quite a lot. I say this is the blessing of this book, to know that. Not just to understand all its mysteries and symbols but to know that. That He IS Lord and that nothing can alter that. The Lord give us that blessing in our hearts.

Chapter Three

THE CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST

"I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the midst of the lampstands one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto varnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."

(Revelation 1:12-16)

Revelation of Jesus Christ. We have already indicated that this whole book which bears those words as its title is gathered into one tremendous consummate issue; that of the government of this universe, heaven and earth, as determined by God, centered in His Son Jesus Christ. This book is the revelation of the processes and progress in the culmination of this world's history unto the final establishment of that government.

In that setting, this afternoon we were occupied with the victory of God's Son, as in this first chapter. This evening we take this short section, these four verses which set forth the character which lies behind that victory.

It's a mighty victory. We have seen His declaration of Himself as the Living One — Who became dead but is now alive unto the ages of the ages — sets forth the greatness of His victory. We have seen it was no small power that was exercised and exerted by the great Roman Empire for the destruction of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. In the vision of that empire in the book of Daniel, it is rightly symbolized by iron. A symbol of great strength and power to break everything. And the great strength of that, the mightiest of the empires, was directed toward and concentrated upon, the extermination of the testimony of Jesus, which testimony was that He is Lord. That Jesus survived the exhausting of that mighty power and triumphed over death and is alive unto the ages of the ages, is no small testimony to the greatness of His victory.

Combined with the Roman Empire was the Jewish nation. It would take a lot of time to tell and describe conditions of the Jewish nation in the times of the New Testament. I myself have been very deeply impressed as I have read anew during the past week the account given by the great Jewish historian Josephus about the wickedness of the Jews at this time. He's a Jewish historian. He says that there never was anything so utterly wicked as the condition of the Jewish people in New Testament times. Terrible thing to say and he shows how that was, and it is only an exposition of what the Lord Jesus meant when He said "this WICKED generation" — this wicked generation of downright wickedness of those people. Not only in their crucifying the Lord Jesus, but their condition behind all their religion; their moral condition — using that word in its most general sense. And they, as we know, exhausted their malice to DESTROY the Lord Jesus and all that He represented. If Saul of Tarsus was really their representative and agent, he himself tells us in many words how utter he was in his determination there should not be left a relic of Jesus of Nazareth. He persecuted this Way unto the death, both men and women he cast into prison.

All that vicious, vehement hatred, malice, concentrated upon Jesus Christ as Lord. All that and what more? Behind it, around it and over it Satan and his vast kingdom calling upon all their resources to quench this Light, finish this Testimony, to blot out this Name, obliterate this Way. And He says "I am He that liveth, I became dead but I am alive unto the ages of the ages". What a victory, what a victory! We can almost say 'is there anything left over which He can triumph'? If He HAS done that, if our Christian faith is true, if what we declare as to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ is true at all, it's a far, far greater and vaster thing than we have comprehended. And that is the message here and as we have said before, that is the bless-

ing of this book: if He can do all that, what cannot He do? That's hope for the end. But when we have said all that about His victory and much more that we could add to it of truth, this fact remains — the victory, the throne, the government of Christ and the Church is based upon His essential character. It is not just objective and official, that is, it is not just something that is done by the exercise of superior might — as might. It is something that is accomplished in virtue of His glorious character; it rests upon that.

Here is a combination of two things which, mark you, always go together with God; the combination of power and character, nature and strength. With God character is power and power is character. He seems to have written this large in the universe, in nature. It almost appears that He has established it as a law that these two things go together. You see all that God does combines these two things. You go into the alpine country; you are on the one side impressed at the massive and awesome strength of the mountains, the terrific force, volcanic force which heaved them up and the mighty strength that they represent as they tower over you. It's awesome! And yet as you stay to climb their massive slopes, in their crevices and on those slopes you find the beautiful edelweiss. The beautiful flower. The combination of strength... and beauty. Nature has done it — balanced these two things. Come to the English countryside, you see the massive towering oak tree and nestling at its roots — the beautiful violet. Just nature, not arranged, quite spontaneous — strength and beauty, power and character — in balance and combination. And we could go on like that drawing upon creation for illustration. But you go back through your Old Testament, you find in the typology and the symbolism, all that comes from heaven, this wonderful balance of strength and character. And here it is! In all this and particularly in this passage before us, we have God saying, "If there is to be power, dominion, victory, ascendancy, might; there has got to be goodness and if there is goodness, that is the greatest might!" It's the nature of Christ that is set forth here which is the foundation of His Kingdom, of His Throne.

So you turn to this description or portraiture of Him. You notice the power lying in His eyes as a flame of fire; His voice, the voice of many waters, the sound of many waters; His mouth, out of which proceeds a sharp, two-edged sword; His countenance, as the sun shineth in its strength. All that is the symbolism of power! We go back again to character, His garment down to the foot, a girdle about His breasts, the whiteness of His hair and the purity represented by the refined brass of His feet. All that speaks of the other side, it speaks of His nature, His character.

Now it is that that we are going to be occupied with for the time at our command tonight. But may I remind you that we are here in the presence of One Who is called "THE SON OF MAN". We ought to be duly impressed with that. He is not here in this book called the Son of God, He is that, but for the purposes of this book, His title is that of "The Son of Man". We are familiar with that title in the Old Testament, in the prophets: in Ezekiel, in Daniel. And we are familiar with it in the gospels. In the gospels only, the title is used of Him eighty-five times; no fewer. In the Old Testament as applied to the prophets, it is 'son of man', in the New Testament as applied to Him it is THE Son of Man. What they were partially, He is absolutely. And we know that the very title itself, 'son of man' or 'The Son of Man', is related to God's full thought for His people.

In the prophets, as we have pointed out already today, their business was the recovering of God's full thought for His people; and so they were representative of that thought — son of man. And that very thought of God or those thoughts of God had to be wrought into their very experience and life and history and they became the embodiment of those thoughts, hence they were made a sign unto the people of God. And that is the essence of this very title: Son of Man — a sign of God's thought for His people. You come to the Lord Jesus and you find that in a full, and final and utter way, He is THE Son of Man in this sense: that He embodies to the full God's primal conception for man. What God ever had in His mind in conceiving the humanity idea, the manhood conception as a special and peculiar creation, that is realized and expressed in this One Whose title here just means that: THE Son of Man. THE One in Whom ALL God's thought AS TO MAN is realized.

We're in His presence here as you notice: "I saw one like unto the son of man" then the portrayal. We look all so briefly, inadequately, at the features of this Son of Man.

"I turned to see and having turned I saw one like unto the son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot." And of course there has been a division of opinion as to what that garment was. Dr Campbell-Morgan said it was the garment of the Governor. Other equally able expositors have said it's the garment of the Priest. I'm not at all concerned to take sides in that matter — it doesn't trouble us which it was. What we want to get at is the meaning of a garment at all; not what kind of a garment it was exactly, but WHY a garment at all, down to His feet. Whatever the robe was, whether of governor or of priest, it speaks of character; for garments always did from the beginning speak of character, they were the symbol of the man. That's true right up to date. The garments, the dress, betray the person. I won't dwell upon that too much, it's dangerous ground! But nevertheless it's true. Right from the first garments that ever man wore, made by God Himself, garments have always been the symbol of the person, indicating what kind of a person, or sometimes, what the person thinks of himself or herself. That is character. I mean, in the days of the Lord Jesus they loved to wear long garments, and they wore their phylacteries, they pretended to be something but they were not, but that was their character; their character was a pretense but that was the people — revealed in the way they dressed. See the point.

Here, whatever the garment was officially, undoubtedly it was symbolic of the Person. It does not say so, but I have no doubt that in the light of things which follow in this book, that it was a white robe... it was the white linen... that would be true of priest or of governor. And we know from this very book the white linen is the righteous acts of the saints and we know from the Old Testament typology, the white linen garments al-

ways spoke of the character of righteousness in the presence of God, covering the unrighteousness of man that no flesh should appear before Him. And here, right in the very first thing, describing this Person, the Son of Man, you have Him enfolded and enwrapped in a character of spotless purity. And it is that that gives Him His regal position, it is His holiness, His purity. It is enough to say that and leave it.

But this robe is girt up with a golden girdle around His breasts. How full of significance! Well, a girdle is always the symbol of strength. Gold in the Bible is always the symbol of what is precious among minerals or metals; precious. And the breasts are always the symbols of devotion. And if you put those three things together, what a wealth they contain. Here this One is characterized by a passionate devotion to that which is precious to God, of pure gold. The strength of this One, the strength of this One is that He is girded with this passion for what is precious to God. That runs right through this book, it comes right out at the other end with the City, it is an underlying, fundamental thing, and as I repeatedly say, it is the key to the throne. His throne is established in His character, by His character and all, ALL victory is that, where God is concerned. This is going to be a very searching thing through this book, it's going to be a very deciding thing everywhere in the churches. We shall meet it again when we come to the churches in the will of God. It's a deciding thing as to the rise and the fall of the Church and the rise and the fall of individual Christians, and the rise and the fall of nations — their character. "How much of the character and nature of Christ is there?" is going to be the deciding thing, come back to that again. Well, there it is: the strength of devotion to what is precious unto God. Remember that; that is the secret of spiritual victory in any life.

"His head, and His hair, were as wool, white wool, as white as wool". What is it? Well, here we have another combination, purely of age. We get this figure in the book of Daniel and it's the "Ancient of Days" that describes this one. You get age — if you like — eternity. It's not always true that white hair is the mark of age, but usually it is. The symbolism is a very common one, it speaks of that which outlasts time, that which transcends time, that which is not of time but which is of eternity. And it speaks of purity. And seeing that this is His head and His hair, the strict and exact interpretation of the symbolism, we have the permanence, the endurance, the time outlasting power of truth, of purity. Here are His judgments, His thoughts, His mind, and there is nothing impure in His thoughts, nothing unclean. How exact the Word is; "white as white wool", both to doubly emphasize the utterness of this purity and cleanness.

Dear friends, though we may not be very much enamoured of the symbolism, the truth behind all this is tremendously important. The fact is again that His kingdom which is an everlasting kingdom, is that because His judgments are right and because it is founded upon absolute truth. It is a mind that is freed of everything of mixture and duplicity; what is contrary to God. The apostle Paul writing to the Philippians said "Whatsoever things are PURE, think on these things" that's the mind of Christ. That's the mind of a character of Christ "let this mind be in you... whatsoever things are pure, think on these things... whatsoever things are lovely" for here it is; that is what He is like! A mind, that is, the mind of Christ, not our mind, is something that is a very strong thing where God is concerned. If we can only get the viewpoint of the Lord, if we can only see as the Lord sees, if only we can get the mind of the Lord about a person or a situation; we're in a tremendously strong position. Let me put that the other way, so much of our weakness and our failure and our breakdown is our WRONG mindedness, isn't it like that? We've got the wrong attitude of mind, we haven't the singleness of mind for the glory of God, we're affected by how things touch us. Well, He was never like that, He was never like that. And that character of right judgment of absolute truth, absolute truth — was the strength and is the strength of His government, of His kingdom.

Let these things come out of the Bible and out of this high symbolism to us as spiritual lessons, spiritual instruction. Do you want to go on and go through and endure and abide? Do you want spiritual strength? For that is not something that He can give you, that He can give you as from the outside. Oh, how we ask for power, how we ask for strength... It is only something that He can do IN us; He will make us strong by making us good. What a lot that explains of His dealings with us! So often when we ask for strength He puts us through an experience that is going to change something in us of our character, our attitude, our mentality; that is His way.

"His eyes were as a flame of fire". Well, all we need to say here is that these eyes, symbolizing His discernment, His discernment, His real discernment and perception and grasp of things and seeing into things and seeing through things and arriving at RIGHT conclusions, was due to the fact that His mind is what we have said it is, like that. You know dear friends, discernment is a tremendous thing in the Christian life. Oh, what a lot of mistakes we make, for want of real spiritual discernment... If only, if only we had this spiritual discernment, if we were able to perceive, to recognize, to discern, to understand the meaning of things; what a lot we would be saved. There is a great deal of strength in spiritual discernment. There is! People who are always making confusion and messes because they lack real discernment, they are in a state of weakness, unable to see the meaning of things, see through, beyond appearances of what is on the outside. Because His Spirit is what it is, His mind is what it is, He is able to rightly discern everything. Oh, we are going to come onto this when we come to the churches, seeing through and seeing things as they are truly, no deception can come through those eyes. No, He is in the mighty strength of clear discernment, His eyes are as a flame of fire, there is nothing but truth there, no falsehood, no carnal-mindedness (to use Paul's phrase) therefore He can see. The pure in heart shall SEE God. Shall see! See... What we see depends on the state of our heart; His eyes as a flame of fire were that because of the purity of His heart.

"His feet were as varnished brass as though it had been refined in a fire". How meticulous is the description. Well, feet simply, we know, represent a man's ways, a man's goings and a man's quests — what he's af-

ter, what he's aiming at, and toward which he's moving; the object of his movements. That's just the symbolism of feet everywhere in the Bible; the goings of a man. And here we have brass, varnished brass refined in a fire. Brass is always in the Bible, as you know, the symbol of strength and the fire is always the symbol of purging. Then brass becomes righteousness, the strength of righteousness which has come out of the fire. Righteousness, the Old Testament says, is the girdle of His loins and the foundation of His throne. Here again, the quest, the objects, the interests, the movements, the ways, the goings of the Lord Jesus are always PURGED ways, CLEANSED goings, no self-interest in this — nothing but the pleasure of God. "I come to do Thy will O My God". His ways are all tested in the fire; purged of all unworthy motives.

"His voice was as the sound of many waters". This is very beautiful. The sound of many waters! What is the sound of many waters? Not of much water, but many waters; all coming from all directions, and this way and that way and the other way, rivers and the rivulets are all coming, converging and blending and harmonizing. And this one has its note and that one has its note, the other one has another note and yet in their converging and coming together they form a beautiful harmony like a choir of many notes. The sound of many waters. Diversity in unity, unity in diversity.

Now, you say that's all a beautiful picture and it sounds all very nice; what do you mean? Go back to your gospels and sit and listen to the Lord Jesus or follow Him with open ears, listen to His voice and you will hear sometimes the note of deepest sympathy and tenderness... His kindness. Where a situation calls for that note, it comes — gentleness and kindness and sympathy and understanding — "Leave her alone, for my burial she's done this" and many other instances of the sympathetic, understanding, kindly voice... But we dare not take the time for it all. But you will find sometimes there's a sharp rebuke like a clap of thunder and out they go, convicted, from the oldest to the youngest. They've been smitten as with a flash of lightning from His mouth. There's sympathy, there's judgment, there's condemnation... oh, there's every note in His voice, and He's a combination of them all. His voice is the sound of many waters. You and I have heard that, sometimes we have heard His voice of sympathy and consolation, sometimes we've heard His voice of rebuke, sometimes of exhortation and encouragement. It varies but His is the voice as of a sound of many waters. You're going to come up against that when you come to the seven churches, you will find there are seven notes in His octave. For the churches a wonderful harmony, as a voice as the sound of many waters.

"And out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword". Our letter to the Hebrews chapter four verse twelve interprets that for us: "the word of God is quick, powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, laying bare the thoughts and intents of the heart". Two-edged sword — discriminating, dividing, putting things in the place to which they belong — that belongs there and that belongs there and you're to put those things in their right place and don't confuse things and call something by a name that does not belong to it. Dividing asunder — a sharp two edged sword. This is His character; that He cannot have confusion and mixture and contradiction; two things that do not agree. That is the character of the Lord Jesus and mark you, there's a great deal of spiritual strength in that. One thing that God has always hated is mixture, is mixture: is contradiction in the same place, speaking with two voices at the same time. God hates it. If there's one thing about God that is true it is that He is of one mind. He is perfectly clear as to what He means and what He wants. Two-edged sword divides, puts things where they belong and there's a good deal of strength in doing that, dear friends.

"And His countenance was as the sun shineth in its strength". Of course the countenance is the sum of all the features isn't it? It is the expression of the person. It is possible, of course, to hide yourself behind an expressionless countenance but in the main, generally the countenance is the betrayal of the person behind it; the expression of the life within. And so the countenance here is the sum of all His features. When you sum up everything and what you have to say, there is no darkness at all. There are no shadows here; it is as the sun shineth in its strength. In Him was light — in Him was light! In Him is no darkness at all, there is no variable-ness with Him, neither shadow cast by turning, by changing, by being of two minds; He is all Light, no darkness, no shadows.

Now dear friends, we've said all this but we've got to sum it up. We have set out to show that the end of it all is not only Christ in the place of absolute sovereignty and Lordship and Kingship and dominion, but His Church with Him, His Church with Him. If the City means anything it is the Church with Christ enthroned! If we are to come there, let us not make it too objective and far off, belonging to some remote or near future time, let us see that He's at work upon this thing in us now. Paul has given it in the revelation entrusted to him, has told us that we were foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son. The Holy Spirit had this in view when He first drew you and me to the Lord Jesus. And if He has meant anything in our lives at all, this is the thing that He has been engaged upon and is engaged upon: to conform us to the image of God's Son, working into us the character of Christ, with a view! With a view; oh, I wish I could remember this always, I wish you could remember it always, when He's trying to do something inside in the life, in the nature, in the character to change it, when He's dealing with something which is not Christ and hammering it and battering it and shattering it; giving us an awful time because of what we are in ourselves. It is not just for destruction, He is seeking to make room and way for the Lord Jesus in our characters! That out of this shall come something that is more like the Lord of patience, of love, of thoughtfulness and generous impulse and all that that is Christ-like, to bring that in. Ah, but not that THAT is an end in itself... because it's that kind of person and that kind of Church that is going to be His instrument of government in the ages to come. Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it that He might present the Church to Himself, a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. That is the governmental vessel and instrument at the end, it's a thing of

character and its character is taken from the Lord Jesus. The whole thing begins with the Church. When we have said that, we have just got to the end of the contemplation of Himself personally. As the Lord leads us on in this, we shall see how all this is brought down to the seven churches and that everything there is tried, tested and dealt with on the basis of this personal portraiture of the Lord Jesus.

Now does this throw some light upon what He's doing? All that He is allowing in our lives and all that He is working at in us... why is it? If we suffer we shall reign, and it is through the suffering, the tribulation that we're going to come to the throne and through much tribulation we shall enter the kingdom, and come to reign together with Him. It is necessary for us to see the Lord Jesus — the revelation of Jesus Christ, that we should see Him.

I suggest to you, I urge upon you, dear friends, that your constant and earnest prayer shall be: "Show me Christ. Let me see the Lord Jesus, not objectively in some vision, but by the Holy Spirit let me see what Christ is. May He make me more and more uncomfortable as to myself but then ever remind me that the work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Him and then make me like Him. For we shall be like Him as we see Him as He is." That must be our prayer.

May the vision of Christ break upon our hearts and see His glory and His beauty; see what God desires and is working at where we are concerned and all again, all again, with the Throne in view. For whether it be a literal throne, whatever the reigning means, I think we are learning just now that government and ascendancy is a spiritual thing, it's a spiritual thing. This Stone that wrecked the Roman Empire was cut out without hands. That simply means that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom, not made by man, it's a much more powerful thing than all the kingdoms and dominions that man made whether they be Nebuchadnezzar or the Caesars; a spiritual kingdom is a far more powerful thing than all [kingly] systems. That is the truth that you and I have got to learn; the transcendent importance and power of spiritual life and spiritual character.

Chapter Four

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

"Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him..." Revelation 1:1.

"John, to the seven churches which are in Asia..." Revelation 1:4.

"What thou seest write in a book and send it to the seven churches, unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia and unto Laodicea." Revelation 1:11.

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false; and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I will come to thee, and will move thy lampstand out of its place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God." Revelation 2:1-7.

We have been led at this time to be occupied with revelation or the unveiling of Jesus Christ. We began by taking note of the fact that this book which has that as its title and which has that as its very comprehensive content, is the book which reveals Him inclusively, comprehensively as coming forth at last to settle all those issues which have been underlying the spiritual conflict of this universe. All through the ages there has been a mighty conflict in process. This earth has felt its repercussions; all that has been taking place here has been related to a great conflict in the heavens. And the issue which has been in all that long, drawn out and many sided conflict is none other than the issue of God's intention as to the government of this earth from heaven. His purpose, in the first place, concerning His Son as the appointed Lord of lords, King of kings, supreme Ruler in heaven and earth. And in the second place, the eternally chosen or elected vehicle of that government, what we now know as the Church. These two things as two parts of One have been back of, and the occasion of, all this tremendous swirl and welter of conflict through the ages. And this book is the revelation of Jesus Christ coming out to settle that issue once and for all and finally. And in this book we see the processes of that settlement — how it is headed up, in different connections and relationships — a steady, progressive movement until at last... the kingdoms of this world are the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. The issue is settled and He is established with His Church as forever in an unchallengeable supremacy. Well, that is the revelation of Jesus Christ in very few words.

In our former three sessions we have been considering the introduction to that. First, in noting how everything in this book is consummatory. It gathers up everything from the beginning of the Bible all the way through. In its some four hundred allusions to the Old Testament, it is very comprehensive and quite clearly

it is the bringing of all that to consummation. And then we went on to contemplate the two aspects of the Lord Jesus as presented in chapter one, as foundational to all that is to follow. First of all, His personal victory: "I am He that liveth, I became dead, behold I am alive unto the ages of the ages, I have the keys of death and of Hades." His victory... And we spent quite a lot of time seeing what that victory was and how it was. And then we went to the second aspect of this foundation: His person, that is His character. This matchless description of Himself which we have in chapter one... and we saw that it is upon the basis not only of what He has done, but of what He is in His intrinsic character, nature and worth that He has the right to decide anything — to judge either Church or nations or the devil himself. His authority is based upon what He is, His real character. And that is always a law with God; the power rests upon what a person is more than what a person does. With God the matter of authority, of dominion, of government, or of any kind of trust or responsibility, always depends upon the character of the person or the persons in view. With the Lord Jesus that is perfectly evident that He triumphed because of what He was. And therefore He is in the right of judgment of all others because no one can ever point at anything in Him that Satan could encamp upon and say, 'That's a contradiction'.

Well, again, we spent a long session on the character of the Lord Jesus and the challenge of that character to everything. But when we have said all that we can say, and a great deal more could be said about chapter one; all that is but preparatory to what follows. It is as though the Spirit of God had laid down a foundation for everything now that is going to transpire. As though He had said, "Now this is our ground for everything and of everything; it is upon that and from that that we move to everything else".

You notice that the first movement of the Spirit, here described symbolically as the seven spirits of God (the meaning for that which we may consider at some time) is the Holy Spirit undoubtedly in sevenfold expression. It is the Holy Spirit moving in the first place toward the Church, to deal with the Church inclusively and comprehensively upon the basis that He Himself has laid down. That is a thing that we must bear in mind and which will become more and more apparent as we go on.

Now, if chapters two and three — which contain this first movement to the Church — if these chapters have any relation to our own time, then, dear friends, surely with them we are in the presence of the most solemn and the most momentous issues. What is taken up in the first place where the Church is concerned is nothing less than the very testimony of Jesus Himself in this universe. The Testimony of Jesus... that IS the supreme and the ultimate thing for all history and for all realms. We've seen what that testimony is — the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ in every realm. That is the Testimony of Jesus. And that matter is the first thing that governs the Spirit in moving toward the Church. We see that more fully as we go on. Then of course there follows quite clearly by the patent conclusion that has to be drawn, the Church's responsibility for that Testimony. It is not some thing that is detached and unrelated, abstract and apart in itself. The Church was chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world to be the vessel and the vehicle of the Testimony of Jesus. And so, what is here in the second place is the great and honourable responsibility of the Church in relation to the greatest issue in this universe; the divinely appointed place for Jesus Christ in the whole system of things. And these two things lead on, as is made perfectly clear, to the ultimate government of the world FROM heaven, BY Christ, THROUGH the Church. Those three things are not small things. If that is what is here, then I am justified in saying that when we begin with this first movement of the Spirit to the Church, we are faced with the most solemn and momentous matters. And taking it (and with all our human insignificance, smallness and weakness, all that we would not be and are not that we would be, we are a few of the Church, therefore we must not think too objectively at this time) but when it says "the Spirit saith to the churches", the Spirit is speaking to us here in this place concerning these very matters in this time.

Well, what is here then, is for the enlightenment of the Church as to the meaning of things that happen. Dear friends, things are happening. And things are going to happen. That is what it says right at the beginning. Things are happening and things are going to happen, we are in the midst of these happenings now. There are movements of tremendous significance, very portentous in this creation with an impact of spiritual forces upon this earth, and a lot of things are happening and a lot of developments are in process. We shall see more and more of these things happening. The important thing is that we understand the MEANING of these happenings.

It is a tremendous thing to understand what is happening to us, conscious that things are happening to us, they are happening to us spiritually, in our own spiritual experience and life; conscious of being taken into and through things that are difficult to bear and to understand. We don't know what is it that's happening to us; why are we involved in this... this stress, this pressure, this strain, this tension, this conflict? If we are really God's people going on with God, putting Christ in His place, we're involved in something; every one of us personally. It strikes upon us individually in some way or ways. It strikes upon every relationship of our lives, it strikes upon our families, and upon our homes, upon our businesses, it strikes upon our relationships with other believers, it strikes upon the whole question of spiritual fellowship, it strikes upon the work of the Lord, it strikes upon the local companies. Yes, things are happening, it's like that, we're involved in something.

There are big spiritual movements afoot and I repeat it is of TREMENDOUS importance that the people of God know the MEANING of what is happening; WHY we are passing this way, WHAT the Lord is trying to do with us, what the Lord MEANS by what is taking place. Yes, it's tremendously important that we have understanding of these things. These things will happen. That is what is here in these messages. The Lord is moving in, so to speak, and is bringing every thing to some particular issue. That's a very impressive thing you know, that the Lord seems to be concentrating upon one specific issue!

I don't know how you felt when I read again that first message to the Church at Ephesus. I'll tell you how I have felt as I have read it, I've read it: "I know thy works, thy toil, thy toil and thy patience, that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, thou didst find them false..." Remember this same writer John, who had the responsibility in the church at Ephesus, had written in his letter "beloved, try the spirits, for there are many false prophets gone abroad". Try them! They had done it. "Thou hast tried them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, thou didst find them false. Thou hast patience and didst bear for My Name's sake and hast not grown weary..." "What more do You want Lord? What more can You ask for? If You want more than that, You're very exacting. What can You expect of any people more than that, what are You asking for?" Is that how you feel? You have to react like that in order to get to the heart of things. "All that Lord! All that! We've given You all that, You've got all that, and that means a lot, you know! It means a lot for any church in a day of persecution especially, as in this case. You've got all that; what more do You want, what more can You have? And with all that, You come back and say, with all that, 'I'm on the point of removing your lampstand out of its place, there's something, with all that, which not being present, does not justify My preserving you as a vessel.'" That's terrible isn't it in one way? That's searching, that would drive us to our knees. WHAT IS IT, that with all that, is essential to our continuation as a vessel of the Lord?

We'll have to come back to that before we are finished. I say that it's important that we understand why such people can be dealt with by the Lord in condemnation, yes in correction, with an effort by encouragement and confirmation to get that something else; that essential. Dear friends, there is one thing that surely is such a contemplation and consideration will bring home to you and to me: that is that the Lord is never satisfied with the comparative. He must have the absolute. The Lord will never ultimately, ultimately settle down to accept something good, something good. He's going to have the best. A church may be good in many respects, a group of the Lord's people may have many commendable things, that even the Lord commends, but in the final analysis, His attitude is, "A good thing, with many good things is not what I set out to have. At the beginning I set out to have something not good, but the best. Not comparative, but absolute. Not partial, but complete." That, I say, is the conclusion to which we are driven if we read this right; we have to decide that.

Now then, here we have to answer one question; do these messages to the seven churches in Asia have an application to the Church today? Of course there are these schools of interpretation to which I have referred earlier. I'll not even mention their technical names, but there is the one school that holds and concludes that what is here in this book was confined to the time of its being written, it was just a matter of contemporary history, it had only to do solely with the churches in Asia as they were at that time, and all this was contemporary history. Very well, if so, it may be interesting to read it, to know what happened and how things happened; but you don't get over all your difficulties that way.

There is the next school that interprets all this as having commenced in apostolic times, in late apostolic times, and been spread over to the time of the coming of the Lord, that is, that all these seven churches are like seven phases of history which fill up the big gap between the two comings of the Lord. Alright, we are not going to argue about that. And then there is the third school which holds that it all belongs to the end, to the end of the age and afterward, all this is going to come up as the day of the Lord draws near and going to be all cleared up and settled in the last phase of this age and then what follows afterward.

I would say here, that not by way of convenience or compromise, I'm thinking that they all hold truth, they all hold truth and they all hold error — or if that is too strong a word — they all hold weaknesses and flaws. But I'm not going to discuss them, that is not the point at all. What I'm after is this: if this is the word of the Lord, if this has come from God, if this is the word of the Holy Spirit, you can confine it to no particular time. It ranges ALL time in the principles which it embodies.

You are not dealing here finally and ultimately and conclusively with anything that belongs to any one fragment of time. You're dealing with the thoughts of God which govern ALL times. And wherever and whenever you have those things that are found in these churches which are condemned by the Lord; at any time in history they're still condemned — condemnation does not belong to any one place or one time. They are principles of universal application. And where you find, and whenever you find that which the Lord here commends and is seeking to have, that is an eternal something which compasses all time! And I hold that as the answer to all interpretations; that we are not dealing with mere history, and localities and phases in time; we are dealing with eternal principles. And I am certain that that is the sum of the significance of this book. As we have pointed out, it goes RIGHT back to the eternal counsels of God and what took place THEN and He decided. And what has been disputed and challenged and fought over through all the ages and now on the threshold of the ages of the ages — it's THAT that is being settled as much in Ephesus as anywhere else. And the same everywhere else as in Ephesus. These are no issues for some period or some place; we are in it as much as ever Ephesus in apostolic times was in it. This is to us, because the word of the Lord is forever! He speaks and when He speaks He expresses an eternal mind and a universal mind.

Well now, this book clearly compasses all time — past, present and what there remains of the future. And it does so in one inclusive respect: this issue of the utterness, the utterness — not the comparativeness, not the partialness — the utterness of the place of the Lord Jesus. That's the issue, and that was the issue for Ephesus, no doubt about it. We'll see that as we look into this message.

You see, it is the full revelation of Jesus. The FULL revelation of Jesus. This is no partial revelation of

Him, He's here in fullness; and THAT'S the challenge. Churches, times, are not being challenged on something about Jesus, some, even true part of Jesus; the challenge is upon the fullness of Christ, the FULLNESS of Christ — that's the issue. And that is where we are in this book. And so I repeat for you, certainly that this book holds principles for all time.

Now then, to Ephesus. He is heading up, we have said, to a final conclusion all these outstanding questions and controversies through the ages. He's heading them up at last, saying "Now we are going to settle this and settle it forever." And where does He begin? He begins with the Church. Rightly so! It's in the right order of God to begin this with the Church. He cannot pass to the nations and call them to account until He has dealt with the Church. He cannot even dispossess the evil powers of their place and cast them out until He has dealt with the Church. Tremendous principle involved in that. Without giving mystical interpretation to this and this is not my intention at all because I believe this is historic and by descent, nevertheless the principle does apply in this way; that you and I will never see the evil powers and the evil one cast out of our realm while there is something wrong with us before the Lord. Isn't it true? If he has some rightful foothold in us; no hope of his being cast out. You've got to take the ground from him before you can do that. That is true in principle. In dealing with any life where Satan has really got power, you've got to get down to know WHY he has got the power in that life, that there is something there that is of himself. It's got to be removed before that life can be saved. That is the meaning of our Lord's own words "The prince of this world cometh to me and hath nothing in me; hence the prince of this world is cast out". See the basis. It's like that.

And that is what is here: how can you deal with the world in judgment or with the great kingdom of Satan which will be dealt with in the third place, until the Church is put right? Because presently it will be the accuser of the brethren who is cast down, but that will not happen until the ground of his accusation has been dealt with in the brethren. You got that? His is not official power, his is not just objective power, his is spiritual power. His strength and his hold rests upon a condition, a condition. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath obtained thee by asking that he may sift thee as wheat but I have prayed for thee, when thou art turned again strengthen thy brethren..." WHY does Satan have his request granted, to sift Simon Peter as wheat... and he did it, mark you, he did it very thoroughly. Why? Because the Lord saw there was something in Simon Peter that had got to BE sifted that Satan had a right over. And so the Lord dealt with that, and you have an authoritative Simon Peter after that, a man in spiritual ascendancy indeed, who cares for neither men nor devils. That was not the original Simon. You see the working of this law; power rests upon character.

And so, if the Church is God's eternally chosen vessel for the administration of the kingdom of God by Jesus Christ, it's got to come to a spiritual position which justifies that government, that control. Hence the Lord MUST begin with and be thorough and exact with the Church and not just accept good things, but sift down and sift down. So the ultimate issue is bound up with these messages, no less an issue than that that we have called, dear friends, we have called, (the wonder and amazement of it, it has perhaps by familiarity lost some of its impress upon us): called into fellowship with Jesus Christ to take the place that the prince and principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness now hold. Not so difficult to understand if you think about it... this world is governed spiritually. No doubt about that. It's a spiritual government that's behind all that's happening here. Even men who make no profession whatever of being spiritual, even in any particular sense Christian; never give us anything to indicate that they are born again people and know the Lord... nevertheless they see. They see through, and they know that there are forces of evil behind the movements in this world. They say, they speak of it as "that evil thing, that evil thing"; they know. And so it is. Back of all this there is spiritual government of this world, "the world rulers of this darkness" what a rich full phrase that is. Where's it coming from? Principalities and powers and hosts of wicked spirits in the heavens.

The ultimate vision of God's purpose realized is the Church in the symbolic presentation of the new Jerusalem, heavenly City, taking THAT place, occupying THAT place. So difficult to move in our minds from a literal symbolism to a spiritual meaning... That's what it means! Church is a heavenly body, with a heavenly calling, to occupy a heavenly position for heavenly government with Christ in the ages to come. And if I have not misread my Bible, that is what the Church is called to and that is what we are called to. Now, you cannot have such a calling and such a vocation, such a divine intention, without the Lord being very exact. VERY exact! And, as I say again, being unprepared to accept what is comparative.

Well, here we have the seven messages and I haven't got to Ephesus yet. But here we have then the seven-fold symbolism and representation and it's that we must note first of all. Seven churches in Asia. Yes, but there were plenty MORE churches in Asia besides these seven! All the churches in Asia are not mentioned when you've mentioned these seven. Are the others alright, they did not need to be mentioned, nothing wrong with them, they're alright; is that what it means? Why select these? Why select just seven? Well, because seven is always a representative number, that's all. Seven is the number which symbolizes spiritual completeness. It represents spiritual completeness or fullness. And so seven here selected are just lifted out, so to speak, to be representative of all others and the whole Church and what the Lord says to the seven He says to the whole. It is here a representation of the whole Church — that is all that is meant by selecting seven — to embody a complete expression of spiritual principles. Is that clear? If that is true, then it's more than for Asia, it IS the whole Church and what was in Asia, inside of Asia in these seven, is only taken as a kind of sounding board or platform for the Church universal and all time.

These are united in the right hand of Him that walks up and down in the midst of the golden lampstands. United in His right hand, "Who holdeth in his right hand", you notice "who HOLDETH in his right hand the

seven". Well, the right hand is another symbolic idea, it's the place firstly of honour and then of authority and then of strength. He holds... all there in His right hand, in His authority, in His strength. The word 'hold' as used here or 'holdeth' is a very strong word in the Greek; different from other words which mean just 'to have', here it's what we might call 'to have a grip'; He's got a grip on this. He is in charge, in possession. He has not let go what He intended here, He is not regarding this loosely, carelessly, indifferently, weakly. This whole matter of the Testimony of the Church and the churches is with Him something very definite, very positive, He holds in His right hand for His honour.

The golden lampstands... the golden lampstands; that is essentially a divine idea. And as we, I think, earlier said, gold in the Old Testament is always the symbol of that which is most precious amongst metals. You speak of gold there; you always have the idea of value, of preciousness, of something that counts. Here it's in the churches that which is precious to Him. That which is precious to God. That which is of intrinsic value. That which is incorruptible. We've tried to set this forth in a fuller way in a book, "The Gold of the Sanctuary" but that is it. What is He after, what is His thought about the Church and the churches, what is His thought about us as companies of the Lord's people; what is it? His thought is that there is where we are — or there ought to be where we are — something of transcendent preciousness to Himself and to the Father. Something of real value; REAL value. It's that that He's after.

These symbolic representations of lampstands of gold is simply this — here and there in the intention of God shall be a representation and an embodiment of that which is supremely precious to God. If it's like that, if it's like that, well of course that will explain a very great deal why the enemy would like the fine gold to become dim, why the tremendous conflict for the PURITY of any corporate expression of the Church — its purity. To corrupt, to corrupt — it's one of the things the Lord is dealing with in the churches — to corrupt, to spoil and mar the fine gold, to rob the Lord of the preciousness. Oh, let us be very much given to this, brethren and sisters; see to it that so far as we are concerned, we take this responsibility. I am not one of those who can conclude that the angels of the churches are the single ministers of the church; I don't believe that because it contradicts so much that is in the New Testament. But I believe that the angel of the church is simply the principle or the focal point of responsibility. We are ALL responsible people in the Church and we're all called to take responsibility for the Church and so I say the Lord help us every one to take responsibility where we are and where we are concerned, to see that there is something precious for the Lord, that our gatherings and our companies are not just preaching places, teaching places with a lot of truth and head knowledge of divine things... but really in character there is something very precious to the Lord — it could be said that there is something there that is very precious to the Lord. If that were spoiled, if that were lost, something of real value to the Lord would go. It MUST be like that dear friends, very practical, but you see this is what the Lord is after: the intrinsic value, not the comparative value, not the size of things at all, not what is external but the INTRINSIC value, the gold... refined in the fire. That which is PRECIOUS TO THE LORD.

Seven golden lampstands. Lampstands, that is a better translation than candlesticks because a candlestick burns itself away or the candle burns itself away. The lamp, it burns by a supply, an endless supply from outside of itself. However, that by the way, the function of the lampstand, that's the point; what is it? Of course, obviously, it is LIGHT, by the Holy Spirit. Let's qualify that. It is light, but it is light by the power, the illumination, the energy, the resource of the Holy Spirit. A Holy Spirit testimony in every place where there is a company, small or large, of the Lord's people. LIGHT in that place!

I cannot emphasize the importance of this enough although it seems SO obvious. But this ought to really concern our hearts, really be a burden on our hearts, that where we are, as the Lord's people together, however few, people can see Christ. People can really SEE Christ because we are there. Isn't that searching and challenging... Just the matter of seeing the Lord Jesus. I've seen a lot of people going to meetings in a certain place, hearing them sing and wondering what's happening amongst them, but you meet those people and you meet more than those people. If you have any idea of God at all or what God ought to be like, if you have any information as to God's character and nature, you see it in those people. You meet it with those people, you've got it right in your very presence, that's where it is. That is the essential function of the Lamb, it is not an ordinance, it is not a code to get something, it is not a form and a shape; it's a living Life, a living History. That is what the Church is here for and the churches are but local representations of the Church. It is that there, where the Lord's people are, that is where what is Christ is found. Just what is Christ! Yes, these are the seven golden lampstands.

I must stop there I think, before we come to Ephesus after all, but that is enough to search our hearts. It begins to show us, it begins to lead us to this thing that the Lord cannot do without, He cannot do without. With all the works, the labour, the patience, and all the conscientiousness, and integrity and all the hatred of evil men, and all the testing of people's professions and judging whether things are right and wrong, with all that, there's some intrinsic value which is more than all and without which the Lord cannot be satisfied and the vessel is not justified in its continuing. Very solemn thought, that is.

May the Word this afternoon provoke us to this and I would close here, this part, by saying again that as with Ephesus, so with us all — there can be no substituting of something good for the best. I'm sure that searches us here in this place. There may be a lot of good things, we may be wanting a lot of good things and doing a lot of good things but remember there is a FULL thing for which God brought us into being. A full thing for which He brought us into being, and He will never, never allow anything less than that to pass with Him. He'll hold to that and ask: "Why did I bring you into being? This or that, something else... quite good, yes, nothing wrong with that at all... quite good, BUT... is that all, IS that all?" That's His interrogation here.

“Repent and do the first works”. And we shall have more light on this as we actually look into this message to the Church in Ephesus. The Lord hold our hearts.

Chapter Five

CHRIST’S MESSAGE TO EPHEBUS

Now I think we can tackle this matter of Ephesus. We’ve been marching round Ephesus so far, now we try to get inside. I’ll just read a part of the message, the second chapter, the book of the Revelation: “These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false; and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name’s sake, and hast not grown weary. But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I will come to thee, and will move thy lampstand out of its place, except thou repent.”

So what we have to do, seek the Lord’s help to do, is to get right to the heart of that message and find out what that thing was and is, upon which everything turned. For, as we have seen, the continuance of this vessel as serving the Lord’s purpose did not rest upon a number of quite good and commendable things but it hung upon one thing and that is called the first love — “thy first love”. And we are going to ask the question and seek in some degree to answer it: what is first love?

May I say here before I go on with that, that it is not my thought or expectation to make anything like an exhaustive study of these messages. Indeed I do not know whether I shall deal with all of them. But whatever we do, we shall seek to get right to the heart of the message and find out exactly what it is that is THAT expression of Christ which is so vital and so full of consequence as to make this whole matter of continued ministry into a crisis. For there’s no doubt about it, that we’re in the presence of crisis when we are here with these messages. There’s a real upshot of a very ultimate and utter character bound up with these messages. We want to find out what it is that carries so much with it and means so much to the Church and to the Lord.

I have said, THAT expression of Christ; here I ought to spend time in again approaching this but I’ll do no more, for I’ve had a hint that I’m putting too much in, or trying to. But it is perfectly clear to the simplest reader that it is that portrait of the Lord Jesus in chapter one that is spread over these seven messages. You probably have noticed that something out of that description of the Lord Jesus is used in the introduction to every message. There is only one slight change and that is to Philadelphia where instead of “who hath the keys of death and of Hades” the change is “who hath the keys of David”. With that exception or change, every message contains something taken out of the description of the Lord Jesus “He that...” and then you have something from the full portrait and presentation of Christ, clearly implying that it is THAT which is of Christ which is governing in every case, all round, and everywhere, every time. It’s something vital of Christ that’s at issue. That is the important thing to note.

Now come to Ephesus. Of course Ephesus was the mother church of Asia. We know that to be so because it is said by Paul’s three years there in Ephesus, “ALL Asia heard the word, both Jew and Greek” and it was the mother church. And in the introduction, the message to Ephesus, the Lord describes Himself as “he that holdeth the seven stars... and walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands...” Ephesus is inclusive of all. Ephesus is comprehensive. And so what is said to Ephesus is not just said to Ephesus alone, it’s to Asia.

It is quite comprehensive this message. And as we are able to put our finger upon this vital matter right at the heart of things, I’m sure without my pointing it out, we shall see that it is a matter that is in no sense exclusively local or of a particular period. It is something that is ever the peril of the people of God.

So we return and say, what is this thing called ‘thy first love’? For the answer of course, we have to or should, go back to the great letter of Paul which now bears the name “the letter to the Ephesians”. We know it was the letter to more churches than Ephesus but that was one of the churches, perhaps the first one which had a name put on it in its circulation. We can, for our purpose, speak of it as the letter to the Ephesians. And if you call to mind the content of that letter, you will remember that it has a very great deal in it about love. Chapter 2, verse 4: “For his great love wherewith he loved us” chapter 5:2: “Walk in love as Christ also loved us” chapter 5:25: “As Christ loved the church and gave himself for it” chapter 3:17: “Rooted and grounded in love” chapter 3:19: “The breadth and the length and the height and the depth, the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ”. It’s not a long letter so far as compass of words is concerned, but what IMMENSE statements those are! What a tremendous love is represented there!

Yes, Ephesus was the church which had been given a ministry and revelation of love; the knowledge-surpassing love. And Ephesus had responded to it! Ephesus had responded to it, there’s no doubt about it. Read chapters nineteen and twenty of the book of the Acts and see the response that they made to that love and to the man who had brought the knowledge of that love to them. As he bade them farewell, they knelt down together, he prayed and they wept much at his departure. It’s all a scene of divine love reciprocated.

Ephesus in a very real sense embodied love, from God and returning to God; from Christ to Christ. Yes, that’s all very true. But you’ve got to add another word alongside of that to be able to arrive at the meaning of

this 'their first love' and it's the other word which has the largest place in the letter to the Ephesians and it's the word 'grace'. Grace! I'll not take the time to give you all the nine references or mentions of grace in that letter, but grace, grace is everywhere. Grace is running through it all, it's all grace! WHY was there such a response to the love of God? Because they recognized and were fully alive to the fact of how GREAT GRACE there MUST be for SUCH people to be loved in such a way!

This first love is no sentimental thing. We talk about first love... a good deal of sentiment bound up with that phrase as often used. No, this is not something sentimental. This is a quality of love. The Lord help me to show you that quality of this love.

The Lord loved Israel of old. Oh, how the prophets declared that love, how the Lord made known His love for that people, there's no doubt about it; the Lord loved Israel. But Israel all too soon lost the sense of the infinite condescension of God to love them. The infinite condescension of God in CHOOSING them from amongst all peoples of the earth. And all too soon Israel allowed themselves to feel that THEY were something, and worthy of that love, and they became proud and they took the love for granted. THE sin of Israel was just that. In the end, well, it was just that, THAT; THEY were the people, THEY were the people! Yes! THEY merited this, THEY were worthy of this, THEY were something to take account of, they WERE the people. [?] All of them. That's how it came to be, that's how it came to be with Israel, and for THAT very reason, the covenant was broken and the Gentiles were brought in their place.

And do you notice about the Gentiles... when the apostle turned to the Gentiles, when the message went to the Gentiles, you always, you invariably have this most wonderful thing that you can think of — that WE should be allowed into this! Never was anything heard of like this; that Gentiles, the heathen, the people whom Israel called 'the dogs', brought right in, right into the family and given all the privilege of sons. Most marvellous thing! It was the TREMENDOUS APPRECIATION of divine love!

Did you hear our brother's prayer tonight, he might have known what I was going to say, first love, first love, first love. Well, in this case you see, it was like this, it was like this. Here is a wife. Here is a bride. The Church is the bride of Christ, not saying, "He's lucky to have ME for a wife, I'm quite worthy of Him, He ought to be very thankful to have such a wife as I am". But no, "It is the most amazing thing that He EVER looked at me at all! That EVER He should have given me a FIRST thought let alone a second thought. I can NEVER explain it, NEVER understand that! I'll never be able for all eternity to know why He thought of ME, let alone loved me and gave Himself for me". You see, that's the spirit of the Church, and that was the spirit of the Gentiles when the Jews just took everything for granted. It all became so common place with them... all that God had given to them and shown to them, well, there was nothing now very wonderful about that. It lost its lustre, its glory, its wonder, its amazement; so commonplace now... They could do as they liked with it, take it or leave it.

But not so the Gentiles, see them in the house of Cornelius, my word what openness of heart! See them in Philippi, what openness of heart, how they just drink it in there. See them in Thessalonica, as Paul said "you received the word not as the word of man but as the word of God". Received it! Whenever you move outside of Israel you've got an intense appreciation, a TREMENDOUS wonder and, coming back to Ephesus, come back to Ephesus — what have you got here in Ephesus? You have this: "not a few of them that practiced curious arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all and they counted the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver". That's appreciation, that's appreciation, there's nothing commonplace there. That's first love, dear friends, that's first love.

The peril is, even in your labour and in your patience and in your conscientiousness and your sincerity and all these works and lose that — the glory and wonder and amazement of being saved at all has been lost. And all this marvellous revelation that God has given as to the Church's election, calling, vocation, destiny — what is called the eternal purpose — you can hear it without a thrill. You can have it all and it does not stir you to the profoundest gratitude and worship; it's all so commonplace... so familiar with it... It's lost its wonder. THAT'S the heart of the message, that's the heart of the message! I say that's the peril of the Church at all times. God has given so much, we begin to make it or allow it to be commonplace — "oh, we've heard that before, we know all about that, you can't tell us anything that we don't know in that matter, we've got it all, we've got it all" and we are not on our faces before God in the presence of it saying "AMAZING wonder, AMAZING wonder that ever I should have a place in that"!

"Consider from whence thou art fallen". The mighty price of their earthly things became as nothing, NOTHING, when they saw the Lord Jesus! They brought all those things of value to men and in this world by which they had laid such great store, yes a great price, as things of this world go. And they burnt them in the sight of all "That's rubbish! We've seen JESUS!" and not until you've seen Jesus does everything else become tawdry and worthless and no greater value than to go up in smoke.

To see Him... Oh, the revelation of Jesus Christ ought not to be a teaching, a truth, an interpretation, a book; it ought to be a WORSHIP. "And when I saw Him, I fell at his feet as one dead". Have you ever seen Jesus to bring you down like that? Have you ever seen what He has given to you to the point of making you say 'it's the most wonderful thing man could ever think of that I, I, should be given that, that I should have a place in that'? Do you see how we need to be recovered? Don't let us blame Ephesus, this is OUR constant enemy, it's my constant enemy. My continuous handling of these things through the years... always, always dealing with these matters and ministering them... my abiding enemy is familiarity and association with it all as with truth, as with truth; to lose the wonder. And it IS wonderful! And dear friends, that's your peril, when you

continuously and repeatedly hear it, it would be as a song that has lost its enchantment, this tale that is true, a familiar story; yes, a wonderful story, but never bowing us before God in worship. That is our peril. That is first love.

And now you can see that you may have a lot of things and not that. A lot of good things. Oh, it isn't that you're all bad, or we're all bad, and there's nothing good to be said about us at all... there is a lot of devotion and there's a lot of labour, a lot. Yes, but, but what He is looking for is that TRUE heart appreciation of HIMSELF, what He has done, and what He has given. We move into this book and you find that you move into a realm of worship: "unto Him that loveth us, loosed us from our sins with his own blood, made us, made US, a kingdom and priests unto His God". WHAT can you say? Only: to HIM be the glory, to Him be the glory! You move into chapters four and five and that's where you are — a Church in heaven — a worshipping Church in the true and full appreciation of the Lord.

Now, that's not overloading you in matter, but it is putting upon us a very great responsibility. I believe, dear friends, that this is just the word the Lord would say to us all at this time. And I'm quite content to leave it there tonight. Having conference after conference, conference after conference... if you saw my office you would see a stack halfway up my own stature of reports of conferences over the years. You have to ask: with all that has been given, the volumes... the volumes that have been given through the years; how much worship has it produced? How much of all that are we alive to, as to what the Lord has given? But please don't think that I'm making this personal, I'm only illustrating what I mean. What we, who are SO privileged, not here only, we the Church in our time, who have all this... so privileged to have the revelation of Jesus Christ. All the cost to those first servants of the Lord to give us this, all the cost to the Lord Himself that we should have it... Oh yes, what a price lies behind it all! How much do we value it? How much do we worship in the presence of it? How much does it REALLY mean to us? How much is teaching and truth and the Bible? How much does it REALLY touch our hearts? That's the question and that is the meaning of first love, first love. Oh, the appreciation that ever the Lord should have looked our way... to say nothing of just lavished upon us all that He's got to give! Well, there's the message.

See, we can understand now why it was the Lord could not be satisfied with a number of quite good things if that one thing — the essence of all the cost — was left behind. No wonder He says do the first works, go back again... first works; there they are. Oh yes, there's no doubt about it that they made a marvellous and costly, as this world would think, response to the Lord. I love to read that story in Acts 19 and 20 of Paul in Ephesus; tremendous riot where they would fain tear that apostle limb from limb. And some of these Ephesians said — ah, not only said but acted for his preservation — "Don't you go out there, you stay in here. We come between you and them"; and would not allow him to go out to them in their wild rage. They wanted this man kept because for them he was God's channel of so much. It's all such a wonderful picture of how they APPRECIATED what had come to them. Now the Lord says, "You've fallen from that, you've fallen from that, you've left that. You haven't given up Christian work, you haven't given up all Christian virtues, there's lots of good things about you but that's the thing that matters."

I need not add more words to this; you see, it's all the appreciation of the grace of God. The GRACE of God! Where should we be but for the grace of God? Oh, grace had no meaning for Israel; they didn't feel the need of it, they were self-sufficient... and they lost it all. The people who really put supreme value upon grace were the people who've got it all. Who've got it all! The Lord make us people like that, and stir our hearts and challenge us and recover in us THIS first love.

Chapter Six

CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO LAODICEA

"For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea..."
Colossians 2:1.

"I bear him witness, that he hath much labor for you, and for them in Laodicea... Salute the brethren that are in Laodicea... And when this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans..." Colossians 4:13,15–16.

"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus. I count not myself yet to have apprehended: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded..."
Philippians 3:12–15.

We will hold those Scriptures in mind. In these closing verses of the third chapter of the book of Revelation, we reach the concluding phase of the first movement of the risen Lord toward the consummation of divine purpose in this age. Throughout this time we have sought to have the great end of God for His Church overshadowing everything, kept clearly in view, because what we have here, in the first part of this great book and in the last chapters, is the great purpose of God in our salvation.

Paul, as we have read this evening, said that he was on full stretch to apprehend that for which he had been

apprehended by Christ Jesus. And then, without defining exactly what that was; that object, that purpose... he did add "the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus". It was unto that that he concedes himself as having been apprehended by Christ Jesus. Not only to be saved but to be brought to a great and glorious destiny in and by Christ Jesus. He calls it 'the prize of the on-high calling'. The end of this present part of the book of the Revelation, which book is bringing us very near to the goal, the intention of the book is to get the Church ready for the end, for the great time of crisis in view. At the end of this first part of this book which has to do with the Church, we are told what it was that Paul meant by the prize of the on-high calling. This is it: "To him that overcometh I will give to him to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in His throne". That is the great object and goal for which people are saved and apprehended by Christ Jesus; to a place of sharing with Him, their Lord, the throne of government of this universe. That is the meaning of Christianity. That is in the heart of the Lord in giving the gospel, in appealing to men. It is that, dear friends, that is in view in our Christian lives. Nothing less than that. A great calling, an on-high calling, a wonderful prize: throne-sharing with Christ in government.

Well, it is of course quite significant, is it not, that that is the last note in this phase in this section of the book. And we can say, because it is quite true, that it has been that, that has governed all that has gone before. The wonderful presentation of the Lord Jesus in person in chapter one was in order that by showing His victory, the glory of His risen person, the standard should be set. And then through all these seven messages to the seven churches, as representing by their very number the whole Church in all ages — in all that is said through these: This thing is governing, this end is overshadowing, it is to this that everything is moving, the judging and the condemning and the demand to put away everything that would thwart that end and the encouraging and the confirming and the exhorting in relation to other things that will help toward that end. The End governs everything — the on-high calling, the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus. That is in view. That explains everything. It explains all the Lord's dealings with His people. If at all times when the Lord is dealing with us we could but pause and be quiet and think "what's the meaning of this, why this?" and allow ourselves to entertain this great governing truth: He's getting us ready for the throne. He's doing something now that relates to that glorious end; He's paving the way, He's preparing us, He is cancelling out things in us that would hinder our progress toward that end. He is seeking to inculcate and develop in us the things that will hasten us toward that end. If only we could be convinced that that is exactly what it all means, it would be a tremendous help.

Now, you notice that the Lord in these letters says that quite clearly to His people. We were thinking earlier in the day about that suffering church, that suffering church, called to be faithful unto death. The Lord simply told them in plain language that their tribulation was all with a spiritual and divine purpose and quite clearly to prepare them, to qualify them for their great eternal destiny. And that's how it is.

I think, dear friends, perhaps our obsession with the importance of this life is often a great limitation upon our appreciation of the heavenly calling. We make FAR too much of this life from one standpoint, from another perhaps we don't make enough of it. From one standpoint we make far too much of it, that if we don't see everything accomplished here and now in this lifetime and all our hopes and expectations realized, then we're disappointed beings. The Lord never looks at it like that at all. Never has anything been made perfect in the lifetime of any one believer except the Lord Jesus. It is like that. On the other hand perhaps we do not make enough of the TREMENDOUS importance of what the Lord is trying to do with us IN this lifetime. However, be that as it may, there is this that stands over our lives now, these lives here, it's this tremendous heavenly calling unto which we have been apprehended by Christ Jesus. But unto the realization of that or what Paul calls the 'attaining' unto that; certain things are necessary. And in this message to the church in Laodicea the Lord makes perfectly clear what is essential in the final issue — this Man. And He does that in the first place by presenting Himself in certain terms. You notice how He introduces Himself here: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God". That may not be very clear as to what it really means. Well, I suppose everybody is quite clear on the first, if you aren't, then you're terrible hypocrites for I've been hearing a lot of 'amens' tonight. That prayer drew out many 'amens' tonight. And we're accustomed to using that word, is it just a word? Is it just something we tack on at the end or at a certain point? Is it a habit, a custom? What DO we mean? No, we understand that the meaning of that word "amen" is verily, truly, positively, YES! We mean it! "These things saith the Amen..." the Amen. The One in Whom and about Whom there is no uncertainty or indefiniteness.

My dear friends, if you and I at all value our salvation, we owe it to Him Who was so THOROUGH in the work that He did for our salvation. Where should we be if He had been indifferent about our salvation? If it had been a willy-nilly matter with Him whether we were saved, whether He was neither cold nor hot about this; where should we be? No, everything about that work of redemption sees Him as One Who, without any reserve whatsoever, or two minds, divided heart, GAVE Himself for our sin that He might redeem us unto God and from all iniquity. He did not stop half way, thank God. He did not suffer Himself to be turned aside or to be influenced by secondary interests; not at all. He is the girded Servant of the Lord. He came, as we have sung, from the mansions of glory having laid aside His robes of comfort and ease... girding Himself as a servant He's come forth, on business and thorough-going business. He's finished the work. These things saith such a One. "The faithful and true witness..."

The faithful and true Witness, you see these are strong, emphatic words. He has been faithful, absolutely faithful. The apostle Paul called upon Timothy to remember Jesus Christ who before Pontius Pilate gave His testimony faithfully. Yes, He was a faithful witness and a true... the point is, and the underlining is that every-

thing here is emphatic, it's positive, it's definite, it's real, it's utter! It is unreserved.

"The beginning of the creation of God..." How does that come into this? Well, first of all we've got to get that word "beginning". It is not the word that means the first of the creation; that He was the first one created and then there were a lot more after Him created. It is not that word at all, [it is] the Greek word "arche" which means the source of everything, the fountain head of everything, the One in whom and from whom everything has come and Who is Himself the Standard and Model of everything. That is what we mean when we speak of an 'archi-*tect*' — one who produces the model, out of whom comes that which is to be; the source of everything. And that's the word here, the beginning of the creation of God. How? See Him coming forth — for it says that in Him and through Him and unto Him were all things created, ALL things were made by Him, that's the Scripture. Was He lackadaisical in the creation? Was He careless in it? When the thing was completed, the evening of the sixth day, was there a lot left to be desired and a lot that needed improving upon? No, the verdict is, "it is VERY good", it is very good. The Divine verdict. He had done His work thoroughly and well, He had applied Himself to it.

What we now, even in a wrecked creation, a ruined creation, can trace of His creative fingers impresses us with the wonder of it, the wonder of the Mind there, the wonder of the Power there, all there. My point is, dear friends, that this is only one further, it's the third phrase that bears upon this one thing: you're dealing with Somebody Who is very thorough! Thorough in creation, thorough in redemption and thorough in His own person and His own witness. And that is how He is introduced to Laodicea as though He would say "this and this alone will bring you to the end". Such a spirit, such a mind, such a devotion, such a thoroughness, such an amen disposition is ESSENTIAL if you're going to reach the end. You have got to mean business! You've got to mean business to reach that goal and obtain that prize. That's perfectly clear as the basis of His speaking to Laodicea and He goes on then to show the Laodicean's attitude of mind and heart will never get THEM there, never get them there. "I have this against thee, thou art neither hot nor cold..." There's ALL the difference between sitting with Him in His throne and being spewed out of His mouth and those are the alternatives resting upon this matter of downright and utter committal, devotion and persistence unto God's great End. Like that.

Then He analyzes this thing and in so doing indicates some things, other things, more things, essential to the attaining. Notice: "because thou sayest I am rich and have gotten riches and have need of nothing". Laodicea was a very wealthy city, it was the great banking centre of Asia minor, and which, and out from which, all the wealth of the province flowed. And the Lord took hold of that, they were proud of their wealth in Laodicea, the world was, but in the church at Laodicea there was a complacency, a satisfaction, a sense of being quite sufficient — of having got there and there was not much more to do about it "rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing". The Lord says "That will never get you to the prize, that will never get you to the prize. One ESSENTIAL if you are to come to that for which I have apprehended and chosen you, one essential is and must remain, a sense, a deep sense of your own insufficiency, of your own need, of there still being FAR more in Christ than ever YOU have discovered or possessed." It's this sense, deep sense, of spiritual need which is essential! ANY kind of gratification or satisfaction that you haven't much further to go or to gain... you're content with the little that you've got or perhaps you want a little more... but here is the spirit of the great apostle "and we've discerned it over Laodicea and I would have you know, I would have you know of my travail, my conflict for them of Laodicea".

Dear friends, anything in the nature of settling down with less than God's FULL content of Christ as our calling, will rob us of the prize — will rob us of the prize. It will just be the people who are deeply, DEEPLY conscious that they have not attained neither are they already complete but who have YET everything to gain in Christ, however much they may have. That is the spirit, the mind, the disposition that is here demanded of Laodicea: "So I counsel thee because thou knowest not that thou art wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked: I counsel thee first of all to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich". This is not buying salvation. Salvation is without money and without price. If there is something to be secured, it is not salvation by our effort or our works or even our earnestness. Not that, that's of grace, but BEING saved we are saved unto something that will draw us out and extend us to the full in the matter of faith. And it is in the fire, in the fire that faith is refined and will be the currency by which the crown is won. I'm not going to dwell upon all the details here; I just want you to catch the spirit of this without an exhaustive exposition.

"Thou knowest not that thou art poor, thou knowest not that thou art blind... I counsel thee buy of me eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see." Thou knowest not that thou art blind; here again is a local touch taken up in connection with one of the temples in Laodicea there was a famous medical school and from that medical school all over the Greek and Roman world an eyesalve went. It was famed for this ointment for eye trouble. Everybody knew what this meant in Laodicea and yet, and yet, right there in the precincts of the place where the world was getting its natural eyes healed, the church was blind. Spiritual blindness was there. "Knowest not that thou art blind?" Let us say right away without too many words, an absolute ESSENTIAL of reaching that end of God is to have a vision, to have a spiritual vision. I ask you my dear friends, every one of you personally now, to challenge your own hearts; have you got a spiritual vision? Are you drifting on from day to day? Are you going on without a mighty incentive for the divine eternal purpose? Are you in the shadows or in the dark as to what it all means, and what the end is intended to be? Or is there before you, before your enlightened spirit, a clear vision of what God has determined as the issue of all things and has called you into in fellowship with His Son? Are you CLEAR about it?

You know quite well that no one ever gets anywhere without a vision. An artisan will never get anywhere

without a vision, no one will ever make any progress unless they clearly see what they are after, what they are aiming at. In any realm of life in order to get somewhere you want to know where it is and what it is you're going to. Here, an essential is that you should see! The whole force of these letters and the presentation of the Lord Jesus is a REVELATION that is going to MASTER our being; a revelation of Jesus Christ that shall capture us and draw us on and make us people of a purpose, people who KNOW where we are going and what we are going after. Are you like that? Have you got the vision of God's eternal purpose in Christ for the Church into which you have been called by His grace? Have you got the vision? Is that something that is coming down into your life continually? Are you tired of hearing that phrase "the eternal purpose... the eternal purpose"? Has it lost its music, its charm, its captivating power? Ah, that's Laodicea you see; lost vision. Lost vision. That is ESSENTIAL to our eyes.

"I counsel thee to buy of me eyesalve that thou mayest anoint thine eyes that thou mayest see." What do you mean when you talk like that figuratively and symbolically "buy of me eyesalve"? Well, again I've only to take you back to such familiar words in Paul's letter to the Ephesians "That He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him... the eyes of your heart being enlightened that you may KNOW what is the hope of his calling" there it is! Buy eyesalve? That means lay yourself out with all your being before God that the Holy Spirit will open the eyes of your heart; give you to see what God means for you as a part of His Church. Buy eyesalve.

"Knowest not that thou art... naked: I counsel thee to buy of me... white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest". Again, there it is here, this thing, as a manufacturing centre for a beautiful fleece which they cultivated in their surrounding fields and made wonderful garments which were world famed. A glistening fleece of Laodicean manufacture. They knew what it meant. Here, in a place where everybody knew of this beautiful garment's material, that people were proud of wearing those Laodicean garments, right in the presence of them all as the Lord looked at them, He saw them naked, but they didn't know it, they didn't know it. "Knowest not that thou art naked?" He saw them as they were by nature and you know dear friends, when our eyes are opened about ourselves, the one thing we want is to get covered up somehow. As soon as Adam's eyes were opened the one thing he wanted was to get covered up, he went and hid himself. And we know ourselves, and of course you know what I'm talking about, when we begin to know ourselves in the light of God, one thing we feel to need is "Oh, for a covering. Oh, for a hiding... Oh, to get out of the way, out of the scanning of those eyes, if only we could hide ourselves from ourselves!" This is no pleasant view when we begin to see ourselves... but they didn't know it, that's how they were, that's how God saw them but they had no sense of nakedness, they were priding themselves in the garments of their own flesh, their own making.

Again the Lord says quite clearly, if you are going to reach the end, you must have a very, very poor opinion of yourself and realize your absolute need of a clothing that you can't make for yourself; the white raiment of Christ's own righteousness. That's your only way to the end. So Paul says "that I may gain Christ, not having a righteousness of mine own, but the righteousness which is of God through faith" — that's the white raiment. We've got to sense our need of that because of our deep and overwhelming sense of our own unrighteousness. These are the people that are on the way to the throne. Any sense whatever or degree of self-righteousness, of being at all fit, will put us out of the running for the prize. This may be comforting for most of us but this is, after all, the gospel isn't it? And it all just amounts to this, that on the one side of this great argument, the Lord is saying you've got to be a people who are characterized by such a strong sense of need, which only the Lord Jesus can supply. You've got to be a people like that if you're going to get there to the place we are called. How different this is from the whole world's attitude, why, the world's attitude is always certain fitness, certain ability, certain self-sufficiency and self-importance to receive the prizes.

It's not the spirit of the world to feel absolutely unfit and unworthy and worthless! That's not the spirit of the world but this is the spirit of Christ and this is the spirit called for. "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten." These people are a chastened people. Well, some of us know a little about that... what it is to be chastened. "But as many as I love, I reprove and chasten" then the appeal: "be zealous..." be zealous! That word simply means be on fire, be burning, be not like that stream that runs alongside of Laodicea which is not a hot stream nor a cold stream... It was well known what He meant, there it was, a river just by the city, of tepid water — neither one thing nor the other. "Be not like that but be zealous, be hot therefore and repent, behold I stand at the door and knock..." We could dwell much upon that but it has been dwelt upon so much, it just means this: that where conditions obtain such as these — no sense of the need of Him, no sense of our own undone condition and helpless condition — well the Lord is outside of that, He's not inside that at all, He's outside of that. But He says I stand at the door and knock... that knocking may mean many things, many things... the Lord is trying to get on the inside by many a form of knocking and then this: "if any man open the door... I will come in... will sup with him, and he with Me." Looking at that word 'sup', I find there are three words, one that applies to the Greek breakfast which was but a bit of bread and a drink and that sufficed. Another was another little larger meal that they had during the day; but there's another word which is used for the FULL meal of the day and that is the one here. "I will come in and there will be a full meal." You see, everything that you look at in this part of the Word is something positive isn't it? Something full that the Lord is after, not something partial, not just the early morning scrap with which you start the day but the FULL meal! He's after fullness. "I have come in and there will be fullness." It's all that!

Well, He calls for us to be of THAT mind, of THAT spirit, of THAT disposition, for again He says it's just the people who have but One Thing... this ONE thing I do... leaving the things which are behind, all the things

and having only One Thing, “this one thing I do leaving the things which are behind I press toward the mark of the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus”.

Oh, dear friends, don’t be satisfied with less than God meant for you when He saved you. Don’t settle down to something that is not His FULL thought for you. Don’t you be robbed of your prize by any compromises of any kind or any carelessness. Be you an “amen” man, an “amen” woman. May our churches be like that, be like that, that everybody can say, “Those people know where they’re going, what they’re after, there is no doubt about them, they’re on business bent! They’re not just a people either drifting or just having meetings, they’re a people who are marked and characterized by a sense of a great Meaning, a great Purpose.” The Lord make us like that.

Chapter Seven

CHRIST REVEALED AS GOD’S PURPOSE

The Lord has led us in these days to be occupied with the revelation of Jesus Christ. So far, John the apostle has been our interpreter. We are going now to allow Paul to say something to us about this matter.

I turn you, therefore, to his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter four at verse six: “Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Place alongside of that the words from his letter to the Galatians chapter one at verse fifteen: “...when it was the good pleasure of God, to reveal His son in me.” It was the good pleasure of God, to reveal His Son in me; shined into our hearts in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is Paul’s way of describing his great life revolution. This is his personal testimony as to what happened when he saw the face of Jesus Christ. And as you see, he likened that to the divine fiat in creation: God who said “Let light be” has repeated that in a spiritual way in my heart. The implication clearly is that what happened in creation when God commanded light to shine, had happened in Paul when he saw the face of Jesus. And when you apply that to such a man as Saul of Tarsus (later Paul) the implications are indeed tremendous. It’s a tremendous confession on his part because when God said at the beginning in creation “Let light be” — there was NO light. All was darkness. Darkness was over the face of the deep. And here is this man, SUCH a man as we know him to have been with all his claimed enlightenment, here is this man saying: “until I saw the face of Jesus, that’s how it was with me”. He would never have admitted that before, that he was in the dark, and all was darkness to him; he would have claimed to have been one of the most enlightened of men! Here, when he saw the face of Jesus, he said “Until then, I realize now that the primal darkness at creation was my condition spiritually”. More than that! When God first said “let light be” everything was in chaos, a state of disruption, disorder — yes, chaos. The earth was without form and empty. And Paul dares here to say “After all, with all that I had and had learned and knew and claimed to be, until I saw the face of Jesus, that’s how it was for me, chaos, chaos! And still again, until God said ‘let light be’ there was utter desolation and barrenness. Really nothing there at all!” Paul means what he’s saying.

He realized — oh yes, you will find plenty in his writings afterward and utterances to bear it out — that for him the face of Jesus meant light as over against darkness. Not just some more light, but the mighty CONTRAST between light and darkness. Seeing the face of Jesus meant for him order out of chaos, meaning out of meaninglessness, and still seeing the face of Jesus meant for him fruitfulness out of barrenness and desolation.

I say the implications are tremendous, but Paul quite agreed with all that, indeed he does. And dear friends, although the method and the manner of the beginning of our Christian life and experience may differ, indeed there may be many different ways in which we come into new life in Christ; however many may be the ways, those should be THE features and characteristics of everyone’s coming into that relationship with the Lord Jesus. It should be as passing truly from darkness to light. Not just getting some light but the difference between day and night, and the darkest night and the brightest day. Between chaos, confusion, disruption, and order; beautiful order and meaning. Between emptiness, hollowness, a void, and fullness and fruitfulness and plenty. It should be like that in every case.

But note the main and the great point in all this is that it was all in the face of Jesus Christ. In the face of Jesus Christ! When it happened and Saul questioned, “Who art thou?” the answer came clear: “I am Jesus, I am Jesus”. We can never, never grasp the tremendous (and we do not use exaggerated language when we say the TERRIFIC) implication for that man of that word ‘Jesus’ at that time. All this, all this in the face of Jesus! It’s there that I want to spend a few moments because that is really the focal point, and very much can be said but we want really to feel the force of this message.

Of course we know that the use of the word or term ‘face’ is metaphorical. In the original language the word means more than just ‘countenance’ it carries with it also the idea of person or personality. We understand that, that metaphorically the face is the expression of the person. And so everything was in the Person of Jesus Christ that Paul saw and came into.

Now this is the thing that I want to stress right at the outset, that if you and I, dear friends, are going to

make anything like the progress that Paul made as a young convert and as a growing Christian, and if we are going to have anything of the wheat that he has had in spiritual impress and impact, and if we are going to count in any degree as he counted in the work of the Lord; one thing is absolutely essential and do get hold of this. The youngest Christian get hold of this and everybody else; that if we take our salvation, our conversion or anything that has to do with it as something in itself, there's going to be limitation. We have got to see every thing in the light of the PERSON, Jesus Christ! That is, we have not to take this as a gift — salvation as a gift — or anything else of the Christian life as a gift in itself; we have got to look at that and say: "What does that signify as to the Giver? What does THAT signify as to Christ? What does that mean as to the Source of my salvation?" You may not grasp the point but it is of infinite importance because all progress in the Christian life and all power in Christian service comes from NOT the grasping, the apprehending, and the enjoyment of salvation as such, but SEEING JESUS! Because, you see, Jesus is the sum total of ALL divine fullness.

In a long experience in Christian ministry and work, I have moved much amongst Christians and I have had a lot to do with what we may call "mission centres", "mission halls". Larger or smaller, in some cases a very large number of Christians meeting there, and listening either to their prayers or to their singing, taking note of their Christian life... There they are, they've been Christians for years, decades; and all they've got to talk about is the day when they were saved, all about when they came to the Lord, when the Lord found them — they're back there. And when you come to these people — who have YEARS of Christian life — with anything beyond the most elementary, they don't know what you're talking about — it's another language, just can't follow it — you've got nothing to work on! They've not grown up, they cannot take solid meat. All they want, as they say, is the simple gospel, let's have the simple gospel.

Now, that is not meant to be a criticism or a judgment, but an illustration. What have they done? They've taken salvation in itself and not seen salvation as only a PART of something FAR, far greater, more immense; and that greater fullness is Christ! It is the thing and not the Person! And it makes all the difference. See, I come back here: what does explain Paul's BOUNDING onward in the Christian life, his RAPID spiritual progress, his stature spiritually and his tremendous impress upon the dispensation? The answer is he saw in the face of Jesus everything. Everything! For you see, Paul was a Jew and both personally and nationally the quest of the Jews was for light, light! They were always in quest of light, they were trained to be the most enlightened, but light was what they were after all the time. Light in relation to God, and God and man, and man and God. And Paul says himself that although that was true of him as of all Jews, perhaps more so in his own case than many of his own countrymen; all that quest for life did not begin to be answered until he saw the face of Jesus Christ. This was such a tremendous thing, such an overwhelming thing for him!

The Christian life and everything to do with it is inclusively and fundamentally a revelation of Jesus Christ in the heart. It may be there in the Word, now note: Paul probably knew the Old Testament as well as anyone and better than most — it was all there! But not until this happened did he see his Old Testament; when he saw it in the face of Jesus Christ. You will never know your Bible truly as it needs to be known for spiritual effect until by the Holy Spirit you see Jesus Christ everywhere. Not the Bible, not books of the Bible, not the analysis of the books of the Bible, not the themes and the subjects of the Bible, but in and through them all — the face of Jesus. That is, how HE is signified here, how HE is implied here, what this means where HE is concerned. That is the key. Paul never had that key until he saw the face of Jesus and then wherever he looked after that, ANYWHERE in this universe — Bible or outside the Bible — he saw the face of Jesus. That face was clear to him wherever he looked. Now that is not exaggeration. You know sometimes if you look right into the sun, right into the sun, for some while afterward wherever you look you don't see the things that are there, you only see the sun. You're blinded to everything else. That is exactly what happened with Paul; he was blinded in a sense, to everything else, having seen the face of Jesus.

Everything in life, everything in character, everything in endurance, through trials and opposition and suffering, everything in victory over opposition and adversity, everything in service; will depend entirely upon how much we have seen in the face of Jesus Christ. Make no mistake about it. Dear friends, this, as we have said and as we've said in prayer again here this morning, is a very critical time in the history of the people of God as it is in the history of this world. And if I'm not mistaken, this conference is set in a very critical time. We are fast moving into and more deeply into, the final testing of everything. Oh, how true that is literally in some parts of this world. What an ultimate testing is taking place in the life of many of the Lord's people and the Lord's servants. And think not that we shall escape that, in some form or another we are really going to be put to it. The world is going to move into a situation where every Christian will have their foundations most certainly and severely tested. You may be tasting that in a spiritual way now. How many people have said to me about this very time, "Why, what a battle it's been to get here!" all the unusual things happening... wouldn't happen otherwise; strange things. It all just happens when you've got something of the Lord in view. Oh yes, and those happenings are very, very often testing happenings; they could shake you.

Well, it's like that, toward the end. I don't want to discourage you... it's going to increase in that way. But you see, the point is this: even our salvation as such is going to be put to the test. Even all that we have really got is going to be put to the test and it will not be too difficult for us to question our salvation, to question the Lord Himself if our Christian life is a kind of objective thing that is made up of things, made up of meetings, made up of teachings, made up of fellowship, made up of beliefs. If it is made up like that it will not be difficult for us to question the reality of the whole thing. The REALITY of the whole thing — does that sound a terrible thing to say? The REALITY of Christianity... not difficult to allow that question. The issue? The issue is going to be only one thing: how much this thing is a matter of God having shined into our hearts! I've put it in a way

which has caused a good deal of trouble, but nevertheless perhaps that itself is significant; that God has revealed it in us, what we have has come to us by REVELATION of Jesus Christ. I emphasize that does not mean something extra to the Bible, but what is there in the Bible has, by the Holy Spirit, been ILLUMINATED in our own hearts. That this has come out of the Bible into us by an ACT of God, a FIAT of God; we have seen that in our hearts. That has become a HEART matter with us when it's like that.

Well, we referred, I think yesterday, to the saintly Polycarp who was burned for the faith there in those days of the early persecution. And, as an old man with his white hair and his saintly face, was being forced along by those cruel and wicked Jews to be burned on that day, an official standing by looked and was tremendously moved to see such a man being carried to such a fate. And he stepped up and he said "Curse! Just curse Jesus and I will save you. I'll save you!" Said Polycarp, "Forty and six years have I served my Master and He has never done me a single injury. Do you think I would say something against Him to save my life? No." And so he went to the martyr's death. That's a heart relationship isn't it? That is something more than life, more than anything else. I say, it was that that carried Paul through all his sufferings; he'd seen the face of Jesus. It was that that was the strength and the substance of his great ministry, he'd seen the face of Jesus. It was that that made him the Christian that he was. And please do not get mentalities about objective visions of the face of Jesus, that's not what I'm talking about at all — seeing a face — I'm simply meaning that there has come to you by the Holy Spirit in your heart, a knowledge of the significance of Jesus Christ in this whole universe in the counsels of God: the revelation of Jesus Christ. That's the light, the knowledge, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. What strength that brings, what strength that brings!

I'm quite sure that there are some here today who have gone on for many years with the Lord and who could say with me that if what we have and hold and teach had only been theory, we'd have been out of the fight long ago. Been out of the fight long ago, no doubt about it. It is because, may I put it this way, we've SEEN something... where something is into someone, when you've seen, when you've seen, something is done. Oh, what effect it had with Paul, first of all look what a man it made of him. Do you notice the context of those words that we read in Galatians, "When it pleased God to reveal His Son in me what did I do, go and consult those who were apostles before me as to whether I was right? Wonder whether I was mistaken, whether this was according to tradition? No, not at all. I didn't go up to Jerusalem to confer with flesh and blood and talk it over and see whether I was right; this thing put me on my feet in such a way there was no question for me about it. No one could add anything to this for me by way of confirmation as to the reality and the rightness of it." So many dear Christians are all the time running around to others for advice on their Christian life and on this and that... Now, please don't misunderstand me, get all the help that you can, but somehow it seems that some people can never stand on their own feet for any time together, they're not sure at all. They're not sure about anything, anything that arises they've got a question, they must get some opinion on this matter. Now, while you must have help and seek it, there is after all a fundamental, root thing that makes you KNOW where you stand — you stand in Christ by a work of God. Something's been DONE. You can never question that. It put Paul in that position where, while he was not independent and he did later on go up and have a nice time of conference with Peter in Jerusalem for several days and I suppose they talked over much, but that didn't happen until Paul had faced this whole issue for himself and got it settled with him between himself and the Lord. Like that. And all these other aspects of a new creation started on their wonderful movement after he'd seen the face of Jesus like that.

The certainty and the assurance that was right at the root of his Christian life and service came because of this one thing: he'd seen everything in Jesus. Everything... in Jesus. What liberation that brought to him! What emancipation! We have often said here that there was no power in this world that could have turned that rabid, fanatical Jew, Saul of Tarsus, into a Christian and a lover of Jesus of Nazareth. No power in this world that could have done that, but just SEEING Jesus Himself in this way and that did it, that did it! He was emancipated, he was free! No wonder of all his writings the fiercest, the fieriest is his letter to the Galatians, the letter of our LIBERTY in Christ and it begins with this "God revealed His Son in me and that set me free from all other things." No use telling people that this and that, and the other thing is a limitation and that they should seek enlargement by getting out of it. That is an unfruitful, unprofitable, indeed that's a dangerous line to take with anybody. But again, if only we can bring CHRIST... with all His divine significance and meaning and comprehensiveness to them and the Holy Spirit can reveal Him in their hearts... oh, that will do it! That will do it; they will never again be content with anything that limits them to the grave clothes of religion. It delivered Paul from Judaism as nothing else would have done. The way of an escape, the way of enlargement, the way of endurance is to see Jesus. It is not by learning, that is, it is not by the schools. Paul had all of the schools he did... of religion. He didn't get it through the schools and we'll never get it through the schools; along that line of the technical instruction of things Christian or religious. This is not a merely mental or academic or intellectual thing at all. It is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Well, that's the foundation and may the Lord even now begin to shine into our hearts. I want to go on just for a little while in answering the question: What DID Paul see in the face of Jesus Christ? Yes, he saw the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; a comprehensive statement. What DID Paul see in Christ (if you like to drop out the word 'face' you can) what did he see when he saw Jesus Christ by divine illumination? And I suggest to you that the first thing that he saw was Christ as the Purpose of God, Christ as the Purpose of God.

If there was one thing that was true about Saul of Tarsus, it was that he was a man of purpose. He was a purposeful man, there's no doubt about that, he was bent upon something, he was after something, he was in

quest of something, he was on full stretch for something. That is, he was characterized by this spirit or sense of purpose. Now, as a Jew, and a member of the Jewish nation, his whole horizon was Israel. For him all divine purpose was centred in Israel. It was the nation that stood at the heart of the purpose of God for him, that nation as in ascendancy over all the nations, superior to all the nations, ruling all the nations, having that central place in the midst of the nations, to make all the nations serve it, and well, yes, to serve all the nations. This was what divine purpose meant to Saul of Tarsus, as it meant to every Jew, every member of the Jewish nation. That was the horizon. That was all temporal, that was all earthly, albeit it was religious. But that was the horizon. That spelt purpose for every Jew and inasmuch as Saul of Tarsus was a Jew plus, you can see how that idea of divine purpose for his own nation was **INTENSELY** strong for him. Let anybody call that into question! That really was the cause and the reason for his **VEHEMENT** antagonism to Jesus. You know quite well that that is why the Jews crucified Jesus. They said, "If we let this man go on, the Romans shall come and take away our, our nation, our kingdom." And Saul was one of them. He saw that Jesus setting up another kingdom was a menace to Israel and all Israel's heritage. That, for him, was the meaning of divine purpose. When he **SAW** the face of Jesus Christ, all that was changed! All that was changed, his horizon expanded to the universe and what a universe it is that is presented to us in his letter to the Ephesians! What an immense expanse and **RANGE** of divine purpose that comes out — "called according to His purpose Who worketh all things out to the counsel of His own will from eternity to eternity" — divine purpose. Poor little Israel, shrinking, and shrinking, and shrinking, until for him, while he would that they would be saved and give anything to have them saved; they no longer occupy that place — his horizon has become universal. And again, the temporal, the temporal has given place to the spiritual and the eternal in talking about every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies unto the ages of the ages. These, you see, are all terms which explain what happened in this tremendous revolution in which Paul's horizon was pressed out to the uttermost bounds. He saw **ALL** this in the face of Jesus, **JESUS** signifies **THIS!** **JESUS** is the embodiment and the sum of Purpose from eternity to eternity! It is the purpose in Christ Jesus; that is his language. **HE** is the Purpose of God and it's not of this earth, temporal or temporary, material and transient; but of heaven, of eternity and it's **ALL IN HIM!** Summed up in Christ — the fullness of all things.

If only we could, what tremendous amount we could draw in of quotations from Paul about this. God's purpose concerning His Son that He should fill all things and that He should be the fullness of all things; all things should in Him dwell, all things should be gathered together into Him! Indeed, his world has enlarged and all the barriers have broken down. Dear friends what does this **MEAN** to us? This is not just a beautiful story or description of what happened to a man, I'm speaking of spiritual principles. If you and I really **DID** get a sight of the significance of Jesus Christ, we really **DID** see the glory of God in His face, we can **NEVER** be little! We can **NEVER** be just tied up in our little local things, we can never be sectarian or anything like that at all, we should be all-embracing. We could not (we get into a lot of trouble because we could not and would not) accept the confines of human systems and Christian departmentalisms and all that. You're emancipated right out when once you've seen the Lord Jesus and all that is silly nonsense — churches and chapels and playing at things — no! Christ is **FAR**, far greater and vaster than all this. For enlargement you just need to see Him! For deliverance you need to see Him!

What happened to Paul, and Paul's universality of vision and ministry, Paul's spiritual and heavenly impact upon this earth through the centuries is due to this: he saw in the face of Jesus Christ the greatness of God's purpose for this universe — that the universe was Christocentric. Not Israel-centric but Christocentric. He saw then that divine purpose is centred in Christ. And that revelation, that seeing, that apprehending, brought with it certain other things. First, it brought with it the understanding and recognition of God's energy in relation to Christ, God's **ENERGY** in relation to Christ.

You can see that the creation was for, through and unto Christ. And all the energies of the Godhead called forth in creation — and they're tremendous energies, tremendous energies — called forth in the creation of this universe, those energies in creation were working toward Christ's inheritance. Tremendous energies in creation again were unto Christ: "for unto Him were all things created, things in the heavens, things in the earth". Unto Him! The mighty energy of God in creation, in changing chaos to order, light to darkness the darkness to light, and emptiness to fullness; all that was mighty, mighty power of God, but it was unto His Son. The end is that He should be the Heir of all things for He was appointed Heir of all things and He was to come into His heritage at last.

We've been dwelling in the book of the Revelation and these are the final movements to the kingdom becoming the kingdom of our God and His Christ — the inheritance of His Son. But that's only a mere fragment of the whole story of divine energies. After that creation we see the fall of man and the fall of this earth. And it's a tremendous fall, it's not just a moral fall, a moral collapse... We dare not stay to contemplate the **IMMENSITY** of the thing that happened when Adam disobeyed God and what he dragged with him and all the **TREMENDOUS** forces that were focused upon him from the outside spiritual world to make him do it. Yes, it was a fall indeed, involving tremendous and far reaching things as we very well know that was part. But does God abandon, does He give up? He at once reacts, reacts to that and with new application and new energy proceeds along His line — same line — toward His Son. And He immediately gives intimations that all this that has happened which has come from the great usurper, the serpent, the devil, will one day in His Son come [under His heel] and be crushed forever. Immediately He reacts! And you and I, dear friends, know what power is called for to bring that about — the energy of God concerning His Son. God said that the Seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. That's not a fanciful statement, that's a **TERRIFIC** cosmic conflict! The battle of the ages, but at last we see it; forces in the heavens hurled down, no more place found for

them, cast into the abyss. It's done! But this is the energy concerning His Son, and that again is but a fragment.

The people in whom all this was to have its illustration and display as a kind and token — Israel — we find them, because, because of their failure, spiritual failure, following on in the way of the covenant in the bondage of Egypt and what bondage. You see, God has taken pains to let us know that THIS thing was a thing of TREMENDOUS spiritual power. We are impressed aren't we, with how Pharaoh could stand up to it! Why surely he'll let them go after that, even the first judgment, and the second and the third! No, not a bit of it. We're amazed! I venture to say that you wouldn't hold onto anything if you had a little bit of that. Here it is, and God is drawing out this thing, extending it to show what terrific force there is behind this whole matter and then finally with one blow He smashes the whole thing until there was those people and forever their deliverance from Egypt becomes the Old Testament illustration of the EXCEEDING greatness of His power. Always refer back to that as the example of God's exceeding power: deliverance from Egypt. But it's all in line of His Son, the Son's in view. It's the energy of God, you see, moving on.

I've missed the flood, another thing; God's reaction to a departure of the world. And so you must go on pursuing this through the Old Testament — Israel coming through the wilderness to the border of the land and then again the whole thing breaking down by unbelief. Did God give it up? No, that land forever stands as a type of His Son and in His fullness into which He's going to bring a people and therefore He cannot give it up in light of the spiritual meaning. He cannot give it up and say "Well, I must abandon My purpose". Not at all. Let THAT generation fail, He'll have another, and He'll bring them in, and see the mighty energies of God in that new people as they take possession and overcome in the land.

Failure again and you have exile in Babylon; oh dear, surely God's purposes are defeated now... The land lies desolate, the city is waste and the people are gone. No! "For your sake have I sent to Babylon and have brought down all their mighty ones". The remnant shall return! But this is not something in itself, it is still with the object, the ultimate object in view: the kingdom of His Son moving on. So we go on like that. We come as we have been in this book of the Revelation where His Church is suffering untold agonies, persecutions and martyrdoms... but how does it end? Well, it just ends in God's victory, God's power, God's energy. Does it? How? His Son is at last on the throne! That's the point. The purpose of God, calling out the energies of God; all in relation to His Son! And what I have said to you is only what is contained in Paul's writings, I haven't added or imagined, I've given it to you and I've given it to you imperfectly, it's all there, this is what Paul saw! The Purpose of God, drawing out the energies of God, he puts it in one so familiar phrase, "the exceeding greatness of His power which is to usward who believe according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ in raising Him from the dead and setting Him at His own right hand far above all rule and authority and every name that is named". Exceeding greatness! The energy of God in relation to His purpose concerning His Son... Paul saw that in the face of Jesus Christ. And I repeat, if we see something of that, it's going to be a tremendous strength to us, it's going to mean tremendous enlargement, enrichment and strengthening to see us through at last.

Now, because of my warning not to put too much on you at one time, I'll stop there, although there is so much more of what Paul saw as to that very matter — God's thought concerning His Son, the Purpose. We'll have another session yet perhaps.

Chapter Eight

CHRIST REVEALED AS GOD'S PATTERN

For the many friends who have not been with us through the earlier gatherings, let me say the very briefest possible word by way of retrospect. We have been led at this time to be occupied with the revelation of Jesus Christ. We feel that the Lord has led us in this way with more than the object of just studying some thing, but as related to the movements toward the consummation of this age which we feel are so evidently taking place and that therefore, in the final scenes, the Lord is culminating and consummating His Testimony on this earth, it is very necessary for His Church to be very clear as to their position. And that position is essentially and inseparably a matter of understanding exactly what the Christian life and the Christian Church is and the Testimony which is entrusted to them.

So we have spent nearly three days with the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation, particularly noting that as that book does bring to this culmination and consummation of everything in the age, the Lord takes very careful pains to give a full-orbed, clearly-defined, presentation of His Son. The significance of the very first chapter of that book is that Christ overshadows everything. Christ encompasses everything. Christ stands before everything as the Standard of God. And then all that follows — firstly in the dealing with the Church and then with the nations and then with the kingdom of Satan and then the bringing in of the eternal kingdom; all that is governed by what Christ is, by that matchless presentation of Himself. I go over that again in order that we may see where we are, the setting of what we are saying today.

It has been there that the main part of our time has found us. But this morning we went back or over to the apostle Paul in this connection and began to consider the content of his words in the second of his Corinthian letters, chapter four, verses five and six: "We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, seeing it is God

who said Let light be, who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” This morning we spent our time with the beginning of what Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ. We did note right at the outset that what he saw, or in seeing the face of Jesus Christ (which simply means that the Spirit of God gave him an inward illumination or revelation of Christ) what he saw in the face of Jesus Christ brought about a tremendous revolution both in his being and in his whole outlook. And the first thing that he saw in the face of Jesus Christ or in the Person of Jesus Christ, was God’s Purpose.

Well, we spent our morning time on Christ as the Purpose of God. This afternoon we are going to be occupied with the second thing that Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ, that is, he saw Christ as God’s Pattern. I’m going to be quite simple in the way I speak and in what I say this afternoon because there are many young Christians here. What I say, or the way in which I say it, I trust will help them particularly; but I trust it will be, if necessary, a corrective for us all.

It is exceedingly difficult to convey the impression that must have come upon Paul when he saw the Lord Jesus — that time of which he speaks when he said, “it pleased God to reveal His Son in me” — the tremendous effect that it had upon that man. I wish it were possible to convey to you something of that, because it is not in the terms, the language or even in the teaching; it is in the IMPACT that we shall have the value. You may hear all that I have to say and missing that impact it will be of very little value. I want you therefore, to try to enter into this in spirit.

You see, when Paul saw Jesus Christ by revelation of the Holy Spirit, a WHOLE SYSTEM collapsed for him. It completely collapsed! A whole mentality and way of thinking was shattered; turned upside down, inside out. He had to go right away into the desert. He spent two or three years there to think this thing out, to reconstruct everything in the light of THIS. It was indeed a revolution in that man. And although we are Christians and although we have all the teaching of Paul and the other apostles, and we’ve got all the Christian tradition of the centuries, I do feel, dear friends, that there’s the need of something like that with us. That we can have a system, a Christian system, just as thorough, just as complete, just as strong, with ALL its ramifications and paraphernalia as the Jews had — without the TREMENDOUS impact of it all. We can have it all... Christianity has become so largely only another Judaism in that sense; another system. I know it means much to you... I would take nothing from all the blessedness and reality Christ is to you, but still I hold to this — that there’s a great need of a revolution even in the Church and in Christianity at this time and the same kind of revolution caused by the same kind of revelation as came to the apostle Paul. I trust that you will at least begin to see something of this as I go on on simple lines this afternoon.

We have got to see as Paul saw Jesus as God’s Pattern, Jesus as God’s Model. What Paul has shown us in his writings is that he came to see that before ever this world was created, before any of this cosmic system was set up, God had in view the constituting of a universe on the basis of sonship; His Son. HE was before all things. HE was God’s appointed mind concerning all things. And all things were to be made with the embodiment of the spiritual and eternal features of Christ. And when God reaches His End, and we come out with the work completed, finally, the thing that will obtain will be that in everything perceptible, everything in the creation revealing something of Jesus Christ. And oh, what a wonderful universe that would be! If we meet a little bit of Jesus Christ anywhere in anyone today, what a blessed thing it is. But think of that being universal and nothing else to it! Now that is what was in God’s eye and mind right back there in the eternity past. And so God set in motion all the creative processes and, by reason of necessity, all the redemptive processes, all the elective processes, all the sovereign and providential processes of His grace to work out this Pattern, to perfect this design — all things according to Christ. That’s Paul’s great phrase “According to Christ!” according to Christ — that controls everything. Now, Paul came to see that and that vision, that perception and apprehension or revelation was the governing motive, power and object of everything for him, “for me to live”, said he, “is Christ”.

Now then, we can break that up into very simple questions and answers. What is a Christian? What IS a Christian? How interesting it would be if you were handed out a half a sheet of note paper all of you and asked to put down your answer. What is a Christian? What is Paul’s answer? What would your answer be? A person who believes certain things about the Lord Jesus? A person who has come to make the Jesus their Saviour, who has given himself or herself to Christ? How would you put it? But what is Paul’s answer? Now that’s the true one: a Christian is a bit of Christ, a bit of Christ! Every true Christian is a bit of Christ. We will bear that out more fully as we go along. From God’s standpoint now, and He has laid the foundation for that, from God’s standpoint now, the only thing that concerns Him is our interest to Him in you, in me, as Christians, as believers, is that bit of Christ which we represent. That’s all He’s concerned with where we are concerned; the bit of Christ that we are. He’s concerned first of all to have it as a bit of Christ and then He is concerned to enlarge it to something more of Christ and to bring it to as full a measure of Christ as He can. And God’s focus is upon the bit of Christ that has been made a part of us, that has been deposited in us by new birth. By new birth God has deposited something of Christ in us. It may be a very much smaller thing than all its surroundings — and we are the surroundings, what we are — to begin with it may be, but it is of transcendently greater INTRINSIC value than all the rest. To God it is THE value. He is prepared to do anything in relation to that.

And so every true Christian from God’s standpoint is just a bit of His Son. “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts whereby we cry Abba, Father.” Now I cannot gather up all the Scripture that proves that, shows how that is, but that is the simple beginning. What are you when you become a Christian? What are you as a Christian? What is it that makes you a Christian? What is the Christian and the Christian life,

what is it? Well now, strip it of everything that has been gathered around it — men say this is what makes a Christian, this and that and the other thing comprises a Christian. Strip it of all that that has become the accretion of Christianity and come right down to this: a Christian is a bit of Christ. Go about this world, get that mentality, realize that I am — not when I'm in the meetings only, not when I'm with other Christians only, but wherever I am — I am a bit of Christ. In that measure, in that measure, where I am Christ is. People have got to know it, that it is not I, a professing Christian, a religious person, a person who belongs to Christianity; but I in very reality as a bit of Christ Himself. I am there in this world. For me to live is Christ! Let's go on.

What is a church? What is a church? Now then, what was Paul's idea and mentality about churches? Do you really think that Paul set out on a campaign to set up churches? To bring churches into being? To build churches? Do you think that? Do you think that his vision and his mission in his mind was to see churches set up all over the world? Think about that again, this is where we've got to rethink things. When you use the word 'church' or 'churches' you're only meaning companies of Christians, you're only meaning groups living together, gathering together in certain places on a basis of corporate life. I believe most strongly that the apostle Paul would repudiate the whole idea or suggestion that he felt himself chosen of God to go about this world setting up churches. If you asked him what his business was in this matter, why, after having got the individual parts of Christ in gathering them together and constituting them local companies, fellowships, (churches if you like) if you'd asked him why... he would simply answer you in the simplest terms, I believe, and yet with very strong feeling and conviction: that there should be a larger expression of Christ in that place and by as many bits of Christ brought together as possible, the measure of Christ should be as strong in that place as possible. In other words, just that CHRIST should be all the more there! He's governed by this whole Pattern of God — that Christ should fill all things! And he saw that two is better than one and three is better than two in this matter and the more bits of Christ brought together (forgive me putting it like that, I must put it in simplest language) the more bits of Christ there are really brought together, so the stronger the IMPACT of Christ in any place.

No, dear friends, it is not God's idea to set up churches or Christian fellowship centres or that sort of thing — institutions and what not — that's not His idea at all. Let's clear the whole mind on this matter. If any company of Christians fails in THIS respect: to be there a corporate and an adequate expression of the Lord Jesus, the presence of Christ commensurate with their numbers or their being there; they've failed in the purpose of their existence in that place! There's no justification. I believe that that is EXACTLY why the Lord said to Ephesus as the representative church in which all were included: "repent or I will remove thy lampstand out of its place". ALTHOUGH there were so many commendable things, they were THINGS! Works, labours, yes toil, THINGS... but evidently THE Thing was lost sight of in the things. And THE Thing which, and which alone justifies, and gives meaning to any local company of the Lord's people, is not the people and not their procedure, not their forms, but CHRIST! CHRIST is met, CHRIST is found. Anybody who is seeking Christ will find Him there and whether they are seeking Him or not they will meet Him if they go there. It is Christ!

So Paul would say, Ephesus, Laodicea, Thyatira, Sardis, Corinth, anywhere; I'm not out to set up a Christian church there, I'm out to bring Christ there, to have Christ there and the bringing together of these, may I use the word again, bits of Christ, is only to increase the measure of Christ. And if you want evidence from the other side that this is so, remember that the great enemy knows the implications of Christ; he knows the implications of the presence of Christ and especially the presence of Christ corporately expressed. And if there's one thing that the enemy has set himself to do, it is to DESTROY the fellowship of the Spirit of Christ — to scatter the believers, to divide them, to BREAK UP this unity of Christ because he knows THAT on the one side weakens Christ, on the other side it strengthens his kingdom. Well, there's no argument there at all, there's no answer to that, that's a fact beyond any, any question at all; that this matter of the RELATEDNESS of Christians is the most contended thing in this universe. What are churches? Why meet together? Just that. Just that. Not the other in the mind of God, Christ is God's Pattern.

Then what about those two great things that belong to the Church and the churches: baptism and the Lord's table. What are we? Well, ask everywhere what kind of a church are you and what do you do and, "Well, we believe in baptism", various forms given to the name in different times, "we believe in and practice baptism." Do you? You believe in and practice baptism of infants, you call it. You, there, believe in and practice baptism of adults and believers. You believe a little water will do, you believe that a lot of water is necessary. However, baptism is a part of our order and system because we believe that it's a New Testament part of the Christian church and order. Is that all? Is that all? See, you can never, never reach any conclusion of the whole matter by arguing about the right and the wrong of THIS method or THIS time. Don't you try. The only way in which to settle this whole matter is to stand right back and say, "What, according to the revelation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, does this thing really indicate?" And Paul will give us undoubted light on this matter. And he will tell us in an accumulation of statements by him in this, "Why, baptism... do you want to know what it is? Yes, it's right it's right, but it's not an ordinance, it's not a ceremony, it is not a rite, it is not a bit of ritual. Baptism is just the way in which Christians say: one whole thing has gone and Christ has taken its place. It's something that testifies to the fact that now all the ground is Christ's, we've died to all other ground. Everything else has died and been buried, and now on this ground of resurrection, it is only Christ!" And if baptism doesn't mean that, it has no New Testament meaning. You see, it's related to this One Thing! It is not something to be just perpetuated and carried out because it is something that they did at the beginning. It is something which has got to be brought right up to date with every new believer: that they have definitely died and been buried to ALL that is not Christ! It is a position taken. And now they live, and they live ONLY for Christ — it is Christ. "I have been crucified with Christ, it is NO longer I... but Christ". That's utter

isn't it? So it's not the thing, it's the meaning.

What about the Lord's table? Here again, we believe in the Lord's supper, the holy communion or the Lord's table; whatever phrase applies to the different sections... And we have it, some once a quarter and some once a month and some once a week, and that's our order and our procedure and that's what we believe is the way. Is that all? Is that all? "We must have the Lord's table, we must have the Lord's supper, because... because, well, they did it in New Testament times and it's quite clearly the Lord's will that it should be had..." IT, IT, IT! See? That's where the whole thing breaks down. It's an IT: some THING! What IS the Lord's table? What IS the loaf and the cup? It is the Church's and the believer's CONTINUOUS declaration that CHRIST is their Life — that they have NO life but Christ! It is all Christ. That's not going to communion service. You see the emptiness and hollowness of so much. The meaning is good, all well meant... but oh, oh, the power and presence of Christ — that's the Thing that matters; not the ordinance, not the maintenance of the order, but the LIVING Christ. Christ is our Life; and that not only individually and personally, He is that — He is MY Life and my only Life — Bread and Wine — but He is the Life of the Church. He is Corporate Life, Corporate Life.

I earlier used that word "bits" of Christ. It's an awkward word; pieces of Christ, fragments of Christ, for when you take the Loaf and break it and you all, twenty, thirty, fifty, hundred, two hundred, have that piece of the Loaf, is that a piece in itself? No, it's the Loaf in representation. "Seeing that we who are many are one loaf." One Loaf! One Loaf, one Body. The Lord's table is the declaration of that Life which finds us, joins us, and binds us and holds us together, so that divisions in the Church NULLIFY the very meaning of the Lord's table. Divisions amongst believers rule out the very significance of the Loaf and the Cup; are a denial of it. It cannot be when you come to the Lord's table. It's a contradiction because it is Christ and Christ is not divided! Christ is not divided, Paul says that doesn't he? Is Christ divided? No. The Lord's table is then a representation of Christ as the ABIDING Life of the Church, until He comes, until He comes... that Testimony to Christ. Just Christ, that's all. Oh, when you come to the Lord's table do remember that. What are you doing? Just going through some thing that is a part of the church form and order, of Christian procedure? Oh no, I am here declaring one thing in two ways, firstly that Christ is my very subsistence. I have no life, I have no constitution, I have no maintenance, I have no continuance apart from Christ. He is my Existence. I declare that for myself, but here is a very searching thing: I declare that my fellowship with other believers in Christ is also my Life, that Christ is my Life collectively by fellowship, by oneness, by the unity of the Spirit and that if I break that, if I break that or allow that to be broken; if I fail to try and repair any breach between me and another child of God, I am simply saying that the Lord's table is a mere form — it's robbed of all its meaning, its real meaning and I am strangling my own spiritual life. I am doing injury to my own spiritual life because my Life is not only an individual life, it's a collective or corporate Life. We depend for our Life upon one another, brethren. Satan will rob us of our Life by interfering with our relationships. Let there be no mistake about it, that can be very easily proved.

We go on... what is ministry? What is ministry? Now, this doesn't only apply to those who minister. Any who minister can listen with all your ears, but those who are ministered to, what is ministry? Is it to make people know what the Bible contains as its subject matter from Genesis to Revelation? Well, that's important, and very good, and in some senses it may be necessary as a foundation... Is it to give out addresses by research and study and get it off onto a company of Christians? Oh, I could go on like that, it's not pleasant. What is ministry? Any ministry and all ministry that does not make possible and provide for an immediate increase of the Lord Jesus, is not the ministry of the Holy Ghost; is not the ministry of Christ. ALL ministry must have as its IMMEDIATE object, the increase and the building up of Christ in His people. That is the test; not that it is interesting, informative or anything else, but that here Christ is being ministered: "I'm being brought right into touch with Christ. Christ is being brought into touch with me. Not a lot of words... no; I'm having to face up to the Lord Jesus in some way today, the whole issue of this word is: Christ! The living Christ". That is ministry. That is ministry, you see it's like that, you can take all that I'm saying back to Paul. Take it all back, take it back into this second letter to the Corinthians alone and you'll find that's it.

And then, for the present, because of the time, this final question: what is evangelism? What is evangelism? You say evangelization is the business of the church. True. What is evangelism? Try not to misunderstand me when I say that the end that God has in view is not just to get people saved — He wants them saved, He sent His Son that they should be saved — we cannot be too much concerned for their salvation. But that is not the end upon which the eye of God is resting. Evangelism, the salvation of men's souls with God is a related matter. It is to people, the kingdom of heaven with Christ, Christ-people; more and more in whom He may have His dwelling to be an out-shining of Himself. Listen: "When it pleased God to reveal His Son in me that I might proclaim HIM among the nations". Evangelism is NOT to get so many people converted. Evangelism is THROUGH their being saved to INCREASE the measure of Christ in this universe! That's a sufficient and a much greater motive I think, than to be able to count heads and say we've had so many conversions. Oh no, let us say rather, "Christ is getting more and more ground in this way!" Different mentality! And I am not quite certain that the Lord is not very much reserved and straitened because of this wrong idea — we put it the other way. I believe that if really the whole concern in evangelism was not to be able to count heads and say so many converts and so many have signed the cards and so on and so on, but to say "My, Christ is gaining ground!" I believe that if that were more the object and the motive, God would come into it more. Because I do believe, dear friends — and forgive me for putting it as my belief, that doesn't matter at all what I believe, but test it by the Word of God — that where Christ is the ONE, the ONLY, the FULL Object in view, God's interest is the greater. God commits Himself. So it must be in all this, the individual fragment of

Christ. Oh, to be here as Christ here, then the Father will be with you; for the local companies to be here in this neighbourhood as Christ, as Christ... God will commit Himself to that. So in everything else, everything else that we have mentioned: Christ, only Christ! Christ the Beginning, Christ the End, Christ All in all.

Chapter Nine

CHRIST REVEALED AS GOD'S PROVISION

Now as we come to the close of this time together in which the Lord has been bringing anew into view the great end for which we, with all the saved, have been called — the great end of our salvation in the purpose of God, a very wonderful end — nothing other than union with Christ in His Throne in the government of this universe. I'm sure that you have, as we've proceeded, become conscious of great need. Perhaps at times your hearts have trembled in the presence of the tremendous demands that all this makes. The question may have been with you: is it possible, can we ever reach that? The demands, requirements are so great in various ways if we are to attain unto that high and holy calling. It all perhaps seems too much for us. We might fear that we should fail, that we should come short, that we should not be able to go through. And our fear would probably have certain factors in it, for it is not just an abstract kind of feeling. There's certain things that we feel that we need, we know something of what those things are.

Now, today we have been with Paul in his words in 2 Corinthians 4:6 "...it is God that said light shall shine out of darkness who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." We have been looking to see what it was that Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ. And firstly it was Christ as the Purpose of God and then secondly Christ as the Pattern of God.

Now for a little while, in the third place, Paul saw in the third place Christ as the Provision of God. Christ as the Provision of God; that he saw that provision in various ways. The one thing that I'm quite sure happened to Saul of Tarsus when the Lord met him on that road on that day and he saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, I am perfectly certain that that was the final blow to all his own self-righteousness. I am certain that that day the bottom was knocked out of all his self-assurance. Whatever he had thought of himself — and he tells it, what he thought of himself — he tells us in his letter to the Philippians what he thought of himself; he included the whole sum of his former assets with "concerning the righteousness which was of the law: blameless" the bottom was knocked out of that on the Damascus road. He'd had a very great sense of his own righteousness and the righteousness which was of the law. And from that moment when he saw the face of Jesus, there was no man on this earth more uncertain about his righteousness. And from that time onward this whole question of righteousness to commune took on a new tone for him. What a lot he writes about it! Have you ever tried to gather up all that Paul wrote about this matter of righteousness, justification? One big question with him, one big matter; it seemed in a sense to overshadow everything else... If ever he, as Saul of Tarsus and as a traditional Jew had thought that he had a standing with God that was quite acceptable and quite good and quite unquestioned; all THAT went on the Damascus road. Why, right at the end, right at the end of his life, when he's writing his last letters before going to be with the Lord he said that "my aim, my one aim is that I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness that is of mine own but the righteousness which is of God by faith".

It is a TREMENDOUS thing this matter of standing with God, acceptance with God, being able to have fellowship with a holy God. What an undoing of the past, an emptying out of everything upon which he had rested. A starting all over again with one big question, one big issue, one big quest — how shall a simple man dwell with a holy God? But the answer he found in the face of Jesus. Yes, looking into the face of Jesus he saw that all the righteousness that he needed, all the righteousness that ever God needed for him and in him — Jesus was, for Paul, the Righteousness of God.

Now, dear friends, I know that is very elementary Christian teaching but you know what I have been repeatedly emphasizing during these days, that it is NOT sufficient for us to have our Christian doctrine. When it comes to the end, the theories of Christianity, the doctrines and the teachings and the interpretations and all the systems of Christian truth are not going to get us through. They are not going to get us through. It is only as these matters in Christ really are rock under our feet in the day of the tempest that we'll get through and this is such a matter. It's always arising. This evil one in this universe called the Accuser of the brethren, is ever and always on our track to undercut this whole matter of our standing with God, our position with a holy God. And we perhaps find this one of the biggest battlegrounds in our Christian experience. Let me put it like this — perhaps I'm only suggesting things to you that you've never thought of, but whether you have put it in this way or not, and I'm only putting into language perhaps what has troubled your hearts without defining the trouble — let me put it like this: if we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, if He atoned for our sin, if we are no longer seen by God in ourselves by nature but in Christ, if we have received by faith in Him remission of our sins; then why are we dealt with by the Lord as though we were sinful creatures? Why do we suffer for our wrongdoing, our mistakes, our faults, our errors, our breakdowns? Why do we suffer if He suffered for it all? Why does it seem that WE have to atone for the things that we do wrong if He atoned for it all? Now I'm perhaps suggesting to you something you've never thought of, but isn't it just like that? That when we're in suffering, in adversity, in affliction, there sometimes comes a cloud between us and the Lord and immediately there's an accusation: "THIS is judgment on you, this is punishment, this is because, because of this or that". Have you never met that? It's like that always. There's always present this voice of accusation in the presence

of adversity and suffering and difficulty, laying at our door because of, well you see, we were wrong in this and in that... Isn't that a problem? We have got to get VERY clear on this matter of our standing and of the provision of righteousness in Christ to undercut the work and the power of Satan and for our own salvation in the day of adversity.

If trouble is coming, if suffering is coming, if we are going to have difficulties and adversities; there's going to be plenty of room for accusations and condemnation, plenty of ground for the enemy to work on. But we have got to be absolutely clear on this matter of the provision of righteousness in Christ in order to get through. There are two things to say about this. One is we must understand the meaning of righteousness. What is righteousness and what is unrighteousness? It's an important thing for us to understand that. And the other thing is we have got to be able to cut clean in between the matter of our training and discipline and transformation; and the judgment of God. There's a great difference. Those are two different realms altogether. Let's look for a moment at this matter of righteousness.

What is righteousness? Or, what is unrighteousness? Our translation of the word is rather unfortunate; especially the Authorized Version is very misleading. In 1 John 3 in the old version it is stated "sin is the transgression of the law", well of course the transgression of the law is sin, but it doesn't say that and it doesn't mean that. If you look at a better translation (the Revised will help you) a more correct, accurate translation is "Sin is lawlessness". Lawlessness! That is unrighteousness. Now we can take an illustration from the Old Testament because John takes this illustration there in that very chapter. He brings in, he introduces Cain and Abel. And he says Cain was of that lawless one. Now if you look back in the Old Testament to Genesis 4 you find this: "Now, now in the process of time, Cain brought his offering..." and then you have the story of what happened: brought his offering, built his altar, presented it to the Lord and got no acceptance whatever. No standing with God. God absolutely ignored the whole thing. And then that tremendous controversy between Cain and the Lord. But Abel brought his offering, built his altar, presented it, and the Lord signaled his acceptance by the fire. Abel got through. John says he was of that lawless one, Cain. "In the process of time..." and the context will show you that there had been plenty of time for light to be given and the light was that standing before God, acceptance with God, was on the basis of another life given to God. Symbolized in the blood. That was the light, the light had come. But here is a man who is a lawless one of the evil one, you see?

The evil one is called by Paul "that lawless one". That lawless one would NOT accept the light, be obedient to the light; refused to come under the law of any kind, especially the law of the blood of the Lamb. No standing; that's unrighteousness. And the very essence and core of unrighteousness is not that you are an imperfect or sinful man or woman, it is a matter of your will in the presence of Light. Now that's what Paul teaches, it's the reaction of our will when light has been given! Unrighteousness is lawlessness; refusing light. Don't you see that with all their pretended, assumed, claimed, proclaimed righteousness; the whole nation of Israel was set aside and rejected. Why? Lawless! They refused the Light. "This is the condemnation, that Light is come, and man loved darkness rather than light." Because they are of that lawless one. That's unrighteousness.

Now, in the face of Jesus Christ what have you got? Ah, just the most perfect and utter opposite to the lawless one. The One yielding... it's the Lamb, you see, it's the Lamb — submissive and yielding and meek and lowly — amenable to the will of God. "Not My will but Thine". One who is wholly and utterly under the will of God. No lawlessness. No rebellion. No independence. No superiority. Nothing whatever that came across His submission to the will of God. He became obedient unto death, yea the death of the cross. There is your great Abel. Now note: the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, as you well know, said "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain WHEREBY witness was borne unto him that he was righteous". The whole matter of righteousness for standing, dear friends, is not what we are as big or little sinners, for remember by nature Abel was no better man than Cain, no better man than Cain. He was of the sinful fallen race just as his brother. And it is not that we in ourselves are better, are good, are an improvement on someone else whom we would call Cain. No! We're all on the same ground. You know it as well as I do that there is just as much lawlessness in us by nature as there is in anybody by nature. But! Light is given. And we act toward the light with our wills and are submissive and surrendered to the will of God. And that is righteousness, that is righteousness. No lawlessness. That brings us into a standing with God because that is Christ. That is Christ! The whole matter of righteousness in the case of Christ in His acceptance with God as our representative was not that He was not made sin, for He was; it was that He so utterly and completely yielded Himself to the known will of God by faith in God, whatever that meant, whatever that meant; faith in God. He did the will of God and He stands.

You see, that is the meaning of baptism. In baptism, a figure of the Cross, where He, humbling Himself and being obedient unto death can... what does He say about it? "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness". How? Obedient unto death! Humbling ourselves, then the heavens are opened: "This is my beloved Son". See? Justified, accepted, standing with the Father. It's an attitude of will. If you are stubborn, rebellious — you will not, you just WILL not — then you are out of the running, you are out of court. For no matter what we may be as faulty, sinful creatures, in this matter of standing — mark you, I'm talking about standing now — we stand on the ground of a righteousness that is not our own at all. It's that righteousness perfected in Christ which God accepts for us. He is made unto us from God, Righteousness.

Now, let me say this in passing on. I doubt whether there will be a more fierce battleground for the Lord's people at the end than this one. It's an amazing thing; I recently read again the life of such men, two men, Dr

A J Gordon, one of the most saintly men, certainly one of the men most greatly used in his time, one of a few men who walked with God in those days. And then the other, A T Pierson, another one, same kind, men who walked with God. And a third one, A B Simpson. Here you have three spiritual giants. Well, out of the three, at any rate two of them, right at the end of their course here on this earth, had the most terrible battle of all their lives on the question of their acceptance by God, their standing with God! They passed into a time of such awful darkness as though all the forces of evil gathered around them and quenched the light and raised this question of their acceptance. Thank God that in both cases before they went they got through and the light returned. But it's significant! It's significant that this is THE battleground. And dear friends, whether it comes like that to us or in any other form, and in any other way, you and I need to be absolutely assured of this matter: that our standing is not on the ground of what WE are but on the ground of what Christ is.

It is so easy for us to sing "Not what I am O Lord but what Thou art" but when it comes to the test we forget all about that and we go down under what we are. We know what we are. Now let me finish this bit for the moment by saying, that in the end, in the end we are just going to be forced back upon Christ without any alternative. The Church will be forced back on Christ. You and I will be forced back on Christ! We will have no other ground on which to stand. And if, if then, we are not sure about Him and what He is for us to God, it's going to be a sorry lookout for us. But Paul looked into the face of Jesus Christ when all his mighty structure of self-righteousness had collapsed, the bottom had fallen out of that whole system of righteousness by works, he looked into the face of Jesus and saw a Righteousness that would carry him right through. He saw all the Righteousness that he needed and one that would never collapse. Yes, Christ is God's Provision in the matter of righteousness.

But then there's another phase and I know what you're all thinking about this, "Yes but what about this other phase of what we are after all and our failures and all this. We are that we ought not to be and are not that we ought to be... are we to ignore that?" Not a bit, not a bit. You see that was one of the charges that the Lord brought against two churches in Asia: "Thou hast there those that hath the doctrine of the Nicolaitans". And that doctrine was "Well, you're saved! You're saved, by grace... do as you like, live as you like, doesn't matter what you do, you'll be saved alright. Once in grace always in grace, doesn't matter what kind of life you live, you can be worldly, you can sin, do anything, you're saved alright, nothing can alter that. None will pluck you out of the Father's hand." And He said "Which thing I HATE!" Which thing I hate: condoning wrong, not reckoning with evil in your life. Oh yes, it doesn't mean that, but there's all the difference, dear friends, between judgment, condemnation as out of Christ, without His righteousness; and the work of God in what the writer calls 'chastening', that is child training... child training. Now here you have it: "But we all with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same image from glory to glory as from the Lord the Spirit".

When the Lord disciplines us — and He does — that does not mean that He has put us under judgment, under condemnation. It means that He is just going to make good IN us by this discipline, what is true ABOUT us in Christ. All His disciplines are transformative. You may not think so, sometimes you think they're making you worse; it does seem like that but wait a bit, wait a bit... there's something gracious coming out of it, something beautiful. You meet more of Christ in those who have the hardest time. Saints I mean, real saints are the people who seem to have had the hardest handling by the Lord. It's like that. He is developing the character of Christ by what seems to be hard dealings; hard dealings. He's very faithful, very faithful. He knows... He knows what we perhaps would not believe, and His dealings with us are really going to be in the direction of transformation. This is what happens with TRUE believers. It doesn't happen with unbelievers, if they are dealt with hardly they go from bad to worse and Paul says here when we are dealt with hardly we go from glory to glory! And though it may not seem like it or appear like it, it is true, it is true.

We cannot speak very much about ourselves and our goodness and the grace of God in us, but we do know just a little, that something has happened to us through our sufferings and our afflictions to change us a bit from what we were. At any rate we say this: where would we be today, where would we be today if the Lord hadn't dealt with us very faithfully? Very faithfully. But, you see, you must keep this line between the two things, that of judgment and condemnation, and that of child training, discipline and transforming.

Now then, what is the provision here for the standing? He's made the provision in the face of Jesus Christ, of Righteousness. Do you notice the last clause of the verse just quoted: "as by the Lord the Spirit". Thank the Lord for that, the Spirit has got this thing in hand; the Holy Spirit is the Custodian of Glory! The Holy Spirit is the divine Provision to change us; He's at work upon it, it's in His hands. If we wonder however we are going to be reconstituted according to Christ, not only justified in Christ but reconstituted and conformed to His image; leave it with the Holy Spirit. He's taken it in hand and He's going to do it and He will do it. Don't get back onto the ground of rebellion. While you hold your ground of faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit will do it alright; make no mistake about it. "As by the Lord the Spirit."

Now, I want to hurry to a close. The third question that arises, it arose for Paul and it arose very quickly for Paul... he was hardly off the Damascus road before the question of endurance began to be raised. Now, well, you see to begin with he had been the official envoy of the Jewish rulers and their commissioned agent to persecute the church and blot out everything to do with Jesus of Nazareth. And he was about his business very thoroughly and he represented the attitude and the spirit of those in Jerusalem who had sent him on this business. He was the very embodiment of them. He turned right round; on the side of the Christians what does he meet? Well, of course he's got to meet what he'd been giving the others. He got to meet all that of which he'd been a part as now against him and that pursued him down the years wherever he went. Oh, the

wickedness of it, the suffering those Jews caused him everywhere... and there were other kinds of suffering. The enemy, the great enemy, was ever on his track. He knew physical suffering, yes, very much physical suffering. He knew treachery, oh yes, every kind it's certain, he gives us the catalogue. Christians are very, very real on how shall we get through? In the presence of persecution, in the presence of affliction, suffering, and adversity, trial of every kind; how shall we get through? "And he said unto me: My grace is sufficient for thee and My strength is made perfect in weakness..." Jesus; the Provision of God to get through. "Christ in you the hope of glory..." He looked into the face of Jesus and was ever looking into the face of Jesus with this question: Can I go through? Shall I get through? Shall I fail? Shall I breakdown? And ever came back from that Face: "My grace is sufficient for thee". I remember how Mr Spurgeon put that, he said the little fish, the little fish in the mighty ocean... wondering how he's going to cope and the mighty ocean says: 'Little fish, my waters are enough for you'. Little, little fish... be he Paul the apostle or anyone else: "My grace is sufficient for thee, My strength is made perfect in weakness". The answer of the face of Jesus to every need; Paul saw it all.

You see how I've had to hurry through it and merely skim the surface, but go away not with the exposition, not with the buildup of evidence, but just with the glorious fact: in each, in each case, each respect which proved, PROVED to be sufficient for that man, and if it could be sufficient for HIM, it can be sufficient for us. Righteousness? Yes, not our own but Christ's, that we may stand before God. And in the daily need of being changed, the Holy Spirit given to us and ever present with us to work through our difficulties and trials to change us into the same image and in our sufferings and afflictions the Holy Spirit ministering grace to us. The grace of the Lord Jesus, all sufficient grace.

May we see the face of Jesus, may we see the Answer that comes back to all our need as we look into that face. May the Lord make this time together really to prove to be a time of looking into His face and being changed.

“THE HOLY CITY, NEW JERUSALEM”

Chapter One

THE NATURE OF GOD

“And there came one of the seven angels... and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God”
(Revelation 21:9,10).

“Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”
(Hebrews 12:22).

“But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother” (Galatians 4:26).

We are going to occupy the first part of our time with trying to see where we are, and those passages do tell us quite precisely where we are. The Word says: “Ye are come unto... the heavenly Jerusalem”, and that “the Jerusalem that is above” (that is, the heavenly Jerusalem) “is our mother”. Well, that says where we are, but it does not explain, and this week we are going to be occupied with that to which we have come.

Now when you read these last chapters of the book of the Revelation you are inclined to think that it is all in the future. “The holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” — surely that belongs to some future time? Well, it may have a future aspect, but these Scriptures say that we have come there already. I know that that sounds rather mysterious, but in these hours which we spend together I think we shall be seeing exactly what it means. At the beginning, then, we must lay the foundation for our studies.

WHY WERE THESE CHAPTERS WRITTEN?

First of all, we must understand why it was, and when it was, that the Apostle John wrote all this about the new Jerusalem. This was written at a time when Christians were undergoing very severe persecution. The great wave of persecution of the Christians was proceeding, and Christianity was being subjected to very strong opposition from this world, so that Christians were finding that it was a matter of very great cost to be faithful to the Lord Jesus. As you know, the Apostle John himself, who wrote this, was in exile on the isle of Patmos for the testimony of Jesus.

That very first thing makes these chapters very contemporary. A new wave of persecution of Christianity has already begun on this earth, and it is spreading from the east to the west. While we are here in this place quite a number of the Lord’s servants are in prison for the testimony of Jesus. So this book does not just relate to something which happened centuries ago, nor to the future, but we are going to see that it has a very real application to our own time.

The second thing about the writing of this vision of the heavenly Jerusalem was that it was written in a time when the churches were losing their first love. A change was coming over them, and the first chapters of this book show us what that change was. The first love, the first life, the first glory were being lost. Surely we all realize how true that is in many places in our own time! The great cry today is: ‘Let us get back to the things of the beginning!’

The third thing that led to the writing of these chapters was this: It was a time when many false prophets and teachers were bringing confusion into Christianity, and the faith which was ‘once for all delivered unto the saints’ was losing its purity. One Apostle, who wrote a very short letter, said he was constrained to write in order “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Is that not another condition in which we are living today? Many false teachers are bringing the people of God into confusion so that they hardly know what to believe.

Perhaps there is no book in the Bible which is more confused than this book of the Revelation. Many Christians have given up reading it, saying: ‘I don’t know what to think about it. This Bible teacher gives this interpretation, while that one gives another.’ If I tried to do so, I could not tell you how many different interpretations of the book of the Revelation there are!

Well, that is how it was in the time when John wrote. You know that in his Letter he said that many false Christs had arisen (1 John 2:18). We must remember that this revelation of the heavenly Jerusalem was given because of all these conditions.

But let us note one more thing. This book was written at a time when judgment upon this world was beginning. You have only to read through it to see the judgments that were coming upon the world, and they began at the earthly Jerusalem. I think there is nothing in literature so terrible as the account of the destruction of Jerusalem given by the historian Josephus! But when the earthly Jerusalem is destroyed and removed, the heavenly one comes into view.

The judgment upon this world began at Jerusalem, and then it came upon the Roman Empire, and upon

Rome itself. The time was not far ahead when great and wonderful imperial Rome would be devastated. From all its wealth, its luxury and its plenty it was reduced to famine and pestilence, and the economic situation became so bad that the most wealthy people were begging for food. And so you read in this book of these pestilences, famines and wars, and all these conditions which were coming upon the world. The judgments of God upon this world were beginning — and who shall say that those judgments are not beginning in our world today? We leave that for the present.

So we have here conditions of suffering and corruption and loss of glory, the decline of the Lord's people from their first love, a state of falsehood and spiritual weakness — and when things were like that, and are like that, the heavenly Jerusalem is presented and is the answer to all those conditions. It is just exactly the opposite of all those things.

Now we leave that for the moment and move nearer to the heart of these last chapters in the book of the Revelation.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

We want to know what is the meaning of this holy city, and I think that before we get very much further many of your ideas are going to be thoroughly upset! We are going to spoil many of the hymns that you sing, but we are going to have something better, and I hope that you will be singing a new song before we have finished.

The Christian who takes his, or her, Christian life seriously is always seeking for something which will explain his experience. Such Christians may not be actually searching for this, but in their hearts they are asking for something which will explain everything. In our Christian lives we are asking: What does it all mean? What is it leading to? Men in the world are asking the question: What does it all mean? When I was in hospital some years ago there was a man who had both his legs amputated, and I heard him groaning in his bed almost every day: 'What does it all mean?' You remember that in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul speaks about the groaning creation — "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together" (verse 22) — and if you put your ear to the groaning creation, what do you hear? I feel sure you would hear this: What does it all mean? And then the Apostle Paul goes on to say: "We ourselves groan within ourselves" (verse 23). We have a deep question in our hearts: What does it all mean? What does all this difficulty, trial and suffering in the Christian life mean? What is it all leading to?

Now, of course, it is the business of the Christian teacher to provide the answer to that question and so to help God's people to understand what it means. So we have to ask this question: Is there an explanation which can be found in the Bible which will provide us with light upon the way?

THE KEY TO EVERYTHING

I want to say that there is an explanation, and I think these last chapters of the Bible are the best explanation in the Bible. If only we understood these two last chapters a great light would break upon our hearts, and we would say: 'And now I see. I have the key to everything.' Now that is making a great claim for two chapters — the key to everything!

I am not just using words. I have dwelt upon this for many days and weeks, so that these are not just empty words. What is the explanation of everything? There is one thing which governs everything in the Bible, and it is that which comes out in fullness in the last chapters. What is that key to everything? When I put it into a short phrase, of course, you will not grasp what it means, but the more you think about it the more you will see that it is true. The thing which governs everything in the Bible from beginning to end is the nature of God. Have you got that phrase? The nature of God governs everything, and by 'the nature of God' we mean the very constitution of God Himself. We say about people: 'Well, he, or she, is constituted that way. That is how he thinks, how he feels and how he speaks, and because he is made like that, he speaks and thinks like that. That is just his constitution.' It does not matter what you do, you cannot get away from your own constitution. It is your constitution that makes you behave as you do.

That is what we mean by 'the nature of God'. If I may put it in this way: It is just how God, because He is what He is, looks at everything.

Well now, one of the real lessons of our Christian life is that we learn that God looks at everything quite differently from ourselves. He looks at things from the eyes of His own nature. If anything satisfies the nature of God His eyes fill with life, and He says: "In whom I am well pleased", but if anything does not satisfy the nature of God and He does not accept it, His eyes become dark. God judges everything according to His own nature, and He decides everything according to His own nature. The value of anything is always decided by God as to how it answers to His nature. God determines destiny for eternity on the standard of His own nature. Is that too difficult for you to grasp? You will never understand this city until you understand that, and you will never understand why Jesus Christ came into the world until you understand that. God is deciding the destiny of this world from the standpoint of His own nature, and His Son Jesus Christ is His standard of decision.

There is one question which stands over everything, and that is: Does it satisfy the nature of God? The Bible begins with the FACT of God and ends with the NATURE of God in perfect expression, and this perfect expression of God's mind and nature is presented to us in the symbolism of a city and a garden. Do you notice the word that I have used? The SYMBOLISM of a city and a garden — and this is where we upset your hymns

and you have to have an absolute revolution in your mentality. Have you the idea that you are going to the heavenly Jerusalem as to some thing and some place? I am sorry to tell you that you are wrong! When you sing: "Jerusalem the golden! With milk and honey blest," What do you mean? When you sing: "We're marching upward to Zion" What do you mean? When you sing: "We shall tread the streets of gold" What do you mean? When you speak about "drinking at the river" and "taking of the fruit of life", what do you mean?

If I did not see the real meaning I should be very sorry to spoil all your lovely pictures! There is no such thing as a literal new Jerusalem and there is no such thing as a literal heavenly city answering to John's vision, but there is something very much better, and that is what we have to consider more fully.

WHY THIS SYMBOLISM?

I will just close by telling you why all this book of the Revelation, especially the last chapters, was written in symbolic terms. This book throughout is almost entirely symbolism. Why? Because so much of it was not only prophetic as to a more distant future but had to do with the history of those times. Supposing that, instead of speaking about a great dragon or a terrible beast coming up out of the sea, John had said: 'Caesar is an awful dragon and wild beast. Caesar is like THAT.' Well, you know what would have happened! So these historic truths were presented in symbols, and the Christians understood. You know that Peter called Rome 'Babylon'. Well, the Romans, in reading that, would have said: 'Oh, he is talking about Babylon. Where is Babylon?', but the Christians understood that Peter's Babylon was Rome. So it was all written in symbols and the Christians were the only ones who understood, and that is true of the holy city. It is not something literal; it is something which represents something spiritual, and it is for Christians to understand that this is not some imagination but some SPIRITUAL reality. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to the rest in parables" (Luke 8:10). That is: You understand, they don't. So these chapters are for spiritual understanding. This city, this heavenly Jerusalem, is that which fully answers to the nature of God. Every detail about it represents something of the Divine nature, so the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says to Christians: "Ye are come unto... the HEAVENLY Jerusalem."

Now that introduction was very necessary. It might not be very inspiring at the moment, but we must understand what it is that we are having to deal with, and why this has such an important message for our own lives and our own times. If you forget all that I have said this morning, try to remember one thing and take it away with you, think about it and keep on thinking about it: All God's work in our lives is on the basis of His own nature. We are called to be "partakers of the Divine nature", and when God has finished with us — if we let Him have His way — we shall be a full expression of the nature of God. Then, when you have a great multitude of people like THAT, a full, living expression of God's heart, then you have the heavenly Jerusalem.

Now you can sing again, if you like, "We are marching to Zion", but be sure of what you mean!

Chapter Two

THE NATURE OF THE CITY

We are engaged upon a consideration of the last chapters of the book of the Revelation, especially with those parts that deal with the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven. In that connection will you look at three verses of Scripture in the Letter to the Hebrews:

"By faith he (Abraham) became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (11:9,10).

"But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22).

"For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come" (13:14).

Before we continue with our consideration of this city I do want to say a very serious word about the purpose of these meditations. I want to say to you that this is not just a subject for a conference, nor just some Bible study for a series of meetings. My own strong conviction is that this is a word from God in this serious time in which we are living, and we are living in the most serious time in the history of this world. If we knew what was happening in the nations of this whole world today, one question would fill our minds: How much longer can it go on? Things are happening which make it very possible that many alive today will see the great change in this whole world. We are not exaggerating if we say that it is quite possible that within the next twenty or twenty-five years the end of this present world order could come. That would mean that this could happen in the lifetime of the middle-aged people, and certainly of younger people. It is not my desire to be an alarmist, but what I have just said is very possible, and so many things are happening in the world as to make the time very short.

I am not prophesying, so no one will be able to say that I was a false prophet if it does not happen! I am only saying that it is very possible, and if this is true, then we might expect that God would send a message to His people to prepare them. So I repeat: this is not just some bit of Bible teaching for a week. This could be a message from the Lord to prepare us for what is coming very soon.

Now I must take you back to the main thing which we said earlier, because that is the thing which is right at the centre of everything else. It is that the thing which governs everything in the history of this world is the nature of God. When God created this world He created it to be an expression of His own nature, so that wherever you looked you could see what God is like. When God created man He intended him to be an expression of Himself. He, said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26), which just means that when man is as God meant him to be, we should see what God is like. When He finished that creation He said "it was very good" (Genesis 1:31), and when you think of what God is like, for Him to be able to say 'It is very good' of anything, it means that it really must satisfy His nature.

Then everything went away from God and became displeasing to Him. When He looked out in the world He could not see His nature being expressed, so He put a curse upon everything. In effect, He said: 'That no longer satisfies My nature. I do not want it.' From that time onward God was always seeking to find something that would satisfy His nature. That is the story of the Old Testament — it is just the story of that which does satisfy God and that which does not satisfy God. And God accepts or rejects just according to how far His nature is satisfied. It is a long story; but running through that long history was one golden line, like a golden thread in a black fabric.

ABRAHAM'S QUEST

It is a long history. It reaches right back to the beginning, and then it was taken up by Abraham, who, it says, "by faith... looked for a city" — now note — "whose builder and maker is GOD". Not a city built by sinful man. However wonderful such a city might be, it would never satisfy God. It had to be a city which satisfied the nature of its Maker, God. That vision was put into the heart of Abraham, and he could say: 'Somehow I have come to understand that God wants a city, and if He wants anything, it will have to be like Him, and be made by Him. It is a "city whose builder and maker is God".' So we have read that Abraham went up and down the land, and as he did so he saw some cities. He saw the city of Sodom, and said: 'No, that is not it. That could never satisfy God.' Then he saw the city of Gomorrah. 'No,' said he, 'that is not the one.' And then he saw the city of Salem, the original Jerusalem. 'Now this is very much better than Sodom and Gomorrah,' but the Spirit said to Abraham: 'No, not even that one.' So he went on moving up and down the land, and this Divine conception of the city never materialized. Seventy years, eighty years, ninety years... and then he died, and he never found the city! This Letter to the Hebrews says: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises... God having provided some better thing for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect" (11:13,40).

THE END OF THE QUEST

And then this same Letter says: "But ye ARE come... unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." It has been a very long spiritual pilgrimage, but it is at an end now. Abraham has got it now. He is a co-inheritor with us.

Yet once more we have to change our ideas. There is a long, long story of Jerusalem in the Old Testament, but that Jerusalem, even in its best days, never finally satisfied God's nature. Everybody who knows his or her New Testament knows this. Have you read Peter, Paul, John and Stephen? They very largely make up the New Testament, and everybody knows from them that the things in the Old Testament were only patterns of some spiritual thing in the New Testament. Read Peter's Letters again, and there you will find that he is speaking of God's new Israel, and the NEW House of God in Israel. He calls it "God's spiritual house", and speaks of the offering of "SPIRITUAL sacrifices". This is the new Israel. Read Paul again, and you will find him writing to the Galatians: "Now this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to the Jerusalem that now is: for she is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother" (4:25,26). And then he will say in his Letter to the Philippians: "Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour" (3:20). That is the transition from the earthly to the heavenly, from the temporal to the spiritual.

You know, John builds his Gospel around Jerusalem; that is, the Gospel by John is centred in and circles around the Jerusalem which is below, but when you move on to the book of the Revelation, written by the same man, the centre is the heavenly Jerusalem. He is walking around her, noting her walls. In these two great writings John has moved from the earthly to the heavenly. And then this wonderful Letter to the Hebrews says that we, the believers of this dispensation, "are come unto mount Zion... the heavenly Jerusalem".

But, you see, this is all spiritual language. It is that of a spiritual character which God is seeking to possess.

Well, let us say it again, very strongly: This is only symbolism. What does it really mean? It just means what all the Bible is about: God is going to find His full satisfaction in His Son, and in a people conformed to the image of His Son. It is not a thing, nor a place — it is the Son of God and the sons whom He is bringing to glory.

THE PRESENT PREPARATION

Let us bring that city right here. Dear friends, if you are really a born again child of God, you are a part of the city which God is now building. God is now building something, and this building is going on inside of us — or it ought to be! God is, by His Spirit, building His Son into us. Christ is being built up in us, and we are being built up into Christ.

This is a tremendous business! When we are born again the Holy Spirit gets hold of these pieces of rough stone — and what poor bits of humanity we are! What poor pieces of material we are for a heavenly city! We have a lot of corners, like a piece of stone, and the Holy Spirit says: ‘We will knock off some of those corners,’ and so our spiritual experience is one of having the corners knocked off. You know what I mean by ‘corners’! If you don’t think that you have any corners, you know that other people have! We are very awkward people and do not fit in anywhere, so we have to be made to fit into this heavenly city. You see, this heavenly city is very practical. It is all very well to sing about ‘Jerusalem the golden’, but when the Holy Spirit is knocking off the corners, that is not what we mean when we sing. The symbolism may be very wonderful, but the actuality is through suffering. But when the work is finished we will say: ‘God has done a wonderful thing in me. What a difficult person I was! How difficult it was for me to fit in with others! Indeed, I often wanted to run right away from everyone because I did not fit in, but God has done His work faithfully. All the awkward corners have gone and Jerusalem is a city that is “compact together”.’ Do you remember those words from Psalm 122? “Jerusalem, that art builded as a city that is compact together” (verse 3). and Peter says: “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). Yes, God is building His city.

Not only are we people with corners: we are people with a very rough surface, and when we rub up against one another there is a lot of friction. You know what I mean! We just do not get on smoothly together, and then the Holy Spirit takes the sandpaper to smooth us down. But, oh no, He does not take a piece of paper and rub us smooth — He puts us up against someone else who is not smooth, or He puts us in a situation in life which is not smooth. We want to get away from that person because he, or she, rubs us up the wrong way, and we want to get away from that situation because it does rub us up the wrong way so much. We want to have a smooth time, but the Holy Spirit does not let us have it. We shall never have a smooth time until we are smooth — and do you know what it is that makes us smooth? It is the grace of God in suffering. We have to say a lot about that when we further consider the city.

Now you have got away from symbolism, have you not? We have come to spiritual reality! And this city is just the embodiment of these spiritual principles.

BUILDING FOR ETERNITY

When you are talking about the heavenly Jerusalem you are talking about something eternal, and that is something of which we are very conscious now. Here again we have come into the realm of what is spiritual and not temporal. The point is this: What God is doing in the small fragment of time in our lives is going to be revealed to His glory for all eternity. To use the words of the Apostle Paul: “Our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). God is doing in these little lives that which will correspond to the city “coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God”.

I do trust that you are already beginning to see what God is working at, and what He is now building for all eternity. So we cease to think of the city as a place, and think of it as a people conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. “Partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Chapter Three

COMING TO THE CITY

Up till now we have been making our way toward the city. Now we arrive, so I want you to open your Bibles at the twenty-first chapter of the Book of the Revelation:

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (verse 2).

“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God; her light was like unto a stone most precious, clear as crystal” (verses 10,11).

As we have contemplated this city of God we have been breaking our way through the symbolism to the spiritual reality, and I hope that now we have succeeded in realizing that we are not considering some THING, or some PLACE, but that this is only a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ and His Church. In this presentation at the end of the Bible we see what God is working toward: bringing the fullness of His Son into His Church for final manifestation. That is the explanation of the Christian life, and there is no other explanation. It begins with Christ, it goes on with the increase of Christ, and it ends with the fullness of Christ.

Now I trust that we are quite clear about that. We need to have our minds converted, and that conversion has to be from the imagination to the reality, from the symbolism to the spiritual meaning. You know, in this western world where everything is so practical, THAT conversion is a very big thing! So we are not thinking about some time, some place, some thing, called the New Jerusalem, but about the Lord Jesus Christ becoming more and more full in the Church, until that day of fullness and glory comes when what has been done is manifested in the whole universe.

So we come now right to the city. That is, let me repeat, to Jesus Christ and His Church represented here

in the terms of the new Jerusalem.

Now there are four words that we have just read upon which we want to put our finger:

“He carried me away in the Spirit” First, then: **“IN THE SPIRIT”**. “The new Jerusalem”... and the word is **“NEW”**. **“OUT OF HEAVEN”** is the third. And the fourth: **“HAVING THE GLORY OF GOD”**.

I trust you have those four things. I shall begin with the last.

HAVING THE GLORY OF GOD

What is the glory of God? We know quite well from John’s other writings that the glory of God was in His Son, Jesus Christ, and we also know, especially from the Apostle Paul, that the Church is to be the vessel of that glory: “Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the ages for ever and ever” (Ephesians 3:21). But those are statements of truth. They do not define or explain anything, or tell us what the glory of God is, and it is important for us to understand what it is.

Let us remind ourselves that it is that word ‘glory’ which governs everything where God is concerned. The one thing that God had in view from the creation, and right through the Old Testament, was His own glory. When we open our New Testament and find God’s Son present in this world, we hear the Apostle saying: “And we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father” (John 1:14). Again we ask: What is the glory of God?

The glory of God is the absolute satisfaction of the Divine nature, when God is able to say, really from His very nature and all that He is, ‘I am well pleased with that. That perfectly satisfies My very nature.’ If you and I were in the presence of that Divine satisfaction we should feel a tremendous joy, and would just exclaim: ‘Oh, this is glory!’

Let us consider this in the opposite way. What is it that robs our lives and our hearts of glory? What is it that makes us sing about the great day when “that will be glory for me”? What is it that makes us long for the glory? I can tell you quite simply. The glory in our hearts and in our lives is limited because of our consciousness of how unlike the Lord we are. Oh, how different our natures are from God’s! That worries us every day and hides the glory in our hearts. We live so little in God’s satisfaction and so much in our own dissatisfaction. We have not yet come to really grasp the great truth of our justification in Christ Jesus, nor have we come to understand that what God is doing with us is to change us from what we are into what He is.

I am going to be very simple for a minute or two. When you first come to the Lord Jesus you have a wonderful sense of glory. You do not understand all the teaching about coming to the Lord Jesus, but you just come and give yourself to Him, and take Him to be your Lord, and something happens almost immediately. A great burden rolls away from your heart. A great cloud is removed from your life and you have to say: ‘Oh, this is wonderful! This is glory!’ Why is that? Because there is One who knows a great deal more of what it means than you do. The Holy Spirit has come to lead every one of us to that final glory, and this is the beginning. He says: ‘I have got him — or her — on the road to glory,’ and so He registers glory in our hearts. All the meaning of justification by faith — that is, being made righteous in Christ — is in that first step, and so God the Holy Spirit says at the beginning: ‘I am well-pleased.’ The heart and the nature of God are satisfied, and, without a great deal of teaching, you just know it.

Glory is just that wonderful sense, or sensation, of God being well-pleased. The pathway of the child of God is intended to be the pathway of glory. The Holy Spirit has taken possession.

IN THE SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit has taken charge. Now, after you have taken the first step and tasted something of the glory, you will come into a situation, or a temptation, where the whole question of the glory is involved. There is something in your life upon which the Holy Spirit puts His finger and says, in effect: ‘That belongs to the world you have left behind, so you must leave it behind. Now, what about it? What are you going to do about it? Are you going to hold on to it, or are you going to let it go?’ The continuation of the glory depends upon your decision. If you hold on, and do not let go, that glory of the Divine satisfaction will be clouded. A cloud will come over your heart, and people who saw you when you first came to the Lord will say: ‘Something has happened. The light has gone out of his — or her — face.’ And then you have a big battle, and if you get through it and let the Lord have His way fully, some of the old glory will come back and you will feel: ‘Oh, the burden has rolled away.’

Those of us who have gone on with the Lord through the years have had many battles. We have had to come to new positions as to the will of God, and as long as the issue was not settled it seemed as though the glory was lifted up and waiting for something, but when we have fought that issue through and got clear with the Lord, the glory has come back. Perhaps the biggest battles will come at the end — this book of the Revelation says so — but then, through the last and greatest of all battles, we come right through into the eternal glory: that is, we come to the place where God’s nature is fully satisfied with His work in us.

Do you understand the meaning of glory now? Glory is a wonderful influence of God in our lives. We shall see that all the way through our meditations, “Having the glory of God”. What an influence it is when the glory of God is in our hearts!

You see a little child who is absolutely satisfied and delighted with everything, and don't you like to be where that little child is? That has a wonderful influence upon you! Put it the other way — a little child who is discontented with everything. What a miserable effect that has upon you! I heard of such a little child. It was bed time and mother said: 'Darling, it is time for bed. Put your dolls away.' The little child said: 'I don't want to put my dolls away.' The mother saw that she was going to do nothing with the child, so she said: 'Well, would you like to play with your dolls for a little longer?' 'I don't want to play with my dolls any longer!' Poor mother did not know what to say next! So she said: 'Well, darling, you just do what you want to do.' And the little child said: 'I don't want to do what I want to do!' Poor mother! What a miserable time for her! There is no glory in that! But when God's nature is fully satisfied and we come into harmony with that nature, there is glory in our hearts. Do you see that the Holy Spirit is trying to produce in us that which satisfies the heart of God?

It is perhaps a hard school. It means much discipline, and much testing of our love for the Lord. It constantly raises the question as to whether we really want the Lord to be well-pleased with us, but this life is the school of those who are to be the sons of God dwelling in His glory.

So you see how two things are joined together: "In the Spirit... having the glory of God." Be out of the Spirit and you are out of the glory, because, as you know, one of the names of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of glory. That means that the whole purpose and work of the Holy Spirit is to bring us to glory, to the satisfaction of God.

NEW

Now we have two other words left. "In the Spirit I saw the NEW Jerusalem." That is only a symbolic way of saying that you have to be under the government of the Holy Spirit if you are going to see God's new things. One of the characteristic words of the New Testament is this word 'New': 'In Christ Jesus there is a NEW creation... In Christ Jesus there is a NEW man... In Christ Jesus there is a NEW life... In Christ Jesus there is a NEW way of life', and so you lift that word out from your New Testament until you come to the end, and it says: "A NEW heaven and a NEW earth" (Revelation 21:1), and then "the NEW Jerusalem". The word 'new' has no meaning unless there is something old. It is a comparison and a contrast. There was an old Jerusalem, but it has gone. It has been put away under judgment, and when the old is put away, the new is introduced. We have yet to see the meaning of the city of Jerusalem, but for the moment it is just this word 'new' with which we are concerned. It is something completely fresh, and there is something about it that has never been true of anything before.

When you consider the history of the old Jerusalem, what a sad and tragic story it is! And it is a tragic story because of its sin. It had its days of glory, but they were very few. The glory soon departed and the tragedy is written through the Old Testament. The last words for that Jerusalem were pronounced by the Lord Jesus: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens, under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:37,38), and two thousand years have told the story of that desolation.

This NEW people that God is bringing into being is just the opposite of the old Jerusalem. This is something which is called "unto his ETERNAL glory" (1 Peter 5:10). This is something which is not called unto tragedy at the end, but glory; something over which all the powers of evil are not going to prevail, as they did over the old Jerusalem. This is a NEW Jerusalem.

Now I must just very briefly touch on the other thing, upon which we shall enlarge later in the week.

OUT OF HEAVEN

Of course, if you just use your imagination, you do not know what that means. You begin to think of some great object called a city descending out of heaven. Dear friends, we shall not have gone much further before we shall see that that is absolutely impossible. You hold that for a little while I try to explain this, but I shall remind you more than once of what I have just said about the impossibility of it being a literal city.

If this is going to come down out of heaven, it must be there before it can come down. What does this mean? The Apostle Paul tells us that the Church is seated together with Christ in the heavenlies now (Ephesians 2:6), but we might answer: 'We are not in heaven; we are very much on this earth. Everything down here is much more real than things in heaven.' Are you quite sure that you are right? Is that really true? What is the very first thing that comes into your consciousness when you are born again? It is: 'I do not belong to this world any more. Something has happened to me which has separated me from it. Things in this world are different now, and the things that were once my life are no longer my life. The things which I once sought after I now no longer want. The people who were once my true friends are no longer my true friends. My true friends are now the people of God, and my true family is the family of God. What has happened to me? They say that I am "born again", but when they say that they do not put it right. What the Bible says is "born from above".'

You know, if you have been born, and have spent your childhood, in a certain place, there is a strange link between you and that place in your life. Now, I spent much of my childhood and my schooldays in a certain place, and somehow, through all the years, I have wanted to go back to that place again and again, so, from time to time, I have gone back. But, oh! how everything has changed! All the old friends have gone, all the old scenes have changed, and I do not think they have changed for the better. Sometimes when I have left that place I have said: 'I will never go back again!', but wait a year or two, and I am back again. I cannot keep away.

There is some pull inside. Do you see what I mean? If we really have been born from above there will always be a pull away from below. We may have some bad times, and we may be tempted to give it all up, but somehow or other we just do go on.

“I was in the Spirit... and I saw the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven.” The most powerful work of the Holy Spirit in a life is to make that life know that it belongs to heaven and not to this world.

I expect most of us know what is meant by this. Paul says: “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20), and the Psalmist says: “This one was born THERE” (Psalm 87:4). We do not belong to this world, and we ought to know it. If we can settle down and be satisfied with this world, then we know nothing about the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit sent down from heaven to link us with heaven.

Well, that is what it means to come to the new Jerusalem. It is not just an abstract idea, nor a symbolic imagination, but a powerful reality in the life. We are not going to the city: we ARE the city.

Chapter Four

IN THE SPIRIT OR IN THE WORLD?

“And there came one of the seven angels... and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, ...clear as crystal”

(Revelation 21:9–11).

There are those people who think that I am wrongly spiritualizing everything, and they say that I am wrong when I say that this city is not a literal city, but represents a spiritual people. But I hold to my position! One would think that it only needs one phrase here to justify that position. The angel said to John: “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb,” and when he got John there, there was no wife or bride at all: he showed him a city. And there is so much more like that in this book. There was a time when there was a book sealed without and within, and John wept because there was no one who could open it. The angel said: “Weep not: behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome, to open the book...” (Revelation 5:5). And when John turned to see this Lion: “I saw... a Lamb” (verse 6). Well, what is there in common between a lion and a lamb? You can only explain it if you get the spiritual principles. I think it is worth while taking just a few minutes on this particular point, especially for the Bible students, but, of course, for everybody.

It is essential that we really understand the particular form that John’s ministry took, and this was his method more than of anyone else in the New Testament. John was most concerned with the spiritual meaning which lay behind material things. You know how true that was in his Gospel — everybody will accept this principle in his Gospel! He called all the miracles of Jesus ‘signs’, and did not just say: ‘Now this is something that Jesus DID’ but: ‘This is what Jesus MEANT when He did that.’ When Jesus turned the water into wine, John meant it to teach us that Jesus can give us an altogether new kind of life. When the old wine — or life — fails and disappoints us, Jesus can give a new life. When Jesus raised a poor man from his bed after he had been there, unable to walk, for thirty-eight years, John says: ‘That is a sign.’ Jesus can take a poor moral and spiritual cripple and put him on his feet: He can give him the power to walk in a new kind of life. When Jesus gave sight to the man who was born blind, John says: ‘That is a sign: a sign that Jesus can give us a new sight so that we can see spiritual things that we never saw before.’ And so it is with all the eight signs in the Gospel by John.

You accept that in John’s Gospel and say: ‘Now these things in the natural world are signs of something in the spiritual world.’ But if you accept that in his Gospel, why will you not accept it in his book of the Revelation? This city, the new Jerusalem, is a sign of something else. Every part of it signifies something spiritual, something in relation to the Lord Jesus.

Do you accept that? If you do, we can go on.

We come again to this tenth verse of chapter twenty-one: “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem.”

Well, “a mountain great and high”, and “he carried me away IN THE SPIRIT”. In spiritual terms that just means that John was alive in the spirit. Do you think that this angel took hold of the Apostle John when he was on the Isle of Patmos and lifted him right away to some great high mountain? There would have been trouble in Patmos if that had happened! The Roman authorities would have been saying: ‘John has escaped!’ Do you see what I mean? This was a spiritual experience. It may have been a dream, or a vision. You know that in our dreams we can travel a long way. I have sometimes dreamt that I was in America, and then I have awakened a few minutes afterward and found that I was still in London, but I had been travelling a very long way. You will accept that in the natural. Why will you not accept it in the spiritual?

Now there are two things here, and you must remember that these are fundamental laws of the New Testament, or of the Christian life.

Firstly there is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a great reality. You believe in the reality of the Holy Spirit as a fact, but you cannot see Him, or hear Him with your natural ears, and you cannot know the reality of the Holy Spirit until something happens in you. Early in his Gospel this same John speaks about being “born of the Spirit”. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being born again, Nicodemus’ mind was just working in the natural realm and he said: ‘Impossible!’ Jesus said: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit IS spirit” (John 3:6). What is it that is born of the Spirit? It is our human spirit. Because it has become separated from God it is looked upon as dead, and death is just separation from God, whether it be in time or in eternity.

Now, being ‘born again’ means that our spirit is brought into life union with God, and what the New Testament means when it speaks of ‘being alive in the spirit’ is ‘in living union with God, the Holy Spirit’, that is, our spirit being alive unto God and unto Divine things. Here John was only saying in principle that his spirit was alive to the Holy Spirit at this time, and when that is true, as it should be of every one of us, we see a new world. “And (he) shewed me the holy city”, and the Holy Spirit will do that with every one of us, so that we are able to say: ‘I have seen something that God has shown me.’ Will you believe me when I say that that ought to be true of every Christian? The Christian life is not just a matter of reading the Bible, saying prayers and going to church. Those things may be good and necessary, but the Christian life really is a walk with God in the light. It is a matter of being alive unto God in the spirit and God being able to show us in our hearts what is His will, so that the true Christian should be able to say ‘The Lord is showing me things’.

Now, you mature Christians, be very patient with this, because there are some young Christians here, and we can never go on very far until we have laid a proper foundation. What I have just said, then, is fundamental to the Christian life from its beginning.

Now we can go on to the next step. You say: ‘Well, that is very wonderful and I want my life to be like that, but how can it be?’ We have our answer here, but in spiritual principle. What the Lord shows to your heart will depend upon how far up the mountain you are. Again you say: ‘Oh, Mr. Sparks, what do you mean?’ Well, I am not talking about climbing the Jungfrau or the Blümlisalp. What does this mountain mean? What does it mean to go up any mountain? It just means getting away from this world. When you get up the mountain you have left the world behind; there is a great separation between you and the world, and you will never see heavenly, spiritual things until that has happened.

Do believe me: this is not a matter of age, or years. There are multitudes of Christians who have been saved for many years, and they are still down on the earth. They have still got their interests in this world — this world, and the things of this world, still have a large place in their life. They are what are called ‘worldly Christians’. Of course, that is a contradiction in terms, because it is not true Christianity. Listen to Jesus as He is praying to His Father about His disciples: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:16). ‘They are not of the world. They do not belong here. They belong somewhere else. This world is not their life; their life is above.’ That is in John’s Gospel, and it is just clear, straight language, is it not?

In the book of Revelation John puts it in this way of illustration — of a great and high mountain — and he is saying: ‘The people who make this city are heavenly people, not earthly people. They are people who are separated in spirit from this world.’ The Apostle Paul put it in this way: “If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is” (Colossians 3:1), and that only means: ‘Get up on the mountain. Leave this world in spirit, in heart, and come up with the Lord Jesus.’

Let me go back again to what I began to say. This life in the spirit, in union with Christ, is not a matter of years or of age. It is possible that you were only born again yesterday and yet you are high up the mountain, and that is because you have said ‘good-bye’ absolutely to this world. You are very utter about this matter of new life with the Lord.

As we move about this world we meet many people who call themselves Christians, and the strange thing is that we cannot talk to them about the things of the Lord. These professing Christians open their eyes and their mouths when you begin to talk about the things of the Lord. To them it is as though you were talking the language of another country, and the reason is that they have not yet come right away from this world in spirit. Let me say to the young Christians that this mountain is for you from the day that you are born again.

Now I want to say a very strong thing, and it may be difficult for you to accept it. Do you realize that this world lies under a curse? God has pronounced a curse upon this world as it is, and what is the expression of a curse? The law of frustration operates where a curse is. You just go so far, and you can go no further. Human life just goes so far, and that is the end. It does not go right through to fullness and perfection. Everything is imperfect, and is frustrated by death. A man spoken of by Jesus Christ accumulated great stores in his lifetime, and then he rubbed his hands together and talked to himself: ‘Soul, you can retire now. You have great stores laid up for yourself, so just eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said: “Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee; and the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?” (Luke 12:20).

The curse and death mean the frustration of all the purposes of man, and what is true of human life is true of the world. Oh, what a lot man has done to try to break through the sound barrier of frustration! What a long way he has gone today! Why, if you had been told twenty-five years ago how things would be today, you would never have believed it. Yes, man has gone a very long way, even to the moon — and then someone just puts his finger on a button, the nuclear bombs begin to fall and all his work is wiped out in a moment. Everybody knows of that possibility, and the Word of God has told us quite clearly that that is exactly how it will be. Be-

cause a curse rests upon this world it can never go right through to perfection.

What I am getting at is this: If you and I in spirit get bound up with this world we shall come under spiritual death. Any Christian who is sensitive to the Holy Spirit will register something wrong when they touch this world and their reaction will be: 'I have come down. I have touched this cursed world and death is registered in my spirit.'

You will never see the things of God until you get above the fog of this earth. If you come down into the self-life, then it is frustration. If you touch the world's life it is frustration, and you will never see the things of God until you get above this world in spirit. The language is very simple and very significant: 'I was in the Spirit, and I was on a great, high mountain, and then I saw something.' You see, these are spiritual laws of the Christian life and they are very real. I hope we do know something about this.

May the Lord explain to our hearts just what it means where we individually are concerned!

Chapter Five

THE LOVE OF GOD

"And he that spake with me had for a measure a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth; and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal" (Revelation 21:15,16).

For the sake of friends who have not been with us before let me just give this word of explanation. We are considering in these days the meaning of this new Jerusalem, this holy city, which the Apostle, in a vision, saw coming down from God out of heaven. We have pointed out that this is not a literal city, but a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ and His Church as God is going to have it at the end.

So now we come to the greatness of the city. The Apostle says that in his vision he saw an angel, in whose hand was a golden reed with which he was measuring the city, and then the Apostle tells us that the measurement was given by the angel — twelve thousand furlongs high and twelve thousand furlongs on every side. And the city was made of transparent gold. That, of course, is something that you have never seen on this earth! The reed with which the city was measured, and the city itself were of the same material: the measurement of the city was by a reed of pure gold, and the city itself was of pure gold. In the Bible gold is always the symbol of the Divine nature, and the supreme thing in that nature is love. It is this same John who says: "God IS love" (1 John 4:8), and everything that is of God is measured according to the standard of Divine love. When we approached this city earlier in the chapter John told us that he saw "the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God", and the supreme thing about the glory of God is the love of God.

THE GREATNESS OF HIS LOVE

Now look at the size of this city. The measurement is given as twelve thousand stadia. I don't know whether any of you have worked that out, but in English that is one thousand, three hundred and seventy-nine miles, and in metres it is two million, two hundred and twenty thousand. Do you recognize what that represents? That is many times higher than the Jungfrau, and, indeed, many times higher than the highest mountain in this world, Mount Everest. Do you understand now why I say this cannot be a literal city? It is as high as that, as long as that, as wide as that, and is as great as that on every side. This is impossible of literal interpretation, and must therefore represent spiritual principles.

Now understand that we are speaking about the love of God in Jesus Christ expressed in a redeemed people and manifested in its fullness in eternity. If this measurement is something beyond all natural conception, the love of God in Christ Jesus toward us is completely beyond our imagination, and this immense city is a symbol of the immensity of the love of God. The Apostle Paul mentions this in one place, when he prays that the Church may be "rooted and grounded in love", and that it "may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge..." (Ephesians 3:17,18). The love of God surpasses knowledge, just as this symbolic city is something altogether beyond knowledge. That is why we sang that hymn which is all about that Divine love:

"It passeth knowledge, that dear love of Thine...Oh, fill me, Jesus, Saviour, with Thy love!"

It will require all eternity to understand that love.

Do you remember what the Apostle Paul says about this love? His description of how great this love is is that it is beyond the greatest things that are known in our human life. He says, in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (verse 35), and here are some of the big things in human life: "Shall tribulation?" Perhaps you do not know very much about tribulation, but there are some of God's people in various parts of the world who do know the meaning of that word, and for them the second greatest thing in life is tribulation. "Or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" These are all very big things! If you know anything about them you know that they are bigger than anything else except the love of God. But the Apostle has not yet completed his list. He goes on like this: "I am

persuaded, that neither death..." Is death a big thing? "...nor life" — and life is a big thing, for it can hold a great many big things — "nor angels..." Well, now, you will have to have a good Bible study with that word! Read all the great things that angels did. On one occasion the earthly Jerusalem was besieged by a great foreign nation, who came with their chariots and their horses, and their men in armour, and they spread themselves like locusts over all the land. The servant of God prayed, and God sent one angel. In the morning, when the men of Jerusalem awoke, that whole army consisted of dead corpses. Only one angel — and a vast and mighty army lay dead! Shall angels separate us from the love of God, whether they be good or bad angels? "Nor principalities..." They are the spiritual authorities that govern the nations of this world, and you must remember that they are SPIRITUAL forces. They are evil forces, and today you are seeing what they are doing in the nations of this world. They are doing very terrible things: but the Apostle goes on: "Nor things present..." and there are plenty of things present today, enough to frighten anyone. It would not do for me to begin to speak of all these terrible things which are now present. We have read in our papers today of the assassination of the Prime Minister of South Africa, and that within the last few years twenty-six world rulers have been assassinated. These are only a few of the things which are now present. "Nor things to come..." — and the Bible tells us of terrible things that are going to come on this world. On he goes: "Nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation..." Think of anything that would be terrible and great, and the Apostle says: 'Put them all together and they will NOT be able to separate us from the love of God.' How great is the love of God!

This same John wrote in his Gospel: "God so LOVED the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). How great is His love!

It takes something that man cannot measure even to consider the love of God. These measurements of the city are only symbolic of the greatness of the love of God toward you and toward me in Jesus Christ, and when God has done His work in His people eternity will show how great His love was. We may not be able to grasp it or understand it now, but then we shall fully understand, and I think that the thing about which we shall all be talking for all eternity will be: 'Oh, how great was His love!'

Presently the Apostle will tell us who are outside of the city, for he says that there will be many outside. These are the people who never accepted God's love, and for all eternity they have lost this wonderful thing — the immense love of God. What a great thing, therefore, it is for us to accept God's love!

THE STABILITY OF HIS LOVE

If these measurements represent the greatness of God's love, this immense city must be a very, very stable thing. It would be a very big thing to be able to move the Jungfrau, but if you put a hundred Jungfraus on top of one another, no Samson would be able to lift that! Here we come, year after year, year after year, and the mountain is still just in the same place. When I was a little boy I lived where there are some mountains, and I go back there now — and I won't tell you how long it is since I was a little boy! — and see the mountains in exactly the same place. They have not moved nor changed one little bit. You see what I am coming to — how reliable is this love of God! "They that trust in the Lord", said the Psalmist, "Are as mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever" (Psalm 125:1). One of our New Testament texts says: "Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22), and in spiritual language that just means: 'You are come to the love of God, which is unchanging and immovable.' Stability is a characteristic of Divine love.

The Lord Jesus has given us a picture of this in His well-known parable of the Prodigal Son. That son was a son of his father's love, but he despised it and packed up, and went right away from where that love was. He spent all his father's resources in sinful living and brought shame and dishonour upon his father's name. Then, at last he remembered his father's love and said to himself: 'I will arise'. He did not say: 'I will arise and go home', but: 'I will arise and go unto my father'. So he turned his footsteps toward his father again, and Jesus gives us the picture of the father on the top of the house looking to the horizon. I suppose that father had been praying every day: 'Lord, bring my son home.' So every day he went out to see if his prayer was being answered — and then this wonderful day arrived. He saw a black spot on the horizon and said: 'Someone is coming.' He watched, and then he said: 'It is my son!' He did not wait for the son to arrive. Down the stairs he went and out on to the road. The boy began to make some excuses and give explanations, but the father smothered it all and he could not get it all out. It says: "He (the father) fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). He brought the son back into the house and said: "Let us eat, and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Now Jesus was saying: "That is the love of God for man, for sinful man, for man who has gone away from God. God's heart just longs to have that man back again." The unchanging love of God! The father did not say: 'He is a bad boy. He has not appreciated my love. I wash my hands of him and will have nothing more to do with him!' Oh, no, God's love does not change when we go wrong. How strong is this city! How immovable is this city! How unchangeable is this city! And all that is true of the love of God.

THE EQUALITY OF HIS LOVE

One more thing: I did not expect to be preaching the Gospel in this way this evening, but I have the feeling that this is what the Lord wanted said, and I think He wants us all to have a new understanding of the greatness of His love.

It says that this city is equal on all its sides. It is all the same on the east, on the west, on the north and on

the south. The love of God is not bigger for people who live on the east than it is for people who live on the west. It is not different for those who live on the north from what is for those who live on the south. There are the people who have everything that they need and want. We say that they were born with a silver spoon in their mouths. On the other side there are the people who have nothing, the poor, miserable people of this world. There are the people who live in the sun of the east and the people who live in the cold winds of the north. There are all kinds and conditions of people in this world, but the love of God is equal to them all. God has no favourites. There is no partiality about the love of God. It does not matter what we are, or where we are. On every side the love of God is the same. How equal is the love of God! Are you not glad that it is like that? There are those people who have all the advantages. They have godly parents and grandparents, were born into a Christian home and brought up in a Christian atmosphere. There are those people who never had any godly parents or grandparents. They were born into very sinful homes and families. You know, General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, said a very strong thing about those people, and used a word that we don't like using: 'My work is for the people who were damned into this world!' Well, it does not matter which side it is. God's love is no greater for the people who have all the advantages than it is for those who have none. God's love is a very righteous love. It just levels everyone out, and in eternity it will not matter what we were here — we shall have to say: 'It is the love of God that got me here.'

The greatness of His love; the stability of His love; the equality of His love — how wonderful is the love of God! And you and I are called by that love that we, through eternity, shall show it forth to the whole universe.

Chapter Six

“CLEAR AS CRYSTAL”

“...and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper stone and a sardius” (Revelation 4:3).

“Having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were jasper stone, clear as crystal... And the building of the wall thereof was jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto pure glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper... and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie” (Revelation 21:11,18,19,27).

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and stood not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof” (John 8:44).

“And as for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie” (1 John 2:27).

We have now passed the half-way line of this consideration, and it is very important that we should understand clearly what it is that the Lord is wanting to show us. There are many words, and there is much teaching, and we just ask ourselves: 'What is it all about?' The one thing about which we shall have to be clear at the end is: 'What is it that the Lord has really said?' Therefore, leaving all the symbolism, that is, the means the Lord uses to lead us to the truth, let us seek to understand exactly what the Lord is saying.

THE END TOWARD WHICH THE LORD IS WORKING

It can all be gathered into a few words: The Lord is trying to show us what is the great end toward which He is moving in the lives of His people, and that end is the expression of His own Divine nature in them. That Divine nature has been brought to us in His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit has come to reproduce Jesus Christ in the Church, so that when God's work is done in His people there will be a manifestation in His universe of the Divine nature in a people. God is not doing two things, but one thing. Evangelism is just the gathering of the people, the adding of believers to the Lord Jesus. From that time it is the work of the Holy Spirit to conform those believers to the image of God's Son, and the end of the work of the Holy Spirit is the manifestation of Christ in and through the Church.

The Christian's life is progression in the increase of Christ. That explains all the dealings of the Holy Spirit with us, for His one object is to bring the Church to the fullness of Christ. If you want to know what the fullness of Christ is, then you have it in this symbolic presentation of the holy city, the new Jerusalem. Every aspect of this city represents some spiritual feature of the Lord Jesus, that is, it represents some feature of the Divine nature which is to be reproduced in the Church, the people of God. Is that quite simple? Now do you understand what it is all about? If you do, we can go on.

JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO THE JASPER STONE

We will come to another feature of the Divine nature to be produced, not in some imaginary thing called the Church, but in you and in me.

We have already seen that the all-inclusive character of the city is gold. Pure gold is the dominating presentation of this city, and we have seen that in the Bible gold is always the symbol of Divine character, espe-

cially love. We considered that last time. Now we are going to look at the first feature of that Divine nature. If you have read carefully those passages cited you will have noticed that there was one idea in all of them — that which is “clear as crystal”. It says that the city is like “a jasper stone, clear as crystal.” Jasper, as a symbol of clearness, is mentioned in all the main connections of this book of the Revelation. Immediately the Lord has dealt with the seven churches in Asia, the second part of the book begins, and the Apostle John says that he saw “a door opened in heaven... a throne set in heaven... and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper stone” (Revelation 4:1–3). The churches have been judged, and now all the world, and everything else, is going to be judged, for the throne means judgment. It is the governing of everything from heaven, and everything is going to be judged in the light of the jasper stone, that is, according to that Divine nature which is absolutely clear. The churches have been judged in that light, and the world is to be judged in that light. It is judgment according to what is absolutely TRUE. Did you hear that word? Transparent — you can see right through it. There is nothing here that is not perfectly clear and true. There is no darkness whatever in the Divine nature — it is perfectly transparent. There is nothing false about God, nothing that is not real. There is no mixture of two contradictory things in the nature of God, nothing that is imitation or artificial. There is no hypocrisy in the nature of God and nothing that deceives or pretends to be what it is not. It takes all these words, and many more, to get to this characteristic of God, which is complete purity, clear as crystal.

THE LIE AN ABOMINATION TO GOD

In this description of the city John says that nothing can enter in that makes a lie, and he calls the lie “an abomination”. That which is not absolutely true is an abomination to God. In this way the Lord Jesus showed what God’s nature is like. The strongest and most terrible things that came through His lips were against hypocrisy. I would not like to have been there on that day when He looked at the Pharisees and said: “Ye hypocrites!” “Hypocrite” just means “play actor” — he is on the stage of this world playing a part which is not real and true. In the face of the Lord Jesus there was anger against what was not genuine. We read those terrible words from John 8 when He said to those Pharisees: ‘You are of your father, the devil, and the works of your father you will to do. He is a liar and the father of lies. When he speaks a lie he speaks of what he himself is.’

THE ENTRY OF THE LIE INTO THIS WORLD

That brings us to an issue which has a very long and terrible history. Jesus was thinking of what happened right back at the beginning in the Garden, when Satan told a lie about God and Adam accepted it. The whole history of the terrible tragedy of this world came from that lie. There is a lie right at the heart of this universe, and there is no truth in this universe outside of God. The history of this fallen creation is the history of a lie.

Jesus said of Satan that he “abode not in the truth”. Therefore he must have been in the truth at some time, and at some point he abode not in the truth. He departed from it and the terrible judgment of God fell upon him and all those who shared the lie with him. So he came to impart his own lie and nature to man, God’s creation, and the Apostle says: “The whole world lieth in the evil one” (1 John 5:19). This is a very long and terrible history, but it is coming to its climax now. One of the most powerful influences in this world today is that which does not believe there is truth. It says with Pilate: ‘What is truth? There is no such thing as truth. It is just as good to live by lies as it is to live by anything else.’ That ideology is spreading over all the world — cynicism as to truth. This world is a deceived world, and Christians know how artificial, unreal and empty this world is. Here we are face to face with one of the most solemn issues in the whole history of this world.

GOD’S ANSWER TO THE LIE

It was in relation to this historic lie that the Son of God became incarnate in this world. Jesus said: “I am the truth” (John 14:6), and “To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37). Jesus is the embodiment of the great answer to the history of the lie. That is why the devil hated Him so much, and why those who were children of the devil, according to His word, hated Him so much. He tore the mask of their hypocrisy and their play-acting in religion off from them. He exposed their true nature and, driven by the devil, they took counsel to destroy Him. Truth with the Lord Jesus was not just some abstract thing. It was not just that He spoke the truth — He WAS the truth. He became a personal power in this universe, a mighty, effective witness against all that was not true. When Jesus came into this world the battle was on between the truth and the lie, and He was only just born into the world when that great hypocrite, that false man, Herod, sought to destroy Him.

Jesus is the truth. In Him there is no darkness at all, and that is why He could also say: “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

The Holy Spirit is called “The Spirit of Truth” (John 16:13). Jesus said: “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth”, and: “The Spirit of truth... for he abideth with you, AND SHALL BE IN YOU” (John 14:17). Jesus was saying: ‘What I have been outside of you the Holy Spirit will be IN you.’ “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32) — free from the lie. So John says: “As His anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie.”

Now you can see how we are coming to the city. Dear friends, do try and be patient with me, for I am dealing with something of very serious consequence and this is God’s solemn truth. If this city represents any great spiritual principle of the Divine nature, and if the One upon the throne of government is as a jasper

stone, we are all going to be judged according to what is now being said.

A GLORIOUS CHURCH

Well, then, here in the symbolism of the city the Church, in relation to Jesus Christ, is presented. The Apostle Paul said that He is going to “present the church to himself a glorious church” (Ephesians 5:27), and here it is at last, “having the glory of God”. But then the Apostle defines what he means by “a glorious church” — “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” That means not having any dark thing in it, or any of the marks of this deceived creation — in a word, nothing that is not absolutely true.

All this may sound very terrible to you, and I expect some of you are saying: ‘Why is he talking to us like that?’ Well, I am talking to myself just as much as to you. What is the Holy Spirit seeking to do in you and in me? He is seeking, on the one side, to deliver us from that nature of ours which is so impure, and, on the other side, to bring into us the nature of the Lord. The Lord, the Spirit, is trying to purify the gold until it is like transparent glass, that is, a gold which is quite different from what is natural. Is there anyone who has seen transparent gold like glass? A piece of gold which you can look right through as you can look through a window? Well, I have seen a lot of gold in many parts of the world, but I have never seen any like that! This is something that is not natural: it is Divine. This is not what we are by nature, but it is what we are going to be by grace. To change the metaphor: ‘Whiter than the snow’. That is why I chose that hymn this morning. I had been looking out of my window upon the Blümlisalp and I saw that perfectly white snow glistening in the sun. I said: ‘Is there anything whiter than that snow?’, and then the Word of God came: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). Later on we shall have to see the place of the Lamb in the city and then we shall see why the city is transparent like pure gold.

You see, this book of the Revelation gives us a picture of the Church at last arrayed in white robes, clothed in that pure, righteous nature of God and “they shall walk with me in white” (Revelation 3:4).

The message of this book of the Revelation comes from one who says: “He that is true” (Revelation 3:7).

Dear friends, the Lord wants us to be people who are real, genuine and transparent. You know, fellowship is impossible unless there is absolute transparency. It says that the street (and there is only one street) of the city is PURE gold. It is going to be the fellowship of the Lord’s people in absolute transparency. You cannot have that fellowship while you are suspecting one another, while you are not sure about the motive of the other person, and while you have to say: ‘Now, I wonder what he — or she — is after! I wonder if he is trying to find something out! I wonder if he is trying to get hold of something that he can use against me! I don’t trust him. There is something about him that is not transparent.’ You see, that is the world. You cannot have fellowship when it is like that, and if you want to mingle on the golden piazza it will only be if all that is not true, real and genuine has been removed.

The Lord cleanse our hearts and our minds from all that is not true!

Chapter Seven

“A WALL GREAT AND HIGH”

“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal: having a wall great and high; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east were three gates, and on the north three gates; and on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb... And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. And the building of the wall thereof was jasper”
(Revelation 21:10–14,17,18).

We remember that this city, and all connected with it, is a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ and His redeemed Church. Everything here is a representation of the spiritual characteristics of Jesus Christ, and of those characteristics to be expressed in the Church; and here we are in the presence of the foreshadowed fullness of the realization of that.

WHY A WALL?

We now come to the wall of the city: “Having a wall great and high.” The measurement of the wall is given — one hundred and forty-four cubits, or twelve by twelve. Just keep that in mind for a minute. I suppose one hundred and forty-four cubits does not mean much to you, but if I tell you that the height of this wall is seventy-two metres (216 feet), you will realize that it is a pretty high wall, and the fact that this city should require such a high wall has a very real meaning. I said that it was twelve multiplied by twelve, and in the Bible symbolism of numbers twelve represents government. We are going to come upon the number twelve quite a lot of times in this connection.

So when we contemplate this wall we are contemplating that which governs everything. It is what this wall

represents that governs what can come inside and be a part of the city. Why do you put up a wall? Why do you have walls to your houses and around your ground?

A BOUNDARY

The answer is that a wall represents a boundary. It demarcates an area. People may come toward your house, but your wall will limit their progress. The wall says 'So far, and no farther. What is outside may be yours, but what is inside is mine.' So it is with the wall of this city. It determines what is of God and what is not of God. Presently you will be told what is outside the city, and if you look at those things you will see that they are all things which are not at all acceptable to God. In our last chapter we spoke about the lie, and it is said that that which makes a lie cannot come into the city. So, in the first place, the wall is a boundary between what is of God and what is not of God; and when you examine this wall and see what its foundations are — "all manner of precious stones" — then you are seeing, in a symbolic way, the character of God in its many aspects.

So the wall is a testimony of God; firstly, the testimony to what God is like, and then the testimony that only that which is like God can come into this Church.

PROTECTION FROM EVIL

Then the wall is "great and high". Like the city, it is very substantial, and you are not going to get through, or over, this very easily. If you try to get into THIS Church of God in a way that is contrary to Him, you are going to meet God. We are told in this connection that this is where God dwells. The tabernacle of God is here, and it says: "He shall dwell with them" (21:3). Therefore, anything that tries to get in where God is has to meet God.

I think we are too careless in our language about going to heaven. If you ask anyone if he, or she, is going to heaven, they will say: 'Well, yes, I hope so.' You all hope to get to heaven, but there is a great and high wall round heaven and we have to get through that wall to get in where God is in order to dwell with Him. Again I say: it is a "great and HIGH wall". This wall is not an easy thing to negotiate.

The wall is nothing other than the nature of God. That is why I mentioned twelve times twelve. It is government twelve times repeated, and it is the government of the very nature of God.

So we come to the second thing about a wall: A wall is for protection, to keep out all things that are harmful and dangerous. That is what the nature of God is — a defence and protection against everything evil.

HOW DO WE GET THROUGH?

Now I am coming to something very practical in this. You know, men put up walls around the Church. They have put up thousands of walls around it. There is the wall of denominationalism, which men have put up, and the wall of certain men's names, such as Lutheranism and Wesleyism, and I could go on with a lot of other names that you know, and if you want to come into the Church you have to come in under one of these names. Sometimes it is the wall of a particular kind of teaching, and if you do not accept that teaching you cannot come into the Church. Sometimes it is a technical system of 'how it is done', and if you do not conform to this particular way of doing things, you cannot come into the Church. Well, I could go on like that. The walls that men have put up are so many, but I have studied these verses about the wall and I don't think I have made a mistake — I cannot find what is of man as defining this boundary.

What can I find on this wall? All I can find is the nature of God manifested in Jesus Christ, and that is the only exclusiveness that God recognizes. You will get in here without any trouble if the nature of Jesus Christ is in you. There are twelve angels at the twelve gates, and when you come to a gate no angel will ask you: 'What denomination do you belong to? What particular line of teaching do you hold?' The angel will look at you and at me, and everyone who wants to get in, and angels do not have to ask questions. They know at once without asking any questions, for the only thing they want to know is: 'Is Jesus Christ in your life? How much are you like Him? How much of Jesus Christ is there in you?' That is the only standard of judgment for being where God is. Have you received the Lord Jesus Christ into your life? Since you did that have you been allowing Him to possess you more and more fully? Has there been a continual increase of Christ in your life? That is the basis of Judgment, and that is the thing which determines whether we can come in or whether we stay out.

Do you think that that is mystical and abstract? Well, let us be very practical. When you travel about this world, as I do, you meet many people. Then one day you meet a certain person. It may be that he or she gets into a train where you are, or it may be in some other place. There are other people there, but there is something about this person that makes you say to yourself: 'He is a Christian, I am sure', or 'I am quite sure that she is a Christian.' No word has been spoken, and up to that point you have not said anything, but presently you begin to ask questions, and it is not long before you discover that you are right. This is another child of God! You say: 'I knew you were!' 'Oh, how did you know I was a Christian? I never told you I was.' 'You did not have to tell me. There is something about you that tells me that you belong to the Lord, something quite different from the other people.'

Now that is very simple, but is it true? Why, you can tell in a meeting like this who are really the Lord's people, and anyone who is not the Lord's. That will be what the angels look for at the gates.

Of course, that is only an illustrative way of putting it. We are speaking about dwelling with God in time and in eternity, but it is only possible to dwell with Him if His nature is in us.

I just want to repeat one sentence: That is the only exclusiveness that God recognizes. We are in, or we are out, according to the measure of Christ in us.

VALUING JESUS CHRIST AS THE LAMB OF GOD

That leads us to one other thing before we close. We are told that this wall rests upon the foundation of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. It does not say that the twelve apostles are the foundation, but the foundation is the foundation of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The apostles were the 'sent ones' by the Lord, and when they were sent out into the world what did they preach? What was the foundation of all their preaching? It is all gathered into this one word: the Lamb. You know that when the Apostle John, who wrote this book, wrote his Gospel he very soon wrote: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), and in different ways all the Apostles who preached Jesus Christ preached the Gospel of the Lamb of God. In this book of the Revelation the words 'the Lamb' occur twenty-six times.

To begin with, the Lamb means the taking away of sin. That is the very beginning of everything which is going to come into God's presence — the taking away of our sin. That is the foundation of this wall.

Then, not only the Lamb of God which takes away sin, but in this book another phrase is used: The marriage of the Lamb. Of course, that is strange language, but what does it mean? What is a marriage? It is a covenant made between two parties, a covenant of love, and the marriage of the Lamb just means that, by the blood of the Lamb, a covenant is made which unites us with the Lord Jesus. It is the covenant of His eternal love for us, and our covenant with Him, because of His sacrifice, to love Him for ever. The marriage of the Lamb is a covenant of love between Christ and His Church for ever, and it is only those who have entered into that covenant who will be found abiding in God for ever.

And when you come to the end of this book it is: The Lamb's book of life. What is that? Again it is only a figure. I do not think that when we get to heaven they are going to open a literal book. Of course, we have hymns which say that, such as our little children's hymn:

"Is my name written there In the book grand and fair?"

In the First World War I was out in the Mediterranean with the troops, and on Sunday nights we had a great gathering of soldiers for a service. There were twelve hundred men who had come back, wounded or sick. We used to say: 'Now, boys, what shall we sing?' Do you know what they chose every time as the first hymn? "When the Roll is called up yonder, I'll be there"! Well, the idea is all right, but the Lamb's Book of Life just means the record of those who have received that eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ.

Now that again is very practical. There was a day, when the Lord Jesus was here on earth, that a great crowd gathered around Him, and in it was a poor woman who had had an infirmity for twelve years. She had spent all her living on physicians and no one had been able to help her. She stood on the outside of this great crowd and began to wedge her way through the people. She was pushing this way and that way, and the man who wrote the Gospel tells us that she was saying to herself: "If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole" (Matthew 9:21). At last, after a lot of trouble she got behind Him, reached out her hand and just touched the edge of His garment. Immediately she was made whole. But Jesus turned round and said: "Who touched Me?" The disciples said: "Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" But Jesus said: "Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me" (Luke 8:46, A.V.). 'Virtue' is another word for 'life', and life had gone out of Him into that woman. The woman saw that she could not hide herself, indeed, this new life meant so much to her that she came forward and fell on her face before the Lord and confessed. Jesus said: "Daughter, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (R.V. margin).

Being in the Lamb's Book of Life just means that life has come out from Him into us by faith in Him. You know, the Lord Jesus knows when life has gone out from Himself into someone else. He knows when anyone has touched Him in faith and received His Divine life. He said: 'I came that they might have life' (John 10:10). And when, by faith in Him, we reach out to Him and receive His life, that is recorded in heaven.

When the disciples came back to the Lord Jesus from a mission they said: "Master, even the demons are subject unto us." But He said: 'Don't rejoice in that. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' The greatest thing is to have our names written in heaven, and that depends upon our having received the life of the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God who gave His life for us. I hope that everybody here has his or her name written in the Lamb's Book of Life! There are no physicians who can heal you of the disease of sin. but the gesture of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can do it, and it is those who have made it who are in the Lamb's Book of Life.

This is what determines whether we belong to the Church and to Jesus Christ, and, in this pictorial language, it is this that decides whether we can enter through those gates and into the city — it is just how much we value Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. That is why we sang:

"Tis the Church triumphant singing: Worthy the Lamb!"

Chapter Eight

THE MANY-SIDED RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE IN JESUS CHRIST

"The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones" (Revelation 21:19). The following passages are a commentary on that verse: "Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation; if ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious: unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame. For you therefore which believe is the preciousness" (1 Peter 2:1-7). "In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach... the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (Ephesians 3:16). "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). "That he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he afore prepared unto glory" (Romans 9:23). "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past tracing out!" (Romans 11:33). Now we have to come back to the first passage, in Revelation 21:9: "The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones."

THAT TO WHICH GOD IS WORKING SET FORTH IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

I think you know that the order in which we have the books of the New Testament is not the order in which they were written. The chronological order would be quite different from the one which we have in our arrangement. The Book of the Revelation was not the last book of the Bible to be written, but there is a Divine order in the arrangement, and this is a very real mark of the government of the Holy Spirit. When the books were put together in the way in which we have them, perhaps the men did not know what they were doing, but the Spirit of God, who inspired the writing, also governed the arrangement, and everybody recognizes that this book of the Revelation is in the right place. It is the summary and consummation of all that is in the Bible, and its dominant note is the coming again of the Lord Jesus. These words stand over every section of this book: 'Behold, I come quickly', and almost the last words are: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come" (22:17). It is the Person of the Lord Jesus who stands supreme over this whole book, in all its sections. He is given various names: The Word of God, the Faithful and true Witness, King of kings and Lord of lords, and other names, all of which only occur once, but there is a name which is repeated again and again, and that name stands over every section of the book from the beginning to the end, and that name is 'The Lamb'. Jesus as the Lamb of God stands over this whole book, so that the book is a record of the power, the authority and the glory of Jesus Christ in His cross. It is His place of supremacy in the Church and in the nations by virtue of His sufferings. This book is therefore a presentation of what Christ is through His Cross, that is, through His suffering and death, and all that He is through His suffering and death is here, in this book, reproduced in the Church. The Church here, as we have been seeing, is represented in the symbolism of the city, and that city is the Church embodying all the features of what Christ is by His suffering and death. I only have to remind you of those words in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12:22,23: "But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven." You see, the city of the living God is the general assembly of the firstborn, the Church of the firstborn ones whose names are enrolled in heaven, in other words, whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life. The letter to the Hebrews corresponds to the book of the Revelation. So this book of the Revelation, and especially these last chapters, sets forth that to which God is working in the Church now. It tells us what it is that God is seeking to do in believers now, and the goal to which He is working, which is a full revelation of Christ in the Church at the end. That statement is a very important statement for us, for it means that if God has got hold of our lives, if we are truly under the government of the Holy Spirit, He is doing a work in us throughout our lives, and that work is that at the end all that is symbolically true of the New Jerusalem will be found true in us.

"ALL MANNER OF PRECIOUS STONES"

Having already considered many aspects of this city, we have at last come to the wall. We have read that "the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones", so that the wall represents the many-sided riches of God's grace in Jesus Christ. We did not read all these precious stones, but if you will just pass your eye over them you will see how precious they are, and what a variety of preciousness is represented here: the jasper, the sapphire, the chalcedony, and so on, and you will notice that they finish with the amethyst. There was a little Methodist church in the country in England, and they were having a conference. For the lesson an old farmer read this twenty-first chapter of Revelation, and he came to the part about the precious stones. Everybody saw his face getting more and more excited. He started off: "The first founda-

tion was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony..." and he was getting more and more excited. "...the fourth, emerald; the fifth... and the sixth... and the seventh... and the eighth... and the ninth... and the tenth... and the eleventh... and the TWELFTH was a METHODIST!" Well, it is something to be excited about. If we could put ourselves into the description of an 'amethyst' it would indeed be something glorious! We have said that all these stones set forth the many-sided riches of God's grace brought to us in Jesus Christ. It is quite impossible for us to comprehend the many aspects of God's grace, and that is why we read all those passages about the riches of His grace, the riches of His glory, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and also why we read Peter: "For you therefore which believe is the PRECIOUSNESS." But perhaps we can understand this a little better if we take note of two things.

THE GRACE OF GOD FOR JACOB

It says here that there were twelve gates to the city, "and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel" (verse 12), and then it says: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (verse 14). Now, you Bible students, don't expect me to exhaust all the meaning of that! But I want to suggest to you just one thing about those two verses. On the gates were the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Paul tells us, about Israel, that "it is the remnant that shall be saved" (Romans 9:27). While all Israel may now be cast away, a remnant shall be saved. Israel will be represented at the last, but why and how? This is what I suggest to you to be a meaning: The twelve tribes of Israel sprang from Jacob, and if ever there was a man who ought not to have had the position that Jacob had, it was Jacob. No man of character has any respect for Jacob. He was a deceiver, a man who was always seeking to get his own advantage at the expense of someone else. It did not matter how much others had to lose or suffer so long as Jacob got what he wanted. The earlier years of Jacob's life are a story that is not pleasant to read. You say: What a mean and despicable man was Jacob! And you agree with the prophet when he says: "Thou worm Jacob" (Isaiah 41:14). Jacob had very little naturally to commend him. Why, then, should Jacob come to occupy the great place that he has in the Bible? Why should his name be changed from Jacob to Israel, 'a prince with God'? There is only one answer: Sovereign grace! God took hold of THAT man to make HIM a "vessel of mercy". We know the mercy and the grace of God when we see it taking hold of a character like that! "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past tracing out!"

THE GRACE OF GOD FOR THE TWELVE TRIBES

But not only the man, the twelve tribes. What a story of tragedy, failure and shame is the story of the old Israel! God's patience was tested to its utmost by that people. There was a time when He said to Moses: 'Stand aside! Let Me destroy them and I will make of thee another nation.' One day Moses himself cried: 'You rebels! Must we bring water out of this rock for you?' Yes, it is a long and a terrible story is the story of the twelve tribes of Israel, but their names are on the gates of the New Jerusalem. Whatever other things this may mean, I am quite sure that it means this: Here you have a wonderful, wonderful testimony to the unspeakable grace of God in Jesus Christ. "For you which believe is the preciousness." A remnant of Israel shall believe and be found in the holy city. So that, whether it be Jacob himself or his twelve sons and the tribes, here at the last is this testimony to the sovereign grace of God.

THE GRACE OF GOD FOR US

Why is this written at the end of the Bible? Just to say that there is hope for you, and there is hope for me. The grace of God for Jacob and the twelve tribes is big enough for us. This Church city is a great monument to the unsearchable riches of His grace. There is always a note of warning in these things, and the Apostle Paul warned Christians to beware of failing of the grace of God. We read that verse in Romans 2:4: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering?" It must be a very terrible thing to fail of this grace if it is so great! But let us proceed.

THE GRACE OF GOD FOR THE DISCIPLES

On the foundations of the wall were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Now this means much more than I am going to say, but I am quite sure that it means this one thing. I read the story of those twelve men before Pentecost, and it is not a very happy story. They were men who were constantly quarrelling with one another, and they all had something of Jacob in them — trying to get an advantage for themselves at the expense of the others. Two of them came round the back of the others with their mother. There has been a little family conspiracy, and this mother was very ambitious for her two sons, and the sons fell into her ambition, so that while the other disciples were not looking (you see, this is Jacob!) they came round to the Lord Jesus and the mother said: 'Master, I want to ask you for something. Will you promise me something?' But Jesus was always awake to anything like that — 'You tell Me what you want and then I will tell you if I will give it to you.' And so the mother said: 'Master, when you come into your kingdom, will you let THIS boy be on your right hand, and THIS boy be on your left hand? Will you let my two sons have the first two places in the kingdom?' Well, Jesus just said: 'That is not Mine to give. That is for the Father.' But it was not all over then — the story does not end there. When the others knew it they were very angry: 'They tried to steal OUR place!' Well, I could go on like that about these disciples — and you know how that story ended! The chief one amongst them denied the Lord Jesus three times, most vehemently. When it was said to him: 'You are one of them!' he said: 'I don't know what you are talking about.' And then, when later on it was said to him: 'You WERE with Him,' he said: 'I tell you, I know not the man!' We can hardly believe that the leader of the Apos-

bles should fall so low! Surely, we would say, there is no hope for a man like that, and the others are not much better, because it says that they all forsook Him and fled. All right — their names are on the foundation of the wall! The riches of His grace are at last manifested in them. Peter needs grace in one way — I don't know whether he corresponds to the jasper — and John needs grace in another way — perhaps he corresponds to the sapphire. But they all needed some form of Divine grace in a special way. And that is true of us all. My nature needs Divine grace in a special way, and everyone here needs the grace of God in some particular way. But the grace of God in Jesus Christ can meet every one of us in our particular way, and right at last, whether it be an amethyst or a 'Methodist', we will be in the city. We have only just touched the very fringe of the unsearchable riches of grace, but may we from this time have a larger appreciation of this wonderful grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Chapter Nine

DIVINE LIFE

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the garden of God" (Revelation 2:7). "And he shewed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month... Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life... And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city" (Revelation 22:1,2,14,19).

THE PLACE OF THE TREE OF LIFE

So with this last chapter of the Bible we are taken right back to the beginning of the Bible and find ourselves in the presence of the tree of life. In this connection, the ending of everything is found to correspond to the beginning, but, of course, with one great difference: the end is the full realization of the meaning of the beginning. In this form of a symbolic tree of life we are quite evidently in the presence of the main issue of the ages — all the ages are compassed by this one issue. When Jesus, here at the end, calls Himself the "Alpha and the Omega, ...the beginning and the end" (verse 13), He is referring to Himself as the tree of life. The tree of life is the first thing, and it is the last thing. But although the tree of life was there in the midst of the garden at the beginning, man never partook of it. The partaking of that tree was on certain conditions. Those conditions were faith and obedience, and because man failed in those conditions, and because man disbelieved and disobeyed God, he was removed from the presence of the tree of life. Then God set up a protection for that tree and made it impossible for man without faith and obedience to partake of it. Of course, these are spiritual principles set forth in a symbolic way. This question of Divine life is the supreme question in all history. It is the issue of all the ages — just whether man will receive this Divine life or not. Man's eternal destiny is decided upon that issue. This was God's supreme purpose in the creation. This life is the life of God, Divine life because of the Divine nature, and it was God's desire and purpose to share His life with His creation. The symbolic place that this tree had is very significant. It was in the midst of the Paradise of God. This question of Divine life is at the very centre of the creation, and, having the central place in all things, it governs all things.

SPIRITUAL DEATH

This life was available to man. It was God's thought and desire that man should take this Divine life, but, as we have said, it was on the condition of faith and obedience, and man never partook of this Divine life because he failed in those two things. So God said, quite effectively: 'That kind of man shall never have My Divine life', and death, and the prince of death, reigned over that realm and that kind of man. What the Bible means by death reigns over the whole creation of unbelieving men. Disobedience is the positive aspect of unbelief. If man says that he believes, God says: 'Prove it by obedience!' Spiritual death is the hallmark of unbelief and disobedience. And if you want to know what spiritual death is, the Bible makes it quite clear: it is separation from God. God is the source of this life, and separation from God means separation from the very source of life. But that is not sufficient explanation. What is the effect of spiritual death? It is that nothing is ever allowed to come to perfection apart from God. It will just go so far, and no further. In our cemeteries in England we have stones set up over graves, and many of these gravestones are in the form of a pillar which is just a certain height, and then it is broken off. It is meant to say: This life just went so far and could go no further. Life apart from God can never go through to fullness. There was a great atheist once who thought he knew a great deal. He boasted of his wonderful knowledge of philosophy, and made a great name for himself as what is called a 'free-thinker'. Then the day came when he was dying, and on his deathbed he was in a state of mental torment. His last words were: 'I am taking a terrible leap into the dark!' It does not matter how much we gain in this life. If it is apart from God that is all left behind. Nothing can come to perfection that is separated from God, and that is the mark of spiritual death.

THE BATTLEGROUND OF THE AGES

Now because faith and obedience are the way out of death, this matter of faith and obedience has been the battleground of all the ages. There is no greater ground of conflict than the ground of faith, and this great is-

sue was headed up to its climax in the incarnation of God's Son. The whole purpose of God being manifest in the flesh in His Son was to take up this issue and settle it for ever. "A Final Adam to the fight and to the rescue came." This whole issue, then, becomes a matter of faith in the Son of God, and a life of obedience to Him. That is the pathway of eternal life. Now you see that the tree is not just a tree, it is a Person, and that Person is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We have been considering this New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, and we have been seeing how its many features are the features of Jesus Christ. Now what we have to see as we are coming near to the end is that all the features of the city are summed up in the tree and the river of life. All that the city represents is found in these final things, the tree and the river, and it is the tree of life and the river of the water of life.

THE PRACTICAL NATURE OF DIVINE LIFE

I want to say here, quite emphatically, that life is a very practical thing. That is true of natural life. We know what a tremendous thing it is to fight for someone's life. All the vast resources of medical supply and surgical care are concentrated into this one issue, and that vast realm of activity is concentrated upon this one thing — life. Everything and anything to save life. It may be just a little life in some poor body, but all the resources of medical science and care will be employed just to save that bit of life. What a tremendous amount is bound up with this matter of life! When that life has gone all the activity and energy and concern ceases. This matter of life can make us very busy. I expect most of you have heard of the great missionary David Livingstone, and some years ago I was associated with a great movement for the celebration of the centenary of his birth. You know, for nearly a whole year we were busy, almost night and day, making the arrangements. We took the greatest hall in London, got the Archbishop of Canterbury to promise to preside, we had a special oratorio composed, and had special biographies of David Livingstone written. My word, we had to work hard! One day the man with whom I was working said to me: 'Old David Livingstone is not dead! He is still knocking us all out by his vitality!' Well, you see, life is a very practical thing. Electricity is a very practical thing. You do not need that I should demonstrate that! If you want proof of that, just unscrew the lamp, pull down the switch and put your thumb on the point. If you did that to the lamp over there, the next moment you would be sitting in another corner and you would be believing in the practical aspect of electricity! Now all that is only to come to our point. If all that is true of natural life, how much more true it must be of Divine life! Divine life is immensely practical. It is not just something which we receive; it is a power in us. The Apostle Paul said one of his very great things about this: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20) — 'Exceeding' ... 'Exceeding abundantly' ... 'Exceeding abundantly above' ... 'Exceeding abundantly above all...' according to the power that worketh in us.' It is the power of this Divine life by the Holy Spirit.

THE LIMITING OF DIVINE LIFE

Now we have been seeing that this city, in every part, is an expression of the Divine nature, and that is brought down to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. Where there is anything contrary to the Divine nature, that is death and not life. Recall some of the features of this city. We said that it was clear as crystal. You can see right through it — there is no dark thing. It says that it is like transparent gold. That is only a symbolism for absolute honesty, absolute truth, and absolute purity of mind, and where there is anything that is not absolutely honest and true and transparent, there is not life. If you were to try to deceive me, or someone else, or I tried to deceive you, that would seriously limit the Divine life in us. If we as Christians are not absolutely honest in our business, we are working against the life of God in us. If our Christianity is only a profession and not a reality, there is no life in it. I think I need not labour that any more. This place where God is is completely free from everything that is dark and dishonest. There are several things in the Bible which are said to be an abomination to God. We pointed out that the lie is an abomination to Him, and the Bible says that pride is an abomination, too. It says: "The proud he (the Lord) knoweth afar off" (Psalm 138:6). Pride cannot come near to God. What is pride? It is making believe something that is not true. Let us look at another thing about this city. A city, ideally, is the symbol of order. In a true city everything is in proper order, and everything that is governed by it is put into order. God is a God of order. Disorder is contrary to His nature. Whether it be in the personal life, or whether it be in the home, or whether it be in the church, or wherever it may be, disorder is contrary to the nature of God. Disorder is lawlessness, and all lawlessness has come from Satan. Satan is called the 'Prince of this world' (John 14:30). Now, look at the world! There is only one word to explain the world situation, and that is CHAOS. More and more, and ever more chaos is coming over this world. The prince of this world is making for disorder everywhere in his world. In the realm of Divine life things are ordered if that life is having its way, for it is Divine life that will bring order into your personal life. When I see a disorderly life, a life in which you cannot see any real order, then I have to say: 'Divine life is suffering in that person'. When there is disorder in a company of the Lord's people we know quite well that the life is limited. We have to say: 'When I go there, amongst those people, I do not come away feeling renewed in my life.' When things are in Divine order, then you always feel life.

THE FRUITFULNESS OF DIVINE LIFE

Just two other things about this life. Divine life is always fruitful. You see, this tree is planted by the river of the water of life, and it bears all manner of fruit. It does not matter whether it is seventy, eighty or a hundred years old, it bears fruit every month. You have never seen a natural tree do that! It just means that fruit goes on and on and on. Divine life never grows old. What does that mean? You are saying: 'Well, what do you mean by fruit?' Life is influence. Somehow or other this water of life has an influence upon its surroundings,

and that influence is seen in green leaves and much fruit — you have to say: ‘Well, that water is having a great influence on this whole area!’ If we really have this life in us, our lives will be influential. They will have an effect upon what is around us.

THE PLACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN OUR LIVES

The last thing for this time. The city is the seat of government, and you notice that the river of the water of life flows from out of the throne, so it is the throne that produces everything. You know what that means! It is the throne of God and of the Lamb. In a word, it means the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ. Right at the very centre of everything is the government of Jesus Christ, in virtue of His Cross, and as the Lamb. All the other things will depend entirely upon the place that Jesus Christ has, and will depend entirely upon how much we are committed to Him. If we are WHOLLY committed to the Lord and He is ALTOGETHER Lord, then the life will flow and all these things that we have said about life will be true in us. It will be the testimony to absolute committal to Jesus Christ.

Chapter Ten

THE GREATNESS OF GOD’S GRACE IN JESUS CHRIST

Reading: Psalm 51

“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star” (Revelation 22:16). I think it is a very wonderful thing that the Bible almost finishes with a word about David, and I think that you will agree with me. Here, right at the end, our Lord is saying: “I Jesus... am the root and the offspring of David.” ‘As the root, David came from Me. As the offspring I came from David.’ That is why the Lord here calls Himself by the simple name of Jesus. He says: “I Jesus have sent mine angel.” Now the Apostles and New Testament teachers very rarely used that name, for they almost always spoke of Him as the LORD Jesus, or Jesus Christ our Lord. It was very rare for them just to use His name ‘Jesus’, because that was the name before His resurrection and exaltation. ‘Jesus’ was the name of His humiliation, the name of the One who died for us, the One who was made sin in our place. ‘Jesus’ was the name of the Saviour: “Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). ‘Jesus’ was the name of the One who “humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). And here, right at the end of everything, He says: “I Jesus” — “I Jesus... am the root and offspring of David.” David! That name brings back many things to us. David was the greatest king that Israel ever had, but what was his greatness based upon? We have read that Psalm, but did you notice the inscription at the head of it? Here it is: “A Psalm of David: when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba.” This Psalm is one of the most terrible things in the Bible! It is the Psalm of a man whose heart is broken because of his sin and because of the terrible nature of it. Do you remember the story? There was a man named Uriah and he had a very beautiful wife. At a time when Israel went out to battle David, instead of going out with his forces, went up on to the housetop, and from there he saw this very beautiful woman. His passions rose within him and he said: ‘I must have that woman! She is already married to Uriah, but I must have her somehow.’ So he said to his captains: ‘I want you to put Uriah in the front rank of the army and then go forward to meet the enemy. Then, when the enemy attacks, let the army fall back and leave Uriah alone.’ That is what they did and, of course, the plan succeeded. Uriah was killed, and then David’s captains came back and said: ‘Uriah is dead.’ David sent to Uriah’s wife, Bath-sheba, and said: ‘Uriah is dead. Come and be my wife.’ So David got Bath-sheba, as he had planned, but the Lord said to Nathan, the prophet: ‘Go to David and tell him a parable of a poor man who had but one sheep, and of another man who had many sheep, but this man who had the many sheep stole the one little sheep belonging to the poor man.’ And as David listened to the story his wrath within him and he said: ‘The man who would do a thing like that is worthy of death. He shall die!’ And Nathan said: ‘Thou art the man!’ David had committed murder by planning to do so, and, do you know, by doing that he had put himself right outside side of all the Lord’s sacrifices for sin. The laws of God through Moses had provided for a sacrifice for every other kind of sin. There was even a sacrifice for the man who killed somebody by accident, for the man who did kill somebody but had never intended to do so, but for the man who thought it out and planned it, then carried it out, there was no sacrifice. That was called ‘blood-guiltiness’, and there was no sacrifice provided by God for that. Such a man might bring his offerings, his sacrifice and his burnt offerings, but God would take no pleasure in them, and that is where David was in Psalm 51: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness... Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin... My sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me... Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation... Thou delightest not in sacrifice; else would I give it: thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering.” David is saying: ‘I have not anything that I can offer. I have put myself outside of all God’s provision. My condition is absolutely hopeless, but for one thing, and that one thing is Thy grace.’ Do you think now that it is a wonderful thing that the Bible ends with: “I am the root and offspring of David”? To put that in another way, the Bible ends by saying that God’s grace is greater than the greatest sin, and is sufficient for the man who has no hope.

I think it is a wonderful thing that after this God did make David so great, so that his name is one of the greatest names in history. Solomon was the second son of that woman Bath-sheba, and the very name 'Solomon' means for us the greatest glory in the Bible. Jesus Himself will acknowledge that. He spoke of "even Solomon in all his glory" (Matthew 6:29), but "a greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). First of all, you have this wonderful greatness of Solomon from a man who had sinned like David. How can you explain that? It is explained because a "greater than Solomon is here". In what way is Jesus greater than Solomon? Because He will take someone who has gone to the deepest depths of sin and raise them to the highest place in glory. That is greatness indeed! It is the greatness of the grace of God which has been brought to us in Jesus. "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches." What is the greatest testimony of Jesus in the Church? It is what Paul calls "the exceeding riches of his grace" (Ephesians 2:7). So we end our studies in Revelation upon this very high and glorious note. Jesus says: "I am... the root and offspring of DAVID". Fancy Jesus associating Himself with David! That is grace indeed! But remember that there was something in David. 'If there is no sacrifice provided by Moses for my sin, there is a sacrifice provided by Jesus.' David said: "Thou delightest not in sacrifice... thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." The message speaks for itself. It is too great, too wonderful for words! How great is the grace of God in Jesus Christ! And the way into that grace is not by any works that we can do, nor by any offering that we can make. It is by a broken and a contrite heart that comes to the cross of Jesus and sees there God's sacrifice for sin which no other sacrifice can put away. And so we sing: "Plenteous grace with Thee is found; Grace to cover all my sin."

CHRIST OUR ALL

CHAPTER 1

Christ Our Life

Reading: Acts 16:6–13, 16–19, 23–26; Philippians 1:1–2.

We are beginning a meditation in the Letter to the Philippians with its message as to how the Cross makes Christ our all, for that is what this Letter really does bring before us. Not any of us can preach from this Letter as the standard of our attainment, but we must be very quiet and humble as we speak of it. Indeed, our approach must be that of its writer: “Brethren, I count not myself to have attained, neither am I already perfect.”

When the Apostle wrote the Letter to the Romans, he set himself to set forth a great and tremendous theological argument. When he wrote his first Letter to the Corinthians, he set himself to answer a lot of questions that had arisen, and to give his judgment on some very serious matters. When he wrote the Letter to the Galatians, he gave himself up to issuing a tremendous challenge and to answering a challenge which had been issued. When he wrote his Letter to the Ephesians, he was pouring out a great revelation which had been growing and growing and growing until it had reached a great measure of fullness. But now, in writing this Letter to the Philippians, he is not doing any one of those things. He does not say: ‘Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ’, nor: ‘I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ.’ No official designation is used and no great treatise is in his mind, but he simply takes the position of a man — with Timothy he says: “Bondsmen of Jesus Christ” — and is about to open his heart as a man to men, as a Christian to Christians, as a lover of Christ to other lovers of Christ, and to share what is in his heart on common ground and on a common level with them.

“Brethren” — he will say presently — “Brethren, I count not myself to have attained, neither am I already perfect, but this one thing I do...” You see, it is the appeal from his own spiritual life and aspiration. His position is just this: ‘Brethren, this is what I have in view, what I am seeking after, and what I call upon you to join with me in seeking after!’ That is the position of this Letter, and you and I must come to that position as we approach it, for here not one of us can give an address. We can only say: ‘Brethren, this Letter is beyond us! All that is here is far beyond anything to which we have attained! We cannot preach at one another but here is the Lord’s thought, and let us talk to one another about it with a view to encouraging one another if it may be that we, by any means, may also attain.’ So that is our starting-point. May it be that the Lord leads us on from that to some increased measure of Himself!

We have said that the message which comes out of the Letter bears upon Christ as our all through the work of His Cross, and that arises in several particular connections. Each chapter of the four has a particular connection. We shall now just look at the first, which arises in chapter 1, verse 21:

For to me to Live is Christ, and to Die is Gain

‘For me to live is Christ.’ Then that means that Christ is our very life, the very motive of our life, of our being. Asked what life means, the Apostle would say: ‘Just Christ!’ ‘What does life mean to you, Paul?’ ‘Christ!’ ‘What is your outlook, Paul?’ ‘Christ!’ ‘What are you working for, Paul?’ ‘Christ!’ ‘What is your hope?’ ‘It is Christ!’ ‘Have you nothing else, nothing else at all in this world for all your days?’ ‘No, nothing else. Christ, just Christ; that is all! For me to live, for me to live is Christ!’

I think we have already established what we said a minute or two ago: this Letter is beyond us! I think that if we were put to the test on that in a number of different connections, interests, associations and objects on this earth, we should be weighed in the balances and found wanting. Well, we will not press it. It would be too painful and we should all be ashamed. But, again, it is an object and an aspiration that it should be like that.

Before we go further, let us just look over this chapter and see what place Christ has here:

- 1: “Bondsmen of Christ Jesus.”
- 2: “Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- 6: “Until the day of Jesus Christ.”
- 8: “The tender mercies of Christ Jesus.”
- 11: “The fruits of righteousness... through Christ Jesus.”
- 13: “My bonds... in Christ.”

- 15: "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife."
 18: "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."
 19: "The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."
 20: "As always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death."
 21: "To me to live is Christ."
 23: "...to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better."
 26: "Your glorying may abound in Christ Jesus."
 27: "Worthy of the gospel of Christ."
 29: "To you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf."

It is Christ everywhere, Christ in every direction, in every connection; it is all Christ.

Christ Our Life by Way of the Cross

Now then, we have to see how the Cross had brought Paul to the place where Christ was his very life, and how it had wrought in him to bring him to that place. We have read from the account of how this church at Philippi came into being, and we picked up the story at the point where Paul and his companions were moving prayerfully, and in the Spirit, forward in their great ministry. They reached one point and essayed to move on in a certain direction, but they were not suffered of the Holy Spirit to go and preach in that direction, and, finding that way closed, they sought to move in another direction, and again the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not; and so they stayed still. For the night at least they stayed where they were and prayed, I suppose, and during that night a vision came to Paul. You notice that HE saw the vision and THEY came to the conclusion. The man of Macedonia stood and appealed, saying: 'Come over into Macedonia and help us!', and they concluded that the Lord had called them to preach the Gospel there. So they went by a straight course into Macedonia, into Europe for the first time, and came to Philippi. That all seems fairly straightforward. They went down on the Sabbath Day by the riverside, supposing that they would find a place for prayer. I expect that they were looking in all directions for the man of Macedonia. You know what they found — a woman, not of Macedonia at all, but from Asia, where they had been forbidden to go and preach the Word! Contradiction number one! And then a girl possessed of an evil spirit bothered, worried, annoyed and vexed them; not much hope of things in that direction! Contradiction number two! And then the immediate issue of Paul's act — they were thrown into the inner prison and their feet made fast in the stocks! Contradiction number three! Where is this man of Macedonia? Where is this open door for preaching the Gospel?

Now I venture to say that you and I might just have sat down and said: 'This is a terrible case of mistaken guidance. It is all a mistake! I was quite sure that the Lord gave me that vision, that the Lord was in that matter of our coming this way, but everything now argues to the contrary! Now, seeking to do what I believed to be the Lord's will, this is where I get landed. I was trying to follow the Spirit's leading, and checking up as I went, and this is what obedience to the Lord results in!' Something like that would go on inside, at any rate, for the devil would see to it. The situation, the appearances, the apparent contradictions, on the one hand, and then bleeding sores and a dark dungeon. These are things which are calculated to raise very serious questions about your Divine guidance and being in the will of God. At any rate, they provide good ground for the enemy to encamp upon. Well, I have no doubt that it was a very real and severe test of faith for Paul and Silas as to their guidance.

How did they survive? How did they get on top of this situation? For undoubtedly they were on top of it. At midnight they prayed and sang hymns. Again, I have to pause and say that this Letter is beyond us, and this whole matter finds us wanting. I think the answer, at least, a part of it, to the question of their triumph in such a situation is this: that the Cross had done a work deep enough to rule out all personal interests, and personal interests were so thoroughly ruled out that the Holy Spirit Himself had a clear way to bring up their spirits in triumph in spite of darkness in circumstances and darkness in spiritual appearances. The Holy Spirit was able to do this. You notice what Paul says in this first chapter — and it does seem to me that there is much in this Philippian Letter which is an echo of the Philippian experiences years before — "For I know that this shall turn out to my salvation, through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." "The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Do you not think that that explains it?

We do not want to be too analytical or introspective, but it will not do us any harm to take account of our own disposition. If we are quite honest with our own hearts, is it not true that a very large measure of our darkness under trial, our failure, our breakdown, our going to pieces, our loss of position spiritually, is because we are disappointed, and our disappointment lies very largely in the direction of something upon which our hearts were set, something of personal interest even in the Lord's work; OUR ministry, the WORK — meaning, of course, the Lord's work and things for the Lord. We would not call it OUR ambition — perhaps we have never used the word 'ambition' — but may there not be an element of that lying behind our vision, something, even though it were for the Lord, which we had hoped would be blessed and pros-

pered, and the Lord would give good success? The whole thing is brought, like David's enterprise with the ark on the new cart, to a sudden hold-up and everything seems to go to pieces, and WE go to pieces; then, when the truth is really known, we discover that there were really personal interests in it.

It does seem to me that in Paul's case the great factor in his triumph continually — for he was a triumphant man — in the midst of terrible adversities and trials and difficulties and sufferings all the way through the years was his utter disinterestedness; that with him there was no personal interest at all. It was Christ. The Cross had smitten everything personal, and this Letter to the Philippians is full of that. Take this fragment, for instance: "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good will: the one do it of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel; but the other proclaim Christ of faction, not sincerely, thinking to raise up affliction for me in my bonds" (verses 15–17).

How mean, how contemptible, how wicked to preach Christ with a motive like that! To preach Christ in such a way as to afflict one of Christ's servants! What does Paul say? 'Contemptible wretches! The Lord bring His judgments to bear upon them!?' Not at all! 'Oh, what does it matter how they preach Christ? Christ is preached, and that is all that matters. Therein I rejoice and will rejoice!' I tell you that it wants a crucified man to say that! A man is in prison in bonds; other men are trying to hit him when he is down and are using the very Gospel or the preaching of the Gospel — their manner of preaching the Gospel — to that end. Then this man says: 'That is all right. I will simply stand all that and thank the Lord that, however they preach, so long as Christ is preached, that is all that matters!' I say that it is a crucified man who can say that, a man who has no personal feelings or interests.

You know what he says a little later in the Letter about all the things that were gain to him. 'I was this, and I was that, and I was the other. I had this and I had that, and I was in a position. Yes, but these things which were gain to me I counted loss for Christ' — "Yea, verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and to count them as refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him" (chapter 3:4–8). You see, the Cross has dealt with name, reputation, position, advantages and everything that was personal. This man has come to the tremendous vantage ground of perfect disinterestedness and selflessness, and it is the working out of the principle that the Holy Spirit follows the way of the Cross.

The Spirit Follows the Way of the Cross

That is true right through the Word. The Cross leads the way of the Spirit: the Spirit follows the way of the Cross. We sing:

"Enlarge our soul's capacity,
Cut deeper channels, Lord.
Room for the floods of blessing new,
According to Thy Word."

'Cut deeper channels' — the Cross cutting the way for the supply of the Spirit. Here is the message, if we said no more. Paul was a man who was crucified to self. The Cross had wrought that in him, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus did the rest. Oh, I cannot preach at you! I can only say to you: 'Brethren, will not the Holy Spirit spontaneously take the course which the Cross has opened up? Will not the Spirit of Jesus come in and lift us up, even in our sufferings and our sorrows, when we have got rid of that horrible, hateful, obstructive self-interest, self-pity, self-consideration, self-realization and self-strength?' I am sure our hearts must be smitten by this word if it is true. If you and I — and this is the sum of the whole Letter — can really come, by the grace of God, to the place where the Cross has wrought in us so that we are delivered from all self-interest, on its weak side and on its strong side, the Spirit of Jesus Christ will make a difference in our case in the time of adversity which will turn the midnight into midday, darkness into light, and make us sing in a dungeon. At least it is worth thinking about! In Paul's case the Cross had resolved everything into a matter of Christ.

Now, perhaps some of you have gone beyond me, and even yet there lurks somewhere in your mind this question: 'Yes, but those who are most utter for the Lord, most out-and-out and most thorough-going for the Lord, are very often the ones who have the greatest reason to wonder whether the Lord is for them.' And yet when that question arises — and I must press this again — there is a tremendous deliverance from the sting of that sort of thing when you know, and the Lord knows, that you have no other concern but for His glory. I think the sting of discouragement, disappointment, despair and doubt is very often found just in the tail of some self-interest which means disappointment, personal disappointment as well as disappointment for the Lord. Well, what I see here in Paul's case is that, with the destruction of these self-elements, he came to a position which was a very strong one. This position — "For me to live is Christ" — in his case was a very strong position in the hour of deepest difficulty and trial. "I KNOW that this shall turn to my salvation." "Now I would have you know that the things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel." That is a strong position!

A Strong Position

What is the strength of it? It is this: that the sovereignty of God is behind it. If you and I can come to the place where this is true in our case — "For me to live is Christ" — where the Lord Himself knows that it is true and not just something said by us, then I believe it is a position which has the sovereignty of God behind

it. See them at Philippi again! They were there for the Lord, and for the Lord only, without any kind of interest at all apart from His interests. Well, the situation which arose was a very difficult and perplexing one, apparently full of contradictions, but look at the sovereignty of God behind it!

How strategic it was, to begin with, in that it was an open door into Europe! And what an assembly came into being!

“I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you, always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy, for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now” (1:3–5).

What an assembly! And what a sovereign act to make the first members of that assembly the very gaoler and his family! Where Lydia came in I do not know. She was evidently a commercial traveller, and you know that that meant great possibilities for the Gospel, for she linked up Asia and Europe. It is all very strategic and wonderful, and God is behind this whole thing — and yet what a complication! If you sit down with the thing at the outset and take the situation which immediately arises, you say: ‘Well, this is a mess! This is a mistake. You have made a blunder this time!’ And you give it all up and lose your confidence in God. Well, Satan knew better than that: and these men who had not any personal interests did not go down under despair. They proved the sovereignty of God. And Paul in another prison years afterwards in Rome wrote this Letter and just touched on the same thing — that the sovereignty of God was behind a crucified life: “I would have you know that the things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel.” “I know that this shall turn to my salvation.” The sovereignty of God! It is a strong position, but we cannot be sure of sovereignty unless we are well crucified. If there is any sovereignty of ‘I’ or self, the sovereignty of God is set aside.

An Emancipated Position

And then it was a very emancipated position. How unfettered Paul was by human judgments! It did not matter a scrap to him what people thought or said or did. He was a free man all the time, whether he was in prison or out. Why? Simply for this. If you and I KNOW that we are not out for something here, that our hearts are really for the Lord and the Lord only, it is a wonderfully emancipated position to be in. What does it matter? Let these men preach in the manner in which they mean to bring harm upon us, preach against us, and even use the Gospel as an instrument against us! What does it matter? We are emancipated; we are on top of that! All are emancipated who are delivered from self. If we know that there is no question about our utterness for the Lord, we are not worried very much about things said and things done.

A Joyous Position

And I see, too, what a joyous position it was, and I say: ‘I see it.’ I am not telling you that I have got it, but I see it. Someone has said that the Letter to the Philippians can be summed up in a very brief sentence. It is this: “I rejoice! You rejoice!” And that is the Letter — “I rejoice and you rejoice!” It is full of joy right through — joy in the Lord. And what is the secret of joy? If you ask what the secret of misery is I can tell you very quickly: to be occupied with yourself. The secret of joy is to be occupied with the Lord.

May the Lord lead us into Paul’s secret: the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ by the Cross!

CHAPTER 2

Christ Our Mind

The note in chapter two of the Philippian Letter is the Cross making Christ’s mind ours — Christ our mind.

“...make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind.” (verse 2).

“Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him” (verses 5–9).

“For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your state. For all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ” (verses 20–21).

“I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord” (4:2).

The Street of Gold

When we reach the end of God’s work in this dispensation and see that work concretely represented in its consummate form, SYMBOLIZED by the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, the specific features of which are described or mentioned, we see that one of those features is that

the city has one single highway or street, and that street, that highway, that thoroughfare of the new Jerusalem, is said to be of pure gold. God will not begin to make His city at the end of the dispensation. He is making it now, and every part of it is now in process of constitution, and not least the street of gold. When we take up our New Testament and begin to read these apostolic letters — Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians — we are already in the preparation of the city, or the city is already potentially present, for the city is the Church, and we can see the street running through all these letters as the Church is in view, or we see God making His thoroughfare, preparing His gold.

But the city is being prepared, constituted and built amidst much adversity, just as much as — and I think a very great deal more than — Nehemiah had to contend with in building the earthly city, or its wall.

To come straight to the point: this street, this thoroughfare of pure gold, is where ALL the saints meet. If there is only one street that is the only place; people will not have outside streets and back ways out of touch with one another. They will all be there together in one place, and this gold, this golden thoroughfare, is none other than the drawing together of the love of God. What we really have, amongst the many other things in these letters, is the way in which the Cross secures that love which constitutes the oneness, the fellowship, of the saints: for the Cross is so closely associated with the love of God. We know that quite well, and we know that for His love to be truly in our hearts is the result of a deep work of the Cross. The letter to the Philippians brings that into view in a very clear, precise way. We have seen how all these letters lead on and on, stage by stage, step by step, to final fullness, each one taking up what has gone before to carry it on to something greater, but we will look back over them just for a moment.

The letter to the Romans is a great letter on the love of God. We need not stay to argue that, but you will remember that it is there that we have everything presented in a full, comprehensive way. It is ALL gathered there; our salvation in its fullness, in its completeness from every angle, is all gathered into that letter. But when you pass on from the letter to the Romans, then you begin to take things up, shall we say, piecemeal. The thing has to be dealt with in parts, so that the next letter — the first letter to the Corinthians — is very significant from this present standpoint of our immediate consideration. You remember how, at the beginning of the letter, the Apostle deplored the slowness of growth, the poorness and meagreness of spiritual life, so that he was having to speak to babes and not to men; and then he put his finger upon the cause and spoke of divisions among them. ‘One says I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos; another, I am of Peter, and yet another, I am of Christ,’ and all these positions were repudiated and rebuked by the Apostle. Here was a making of four thoroughfares where God intended that there should only be one! I suppose the people who said: ‘I am of Christ’ thought that their thoroughfare was the best of them all, but probably it was the worst, because it was making Christ an instrument for doing the very thing that He had come to try to make impossible, for bringing about something that was furthest from the thought of God. All this was a terrible contradiction of love! It was a contradiction of the nature of the one street of the city, so we are not surprised that, as the Apostle gets near to the end of that letter he, by inference, says: ‘Your gifts may divide you, and because gifts may divide or be the occasion for one setting off another, or for setting himself off against another, all these gifts may just miss their objective, which was for the building up of the whole Body. Therefore, although gifts may be right, in order for them to reach their end there must be the one all-governing thing: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.”’ So he covers the ground of gifts and says that love is the way, love is the street, love is the thoroughfare, for them to reach this end of building the Body.

Satan’s Antagonism to Fellowship

We might pause there, because what we want to see at the outset is how Satan continuously fights this very thing because of the tremendous issue, the end of love. What we are going to see, or what we may see at once without any waiting is that Philippians 2 brings immediately the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the highest place of authority, power and dominion in every realm. That is what this chapter brings into view: the Name which is above every name, in which every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess to the glory of God the Father. That is the end — the city being the vessel of the glory of God, having the glory of God by the testimony of Jesus.

Now, says the Apostle, in order to reach that Throne, that highest of all places, the way is: “Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus.” What is this mind? Well, ‘be of the same mind one toward another... I beseech you to be of the same mind’. It is oneness in love. “I have no man likeminded who will earnestly be concerned for your affairs: they all seek their own, not the things which are Christ’s.” You see that this mind of Christ is a oneness of mind which has no self in it — and that is chapter 2: “He emptied himself.” There was a great deal of self at Corinth. Satan continuously fights against the building of the city, and especially against the preparing of this highway of love. Sometimes it would seem that the objective of the devil is the destruction of the love of God’s people one for another because of the great end in view through that love: “Love buildeth up”. Dear friends, what do these things mean ‘I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Peter, and I am of Christ’? Do you not think that it is very probable that those who said: ‘I am of Paul’ were really taken up with a line of teaching? ‘That is Paul’s teaching, Paul’s interpretation, Paul’s vision, Paul’s conception, Paul’s wonderful comprehension of spiritual things as such!’ It was something peculiar to Paul’s ministry that attracted them, and they made IT the thing upon which they fastened. Apollos — well, we have come to think of him as being a very eloquent man, a man of eloquence and burning zeal. According to the word in Acts 18 he was a learned man, he knew the Scriptures, was full of zeal and very earnest, but,

again, it was something peculiar to a man and his ministry, or, shall we say, to a ministry. Peter — what shall we say of Peter? It may have been that Peter, being the Apostle to Jews of the Dispersion, appealed more to those who had a Judaistic outlook and rather relieved the tremendous strain which Paul's heavenly position put upon them. Whatever it was, you see that it was a MAN'S line of things, given him by God, but something of ministry which appealed to them. What shall we say of the fourth group? 'I am of Christ!' Well, it may just have been this: 'I do not belong to your denomination, nor to your sect. I do not belong to any denomination at all. I am above and outside.' Even such can make undenominationalism a denomination and standing apart, and be schismatic. That is why I said that perhaps this is the worst of all. We have to be very honest and faithful in facing things like that. These are the things that have been going on all through the centuries. The people of God have been broken up by teachings, ministries, personalities, and then by false conceptions of what a heavenly position is — perhaps as represented by the 'Christ party', FALSE conceptions of a heavenly position. Oh, if the Lord will enable us to receive this word, it may make a lot of difference and provide a way, as we were saying earlier, for the Holy Spirit, a way for the 'supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ'. The Cross has to do something in this matter!

The Work of the Cross

Now first of all, you and I have to allow the Cross to smite and to slay everything represented by the first three, that is, teachings, interpretations, specific lines of truth, of ministries and personalities in ministry, so that in no way are we attached to these as things, but rather, in a true and right and spiritual way, it is Christ who is our focal point, our meeting point, our basis — Christ Himself. We may have Paul, Apollos and Peter and not grow one whit spiritually, like the Corinthians. We may have all that they have to give us and still remain stunted because there is an 'it', a something, a line, a teaching, an interpretation, a ministry. We think, of course, that it is the Lord. Are we quite sure? That it really is the Lord is a matter about which we have to be made very sure. And then the Cross must deal with this fourth thing, or that which is represented by the fourth thing: 'I am of Christ!' I will be very practical and come right to the point. It is a false apprehension of a heavenly position for anyone to run down Christians because they are in denominations, and to have anything in them which separates them from children of God because they are in these things. That is a false apprehension of a heavenly and spiritual position. I want to say that with great emphasis. Such people have not yet come to the place where they can discriminate between children of God and things in which children of God may be. You and I might come to the place where, more or less, we could not participate in the THINGS, and might see that the THINGS — call them what you like, 'sects', 'denominations', such things — are limiting things and are a contradiction to the thought of God. We may come to see that there is all the difference between a very strong feeling and conviction about that, and allowing our feeling toward the thing to touch the people who are children of God. Dear friends, you have to keep a very wide gap between those two things, and when you meet someone who is in something, which THING you feel the Lord has delivered you from or led you out of or shown you to be not in accord with His mind, you must not allow your feeling toward that THING to touch that child of God. Our attitude toward a child of God is to be the love of God for His children AS HIS CHILDREN wherever they are, and there are children of God in some extraordinary places and in things which may be unthinkable to us. You and I have to recognize children of God wherever they are, in whatever they are, and keep the street intact — one street, one thoroughfare. We walk with children of God as they walk with the Lord because they are children of God. Satan's business is to try and make that impossible and to split up this street into a thousand highways and byways and cul-de-sacs. It is true! He is fighting against this all the time, and there is nothing too sacred for him. The tragic, painful, grievous story of the Church is just this — the story of Satan's mischief in dividing the Lord's people.

Well, Corinthians is basic to this matter. I would like to leave what I have just said and say no more, but if only the Lord would take hold of that and deal with us on this matter! It does seem to me, dear friends, that if we violate this it is as though we drew something across the thoroughfare and closed the way to our own progress and to our own testimony. If we cut short God's way, our way is cut short. Well, Satan fought it at Corinth in this way, and you see how Paul answered.

Paul fought it in another way at Galatia, but it was the same thing in principle. Here these Galatian believers had shown marvellous love, the love of Christ, at their conversion, toward the Lord's servant who was used as their spiritual father. He said: 'You would have plucked out your very eyes and given them to me!' Then along came the Judaizers with their pernicious work and they gave themselves over to the devil to do this very thing, and that beautiful love, which showed itself so wonderfully at the beginning, just passed out. These Galatians turned against the very man whom God had used to bring everything into their lives. Read the letter again in the light of Satan's work against the love of God, and see what Satan was after: 'Ye did run well. Who has cast the witch's spell over you?' 'Having begun in the Spirit, do you think you are going to be consummated in the flesh?' What is the devil after? Simply the arresting and turning back of these people in the way to God's purpose. And how did he do it? Well, you may say by Judaizers, by false teachers, by false brethren. Yes, but in main how? By interrupting the love between them and the one whom God had appointed and chosen to lead them on to His full thought.

We dare not pass through all the Epistles now! You notice that Galatians leads on to Ephesians, and Ephesians takes up Corinthians and Galatians. How wonderful is Ephesians on love! When you get to the end of the letter you have the great revelation of the love between Christ and His Church: "Husbands, love

your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it.” And you know that it is not long before you find yourself in the battle in the heavenlies. When you look very closely you will find that it is love that is very largely Satan’s objective. Why do I say that? You look at the letter itself, and then go over to the first chapters of the book of the Revelation, where the Lord says to EPHEBUS: “I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love.” Satan has won!

You pass into Philippians, and it looks back and it looks on. It looks back to Corinth. How much there is in this letter to the Philippians that savours of what we have in Corinthians, although, of course, it is very much more beautiful here and things are on a very much more advanced level; and yet, you see, you get something coming down the way, a dim reflection of what was at Corinth. What is all this about? “Be of the same mind”, “be of one mind... one love... one heart... one soul!” What is it all about? It is a Corinthian peril again at Philippi, and the need still is that the Cross should keep out all that ground which is contrary to love, the love of Christ, and hold the saints together unto the full end. There is a real backward look in this Philippian letter, as you will see if you only look at it.

And there is the onward look. After this we shall come to Colossians in this Divine ordering of the arrangement of the letters, and there we shall find ourselves in the presence of “Christ, all and in all” for the Church, that is, the Church now coming into the fullness of Christ. But with what does Philippians anticipate that? Oh, Satan’s way of preventing the whole corporate expression of love by individual differences! That is what you have in Philippians. It seems that the trouble — what trouble there was — at Philippi was individual differences. Here are Euodia and Syntyche, two sisters, I presume, who had a difference. I think it is a very wonderful thing that the Apostle knew all about individual things at Philippi, and the state of things between individual believers! But there it was, and these individual differences were Satan’s blow at the great corporate oneness in the fullness of Christ.

My point is this, dear friends: that it is no use our talking about the Church, the Body, or the city in these comprehensive terms and figures, and their wonderful representation and all that they mean, and be taken up with the great idea which makes its appeal to us and fascinates us. That all becomes nonsense if there are those in a local assembly who are not of one mind. It is all nullified by such people. The message of Philippians is just sandwiched between Ephesians and Colossians. Think of that! I always thought that there was a point where the arrangement broke down: Colossians and Ephesians ought to be right next to each other, Colossians first and Ephesians next. That may be how they were written, but the Holy Spirit is quite right in the arrangement. Ephesians: the Body comprehensively presented with its great eternal calling and destiny; Colossians: the Church in relation to the Head in whom the fullness dwells, and sandwiched in between there is a little letter like this which says: ‘Yes, these are great conceptions, immense Divine ideas and intentions, but do not forget that the whole arch rests upon one keystone, and the keystone is two of you — Euodia and Syntyche.’ Very practical! My word, it brings us up sharp! I said earlier that this letter finds us out, and none of us can stand up to it.

Now, all that we think, all that we stand for, all that we speak of, all our vision, all the great language and phraseology — “the Church”, “the Body”, “the city”, “the eternal purpose”, “the calling and the destiny” — just come to be focused upon something between persons: “Be of the same mind.” You see, when the city comes, it will be inconceivable that two people should be somewhere up in a corner or in a side road having a difference. We all have to move together on one thoroughfare, and the nature of that thoroughfare is pure gold — perfect love. That is what God is working at, and that is what Satan is working against. How very elementary we are! How at the beginning of things we are! But are we really? Philippians is well on, and it just says to us that perhaps it will be more difficult to show this mutual love and be of this oneness of mind at the end. Perhaps it will get more difficult as we go on. Perhaps Satan will have a great deal more to use and to play with, and will use it well. Perhaps the battle will become far more intense. Yes, I have no doubt but that Satan will persist in increasing force in his endeavour to divide and scatter the people of God.

Now, a great responsibility is thrown upon us by this very simple word. The whole testimony of Jesus just comes back again to become a matter between persons, and what this letter says to us, particularly in this part, is this: Wherever they are, in whatever they are, children of God are still children of God, members of the Father’s family — a brother, a sister of yours and mine — and we must not be evilly affected toward anyone because of any of the reasons why they are where they are. They may not have seen what you have seen, they may not have had the advantage of the teaching that you have had. Oh, countless may be the reasons why they are there, but if they love the Lord it is not for you or for me to judge them. See how Paul takes this line all the time with those who did things which others thought to be utterly wrong! Some of us feel very strongly about the fundamentals of the faith, but many a man who would not be called a fundamentalist, and who by his very upbringing and training is a modernist, has been won by the love shown to him by others. Many who have gone away into that sort of thing have at the end come back by love being shown, and love can do a great deal more than argument. We must not hate PEOPLE away from the Lord by our hatred of their wrong ideas.

Now, we are not going to compromise with evil, and we are not going to say that wrong things are less wrong, but let us always keep that gap between a true child of God and the thing he is in. Many modernists are NOT truly born again children of God. Many HAVE a background to which they may return when suffering intervenes. In any case, let us not harden the situation by an un-Christlike spirit. Let us show love unto all, for there is so much hanging upon it. I am sure that if the Cross will do this work in us it will be cut-

ting a channel for the Spirit, and He will have a freer way; and I am quite sure that the Holy Spirit is locked up and hindered where there is anything that is contrary to the love of God.

CHAPTER 3

Christ the All-Dominating Object and Prize

What we have said about Christ as our mind leads us straight into chapter three of the Letter to the Philippians. Chapter three is the continuation of what is in chapter two. We recognize the convenience of chapter divisions, but we greatly regret them. They are not part of the original New Testament writings, but were only introduced by a man named Stephen Langton in the thirteenth century, just as the verse divisions were made by the Paris printer Stephanas in the seventeenth century. These divisions help us to find the place, but they are very artificial and really — in one way — are apt to rob us of real values. So very often it is essential to run straight on in the reading, ignoring the chapter division, in order to get the full value and meaning of the subject being dealt with.

There are few better examples of this than the one before us (as mentioned above). The continuity is found in this: “Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus”, who — in order to secure God’s full purpose and realize God’s full end — emptied Himself and let go of everything that He had, and humbled Himself, etc. The goal and prize of all this was His full and final exaltation and glory. This was the mind of Christ.

Now Paul goes on to say that that mind had been planted in him and — in the much lesser way — he had let go of the rich heritage which had been his and had counted it all valueless in view of the great “on high calling” to “gain Christ”. The loss of all things was incomparable to that great ultimate “gain”, the fullness of Christ. Christ’s supreme example, and Paul’s own apprehension of Christ with this very practical effect, were the basis of his appeal for oneness of mind in believers. What Paul is really saying is that oneness, unity, and single-mindedness among believers will be achieved by — and only by — THIS Christly disposition, and by Christ being the only and all-absorbing object and prize. He contrasts this “mind” with those who “mind earthly things” (4:8) and who “seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ” (2:4,21).

We could include MANY things in that “all seek their own”, for apparently this referred to the Judaizers, who were wanting to change Christianity. Maybe ‘their own things’ were just “things” in which THEY were interested in Christianity. It has turned out in Christianity that the means to the end have become more than the end. Hence jealousies, rivalries, vested interests, the clientele, support, the ‘Mission’, the ‘Denomination’, the Institution, etc., and if anything seems detrimentally to affect it, a bitter spirit arises, and charges of ‘sheep-stealing’, divisiveness, and so on, split the spirit of Christ. If everything were looked at as to whether it has a contribution of Christ to make to believers, rather than how it affects our particular interest, Christ would be the unifying object.

Paul was not saying that there must be uniformity of mind on all particular points, for “there are diversities of gifts”, and functions, but that in right and proper diversity there should be one all-unifying “mind”; the passion for Christ transcending and dominating all else, and arbitrating in all issues.

Paul’s own life, a life so capable of versatility, variety, many interests and possibilities, was unified by this “one thing” (3:13). We must keep clearly in mind that in what Paul is saying here he is not thinking of salvation, but of the purpose of salvation, which is so very much more than escaping eternal judgment and getting into heaven. I do not think that the deep concern and exercise shown here by the Apostle meant that he feared for his salvation, but, as he says, “If by any means I may attain” — unto what? Being an eternally saved soul? No! But “that I may apprehend THAT FOR WHICH I was apprehended”: “The prize of the on-high calling”.

The stress — if that is the right word to use — the intensity exhibited by Paul is not because God has made it difficult, but because every art and artifice, every means and method of Satan, every danger in his own reactions to suffering is encountered especially by those who are set upon, and in the way of that on-high Calling! The enemy knows the ultimate peril to his kingdom involved in this utterness for Christ, for the on-high calling is to reign, and there is an “If” attached to that. So this oneness of mind is an immense potential!

In his appeal the Apostle reminds his readers that this motive comes from the very fact that their “citizenship is (now) in heaven” (3:20) and therefore the “on-high” or “heavenly” calling should be in the very constitution and disposition of a heavenly people.

May our true heavenly nature assert itself more and more powerfully so that
“the things of earth (do) grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.”

GLORYING IN THE LORD

CHAPTER 1

The Wisdom of the World

Reading: 1 Cor. 1:1–31, 2:1–5, 3:18–23.

As we meditate in the first letter to the Corinthians, it grows upon us that the background of the letter is represented by the word “wisdom”. It seems quite clear that it was that which took hold of the apostle as summing up the situation at Corinth, and demanding rectification.

Undoubtedly to the Corinthians wisdom was the pre-eminent, the most important thing. Indeed it was so with the whole Greek world. As the apostle says in this letter “...the Greeks seek after wisdom”, and the Corinthians were a very strong expression of that fact, the quest for wisdom. That which was their natural disposition had been brought by these believers into the realm of the things of Christ, into the realm, shall we say, of Christianity, and that quest, that element, that disposition, that craving, lay behind the whole occasion of this letter. With them wisdom determined value. According to the measure of what they would call “wisdom”, so the value of a thing, or of a person, stood or fell. The whole question of power hung upon the matter of wisdom. For them dimensions were always determined and governed by the idea of wisdom. That is to say, in their eyes a thing, or a person, was great or small, powerful or weak, to be taken account of or to be entirely set aside, according as what of them was accounted “wisdom” was possessed or evidenced by such. It was that domination of the “wisdom” idea which influenced their attitude toward men.

A Wisdom That Issues in Division

It would seem that this is the explanation of the divisions in the Corinthian assembly. The apostle writes, “Each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.” These respective attitudes were governed by this “wisdom” idea. For some Paul was the embodiment of wisdom; for others Peter; for others, though still in a natural way, Christ was the embodiment of wisdom. Thus their attitudes were influenced and governed by this dominating, shall we say, this obsessing, idea of wisdom. The whole tendency of it was to make Christianity a philosophy, and to separate it from the living Person. When that is recognized it is possible to understand and appreciate this letter to a far greater extent, and to see that the whole letter has a bearing upon that issue.

A Wisdom That Issues in Unrighteousness

Further, notice the effects morally of this wisdom obsession, remembering that with them it was natural wisdom, the wisdom of the natural man, or, as Paul calls it, the wisdom of this world. What is the nature of that wisdom? There is one passage in the letter of James which will greatly aid us in understanding this first letter to the Corinthians, and in our answer to that question. The statement is as follows:

“This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above, but is earthly, sensual (the margin reads ‘natural’, though more literally the word is soulical, or soulish, psychical), devilish.” (James 3:15 R.V.)

There we have the wisdom of this world strongly defined. Look at it. It is “earthly”: that sets it over against the heavenly wisdom. It is “sensual”, soulish, psychical: that makes it entirely of the fallen nature of man and not of the nature of God; not divine nature, but fallen human nature. It is “devilish”: finally, therefore, it is not of God but of the devil.

Carry that back into the first Corinthian letter and you have an explanation of what is found there along those very lines. You see these Corinthians being strongly influenced by their natural propensities, their natural inclinations, their natural desires in the sphere of wisdom, and bringing all that into the realm of Christianity. The outworkings of such a course is that you have sensuality making its appearance in the realm of divine things, and with just such a condition of affairs this letter has very strongly to deal. You know some of the grave touches in this letter, how far even these who were in the assembly, in the Church, went in the matter of sensuality. And the wisdom which led them that way led them into this further state, where they failed to discriminate between what was of Christ and what was directly of the devil, inasmuch as they came into an active touch with demon idolatry in its intrusion into this world, and opened a way for it into the very assembly of the Lord. The wisdom which is from beneath will go that far. What sort of wisdom is this? Sensuality, leading imperceptibly into touch with what is directly of the devil! The temple of God, and idols! The Lord’s table and sacrifices offered to demons! Oh, the blindness of this thing, the utter blindness! Yet they were in the Christian church, in the Christian assembly.

These divisions are another outworking of this “wisdom” matter. Wisdom worked out in schisms. The apostle touches the deepest depths when he says that this wisdom led those who were its devotees to crucify the Lord of glory, and therein is a veiled suggestion that that may happen even in the assembly of the saints, if the same thing is governing, namely that which is of man; that which is of uncrucified natural man brought within the compass of the things of Christ. Even there the cross of Christ may be made of none effect, may be made void, and all that the cross stands for may be countered, contradicted, and these things obtain. The “wisdom” question pervades this letter from start to finish, is the background of it all, and because of the serious outworkings and effects of it the apostle wrote this letter, in order that he might show what the true wisdom is, the wisdom which is from above.

We will not deal with the wisdom itself for the moment, but give our attention to this first chapter of the letter under consideration, which sets for us the basis of everything. Here we have the question of stature, worldly and divine. Firstly the worldly standard of value is presented, stature as viewed and determined from the standpoint of worldly wisdom, and then stature as judged from the divine point of view.

We have dealt with the worldly side. We have seen enough for the moment of what its valuation is, and we are not very impressed. If what we have noted is the stature of worldly wisdom, then indeed God has made foolish the wisdom of this world, and God has made weak the strength of this world. We are not impressed with those dimensions of a man.

Divine Wisdom

■ Stature according to this wisdom

We now turn to look at the divine side. “For behold your calling, brethren (that is, behold God’s call, what God has called), how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world... and God chose the weak things of the world... and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised... and the things that are not...” (1 Cor. 1:26–28). This is very strong, very positive. God chose! The force of that is “to pick out”. This has nothing to do with eternal election. The apostle is not touching here upon election in relation to God’s purpose in Christ. This has reference to the natural calibre of those who were chosen in Christ. God picked out foolish things. God picked out weak things. God picked out base things. God picked out things that are not, (literally, things which have no being); God picked out things which are despised, or considered nothing. Why? That He might put to shame wise men of this world; that He might put to shame strong things of this world; that He might bring to naught, or make void, things that are. Let us grasp the situation as presented to us here. Foolish things set over against wise men: weak things set over against strong things: things which are not set over against things which are: things which are despised set over against things of repute. God did this deliberately.

That word “chose”, or as we have translated it “picked out”, is very interesting. In a book by Dr. Deissman called *“New Light on the New Testament”*, he makes much of this section of the chapter before us as a means by which the calibre of the first believers is established, and he says that in the rubbish heaps which have been turned over in recent years in the East a great deal has come to light as to the Greek language which was used in New Testament times. He tells us it is amply proved by the disclosure of these rubbish heaps that communication was very largely in the language of the ordinary people, and that the New Testament language — the Greek of the New Testament — is that of the common people. He takes this word “chose”, or as we have called it “picked out”, and says the very ordinary people, not the educated, of those days used this particular Greek word when they were making a selection from a number of things, getting something which they were set upon. They would turn over a number of things, and when they found the best thing they took hold of it and picked it out from all the rest and carried it off. It was the common language of the people, and this particular word related to turning over things and finding just that thing which was wanted and picking it out.

That is a good commentary. It is as though God looked over the mass for something that He was after, and when He lighted upon it, He picked it out from the rest and separated it, and made it His. God picked out, like that, foolish, weak, despised things, things which are not, for His own purpose.

There is an inclusive reason given, which is found in verse 29: “That no flesh should glory before God.” We have seen that God in part picked out things of no worth that He might bring to naught, or make foolish, the wise of this world, the mighty of this world, the things which ARE of this world: but inclusively the governing principle of His choice was, “that no flesh should glory before God”.

Then a quotation from Jeremiah 9 concludes that part of the chapter: “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” There you have the explanation of everything. What is God after? On the negative side, He is undercutting all the glory of man; on the positive side, He is providing Himself with a basis by which He Himself shall receive the glory. That is the governing factor in all God’s dealings with us; on the one hand, to undercut that natural tendency to glory in man, and, on the other hand, to constitute a basis for glorying in the Lord.

What are God’s men of stature? We see what the world’s men of stature are, but what are God’s men of stature? They are, on the one hand, foolish things, weak things, despised things, and things which have no being. That is the negative side, and it is essential to the positive side. The positive side is only possible in so far as that obtains. What is the positive side? Glorying in the Lord; that is, an utter, complete appreciation

of God, where the Lord is everything. Of course, the further statement of the apostle has to be put in there, over against his enumeration of God's choice of the foolish, and the weak, the despised, and the things which are not — "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption..." That covers this whole book again, and takes you through it on this other line. You see how natural wisdom takes you through this letter, and mark the consequences, which are sensuality, devilishness, divisions; now come on to the line of God's wisdom, and you find wisdom of another order, working out, not in sensuality, but in righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

We must leave that; but you see that for all the deficiencies and lack on the natural side God has made full provision in His Son. He is made unto us wisdom. The outworking of that wisdom is its own vindication, just as the outworking of the wisdom of this world is its own condemnation. The condemnation of the wisdom of this world is that it leads to schism, to sensuality, to devilishness. It leads to all these things. That is its own condemnation. The vindication of this wisdom from above is that it leads to righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. The men of stature from the divine standpoint are those in whom this wisdom is working out in that way, who are standing in the value of that wisdom, even in righteousness, sanctification, redemption.

Zero in Man — The Divine Starting-Point

All that we have to say at this time is this one special thing, that stature from God's standpoint is a matter of the utter nothingness of man in himself, and the absoluteness of Christ for man. Do you want to know what stature is? It is not to be something big, and important, and noble, and wise, and strong from this world's standpoint, but to be the negation of all that in a relationship with Christ, in which He alone is value to the vessel. The deliberateness of God's act is seen here, with a view to giving men a stature. He chose, He picked out, He went over everything, He turned over everything, He scrutinised everything, and then He deliberately picked out what He was after; and when He had secured it, He said of it, so to speak, "Poor stuff!" Where is the wisdom of that? Where is the strength of that? What is there to glory in that? God deliberately lifted that out of the mass with an object, and bringing that into living relationship with His Son, He deposited in that thing of poverty something that infinitely transcends all the wisdom, and the power, and the glory of this world. Then of this He says, That nothing, that foolish, weak thing in a living apprehension, appreciation, enjoyment of My Son is stature from heaven's standpoint, from My standpoint, from eternity's standpoint.

This is calculated to revolutionize conceptions of things. The apostle Paul so thoroughly accepted that position himself, that no sooner has he summed up the position in the words, "He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord", than in respect of himself he continues — there should be no break in the text between chapter 1 and chapter 2 — "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom... I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." I ask you whether your own heart, and whether history, bears record to the fact that Paul was a man of stature. We covet some of his stature; but here he is taking that position of a foolish thing, a weak thing, a despised thing, a thing which has no being from this world's standpoint. But, oh, how that nothing has counted! How God has registered Himself upon the course of this world through that nothing! That is stature from God's standpoint. It is the measure of Christ. The measure of Christ entirely depends upon the little measure of ourselves, or the no measure. God can do things when He gets us there.

The Cross — The Divine Means

Paul puts the cross right at that point — "...Jesus Christ, and him crucified..." "The word of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness" "...the foolishness of the thing preached..." (R.V. margin), not as otherwise rendered "the foolishness of the preaching". What is the foolishness of the thing preached? It is the cross, which brings us to foolishness in ourselves, and causes us to glory in Christ. The Lord Himself acts in a way that makes it possible for the world, as it looks upon believers in themselves, to regard them as very foolish things, things which do not count at all. The world is quite right, if it takes that view of us naturally. But the world is very far out in its calculation, if it thinks that that is where the matter ends because the world is going to discover, as it has already discovered, that that which it is quite justified in regarding as weak, and foolish, and nothing in itself, will nevertheless utterly overthrow the world, will challenge the world in such a way that the world cannot answer the challenge. The history since Paul's day has been that in the "nothings", the foolish things, God has established a challenge which the world cannot get over, a force mightier than all the force which this world in its totality of wisdom and power can possess.

Why always try to be important? Why want to be somebody or something? Why want to be seen and known and heard? That is the way to counter your spiritual effectiveness. Shall we not covet rather to be in ourselves nothing, that Christ may be more gloriously displayed by this? Shall we not in a new way say Amen! to God's choice, and recognize that that is the way of His glory? "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

CHAPTER TWO

The Wisdom Which is From Above

Reading: 1 Cor. 2:1–16; 3:1–4, 18–23.

The real trouble at Corinth was that the habit of looking at everything as a philosophy, which had reached such a height of development amongst the Greeks, had been carried into the realm of Christianity, and Christianity was being considered by them in the light of philosophy, was in fact being reduced to a new philosophy. In practice, therefore, at Corinth, Christianity was set forth as a philosophical teaching, as opposed to a spiritual state.

There is always that peril lurking amongst God's people. It is not a thing peculiar to the Greeks, nor to the Corinthians, nor to a bygone age. Somewhere not far off from any assembly of God's people there lurks the same danger of Christianity becoming a matter of teaching, wisdom of words. From the reverse side the danger is seen as something which merely gratifies the mind. The natural man loves to be in the know. Knowledge to the natural man gives a sense of strength, of power, of importance, and that peril of the natural man creeps into the realm of Christian teaching. Thus to have good teaching, clear teaching, systematic teaching, the presentation of Christian truth in a manner in which the mind can grasp it, become informed and enriched, has always this peril associated with it.

That is why a great many people do not like reiteration. They like something fresh. To such the novel preacher is the attractive preacher, the one who is "original", that is, who is not saying things well known, but something quite fresh, something unique, something that is not so familiar. There is an attractiveness about them which makes its appeal to this appetite. But should anyone get up and emphasize, and re-emphasize, and constantly hammer home one point people get upset. They get tired of it. They want something fresh for the mind. Very often they have not recognized the importance of that truth to the heart. All this belongs to the same dangerous realm of Christian truth and teaching becoming something for the mind. The peril is never far away from the place where much truth is given, or a teaching ministry fulfilled.

The Greeks were experts in that realm. That was their make-up, and they had brought that over into Christianity, and were reducing Christianity to a human philosophy, a system of worldly wisdom. The consequences were very serious indeed.

Wisdom's Fruits

The point we want to emphasize is that you can always tell whether truth possessed is possessed as a teaching, a doctrine, a philosophy, or possessed as a living thing in relation to Christ, by the results that issue from it, by its effects. In Corinth they had the Christian truth in a very great fullness and richness, but they had it in the natural mind as teaching, as truth, as doctrine, as a philosophy, and the terrible consequences were that there was that which was sensual, earthly, and even devilish; so much so that the apostle had in one case to hand over a certain individual to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of Christ, so devilish was that thing in the assembly.

It is terrible to contemplate that such could be the case in a Christian assembly, where the Holy Ghost is, where Christ is, and yet here is not only the awful possibility but the actuality. The apostle puts his finger upon the cause when he says: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). What is carnality? It is the bringing over of the natural tendencies, the dispositions of mind and heart, into the things of the Lord, and that is a very dangerous thing to do, and has very pernicious consequences.

When the apostle introduces the heavenly wisdom he shows that it is pre-eminently marked, not by words, but by a state. Of his own visit to them he declares: "I... when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom... that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1–5). It is a spiritual state. The wisdom which is from above produces a state which is altogether the opposite of that produced by the wisdom of this world, even though the wisdom of this world operate in the realm of Christian truth.

Paul wrote, "I hear that divisions exist among you..." (1 Cor. 11:18). Whence do they come? They come from the intrusion of human wisdom into the realm of Christian truth. Let us put that in another way. We find believers divided because they get teaching apart from a living state: yes, Christian teaching, the doctrine of Christ, resulting in schism amongst believers, because they only have it as a teaching and not as a living state.

What is true of divisions is true of all these other unhappy things at Corinth. Why such things? How do sensuality and the very mark of the devil come to be found in a Christian assembly? This has been the sad history of the Church again and again, that right in the midst of a Christian assembly something perfectly devilish has sprung up, as well as these other things — which are, of course, from no other source than the devil — divisions, rivalries, jealousies, factions. This, I repeat, has been an unhappy history in the Church at

large. Why? Because of Christian teaching being handled merely as a philosophy instead of both proceeding from, and producing, a spiritual state.

We cannot be too emphatic about this matter. We do not want to run the danger of anything so horrible and so gross, and if not, we must face it. We do not want to get into a position like that. We want everything in our relationship with the Lord to become a living and outworking reality.

Now the wisdom from above, of which the apostle speaks, produces a state just the opposite of that state produced by this wisdom which is from below. James 3:17 gives the definition of the wisdom which is from above: — “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubtfulness, without hypocrisy.” (R.V.M.)

There we have seven things marking the wisdom which is from above. And do you see how closely this passage in James runs parallel, though in striking contrast, to things at Corinth. We will not at this time dwell on these seven features, but only in the briefest manner touch on one or two.

“The wisdom that is from above is first pure...” At Corinth there was a state the very reverse of this, because worldly wisdom had come in. There was sensuality, uncleanness, and oh, strong word, “It is actually reported that there is fornication among you...” (1 Cor. 5:1).

“...Then peaceable...” The wisdom which is from above is peaceable. But of the Corinthians the apostle has to write: “...I hear that divisions exist among you...” (1 Cor. 11:18).

So we might follow the comparison and the contrast right through, but what we are seeking to say is this, that it is a state which is produced by heavenly wisdom, a spiritual state. That is the ground of the apostle’s use of the words in the second chapter, “he that is spiritual” (verse 15). This state is here said to be Christ.

Wisdom Solving the Supreme Problem

We want to get closer to this wisdom which is from above. What is the object of wisdom? For what is wisdom required? It is to solve problems, to see your way through, to get through your difficulties. Sin has set up the greatest problems that this universe has ever known, and sin in man set God His greatest problem. If we may speak, and I think we can rightly speak, of God having a problem, then sin in man confronted God with the greatest problem He has ever met with. What was the problem with which God Himself became confronted when sin entered into the very nature of man, and man became, not only a being with sin in him, but himself sin? God’s problem was as to how He could overcome Himself. The position is that sin must be destroyed if God is uncompromisingly holy. If God cannot recognize, let alone condone, sin; if God in His very being, is in absolute antagonism to sin, and it is war to the death if God has made man and man has become sinful in his nature, God, by reason of what He is, is compelled to destroy man utterly as a sinful thing. God has either to do that, and destroy man completely, destroy His creation, or He has to find a way of overcoming Himself, of overcoming His own nature, and the demands of His own nature and being. To destroy man utterly, and to wipe out the whole sinful creation, would spell defeat for God, and give occasion for Satan to rise up and say: I have won. I have destroyed the work of God beyond repair.

That is one side of the problem for God. For God to spare sinful man is to violate His own nature. How is a problem like that going to be solved? There is wisdom wanted: on the one hand, wisdom to know how to do it, and, on the other hand, power to accomplish it.

This is where glorying in the Lord comes in. You can see the answer. You are living in the enjoyment of it. Christ is the wisdom of God, and the power of God, Christ crucified. God has solved His problem by Himself becoming Man, and in a great representative and all inclusive Manhood taking the full and final consequences of sin so that the very nature of God is satisfied in an inclusive Representative. What mighty power there was in destroying the dominion of sin. There was wisdom in finding the way, and there was the power in executing the work, and it was all in Christ crucified. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

How can God save sinful man and be true to Himself? CHRIST IS THE ANSWER. This is a heavenly wisdom, and Christ is made unto us of God wisdom. What is that wisdom? Righteousness, sanctification, redemption. How is there righteousness from God to us in Christ? Because Christ has fulfilled all righteousness; because in His death He has carried the judgment upon all unrighteousness, and therefore satisfied the highest standard of divine righteousness. Sanctification is something more. Redemption is something more still.

Let us think for a moment of each of these. The three are an exegesis of the one. That is to say, wisdom is defined in the other three. Heavenly wisdom is righteousness, sanctification, redemption.

Righteousness

What is righteousness here? God’s laws are judgments. They carry with them the absolute demands of God, which if violated result in the judgment of God. There is no escape. Every man and woman entering into this creation comes by birth under the rule of God’s judgments through God’s laws, and becomes responsible for the laws of God. But every man and every woman coming into this creation is totally incapable of meeting those demands, answering to those laws, and escaping those judgments. There has come one Man into this world, Who also was made under the law, Who came under the laws and judgments of the infinitely holy God, but who was ABLE to stand up to them, to fulfil them, to satisfy God. Not only did He do that as for Himself, but there was a point in His career here on this earth where He stepped right into the

place of other men, accepting all the weakness of all the race of men, and was then made sin, and tasted death in the behalf of every man. But because of that sinlessness which was inherent in Him, He could survive and not be engulfed in the condition which He had voluntarily accepted for other men, and through the eternal Spirit, the indestructible Spirit, the timeless Spirit, and therefore the deathless Spirit of God, He overcame that condition which He accepted in a voluntary way, swallowed it up in all its power, its awfulness, its blackness, and its consequences of judgment, and overcame, not only in an isolated way for Himself in what He was, but in a related way for all men. God having taken that One into His presence, and made Him the Head, faith in the Lord Jesus, we are taught, means that the righteousness which is true of that Man is put to the account of those who believe, and thus He is made from God righteousness to us. That is a state in Christ for us.

Righteousness goes beyond justification. Justification brings us into a standing, but righteousness in Christ means that that standing could be eternally maintained. Justification means that we stand acquitted. But what is our hope that we shall not again go back onto the old ground and lose that position? It is the righteousness of Christ which is eternal, indestructible, deathless, incorruptible. The case, then, is not one of faith only for a standing, but faith in a righteousness which abides, abiding righteousness to keep us there in that position with God. It is one thing to be brought to a position. It is another thing to have put to our account that which can keep us there eternally. Righteousness is that which establishes justification as an eternal thing. It is ours through faith. He is made unto us righteousness from God.

Sanctification

He is made unto us sanctification from God. Notice the direction of this. Where does sanctification originate? From whence does it come? Does it come from our effort, from our struggle, from our endeavour? Does it come from our consecration? No, it does not! Sanctification comes from God: in this sense, that before ever we could be for God, God Himself singled us out for Himself. God singled Israel out from the nations for Himself. That was their sanctification. It came from God — “Ye did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). Sanctification originates with the initiative of God, and all that we shall ever be or do in a sanctified life will be because God started it, God initiated it, God singled us out, chose us to be His own.

The foundations of sanctification are not in our efforts to be holy, nor in our decision to be holy. The foundation of sanctification is in God’s laying hold of us to be all for Himself. All our efforts would be in vain if God had never made us His own. But to be the Lord’s carries with it the fact that we are wholly separated. Separation is not unto sanctification; it is because of sanctification.

Let your reason for not having anything to do with what is not of the Lord be that you are the Lord’s. Do not break off this and that so as to be the Lord’s, but recognize that you are His, that He has chosen you, and you have then the basis and the dynamic for a holy life. It is in Christ. To be in Christ means that we are the Lord’s, and carries with it the truth that we are wholly the Lord’s. There must be no violation of that: and this implies the recognition of a position which carries with it a state. The recognition of that, and the acceptance of it by faith, is the power of a holy life. We are sanctified by faith, even as we are justified by faith. How are we sanctified by faith? By believing that in Christ we are holy, that God has purposed we should be holy through our being in Him. Anything unholy is a contradiction, and God is against it. God is for holiness, and would have us recognize the fact, and receive that holiness in His Son Whom He has given.

Redemption

Redemption is more than justification, more than righteousness, more than sanctification. Why does it come last? Surely, we might say, Paul has made a slip! He ought to have said, Now Christ is made unto us redemption, righteousness, sanctification! Surely that is the order of doctrine! No! there is no mistake. The order is correct, and the statement accurate as it stands. We so often think of redemption in the limited sense of the ransom paid at the beginning by which we are set free. But that is a mere fragment of redemption. Look at 1 Corinthians 15 and see to what point redemption leads. It leads right out of this body of humiliation, right out of the last remnant and vestige of corruptibility, into a spirit glorified in a glorified body. Go back to Romans 8:23, where you have that stated emphatically — “...waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” Redemption is the full and final consummation of the whole work of new creation in spirit, soul and body, and in the whole creation outside: for “...the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption...” (verse 21). That is redemption. Redemption carries you right on to the end, and that is why it comes last here.

Redemption is an immense thing. And Christ is made redemption unto us. In Christ that is secured to us. It is beautiful to know that we are justified and stand before God. It is good to know that that righteousness, unimpeachable, incorruptible, is put to our credit. It is good to know that in Christ we are sanctified. But, oh, see to what that is leading. It is leading to glorification in every part of our being, and in every part of this creation, this universe. That is redemption in Christ Jesus. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

The Lord brings all this and gathers it up into one word “grace.” While the word itself is not used, you can never have a more beautiful exposition of grace than you have here. “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom...” God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the despised, and the things which are not, and brought them through to that. God chose! That is repeatedly stated. It is of Him that we are in Christ. Is that not grace? Foolish, weak, despised nothings in this world brought through to that in Christ:

and it is all of God — “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God (out from God unto us), and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” It is all the divine work. All comes from God. All is grace.

What an argument that is against this wisdom of this world! It argues in these two ways. In the first place all this says that the wisdom of this world is intended to make something of man. Man wants to be something in himself. He wants to be wise, and by his wisdom he wants to have power, to be able to do because he knows, and it is all the bolstering up of man. Thus the Greeks came to worship the most perfect man that they could find. The best philosopher was worshipped. The best athlete was worshipped. The man of wisdom and strength was the object of worship amongst the Greeks. It was making something of man, and wisdom was all to make man something.

That rules Christ out, and it rules out everything being of God, if it is all of man. Which will you have? Are you going to have this inflation of humanity? Where will it end? To what will it lead? Perhaps a few years of fame? “Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown...” How true that is, “a corruptible crown”! So you come to the Pantheon, and you find that one wise man, one philosopher, and one athlete, succeeds another. Every year the one who was at the top is superseded, and that is how it goes on. Fame and influence may last for a year, but you will be very lucky if you get beyond that. That is the value of this world’s wisdom and power, a transient thing, no more permanent than the laurel crown of its reward. But here is a wisdom established upon the weakness, the foolishness, the nothingness of the human element: fadeless, immortal, eternal, heavenly. That is the argument between the wisdom from above and the wisdom from beneath. And when these are compared, which is wisdom? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world, seeing what the heavenly wisdom is? What does your heart say to that? When you see the heavenly wisdom, and its possibilities, and its fruit, do you not say that the wisdom of this world is foolishness compared with that? God HAS MADE foolish the wisdom of this world, and God HAS MADE weak the strength of this world, by a revelation of the heavenly wisdom, the heavenly power in Christ.

It all resolves itself into a matter of whether we are prepared to accept the working of the cross of Christ crucified. Of course, facing it like this you agree, you assent, you say: Yes, of course, there is no other choice to be made. Are you prepared to be regarded by the world every day that you live as utterly foolish, as nothing, as having no existence? That is literally what the words mean. You might say in an hour of enthusiasm, Oh, yes! Ah, but it is not so easy. Many a battle has to be fought against the proneness of this human nature to be something, against its desire to be able to hold its own, to make an equal show with others. How against this nature weakness is! How we cry out against weakness. It is, then, a question of whether we are prepared to have the working of Christ crucified in the whole constitution of nature, so that the result is the complete ruling out of ourselves and the utter ruling in of Christ.

Paul relates all this to the living person of Christ. As Chrysostom said in his own quaint way, “Paul always nails it with nails to Christ.” He meant that Paul always brings it in in relation to the living Person: not talking doctrine, not things, not sanctification, redemption, righteousness as doctrines, but the living Christ. It is, after all, the question of how far Christ is to eclipse us, totally eclipse us.

In the Greek world in these New Testament days a slave was regarded as having no existence apart from his master. He dare not have his own thoughts: he dare not have his own mind, his own will, his own ways, his own plans, his own workings. He was but the shadow of his master. He had completely to sink his own personality into that of his master. That is why Paul constantly calls himself the bondsman of Jesus Christ. In effect he means, I have sunk my own individuality, my own personality, into Christ — “For me to live is Christ,” the shadow of my Master! “We have the mind of Christ,” His thoughts, His ways; and that implies the transcendence of Christ over ourselves at every point. Paul gloried in that He did not think it something of great cost and sacrifice to let himself go to Christ. He gloried in the fact that he was a bondsman of Jesus Christ, because he gloried in Christ. It is, once again, what Christ is from God to us, and this it is as much our glory to accept as our necessity.

We may talk much about the cross. It is necessary for us to speak about the working of the cross, because it is necessary for us to be reminded of the method. But what is far more than all is the utter and absolute Lordship and dominion of Jesus Christ. That carries with it the cross. You will never know that relationship apart from the cross. The cross is the way to that, but the object in view is not to be crucified. Do not live as though the one thing in life is to be constantly crucified, to have to die, die, die, and to be shut up with this as the only subject to which your thoughts are ever given. Let us be concerned with the positive side, which will include the former, with Christ all, and in all, the complete eclipsing of ourselves by Him. The eclipsing work will be by the cross, but the end will be Christ! And what a Christ! “Hallelujah, what a Saviour!” “He that glorifieth, let him glory in the Lord.” The Lord put more glorying in Him into our hearts.

CHAPTER THREE

The Supreme Importance of a Living and Clear Apprehension of Christ

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3.

These words are carefully chosen: the supreme importance of a living and clear apprehension of Christ. If it were necessary to show how supremely important that is, it could be done very easily without going outside of this first letter to the Corinthians; for undoubtedly all the sad, the tragic, the terrible conditions with which the apostle had to deal in the assembly at Corinth were due to an inadequate apprehension of Christ. But there is very much more than what we find in this letter to prove this necessity, and it is upon perhaps one aspect of the necessity that we shall dwell more particularly at this time.

In the third chapter there occur the familiar words about the foundation and the building. The apostle says: "I laid a foundation... other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is." (verses 10-13) — "the fire shall prove each man's work of what sort it is."

We need to ask the question: What work is it that is referred to there? To what does that relate, "each man's work"? I do not think the apostle is here referring to Christian service. That is the common idea about this passage, that it relates to the work which we do for the Lord. Of course, that comes into the category of things tried by the fire, and of things manifested in that day. But I do not think that is the thing which the apostle has in mind when he writes this. I believe he is rather thinking of the substance of faith. We are building a Christian life: we are building ourselves up on Christ; we are constructing and constituting Christianity in ourselves. We have been doing this for a long time, and this superstructure of our Christian lives is composed of the things which we believe, the things which we accept, the things to which we give assent; everything that we gather in to make up the Christian life. We are Christians, and the make-up of ourselves as Christians is going on, is increasing, and in that way we are building. It is the substance of our faith that is in question, using the word "faith" in its largest sense.

The Nature of the Building

It is at that point that the whole argument of the apostle has its application, so far as this letter is concerned. Just there in the make-up of the Christian life of every one of us, that which constitutes the substance, the material, the elements, the features, it is there that the apostle is applying this great difference between earthly and heavenly wisdom. These Greeks at Corinth, because of their natural inclination and disposition to reduce everything to a philosophy, had taken up Christianity very largely in that way, regarding it as a philosophy, and handling it as such: examining, dissecting, appraising according to the standards of worldly wisdom, philosophical thought, and interpretation. So they looked at the preaching, the teaching, from that standpoint, and in a mental way, an intellectual way, took hold of Christian truth and made it, with human, worldly-wise interpretation, the substance of being Christians, the constituents of a Christian life. They were building on the right foundation. Christ was there as the foundation laid by the apostle. But they were building upon that foundation, a worldly interpretation of Christianity, a philosophical structure in Christian doctrine, terminology, phraseology, ideas, conceptions and it was becoming a purely mental, intellectual, academic thing. That is what they were building up. It had no living relationship to their inward condition. It was purely external. The result was that, while they had all that worldly structure of Christianity, Christian thought, and Christian ideas, and Christian doctrines, they were behaving in the most shocking manner amongst themselves and in holy things.

It was at that the apostle launched this word: "...let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon" (1 Cor. 3:10). In other words, that which is of supreme importance is not Christian doctrine, mentally appraised and apprehended, but a living and clear spiritual apprehension of Christ. That is the work. What are you building? Are you, through a living, clear, inward, experimental relationship with the Lord Jesus, building a structure which comes out of that inward spiritual knowledge? Is it by that you are growing? Or are you growing by things said and mentally judged, appraised, dissected, accepted, assented to? What is the nature of the building? The work in which we are engaged, to which this phrase "each man's work" applies, is the building of Christ livingly into the very substance of our being, into the very fabric of our lives. It is not a question of getting to know a great deal about Christianity. Let us note that. The heart of the whole matter is the difference between the philosophy of Christianity, of Christian doctrine and the spiritual knowledge of Christ.

The Nature of the Trying Fire

Now we come to a further point. "Each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13). What is the fire? We have, as we see, the clause "for the day shall declare it," which no doubt applies to the day of the Lord's appearing, but I think there is an application of the words "the fire itself shall prove" in that day, which is specific, which is along a certain line.

Passing over to another part of the Scriptures, let us ask what the nature of the devouring by the dragon is in Revelation 12:4. There we see the great red dragon standing waiting to devour the man-child the moment he is born. What is the character of the devouring? How will the dragon seek to devour? I do not think it would be an adequate answer to say that this is a way of describing a great persecution from without, a physical persecution of the saints. That is not an adequate explanation; because the Blood of the Lamb is not the ground upon which you overcome physical persecution. You go through physical persecution, you are not delivered out of it. You can appeal to the Blood of the Lamb as much as you like in the day of persecution from without, and the Blood of the Lamb does not avail to release you from it. There is a support through it. But here in this twelfth chapter of Revelation the man-child is seen escaping the jaws of the dragon, being delivered from him, and being caught up to the throne. It is an absolute deliverance from the dragon who stands waiting to devour. Now what is the nature of the devourer? The nature of the devourer is explained by the nature of the victory. "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony..." It may be outwardly they suffer death, loving not their lives even unto death, but there is something inward which means that, even while they are delivered up unto death outwardly, they overcome spiritually.

Here is something in which these escape the dragon and are not swallowed up by him; and that will tell you, if you think for a moment, what the nature of the devourer is. It seems to me that the devourer is related to the faith of the overcomer. It is a matter of swallowing up their faith. Faith in what? Faith in all that upon which they stand for their eternal salvation. The accuser is there, and if, with no more multiplication of words, we reduce it to this, you will see what we mean. It is a question precisely of an inward spiritual, living relationship to Christ Himself. In that day, when the enemy moves in that intensified form against an overcomer-company to swallow that company up, there will be the most severe and intense testing and trying out of an inward relationship to the Lord.

It will certainly come along one line, if not entirely along the one line, namely, of being tempted to believe that the whole foundation has given way. In other words, the great effort of the adversary will be to bring to a place where the hope of salvation is gone, where the saints have had cut from under them their assurance in Christ. The devouring will be in relation to their faith, the awful blackness of being out of the pale and hope of salvation. That is not mere hypothesis; that is an actuality. There are many true children of God in that affliction now, and the enemy is pressing that, and will press that more and more toward the end. You and I, beloved, by reason of being given certain conditions and circumstances: physical, circumstantial, mental, will be tested on that matter, tested right out as to what we have been using to build with. What does your building represent? Is it so much teaching, so much doctrine, so much theory, so many meetings, so many prayers, so much Bible reading, Bible study, so much activity in the Lord's work? Is that the structure? Supposing it all goes, and you are no longer able to do anything: no longer able to pray, no longer able to study the Word, no longer able to go to the meetings, no longer able to work for the Lord outwardly, what do you have left? Supposing all that structure is all that you have, and your whole Christian life is represented by that, and it all goes, what do you have left? Do you have Christ inwardly? That will be the test.

"Each man's work shall be made manifest... the fire shall prove each man's work of what sort it is." (1 Cor. 3:13). The work is that which we are doing now in the building up of our Christian lives. What are we using? What are we working with? I believe that the only thing which will satisfy the Lord is that we should be able to stand with Him in any place, though it be in hell itself. The Lord might test us by the fires in that way, as to whether we are able to stand not merely when we are in the good fellowship of Christian people, with all the helps around us, with all advantages at our disposal spiritually, but when we are alone, cut off, shut up, or in some place where it is ninety-nine percent the devil and hell.

What is it that will make it possible for us to stand in such an hour? Nothing but an inward, clear, living knowledge of Christ Himself. Each man's work shall be tried; the fires shall make manifest of what sort it is. The work relates to the building up of ourselves as Christians. What is it that is represented by our Christian lives? Is it the place in which we meet? Is it the teaching we receive there? Is it anything like that? You may be assured that that is going to be put in the fire, and then the question will be how much of Christ has through that become a living, inward reality, a part of your very being, so that you do not say: I know of certain teaching, and I belong to a certain fellowship! but, I HAVE CHRIST! That is our work, and each man's work shall be tried.

The enemy will stand ready to swallow up, and he will swallow up all that he can. He cannot swallow up Christ. If Christ is in us, in a closer relationship with us than any human relationship, so that Christ has become a very part of us, the enemy cannot devour that.

Only What is Christ Will Endure

The foundation is Christ, and the structure must be Christ. The foundation is not our decision, our beliefs, our attainments spiritually; not our accuracy, not our works, not the measure of our knowledge, not our spiritual ability, not our measure of strength, not our mind or our will, not our activities for the Lord, and not our persistence. It is nothing of ourselves, it is Christ. When you come to think about it, is not that just where the enemy gains his advantage? So many of us have thought that unless we can do certain things, or be of a certain mind, we can have no assurance. The Lord would teach us — and this is the lesson that my heart is bent upon learning, and that I would urge upon you to make your quest also — that the ground of assurance is not in our having decided for Christ, nor that we persist in the Christian life, nor that we feel strong, nor that we have certain ability as Christians and are able to do this or that. It is not the measure of our activity in the work of the Lord, nor any one of these things which constitutes our Christian life. These are simply the outworkings. The thing which constitutes us is that Christ is the foundation, and that we are inseparably linked with Him by faith. Everything else can be suspended as a secondary consideration until that is settled. It is as though God, if we may put it this way to try to simplify the truth, had given us His Son and had said to us: In Him you have everything, and the first thing is not what you are, what you can do, or anything to do with you; it is what He is! If only in the face of all you may see of a multitude of contradictions in your own life in weaknesses, and imperfections, and lack of attainment, you will persistently believe in Him as having it in Himself to bring you through to the end, you will go through in spite of all. We begin to take stock of ourselves, measure ourselves up, and say: I am not this, and I am not that, and I am not something else; or else, I am this, and I am that, and all this goes against me. Nothing of all this is to the point at all. The totality of every divine requirement in us is in Christ.

The very last stroke of our sanctification and glorification is finished now in Christ, and by faith we have to receive the end of our salvation. The only way in which we are related to the matter at all is by faith. Of course faith is always proved in obedience. Perhaps someone will say: You are simply ignoring and ruling out our responsibility entirely! We are doing nothing of the kind. We are saying that our responsibility is faith, and faith works out in obedience. But never let us think that it is our faith or our obedience that saves us. It is Christ who saves, Christ who is salvation, and there is nothing more dynamic unto a life of consecration than seeing what Christ is for us. The dynamic of consecration is not in struggling to be something; it is in seeing Him.

Perhaps none of us have realized that the Holy Spirit never co-operates with our struggling. The Holy Spirit never comes along and assists in our endeavours to be good. Have you not proved that? The Holy Spirit never comes along and lends His aid to us to solve our problems concerning ourselves while we dwell upon our own problems. Have you not discovered that? Why not let that be settled? The Holy Spirit stands back while we struggle to solve our own spiritual problems. What is He waiting for? He is waiting for us to apprehend Christ by faith, and then He will come in and work on that ground. The Holy Spirit works because of what Christ is, not for any reason to be found within ourselves. Faith's apprehension of the perfection of Christ, in His Person and work, provides the ground for the Holy Spirit to come and make that good progressively in us. Stand apart from the perfection of Christ, and you will make no progress. Stand on the ground of the finality of Christ, and the Holy Spirit begins His operations to make it good. There is all the difference between seeing Christianity as a system of life to which you have to conform: a standard to which you have somehow or other to attain; an objective Christianity presented in a systematic doctrine, and seeing that Christ is that fully and finally; and Christ livingly in you is the ground of your conformity.

It is not found in anything that can come from us. God chose the foolish things. Why? To make the wisdom of God everything. God chose the weak things. Why? To make His power in Christ the only power of which such weak things have any knowledge. God chose the base things. Why? In order that that which is noble in Christ should be the only honour of which they know, which they have. God chose the things which are not. Why? In order that He should be the only reality. God's activities are not directed toward making something of us, but God takes account of the fact that no matter how much we struggle and strive we never can be anything. He takes account of the fact that there is a nothingness upon which He can put His all. But you and I have to recognize that that is the place of the Cross, if we have not come to it. It opens up such tremendous possibilities when we see that God does begin at zero, that everything of God is bound up with the place where we see, as to ourselves, that we are out of it. But how we are concerned with ourselves! We must settle it that we in ourselves are of no account, and that Christ is all.

The order in this first letter to the Corinthians is, firstly, Christ crucified, as over against the wisdom of this world, the wisdom of men. The latter, to the Greeks, represented everything that man cares about. I do not know whether Paul would have written the same thing to this Western world that he wrote to them. When he wrote to the Hebrews he did not write about the wisdom of this world, because other things were pre-eminent with them. If he were writing to this Western world, I wonder if perhaps he might speak more of financial acquisition, and would say: Now, when I came to you, brethren, I came not to talk about financial acquisition. I determined to know nothing about financial acquisition amongst you! just as he said to the Greeks at Corinth, And I, brethren, when I came unto you... I determined not to know anything among you about worldly wisdom, philosophy. That was the import of his declaration. Whatever it may be, and in whatever part of the world, the principle is that the fundamental obstruction has to go and Christ crucified has to take its place.

Related to that, the next thing to be noted is the utter nothingness of those who are in Christ. We are said to be “in Christ” — “...of him are ye in Christ...” (1 Cor. 1:30). Who is the “ye?” The foolish, the weak, the ignoble, the things which are not, the nothings, all those whom God has chosen.

The sum of the whole matter is the importance that is given to life in the Spirit, or a spiritual state. Read again the second and third chapters.

“Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit” (verses 9–10).

“For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God.”

“The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God,” and he that is spiritual, that is, who has come into a spiritual state by renewal and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, comes into the realm of the knowledge of Christ as God’s fullness, the things which God hath laid up in Christ for them that love Him. A life in the Spirit is what is signified, which means, firstly, a spiritual state of government by the Holy Spirit. From this in turn there results a condition in which the Spirit is found revealing Christ and making Christ everything. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

If the devourer is going to be cheated of his object, if you and I are not going to come under that awful onslaught of the prince of darkness to rob us of our assurance of salvation, so that the time comes when we doubt whether we are saved after all, doubt whether there is any salvation for us, we must recognize that there is a place in the innermost chamber of our being where we have to know the Lord. Does it seem impossible to you that you could ever reach a point where you doubt your salvation? There are possibilities for every one of us along that line which are fearful. You have only to have a nervous breakdown and, as the entail of it, the devil strutting in to becloud your mind and trade upon your melancholy, to know the truth of this. You have only to be cut off from all your activities, where you cannot pray any longer for some reason or other, where you cannot do your accustomed work in the Word of God, where the Christian service which has been such a delight is taken away from you, and you are shut up in a state of weakness, aloneness, with loss of vitality, and depression to which these minds and bodies of ours are prone, and then have the devourer, encamping upon it all, and beginning to say: God has left you, you have sinned against the Holy Ghost! and to listen to that once, to find yourself engulfed. We have to know the Lord in that innermost chamber of our being, so that, be it mental and physical breakdown, circumstances all against us, all these things, there is that inward grip, that inward reality of Christ which is adequate to stand up to this situation. That is our need.

It must not be ninety percent of externalities in the Christian life, or seventy-five percent, or fifty percent. These things are good: let us make the most of them. But let us continually go to the Lord on our knees and say: Lord, these meetings are good, and it is gracious of You to give us these fellowships and helps: but I must know You in my own heart, lest the day come when the fellowship is blown upon and scattered to the four winds and all these things are taken away, and I am left stranded because my life has stood in the power of outward activities and not in knowing the Lord. Plead with the Lord about that. Have an understanding with the Lord about that. Let us see to it that the building which is going on where we are concerned is the building of Christ Himself into the very fibre of our being. Then the devourer will be eluded, the overcomer will be caught up to the Throne, and the devourer will go away to the wilderness to persecute the rest of the woman’s seed. What kind of wilderness is this? It is the wilderness in which some believers are found now. They have lost the assurance of their salvation: and that is an awful wilderness. God save us from that.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Appeal of God’s Full Thought

Reading: 1 Cor. 1:1–10.

Two things remain to be said about this introductory section to this letter. One is that it represents the position of the Lord’s people in Christ. Quite clearly all that is said there does not directly apply, so far as conditions were concerned, to the whole Corinthian assembly. But the letter is written to the whole assembly, and this salutation is addressed to the whole assembly, and therefore it represents a condition in Christ to which that of the church itself may not altogether correspond. What we are in Christ, and what we are found to be in our own spiritual condition may be quite different things. But what we are in Christ becomes the basis of the appeal to us as to the condition in which we may be found actually.

The other thing is that clearly the whole church at Corinth was not bad. While there were sections there to which the apostle had to write such severe things by way of rebuke, and admonition, and exhortation, the whole church was not in that state.

I suppose the same could be said of all the churches in the days of the apostle, that there were two sides to them. There was that side which was good and noble, and there was that which was subject to warning and rebuke. The object of the letters, almost invariably, was to seek to bring all into the full position as represented in Christ. We could say that there were those who were failing, who were in defeat, who were doing anything but commending the Gospel and glorifying the Lord Jesus, while on the other hand there were those who were overcoming the very things which encircled them, and which in character were contrary to the Lord's mind. In all the churches there were the "overcomers" and the "undercomers"!

The appeal is always to the full thought of the Lord, and almost invariably, if not always, the letters are so introduced that the complete standard in Christ, God's full thought concerning the saints in Christ, is placed right on the threshold, and everything which follows moves from that and to that. It becomes the basis of the appeal, the basis of the exhortation, the basis of the warning, of the entreaty, the rebuke, the counsel, the instruction. It is all in order that that which is representative of God's full will for the saints might be expressed in all the saints.

The Example of Levi

Turn to Deuteronomy 33:8-11. Verse 8 reads, "And of Levi he said, Thy Thummim and thy Urim are with thy godly one..." (the margin has "him whom thou lovest"). Levi is an Old Testament illustration and type of the overcomer of the New Testament, and in these verses containing the blessing of Levi we have the foundations of the overcomer, the nature of the overcomer, and the function of the overcomer.

Levi is represented as expressing a very full thought of God. There is something about this statement concerning Levi, which puts Levi in a very honoured position, in a class by themselves. There is a contrast between the tribe of Levi and the other tribes. That contrast was brought out very clearly in the day of Israel's departure from the Lord, when Aaron made the golden calf while Moses was in the mount with God. You will remember how in coming down from the mount Moses heard the noise of the revelry in the camp and discovered the apostasy of Israel, the spiritual declension which had taken place. There had entered in something of the past life, the life of the world, the life of Egypt from which God had separated them, and they had taken a much lower spiritual level. As soon as Moses reached the camp and had taken in the situation, he immediately went and stood in the gate of the camp, and cried: "Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me." Then the sons of Levi went out of the camp to Moses, and Moses said: "Put ye every man his sword upon his thigh, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour." (Exodus 32:27). It was to be a complete slaughter, without respect of persons, and the Levites went into the camp and dealt with those with whom they were personally associated and with whom they had responsibility. Their attitude was so uncompromising for the Lord that it was possible for these words to be said of them: "Who said of his father, and of his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew he his own children..." (Deut. 33:9). For the Levites the Word of the Lord took a place above all natural relationships, affections, and considerations, so that everything which was in the realm of the natural life was subjected to the known will of God, and was not allowed in any way to influence where the question of the full thought of God was concerned. Were we to consider this thing purely on the human level we should say that these Levites slew their own hearts, in so far as their hearts were apart from the revealed will of God. They smote themselves in the realm of all their natural affections and interests, dominated by the full thought of God's will.

The Cause of Failure at Corinth

Here is our link with what is before us. When you come to the first letter to the Corinthians and the second chapter you find that is the principle underlying what the apostle is saying about the natural man and the spiritual man. God's full thought at Corinth is represented in the introductory words "...sanctified in Christ Jesus, called... saints." That true, full thought of God is violated, destroyed in Corinth, because of these natural elements which are governing the lives of His children there. They have not slain the natural wisdom, the natural mind, the natural heart in its affections and its desires. The devotion to all that God has set before them is not such that every merely natural influence is set on one side. The apostle is obliged to say all that he does about the natural heart and mind governing because there are merely natural considerations influencing these people and keeping them and the assembly back from God's full thought. The result is that you have a situation revealed later in the letter which corresponds to what happened while Moses was in the mount: that is, a departure from God, spiritual declension, idolatry, sensuality, and all such things, for we do not know all that happened when Aaron set up that molten calf. It is necessary to look into the Bible a good deal more fully to have a true inkling of what happened at that time. Read Acts 7, and you will have a little more light upon it. The narrative in the Old Testament immediately connected with the incident is very brief and incomplete. You must remember that there was distinct gross sensuality associated with the worship of the molten calf. They stripped themselves of their clothes, and their behaviour was most unseemly in that worship. It was a real drop into heathen debauchery. It was a terrible situation.

In Corinth you have a very serious and bad situation of sin and spiritual declension revealed, and in both cases the cause is the same, namely, the coming into the realm of the things of God of the natural man, the old man. Levi put all that out. The natural affections and the natural mind were entirely cut off, with God's

full thought in view. That is the overcomer. The Levites left that sin, that state, and went out of it, outside of the camp, and first of all spiritually separated themselves from it, and then from a position of spiritual separation dealt with it. That is always the way. You can never register an effective blow against corruption while you are involved in it. You have to be spiritually apart from it before there can be an influence registered upon it.

A Positive Attitude Against Evil Essential

This is an assembly principle. No assembly can deal with evil in its midst until it has spiritually separated itself therefrom and repudiated it. Whenever unrighteousness is known to be in the midst a stand must be taken where that is recognized as evil and an uncompromising attitude adopted toward it.

We cannot on the ground of sentiment, or through any kind of natural consideration, be in any way involved in that. That is evil. God is not in it. God is not with it, and therefore we must spiritually be apart from it. Until that utter cleavage, that utter separation in spirit and in mind, has taken place, there can be no dealing in spiritual power and authority with evil. That is to say, evil will obtain, will hold, will maintain its grip, until there is a spiritual separation from it. The Levites separated themselves, and then from a position of spiritual separation dealt with the thing. That is God's order. That is the overcomer, the one who is spiritually apart, and who, being in that place of separation with God, is a mighty, effective testimony against evil, not in word but in power, even when that evil is amongst the Lord's people.

Levi is an excellent illustration of New Testament things, and we can see the Levitical principle at Corinth just as we see it elsewhere, a SPIRITUAL separation in a day of SPIRITUAL declension. It must be a spiritual thing. It is not enough that it should be merely a geographical thing. You can separate yourself from other Christians, and be yourself a carrier of the same kind of trouble, and have nothing but repetitions of the same thing. It must be first of all a spiritual separation, whatever else may become necessary, whatever else may follow. It is a matter of the heart.

What is this separation? In other words, what is it that characterizes the overcomer? It is heart separation unto the Lord for His full thought, whatever it may cost. That may mean an uncompromising attitude toward your own sentiments, your own natural reasoning about things. God's full thought demands that there shall be no argument whatever in favour of a thing which is against God.

The Reward of Faithfulness

Then note what follows. We have seen the nature of the overcomer, the nature of the Levite; but what follows when that state obtains, when the Lord has a people whose hearts are circumcised in that way? The Word in Deuteronomy says: "Thy Thummim and thy Urim are with him whom thou lovest." (RV margin) We will not stay to go into details with regard to the Thummim and the Urim (Lights and Perfections), but we know they were the means by which Israel got to know the mind of the Lord, and that is sufficient for our present purpose. So the Lord puts Himself in a special relationship to the Levites, and that special relationship is for the purpose of making Himself known to them, in order that through them He may become known to others. That is what follows. "They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt offering upon thine altar" (Deut. 33:10).

The overcomer, then, becomes the instrument and the vehicle of divine revelation, divine instruction. Come to 1 Corinthians again, and mark how over against the natural man you have the spiritual man. And both these terms, let us note, have to do with believers in the assembly. "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him (in other words, he has no Thummim and Urim). But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:14-16). The spiritual man, who has discriminated between the natural mind and the mind of the Spirit, is the man with whom the Thummim and the Urim are found, the knowledge of the Lord.

So then there is a great and privileged position to be occupied by those who, setting aside the whole of the natural life in its judgments and its affections, will at all costs stand for God's full thought. This great and privileged position is that of being God's vehicle of illumination to others. How are we going to be those who teach Jacob the Lord's ordinances and Israel His law? How is this ministry going to be constituted? It never comes by mere studying. A minister of revelation is not merely one who has studied the Bible very thoroughly, and all relative books and subjects, and has become very highly versed in Scriptural matters. Such are not the instruments of divine revelation, of making God known to others. Those who will fulfil such a ministry of revelation, where it is not they themselves who are revealing God, but God revealing Himself through them, are those who have come clear of the natural mind, and of all that which is represented by the term "the natural mind". Such are in the place of the spiritual man, with God's full purpose dominating their hearts and mind. They are standing for that — and it costs and they are paying the price.

The Cost of Faithfulness

Do you think that while Levi shut their eyes as it were to what they were doing it cost them nothing? You do not cut off your own children without feeling it, your own kin, without suffering yourself as much as they suffer. It was no mere cold, unfeeling brutality which governed Levi. It was, if we may use the word, the

stringing of themselves up to a point where jealousy for the one thing prevailed, namely, God's honour. God's glory must get the better of natural feelings in this matter, and it costs to come thus right out from the realm of nature. It costs to stand in that position where Christ is your wisdom, and Christ is your strength, and you have none of your own. You might have strength in nature; you might have wisdom in nature; you might have position, reputation, influence amongst men; there might be all that in the realm of nature, but you deliberately look beyond that realm. You have to be a fool for Christ's sake, and a weakling for Christ's sake, and altogether outside of the camp of this world for Christ's sake. You might have had reputation and influence had you gone the way of nature, but God in His full desire and purpose and thought has become dominant, and you have cut this other thing off; you have repudiated it. And now from this world's standpoint, and from your own estimate of your natural state from your position in Christ, you know that you are a fool, that you are a weakling, that you are nothing, of no account at all, but you are for God. Christ is now your wisdom. Christ is the only strength you are ever going to count upon. Christ is everything. You do not get there without feeling things keenly at times. It is very often brought home to you what a position like that means of suffering and reproach. To the natural man, to the flesh, weakness, dependence, is no pleasant thing. To the flesh competence, ability, capability are the things which gratify, and which we love. It is a terrible thing to feel ourselves so utterly dependent, but it is glorious to see the Lord coming in all the time, and being the full resource. Yet we know that the sense of dependence has to be maintained. It is along that line that God gets His full thought.

It was because there was not that basis, that foundation fully and finally established at Corinth that God's full thought was not expressed and represented by the whole assembly there. The overcomer is the one who is in that position where Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and everything in between. When you get there, or when God gets an individual or a company there, then there follows a ministry in and by which He is revealed.

That is the kind of training for ministry that the Bible speaks of. It is not a pleasant training, but it is the best, the most effective. We can give out a lot of information, a lot of knowledge, which may please and gratify the mass of people, and they may think it to be doing them great good, but in the day of the test, the day of the fire, when the question is, How much of Christ has entered into the very fabric of the being? We shall see that information does not do that, book-knowledge does not accomplish that. But a ministry of revelation will do that, if it is revelation from God; not our revealing of God, but God showing Himself through the instrument. That is true ministry, and that is preparation for ministry. It will explain some things to us. When we have handed ourselves over to the Lord our real preparation comes along the line of the destroying of the natural fabric, and the constituting of Christ as life, as wisdom, as strength, as everything. God's most powerful instruments in the history of this world have always been those who have gone out in fear and trembling and much weakness.

Are you prepared to accept a life like that? There is something for the Lord in an instrument like that. It is first of all vocation, ministry which is realized. Please do not make a technical thing of that word "ministry," and think of it as applying to platforms or public meetings. If you are wholly for God, standing for God's full thought on the ground we have just mentioned, you will be the means of God coming to other lives, no matter where you are. It is not a question of what you are going to say to them. You may be troubled often as to what you will say, or as to how you can say anything in the position in which you are, in that you feel that people would not listen to you, would take no notice of you. The question is not what you are going to say. God very often says His loudest things through most silent people. God can register an impact of Himself by your presence. It is not always a matter of words. It is a question of the Lord expressing Himself through those who are standing with Him in this way: that is ministry.

"They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee..." If you like to paraphrase that, you may make it read like this: They shall prevail with Thee in prayer: they shall fulfil a holy and effectual ministry of intercession. "They shall put incense before thee (the Revised Version margin says "in thy nostrils" — that is God smelling a sweet savour), and whole burnt offering upon thine altar (that is surely setting forth the ground of full acceptance). Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands (here is a blessing!): smite through the loins of them that rise up against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again." The Lord is on the side of those who are utterly for Him. The Lord will watch over them because His own interests are bound up with them. Sooner or later it will be seen that they are the Lord's anointed, and no hand can be reached out against them without being answered by God in God's time. Levi had a very close relationship with all Israel, and all Israel owed their standing before God to the Levites. The overcomers are appointed of God to lead the way for the rest into His presence.

May the Lord show us that what He needs, what He desires, what He is seeking to have in His people, is that state of heart which is content with nothing less than His whole thought. The people who are going to count for God are those who pay the price, even if it means going outside the camp bearing His reproach, who accept that cost, and go with the Lord, even against themselves in all that is of nature.

THE MISSION, THE MEANING AND THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

CHAPTER ONE

In the Gospel by Matthew

Now, Lord, we pray that as we are gathered together in body, Thou wouldest gather us together in Spirit. If our minds are not gathered together, draw them now to Thyself. Lord Jesus, Thou art the centre of our lives, help us to forget everything but Thyself, help us to forget the place and the people and just be preoccupied with Thee. Help us to forget the messenger and the interpretation and help us, Lord, to listen with our inward ears to Thy voice. We are wholly dependent upon Thy Holy Spirit. Wilt Thou have regard unto our need. We ask in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

I hold in my hand a little book, and all that is in between the covers of that little book has to do with one thing, or three aspects of one thing: the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You know that it is the New Testament, and the whole of the New Testament is summed up in those words — the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and it is that with which we are going to be occupied, as the Lord helps.

I want to underline this: that the New Testament is all summed up in those three things. As you know, it has many parts. There are twenty-seven books, but all the twenty-seven books make one whole. In some way each one of them tells us the mission of Jesus Christ, the meaning of Jesus Christ, and the message of Jesus Christ. There are twenty-one personal letters, and it is a wonderful thing that God chose to give us all this in personal letters. It is indeed wonderful what a personal letter can do when God inspires it! One-third of the whole New Testament is in personal letters. There are five historical books, the four Gospels and the book of the Acts; and then there is the one book, the Apocalypse, which contains history, prophecy and doctrine. The majority of the letters have personal names attached to them. The one exception is the letter to the Hebrews. There were evidently more writings by the apostles which have been lost, but two things of greatest importance remain to us.

Firstly, God has seen to it that everything has been preserved which is necessary to the life of a Christian. For the Christian life we do not need any more than what is in the New Testament, and I think you will agree that we have quite enough. When I was a young man I thought that I understood the Bible. Someone has said that the Psalmist must have been a young man when he said: "I have more understanding than all my teachers" (Psalm 119:99). Well, after sixty years of studying the New Testament, it is more than I can cope with today. God has seen to it that we have all that we need for life and conduct.

The second thing is this: the whole of the New Testament is a many-sided revelation of one Person. Every one of the twenty-seven books is a distinct aspect of one Person, and each one of those twenty-seven parts has a particular purpose, but very many Christians are quite unable to say what that particular aspect is. The great need is for us to read one of these books, and I advise that you read it right through at one sitting. Remember that the chapter arrangements are quite a mechanical thing not arranged until the fifteenth century. That is man's hand upon the book just for convenience, but the really valuable thing is to read the whole book through at once.

Now having read that book, you stand back from it and you ask yourself some questions: 'What does that book say to ME?' Not: 'What is there in that book?' but: 'What does the book say to me? Now that I have read it, what does it amount to? What is its part of the whole? What is the result for me of having read that book?'

That is all preparing our way for the several things that we are going to consider. Our present purpose is firstly to show what we mean by what we have just said, and secondly to consider some of these parts of the whole. I want you to remember this as we go on — that we are trying to understand the very essence of Christianity. Having said that, we will start on our first part, which is the Gospel by Matthew. I want you just to look at two fragments, one at the beginning and one at the end. We shall refer to these more fully later on.

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1).

"But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him they worshipped: but some doubted. And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, say-

ing, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the age” (28:16–20).

The Man Matthew

To reach a conclusion as to the message of Matthew we must first consider the man himself. Who and what was Matthew? Well, we know that his former name was Levi, and he got a double name — Matthew Levi. We know that he was a tax-gatherer, and he lived in Capernaum. Please believe that this is not a lot of unnecessary detail; the two things that I have just said have a tremendous history bound up with them. Matthew was a tax-gatherer and he lived in Capernaum. He was a man who was invested with Roman authority; he was employed by the ‘army of occupation’: he had sold himself to the enemy in the land. He had accepted Roman authority and he was a man under authority. If he said: ‘I want so much as tax’, all the Roman Empire stood behind him. That gave him a great deal of liberty, for he could put his own price on things, and he could be very exacting. Do you remember when John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan and all the publicans came to him? (I wonder if Levi was one of them! If he was, he had never been baptized.) What did John the Baptist say to these publicans? ‘Do not exact more than you have a right to do!’ So the publicans were men who liked to get more than they had a right to have. You are following me closely, are you not? Is your mind moving ahead of what I am saying? Levi was evidently a man who loved power, for he had imbibed the spirit of imperial Rome.

What about the time in which Levi lived? it was the time when Israel was in great weakness, for she was being ground under the heel of imperial Rome and had lost world authority. Put a ring round that word ‘authority’, for that is the key to Matthew.

There is one other thing to say about Matthew. The only thing that remains as the fruit of his life is his Gospel. That is something very wonderful! We don’t know anything else about the subsequent history of this man. Was he an apostle? Yes — and yet the only thing that remains is a book, but what a book it is! He is the only man in the New Testament who calls himself a publican. He alone says: “Matthew the publican” (Matthew 10:3). Twenty centuries afterward we are studying that Gospel, and it has been studied all through those twenty centuries — the fruit of a converted publican. There are possibilities for us all!

Now it says that Jesus came to Capernaum, and as He passed by He saw Levi sitting at the receipt of custom. He said: ‘Levi, you wicked man! You traitor to your country! You enemy of your own country! What are you doing there, Levi?’ No, Jesus did not say anything like that. He looked at Levi, He saw his account books and all his money and He saw all the people looking at Levi with anger. He knew the worst about him and He said: “Follow me!” That is all. And Levi arose and followed Him.

I think it is possible that Levi had overheard Jesus’ teaching in Capernaum, and perhaps he had seen some of the miracles, so that when Jesus said: “Follow me!” he heard in those words something more than the words themselves. He heard something that appealed to his sense of authority. Jesus did not say: ‘Levi, would you like to be one of My followers?’ Nor did He say: ‘Levi, I give you an invitation to come with Me.’ I wish I could catch the tone of Jesus, but it would have been something like this: ‘Follow ME!’ There was authority in His voice. Young Christians, Jesus does not INVITE you to be Christians. He does not just say: ‘Would you like to be one of My disciples?’ The voice of Jesus is the voice of Divine authority. This is not a messenger of the King inviting; this is the King COMMANDING. You refuse this call at your eternal peril. When Jesus says: ‘Follow Me!’ there is all the content of eternal destiny in that. This is where we strike the message.

Now note one or two other things about Matthew. Matthew already knew what was in the Bible. He knew the Scriptures, but the Scriptures had no authority in his life until Jesus came in. If you read through this Gospel by Matthew you will find that he repeats one phrase nine times, and that phrase is: “that it might be fulfilled as it is written.” Now he had all that Scripture, but his Bible was not alive until Jesus came into his life, and when that happened, he said: ‘Why, this is what the prophet wrote about. I am seeing Jesus everywhere now!’ He could identify Christ in the Scriptures when he had wholly committed himself to the authority of Jesus. That is very instructive. You see, we are not saved because we know something about the Bible, nor because we have been brought up in a religious family. The very reality of Christianity is in an absolute committal to the authority of Jesus Christ.

Matthew’s Two Focal Points

Now, just leave that for a minute, and note Matthew’s two focal points. In his genealogy he says: “Jesus... Abraham... David” — ‘the seed of Abraham, the seed of David’. So Matthew sees Jesus in relation to a chosen nation, and Abraham is the first of this new chosen race. Matthew sees Jesus in relation to a chosen people and then he says: ‘of the seed of David’. What does David mean? David represents the Divine thought for this people, which is dominion in the world. First, then, a chosen people: that is Abraham. Then a people in absolute authority amongst the nations. That is the Divine thought.

Hold on to that very tightly. Presently Matthew is going to say to that chosen nation: “The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (21:43). This is tremendous! So Abraham is to have another nation! A HEAVENLY people, and that people is to in-

herit the authority among the nations, to be the TRUE seed of David. That is where you need to dip into the book of the Revelation: a great multitude out of every nation centred in the Throne.

The Basis of Christianity

There is another point of which I want you to make a careful note, because all the sovereign wisdom of God is found in this point. When the New Testament was put together, quite contrary to the usual way of men, the books were put in their wrong chronological order. The New Testament is not put together in chronological order. If it had been, Matthew would not have come in for a long time. When those men sat down to put the book together, for some reason which they did not know they said: 'We will put Matthew at the beginning.' They were more under the government of the Holy Spirit than they knew! The Holy Spirit knew what He was doing, so He said: 'We will put Matthew first.' And why is Matthew first? For the best of all reasons: this Gospel by Matthew is the first message of Christianity, and it is the foundation and basis of all Christianity. What is the basis of Christianity? What would be your answer if you were asked: 'What is the essential basis of all Christianity?' The answer is in the last words of this Gospel: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." The absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ is the foundation of all Christianity.

You notice how this idea had got hold of Matthew. It is he who tells us about the centurion who said to Jesus: "I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers: and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh" (8:9). I hear the echo of the voice of Jesus: "Follow me!" "He taught them as one having authority", says Matthew, "not as their scribes" — and the scribes were supposed to be their authority! The great note of Matthew's Gospel is the absolute right of Jesus to command and be obeyed, and you note that the message of the Gospel in the book of the Acts was: 'We preach Jesus Christ as Lord.' The claim of Jesus Christ is unmistakable in Matthew. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old... but I say unto you..." (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Six times He takes authority over "them of old", and "them of old" means Moses supremely. So on to the end, where it is all gathered up into 'All authority is given (has been given) unto me in heaven and on earth. Therefore go ye and teach all nations... whatsoever I have commanded you' — "have COMMANDED". Matthew's Gospel is always called — by the Bible teachers — "The Gospel of the Kingdom", and the aspect of Jesus in it is that of the King. What we are saying is that the true characteristic of a true King is authority, and this is the imperative of Matthew, the erstwhile tax-gatherer, who worshipped authority so much as, first to sell reputation and honour and popularity to a foreign and hated power, and then to do the same as to this life for the heavenly, spiritual authority of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit in the World Today

Now why are we saying these things? The greatest peril that exists in the world today is the growing spirit of rebellion against authority. There is a spirit which is refusing all government and all authority in this world. It is the spirit of lawlessness, the spirit which claims independence of life and action. Children are casting off the authority of parents. They are demanding a life of absolute independence, and, sad to say, this spirit is amongst many Christian young people. If you would give them advice they will not take it, and if you say: 'That behaviour, that dress is not worthy of the Lord Jesus', they will not listen to you. But, of course, this is not only true of young people. It is a spirit that has come into the world, and that is the message of the letters to the Thessalonians, where it says that at the end the antichrist will be "the lawless one".

Spiritual Power and Spiritual Victory

I need say little more. All that sounds very hard and very terrible, but I will ask you to read again the book of the Acts, which is the book of spiritual power, spiritual authority, and spiritual victory. All the world rose up against the Christians. So much the worse for the world! Did Herod kill James with the sword? So much the worse for Herod! Read the sequel. Oh, no, here is an authority that is greater than the rulers of this world. These people may be poor people, and weak people from the standpoint of this world. They may be despised people. They may be poor, converted Levis, but they were joined to the "all authority in heaven and on earth". They were joined to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Dear friends, you and I may be poor specimens, so far as this world is concerned. We may be the despised things and the things which are not, but Jesus Christ in us is greater than we are, and greater than this world's spirit.

But we come back to the point. The message of Matthew is the absolute Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ. Oh, may we all be found under that Lordship! It will come to mean much more than I am able to say. When all is said, it is victory at the end, for 'He MUST reign until He has made His enemies the footstool of His feet'.

But I do want to emphasize this thing: the beginning and the fullness of Christianity is in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We do pray, our Father, Thou wouldest teach us what this means. May we be wholly committed to the Lord Jesus. We thank Thee that He is our Saviour, but that is for us. We want everything to be for Him, therefore, we want Him to be Lord. Protect Thy Word in our hearts, in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

CHAPTER TWO

In the Gospel by Mark

Lord, Thou art the only Heavenly Teacher; none teacheth, Lord, like Thee. We cannot teach unless Thou teach us. We are here this morning as Thy disciples, those who are to be taught by Thee, take Thy Word and open it to us. Open our ears to hear, give us understanding, give us obedient hearts, lead us in Thy truth, Holy Spirit, do the work which Thou hast come to do. Our Lord Jesus said that when You would come, You would guide us into all truth. Do that work here today that the Lord Jesus may be satisfied. We ask it in His Name. Amen.

We have said that the whole of the New Testament is occupied with one thing in three parts — the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and that every one of the twenty-seven parts of the New Testament contains some particular aspect of those three things. We went on to see how that is true in the Gospel by Matthew, and now we are going to see this in the Gospel by Mark.

Now I am going to ask you to look at quite a number of passages:

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

Those are the first words in this Gospel. Now we turn to the last words, in chapter 16:20:

“And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed.”

“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:12).

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministration, taking with them John whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:25).

“And when they were at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John as their attendant” (Acts 13:5).

“Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem” (Acts 13:13).

“And after some days Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us return now and visit the brethren in every city wherein we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they fare. And Barnabas was minded to take with them John also, who was called Mark” (Acts 15:37–38).

“Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is useful to me for ministering” (2 Timothy 4:11).

“She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you: and so doth Mark my son” (1 Peter 5:13).

Who Was Mark?

Those passages give the life story of Mark and we hardly need to take time to ask: Who was Mark? His full name was John Mark, and he was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10, R.V.). Now I want you to remember these details that I am giving you, for there is a significance bound up with very one of them. He was a cousin of Barnabas, and we shall have more to say about that presently. We know nothing about his father, but we do know that his mother owned the upper room in Jerusalem, and there was a lot of history bound up with that upper room! It was probably the room in which the Lord had the Last Supper before He died. John Mark knew all about that! He certainly knew all that happened in Jerusalem, at least during the last week of our Lord's life. There was a Christian man who lived in the first half of the second century, whose name was Papias, and he wrote this: “Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, as many as he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord.” There is a very great deal to be said about that, as we shall see in a minute.

At that point, then, we want to recognize a very important principle. If you forget everything else, remember this. We are speaking about the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, and we must recognize that those three things were written in the lives of the Lord's servants. Mark did not only write the history: he WAS that history. The history of Jesus Christ was very largely written in the experience of Mark, and that is what we are going to see.

Let us recognize that when the Lord gets hold of our lives, He does not just make us talkers about Him, nor does He just make us writers of books about Him. He writes HIMSELF in our experience and such are the only true teachers and preachers. I know that I say a very responsible thing when I say that, but it is essential that when we speak or write about the Lord Jesus people see Him behind our words. That is why the Lord Jesus makes spiritual history in our experience. When we come to this man, John Mark, we have to see the man behind his Gospel, and that is why we read all those passages about his history.

The Nature of the Gospel by Mark

Let us begin by looking at the nature of his Gospel. Here we come upon a young man in a big hurry! He is very eager to get things done. He has no time for chronology, and times and places do not matter very much with him. His whole disposition is: let us get on with the work! This young man has only three words in his vocabulary. You read the Gospel and you will find them: 'straightway!' Have you noticed how often Mark uses that word? 'Straightway... and straightway...', and he goes on like that. The second word is 'immediately', and the third is 'forthwith'. Thirteen chapters begin with the word 'and'. You see, this young man is getting on with it.

John Mark does not give us any genealogy, nor introduction, but he begins at once: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ". It is the shortest of all the Gospels, but he puts into a short space a very great deal of material. He gives us just enough facts for action, so much so, that scholars believe that Matthew and Luke built their Gospels on Mark. And you notice the last words in his Gospel: "They went forth, and preached". This young man is getting on with the work! His idea is to get things done as quickly as possible.

That is our foundation. Now we begin on the message, which comes out of several things. Firstly, his title: "they had John as their minister", or, in other words, "as their attendant". They had John Mark to assist them in the work; he was a servant to the ministry. Just remember that as we go on.

■ John Mark on Trial

Then as to his history. The first thing that we have about John Mark's history is that he was put on trial. He was given an opportunity — "Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem... taking with them John whose surname was Mark". That provided this young man with a great opportunity. He was on probation. He had the opportunity of proving himself, and proving himself in difficulty.

■ John Mark A Failure

Secondly, John Mark was a failure. He could not stand up to the situation, so he went home. That nice upper room in Jerusalem was much more comfortable than this life with the apostles! So Luke says that "John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem". John Mark a failure.

Do any of you here feel that you have been a failure? Well, the story does not finish there. We come to the third doing, which is

■ John Mark Recovered

Why the failure? We have said that things were too difficult, but why were they too difficult? It would seem that John Mark's beginning in the work was without an adequate foundation. How did it come about that John Mark ever went with Barnabas and Paul? Do you notice the order in which I put the names? Barnabas and Paul! That order will be changed presently... but did John Mark go on a basis of family interest? Dear old Uncle Barnabas! And dear old Uncle Barnabas did want to give his dear young cousin an opportunity and it was out of family sentimentality that he wanted Mark to go with them.

Do you think that I am reading something into this? It was this very personal relationship which resulted in the separation of Barnabas and Paul. John Mark went into the work on someone else's experience and not on his own. I do want you to get the picture right! We know that Barnabas was a very loving man. He had a large heart. You remember the story of Barnabas! Paul, on one occasion said: "Even Barnabas was carried away" (Galatians 2:13) — 'You wouldn't think that Barnabas would ever be carried away!' And John Mark was captivated by this large-hearted, sentimental uncle. He was captivated by some strong, loving personality, and he was not captivated by Jesus Christ. His foundation was some man and not the Lord, and anything like that is bound to break down sooner or later. Do you remember what we said about Matthew? His message is the absolute foundation of Christianity, because it is the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, and that was the weakness in the life of John Mark. Uncle Barnabas was lord! And the very best men are not good enough to go through this battle.

Well, the point is this: the absolute necessity for a personal experience of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is a very dangerous thing to put a young man in responsibility if he has not got that experience! That is the ground of proving ourselves. Policy must never take the place of principle. Diplomacy says: 'Give the young man a chance', but principle says: 'Let only approved people be put into responsibility.'

Well, we see that Mark broke down on natural grounds, but he came to victory when he came under the mastery of the Lord Jesus. He could never have written this Gospel if that were not true. All his enthusiasm in this Gospel is to speak about the glory of the Lord Jesus, and nowhere do you find him speaking about what a wonderful uncle he had. It is always about what a wonderful Lord he had, and that meant a great change. We began with him as an attendant, and we end with him as a partner. He is not now just a busy servant, he is now a partner in the firm. He has passed from being unprofitable to being "profitable" — and that is the word that the great apostle Paul used about John Mark in the end: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11, A.V.). What a big change! Do you want just to be an attendant, or do you want to be a partner in the gospel? One who is just doing a lot of things, or one who is carrying heavy responsibility? Well, we are getting nearer to the message.

The Place Which the Gospel by Mark Occupies

The next thing is the place which Mark's Gospel occupies, and this again is a very significant thing. You know that Mark's Gospel was the first Gospel to be written. It was written before Matthew, before Luke and before John. Why then was it not given the first place? This is not natural at all. Seeing that it was the first Gospel to be written, surely it ought to have the first place! But the Holy Spirit knew what He was doing. He never works on natural lines, but on spiritual lines, and that is a different order from man's way of doing things.

So Mark has second place, and, oh! HERE is the message! All service and activity must come out of authority and submission. Matthew first: the authority of Jesus Christ and His absolute Lordship. Mark second: all service comes out of submission to the Lord Jesus. All action must follow the mastery of Jesus Christ. What is the chief characteristic of a true servant of the Lord? It is meekness. That is true of the Lord Jesus. Do you remember John 13, when He laid aside His robe girded Himself with a towel, the symbol of the bondsman, poured water into a basin, and then He — the Lord of glory, through Whom and by Whom all things were created — now divested of everything, was on His knees, washing the feet of sinful men! He was right when He said: "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29)! Was there ever one who served the Lord more fully?

We have said that Mark was very closely connected with Peter in his writing, and I wonder if you remember the spiritual connection between these two? The Lord Jesus said something to Peter that he never forgot, and when he was about to be executed he said: "even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me" (2 Peter 1:14). When and where did the Lord signify that to Peter? What was it that the Lord showed him? 'Simon, when you were young you girded yourself and went wheresoever you wanted to go. You took your life into your own hands and did as you liked. When you are old another will gird you and carry you where you would not go' (John 21:18). There you have the change between the old Simon and Peter in the end. We know that the whole history of Peter, when the Lord was here was of one who was wanting to have his own way all the time. Sometimes he would even tell the Lord that He was wrong! In other words he said: 'Lord, You are wrong in that! Lord, You don't know what You are saying!' This man must have a very deep history, for the government must be taken out of his hands and put into other hands. From being a dictator he must be a bondsman, and we know the story of how that happened: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not: and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). True service comes out of submission.

So both Peter and Mark embody the principle of subjection to the Lordship of Christ. I like that little fragment which we read in Peter's Letter. It is a very tender reference to John Mark: "She that is in Babylon... saluteth you: and so doth Mark my son". There is a lot of history in that!

Well, now I am going to say a thing which is very difficult to say. You may not all understand it, but I will try to make it simple. It is always a very perilous thing to sublimate the soul. Now you do not understand that, but let me explain. It is possible to put soulish emotion in the place of spiritual feeling and soulish emotion is just sentimentality. It is that kind of emotion which people call love: 'Oh, my dear cousin John Mark, I do want you to come with me into the Lord's work! You know I love you very much, and I am quite sure that your dear mother in Jerusalem would like you to be a minister. Come along, Mark, and I will introduce you to Paul and get him to agree to your coming.' Of course, that is all very lovely, but it is not spirituality. That is false spirituality, what I have called the sublimation of the soul. It is mistaking the soul for the spirit, and in that there is no deep brokenness of soul. Do you see what I mean?

Well, what does all this have to do with the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ? John Mark has shown us in his Gospel how very active the Lord Jesus was, how tireless He was in doing the will of His Father. There were times when they had no opportunity even for taking their food. Mark says: 'Straightway... immediately... forthwith... they went forth' and that is the story of Jesus. No, there is no laziness about the Lord Jesus! Paul's words were very fully fulfilled in His case: "Always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Jesus was wholly committed to the work of His Father, but — and it is a big 'but' — there was no one on this earth ever who was more in subjection to the will of His Father. Two words sum up the work of the Lord Jesus: submission and dependence. He said: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day" (John 9:4). Yes, that is true, but He never did one work without first asking His Father if He should do it. For everything that He did, and every place to which He went, He asked the Father's guidance. With us it all seems so necessary, and the situation is so needy, and the soul says: 'You ought to do it', but not with Jesus. Do you remember the three temptations in the wilderness? They all seemed so reasonable and necessary, but never did necessity or reason govern the Lord Jesus. He was joined to heaven by the anointing Spirit. Why should the Son of God need to pray? Because He was dependent upon His Father. For guidance, for what He should do, He always referred to the Father, and for strength to do it He had to live by the Father.

That principle was written in the history of John Mark. It did not mean that either the Lord Jesus or John Mark did less because they were dependent upon the Father. I think they did much more, and they did much better, and their work remains to this day because "whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

I wonder if you have got the message of John Mark? Let me say to my younger brothers: Be John Marks in the last situation. Be utterly committed to Jesus Christ, and He will make you a very useful partner in the Kingdom.

Lord, with all this that has been said, the one thing that we ask for is an impression. We may not remember all things, but make this deep impression on us — that a life wholly submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ will be a very fruitful life. Make all our hearts Thy throne and reign over us, Lord Jesus. Amen.

CHAPTER THREE

In the Gospel by Luke

We do have very much for which to praise Thee, Lord, and our sense of continued need does not take from our thanksgiving. We do have to testify that Thou has been very merciful and very faithful with us. Having received the help which comes from God, we continue unto this day and while we have further requests to make, we do make them with thanksgiving. We bring, therefore, our petition this morning that we may have a fresh help from the Lord. We have our meetings, our ministries, we have our songs to sing, we have the blessing of fellowship but all this, Lord, will only pass with the time unless Thou dost an eternal work. We, therefore, ask that You will do an eternal work today. Do that which will remain in us all our life here and which will be shown in fruit in the life to come. Have mercy upon our foolishness, have mercy upon our weakness and help us to speak and to hear unto eternal profit. We do ask this for the glory of Thy dear Son, the Lord Jesus, Amen.

Luke 3:23, 28:

“And Jesus himself, when he began, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli... the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God”.

By way of linking up with what we have already been talking about, let me remind you that we have said that the whole of the New Testament is occupied with three things — the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God — and we have said that every one of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament contains some aspect of that mission, that meaning and that message of Jesus Christ. That is, the whole New Testament presents Jesus Christ in three ways. Then we proceeded to see some of these aspects in the New Testament books. In Matthew’s Gospel we saw the foundation of all Christianity, which is the absolute Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ. In Mark we saw the activity of the Lord Jesus as under the government of His Father. Working backward, we saw that all work FOR God must come out of subjection TO God. Of course, there is a great deal more to be said about both of those Gospels.

Now we go on to the third of these Gospels, the Gospel by Luke.

Who was Luke?

We must ask: Who was Luke? because we can only arrive at the message as we know the man. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that God’s method is always to pass on His message through the spiritual history of the messenger; not to get a man to go to the library and study books, but to make the messenger the book. People have to be able to read the messenger and see the message of Christ in him. I think I dare not apply that any more closely!

This is particularly true in the case of Luke. We know that he was a companion of the Apostle Paul. He joined Paul at a certain time and in a certain place, and was his fellow-traveller for a great deal of the time of his ministry, and then, at the last, in the prison in Rome, Paul wrote: “Only Luke is with me” (2 Timothy 4:11). We know from the Letter to the Colossians that Luke was a physician, for Paul speaks of him as “Luke, the beloved physician” (4:14). I think there is a great deal bound up with that, for it is a little side-light on a lot more. You know that the Apostle Paul is the only apostle who speaks about the Church as ‘the Body of Christ’, and in many ways he likens the Church to the physical body. He speaks of the members of the Body as hands and feet and ears and eyes, with all the members dependent upon one another, needing one another, and all making one Body. Paul uses a Greek word which our doctor friends will appreciate: “*syndesmos*”. Syndesmology is the science of ligamentary tissues, and it is by the ligaments that all the members are joined together and function.

Now, where did Paul get all that? I can see Paul and Luke travelling along together on their long journeys and talking about the Church. Presently brother Luke says: ‘Paul, isn’t the Church very much like the human body, with all the members and all the ligaments and all the functions making one body?’ And Paul says: ‘Thank you, brother Luke. I am sure the Holy Spirit has taught me something. Some day, when I get time, I will put that in writing.’ And Paul did get a lot of time in his room in prison, and he wrote his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, which are all about the Body.

That is all very interesting, but I think there is a message in it. We have several doctors here with us, and you doctors ought to have very special light on the Body of Christ and you ought to use your knowledge for spiritual purposes. But not only doctors. Surely this says that we ought to use all our special knowledge for spiritual purposes.

Well, let us get back to Luke. We know that he wrote two volumes. Volume 1 is his Gospel, and Volume 2 is the Book of the Acts. Again, who was Luke? Well, we have said that he was a physician, but he was a Greek, the only Greek of the four Gospels. Then he tells us that he spent a time in research. Now, in order to be a doctor, of course, he had to do a lot of research; but then he turned from his medical research to research about the history of Jesus. In the first chapter of his Gospel he tells us that he made it his business to find out very carefully all that could be known about Jesus.

Now Luke, not being a Jew, did not know the Old Testament to begin with, so the first thing he had to do was to get the Old Testament and he worked his way carefully through it right from the beginning. He has put it down here in chapter 3! He takes Jesus and then he works his way right back through history, all through the Old Testament, until he reaches Adam. That was a good piece of original research! Luke says that he wanted to give his friend Theophilus the most definite, positive data concerning Jesus. Not only did he study the Old Testament closely, but he took a journey to Nazareth to do a very delicate thing — I think a thing that only a doctor could do. He went to ask the mother of Jesus about His birth, and he puts it down here. Mary told Luke the secrets of how Jesus was born.

Well, evidently Luke took more than one journey to make some enquiries. It looks as though he went to Bethlehem to see the registrar of births and deaths and to find in the records the ancestors of Jesus. Need I go into more detail? You have it all here in the first chapters of his Gospel.

So Luke was a very careful, particular student, but note this: he intended to write all this down for his friend Theophilus. That was all that he had in mind, but the Holy Spirit had a great deal more in mind. Luke did not know that he was writing the Bible. It never occurred to him that twenty centuries afterward a group of people would be in a mountain village called Aeschi studying what he wrote to his friend Theophilus, and through all the centuries between his writing it and today people have been studying his writings. The Holy Spirit had greater thoughts even than Luke's.

We never know what the Holy Spirit is going to do with what we write. Although we do not write the Bible, we may write a letter, or a little booklet, and years afterwards we discover that someone has had a blessing all through the years from that letter or from that little book. Pray whenever you write! Ask that the Holy Spirit may make you do better than you know.

Of course, all these are just fragments of the message, and not the real message. We are going to get to that very soon.

The Context of Luke's Gospel

Luke takes up Jesus with Adam, then he takes him up as a little babe, and then he lands Him in glory. Do you notice the last thing that he says in his Gospel? "And he [Jesus] led them out until they were over against Bethany: and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51).

Now we have come right on the line of the message: the son of Adam, the Babe of Bethlehem, the glorified Man in heaven. Luke takes up the Child of Adam and makes Him the glorified Man in heaven. Do you see the immense context of Luke's Gospel? The context is the whole human race from beginning to end. Adam was the first of the human race. Created by God with a great divine intention. It says concerning him: "Thou madest him to have dominion" (Psalm 8:6). God's thought in Adam for the human race was that it should have dominion. That is the revealed intention of God for the human race, but we know of the human tragedy: the human race in the first Adam lost the Divine intention. Put a circle round that word 'lost' and we have the heart of Luke's message.

The human race lost its Divine inheritance because it lost its right relationship with God. The whole of this Gospel by Luke is summed up in one verse: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (19:10). Note the terms: "The Son of MAN came to seek and to save." That is the mission and the meaning, and the message! In Adam universal dominion was lost to the human race. In Abraham an elect people lost their heritage; the seed of Abraham, AFTER THE FLESH, lost their heritage. The New Testament is largely about that. That elect race was called by God to fulfil a special vocation — a heavenly vocation amongst the nations of this world. God said to Israel: "The Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail" (Deuteronomy 28:13). They were called by God to be the governmental instrument among the nations, but that elect race lost their heavenly vocation.

"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost": lost to Adam, lost to Abraham, lost to Israel, but found in the Son of Man.

The whole of the Gospel of Luke is concentrated into one chapter, the best known chapter in the whole of the New Testament — chapter fifteen. Everyone knows what is in Luke 15! It is the chapter of lost and found things. Its setting is very significant, for it begins with these words: "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him (Jesus) for to hear him", and official Israel, in the persons of the Pharisees and the scribes, murmured: "This man receiveth SINNERS." That was a funeral march to the Pharisees

and the scribes, but it was music to the sinners' ears! Then Jesus began to speak to the Pharisees and the scribes, and he gave them these three stories: The Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Silver, and the Lost Son.

The Lost Sheep

Israel had always been called 'God's flock', and God had always been called the 'Shepherd of Israel'. Jesus takes up that thought and says, in effect: 'Israel is no longer God's flock.' Really, He is implying that Israel, like the ninety and nine, is lost in its own self-righteousness and traditional security and exclusiveness. So He enlarges the concept and says: 'I have other sheep which are not of this fold, and those other sheep are these publicans and sinners.' In the rest of the New Testament the Lord's servants are called shepherds. Peter said to the elders of the Church: "Feed the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:2), and "When the chief Shepherd shall be manifested" (1 Peter 5:4). We know that Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11) and when Israel is lost another Shepherd comes and has another flock. He makes up another flock out of Israel and out of the gentiles. Here is Luke! The new flock and the new Shepherd. From that which was lost He has found a greater flock than the one which was lost. How did this sheep get lost? The prophet Isaiah cries: "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6), and how did we go astray? How did we become lost sheep? "We have turned every one to his own way." That will take us back to the beginning of the human race when Adam chose his own way and the human race was lost.

The Lost Piece of Silver

There are many interpretations of this parable, but the most commonly accepted, and I think the right one, is this.

When a young woman was betrothed and married in Palestine her husband gave her a string of silver pieces. I expect you have seen pictures of such a young woman. You wear your necklaces round your neck, but they wore them round their foreheads. You wear a ring on your finger when you are married. Your husband gave you that when you were married and said, or meant: 'I give you this ring as a token that you are mine. I have taken you to be my own. This ring, or this string of silver pieces round your head, is the token that you have accepted me as your master and lord, and husband.'

Now there was a superstition connected with that string of silver pieces. If a woman lost it, or even one silver piece, everyone said: 'That means she has been unfaithful to her husband! She is not faithful to her marriage vows.'

Do you see the meaning of the story? Israel was the lost bride — the prophet Jeremiah said that the Lord espoused Israel to Himself, but they forfeited their honour as the Lord's bride. Israel lost the wonderful relationship of a bride to her husband, and the cry of all the prophets was that Israel was an unfaithful wife. You see what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees and the scribes? 'You have been unfaithful to your marriage vows to Jehovah! You have lost the most sacred relationship that anyone can have.' No wonder this woman is seen lighting the lamp and searching every corner of the house until she finds her lost piece of silver! Jesus enlarges the idea of the lost bride. Yes, there may be some in Israel who will be found in the Bride of the Lamb at the end, but that Bride is a bigger thing than Israel. He is making His Bride out of publicans and sinners.

I may not take the time to carry you over to the later New Testament to show you the NEW Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2), nor to speak about the marriage supper of the Lamb, but by these very references you can see that something was lost, but that which has been found is very much greater than that which was lost. The human race lost its honour because it lost its Lord, but the Revelation in the New Testament is of a Bride "without spot or blemish or any such thing" presented to the Bridegroom.

The Lost Son

Israel was formerly called 'God's son': "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, my firstborn: and I have said unto thee, Let my son go..." (Exodus 4:22-23). Israel occupied the most wonderful position that it is ever possible to occupy. There is nothing more wonderful than to be sons of God, to be those whom God Himself has begotten, to be those who have been born out of heaven, to be those who bear the Name of God, to be those whom God brings alongside of Himself and honours them to represent Him. All that, and much more, is meant by sonship.

Now the Lord Jesus, when He saw what Israel had lost, came to seek and to save that idea of God, to recover sonship. Sonship is a special Divine conception and is the dearest thing to the heart of God. Therefore it is the most wonderful thing that can ever be true of man, and it is that principle which is at the heart of this parable which we call 'The Prodigal Son'. All the wonderful privilege and honour of sonship has been despised by this prodigal. All that Divine conception has been regarded as of no account, and he goes out into the world and repudiates his sonship. Of course, he comes in the end to recognize what he has done. Jesus is very true to principle, and He makes this prodigal son say: "I have sinned AGAINST HEAVEN, and in THY SIGHT: I am no more worthy to be called thy son" (verse 21). There are principles in every one of those sentences. Israel forfeited that high position and honour. It is the PRINCIPLE of sonship that is the supreme factor governing!

Why did this son leave the father and the home? The prince of this world deceived him and told him that he could have something better in the world. Oh, that is what the great deceiver is always doing! He deceived Adam that way. He has deceived the whole human race in that way. He deceived Israel in that way: 'You can have something better in this world.' Jesus said that he was a 'liar from the beginning', and men are finding out today what a lie this world is.

The Message of a New Humanity

Now, having said all that, I have only now come to the message. What is the message of Luke? The Son of Man has come to secure a redeemed, new humanity. Paul calls Jesus 'the second man, the last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45,47). Out of Jews and gentiles Jesus is redeeming a new humanity. Listen carefully! The message of this Gospel, and of the New Testament, is this: God is not now particularly interested in Jews, nor in gentiles, nor in Protestants, nor in Roman Catholics, nor in Baptists, nor in Methodists, nor in Dutch Reformed, etc. God is not interested in those things at all! He is interested in men. All God's interest is in man, let the man be British, or Swiss, or German, or French, or any other nationality, white, black, yellow or brown. That does not matter to God, for His only concern is with MAN. Are you a man — and God called both woman and man 'one man' — and are you of the human race? God is interested in you as mankind, to take out of the nations, and out of the denominations, a people for His Name. Are you a "minister"? God is not particularly interested in you as a "minister", but He is interested in you as a man, and that is true of every other category. You do not think, do you, that because a man is a "minister", a servant of God, God lets him off when things are wrong? God does not say: 'Well, he is my servant so I will overlook all his faults.' Nor does He say: 'Oh, he, or she, is My child, so I will not take any notice of what is wrong.' No, God's concern with us is as people. The Son of MAN came to seek and to save a lost humanity, and to make Himself the Shepherd in that humanity, to make His Bride out of that humanity, and to make His sons out of that redeemed humanity.

Where do we end? Where Luke ends, with the Son of Man, as the representative of the new mankind, glorified in heaven.

I hope I have not made you tired. It is all too wonderful and too big! I could only give you a little hole through which you see a new world, but do remember that in all God's dealings with us He is seeking to make another kind of humanity.

We are cast upon Thy goodness, Lord. We did ask that eternal values might be secured in this hour. May the eternal Spirit take hold of something that has been said and turn it into eternal value for the glory of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

CHAPTER FOUR

In the Gospel by John

Lord, every day brings its fresh need. We feel that as we proceed in this thing together, our need becomes still greater. A little while and this time will be closed; therefore, it becomes so necessary that Thou dost work hard to get that which is in Thy heart. We feel that today brings a very special need. This day could be the very turning point of this conference. Lord, if Thou dost so view it, we ask for the special help that is needed. Lord, our need is for utterance — the release of the Word in us, and the release of us in the Word. Insofar as Thou dost take charge, do that today. Thou hast chosen to speak through man; but Lord, You must not leave it to the man, You must take over the man. Take Thine instruments out of their own hands into Thine. May this not be of man, but of God; we do not want anyone to ever say that it was of man. Our whole heart's desire is that everyone should say, "That was the Lord." If Thou wilt do this, all the glory will be Thine. So far as we are concerned, then, we put ourselves into Thy hands. Work and take the glory to Thyself, in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

In order to arrive at the message of John there are two things to be noted. The first: that his Gospel is the last of the New Testament writings; and the second: the times and conditions in which he wrote.

The Place of the Gospel in the New Testament

It is very important for us to note that John's Gospel was the last of the New Testament writings. If the New Testament were put together chronologically, the Gospel by John would come after the book of the Revelation, but the Holy Spirit did not arrange that. He arranged that it should come in the place where we have it, and I think we shall see His wisdom as we go along. When the Apostle John wrote his Gospel he was a very old man, with long and deep experience.

Perhaps there is a little word of warning to young people there. Young people today are inclined to despise the old people, and to say: 'Well, they have had their time. Now it is our day. They belong to yesterday; we belong to today.' Now, young people, if that is your position, you must cut out the Gospel by John from

your Bible, and I am quite sure you are not prepared to do that! When we have finished this message I hope you will be less prepared to do so.

The Times and Conditions in Which the Gospel Was Written

When John wrote his Gospel all the other Apostles had gone to be with the Lord. All the New Testament epistles had been written, all the Roman Empire had been evangelised, and all the New Testament churches had come into being. The great storms of persecution by Nero and other emperors were fading away. Even John was now released from his exile in Patmos. He was not writing the Revelation to the church which was in Ephesus, but he was writing his Gospel IN Ephesus. Jerusalem had been destroyed and the Jews had been scattered all over the world. That was the time in which John wrote his Gospel.

If we ask about the spiritual conditions of that time, we have only to read the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation. We are familiar with the letters to the seven churches in Asia, and in the majority of cases there was a state of serious spiritual decline. The Lord had to send through John messages of very serious warning. A very tragic state of spiritual declension had come about, and Christianity was very largely in a state of confusion. You only have to read John's first letter to realise that! John felt that he had to write for end times, and that the conditions which existed then would be the conditions at end times.

I do not think that we today, if we believe that we are in the end times, fail to recognise very similar conditions. There was not only a historic feature in John's writings; there was also a prophetic.

Now John was evidently very troubled about the spiritual situations, and out of that troubled heart he wrote his Gospel. The question was, and is: What is the answer to such a situation? What is the answer to the problem of spiritual declension? What is the answer to the problem of spiritual confusion? John's Gospel is the answer. In this Gospel he gives what he is convinced is the need. When you read the Gospel by John always bear these things that we have said in mind.

One of the early Christian fathers, Clement of Rome, said, "John's Gospel is the spiritual Gospel", and that definition has stuck to this Gospel all through the centuries. John set himself to write not a new book on Church order, not a book on Church traditions, nor on new ideas and ways. That is what is being done now to try to solve the problem. Many books are being published on New Testament church order, and many new ideas are being introduced into Christianity. Some of them are the most extraordinary things! You cannot even find them in the New Testament! But what did John write as the answer? He wrote on two fundamental demands, two things which do not deal with the externals, but go right to the root. To use a medical term, he wrote not to deal with symptoms but to deal with causes. The two things with which John deals in his writings are:

1. The Person and place of Jesus Christ.
2. The meaning of Jesus Christ in God's universe, the meaning of Christ in the Divine economy, or order.

If we get clear on these two things we have the answer to all spiritual problems.

The Person and Place of Jesus Christ

John begins on this matter right outside of history: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). You cannot put any date to that! Luke went right back to Adam, but John leaps back behind Adam and speaks of Jesus Christ, God's Son, in His eternal existence, before all time and before creation. Before John has finished this Gospel he will tell us that Jesus is praying to His Father, and in His prayer Jesus says: "O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). That was before the creation — a tremendous thing to remember!

If you were to read all that men have written and said about John you would certainly find yourself in great confusion. Some do not even believe that it was John who wrote this Gospel! Man in creation has brought his wonderful head over against the eternal Christ. There was a great preacher in London some years ago who preached a wonderful sermon on the greatness of God. He set forth the magnificence and glory of God, and all the people were holding their breath. They could hardly breathe for the wonder of God that was being set forth, and then the preacher pulled his gown up round him and said: "There comes down the aisle there a little man, about the size of an umbrella, and he says: "Dr. Parker, I don't believe that there is a God!" Yes, LITTLE man and the GREAT God!

Now, you see, John set himself to show how great is the Son of God: greater than man, greater than history, greater than time, and greater than all things.

Having introduced us to the Person, John proceeds to tell us that this One of whom he is writing created all things: "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made" (John 1:3). He was the creator of all things, and then John brings this One into time: the great God of eternity, the great God of creation, is now present in human form: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Then John says that this One was the creator of light. He is the very source and embodiment of light. He is the light, and the generator of light: "...the true light, which lighteth every man" (John 1:5). Later John records that Jesus said: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

Further, John says that He was the source of life: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

The Meaning of Jesus Christ in God's Universe

Now what is it that we are coming to? John always goes beyond THINGS to the PERSON, and he had one purpose in his mind when he wrote this Gospel. That purpose was to transfer EVERYTHING to Christ, so that the Gospel of John is the Gospel of the great transition.

Here we see the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in putting this Gospel where it is. Matthew is the Gospel of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, showing that all authority is vested in Jesus Christ. Mark is the message of ministry under the authority of Christ. Luke is the message concerning God's new humanity. Leap over from Luke to the book of the Acts, which takes all those three up on new resurrection ground. John comes between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts. He is the link between the two, the bridge over which they pass to the new dispensation. So John is the Gospel of the great transition. What is this transition? It has four aspects.

First, it is the transition from all the parts to one complete whole. Now, I want a whole conference on that alone! If you read the Gospel by John carefully you will find there, in the background, the history of the people of Israel. I dare not stay with all the details of that; but were Israel in the wilderness, needing bread? He said to the Jews: "Your father did eat the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (John 6:49-50). All the way through this Gospel John has in the back of his mind something in the history of Israel. I beg of you to read it in that light! These are all the parts of the Old Testament, and now John gathers them together and makes them complete in the one Person. Jesus is the completeness of all the parts of history.

Secondly, it is the transition from the historical to the eternal. John is showing an eternal significance to the historical. He is showing us a spiritual meaning in all these things in history.

Then it is the transition from the temporal, material, to the spiritual.

And *fourthly*, it is the transition from the earthly to the heavenly.

You remember the repeated phrase of the Lord Jesus in John's Gospel: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you...' How often the Lord Jesus uses that phrase! Most truly, EMPHATICALLY, I say unto you...' And what was the connection of that double exclamation? "Verily, verily, ...I AM." "I am the true vine" (John 15:1). Israel was called 'God's vine', but failed to give Him the fruit that He sought. Israel was a false vine, but Jesus takes that over to Himself and says, most emphatically: "I am the TRUE vine." Israel was God's flock of sheep, and He was their shepherd. Jesus says: 'Verily, verily... I am the TRUE shepherd'. The manna in the wilderness did not keep Israel alive for ever. "Verily, verily, ...I am the bread of life... this is the bread which cometh down out of heaven" (John 6:47-50). Everything in John's Gospel is a transfer to Jesus Christ.

The New Dispensation

Now we must come close to the real message. All this that John wrote was an argument for one thing: he was making it perfectly clear that the new dispensation which had come is a SPIRITUAL dispensation. Jerusalem had been the centre of government for the old Israel. Now Jerusalem has gone, but have men been left without a centre of government? Have we no seat of government? Why is John continually recording that Jesus was saying: 'I return unto the Father'? For this very thing! The seat, and the centre, of government for the Lord's people is now in heaven. It is neither in Jerusalem nor in Rome. The Church has no headquarters on this earth. You may do what you can to have a government for the Church on this earth, but you are contradicting this fundamental truth. Paul says that Jerusalem is above, and we are to get all our direction from above. That is how it was in the book of the Acts — the headquarters had gone from Jerusalem. Where was the headquarters of the New Testament Church? Some people have said 'Antioch', but I cannot agree. Even at Antioch they were going to their headquarters in heaven. It was there that the Holy Spirit said: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:2). John is transferring the city from the earth to heaven, and is showing that all that Jerusalem had been in the old dispensation was true of the Lord Jesus in the new.

I ask you: If it were like that now, would it not solve a lot of the problems? Would it not get rid of a lot of the confusion in Christianity? The prayer meeting, not the board room, is the way of the Church's government. Have the churches declined, as they did in the time of John? What is John going to say about this? He will teach us that the Church and the churches are no more than the measure of Christ in people. Quite early in his Gospel the Lord Jesus will say to the woman of Samaria: 'The hour cometh, and now is, when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. Not in the great temple at Jerusalem, nor in the great Samaritan temple in Samaria, but God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit' (John 4:21-24).

What, then, is the Church? It is not a place, nor a building, nor a congregation, nor so many men and women gathered together. It is just the measure of Christ that is there in those people. If it is only two or three 'in Christ', that is the representation of the Church. CHRIST is the Church, and it is only the measure of Christ in people that makes the Church. The Church is more or less represented according to the measure of Christ. Confusion, yes, spiritual decline, yes; but bring Christ in and all that is dealt with. If we will re-

main on the ground of Christ most of our problems will be solved. Has Jesus gone to the Father? Yes, He has, but the Holy Spirit has come in His place. You see, we are keeping very close to John's Gospel.

Now, that is the nature of this dispensation. It is wholly a spiritual dispensation. But John does not only tell us that as to the nature, but he tells us that this dispensation is superior to all other dispensations. How superior this dispensation is to the one when Jesus was here on this earth! I wonder if you believe that. We have a little children's hymn, and, of course, we like to sing it with the children:

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His fold:
I should like to have been with them then."

Now that is very sentimental! And it is very lovely. And lots of people still go to Palestine to see the places where Jesus was. While they are there they are living twenty centuries ago! Would you prefer to be back there with Jesus on earth rather than to be here today? Now think about that! You have missed the message of John if that is what you think. John is telling us that we are in a far superior time to the time when Jesus was on earth.

There was one word that Jesus was very fond of using: 'Greater.' You remember Jacob and his ladder — his dream when he saw a ladder from earth to heaven, with angels of God ascending and descending, and the Lord above it. Well, that was very wonderful, and out of that dream came the twelve tribes of Israel. But to Nathanael He said: "Thou shalt see GREATER things than these." 'You will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, and this will produce a far greater Israel than the earthly Israel.'

Works In the New Dispensation

But the word that I really want to get to at the end is in chapter 14:12. Jesus has been speaking about the works that He has been doing, and then He says: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father." In the dispensation that follows the earthly life of the Lord Jesus greater works are going to be done than those He did when He was here. What were the works that He did?

At the Pool of Bethesda He raised a poor, impotent man and made him walk. That man was thirty-eight years old. They did not live so long in those days, and I wonder if you realise that even the Apostle Paul was only a little over sixty when he died. This poor man at the Pool of Bethesda only had, at most, a few more years to live, and then he died and went into his grave. 'Greater works than these shall ye do.' What are the greater works? In this context it is a far greater thing to put a man or woman on their spiritual feet than on their physical feet! It is a wonderful thing to see how we are kept by the power of God, for in the course of the Christian life there are many times when we might easily collapse. How often we have felt: 'I cannot go on any longer!', and yet, after many, many such times, we are still going on. Oh, the miracle of lives we have known which seem many times to be going to give up, but they are still going on. The spiritual is the greater work than the physical. Oh, the miracle of the walking power of the Holy Spirit! The same thing is true of all these other works of Jesus. Did He open the eyes of the blind? It is a far greater thing to have your spiritual eyes opened! Spiritual knowledge and spiritual intelligence are far superior to the natural. Did He work a miracle of feeding the thousands in the wilderness? Well, friends, would you not sooner have spiritual food than your breakfast this morning? We go on in this wilderness of a world, and the world can provide us with no food. It is a far greater work to provide spiritual food than to provide natural bread. What was the greatest work that Jesus did? After all these works, He crowns them with the raising of Lazarus. I suppose it would be thought to be very wonderful if we could raise the dead physically, but is it not a far greater work to raise the spiritually dead? 'Greater works than these shall ye do.' This is a greater dispensation than when Jesus was on the earth.

This is the message of John: the transition from the earthly to the heavenly, from the natural to the spiritual, and this will solve the problems and will answer the questions.

The Need of Spiritual Understanding

But when we have said all that: John knew one thing when he wrote his Gospel. He called all these works of Jesus 'signs', and he implied that the great need of this dispensation is spiritual understanding. Any ordinary person can see the thing that is done. The Jews saw the things that Jesus did, but they were not saved because they did not have the spiritual intelligence to understand the deeper meaning. The great need is spiritual intelligence. The Holy Spirit has come to be spiritual intelligence. May He give us spiritual intelligence so that we understand the true nature of the dispensation in which we live!

We know, Lord, that it is this very thing that creates the difficulty. Oh, Lord, we do pray that we may be brought into the superiority of this dispensation, the superiority of spiritual understanding, the superiority of spiritual power — the power of Thy resurrection. Open our understanding to what we have been seeking to show this morning. Make this message alive. We pray that it may not be so many words, that it may be light and life. Watch over the word and watch over our hearts. In the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

CHAPTER FIVE

In the Book of the Acts

Lord, we have just asked Thee to do some very big things in us. We have asked Thee to completely change our minds about things. We have asked Thee to give us an altogether new idea of liberty and strength. We have prayed that Thou wouldest completely reverse our disposition. We wonder what will happen to us if Thou dost answer that prayer. All we can say to Thee is that we agree with it and we ask Thee to do these things. Make us Thy captives, Lord, in order to be conquerors, help us to deliver our souls. Lord, do Thy work in us, take hold of Thy Word this morning and use Thy Word to work in us. Lord, we do pray that what we hear this morning may be the Word of the Lord. Thy Word is like a sword that pierces, Thy Word is like a hammer that breaks in pieces, Thy Word is like a fire that melts, Thy Word is like a lamp unto our feet. Thy Word is like ointment poured forth. If Thou dost break us by Thy Word, so heal us by it. We put ourselves into Thy hands do with us as is good unto Thee. In the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

The importance of this book is best recognised if we were to estimate the importance of it being in the New Testament at all. I wonder if you have ever thought of what the New Testament would be without this book! Perhaps at some time you would like to read the New Testament and leave this book out. There would be a whole lot of questions that you could never answer, and you would be in complete confusion. This book, therefore, is of very great importance to the whole New Testament.

Historically, it is Luke's second volume, and it gives us the beginning and the spread of Christianity. It tells us how all the rest of the New Testament came to be written. That is the historical aspect but spiritually there is another aspect, and that aspect is backward and forward.

In the first words of this book Luke tells us of what happened in the past — that he informed his friend of what Jesus began to do and to teach. That is the backward look. Then Luke proceeds to look forward. In effect, he says: 'Now I am going to tell you what Jesus continued to do.' But there is this particular thing that we must note: all that is in this book is the securing of the ground for the rest of the New Testament. All that is in the rest of the New Testament is built upon the ground of this book. After Acts the New Testament is occupied with the doctrine, or the teaching, and the book of the Acts is the story of how the ground was secured for the teaching.

As to the backward look, this book of the Acts takes up Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and makes those four Gospels actual. Now I want to remind you of one of the first things that we said at the beginning of these messages. You remember that we said that the best way of understanding the New Testament is to read a book and then having read it, to stand back and ask yourselves the question: 'What is the main impression that has come to me by reading that book?' This is of particular importance with regard to the book of the Acts, for when we stand back, after reading it, we see the Holy Spirit making the Gospels real and actual in history. Pentecost truly governs this book, but it will be well for us if we stand back again from that word 'Pentecost', and if we ask ourselves this question:

What Was Pentecost?

Can your minds work quickly enough to give an answer? If I asked you now just to put down on a piece of paper what Pentecost was, I wonder what you would say! I know what a lot of you would say: 'It was the advent of the Holy Spirit.' You would be quite right. Some of you would say: 'It was the baptism of the Holy Spirit', for that is the meaning of the word 'Pentecost' for a great many people, but when you press the question closer, what was, and what is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit? You know what a lot of people would say. It is not necessary for me to discuss that! However, what I am getting at is this: there is an altogether inadequate conception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost has come to mean a very much smaller thing than it really is, and that is what I want to show in the first place. Not one of us will doubt the necessity of the Holy Spirit. Call it 'Pentecost', 'the gift of the Holy Spirit', 'the baptism of the Holy Spirit', or what you like, but, really, what was it?

Taking Up the Gospel by Matthew

Firstly, the coming of the Holy Spirit was taking up the Gospel by Matthew. What have we seen to be the message of the Gospel by Matthew? We have seen it to be the absolute Lordship and Authority of Jesus Christ — and that is the beginning of Pentecost. That is the first meaning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and we do not know the meaning of the Holy Spirit until we recognise that. Now read the book of the Acts in the light of Matthew! "They... went everywhere preaching..." (Acts 8:4), and what was the chief note in their preaching? Jesus Christ is LORD! (Acts 10:36.) The absolute Lordship and Authority of Jesus Christ runs from the beginning to the end of the book of the Acts.

This is the primary test of our having the Holy Spirit, which ought not to be something subsequent to our conversion. This is not the extra gift, nor the second blessing. You look into this book and see! From the very beginning these people who came to the Lord came into His Lordship. They accepted Jesus Christ as

LORD, and they came under His authority, and that was the secret of the power of the early Church. I know it was that that cost them their very lives. If you stand on the ground of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ something is going to happen, but do you want nothing to happen? Yes, things happen in this book. All hell was stirred to its depths, all men were compelled to give a reaction of some kind, and all heaven was very interested. The supreme thing in heaven and earth and hell is the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and making Jesus Christ Lord is the first work of the Holy Spirit in a life. I do not just want to say these things; I do want them to be applied. I hope that no one will read this message without making Jesus Christ Lord in a new way, without making Him Lord in all the practical things of your life and in the way you behave in this world, in everything that people see about you, so that you are captivated men and women, young and old. So the book of the Acts takes up Matthew.

Taking Up the Gospel by Mark

It also takes up Mark. What is the message of Mark? It is that a life under the authority of Jesus Christ is marked by a consuming concern that other people should know the Lord, a great passion that others should receive the Lord and that He should have a full place in them. You remember John Mark? I hope you will never forget him! That young man in a hurry! He had lost time. He returned from the work, and there was a period in his life which was lost to the Lord Jesus. Then he was recovered and his whole spirit from that time was: 'I must make good all the time that I have lost', and so John Mark is: "Straightway... straightway... straightway..."

John Mark, therefore, is the representative of a life under the authority of Jesus Christ, and he takes the spirit of Jesus Christ and says: 'I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.' Now you see in the book of the Acts how that spirit is found. "They... went everywhere preaching", and if you say to me: 'Well, of course, that applies to the apostles', may I remind you that it applied to all the believers that were in Jerusalem "scattered abroad" (Acts 8:4); when the hammer of persecution came down on the Church at Jerusalem and the believers were scattered everywhere. The Greek word for what they were doing is very interesting. I notice that our interpreters have got into difficulty with this word! Well, if you don't understand the word, you know the thing. You can see it on the street any day, and after every meeting of a conference. Two or more people get together, and what are they doing? Well, they are just... GOSSIPING! That is the word. These believers went everywhere just gossiping — gossiping the Gospel. They were talking, talking everywhere about Jesus Christ. That is actually what is said about them. That is in the book of the Acts — but that is the later spirit of John Mark in Acts. He is moving everywhere and is talking about Jesus Christ. Do you see that this book of the Acts does take up Matthew and Mark?

May I just stop here to say something especially to my younger friends? It is quite evident that after his restoration John Mark was a released young man. Before that, although he was a disciple, he was just tied up, and his relationship to the Lord Jesus was in severe limitation.

Now what I want to say is this: You will never get your spiritual release until you become one who testifies. This is a law of the spiritual life. I do not present myself to you as an example. You may not believe it, but I was a young man once! I came to the Lord when I was in my teens, but for quite a time my spiritual life was locked up. Yes, I loved the Lord, I had given my heart to Him, but my life was all tied up until the day came when I stepped into the middle of an open-air meeting and gave my simple testimony to a large crowd of people. It was an awful business! I went home saying: 'I will never do that again!', but it turned out to be my release, and from that time my spiritual life was completely free. That is when I started my preaching life, and that has gone on to this day. The point is that you will never get full release in your spiritual life until you tell someone else about it.

I had a great friend, and he was a great soul winner. I was not very much impressed with his preaching, but he was a wonderful personal worker, and I am sure that in eternity a great number of people will owe their salvation to that man. Now he learned this principle. One day he went out and was wondering where he was to go to meet some souls and tell them about the Lord Jesus. He was just passing the army barracks, and inside the gate he saw two soldiers. One of them was on guard; he had his gun over his shoulder and was marching up and down. On the other side there was another soldier, just standing and watching. He had the stripes on his arm, and was just watching to see that things were done properly. My friend walked in through the gate, and when the soldier came to stand still, quite contrary to regulations, my friend asked him if he knew the Lord Jesus. Well, the result was that this soldier accepted the Lord Jesus. My friend said to him: 'Now that you have accepted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, shout over to that other man and tell him what you have done!' He had much experience, and he knew quite well that while we keep it to ourselves we are not free. If you are an apostle, go everywhere preaching the Lord Jesus. If you are just a simple believer, talk about the Lord Jesus everywhere and you will be a true John Mark. The book of the Acts takes up that principle of the Gospel by Mark.

Taking Up the Gospel by Luke

What about the Gospel by Luke? What did we say about that? We saw that the message of Luke is the message of a new humanity, a new kind of man, and this new kind of man is after Christ. It is not mankind according to Adam, but mankind according to Christ. Is it necessary for us to point that out in the book of

the Acts? The work of the Holy Spirit is not only to make Jesus Christ Lord and to make us active witnesses to the Lord Jesus; it is also to make us LIKE the Lord Jesus. It is to reproduce the Lord Jesus in us, and this is the proof as to whether we have received the Holy Spirit. This is what Pentecost means: a change in our nature from Adam to Christ.

Taking Up the Gospel by John

And then we pass on to John. You remember what we said about John's message? Everything in this present dispensation is of a heavenly character and is spiritual in its nature. I will gather that up into one word. Near the end of John's Gospel he gives us that wonderful prayer of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is praying, is pouring out His heart to His Father, and the burden of His prayer is these men the Father had given Him. He is praying for them, and what does He say to the Father about them? "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). That is New Testament Christianity, and the work of the Holy Spirit is to make that true of every one of us — "not of this world". Romans 12:2 says: "Be not conformed to this world", and do you know what the literal words are? "Do not take the fashion of this world." That is very searching!

Well, I must leave that word with you, especially to the younger people. Are you trying to be like the people of this world in your fashion? I will say no more, but I will ask you to ask your own heart about that. You will never overcome the world on its own ground. The Church has tried to do that, and the world has defeated it. Our victory in the book of the Acts is on the ground that we are not of this world. So the Acts takes up John, and, as I said, makes ACTUAL Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Teaching For the Spiritual Life

When the ground has been secured and men and women have responded to that fourfold message, then the teaching follows. We have the forward look from Acts. All these people in all these places mentioned in the Acts will receive the teaching for their spiritual life.

Now note this again. The teaching demands the position. Unless you are in the position the teaching will do you no good. You may have it all in your notebook, or, if you have a good memory, you may have it all in your head, but it will do you no good whatever unless you are in the position. We can only understand the teaching, and grow up into Christ, if Jesus Christ is absolute Lord. There are multitudes of Christians who have just come to a standstill in their Christian life. You try to talk to them about the fuller things of Christ and they look at you as though you were talking in a language they had never heard before. They do not understand what you are talking about. Well, they have come to the Lord, but for them the Lord is not absolute Lord, and therefore they cannot understand the teaching. They are still babes in Christ. For spiritual understanding and spiritual growth complete committal to the Lord Jesus is necessary.

Again, we cannot understand the teaching or grow up into Christ unless we are very practical in our Christian life. That is John Mark — being very practical about the Christian life. Not just theory, nor doctrine, but practical life. That is essential to spiritual knowledge and spiritual growth.

Then we cannot understand the teaching or grow up into Christ unless we are dedicated to be like Christ. That is Luke — manhood after Christ. If your heart is wholly set upon being like the Lord Jesus He will give you an open heaven, that is, the Holy Spirit will come and teach you and work in you according to Christ.

Finally, we cannot understand the teaching, nor grow up into Christ unless we are not conformed to this world. There is really no such thing as a 'worldly Christian', that is, from the New Testament standpoint, but actually there are many Christians who are still of this world. Do you know, dear friends that this world lies under a curse? Do you believe that of the devil? He was cursed in the Garden of Eden. The symbol of Satan is the serpent, and the serpent has no wings — it cannot get off the earth. The symbolism is that this earth is a cursed thing, and the Scripture says that "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). If you touch this world you touch death, that is, spiritual death. The Word of God knows what it is talking about, and therefore, with very great meaning, it says: "Be not conformed to this world." If you do Satan will make a mess of your life. Brother Watchman Nee always spoke of this as 'the earth touch'. If he saw any Christian who was not going on with the Lord, who had no spiritual power in his life, he said: 'There must be an earth touch somewhere.'

Does this all sound very serious? Well, it is serious. It is not my desire to be hard, but I am trying to help you to see the way of a true Holy Spirit life, and so I come back to what I said about Pentecost. Do you see how much greater Pentecost is than what people think it to be? This is what Pentecost meant in the book of the Acts, and this is what it will always mean. So I say to you what the Apostle Paul said: "Think on these things."

Once more we pray, oh Lord, make this all very real to us. Oh, teach us what it meaneth, make this true and real in our lives. May the presence of the Holy Spirit in us mean these things. We can only ask Thee to do it. Thy Word has been given, ours is the responsibility to respond to it. So help us, Lord! In the Name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

CHAPTER SIX

In the Letter to the Romans

Our hearts are very much out to Thee, oh Lord, concerning this hour. Thou hast been very gracious to us during these days. We can see that having received the help which comes from God, we continue until now. Our confidence is that having helped, Thou would still help. However great the help Thou has given, we are still in need. We are very ready to confess our dependency upon Thee; take account of this, we pray, for unless the Lord helps us, we are helpless. If it could please Thee, give a very special blessing this afternoon. Crown this ministry with something very definite. Again, it is the voice of the Lord that we want to hear. Deeper than the speaking and the interpreting, may we all be given an ear to hear the voice of the Lord. In Thy great mercy and faithfulness answer us, we ask this all for the glory of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In this series of messages our object has been to reemphasize the true nature of Christianity, and we have gathered that into three things — the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ. In the four Gospels we found the foundation position of Christianity, and in the book of the Acts we saw that position preached by the Apostles and the scattered believers. There that position was demonstrated by the Holy Spirit by signs and wonders — what the New Testament calls the ‘powers’, that is, the many aspects of the power of the Holy Spirit. And it might be as well for us to note that that was the object of the Holy Spirit’s working at that time — to demonstrate that the message was true, to give evidence of the truth of the foundation of Christianity. My own conviction is that the signs and wonders relate to beginnings, to the foundation position. They do not belong to the later development of spiritual life, but to the elementary stages of Christianity.

Then in the book of the Acts the position proclaimed was accepted in various degrees. What was proclaimed was received with varying degrees of understanding. Some received the message very earnestly, with a whole-hearted committal to the position, and among these were the Thessalonians, the Ephesians and the Philippians. These, and those like them, made a very whole-hearted committal to the Lord, but the response of some was a compromise between Judaism and Christianity. Their attitude was that Christianity was only a plus to Judaism, and they very largely remained Christian Jews. Thus they had failed to recognize the true nature of Christianity. There were others who made a response, but with a compromise with paganism, that is, they brought over their paganism into Christianity. Of these the Corinthians are an example.

Now the letters of the New Testament were intended to explain and reaffirm the true nature of Christianity, on the one side to correct the misunderstandings, and on the other side to recover from declension. Such were the letters of John.

This is the way in which we should read the New Testament: A fundamental position made clear — that is the Gospels. A fundamental position demonstrated — that is the book of the Acts. Then there follows the section dealing with fundamental experience. The position is not enough: the experience must follow. So the later part of the New Testament has to do with the basic experience of the position, that is, the true nature of Christianity in spiritual experience. I will not go back over the Gospels, but let me illustrate from the Gospel by Matthew.

We have seen that the message of the Gospel by Matthew is the absolute Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ. Now many people believed that as a doctrine, and accepted that as a position at the beginning of their Christianity — as far as they understood it — but there can be a very great difference between BELIEVING that Jesus Christ is Lord and EXPERIENCING that truth. Many of these letters in the New Testament show that the people accepted it as doctrine but did not live accordingly.

We are now going to look at the letter to the Romans, for this is a very clear example of what I have been saying. It is the foundation of Christian EXPERIENCE, a correction of misunderstanding and an explanation of the true foundation of experience.

Right Standing With God

Many definitions have been given to this letter. The disciples of Luther and his school have their own name for it. The reformers always called this letter to the Romans by one name, and most of you will know what that is, but I am going to use one title for this letter. It is a phrase found in a later translation: “Right standing with God” — a position which is absolutely acceptable to God. Everybody will agree that it is essential to true spiritual experience! That is not only the position of the New Testament — it is the issue of the whole Bible. Before God can do anything in any life there must be a right position with Him. You will remember how often in the Old Testament God had to stand back from men until they got into a right position with Him, and that is brought out so clearly in the New Testament. It decides everything as to whether God is going on with us and we are going on with God. If God is not going on with you, then examine your position in relation to God. He is waiting for something, and that is your adjustment to Him.

Let us take a very simple example in the Old Testament. You remember the Prophet Elijah. After that great event on Mount Carmel Jezebel, the queen, threatened his life. Now we are not going to blame Elijah, for if we do we shall be blaming ourselves! Jezebel threatened his life, and then Elijah fled for his life. He fled to try and save his life. The next thing we see is Elijah under a juniper tree and saying: 'Lord, take away my life.' What does the Lord do? Does He get under the juniper tree with Elijah and say: 'Poor Elijah, I am so sorry for you!?' No, He stands outside and says: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" In effect, the Lord said: 'I am not going to get under juniper trees, Elijah. That is not the right position with Me. If you, Elijah, want Me to go on with you, get out from under your juniper tree. I am not coming on to your ground — you must come on to Mine!' The juniper tree is a cul-de-sac, and the Lord does not believe in those things. We must be in a right standing with God if He is going on with us. That is the message of the letter to the Romans.

The Representative of the Human Race

As you know, the first five chapters of this letter are divided into two sections. The first section has to do with the pagan world, and the second section has to do with the Jewish world, and at that time these two sections comprised the whole world. The Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, shows that both sections — that is, the whole human race — are not on good standing with God. The whole race has fallen out of God, and it is in that context that the mission, meaning and message of Jesus Christ are presented in the New Testament. It is in that relationship that the Lord Jesus is introduced, and He is introduced as the representative Man. You will see in chapter 5 how He is connected with Adam, and in chapter 4 He is connected with Abraham. He is of the seed of Abraham. Adam represents the human race as a whole, and Abraham represents the human race in Israel, but all are gathered together on to this ground: Not one man is found to be in right standing with God. The statement here is: "There is NONE righteous, no, not one" (3:10).

From chapter 5 we move into chapter 6, and I advise you to remove the chapter divisions. Chapter 6 is not a new chapter, but is the continuation of chapter 5. In chapter 5 all men are dead, which is how God views the human race. 'In Adam all died', and the argument here is that it is the same with Israel. Israel is a part of the human race and is included in this position: 'all are dead'. What is it that we come to immediately we begin to read what is chapter 6? It is a baptism. And what is this baptism? Well, of course, it is the baptism of the Lord Jesus, but what does that mean? Jesus is the representative of the human race. He is the Son of Man. Why must He be baptized? That is, why must He die and be buried? Because He is taking the place of the whole human race. The Cross of the Lord Jesus is a demonstration of the fact that all men have died, and the Apostle Paul says here that when Christ died all men were represented. The Cross was a universal baptism. Perhaps you would think that I was preaching heresy if I were to say that every unsaved person has been baptized, but please understand me. All men have died in the death of the Lord Jesus, so it is the whole world that has been baptized in the Cross of Jesus Christ. In the death of Christ the whole world is dead IN THE EYES OF GOD, but, although all men have been baptized in the death of Christ, all men are not raised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The death is universal, the baptism is universal and for the whole race, but the resurrection is selective. On resurrection ground only one Man in God's universe is in right standing with God. You remember how, after His baptism the heavens were opened and a voice came out of heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). God did not say: 'This is My beloved world. In it I am well pleased.' On resurrection ground only One is in right standing with God.

This, then, is the message of chapter 6. To be in right standing with God men have to say: 'His death was my death. When He died I died. That is my natural position in the sight of God.' But then, secondly, men have to say: 'His resurrection was my resurrection.' You know the simple words of Romans 6:5: "If we have become united with him by the likeness of his death, we shall be also by the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him." To be in right standing with God demands that we shall be, by faith in Jesus Christ, dead and raised. We have to accept His death as our death. The world will not do that, and Israel would not do that. Therefore the world and Israel remain dead in the sight of God, and it is only those who have accepted that by faith and have then taken their position in Christ risen who are in right standing with God. It is only with such people that God can go on.

And remember that this is not only an initial position; it is an abiding principle. Paul said: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:10). In effect he said: 'I die daily. Every day the Cross of the Lord Jesus has a meaning in my life.'

The Position Established

Now let us go on with this letter. Chapter 6 shows the position of spiritual experience. We move on, without dividing into chapters, and presently we come on to what is shown as chapter 8, and here we find what has happened in chapter 6. A great divide has been made.

First, the position is established: "There is therefore now NO condemnation to them that are IN CHRIST JESUS" (verse 1). All the condemnation has been exhausted in the death and burial of Christ. To those who by faith are in Jesus Christ risen from the dead there is no more condemnation. I wish we knew the truth of Christianity! If there is no condemnation, then we must be in right standing with God! There is no controversy between God and us. Do you not see how important it is for us to recover the true nature of Christianity? There are many Christians who live out their lives under condemnation. Even when they pray

they bring their miserable selves to the Lord, and say: 'Lord, I am no good. I am a miserable creature!' And what does the Lord say? Well, sometimes He does not say anything at all. If He did say anything, it would be: 'I told you that two thousand years ago in the Cross of Jesus Christ. I knew more about you then than you know about yourself, but if any man is in Christ Jesus there is no condemnation.'

But the Apostle goes on with a provision. He uses this little word: "Who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit" (verse 4), that is, those who walk on the ground that they have died with Christ and risen with Christ. The great divide has been made by the Cross between flesh and spirit. What do we mean by that word 'flesh'? The flesh is the self-life: MY will, MY desires, MY ideas, anything that is just ME. If you know anything about yourself, you know that you are not good, and you will agree with the Apostle Paul, who said: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (7:18). The flesh is the self-life in any, or all, of its forms. So that this statement in verse 4 of chapter 8 could be: 'Who walk not after the self-life.' 'I am going to have what I want. I am going to take the way that I want to take.' The self-life has very many complexions.

Now these people do not walk after the flesh. It says: 'They walk after the spirit.' What is that? That is the God-life — not the self-life, but the God-life. Now it is: 'What GOD wills, what GOD desires. It is GOD'S thoughts that I want.' There is no condemnation if we walk the God-life.

What does this word 'walk' mean? Well, we are on a spiritual journey. That comes out a little later. We are on the journey of a new nature, and on this journey there is a new discipline. The journey is not geographical, but from what we are in ourselves to what we are in Christ. You know, you can shorten that journey, for you get there sooner or later according to this discipline. What is the end of the journey, of this spiritual walk? Now that comes out at the end of this chapter 8: "Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (verse 29). That is the end of the Journey.

There are two conformities here in this letter. In chapter 8 it is "conformed to the image of his Son", and in chapter 12, verse 2 it says: "Be not conformed to this world". 'Be not conformed to this world, but be conformed to Christ.' That will determine how quickly you are covering the journey and how quickly you are getting to the end! Those who are conformed to this world are making very slow spiritual progress, but those whose hearts are wholly set upon being conformed to Christ make very quick spiritual progress.

You can see these two kinds of Christians. I can see today many young Christians who have started on the journey but have either come to a standstill or are making very slow progress, and when I look to see why it is I see that it is because they are taking the fashions of this world.

So the true nature of Christianity is to be conformed to the image of God's Son. That demands our acceptance of His death as our death, and demands that we live on the ground of His resurrection. It also demands that we do not live the self-life, but that we do live the Christ-life. The life of the Lord Jesus is to be reproduced in us by the Spirit, and that is what it means to "walk after the spirit". It does not say: 'Stand still', and it does not mean: 'Take a first step.' It means: 'Keep on walking and do not allow this world to stop you going on with the Lord.'

Well, that, in brief, is the message of this letter to the Romans. This is the foundation of Christian experience. You have accepted the foundation position; now accept the foundation experience, and that foundation is standing in right position with God, seeking His grace that in every day, and in every thing we are in good standing with God. On THAT ground we shall reach the goal — conformity to the image of His Son.

I do not think that there is anything to be desired more than that. What is the greatest desire in your life? Is it not to be like your Lord, and that all that is true of Him shall be true in you? May the Lord help us to understand!

Now go back to your letter to the Romans and read it again in the light of these words: 'Being on right ground with God.' It is the letter of an utter committal to God in Christ through the Cross.

We do ask Thee, Lord, to write this deeply into our hearts. We want to go on with Thee, Lord, but more than that, we want Thee to go on with us. We want Thee to be able to commit Thyself to us — not to have any reservations toward us — then teach us from this message the way of being on good ground with Thee. May we all be those who make quick progress toward the goal. In the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In the Letters to the Corinthians

We have, in these messages, been seeing that each part (book) of the New Testament has a particular aspect of Christ to present for the Church in this dispensation. The writer in his apprehension of Christ has this burden and urge, and when we have read all the writings we have a very comprehensive presentation of our Lord. There is, however, another feature which is so very rich and helpful. It is that these separate documents are what they are in value because of their immediate practical context. It is the situations to which they are addressed which bring out the many-sided fullness of the mission, meaning and message of Christ.

History, both temporal and spiritual, makes the Christ so necessary, but also so appropriate. This is so very clear when we see the background and occasion of these writings. The Letters to the Corinthians — or the Church in Corinth — are particularly rich in the drawing out of Christ, as I trust we shall see. Oh, for a pen dipped in the fountain of Divine inspiration to show even something of what is embodied of Christ in these Letters! One's heart fails before such an undertaking.

When "Corinth" or "Corinthians" are mentioned, the reaction is immediately that of a frown. The disorders, the wrongs, the sins, and all that is reprehensible at once take the foreground of the mind. Truly it is a terrible and distressing state of things, and it may be excusable if a major question is asked as to whether that IS Christianity. There is no passing over of it lightly and this element, of contrast and contradiction is not to be excused. The strongest things are said about it by the writer of the Letters. Face it! Take it all for what it is! Hide nothing! Having done so ask your major question: Why did God ever allow all this, and why did He allow it to be put into a document which would go out to ever-widening circles through an ever-increasing length of time? Why did not God cover this shame, this reproach, this contradiction to His own nature and will? When you have done all that, and asked that ultimate question, you have really only given the answer. God has NEVER done that, either in the history of His greatest servants, nor in that of His chosen people. Over this strange way of God, a way that we think we would never take, we have to ask a very significant question: Would there be gain or loss from the standpoint of all future time if all this delinquency and wrong had been covered over and not have been allowed to be known to posterity? There are different ways of putting that question, but, have we, and the Church through the centuries, gained from the Letters to the Corinthians, seeing what it was that necessitated these Letters? There are two main things that have to come out of the answer to that basic question. Firstly, the values that have accrued, which have been DRAWN out by the situation being dealt with. Secondly, why was it that such a situation could exist among Christians?

These two matters are going to take us a long way, and into deep and very profitable waters or mines.

Let us, then, begin by gathering together some of what we may call

The Spoil of Battle

That there was a battle, and a very hot one for God's testimony in Corinth, does not need arguing. Putting aside, for the moment, the tragedy and shame of the situation there, what of the values drawn out by it?

We have been accustomed to speaking of the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, with Philippians sandwiched between, as the high-water mark of New Testament revelation. In their own realm that may be true. That is, as a revelation of the eternal counsels of God relating to the Church, as such, it IS true. But in the realm of Christianity and the meaning of the true Christian calling and life, is there anything comparable in the New Testament with some of the parts of the first Letter to the Corinthians? Take, for instance, that brief section in chapter 2, verses 9–10:

"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, And which entered not into the heart of man, Whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God."

What of the statements in chapter 6, verses 2 and 3, statements which most commentators and exegetes pass over because they cannot explain them:

"Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?"

"Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

What a startling way of awakening us to the calling in Christ! What shall we say of chapter 13? Is there anything in all literature to compare with that? Read it in the various versions, such as Moffat's, the Amplified, etc. This is indeed a superlative standard for attainment. No wonder Paul himself elsewhere — and later — wrote: "Brethren, I count not myself to have attained."

But pass on to chapter 15, this utterly breath-taking presentation of what the Apostle called: "The gospel which we preached". When we read on to the description of the different categories of the resurrection bodies of the saints — sun, moon, stars, glories; the change and transformation from corruption to incorruption, and all the other details — we are left standing, gasping, with one immense question: 'How did Paul come to know all this?' The only possible answer only increases the wonder of the revelation itself. It must be all of a piece with his statement about the Lord's Table in chapter 10 verse 23: "For I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you...". Being in the past tense — "I delivered unto you" must link this on to the second Letter, chapter 12: "I knew a man in Christ FOURTEEN YEARS AGO... caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable things...". Chapter 15 of the first Letter must be just the fringe of the "unspeakable things".

Have I established my statement and argument that the sad and deplorable situation at Corinth was sovereignly in grace made the very occasion of drawing out some of the most sublime things in Divine revelation? Thank God for sovereign grace!

Now we must get nearer to the particular purpose of these messages, namely, what Christ means in this situation.

To reach this we have to note some major features. The Letters to the Corinthians are full of vivid contrasts. Over against each other there is the contrast between:

The old creation and the new;
 The natural and the spiritual;
 Darkness and light;
 The earthly and the heavenly;
 The temporal and the eternal;
 The Old Testament and the New; etc.

In between these contrasts stands Jesus Christ with what He means to each. His back is toward the first set with the mighty “No!” of His Cross. His face is toward the second category with the mighty “Yes!” of His resurrection.

In this way Christianity is shown to be severed and rent in two.

Christianity Split in Two

There is here revealed a CHRISTIANITY to which Christ (in His mission, meaning and message) says positively “NO!” Over that Christianity is written a large “CANNOT”.

This is taken up for emphasis and pronouncement early in the first Letter, and runs on through the many matters which are standing for judgment and correction. Only space forbids us tabulating these points of Divine veto. Let the reader read the Letters and note the points at which Christ says in effect: “Not so!” In that way — in the end — the inclusive and comprehensive verdict is: ‘You will never get through to God’s end in that way!’ To help in seeing this we can note where the Corinthians are placed in spiritual history and geography. Pick out the allusions to the Old Testament in these Letters. Two things rise up in bold relief. One, the old creation with its darkness, chaos, disorder, ‘voidness’, and features of judgment. Two, Israel in the wilderness. We will take this second for our present purpose. Quite clearly, Letter one and chapter 10 puts the Corinthians (and a certain kind of Christianity) in the position of Israel between Egypt and the Land of Promise, and it does so with a very strong warning. The same position is postulated in Letter two, chapter 3, at verse 7 to verse 16.

What, then, were the features of that position in Israel’s history?

1. They were out of Egypt, the realm of judgment by SOVEREIGN grace, and baptized “in the cloud and sea” POSITIONALLY.
2. They were IN THE WAY of the “heavenly calling”, and God’s purpose.
3. They had the TOKENS of the supernatural life and position, e.g. the Manna, and Water, etc: the “mystery of Christ”, “and that Rock was Christ.” They knew the sovereign virtue of the blood of the Lamb. Many were the evidences that God was with them and for them. But with all that there hung over them continually the threat and peril of missing the INHERITANCE, which — alas — that generation did do. This is THE warning to this certain kind of Christianity in Corinthians. Why was that? What does “Corinthians” say to that position? Probably the answer is found in two particulars; one, it is possible to be out of the world POSITIONAL and for the world to still be IN you. Egypt, even after all its judgment, still continued to pull back and maintain its hold. It was never a very difficult thing to hark back to Egypt. From the Corinthian Letters it is easy to see that the world had its pull, its influence, its attraction, over the SOUL of these Christians. The writer was very sure that this could be disastrous regarding the inheritance in the case of those whose STANDING did not lead to their heavenly STATE. In this connection it is that he so strongly discriminates between

The Natural Man and the Spiritual Man

Literally this is the man of soul, and the man of spirit. His summing up of this difference is that the man of soul cannot and does not go through. He does not come to maturity, but, even after years, he is still a “babe” (3:1–2). It is “he that is spiritual” who can, and does, go through! Paul strongly emphasizes the veto that rests upon the one when he says that “the natural [soulical] man cannot”.

Christianity has been very slow to even recognize, to say nothing of accepting, this great divide. For want of this discrimination (resulting from a deep ploughing and cleaving work of the Cross) a Christianity exists which is NOT GOING THROUGH TO WHAT GOD INTENDS, and multitudes of Christians are aware of it!

The universities and colleges may make doctors of medicine, philosophy, art, etc., but be quite sure, a man of the Spirit with the knowledge of “the things which have not entered into the heart of man” can no man nor university make! This is the argument and verdict of the New Testament.

The inclusive point, then, is that CHRIST IS OTHER. He is the other Man, the Man of the Spirit. His knowledge, wisdom, ability, are of another order. The REAL effect of the indwelling and MASTERY of the Holy Spirit is to SHOW and make Christianity a reproduction, a representation of Christ; the mission, meaning, and message of Christ is to produce that essentially other kind that He is (see 2 Corinthians 3:16–18).

But read the two Letters again!

CHAPTER EIGHT

In the Letters to the Corinthians (cont.)

We have seen that, in the Letters to the Corinthians, the Christians are spiritually in the position corresponding to that of Israel in the wilderness. That means that we have to see how Christ is applied to that situation. Every part of the New Testament, i.e. every book, brings Christ into view in some particular way or aspect in relation to some particular situation because THE WHOLE of the New Testament is comprehended by the mission, the meaning, and the message of Jesus Christ. We have seen that the position of believers in Corinth corresponding to Israel in the wilderness means that they were POSITIONALLY out of the kingdom of darkness; baptized into Christ; in the good of the passover lamb — flesh and blood; on the ground of justification by faith. POSITIONALLY they were in the Kingdom of heaven and on supernatural ground. All this was true by reason of sovereign grace. But now, all that was objective and what was positional had to be made inward and their condition; that is, it had to be made their own spiritual state. Many were the inconsistencies and contradictions between position and condition, and God could not accept that. Hence the serious warning drawn from the tragedy of Israel — the disaster in the wilderness in failure to “go on” to the PURPOSE of salvation. In our last message we put our finger upon one real cause of the disaster, and this will have to be kept in view as we proceed into these Letters. In the Corinthian letters we shall find Christians at the point where Israel were at Sinai, and two things will stand out among others, or one thing in two aspects. Those two things are

Spiritual Seeing and Spiritual Hearing

A moment’s reflection will at once bring to mind how very much those two things were the very substance of the mission, meaning and message of Jesus Christ, and, moreover, the governing principles of the whole New Testament.

With Israel in the wilderness these two things related respectively to the Tent of Testimony and the ordering of progress. They are both in the later chapters of the Book of Exodus through the Book of Numbers. The Tent of the Testimony, or the Tabernacle, was central and in view for all to see. The tribes were so arranged as to face the Tabernacle on all sides and from all directions. From the door of the Tabernacle the silver trumpets sounded, to be heard by all the people in connection with all order and movement.

The principles were seeing and hearing; THE SEEING EYE, and THE HEARING EAR. Put together they represent the Lord Jesus as central and supreme, and the Holy Spirit as God’s voice concerning Him. Sit back with those facts and think of the Corinthian letters in their light. So, we come to

The Place of Christ: The Place of the Holy Spirit

in relation to spiritual order and progress in a Corinthian situation.

The Place of Christ

We must step back and join the Apostle when he was contemplating his letter to Corinth, after he had received the information about the situation there.

The Apostle had known about Corinth before his first visit five years earlier. Morally it was the worst city in the world, and such was the situation there that this courageous servant of God said that he was with them then “in much fear and trembling.” However, out of the 400,000 population, a company had turned to the Lord and they represented the “Church of God in Corinth”. But during the five years of the Apostle’s absence there had been this grievous spiritual decline which we find described in this letter. Indeed, it was a decline for in the later part of the letter (chapter 15) the Apostle reminds them of “the Gospel which was [then] preached to them, and which they believed”. What a Gospel! Knowing what he was going into at Corinth he had made a very definite and firm resolve: it was “to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified”. He says here that he laid the Foundation, which was Christ. In five years they had built upon that foundation almost everything BUT Christ. Hence, he returns to the Foundation and is brokenheartedly (“with many tears”) starting all over again. They had sent him a letter in which they asked for his mind on eleven matters, and the very fact of their not knowing what was right or wrong on such elementary matters shows how they had lost sight of Christ and the mind of the Spirit. The letter is largely an answer to the questions, but what we are taking particular note of is his approach to the whole tragic situation. We have said that he returned to his original premise — “Jesus Christ, and him crucified”. In no Letter is the name of Christ so continuously introduced. It occurs no less than nine times in the first nine verses. Throughout the entire Letter, in every particular and problem, it is as though the Apostle was challenging as to how that, and that, and that corresponded to the Foundation, to Christ. That certainly, whatever he said, was his standpoint. Was it the divisions and partisanships? The challenge is: “Is Christ divided?” Those unhappy and deplorable conditions, he says, are due to immaturity, a baby measure, and the immaturity is not growing up into Christ. The spiritual eye was blinded to Christ by being occupied with other ob-

jects. Even Paul, Apollos, and Peter — he says — were between them and Christ. Paul positively refused to allow his own or any other man's name to justify a party or sect! The names mentioned probably represented a personality complex; or an aspect of truth complex; or a particular, temperamental, traditional, or positional complex; but, whatever it was, its effect or tendency was to obscure Christ, and Paul would have none of it. The irony of the situation was that there was a party which would not join the other sects because they were superior and claimed: "We are of Christ." That SOUNDS good, does it not? But Paul is not having that, either, because it embodied the party SPIRIT as much as any other. Paul is against the SPIRIT of things!

We may observe that many things which started out well and good have in time become more marked by their spirit than by Christ. You meet the superior mentality that 'we are the people' and 'they are not of us'. This is as big an abomination as any pronounced sectarianism. It is not that we SAY that we are of Christ, but how much of Christ and the Spirit of Christ is evident in us? The plummet, or plumb-line, by which the straightness or crookedness is determined is Christ.

So Paul brings Christ alongside of all the eleven questions presented to him in the letter from Corinth. The question of marriage, of non-marriage; of sex; of mixed marriages; of dress — head-covering of women and men; of behaviour in the assembly and at the Lord's Table; of meats offered to idols; of 'tongues' and prophesying, etc. While saying some things as from the Lord, and others as his own Christian judgment, in effect he is raising one question over all and making it the final criterion: 'How does this accord with Christ?'

Would that we always, in all things, so challenged the practical matters of our life in a world like this! Not what the world does or thinks; not what is current in the world, or even with some Christians, but is this well-pleasing and honouring to Christ? Not even: 'Is there any wrong in it?' But — positively — is it governed by love of Christ?

So, as with Israel in the wilderness, Christ has the central place and is ALWAYS IN VIEW.

But that is only one half of the matter. The other half is

The Silver Trumpets — The Voice of the Spirit (Numbers 10:2, 8, 9, 10)

The Place of the Holy Spirit

Trumpets have an interesting place in the Bible, from the first in Numbers 10 to the "last trump" of 1 Corinthians 15:52.

In the wilderness their function was to sound "an alarm", to call to battle, to call to a feast (the Feast of Trumpets), to order the camp for journeying, etc. When all is said about them, a trumpet presupposes an ear to hear. It has no meaning or sense if there is no hearing. Hence, it is unprofitable for the Lord to speak unless there is a hearing ear. The Word of God repeatedly unites these two. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear" — but what? "What the Spirit saith unto the churches." The trumpet-sound then is the voice of the Spirit. This was from the door of the Tent of Testimony, that is, with Christ as the governing meaning. Order amongst the Lord's people, individually and collectively. Progress toward the goal and inheritance. To warn of dangers, and to stir to battle. All this is a matter of hearing the voice of the Spirit. If we bring the principle over to Corinthians we shall — or ought to — be impressed with how large a place the Holy Spirit has in these Letters. Very soon in the first Letter we come on the principle which is an absolutely basic truth, and which runs right through the entire New Testament. This goes right to the heart of the Corinthian situation, as it does to every situation which is one of spiritual declension and weakness. We could fill a whole book with this one truth, because the New Testament has so much show about it. But we can here do no more than indicate it. Right here, then, early in the first Letter to the Corinthians (chapter 2:6–16), it is

The Illuminated Spiritual Mind

The fuller truth is that Christ may be — or may have been — presented in great fullness and yet not understood. The Tabernacle was there complete for all Israel to see, but it was a THING, a SACRED thing, and it was known that God was with it, but it was not understood. It was a comprehensive representation, but what it all meant was not understood. The Holy Spirit was present, but the people's minds were not illuminated. It could hardly be said that the "things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard (note, eye and ear) nor hath it entered into the heart of man" had really become A DYNAMIC REVELATION to those Christians. "The Spirit searcheth the deep things of God", but things were pathetically shallow and superficial at Corinth. No one who was hearing the voice of the Spirit in an inward way could possibly behave as they were behaving. I have to confess that it is one of my greatest perplexities how a true Christian can behave, look, and go on so long without the Holy Spirit so speaking in them that changes in conduct, appearance, and habits are spontaneously made without anyone else saying anything. I have to ask: 'Where is the Holy Spirit in them?' Here I just must say some relevant things which — although enlarging this message somewhat — are very appropriate to our times. We are in a time in this dispensation when deceiving spirits are invading this earth to such an extent that — to use our Lord's own words — "if it were possible the very elect would be deceived" (Matthew 24:24).

It should be clearly understood that the most outstanding and definite form of deception is THE SIMULATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. The Christian is so utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit for everything, especially in the knowledge of Christ that to simulate Him (the Holy Spirit) is the master-stroke of evil SPIRITS. The TRUE Spirit is assailed by FALSE spirits, and chiefly so by imitation. Their imitation will often, or usually, be thought to be something very spiritual. There is a false spirituality. Its most subtle form is to push secondary spiritual things up into a primary place and exaggerate them so that they are believed to be ALL-important! You have it here in 1 Corinthians, and the Apostle LABOURS to correct this because of its perils. See what he says about the GRADED importance of gifts. To these poor deluded Corinthians certain gifts of a display, and spectacular kind were the height of spirituality. This opened the door wide to the false in many ways. The sum of all deception is the projecting, assertion, and intensity of natural (soul) force. Deception came into this world through the soul of Eve, and Satan's link with humanity is just there. This is basic to Paul's strong corrective teaching, and in the first part of this first Letter he lays this as the foundation of all that follows. His warning corrective about women asserting themselves vocally and in other ways in Church life and matters, and his — to some people — strange talk about "covering" and "the angels" has a far more sinister implication than will be regarded.

Another form which deception takes is (and perhaps you will find it hard to believe it) superiority to the Word of God. Yes! It is possible to be so 'spiritual' as to blatantly violate the plain Word of God on the plea: "I felt led", "The Lord showed me", and so on. A man can neglect his plain duty as laid down in Scripture to wife and family, and eventually lose all influence with them and their respect because he is so 'spiritual'. We say this in particular reference to the Christian family. A wife can be so 'spiritual' as to violate the plain injunction: "Wives, be in subjection to your own husbands." He may not be so 'spiritual' as you think he ought to be, but the Lord will honour the wife who, with the Cross in her own soul, honours His Word. The Word of God says that if a man does not work he should not eat. It is possible to be so 'spiritual' as to spend many hours, and even months of life doing nothing of any vital account. These are only examples of superiority to the Word of God; there are many more, and much worse.

The projecting of soul-life will most certainly result in deception, and the fruit of deception is just this: many psychic experiences, such as 'voices', apparitions, coincidences, which just go SO FAR as to seem of God and then abort and nothing comes of them. They leave a trail of unfinished, incomplete and disappointing 'experiences'. Satan can lead the intensely soulish person 'up the garden', as we say.

Now all this is in the Corinthian Letters and explains Israel's tragedy in the wilderness. Why did a journey of nine days develop into forty years and then end in tragedy? This Letter tells us, and Hebrews 4:12 (with context) puts it concisely and precisely! The soul-life asserted itself against or over the TRULY spiritual.

I expect that I shall get into a lot of hot water for saying some of these things, but things are in a very serious condition in these times and we MUST be faithful. I confess that the more I have got into these Corinthian Letters the more desperate I have felt the situation to be, and the more impelled to seek the explanation.

Well, we have not finished yet, but, dear readers, do you not now see why the Apostle said: "Nothing... but Jesus Christ, and him crucified" — "Christ — crucified"? The Cross is the solution!

Back, for a moment, to where we started. We said that the silver trumpets were the voice of the Holy Spirit, and that a hearing ear is essential to hear "what the Spirit saith". And then we have gone on to raise questions about hearing. But do note, please, how we have related the hearing. We said that first Christ has to be seen by the spiritual eye. The Spirit only speaks about Christ! Then we said that ORDER, movement, waiting, or going, when and where, were consistent with Christ in character, nature, and holiness. And the great altar was at the door through which the way of the voice of the trumpets was heard.

There is one more message in relation to our particular theme at this time before we leave the Corinthian Letters. We have observed that, by many allusions, these two Letters find the believers to whom they were addressed, spiritually where Israel were when in the wilderness, that is, between Egypt and the Land of Promise; between the Exodus — the coming out — and the Eisodos — the entering in. We have seen how precarious that position is, and therefore how strong the warnings are as taken from Israel's tragic failure.

We are now seeing how our main title above applies to that situation. The Second Letter to the Corinthians has some very rich things in it. Of course, commentators almost universally interpret or define it as the Letter of the Christian ministry, and that is summed up in the words in chapter 4, verse 1: "Therefore seeing we have this ministry." We have often taken that clause in the particular connection, i.e. the ministry of the Church. But for our present purpose we light upon another immensely rich and comprehensive phrase. In the same chapter, verse 4, we have: "...the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ"; and then, in verse 6: "...God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." How rich! Break it up: "The glory of Christ." "The gospel of the glory of Christ." "The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." "The face of Jesus Christ." "The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God." "The knowledge of the glory of God." Every clause is a theme!

In the context the Apostle makes a great transition with a comparison and a contrast: from Moses to Christ. He is emphasising the startling and shattering effect upon the people of the glory of God ON the face of Moses. He is very strong on that point, and thus prepares the way for his particular message. The com-

parison is in **THE SAME GLORY**, but the contrast is threefold: one, the glory **IN** the face of Jesus Christ, and, two, the **EXCEEDING** glory of the latter, leading to three, the effect in each case. The former was a ministry of death, the death-sentence of the Law; the latter was life, the life which comes by grace. This is the transformation implicit in the wilderness, it is the ministry of life in surrounding death. It is the glory of grace in the realm of condemnation. All this, says the Apostle, is focused in “the face of Jesus Christ”. The face is the register, the index, the medium of character, of personality. The glory was **ON** the face of Moses. It was not his own personal perfection of character, divine nature. It was **IN** the face of Jesus Christ, “who is the image of God” (4:4). It was **THEREFORE** a surpassing glory. Earlier the Apostle says that we are “**REFLECTING...** the glory of God”. It is not inherent in us; we are but “mirrors” (3:18, margin).

The point of all this, for Corinthians and for all Christians, is that in a wilderness world like Corinth, and the world generally, it is not necessary to perish, to die. It is not necessary to fail and not reach the inheritance. Israel’s tragedy need not overtake us, because, although we are but “vessels of fragile clay” (4:7 — Conybeare), there is “the exceeding greatness of the power”, which is “of God, and not of ourselves” (4:7).

This is the Mission, the Meaning, the Message of Jesus Christ to His Church as in the world where there is nothing else to help. It is the message to “pilgrims and strangers” here.

The Apostle will take much space in this Letter to meet the cruelty, opposition, criticism, slander, and discrediting work of his enemies, some of them Christians. His inclusive and most powerful answer to them is in this “God hath shined into our hearts.” It is the glory which we have beheld in the face of Jesus Christ. We may be poor and despised “earthen vessels”, but there is a “treasure” within, the power of which will bring us to glory. By this spiritual experience and possession we can, and shall, reach God’s end “while we look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen”, which are eternal (4:18).

This is true for the wilderness journey, but, says the Apostle, it is true for our “ministry”; a heartening word — if challenging — for the ministers of Christ.

But there is another tremendous allusion running through these two Letters. We have heard the Apostle say that what had happened to him and other Apostles was like that which happened in the creation: “God, that said, Light shall shine” (or: “Let light be”) “hath shined in our hearts.”

In the second Letter, chapter 5, and verse 17, he says: “If any man be in Christ there is a new creation.” God said: “Let there be light.” “There is a new creation.” In the first Letter, chapter 15, he refers to the two Adams, the first and the last, in contrast: the earthy and the heavenly. It is not difficult to discern that “in the face of Jesus” we have the new and heavenly order of man and creation. This surely, being in the Corinthian Letters, is set over against the disorder and chaos, the darkness and confusion in the old creation spiritually, the “natural man” of the early part of the first Letter. If this is true, and not just our imagination, we can surely see that the position of Israel in the wilderness, and of the Corinthians correspondingly, is that of transition from the old creation — or before it — to the new; from fallen Adam to the New Man, the Last Adam.

“We all, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed (being changed) into the same image.”

CHAPTER NINE

In the Letter to the Galatians

Familiarity with this part of the New Testament, as it does with so many things, has resulted in the loss of the tremendous impact which it had when first written, read, and circulated. In its nature, its purpose, and its necessity there is nothing in the Bible more contemporary, and suited to Christianity’s need. It has been boxed up in a doctrine, although a fundamental doctrine, and a phrase now describes it: whereas it is really an earthquake, a revolution, a cataclysm. As I have meditated with it some vivid pictures have lighted upon my mental screen.

I have seen a man named Shammah standing in a plot of ground full of lentils and, single-handed, mowing down the Philistines with his sword until none were left to challenge him. I have seen the hordes of Philistines menacing Israel and taking cover behind the giant Goliath, who, day after day, struck terror into the hearts of the men of Israel. Then the youth David resolving that this had gone on too long and too much and must come to a settlement; which settlement he made to the discomfiture of the whole Philistine army.

Then to come to much later history in this country, I see that meeting of barons at Runnymede with King John sitting, pen in hand, at the table, with a fierce and rebellious look upon his face as the barons have decided that a long regime of injustice must cease and a new charter of equity must be signed for all time. There is no way of escape for the monarch.

These episodes and epochs fit so well into the Letter before us. A campaign of misconstruction of Christianity has been following the Apostle Paul from city to city wherever he has gone. He, the most patient and tolerant of servants of Jesus Christ, has borne long and humbly with the assaults upon himself; his charac-

ter and his credentials; his integrity; but it had reached the point where the very true and right nature of Christianity itself was being changed. At this point toleration reached its limit and this New Testament Shammah drew his sword and said: 'The day of reckoning has come. This has gone far enough.' The fire in his bones had reached white heat. Flaming words leaped from his lips: "If we, or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed; I repeat, let him be accursed." His sword clave to his hand that day and he defied to the death the uncircumcised-in-heart Judaizers of all time.

But when we have said all that, and we could say much more like it, we have yet to come to the real and positive issue in question and battle. We have to ask what really was, and is, at stake? Many related questions have to be answered, but the inclusive statement, which governs all those questions, is nothing less or other than

The True Nature of Christianity

That was, and has repeatedly been, the real and true nature of the Mission, Meaning and Message of Jesus Christ. What REALLY did He come for? What did His Person mean? And what actually is His message?

May I here insert a brief parenthesis? While this ministry is to ALL the Lord's people, I know that many of its readers are servants of God in positions of responsibility and influence. To them I do address this message in a particularly earnest way. My brethren, you are surely aware that there is a very serious and vicious invasion of this world by spirits of confusion. NOTHING is escaping this. While it is true of nations and internations, it is particularly so in Christianity. From the general realm of Christendom in ever-narrowing circles to evangelical Christianity and then still inward to the most sincere believers, and to any servant of God who counts for God, there is involvement in complications and perplexity almost to a paralysing degree. New, exotic, fantastic, extreme, peculiar, odd, unbalanced, and singular movements, teachings and practices are following rapidly upon the stage; and many dear people of God are being caught in these, only to end in disillusionment and cynicism. Bewilderment fills the air, and because of this, Christianity is growingly in disrepute. It does, therefore, become imperative that all in responsibility and who have influence shall know where they are and be committed to making clear to God's people what Christianity really is. We are here seeking to make some small contribution to such a ministry.

Coming back to our Galatian Letter, we seek to see what it has to tell us by way of answering our main question: What IS Christianity? There are subsidiary questions which lead to the answer. Is Christianity a take-over and continuation or adaptation of the Old Testament system and economy of ritual sacramentarianism, ceremonialism, ordinances, vestments? Is Christianity the reproduction of the Old Testament system in a mystical form? That is, the keeping of the ritual and ceremonial but attributing to it a spiritual or mystical meaning, so that it can be said: 'Well, of course, it is not the thing itself, but what it implies'? This is what sacramentarians say and teach, and many evangelicals. But a virtue is attached to the actual means employed. Further, is Christianity an ideology, that is, a system of ideas, the result of the mental and intellectual activity of religious minds? In other words, is it a philosophy regarding God, man, human destiny, good and evil, and human conduct? Is it a system of regulations, laws, precepts, rules, technicalities, statutes, nice points? Is it another system of: 'Thou shalt', and 'thou shalt not'? Is Christianity a tradition, a HISTORICAL succession, an inheritance or hereditary?

To all of these, and more, the Letter to the Galatians, and the whole New Testament say — or thunder — a positive and categorical 'NO!' Any one, or all of these, would make what the Apostle here calls "another gospel", and he says of such, even if (supposing such a thing might be) "an angel from heaven" should preach it, let that angel be accursed! There is no compromise here. The sword is drawn and these "Philistines" (above mentioned and defined) are to be mown down without mercy. Paul is, after all, no more vehement and implacable than was His Divine Master when confronting those who would mislead and distort the truth of God and confuse the would-be seekers after the truth.

What, then, IS THE answer? This Letter before us has rightly been called 'The Magna Carta of Christianity' and that in a brief statement of doctrine: 'Justification by Faith.' Yes, true; that is fundamental to Christianity, but we cannot stay there. With every bit of our being we believe that, but when we have said it, have we really defined that which has composed and constituted faith? Justification by faith can be theology, doctrine, creed, a wonderful concept. Look into this Letter and see what it was that led this apostle to his position. He based everything in HIS Christianity, his salvation, his life, his ministry, his endurance, and his eternal hope, upon one thing. It is stated as basic to the Letter itself: chapter 1, verse 15: "When it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me..." Or in another translation: "When he who had chosen me and set me apart even before I was born, and had called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son within me..." What, then, is the answer?

The Inward Revelation of God's Son

This is a strong line running through the Letter in various connections, as indeed it does through all his writings. He says: "Christ liveth in me." He emphasizes the change from the outward to the inward, the objective to the subjective in the matter of the Law, the covenant, the spirit of sonship, etc. Everything now emanates from the indwelling Christ by the Holy Spirit, and this is what he means by the great emphasis upon spiritual liberty. He has come into the meaning of the Lord's words: "If the Son shall make you free, ye

shall be free indeed” — freed by the life and power of Christ WITHIN! The Spirit of sonship within makes Christianity, and nothing else does! God revealed His Son WITHIN. We then have to ask what Paul saw INITIALLY when that revelation came to him, and what was its effect?

Of course, all that we have from the pen of this Apostle was by revelation, but in this Letter there is that which was basic to all the rest. I must, however, pause for one emphasis. Paul takes pains to stress that this knowledge of God’s Son which made Christianity for him was personal, direct, and independent. He says: “It was not after man. Neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:11,12). This is true Christianity. Whatever God may use as a vessel or channel of instruction, such instrumentalities can NEVER impart Christ, put Christ into us, work the miracle of giving the faculty of sight to the blind. It just has to be something done by the almighty Spirit of God so that we exclaim in wonder: ‘I see!’ Apart from that, our Christianity at best is second-hand and objective. The emphasis of the true teacher must be upon this personal knowledge of the Holy Spirit as Lord WITHIN. Sooner or later Christianity will be put to the ultimate test on this all-inclusive ground and issue.

We can now ask what Paul saw on the occasion to which he refers? What did he see as to God’s Son? The full answer would necessitate a going back to the Damascus Road epoch; but what does this particular Letter show? The answer is summed up in one word: the Cross. His three references to the Cross in ‘Galatians’ have three connections. “I have been crucified with Christ” (2:20); “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof” (5:24); “But far be it from me to glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (6:14).

The three relationships are: (1) The personal — “I have been crucified”. (2) The life of the dominion of the flesh — “crucified the flesh” (that is the self-life; “flesh” is self-gratification). (3) The world — ‘crucified to the world’. The standards, systems, and ambitions of this world.

The Cross in this threefold relationship is Christianity. We can never cease to be amazed that the man who would gladly and vehemently have haled Jesus of Nazareth to crucifixion came to see that he was really going to be crucified HIMSELF; but now he is glorying in it for other reasons. No wonder he says, “called me BY HIS GRACE”.

What is this saying to us? It is saying clearly and powerfully that TRUE Christianity issues from a devastating experience of the Cross. To SEE Christ, ‘God’s Son’ crucified, is to see OURSELVES transfixed and desolated. SOONER OR LATER this must come to us if our Christianity is to be the expression of the indwelling Christ as crucified, risen and exalted.

The true Christian and the true Church is a crucified person and Body!

What was the effect of this ‘revealing of God’s Son’ in him? It had the effect of giving Paul a new dimension and a new horizon. It was the end of one history and the inauguration of another. Formerly the Cross was an intolerable offence; later it was the power and wisdom of God. The Cross was the meeting-place of two histories: the one it closes; the other it commences. The former history has been proved false. The new begins the true. This Letter says that one Israel has come to an end, and a new ‘Israel of God’ has been born. That one Jerusalem ‘below’ is no longer the true (if ever it had been) and the “Jerusalem which is above” has taken its place. The old history was based upon a visualized new age centring in Israel’s institutions, Jerusalem, the temple, the Law, the Sabbath. The new history is based upon the enmity of all that demonstrated in the Cross, now centred in a SPIRITUAL nation, a heavenly Jerusalem, a holy, heavenly temple, “not made with hands”, a Law of “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”, and a “Sabbath Rest” reserved for the new people. This is Christianity according to the New Testament, and Paul’s revelation of God’s Son within.

Let us now sum up.

We fully recognize that the real occasion of this Letter was — and is — the true ground of man’s right standing with God, and that that issue is here fought out conclusively. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with that!

But, when we have acknowledged that, we have not settled every relevant element of conflict. Why is it that, when evangelical Christianity has rooted and established that doctrine in its fundamental creed and faith, so much conflict still remains in the evangelical realm? This is more or less present in early Christianity even when that basic ground is accepted. Looking more closely into the controversy in this Letter, we find that it was not only the foundation that was being settled, but what was being PUT ON the foundation. All the Apostles, even Peter and James, were not quite transparent on that (see Chapter 2:11–14). There was controversy among the chief Apostles, NOT ON THE DOCTRINE, but as to their INNERMOST position. Outwardly and doctrinally they assented, but deep down in their religious constitution a drastic “circumcision” — cutting round and between — had not as yet been consummated. There was still a carry-over of birth, upbringing, tradition, heredity, inheritance. In Paul, who had been more utterly rooted, and more vehemently absorbed in Judaism than any of them (1:11–14), this radical severance, this spiritual surgery, had been effected. The remnants and relics of historical Judaism and natural religion on the one side, and the thorough-going emancipation — by the Cross — on the other set up a conflict, and the real cause was the threat to change the true nature of Christianity — the Gospel. It was a subtle and dangerous insinuation of mixture; the Old Testament prohibition by God of ploughing with ox and ass together, or the wearing of a mixture of wool and cotton. Paul, because the Cross had ploughed so deeply into his very being, saw through this threat to the purity of Christianity, and was roused to “the defence of the gospel”.

So we come to the age-abiding conflict, not only between Law and Grace, but the true nature of Christianity and the things which have been associated with it. People can be called Christians who have no experience of new birth, regeneration, or personal knowledge of or walk with the Lord, and there are many whose conduct, appearance, and associations are not only a denial of Christ, but a contradiction of common decency. The range is from traditional 'Religion' to downright worldliness, with varying shades and degrees.

So, we close by saying that the real battle is that for the true nature of Christianity. The call is for "men whose eyes have seen the King"; men who can truly say: "It pleased God to reveal his Son IN ME." Men who will be heart-burdened for the purity of the Gospel, and who will pay the heavy price of the testimony of Jesus. It will be in 'Christianity' itself that they will meet the forces that make it so costly. It has always been so.

CHAPTER TEN

In the Letter to the Ephesians

It is not our intention to enter upon a general exposition of this Letter. Our present concern is with some of the questions which it raises in the light of history, and that history at, and from, the time when the Letter was written.

Firstly, there was the situation at the end of the Apostle Paul's life. Here is a man writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit about the greatness of the Church; its eternal election and vocation; its Divine unity, interrelatedness, manifold function, and spiritual warfare. All this and much more, with a background of his relationship with churches in Asia, and particularly with Ephesus. We remember his extended time of ministry in Ephesus and the wonderful response thereto (Acts 19:19). Later he said to the elders there that he had not 'shunned to declare (unto them) the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:20), and when meeting those elders on his journey to Jerusalem, we read of the very touching farewell to them and how they wept and sorrowed at his departure. And now, AT MOST seven years later, he writes to Timothy that "all they in Asia be turned from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). If Paul died (by execution) in the year A.D. 67 and John wrote the Revelation in the year A.D. 95 (as is most strongly believed) then in less than thirty years a very big spiritual change had taken place in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7): "Thou hast left thy first love... From whence thou art fallen..." etc. Paul's triumphant ministry; Paul's departure sorrowed over; and now Paul repudiated, discredited or forsaken. And yet, this Letter is Divinely preserved and blessed to countless believers through all the centuries!

But what of subsequent history? Through all these centuries to what degree has there been in this world a representation and expression of the Church as we have it in "Ephesians"? Where in all the world can we find such an expression in our day? It would seem that the last and least company of Christians is involved in the struggle for unity, for impact, for spiritual ascendancy! Anything precious to the Lord is so bitterly assailed that its fellowship and fullness are all too soon disrupted. It is quite evident that when Paul wrote his last Letters — to Timothy — there was an incipient movement toward what has now become almost general — the institutional Church with form but without organic life. With all the books that have been written on "Ephesians", and all the extolling of it as "the greatest document ever penned"; with all the acclaiming of it as THE greatest revelation of the Church, where can we find anything that approximates to it in reality?

The questions confronting us with this Letter in hand are:

Is it just idealistic? Do we have to say in regard to it what Dr. Campbell Morgan said about Ezekiel's Temple: "It is just what God would have had if He could have had His way"? or again: Is this Church of "Ephesians" for the future in the "ages of the ages", a phrase used so much by Paul? In which case is it futile to labour and hope for it now? Are we to accept the "total ruin" theory? Comprehensively, with all the wonders and glories of the beginnings of Christianity, was there EVER anything wholly corresponding to this Letter? Are you shocked with these questions? Do you think that, after all, it is just a comparative approximation, more or less? That position can hardly satisfy those who have stood for the revelation in the Ephesian Letter.

Therefore, is there some other answer? Is the answer in the direction of a misunderstanding and misapprehension of the Letter? It is here that we touch what will not only answer our distressing questions, but put us into the realm of the immense spiritual values and dynamics of the revelation contained in this document. But let there be no misapprehension here. It will be the greatest challenge and test to Christendom and Christianity, while at the same time involving in a very real conflict with all the cosmic forces which have so bitterly fought against the true understanding of this Divine revelation!

Far from being only idealistic or mystical, we shall see as we proceed that it is an intensely realistic document. There are one or two things that must be recognized before we can proceed to consider its answer to the confrontations mentioned.

The Comprehensiveness of Ephesians

This is not a new and different presentation of truth, but an inclusive embodiment of all New Testament teaching. The Gospels are here. (See our early chapters.) “Romans” is here, for the total setting aside of the first Adam is implicit here. “Corinthians” is here, for the “spiritual” man is demanded, and the “natural” man would spoil everything here. “Galatians” is here, for there can be no compromise, no mid-course, no perversion or two contraries here; and so on.

Having pointed that out, let us proceed to consider four factors which support the present-age validity of “Ephesians”.

The Standpoint of Ephesians

This can prove to be the most testing, searching, and revolutionary factor in Church history. The point of view certainly does determine everything. Five times in the Letter the word “Heavenly” is used (1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12), relating respectively to the believer’s blessings; Christ’s exaltation; the believer’s position; the Church’s vocation; and the Church’s warfare. Everything is viewed from above, but that ‘aboveness’ is not confined to location. It means another way of estimating, defining, judging. It is a different mindedness from the earthly. On this matter the statement of God is: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9). It becomes necessary, therefore, for us to be brought to the place where we see what God is looking for and at, as so vastly different from our own mentality. This is the key to everything, and, as we have said, most revolutionary. Our mentality as to the Church is almost, if not entirely, earthly.

What ARE we looking for and at in this respect? Let us sift down from what may be the largest to the smallest. Is it a national Church, Roman, Anglican, Greek, Dutch (Reformed), etc.? Is it denominational, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Independent, etc.? Is it ‘Free’ or ‘State’, Undenominational, Interdenominational? Is it ‘Open’ or ‘Exclusive’? Is it something with certain particular characteristics and techniques of practice, form, and behaviour? Is it a ‘New Testament Church’, or churches, with certain things taken from the New Testament to constitute it? Is it a cathedral or a building, great or small? Is it a place at all, whether simple, plain, or ornate? Is God looking down from the “Heavenlies” and focusing His attention upon, or looking for, ANY of these? Is this what He wants? Do these things interest Him at all? Is He impressed with the regalias and adornments; with the pomp and processions of display? Do our ecclesiastical and ministerial attire and dress, robes, vestments, gowns, hoods, impress the Almighty? Does He look down upon them with admiration and wonder? Does He view them at all, or ignore them? If He does behold them, may it not be with pity, or even amusement? Poor little people playing at churches and chapels, like Jesus’ children in the market-place playing at weddings and funerals! Is ANY or ALL of this what takes the eye of “He that sitteth in the heaven”? (Psalm 2:4).

All or any of this may be our way of viewing the Church, and it is wholly an earthly view! If we saw from Heaven’s standpoint, how foolish so much of it would become to us. Just as the biggest things of earth, whether people or mountains, are all the same in elevation when we look down from a high aerial position, so the things so important to man down here lose their importance when we see God’s standards of values.

History’s Verdict

The verdict of history is clearly that God DOES NOT either tie Himself up with, nor preserve things on this earth in THEMSELVES. Tennyson, the poet, said:

“Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be.”

Paul said: “The things which are seen are temporal [transient]” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

History’s verdict upon things which have ceased to fulfil THE ESSENTIAL PURPOSE OF THEIR EXISTENCE, however greatly they may have served a Divine purpose at some time, is that God has left them and they have either been destroyed or left desolate. So it was with the Tent at Shiloh, the Temple in Jerusalem, the ‘Churches’ in Asia, and numerous other places and things. Nothing is sacred to God if it does not fulfil its Divinely intended purpose. The world, and history, are strewn with such relics; desolation, abandonment, death, and coldness declare God’s ‘No interest’. Men strive to keep something going; try to live on a past; but the responsibility is left with them, and the limitation of God’s sponsorship will slowly wear them out unless the Divine intention is recovered. The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is a symbol of history’s verdict, and centuries of tears testify to God-forsakenness.

That is all very sad and tragic, and we yearn to get away from it, learning its lesson, and to come to the answer to it all. We ask again, what has been

Heaven’s Focus through the Ages?

We have seen that the Letter to the Ephesians (so-called — it was a circular letter) bounds all the ages from eternity to eternity. Its range is from “before the foundation of the world” (1:3) unto “the ages of the

ages" (3:21). But what is the focus of this Letter in THAT ETERNAL CONTEXT? There is no missing it. One fragment focuses all.

"Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (margin: "unto the ages of the ages").

You must read this whole Letter (which you can do in a few minutes) with the object of seeing the place and mention of Christ in it. (And the companion Letter, Colossians, with it.)

This Letter goes back before Genesis, and takes up Genesis. In both a Person is brought into view and that Person is never again lost sight of. By personal figures; by types, symbols, prophecies, and a thousand means; in feasts and ordinances, that One Person is ever present, latent or patent! By name He is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christos. Every anointing points to Him. He is the focus of the ages and the eternities. What is Heaven EXCLUSIVELY looking for and looking at? Emphatically, only that which is essentially that Person. Not now symbols, figures, types, representations, but reality, actuality! No, not the "Church" as something objective! No, not the Kingdom of heaven as place and object of perception! "The kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation" (Luke 17:20). It is a fallacy to think and speak of the Church without meaning Christ Himself. They are not subject and object! They are one. The Church is His Body, His wife; they are "one flesh" (5:31). This is "Ephesians". It is equally fallacious to think and speak of the Kingdom of heaven and not mean Himself. They are the same. In the Gospels the two are brought together. The Messiah is present both as King and Kingdom. The very nature of the Kingdom corresponds to that of "the Son of Man". It, as He, is from heaven.

All this, and what it implies, was AN ABSOLUTE REVOLUTION IN MESSIANIC MENTALITY.

How does it all answer the tremendous questions with which we began, in relation to the Letter to the Ephesians? In this way. What God and Heaven are looking for and at is not SOMETHING called the Church, nor for local churches, AS SUCH. God and Heaven are looking for Christ, in His nature, heavenly nature; in SPIRIT and TRUTH; in eternal life; in conduct and behaviour; in virtues and character; in influence and impact; and in victory over sin, Satan and the world. IT IS POSITIVELY NOT LOCALITY IN TERMS OF GEOGRAPHY, but "Whosoever two or three are gathered together in [into] my name, THERE am I." That may be on a ship or in an aeroplane, neither of which can be fixed in locality. Christ MAY be in Ephesus, or Laodicea, or any other place, but it is the Christ which defines the Church, not the place! Christ may be in the congregation, the institution, the denomination, while none of them — AS A WHOLE — may be in Christ. We seek Him. We gather unto Him. HE is the Ground; we meet on Him.

There is a vast amount in "Christendom" and "Christianity" to which we have to deliberately close our eyes, and "not know after the flesh", while we seek for what there is of Christ IN PEOPLE. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son." If we cannot find Him, then there is no heavenly fellowship.

How well I am aware that many questions will be provoked by what I have said, and perhaps the most difficult is the one concerning gathering together, and what has become the problem of local churches. The procedure of men has been to start from the outside or from some more or less advanced point of Christian development. To FORM a church or churches. The names may vary; churches, assemblies; congregations; meetings, etc. Some form, either of doctrine, creed, or practice and procedure has been conceived, often with a greater or lesser degree of Scriptural authority; sometimes with a reading INTO Scripture of an interpretation or meaning which is not really there in truth. Sometimes there is a part of the whole truth, so that it is a certain aspect of the truth for which the particular group stands. The reasons and occasions of the numerous 'bodies' or sects or companies are as manifold as there are such bodies. Too often it is something 'FORMED' by men, and something which they SET OUT to do. To say this is to touch the root of most of the trouble in Christianity. But let us approach it positively.

We are being taught by the Letter to the Ephesians, and what is it saying? We have seen that the Church is Christ, all its parts being parts of His Body. Is that true? Do you believe that? Not that He has no personal existence apart from His Body, but He is the very personality within the Body and only death can separate the two. If this identification with Christ is spiritually true, as the New Testament teaches, we have to ask: How did Christ come into being? Did He appear as a full-grown man? Was He made with hands? Was He put together as a composite entity? Did someone, or a group of people, get some ideas as to what He should be and then get to work to give them a form? Perhaps you are smiling, or are scandalized that such things should be asked. But is that not that which largely expresses the mentality concerning the Church and churches? But how DID Christ come into this world? Was it not simply by BIRTH? There was a seed (that is a Scriptural word about Him from Genesis onward) and that "seed" held the life in which was all the nature, the complexion, the capacity, the form, the purpose, and the destiny of that Entity. That seed was born, and for reproduction was 'planted', fell into the ground and died (John 12:24). The Church is the issue of that seed, holding the same life and potential. The true Church — wherever found — MUST follow the history of Christ spiritually. It must be born, "not made with hands". "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands" — a statement for which Stephen forfeited his life. It must be begotten of God, born of the Holy Spirit, circumcised (in heart), baptized into His death; raised together with Him, anointed for its ministry; led into the battle of the ages, and joined with Him on heavenly ground. It is Christ, always, everywhere! This is "Ephesians". But one word more remains to be said. It concerns

The Basis of All

This Letter to the Ephesians (so-called) is a kind of culmination, a summary. The SPIRITUAL sequence is right, if the chronology is not in order. The Cross stands central, universal and supreme. The Church here as the Christ corporately expressed stands on the full ground of the Cross. It is not just the local Cross, the historic Cross, it is the cosmic Cross. In that super-mundane realm Christ — by His Cross — stripped off the principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15) and “led his captivity captive” (Ephesians 4:8), and by His victory placed His Church above all. But this is inclusive of Romans, Corinthians and Galatians. See what the Cross means in those situations, and then gather that together and you have “Ephesians”.

Our “Church ground” must be Christ, only Christ, and this must decide everything and be the answer to all our “Church” problems. But let us hasten to add, that the Letter before us does show how very great are the values of a corporate expression of Christ ANYWHERE. These values are to the individual believer and to the world around. Such matters are bound up with this body presence of Christ as protection and covering; building up and maturing; rooting and grounding; spiritual power and ascendancy; mutual functioning and ministry; a testimony and impact in the realms of satanic and angelic intelligences. All this is in the Letter as related to a true expression of Christ. If we ask: ‘Can such an expression be?’ our answer is: ‘Yes, if not in perfection and completeness, it can be in vital measure.’ The tenses of “Ephesians” may help us. The past: “You DID he quicken when you WERE dead.” That was the beginning. There is much that is retrospective as to their hitherto spiritual history. The present — the CONTINUOUS present — the bulk of the Letter is concerned with growth, building up, “UNTIL the full-grown man”. Future, “that he might present to himself a glorious church”. “Glory in the church... unto the ages of the ages.”

Note: The eternal and present criterion or test of “Church”, whether universal or local, is the presence of Christ. Is He found there? If we are in the Spirit, can we meet Him, and truly say: ‘The Lord was there today!’? The presence of Christ determines whether that is the true Church. The MEASURE of Christ will determine, not BASIC relationship, but the measure of fellowship, spontaneous spiritual mutuality.

The standpoint — a heavenly position, not earthly.

The focus — “Christ — all, and in all.”

The basis — the Cross, initial and continuous.

The dynamic — the “power that worketh in us”.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In the Letter to the Colossians

[The following note written by TAS preceded this chapter in the magazine:

“Note: In the sequence of this series of messages, the next in order would be the Letter to the Philippians. This has been included in the other series — last month’s issue, “*The Battle for Life*”. Hence, we proceed to “Colossians”.”

The chapter which was in the previous issue was chapter 4 and isn’t based on the book of Philippians. We think TAS may have meant the series entitled *Christ Our All* which was published in the magazine concurrently with the first chapters of this book and is a meditation on the letter to the Philippians.]

In ‘Philippians’ the climax and crown of all is in one clause: “the Name which is above every name” (2:9). That is the point at which the Colossian Letter begins. The supremacy of Christ is horizoned in ‘Philippians’ by two clauses: “Equal with God” (2:6) and “the Name above every name” (2:9). In ‘Colossians’ the One who was equal with God is presented as the Creator of all things and the Upholder or integrating centre. But here we are brought to the farthest range of His victorious work, and the utmost realm of that “Name”. We are not going to take time in telling of and explaining the Gnostic error which called forth this Letter from the Apostle. The conclusion which we shall point out will do all that is necessary in that connection.

Having declared that Jesus Christ was the Creator, the Container, the Consistor and the Upholder of all things, the Apostle makes one flashing and devastating declaration: “He stripped off the principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it [the Cross]” (2:15). This is terrific! It links the Cross with that immense revolt against God and His ‘appointed heir of all things’ which took place in a dateless past, before creation: the occasion of the “casting down” of Satan and the angels which “kept not their first estate” (Jude 6), a rebellion which has built up a vast world kingdom and system which determined to exclude or prevent Christ from His inheritance. The serried ranks of spiritual forces are opposed to God and all His rights. A cosmic conflict for the government of this world and its occupants has been operative through the ages, and for the universe. This conflict from outside made its first HISTORICAL impact upon the first couple, and it LOOKS as though that battle went in favour of Satan. From then on an innumerable host of hostile forces were let loose to press home this advantage. The two major spiritual weapons of Satan and his hosts are sin and death. God’s counter to these are righteousness and life in similar se-

quence. Upon these two pairs the whole Bible rests. Thus it is that something more than historical (i.e. earthly) redemption is essential; it had to be cosmic, universal, super-mundane.

'Colossians' is set in that context, and its focus is the supremacy of Christ and the range of His Cross. The Cross there is seen as cleaving a devastating rift between the two cosmic and world rulers, and between the two forces of sin and death, on the one side, and righteousness and life on the other.

But what a different complexion it gives to Christ crucified! The broken, battered, pierced, bleeding, despised and rejected "Man of Calvary" is not just Jesus the Nazarene dying at the hands of evil men; He is fighting out to an eternal issue the battle of the eternities with the cosmic forces of the universe, and settling forever the question of sin and righteousness; of death and life, and laying down the foundation of human destiny!

There are two ways of seeing that drama of Calvary. One is that of a human tragedy with all its horrors and pathos, giving a place to Satanic triumph and sinful man's evil power. This interpretation would spell the defeat of God, the vanquishing of righteousness, and the victory of death. Such an interpretation would give credit to all the planners and executors of Christ's destruction and make the crucifixion to be a vindication of the Jewish rulers, who were the primary schemers and actors in the work. But there is another and still deeper interpretation and power. The Bible speaks of a Wisdom, a profound wisdom which is HID in God from before times eternal, hid from men, hid from devils, and hid from Satan himself. This means that both men and the evil cosmic forces are in darkness and blindness, and are deceived, so that they really do not know what they are doing in their hatred, malice and spite. The result is that, all unconsciously and blindly, they are only carrying out what God intended, and fulfilling the very purpose which they intended to destroy. This is exactly what happened at Calvary. A great work of cosmic redemption was accomplished there through the very means being used by Satan with the idea of totally preventing it. So Paul speaks of "Christ CRUCIFIED, the wisdom and power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

The Bible views the human race and the world as being in the prison and authority of this great spiritual system headed by Satan. Man is wholly unable to free himself; he has neither the wisdom nor the power to do so. A Man must come to his rescue and, because it is sin and death which are the binding power and basis of the arch-enemy's hold, the Rescuer and Deliverer must draw both the enemies and their power on to Himself (like Samson and the Philistines) — "through death destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

This the Final Adam did when He "to the rescue came". The original commission of the Apostle Paul was couched in these words: "I send thee, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God..." (Acts 26:17-18). There you have it. While redemption has many aspects, which are represented by the various words and terms used in the Gospel, that is the outermost and all-inclusive range and realm in this cosmic redemption.

We have, in much fewer words than are really required, ranged the Gospel of our salvation, but surely we have said enough to show how much greater salvation is than is often so cheaply presented in evangelism. One sometimes thinks that Satan must be very pleased with the cheap and easygoing presentation of this that — to him — spells such devastation! We are called to a very great HEAVENLY vocation in the ages to come and to "attain" is through the most terrific debacle in the history of this universe. Read again the Letter to the Colossians in this light. It is surely not without significance that — IN THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ORDERING — this Letter is the last doctrinal document from the pen of the Apostle Paul before the Letters on the Lord's coming, the consummation of all things, although the chronological order would be otherwise.

Lord Jesus, receive the grateful thanks of Thy people. We bow at Thy feet. We would be Thy humble servants for evermore. Help us by Thy grace to be faithful until the end. Amen.

“THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS.”

CHAPTER 1

Adam and the Law of Life

Reading: Gen. 3:1–7; 22–24; Romans 8:1–2.

The longer one lives and the more one thinks about things, the surer one becomes that the supreme issue which governs everything between God and man is that of life. Our Scripture says here that life is a law, and it further says that that life is in the hands of the Holy Spirit — “the law of the Spirit of life...”.

A law is a fixed and established principle. It has potentialities. It means that, if you are adjusted to it and governed by it, certain results are inevitable; that the potentialities which it contains will most surely find expression when that law is established. So that, what we have here is, that the mark of things being of God the Holy Spirit is life. If anything is of God the Holy Spirit, it will live; its chief characteristic will be life. That is a law, an established principle. What is according to God lives, having God’s own life in it, and that is, as a principle, a rule of guidance. It is a principle for the direction of the people of God.

But there is another thing we must notice at the outset. This is that, in the matter of life as a fixed principle, the life is in Christ Jesus: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” Upon that fact, the Scriptures are more than emphatic, that all that is of God is in Christ Jesus; and inasmuch as the mark of all that is of God is life, then life is in Christ Jesus and in Him alone.

The Expression of Life in Christ Sevenfold

Our object, then, is to investigate life and to note life in its components, or how the law of life works out from its beginning to its consummation, and we shall see, as the Lord enables and leads, that the components of life are sevenfold. They are like the colours of light led out by the prism, and Christ Jesus is the prism. We come to see what life is in its manifold expression, what the law of life is in its sevenfold expression, in Christ Jesus. To know life, we must know Him, we must understand Him. To know Him truly is to know life. Thus, in keeping with this whole truth, it becomes the work of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of life, to reveal Christ Jesus, to make Him known, to lead us into Him as the life. But this making known and this leading into Him is a matter of spiritual education, and it may be spread over a whole life-time. I think it is because of this that we have certain expressions in the Word of God which would indicate that while in the commencement of a true life in God we both enter into life and the life enters into us, we are also called upon to take other actions as we go on, in relation to life. Even the people of God are from time to time called upon, as Moses called upon the children of Israel, to choose life. There are certain crises in our spiritual experience when it becomes a necessity to deliberately choose life. Two ways are there before us, and we have to repudiate one quite positively and as positively choose the other. Then again we are exhorted to lay hold on life. Further there are those scriptures which indicate that life is still future, that we have not yet attained, that life lies on before us. We have to go on unto life, we have to inherit eternal life, and that is because the knowledge of Christ is progressive, ever growing. It is an education, and it reaches from the moment of our receiving God’s free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus to no set future moment, but on, ever on, into the hereafter, when we may still be eating of “the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” This life has no end, is never exhausted, and its furthest bound is never reached. But we are concerned with this little span here on the earth, which constitutes our time for education in respect of the law of the Spirit of life, the law of life, and that education is in connection with this sevenfold expression of that law. We have said that it is Christ Jesus.

Now, Christ Jesus bounds all time as life, and whenever God takes in hand to reach His end, it is always, and all along, by means of what Christ is. That is to say, God always moves toward His end by bringing out some further component of Christ as life, something more of what His Son is, and progress therefore toward fullness of life is by means of ever fresh discoveries of what Christ is. God never moves toward His end apart from Christ. Whatever He uses is something that is Christ in its essence, and so, by means of Christ, He brings on toward the consummation of His Purpose.

We move, then, on to very familiar ground in the book of Genesis. Genesis is comprehensive of the whole ground of death and life, and its comprehensiveness in those matters is gathered up into seven persons, each of whom brings Christ into view in some specific aspect of life. Each aspect of life as brought out in each

of these seven persons is a part of the whole law of life, and the whole law of life is comprehended in these seven persons in this sevenfold way. The seven are from Adam to Joseph.

The Intention of God in Adam

We must note at the outset that Adam and Christ stand right at the beginning to govern all the ages. We are told that Adam was a figure of Him that was to come. Adam was a shadow, so to speak. Somewhere, with the eternal light shining from behind, stood Christ Jesus, and there the reality and the shadow stood looking right down all the ages, to govern all the ages as to God's thought.

The law of life in Christ Jesus is represented by the "tree of life" in the book of Genesis. Adam was intended to show forth the way of life. If Adam had not chosen another way, instead of God's intended way for him, Adam would have shown how life works, how the law of life operates, and how, by the operation of that law, God reaches His end; ever and always by a living way, the way of life through the operation of a fixed principle. But Adam failed: he who was to be the representation, yes, and the embodiment, of that law and that way of life failed, and he now stands to represent the way of death. But Christ, known to us now as the last Adam, stepped in, and He Himself is the embodiment of that law of life. He sets forth the way of life. He accomplishes what Adam failed to accomplish and reaches God's end by the pathway of life.

Now, having stated all that is preliminary, we begin with Adam as the first of the sevenfold expression of the law of life; but of course we have to consider Adam now in the opposite direction and learn what life is, and what the law of life is, by a contemplation of how the opposite operates in his case. We shall be led to the positive through the negative, to the true by way of the false.

In order to understand the beginning of life or of death, we must perceive the nature of the temptations of Adam and of Christ; for, if one thing is true in these temptations, it is that the whole question of life and death, death and life, was bound up in them, nothing less than that. So we must for a few minutes consider these temptations anew. We consider the temptation of Adam in order to understand the temptation of Christ.

Satan's Approach to Man

Firstly, there is the form of the tempter and the temptation. In Genesis 3 we see exactly where and why Eve and Adam fell. It is very simple on the face of it. Perhaps that is its chief strength and subtlety. The occasion was something apparently good. Satan's temptations and seductions are usually presented in a form which makes the object in view something to be desired for good. Always remember that. I doubt whether Satan has ever yet tempted or seduced an individual by letting that individual know the dire consequences of falling. He always pursues exactly the opposite course, and brings the temptation and the seduction in a form which would appeal to the human judgment as something to be desired for good. The trouble is always that man only sees the **THING**: Christ saw Satan; and when the temptation came as something suggested, presented as being desirable for good, Christ saw through it and behind it, and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Now, I hardly think it necessary to press that, and to say to you that if ever Satan is going to seek to mislead you, ensnare you, seduce you, carry you away from the way of life, he will invariably do it by bringing up a good proposition, a thing which to your own human judgment is a good thing. It is a very clear and significant implication that, whenever we want to have our own way, we always give a very good argument for it. That is to say, we always bring up something that is good to throw into the balances with it. I say that is significant. Never yet has a man or woman gone wrong without having a good reason for going wrong, that is, from the human standpoint. Always an argument follows, and that gives the whole thing away.

Now, we know that the temptation was first made to the faculty of acquisitiveness, the power to acquire. In this case, it was to acquire knowledge. Now, beloved, to know is not evil in itself, although, of course, it would have been better for man had he never known certain things, or had a certain kind of knowledge. But I do not think that this matter hangs primarily upon the kind of knowledge that was possessed. It started with a desire to know, the appeal was to that power to acquire, to have, to possess; and here it was to possess knowledge. But, while knowledge in itself is not evil, there were hidden elements here in this case. What lay behind this instance was the motive to possess; that is, to possess so as to be no longer dependent upon, or subject to God. The design was to effect a change of position, to have another position. That is what lay behind this temptation. It was a direct blow at man's dependence upon God, man's subjection to God; or, to put it the other way, it was a direct blow at God's position.

The Impugning of God's Character

Then there was something further, a hidden insinuation, and that in respect of two things. Firstly, there was an insinuation regarding God's love. Buried right deep down in this temptation there was a calling into question the love of God. The implication was that God, who professed to love, to be so solicitous for the good of His creatures, was really withholding the best and the highest and the fullest, was really holding their lives in a straitness which need not be, and which was arbitrary. Really God was not love, for a God who does that is not love. Now, I am not saying that all this was recognized, but I am saying that the whole of the Scriptures as well as of human history bears it out. Satan's first basic, subtle, diabolical assault is always upon the love of God, and he never gives up that assault. You and I will never on this earth be in the

place where we are altogether immune from the possibility of being tempted about that. Do you tell me that God is love? Look at this and that and that! What does it spell but limitation, and your having less than you could have and ought to have?

Then it was an insinuation as to God's veracity; that is, as to whether God is true, whether God can really be trusted. "Hath God said...?" Now you see what happens. In the hour of temptation, God's goodness is always impugned, and God's truth is always brought into question, and all other tokens of His love, His veracity, are always obscured. The obvious answer to anybody alive and awake was, Oh no! look, look everywhere; everywhere there are evidences and tokens of God's love: I have plenty of proof of the love of God if I like to contemplate it, if I like to sit down and think about it and weigh things up. But how many of you have ever done that in the hour of trial, and found your escape that way? Is it not true that, in the hour of trial, of temptation, of stress, of assault, all the blessings that have ever been are obscured? Somehow or other, a mist is spread over them, a fog bank, a smoke screen, and you only see your present adversity and the difficulty of the moment. You are obsessed with a question about God and His love and His faithfulness, His truth. I believe that this is why Jesus, in the final revelation, is called "Faithful and True" (Rev. 19:11). It is the great title of triumph in man; the triumph in man over all this work of Satan which raises for ever and aye the question as to God's love and God's truth. His title has as its foundation all that lies behind such words as these: "I am he that liveth; I became dead." But wait a moment: listen to this cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That is the hour of temptation, the hour of darkness for Him. How did He emerge from it? Not as one who has entertained and nursed Satan's suggestion as to the breakdown of God's love and the failure of God's faithfulness, but victor over the sum of his suggestions and insinuations in an hour such as you and I will never know. He comes forth and becomes the embodiment of those features, faithful and true.

The Real Object in View

Well, here is this double insinuation, blinding to all the mercies and all the goodness of God. Then you see this further hidden thing. It was Satan's subtle, hidden way of putting God out of His place and getting into that place himself. It is very clear when you think about it. That is exactly what happened. God was deposed and Satan put in His place, and that is exactly what Satan was after. You see, he came in, as he usually does, with what was a question about God, and then, found an ear open, a listening ear — oh the peril, the disaster, of an ear inclined to Satan, a parleying with Satan! Christ Jesus never did it. Finding an ear open to his question, he swiftly moved, and followed up that small advantage with a statement which was a lie, a positive lie: "Ye shall not surely die." He is trying to get down to the convictions now, to drive home the superficial advantage, to register something deeper down. "Ye shall not surely die." That, again, is not left, but is followed at once with something else, a truth in a wrong position. "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof... ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Perfectly true! Did not God say later on, "The man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." But that truth was in its wrong position, and the terrible, the dire consequences were not revealed. The fact of knowing is not the point, but the becoming possessed of knowledge by a way that is contrary to God, knowing in a way which puts you apart from God, which alienates from God and alienates God from us. It is knowing at the instigation of Satan with a subtle, hidden intention to make independent of God; and when once man has become independent of God, Satan has secured his end: He is in the place of God.

Now, beloved, this is the way of death, and it is all summed up in one word: the way of death is a way that turns from God to self and to independence; independence of judgment, independence of desire, and independence of will. Hence "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"; mind, heart, will. Independence of God is the way of death; having a mind of our own, having a judgment of our own, holding to our own position, clinging to our own conclusions. Oh what a realm that opens up! It opens up the whole question of the sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus in respect of the Church, which is His Body, and forbids individual members of that spiritual Body to be in any way in independence. It touches, of course, much more than that. The way of death is Adam's way, toward self in the matter of judgment, toward self in the matter of desire, toward self in the matter of will.

Christ the Exemplar of the Way of Life

Now, this brings us to Christ, to see life working in the last Adam in the opposite position to that of the first Adam, to see the way that He took. Oh, always remember Satan's object in temptation. It was true in the case of the Son of God and it is true in the case of every one of us. We must get right down to the thing that Satan is after. I feel that a very great deal of our explanation and exposition of the temptations of the Lord Jesus has not gone far enough. It has stopped short of the ultimate point, and, while it may be helpful, it misses the mark. We must recognize that the all-governing object in Satan's tempting of the Lord Jesus was death, nothing less than that. He was out for His life. He was out to make it impossible for Him to be the life of men. He was out, so to speak, to stop the stream of life at its very spring. The temptations always had in view the question of life. Satan was out for death. That is why he is described in the Word as "him that had the power of death" (Heb. 2:14); something that he is wielding against the sons of God. But see Christ's way. His way was ever from self and from independence to the Father, to God. One of the sublime things to be noted in His life is that; how always, without hesitation or reservation, He turned from self to the Father, from any proposed line of independence to dependence upon the Father. Nothing out from Himself was His

life attitude. It was a fixed thing with Him: no consulting of self, no consideration for self, no self-arguments, no self-desires, no self-will; but ever with Him it was, “not my will, but thine...”; “I am come to do thy will”; “I delight to do thy will, O my God”: utterly away from self and from independence to God. You see, that lies right at the heart of the temptations at the beginning of His ministry. The temptation was to act of Himself, out from Himself, independently of God, but He brought the issue back every time to the one point: God has made known His mind in the matter: God has expressed Himself in this connection: it is written, it is written, it is written. God is the final court of appeal in every matter, not my convenience, not my comfort, not my advancement, not my good, not my self-realization, not my purpose; not even my life, nothing but the Father.

Conformity to Christ, beloved, is the supreme factor in the law of life in Christ. That is the law of life in Christ — always away from self and our own souls unto God; away from our own reasoning, our own desiring, our own willing. That is conformity to the image of God’s Son. That is very practical. When we speak of being foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, we may perhaps think that this is some secret, hidden, imperceptible thing which is taking place under the hand of the Holy Spirit without our knowledge, but that is not the truth. That conformity to the image of God’s Son comes in along the line of definite choice, deliberate choice. It comes through following the law which governed the Son of God — ever away from self to God, away from all independence of mind and heart and will to Him. And God presses the test in a very practical way.

This, then, is “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” What is this first aspect of the law of the Spirit of life as brought out in Adam and in Christ? It is a law of an initial, a full, a continuous and a final subjection to the Lord. That is the way of life. Satan says that is the way of curtailment, the way of limitation, the way of losing things: God says that is the way of life. Satan’s way proved a way of death and the life was cut off and held in reserve for such as would take the way of life, or who would establish God’s fixed principle of life. He is Lord, He is sovereign. It is established beyond question or doubt or argument. God is love and God is true. Move one hair’s breadth from that and you move from life. Hold to that whatever it means and you go through into life.

CHAPTER 2

Abel and the Law of Life

Reading: Gen. 4:3–6, 8–10; I John 3:12; John 7:44; Acts 7:52; John 4:23; Romans 8:2.

In our previous meditation we were drawn to take account of the sevenfold working of the law of life. We spoke of the Lord Jesus as the prism of life, in and through whom life is broken up into its components, in whom we are able to see the working of life. Yet, as we contemplate, the figure changes, and that of a seven-branched candlestick or lampstand looms into view, and we see that it has one central root and stem, and out from it, as part of it, on either side go the six branches. In our previous meditation, which was upon the law of the Spirit of life as brought out first of all in Adam, we have the central root and stem which includes all the others, out from which all grow or radiate, to which all come back; for the beginning of things is very comprehensive, and what we shall see as we go on is that each of these remaining aspects of the law of life is but an outgrowth or outworking of what we have comprehensively and inclusively in Adam. I say that because of the unity of the whole, the oneness of all the parts. This oneness is a very remarkable and a very wonderful thing. How all of a piece this matter of life is! You never really get into anything that is fragmentary, detached or unrelated. You can never deal with any one aspect as though it were something in itself. One thing leads to another and that other leads you back again, so that all the time you are dealing with the same thing and yet growing. That may not be quite clear to your comprehension now, but you will see what we mean as we go on.

What Cain and Abel Represent

We come to the second of these outworkings of the law of life in Christ, brought to us in the second of the seven personal representations of the Old Testament, or of the book of Genesis, and we have now before us Cain and Abel. Here we see the law or principle of life manifesting itself in a contrast and a conflict. Where there is life — and you understand that I am not speaking of ordinary human life, I am speaking of Divine life, spiritual life, that unique and peculiar life which Christ is and which is Christ where that life is, this antagonism will inevitably come to light. It always is the case, and you can neither avoid the clash nor suppress it without doing despite to the life. Immediately the life of God is found anywhere, an antagonism manifests itself, conflict begins.

Here, then, we find that life; and we are speaking now in the realm of types. Life was found along Abel’s line and death was found along Cain’s line, and we have to investigate the difference. What was the difference? Let us look at Cain very carefully.

We can be superficial about Cain and come to conclusions which, while they may be quite right and true, are inadequate. Let us be quite fair, quite precise about Cain. Cain did not ignore God, nor was he one who was outwardly opposed to God. Cain recognized God; he acknowledged Him to be the object of worship. Cain brought to God, as an act of worship, the best that he knew and the best that he had. I say the best that he knew, not the best that he could have known. In this realm, what Cain brought was good and was costly. Until we recognize that, and put it like that, we are not on the way to understanding the difference between death and life. It is of no use our painting what we would call the way of death all in black or dark colours and thinking of the way of death as necessarily being that which is marked by the most atrocious outrages against God. We must not suppose that, to be in the way of death, it is necessary to be openly and positively antagonistic to God, or to ignore God, or to refuse some practical acknowledgment of God. It is not necessary that these things should obtain in order to be in the way of death. The way of death is something deeper than that, something very much deeper than that, and we shall see that this is so as we go on.

You see, Cain brought the fruit of his natural life, and that is all there is to it. When you have said that, if you understand it, you have got near the heart of the thing.

In Abel's case, his attitude was that we must die to live. We have nothing that is acceptable to bring to God, only a life to be repudiated. Abel recognized sin and saw that the sinful soul must be poured out unto death, not offered to God, neither it nor its works or fruits. You see, on the Cain side, the soul seeks to be accepted on the ground of what it deems to be its own good. On the Abel side, the soul seeks to die to itself.

Christ Jesus and the Jews

Now, we carry that over immediately to Christ Jesus and the Jews. You notice that we read of the Jews in John's Gospel in the exact terms used about Cain — a terrible thing. But the point that we and all the Lord's people need to grasp is this, that we are not necessarily dealing with what we call the ungodly, as standing in the place of Cain, and the godly, in the truest sense, as standing in the place of Abel. We are in a much narrower compass of things than that. There is an Israel after the flesh and there is an Israel after the Spirit.

So we turn to Christ and the Jews in His day. The Jews worshipped and they murdered, a terrible combination. Their worship, which in its realm was very devout, and costly in a way, was nevertheless but an outward thing. It is not necessary for me to call to your remembrance various passages which passed through the Lord's lips about that. "Ye make clean the outside of the platter": "They make broad their phylacteries": "You make long prayers": they delighted "to be seen of men to fast"; and so on. It was outward. Their worship was their own glory and works. As they worshipped they drew attention to themselves, and made their very worship an occasion of self-glorification. It was all a matter of forms, into which they threw themselves maybe very heartily, but by which none the less they sought to gain benefits for themselves. Even worship was toward themselves all the time, not really toward God, but for their own favour and good. It had nothing to do with the heart of God. God's satisfaction was not the one and only consideration.

Now, look at the Lord Jesus, who stands always in opposition to the Jews, and they to Him. The opposition is found, not in the outward at all, but deeper down. He worshipped; but He worshipped by a life wholly yielded to God. But more, He worshipped by a life governed by the very nature of God. By that I mean that God's nature was the thing which characterized His worship. God is holy, God is righteous, God is altogether without mixture; He is pure. God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all, no suspicion or suggestion of darkness, cloudiness, or lack of transparency. It was what God was, what God is, that governed the worship of the Lord Jesus. That is to say, He saw that it was not possible to worship God in truth, unless you recognized what God was, what God is, and forever abandoned anything and everything that was not like God. You could not come on to God's ground to worship God and bring there something unlike God, something contrary to God. You must worship God in truth. There is so much that is false, so much that is a lie, so much that is a contradiction, so much that is untrue and unreal and make-believe about human nature, and you must part with it all if you are going to be a true worshipper, and recognize that here you cannot play with God, cannot deceive God, cannot have fellowship with God while there is anything like that about you. You are governed entirely by the consideration of what God is. To do otherwise is like coming into the presence of an extremely sensitive person and just saying or doing those things which create agony to that sensitive person. If you are a musician, a musical person — I do not mean if you played music! — if you were a musical person, if you had a high, keen sense of music, and anyone came into your presence and strummed and struck constant discords, you know what agony it would be. You would go hot and cold. If you knew a certain person to be keenly, acutely strung to true music, and you were not in any special way musical, it would be the last thing that you would do, if you had good sense, to attempt to play in the presence of such a one. I remember a man who played the violin fairly well and he went to hear someone who played the violin very well. He came to me after and said, I am going to put my foot through my violin: I will never play again. If that man heard me play, it would drive him mad! You see what I am getting at. The point is that this is how the Lord Jesus was attuned to God, and the thing which weighed with him was the nature of God. What does God require of a worshipper? Does He want certain forms? His worship was by a life laid down as a testimony against sin. Remember that! The death of the Lord Jesus has various aspects, but this is a very vital one. It was a laying down of His life as a testimony against sin.

It would be impossible for there to be any fellowship with God while there was sin: and there was sin. What are you going to do with regard to it? You cannot clean up sin. It must die. But, seeing that sin is not some abstract thing, but that man is become sin, then to deal with human nature, from which you cannot

pluck out or eradicate something called sin, you have to bring in another human nature in which there is no sin. What is to happen to us then? Not to have sin plucked out, but to die and to have Christ come in our place. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I, but Christ." Well, His worship was by a life laid down as a testimony against sin.

You see the working of that in Abel. Of course, Abel did not lay down his life. That is where the type falls short, but the principle is the same. The death of Abel was a testimony against sin — "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth..."

Now, you see this conflict and the conflict is perfectly clear. There is a Cain line of death, full of worship, full of acknowledgment of God, full of gifts to God, full of splendid things in its own realm, and there is Abel's line of life. This latter works out in an offering, not of things, but of self, and that upon an altar. The creature must die.

The Sphere of the Conflict

■ (a) The Warfare is Between Two Kingdoms

Now we can get very quickly to our point. This conflict operates in two realms. Firstly, it operates in the realm where there is that which is of God and that which is of Satan. We all know that. That is the simplest and most obvious realm of the operation of this antagonism. I mean, it is the realm where every born again child of God moves immediately they receive this life. We all know that immediately we become the Lord's and are filled with His joy, and then go back to our business or our sphere of life in this world, expecting that everybody is going to be very pleased and to respond to this, we find instead that, without so much as breathing a word about it, suspicious looks are cast in our direction and the atmosphere is full of something. You never have to say a word — it is there. More often than not, the moving about of a child of God in this world draws out into the very atmosphere an antagonism, a conflict, without any words being spoken. It is not imagination, it is there, and the more strong the soul-life on the other side, the quicker the discerning of that which is in us; the more shrewd is the arrival at a conclusion that there is something, and the more definite the antagonism. I mean that simple, artless people, while they do not understand you and cannot go with you, they do not give out to you what comes out from those other people of a strong soul-life. We know that realm of the outward, where the antagonism becomes manifestly between what is of Satan and what is of God. I need not follow that, it is known so well.

■ (b) Man Himself the Real Battle Ground

But there is this other realm, where in an inward way conflict arises between that which is of God and that which is of self. The point is this, that the realm, the real realm, of this battle is man himself. That is where the battle really rages most fiercely. Most of us come very quickly to recognize the difference in the outward realm, where the conflict is between us and those who are not for God, and we accept it. But when this thing gets inside, it is far more difficult to deal with. When it arises within us, it is very difficult to accept it, because we do not understand it. We find the conflict within ourselves and that conflict has been precipitated by the very presence of life in us. It is the outworking of the law of life in Christ Jesus. It may be comforting in one respect to know it is that. So often, when the thing becomes acute, the tempter gives his own interpretation to it and would have us believe that everything is wrong and that there is nothing of God there at all; whereas the fact is, it is because there is that which is of God that the conflict has arisen within, and we ourselves have become the battlefield. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: for these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). But what is it, what are the two things that are in conflict? Now a very elementary and superficial answer would be, of course, that it is the flesh and the Spirit, the old man and the new man. That is quite true, but it is not an adequate answer. It really does not get right to the heart of this thing, and I do want that you should see the core of this matter. It is most important. For want of discernment in this matter, many of the Lord's people are rendered helpless, impotent, bewildered. You see, beloved, the real battle is between soul and spirit.

Now, you cannot simply say soul is flesh, soul is old Adam. That is not true in the full sense. You have to be careful. If you say that, then you are going to embark upon a line of killing the soul and you must not do that. The soul itself is not a wrong thing. It is not wrong to have a soul. The Lord tells us that the soul has to be won. "In your patience ye shall win your souls" (Luke 21:19). "We are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:39). And yet the conflict is here between soul and spirit. From this you may recognize the nature of the Fall, as being a violation of spirit by soul. In our previous meditation we noted the attack upon man's soul, that is, upon his reason, desire and will, and we saw how man's reason, desire and will were taken out of their place and made to exercise and function independently of God. Man has a spirit, and by his spirit he was put into communication with God, who is Spirit. He knew God, not through his soul: in that unfallen state, he had not to come to reasoned conclusions about the will of God; he had not to sit down and reason out what God wanted. In his unfallen state, he perceived, he sensed, he intuitively knew, and that is why conscience arose and smote him, because conscience is not a faculty of the soul, but a faculty of the spirit. Well, man disregarded the organ of communion with God when he disregarded God as the final court of appeal on all matters and, acting on the ground of his own soul, violated his spirit. Then that conflict arose in man which has gone on ever since. He is a house divided against itself, which cannot stand, and you have these two sides as in the one, soul and spirit. By nature he is essentially now a soul man. In the New Testament, unfortunately, he is called "the natural man,"

but everybody knows the word there is “soulical” man; man who is governed and actuated by soul, that is, by his own self-reasoning, his own self-discerning, his own self-willing. That is the type of man he is, and over against him in the New Testament you have placed the spiritual man, “he that is spiritual.” Thus there arises the conflict between these two “men” as in the one, the conflict between soul and spirit, spirit and soul; what is of God, God’s thought, as against our thought; God’s reasoning, if we may use that word, or God’s reason as over against our reasoning; God’s will as over against our will; God’s feelings, affections, desires, as over against our feelings, affections and desires. These two things now come in, not into the unregenerate man, but into the regenerate man. We are not talking now of the man out of Christ, we are talking of the carnal man. The carnal man is the Christian in whom there is flesh, and who is actuated by it.

Now, you see, the soul is the place where the flesh resides, for flesh in its spiritual sense (not the physical sense) is an evil thing. It is self-willed, self-guided, actuated by Satan. That is flesh. It is that which lusteth against the Spirit, and you know how much the New Testament says about flesh as an evil thing. It is resident in the natural soul. The spirit reborn in new birth becomes the vessel for the indwelling of that which is of God.

Now, this conflict is set up. You say, I know it all too well, although perhaps I should never have analysed and explained it like that; but I know it! We do know it! But the trouble is that so many have not got past that. They are still in it. We have not yet come to the point but I might as well say right away that it is not God’s will that this conflict should go on in perpetuity throughout our spiritual life, that we should always be in this conflict. We shall speak of that another time.

Divine Life Demands a Walk after the Spirit

Here we have to sum up what we have been saying in a phrase or two. The aspect of the basic matter with which we are dealing here is that the law of life demands a course in the spirit, and not in the flesh or in our own soul. It demands a heavenly union with God in our spirit, and not the soulical religious life according to our ideas. That is the difference between Cain and Abel. Oh yes, Cain was a religious man, Cain was a worshipping man, Cain brought what, in its realm, was good, precious, costly. Cain, in his way, was devout in his acknowledgment that God is to be worshipped, but his understanding was darkened, and so is the understanding of our souls. We, by nature, do not know God’s thoughts. “The natural (or soulical) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: ... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor 2:14). Thus Cain, with all his devoutness and all his worship and his religion and his acknowledgment of God, was still in the darkness of a darkened understanding: his judgment was all out, his ideas were all wrong, he was missing the mark and nothing got through above the altar. God had not respect unto Cain’s offering. The Jews stood in that position, and, to prove it, the Jews murdered, even as Cain murdered. To prove it, challenge the worship of the soul-worshippers, of the religious people who are not spiritual, and you will find something flare up. They cannot bear to have it interfered with, challenged or touched. To a true worshipper, to one who worships in spirit and in truth, you can say or do what you will, and you will find no spirit of murder rising up, or anything akin to it. Like Abel, such a one will lay down his life, even at the hands of the worshippers, the religious. That is the difference here between the soul and the spirit.

Now, I said before that we are in a very much narrower circle than that which embraces believers and the ungodly. Beloved, life, that which gets through and goes on, that which is the seal and mark of God, of what is of God and what is acceptable to God; life is along the line of the spirit. Death, though it may have all the outward semblance, forms, worship, acknowledgment of God, religion, is none the less death. It does not get through: it does not go through. Oh, you say, surely you are speaking out in a very wide realm of things? We know what you are thinking about, of the merely religious people who go to church and say formal prayers. I am not! There is an application no doubt that can be made to them from such words, but that is not what I am thinking about. I am not dividing these things up so utterly and finally as to put them into pigeon-holes. I am saying that there are overlappings of these things in most believers, and therefore there is a limitation of life. Why is it that missionaries can come back from mission fields after twenty-five or thirty years’ service, and say, The whole thing has broken down, the promises of God have become dust and ashes to me! Let us be quite frank. They are doing it. Some are known to us. Why is it? There comes a point where, because of the unreality and because things do not work, do not go through, do not reach Divine ends, so many just come to an impasse and have questions, and justifiable questions, about the reality of things. Why? Now, I am leaving out certain other things. I know all about physical and nervous breakdowns, depressions, melancholia, and all those things which come in sometimes to becloud. I am not talking about that. I am speaking about that realm where what is spiritual is not working out, where there is no seal of God that is adequate. For the much pouring out, the much giving, the much doing, no spiritual life is really to be seen as the fruit of it. The absence of life! Oh, it is possible, beloved, for us to be under the hand of God in chastening and disciplining, where we see no fruit of our labours, no results of our work, and where everything, so far as our senses are concerned, our souls, is hidden, darkened, obscured, and yet all the time for life to be working in the power of resurrection both in us and through us, and for others to be getting the benefit of it, though we neither see nor sense it. That is one thing, but that is not what I am talking about. I am talking about absence of life, where things are dead spiritually. What is the trouble? Well, the answer is in Cain and Abel. The explanation is here in the difference between soul and spirit. The soul is not a wrong thing, but for it to govern is another matter. If that which is of soul gets the upper hand, then it

is self getting the upper hand, and the works are out from ourselves, the energies and activities of our own souls, and not the energies of God through our spirits.

In saying such things, do not let anyone think for a moment that, when you live on the level of the spirit, where all things are to be out from God and nothing out from yourself, there is never going to be anything doing. A lot of people think there are going to be no works, no activities at all. The only difference is in the kind of activities. You do not do less, you do other. It is different, but the end sees much greater gain than all the self-propagated activities for God. In the hidden depths everything must be toward God, not toward self. We do not know how deeply rooted in our own souls is that self. We discover something of it when we can no longer do, when God puts His hand upon us and says, Stop doing for a month or two, and puts us out of action. Then we discover how great a measure of self-gratification was in our doing, and, with its cessation, we are no longer gratified. We have lost our gratification, and we have nothing in its place, and what the Lord is seeking to do is to take away our gratification with things and doings, and for Himself to be our gratification; that, whether we do or do not do, even if there is nothing that we can do, we have the Lord and are satisfied. I am perfectly certain that is the crux of the whole matter. It is what the Lord is to us, not what our work is to us; not what anything is to us which has its seat or spring in our own souls. We have the Lord and we are satisfied. I wonder if there is one of us who has absolutely got there? No, we have still to have patience unto the winning of our souls. These souls have still to be brought over in ever fuller degrees to where God is their only gratification. Through many, many bitter tears we may come there, but when we do come there, the tears will be wiped away. You see, the tears are associated with getting somewhere. They are never there when you arrive. The little girl who said, If God is going to wipe away all tears, He will have to have a very big handkerchief, had a wrong idea as to how tears are wiped away. Tears have to do with processes and the wiping away is simply the result of arriving. They pass away. "In your patience ye shall win your souls."

The Necessity for Enlightenment

But the understanding must be enlightened — "having the eyes of your heart enlightened" — the understanding must be enlightened, so that instead of Cain's way, which is a way in the soul, where even in its devotion to God, even in its acknowledgment of God, the soul yet draws everything to itself, there may be a life which is in the spirit. Cain would not have admitted it was so. No soulful life would admit that it was drawing everything to itself. It is the most difficult thing for anybody to accept that, yet that is the nature of the soul. The spirit is just the opposite. The spirit is always toward God; the renewed spirit, that is. The Lord Jesus poured out His soul unto death; He committed His spirit to God.

That touches a new field of contemplation. The soul-life as such must come under, the spirit-life must come up. In so far as the soul-life governs, there is death. There may be a lot of emotion, a lot of sensation, a lot of pleasing, a lot of activity, but the end is death. Inasmuch as the spiritual life governs, the life of the spirit, there is life, and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is the law of life.

Now, do not bother about the technique, about the way in which this word has been expressed in its details, but ask the Lord to enable you to grasp the conclusion. As one in whom the life is, I am made aware of two things. It is an inevitable result of the life that the conflict within arises. I have, further, to know the nature of that conflict, and, when my understanding is enlightened, I see that it is the conflict between myself on the soul side and myself on the spirit side. It is a conflict between my own soul and what is of God in me. That is a house divided against itself: it cannot stand. It must sooner or later crash, and we are seeing the crash of such divided houses all around. That is not God's thought. There is a way out. We shall see later, if the Lord wills, what that is, but here we recognize the fact. Let us seek the Lord that we may walk in the Spirit, walk by the Spirit, have our life in God and not in things, and not out from ourselves; for this natural life is a false life and it deceives because it is deceived. But His life is true, and He is true who is the life. Because He is life, He is also the light. Because He is the light, He is the life.

Let us ask the Lord to make the meaning of this clear.

CHAPTER 3

Noah and the Law of Life

As we move on in these meditations, there are two other passages of the Word of a basic character which I want to bring to you. One is in I Pet. 3:20-21.

"... once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Without taking it away from its context, which is vital to our present consideration, I want just to underline the last part of that passage: “the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ”.

Then we will turn back to most familiar words in Romans 6:3–8.

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.”

The Basis of a Good Conscience

We now pass to the third of the characters used by God to explain the working of the law of life, namely, Noah. We have seen that not one of these can be taken as detached or unrelated or separate from any other or from the rest. They all overlap, grow into one another and grow out of one another. We find ourselves really in a chain, a chain of seven links; and the links in the chain of the course of death are clearly seen as you take up this book. “The eyes of them both were opened” (Gen. 3:7); that is the first link in the chain. The second link is this: “And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord” (Gen. 4:16). The third link quickly follows: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Gen. 6:5,13). Now you see in that seventh verse of chapter 3 exactly what has happened. It is said that the eyes of them both were opened. It means that conscience came into being, and an evil conscience at that. Up to that time, conscience had not been the ruling faculty. Perhaps they had been altogether unconscious of having a conscience, but now conscience has come to life, and because it is an evil conscience they acted as they did and hid themselves. That has come in with Adam, and what we have to see is that the mischief that came in with Adam has to be remedied; there has to be deliverance from an evil conscience and the answer of a good conscience toward God.

The Adam race in itself is entirely unable to give that answer of a good conscience. No matter how conscience works in the natural man, it always betrays condemnation; for in the natural man conscience usually works either to accuse or excuse, and both alike represent condemnation. Conscience being evil, and man being unable to give the answer of a good conscience toward God, means that, so far as God is concerned, man is dead, dead to God. The answer of a good conscience toward God demands that we should be on living ground, a ground of life, altogether other ground than that of nature: so in I Pet. 3:21, it is the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, it is to this that Noah brings us. Here we have the question of life bound up with the answer of a good conscience toward God by resurrection; for life and a good conscience go together, or a good conscience toward God and life go together. In like manner, an evil conscience and death go together.

Just look back one step in our meditation to Abel. There in Abel the matter is related to the death side of the Cross. As we contemplated Abel and his sacrifice, we saw that Abel’s discernment and conclusion was that, rather than being able to bring anything as the fruit of nature for God’s satisfaction subsequent to Adam’s disobedience, the only way of life is through death: the creature must die, the soul must be poured out unto death, not bring its works, its fruits, its good, as did Cain. So Abel represents the death side of the Cross, where the soul is poured out unto death.

Now, while we look out upon a state of universal death as we come to Noah and death is very much in view, nevertheless it is the positive side that governs in Noah’s case. It is very important that we should recognize that. It is not the death side which is supreme in the case of Noah, despite a universal overwhelming. It is the life side that governs in Noah’s case, the positive side.

Let us mark again what Peter says.

“The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

That is the positive side, you see; the life side. All this brings something into view, namely, resurrection, life; and resurrection, life, is only possible when there has been a repudiation of the natural or soul-life of the old Adam. That is one side of Noah’s testimony. God always finally acts on the positive line. While He says terrible things — “The end of all flesh is come before me... I will destroy them with the earth” — God never intended that should be the end. God is acting on the positive line. He will re-act to secure something that does answer to His original thought. He is not abandoning His thought and saying, I can never do as I intended; man has rendered it impossible for me to accomplish what I had set my heart upon: I am defeated, I am in a hopeless state, I will wipe it all out and try again. It is never thus with God. And to whatever He has to resort to clear the ground, He is but clearing ground for something else; He is acting and re-acting with the positive always in view. Otherwise God is defeated again and again and again. He is as a hopeless, help-

less God making futile attempts through history, and the greatest failure that this universe has ever seen was the death of Jesus Christ! But we know that the death of the Lord Jesus was the greatest triumph of God that this universe has ever seen. It has cleared the ground for a new creation. God is always acting on the positive line. But you can never come to the positive, you can never come to the life, until there has been the repudiation of that which God has repudiated, and God has repudiated the natural life, the soul-life of man as the governing thing. Why is that? Well, as we have seen before, it is because, since Adam's transgression and fall, the natural or soul-life of man is a false life. This is made very manifest in Cain.

The Natural Soul-life a False Life

We must re-emphasize here something that was said in our previous meditation. You have in Cain a very religious man; a man who, along his line, is a very devout man, recognizing and acknowledging God as the object of worship. As he looked over the result of his labours in those fruits of the field and of the trees, he probably picked out the best, he selected the most perfect, he made up a sacrifice that answered to his highest judgment as to what was worthy of God. We will do him credit for that, and I think it is most likely that is exactly what he did do. He brought the best he could lay hand upon, and sought to worship God by that means, and sought life along that line. But, you see, his soul was darkened, and that action of the soul, that energy, that motion, that life of the soul, that natural life, was a false life. It misled him, it deceived him, it caused him to proceed in a way which brought him up against a blank wall where God was concerned, with no opening, no way through. It was the leading of a false, deceived life, and that is so with this natural life of ours. It is a false life, it is a deceived life, and it deceives us even in worship. We may become almost ecstatic in worship, we may become tremendously emotional in worship; there may be something that looks like veritable agony in worship, and I have seen it. I have entered cathedrals and churches in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean at the feast of Corpus Christi and at other times, and I have seen people spread on the ground in what looked like an agony, when the host was elevated, groaning and almost perspiring. Half an hour afterwards out in the street, they were using knives to one another in a quarrel. You see, it is a false life, a deceived life. That, of course, is an extreme expression of it, but you can see the same thing in more modified forms. Sincerity is not necessarily reality: we have to discriminate. We may mean well: so did Cain; but he murdered. This life of ours is a deceived life and it will deceive us even in worshipping, and get us nowhere.

Even in what we call service to God, it may be our own zest, our own zeal, our own enthusiasm, our own energy, putting ourselves into it, and not that energy and vitality of the Spirit of God by which alone God is served. Now, I am not saying that, when the Holy Spirit gets hold of us, we do not put ourselves into things, but I modify that word "ourselves". It is true that, if the Holy Ghost gets hold of us, He will use us up. The Lord requires that, whatsoever our hands find to do, we should do it with our might. The Lord demands that we shall serve Him with all our strength, all our mind, all our heart. Yes, but the Holy Spirit must be in charge to direct, to instigate, to govern, or all is in vain, and we are deceived in trying to serve the Lord and it comes to nothing. The question is, Where is the spring of this — in ourselves, or in Him? Is it of God or simply our own judgment as to what is for God? Now, this is where understanding needs enlightenment, and where things have to be put into their right place. This natural life does not get through to God, and therefore can never lead to spiritual maturity. Strange, is it not, that some of those who are most energetically engaged and thoroughly using their energies in work for God still remain so spiritually small in their knowledge of God? This soul of ours never will get us through to spiritual maturity, to a real and true knowledge of God: and that is the test of everything — growth in the knowledge of the Lord. It is not a question at the last of how much I have done, how sincere or earnest I have been: the thing which matters in the long run is, In what measure do I know the Lord, how much have I grown in the knowledge of the Lord, how has my spiritual intelligence increased? That is the thing that matters; and that is a matter of life, Divine life.

The flood was the verdict upon the course of Cain. The second link in the chain is, as we have said, "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod." Then what happened? He instituted a civilization. You mark what is there recorded. You find cities, trades, arts, industries, all coming out from Cain, all the various aspects of human life. Cain built a civilization, produced a world after his own kind; a natural life, soul-life, soul-world; that which was not out from God but out from himself, and the flood was God's verdict upon the course of Cain, that world of natural glory, of man's fruitfulness apart from God. So the law of life is seen operating, not along that line — that is the way of death — but along another line, through the flood and out on the other side upon resurrection ground.

The Importance of a True and Settled Position

Now, if we at any time leave the ground of resurrection, which pre-supposes the repudiation of our natural life, then life is at once arrested and death takes advantage. We have to settle it once for all that we have done with nature and nature's ground as the ground of our hope, our confidence, our reliance, our expectation. Yet how long drawn out is that awful conflict with our own natures to get that issue! Have we any expectation whatsoever in nature? Of course, as one familiar with the doctrine, you will say, No, certainly not! we see that it is unfruitful, unprofitable, and we can have no expectation there. Then why be miserable because you cannot find any good in yourself? It means that you are expecting something from yourself. Take that ground and you take the ground of death. If you take the ground of resurrection, it implies that you have once for all given up all expectation of any good coming out of yourself. Oh, to get that settled, and set-

tled with reference to the Devil; because, you see, this not only constitutes for us an outstanding point of conflict, but it is also Satan's ground. Every link in this chain, every aspect of the working of this law of life, is a reversing of the work of Satan. If he brought out the soul into a false place of domination, then the soul has to be poured out that his ground may be taken away.

You have heard of the farmer who was always having trouble with his spiritual life because Satan was always coming to him and telling him that he was not forgiven and not a true believer in Christ, that he was not truly saved. Almost every day he went down under that accusation until life became intolerable. One day, unable to go on any longer because of this accusation and the misery of getting down under it, he sat down and faced the thing out. He put some questions to himself with the Word of God before him. He said, Have I accepted that? Do I believe that? Of course I do with all my heart. Then God says that I am forgiven. God says "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." So he went out into the field where Satan had met him so often and took a stake, and drove it deep into the earth, and said, That settles it once for all! Then he went on with his ploughing. He got to the other side and Satan came back and tried to tempt him again. Look here, Mr. Satan, he said, you come along with me. You see that stake? You know why I drove that stake in there: I drove it in to settle this business once for all. God has said it and I believe and accept it. That is an end of it!

Do not parley with Satan. Point to an established fact and stay there. Keep to your fact. If you move off resurrection ground and what it implies, it is death. Stay there, with its implication that you have repudiated the life of nature as having any possible hope, and you have seen Christ as the hope, the sure hope, the only hope. Maintain that position, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes free from the law of sin and death. That is how the law of life operates, on resurrection ground. There is no good conscience on any other ground, as that farmer well discovered when he moved over on to Satan's side and accepted what he had to say.

Noah forever stands to testify against the vanity, the emptiness, the unfruitfulness of a natural life, and his is a practical testimony. He testified to the vanity of natural life by building an ark in order to get out of it. That, for Noah, was the way of life — out of the life of nature. The law of life in Christ Jesus supposes that, in spirit, we are out of nature: otherwise that law is not a law for us; it has no meaning for us, it does not operate where we are concerned. It supposes that we are out of the life of nature and in Christ Jesus.

Noah a Witness against a Lost Discrimination

Now, to examine Noah a little more closely. One of the pronounced features in Noah's day was the loss of distinctiveness between things clean and things unclean. There is that mysterious statement in Genesis 6:2: "The sons of God saw the daughters of men... and took them wives of all which they chose." The last clause is very suggestive — "as THEY chose". Refraining deliberately from going into explanations of the first part of the statement, let us take what lies on the surface. Here are those who are on God's line. We will just leave it at that. There are those who are on God's line and those who are not on God's line, the sons of God and the daughters of men, and there is an inter-mixture, a loss of distinction, a loss of discrimination between what is of God and what is not of God, and a bringing of those two things together and making them one. That is the meaning of marriage. But what was it that led to that? "As they chose." You see, here you have the soul in action, desiring and choosing, without a perception of what is of God and what is not of God. You see the principle. Will you just isolate that little bit, and hold it and think about it? The soul in action; desiring, that is the soul on its emotional side; choosing, that is the soul on its volitional side; desiring and choosing without discrimination as to what is of God and what is not of God. That is exactly the manner of the natural life, exactly what is exemplified in Cain. The life of nature mixes things up and has no power to perceive or discern what is of God and what is not of God: it brings the two together. That today is the tragedy of Christianity, the tragedy of what is called "the Church", the tragedy of the work of the Lord. There things have become all mixed up. That which is of God has been brought under the hand of man, and man is putting himself into the things of God. All this is the mixture of soul with the things of God.

Now, that was a pronounced feature of things in Noah's day, and if there is one thing which is abhorrent to God, it is mixture. God has shown Himself in His Word to be opposed to mixture. With God, there is light and there is darkness, there is death and there is life. When God reaches His end, the river of the water of life is crystal clear, and no murkiness is to be seen. The new Jerusalem, the Holy City, is as clear as jasper, transparent. All this is after God. "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all." God is utter and God hates confusion. He is not the God of confusion, He cannot bear mixture. God is always saying in effect, One thing or the other! "Because thou art... neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). God is nauseated by mixture, and that is what obtained there, natural life mixing up with Divine things. That brings the Deluge, judgment, that is the way of death. The law of the Spirit of life demands utterness or it cannot operate. Life moves along the line of what is absolutely distinct, unmistakable, clear, as of God. It cannot countenance mixture.

You see here, the deception of this life brought about the judgment of God. What is deception? Well, it works in many ways; but, so far as the soul is concerned, it can work in this way, that it is a determined adherence to one's own opinions on any subject, which means we are unwilling to subject those opinions to any court but the court of our own judgment. The thing begins with us and it ends with us. It is tied up with ourselves and we are not prepared to have any other judgment on the matter. You may take it that, if anybody is like that, they are most deceived.

Noah's Testimony Essentially Implies Resurrection

Now, we must close. There are two things to be noted about Noah. It says that he was a just man and that he walked with God. Well, as a just man, he took up what was true of Abel. Abel had witness borne concerning himself that he was righteous; and, walking with God, he took up what was true of Enoch: Enoch walked with God. Both of these things carry you at once on to resurrection ground and show what Noah stands for. If, as is said, he is a just man, whence is his righteousness? Why, only on the ground of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We are justified by His life, that is, His resurrection life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's own act of attestation that all sin and guilt has been dealt with and put away, and that is the ground on which we are justified. It is through His righteousness, a righteousness given us of God. That is life, walking with God. Who can walk with God? No one can walk with God who is not on resurrection ground, who is not righteous before God in that sense.

So we might go on increasing this emphasis in many ways, that what Noah stands for is the positive side, resurrection, and that the law of the Spirit of life operates on resurrection ground. That means that all other ground of natural life has been left and in Christ we have come out. You see, Noah was all those years occupied with that which spoke of being outside of things here; for Noah was building that ark all through those years. He was every day hammering home this fact: I am not in this, I am going out, I am repudiating this! The hour is coming when what is true of me spiritually will take place literally. That is also our position. We too are out spiritually, and we await the hour when what is true of us spiritually will become literally true; we shall go out. But Christ is out, and resurrection life means that we are out of what is here; out of nature, and out of this world, and out of ourselves. Noah with his ark ever bears that testimony — out, always out.

But, even so, it required a lot of patience to be spiritually out and yet to be environed by all that state of things, pestered by it, worried by it, pressed by the life of nature. "In your patience ye shall win your souls." That is the way of life.

Let me emphasize again that this means to be on resurrection ground. That is why we read Romans 6:3–8. It is "out" through death. Link Romans 6 with I Pet. 3:21 — Through water saved on to resurrection ground: planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Eight souls (eight, the resurrection number) were saved through water: "the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us... the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It is quite possible for everyone of us to have a perfectly good conscience. A happy state to be in! Have you a good conscience? Are you under accusation, under condemnation? Are you fretting and worrying about the badness of your own heart? That means that you have not the answer of a good conscience to God. What is the matter? You are still looking for something from nature, from yourself. You had better give it up, as that is the only way out; repudiate it. Tell yourself and tell the Devil once for all that in you, that is, in your flesh, dwelleth no good thing, and you never expect to find anything. The Devil knows it, and yet he is trying to get you on an impossible quest for something he knows you will never find, and that is how he worries you. Then why not come on to the Lord's ground and out-manoeuvre him? Drive in your stake. Let us settle it that we can never expect to find any good in ourselves. All our good is in another, even our Lord Jesus. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The Lord explain all that this means.

CHAPTER 4

Abraham and the Law of Life

Reading: Romans 8:2; Galatians 2:19–20.

The next aspect of the sevenfold law of life is represented by Abraham. We are introduced to Abraham at the end of the eleventh chapter of Genesis.

In speaking of that aspect of the law of life represented by Noah, we were considering the necessity for being on resurrection ground, which implies that the whole ground of nature has been repudiated and for us lies on the other side of a flood, a baptism of death. We now regard ourselves, therefore, as being on resurrection ground, and, being there, we join hands with Abraham and let him lead us on and tell us what the next thing is in the outworking of life.

Life in Christ a Life of Faith

Here, in a word, we shall find the law of life is bound up with faith. When we reach resurrection ground as through Noah, we are inevitably on faith ground. It is well that we should recognize that at once. It is very nice to contemplate resurrection life: everybody will give some response to that idea; we shall not have any controversy or difficulty in accepting that. But let it be understood that resurrection ground carries with it inevitably and inseparably a life of faith. You can know nothing of life only along the line of faith, and it is along the pathway of faith that life increases. These two go together; the one issues from the other.

Our last emphasis in our meditation on Noah was upon the little word “out”. Noah’s testimony, in building the ark, was to his being out of that realm of things. He was securing an exodus, a means, a way of getting out. By his building of the ark, he was declaring, in effect, I am not in this, I am out of this! So you are not surprised that the first word about Abraham is that the Lord said, “Get thee out”. It is all of a piece.

But coming out on to resurrection ground means coming out on to faith ground. Noah typifies resurrection and Abraham faith. “Get thee out”! The life itself is a faith life. I do not mean by that the manner of life, but the very life itself is a faith life, and the faith which is the faith of the Son of God is life. Of course, that is not a profound utterance. You have but to reverse it to see how simple and elementary that is. Whatever is not of faith is always of the nature of death. Doubt is death, unbelief is death, lack of trust is death, and all things that are in that category. Questions, controversies, anything that is short of simple faith brings us to a standstill, brings under arrest. It is death. So then, the law of life in Abraham is seen operating along the line of faith, which faith worked deeper and deeper, producing life in ever increasing measure. These two things go together. The deeper the faith the stronger the life. Similarly the greater measure of life implies the deeper faith.

Here again we note that we are reversing Adam’s evil. In all these cases, Abel and Noah and Abraham and all the others, God is working backward. He is reversing Adam’s evil. When you come to Abraham, you see in him God’s triumph over that basic sin of unbelief. These are figures pointing on to the true. In Christ Jesus all were gathered up, not in a figurative or representative way, but in a living, actual way, and Satan’s triumph in Adam’s deception and fall was completely reversed, completely undone; for Christ was manifested to destroy the works of the Devil. But even here it means, you see, the works of the Devil are being destroyed in something more than a merely figurative way. God is reversing the course of things and undoing Adam’s mischief, correcting things.

Now, we must look at Abraham and sum up this life in two or three comprehensive words. I am not going to attempt to cover Abraham’s whole life, not even in outline, but we can take out some of the main factors in this life of faith.

The Gift of Life is Both from God and Wholly for God

In the first place, it was a matter of going out with God alone. That is what I see to be God’s meaning in what we speak of as “the call of Abraham”. “The Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house” (Gen. 12:1). Thy country, thy kindred, thy father’s house! In the sovereignty of God, Abraham was taken up to be the vessel of life; that is, in type, in figure. That life, the life of which we are speaking, is God’s alone, and it must be lived wholly unto God. It cannot be taken hold of and used in any other relationship. It refuses so to be used. The life of God refuses to be brought into relationship with any other thing than God. Immediately it is so brought over, or immediately there is any attempt to bring it into another relationship, it stops, and the vessel in which it dwells comes to a standstill. That is exactly what happened with Abraham. God said, “Get thee out of thy country”: but He also said, “from thy kindred and from thy father’s house”. It was inclusive, comprehensive, full and final. Abraham took the first step of faith and not the second and third. He took kindred and father’s house with him and did not get very far. He came to a standstill, and there he remained until the rest of the Divine requirement had been brought about, or at least a large part of it. Then Abraham moved on: but even so he did not move completely into the Divine thought, as we shall see presently. I think you see the point.

This divine life which is in the child of God by new birth is God’s life and God’s life alone, and it cannot be related to anything else. It will not work with anything else. It only works in relation to God; God’s thought, God’s mind, God’s will, and if that life is going to carry us right through to God’s full end, then it has to be wholly unto God, and there all other relationships have to be set back. It must not be brought into other relationships. You see, this life is not just an abstract thing. It is in Christ Jesus and it is in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, we cannot separate these; we cannot separate the life from the Person, from the Divine Person. Christ is the life, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life. So when we are dealing with the life, we are dealing with the Holy Spirit and we are dealing with Christ Jesus, and that means that this life, which is the very essence of God, has its own characteristics, its own forms, its own meanings, its own standards, its own objects. It has its own mentality, its own reasons, its own ways. It is something which has a way of its own, and a meaning of its own, and a mind of its own, and there is not another like it. It takes its course. All other ways, all other mentalities are other indeed, altogether other, and there is no correspondence between them. When God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways”; that there is the difference as of the space between heaven and earth between your ways and thoughts and Mine, it is only another way of saying, My life is something altogether different from yours in its mentality, its judgment, its reasonings, its characteristics, its nature; different in everything, altogether other.

Well, what is the effect of that? It means that it cannot coexist or have fellowship with anything that is of nature. It cannot have any companionship with this other life of ours, with this nature of ours. The natural life cannot be a friend of the Divine life and the Divine life cannot be a friend of the natural life. They are in two different worlds. The natural life, the soul-life of man has Satanic elements related to it, and the Divine life has Divine elements related to it, and these are two different kingdoms altogether. Now, this is a fixed principle, that this Divine life demands its own direction and its own relationships. This Divine life demands what is of God wholly, and I see in “thy country, thy kindred, thy father’s house” those things which suggest natural relationships and influences, and God cannot allow that in the presence of His life in us.

Paul said, "When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me... immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16). That would have been human influence, natural influence, in relation to the things of God, and that is the principle here. So far as nature is concerned, this life with God has to be completely independent.

Now, of course, I have to be careful in saying that, because we say so much about the evil of independence. You see, I am talking in another realm altogether and I want to make that clear. First of all, anything that is in the nature of independence spiritually is wrong; I mean as amongst the Lord's people. It is a violation of the corporate law of God, which is also a law of life. Again, I am not speaking of the influence of what is spiritual. We need spiritual influences, relationships, and help from one another, and there must be no independence in that matter, no independence in the matter of what is of God in others. There are those who say, 'I must walk with God, I must know God for myself: I can take nothing from anyone else, I can submit my convictions to no one; I go on alone with the Lord in my solitary assurance and conviction.' That may be a very wrong thing. While we must know the Lord for ourselves, very often the Lord will make Himself known to us through others who are also walking with Him. A wrong kind of independence in these things works to the contrary and we may be utterly in deception because we will not walk spiritually with others and our aloneness not be an aloneness with God. It is a conviction that it is so, but it is an entire deception. That is one thing; but what I am talking about now is the influence of nature, not the influence of spiritual people and spiritual things which are of God. We need those influences and help and fellowship to go right through to God's end. But when it is a matter of natural elements coming in — and they may be many; sentiment, the natural affection of others seeking to influence us, and so on — when natural elements come in to divert us from what we know to be the will of God; elements, that is, not born of a knowledge of God, not born of a close walk with God, so as to be the counsel of God to us through others, then the life of faith demands that all these shall be fully and finally set aside, and that we live, so far as our spiritual life is concerned, unto God, wholly unto God. That was the first test with Abraham and the first application of the law of life in his case. Would he go out with God alone, despite all natural influences? Would he respond to God's movement in his own heart without allowing natural considerations to influence him?

For a long time that was only partial in Abraham's case and therefore the purpose of God was lying under arrest and he was only partially moving in the Divine purpose. In the first place, he took his father with him and that brought him to a standstill, and not until his father died was there a further release as to God's purpose. His life was retarded so long as natural kinship remained to influence him. But all this has to be applied inwardly as well as outwardly. I am not just speaking of our relations, our families. True, it may be there that natural influences are brought to bear on us, but it is much more than that. There is within us a kinship, a relatedness to this earth, to nature. There is that in us which is always taking counsel with the flesh; fleshly judgments, fleshly reasonings, the working and influence of the natural mind, and we have to put it back and cut it off. All that is of the life of nature must stand back when we come on to resurrection ground to know life, because that life is essentially a faith life.

The Proving of the Heart

Now, the second thing in Abraham was the question of ambition as to the things of God here on earth. This will find us out. At length Abraham moved on. Natural influences, so far as relationships were concerned, were lessened, and he moved on and came into the land; the promised land, the fulfilment of great expectations, the thing for which he let everything else go, the thing for which he had launched out in faith. He came into the land, the object of his expectation and his new ambition, and what did he find? A land full of that which was very contrary to God's mind, and a mighty famine in the land, and no one to offer him even a plot. He had not so much as a foothold in it. I suggest to you that such an experience is a fairly good test of our ambitions. What do we expect when we go on with God, when we come right out for God? What have we in view? Well, the answer to that question will decide whether, in relation to God, we have ambitions for something on the earth. Do you get the point? You see, it is so possible to swing over your natural ambitions to spiritual aims. It is the same thing still at work and the only difference is the direction or sphere. You can be as ambitious in the work of God as you can be in the world, and it is the same natural ambition. It is the ambitiousness of nature. You desire — what do you desire? To see something, to have something, to be in something? Ambition for success: yes, once it was in the world, now the same ambition transferred to other things. If that were true in Abraham's case, what a test! It was a test of ambition. He got nothing, no not so much as a foothold in the land. He had to move to and fro, dwelling in tents. There was no immediate, seen response to his faith so far as that land was concerned. Under that test, he broke down; he went down into Egypt. What did his going down into Egypt imply? Some expectations! He had expected something different at the hands of God. He had to be taught that this life is a life of faith, and the more deeply inwrought that life is, the less shall we see to gratify nature, even in the things of God.

You see, it is very often to the children, the kindergarten, the elementary stages of faith, where there is not the capacity to take very much strain, that God has to give quick results and manifest signs. The marks of maturity are usually the withdrawing of outward manifestations and signs, the demand to walk with God alone for God's own sake. It is a mark of graduation in the school of God that He can withdraw outward things. It shows that we have passed the test, as to whether we are ambitious in this life.

Well, Abraham in the first test, the first application of that truth, failed, but he blessedly learned his lesson. We must always give the Lord's servants full credit for every bit of spiritual gain. In the very next thing — and it is remarkable that the two incidents follow one upon the other — you see a marvellous and glorious

triumph in that same realm. In Chapter 12 you have recorded Abraham's going down to Egypt, and that being for him the way of death, and not the way of life. Ambition proved to be the way of death. This is immediately followed in the succeeding chapter by the quarrel between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot for pastures and waters. Abraham came to Lot about the matter and said, in effect, Do not let us quarrel; for what is there to quarrel about? (Are we wanting something for ourselves? — that is the purport of his words). Now Lot, look all round, lift up your eyes, survey the land: see the very best of the land and take your choice of it. Just leave me what you like, leave me the rest: you take your choice. If you decide to go in this direction or that, then I will readily take the other. Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the Plain of Jordan, well watered and fruitful, and chose it: and they separated themselves the one from the other. On Abraham's part it is a triumph over ambition. Immediately God comes in and says, "Lift up now thine eyes... all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth..." There lies the way of life, after all. The way of earthly acquisition, ambition, gratification, of having something here, became the way of death for Lot. Abraham let go, so far as this world was concerned, let go for God, and God came in.

So Lot was separated from Abraham. What has happened? Is this the end of that kinship that has all this time been a cause of limitation? It looks like it. In the day that it happens, in the day when this natural influence is cut off, God comes in with a new range of life. It is a true principle. It is a mark of going on when we can come to the place where it is true before God that we have let go all the prosperity and success even of Christian work and Christian ministry as men would count it. To be able to let go the great opportunities and the great advantages that may be had amongst Christian people, and the prizes that can be grasped, and to say, It is all right, the Lord knows; it is for Him to give or withhold: I am not going to make a line for those prizes: I am not going to allow those things to influence my walk with God: ambition is not going to dictate my course, is a sure sign of growth. It may not seem here on earth to mean very big things; wide open doors and all that, but somehow you may take it that there is life there, spiritual influence there, something that is counting there. In the end it will have counted. But this does sometimes first of all necessitate that conflict with ambition where all those suggestions and influences have to be laid low, and we come to the place where we see the way of life is to go on with God though it costs us everything. The law of the Spirit of life works in that way.

The Divine Use of Delay and Apparent Contradiction

Now, in the third place, we see in Abraham's case life working along what is apparently the way of death in two senses, namely, the Divine way of delay and of contradiction. God promised Abraham a son, and, having made the promise, went away and left the matter there for years; the delayed fulfilment of promises serving to drive faith in God deeper down and to prepare the way for something so transcendently more of God in Abraham's life. The longer the delay, the more the realization of a hope must be of God, and the less and less possible is it of man. That is the thought. God does work in that way, whether we like it or not. Whether we cherish the thought or not, it is true. When God is really working according to the law of life, we have to be brought into this realm of faith where even the promises of God seem to be suspended and have no immediate fulfilment. God is going to be true. God will be no man's debtor. There will never be any balance against God in the end. We may settle that. God will come up to all that can be rightly and truly expected of Him, and there will be at last, even if it be at long last, an overwhelming justification of God and attestation of His faithfulness. We are all permitted to take an attitude such as this: Lord, when I stand before You at long last, You have to be clear of any ground I could lay to Your account of having failed my trust. It is essential to God that He should be in that position. His very nature and character requires that, in that day, those who have trusted in Him shall be able to say, Lord, You have not failed in one thing, but You have done even more than I had a right to expect, even a right in Christ to expect. God will come up to that mark, but, in order to deepen the life, to strengthen the life, to produce Godlikeness, to destroy the power of death and the work of Satan, and to reverse the mischief of Adam, God has to extend us in the matter of faith even over His promises. He does it. It is a mark of growth, of maturity. Such then is the Divine ministry of delay.

Then, further, we have the Divine ministry of contradiction. The son was given at last: but what then — "Take now thy son... and offer him..." A contradiction; God giving and taking, promising fulfilment and then seeming to wipe it all out with a stroke. Well, what does it mean? What lies behind this? I think, beloved, that the heart of things here is that God is always wooing to Himself, that the heart may be for Him and not for things. Even if the promises in their fulfilment are delayed, God is seeking to draw the heart to the place where it is Himself, rather than what He does for us, that is its quest. If there is that ministry of contradiction, its purpose is to woo us from things to Himself.

God, All in All

Well now, you have summed up the whole aspect of this law of life. What is the law of the Spirit of life? How and where does it operate? On this ground, that, from start to finish, it is the Lord Himself being everything. That is the heart of the matter: the Lord Himself everything. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." Get thee out — out from ambitions as to things here on earth even in relation to God. Get thee out of things, as things which God can do and God can give. Out to where? To God Himself. And do you recognize the issue — oh, wonderful thing! — "Abraham my friend." My friend! What a lot lies behind that! All letting go for God, being wholly for God, letting God have His way,

trusting God where even God seems to be denying and contradicting Himself, issues in our coming right into the heart of God. My friend! Is that life? Is that the way of life? For that to be said of any of us at last, in the way in which it was said of Abraham, surely would be life? Surely it is something to be coveted more than anything else? If ever we reach that place, we shall say, This is life indeed! This is worth everything! Yes, life is on the basis of friendship with God.

What is friendship with God? Well, it is, what we have said: not friendship with the world; not friendship with our own natural life, its influences and considerations; not friendship even with ambitions, projects and achievements in the things of God; not friendship with what God can do for us, but God Himself. That is all. That being so, it means that, if the Lord delays or contradicts, we nevertheless trust. You see, friendship is the blotting out of all enmity. It came in from Satan through Adam, and was blotted out in Abraham. What does that mean? Blotted out by faith. Faith will destroy enmity, root and crop. It is progressive, of course. Abraham had to live a whole lifetime in this way, but he came out as God's friend.

And we are in the way of this life, which is the way of this faith, and I do trust that we are steadily and surely moving beyond the place where there is enmity. Is there any enmity in our hearts to God? Are we disappointed with God? Are we sore about God? Is there some tinge of bitterness, is there some reserve? Is there aught of that kind? We know quite well that is working death in us if it is there. That is not life. The only way is to let that life work in accordance with its own law of faith. Why are we disappointed? Why are we feeling sore? Are we quite sure it is because the Lord has not proved Himself to be what we expected? Are we quite sure it is that? Are we quite sure that it is not because things have not gone as we wanted them to go, that ambition is disappointed? Are we quite sure? If only things had worked out as we desired them to work out, how pleased with God we should be! How readily we should say, God is faithful, God is true; we love the Lord! But now things are not working out, things are not easy: things are hard, things are going against us. It is because of the things we are feeling bad. I believe, beloved, if we come to the place where our objective is the Lord, where He is our goal; where it is true that "My goal is God Himself, not joy nor peace, nor even blessing, but Himself my God," we are in the way of life. But it is the creeping in of these other considerations and influences from our natural life that spoil it all. You see that this issue is a very clear one.

For us, the way of life demands that we shall get before the Lord again, and say, 'Lord, though all my earthly prospects fade, though all my ambitions are disappointed, it is You I want. You are my ambition, my goal. If I have You, these other things will count for much less.' I believe that, as we can get there — and not many of us have got a long way on that road — but as we can get there, we find the secret of life, of joy, of release. I am not so sure that we shall not find that God is able to give back the prizes here, the Isaacs. He withdraws them that we may turn from them to Himself, and when He has us for Himself, He may give something here. He may give blessing here on this earth; but let us remember that His desire is to have us for Himself for His own sake, and, as we fall into line, life is found there. It is the way of life. The law of life demands that everything should be for the Lord, without any other influence or consideration — the Lord Himself.

CHAPTER 5

Isaac and the Law of Life

"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:22–23. R.V.)

Our particular passage in these meditations, namely, Romans 8:2, follows immediately upon these verses we have read, because that which comes in between these two passages is a parenthesis.

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

We have come to the fifth expression of the sevenfold law of life. The law of life is one; that is, life is a law, but that life and that law work out in seven different ways. The whole life requires all these seven. All these seven go to make up the one life, and what we find is this, that when that life is received and is given its own course in us, finding us compliant with it, then by its own law it works out in these seven ways. These seven things are inevitable outworkings of that life because it is a law. We have said, and we know quite well, that if a law is established and accepted and recognized, then it works out in a certain way. That outworking is perfectly spontaneous, perfectly natural: we might say it is automatic. So life just works out in certain ways when it is established and obeyed; and we shall find that this Divine life, if allowed to govern us, will spontaneously and quite naturally result in seven things, for these are all components of life, they are the sevenfold expression of life. You see, the Christian life is resolved into a very simple proposition, after all. You have not got to understand all this to be a Christian. But once a person becomes a Christian, certain things begin to happen, and then it is of very great value to understand what it is that is happening, because that is to understand what God is doing, what God is after. But the things happen, if the Spirit of life in us is unchecked, unhindered, if we go on with the Lord.

Sonship as the Fruit of Faith

We have dealt with four of these spontaneous expressions of life, and we come now to the fifth, namely, Isaac. I am going to ask you just to look at one or two other New Testament scriptures. Turning back to Romans 8 let us link together verses 2 and 14.

“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Romans 8:14–17.)

You see the link all the way along is the Spirit: the Spirit of life: led by the Spirit: the Spirit of adoption: the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit; but all in relation to a special thing. We will see that presently.

Let us turn straightway to the letter to the Galatians, chapter 4:5–7.

“That he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son then an heir of God through Christ.”

That is almost a precise repetition of the passage in Romans 8: “the Spirit of adoption” — “that we might receive the adoption of sons”.

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My Son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ... Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (Hebrews 12:5–7,9.)

It is not difficult to get our connection with life, the outworking of life. Here we find that life works out along the line of sonship. In all these passages sonship is brought into view in connection with life, and the Spirit as the Spirit of life. We are led to that by the Old Testament type and illustration, Isaac, the fifth of these personal types.

A great statement about Isaac is found in Gen. 17:19.

“And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.”

God there positively and for ever settles the question of what Isaac stands for in the Divine economy. In our previous meditation, in speaking of the fourth expression of life as represented by Abraham, we were seeing life working out through faith, faith as an aspect of the law of life.

Now, when we come to Isaac, we have sonship as the fruit of faith. Faith is not an end in itself, faith works out to sonship; for Abraham’s faith at its supreme point secured Isaac beyond the reach of death, beyond the range of loss, of time, on resurrection ground. Now, we come to take up that sonship, to look into it, to investigate its nature, its character, for here life is brought to us in terms of sonship.

God’s Sons are Wholly the Fruit of a Divine Begetting

The first thing that we find when we approach a consideration of Isaac is this — and it is made so very definite and clear: it seems that the Holy Spirit has really made it His very serious business to keep this fact ever in view; it is made clear in the Old Testament story, and it is brought out in the New Testament more than once and made very emphatic — that Isaac was an impossibility on any natural ground. Oh how God applied Himself to see that was established! The announcement of Isaac itself came at a time when nature could offer nothing toward the realization of the promise. But then, even after the announcement and the promise, God went away and left the matter in abeyance, as it were, for a considerable time, and every moment and every day of that time was putting the whole matter more and more beyond human hope. So that, when at last Isaac was born, he was something which could not be accounted for in all the realm of natural fruitfulness. He was, in very truth, something wholly and utterly of God: he was not the fruit of nature. That is the point to begin with. Now, put it how you will, call it what you will; call it becoming a Christian, becoming a child of God, being saved, call it what you will, the reality that answers to that is altogether beyond the power of nature; you cannot by any resource outside of God Himself become a child of God. I know how elementary that is, and yet perhaps it needs to be said. There is no work that we can do, no fruit that we can provide, nothing possible to all our effort and energy which can bring this about; no struggle, no striving, no wrestling, no crying; nothing of nature can bring it about. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and the meaning of that in the Bible is not that it is that which is born of the body is flesh. It is something more than that: flesh here means natural ability. Therefore you can never reason, or argue, or talk, or persuade, or cajole, or coerce a soul into being a child of God. When you have settled your last argument, when you

have broken down every bit of intellectual contradiction, when all the walls of reserve and coldness have been overthrown, and when the human will has been overthrown either by argument or by appeal and under that persuasion, that emotion, that impact, a person has taken a step and decided to become a Christian, such a one may be no nearer to being a Christian than he was before, when all those walls were up. That is not the way. This thing is out from God, and nothing can produce sonship but a begetting by the Holy Ghost. Multitudes of people are in a false position because that fact has not been recognized. They bear the title of Christian because of an assent to certain propositions, because of an emotion, because of a decision which they themselves have made under persuasion or influence.

This is but the following out of what we have been saying about Cain, the worshipper who murdered, whose soul-life went out to God with its own best works, best fruit, best everything, believing that it could get through. It never did. Multitudes of people like that are working on that basis, and thinking they are accepted and children of God. Oh for a mighty undeceiving; and yet what a terrible thing it would be! If all those assumed conversions should be disclosed to be only assumed and not real! We have really to get at the meaning and nature of sonship. We have to know what it is, and you begin by this negative affirmation that sonship is not the fruit of nature. God has put it beyond the power of nature to produce it, as He put Isaac beyond the power of nature altogether. That is where you begin: altogether of God, and only of God.

Well, what is sonship. The human spirit becomes the vessel of a Divine seed, the vessel in which something that is of God Himself is begotten, and the presence of that something constitutes the one in whom the deposit is a different kind of being from all other beings in God's universe. You are, because of some secret, hidden mystery about you, something right at the very centre of your being; because of the presence of that, you are something other than all other species of creation. God has begotten His Son in the human spirit. There is that within the child of God upon which the eye of God rests as something belonging to Himself, which has come out from Him and is part of Him, and His eye is upon that as upon a cherished child.

The Law of the Spirit of Life a Directive Law

Now, that is deep truth about everyone who is a child of God, and that makes everything possible for God and for us. Everything is bound up with the residence of that in our human spirit. Sonship has commenced, been introduced into the centre of our being, and where that is true, where that is an actuality, "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God," that there is that which is the sonship of God in us. That is the natural expression of life, and that becomes a living reality. I expect most of you can bear that out. I mean, you can bear it out, not as a single fact or witness, but by many evidences; the evidences of life and of death in your procedure, the evidences of life and death in your conversation, in the things you say, in your thoughts, your judgments, the evidences of life or death in your doings, your ways. It is a regulating law, this law of life, working out in sonship.

What does it mean? How simple, after all, the Christian life is when once you grasp this key. It means, beloved, that Jesus, the Son of God, is living over again His life in us. Watch Him on earth and you will see what He says and what He does not say, what He does and what He does not do; for what He does not say and do is as significant as what He says and does. You will see where He goes and where He does not go. You will see when He goes to a certain place and when He refrains from going to a certain place. You will see a Divinely governed life, in word, in movement, in act, marvellously governed; and He is living that over again in us. We are not by far a perfect expression of it, because we, for one thing, may not be sensitive enough nor quick enough to understand what the Spirit says in our hearts. We have not got an ear that is trained and attuned, simply because we listen to so much else. We are not quick enough in response and obedience, and therefore there is not a perfect expression of Christ; but nevertheless the basic fact is there, and we know it. It is an educative thing, a directive thing. We all know it. Oh, what a history we have of this checking up! Moreover this experience is progressive, for as we go on, we find more and more is checked up. That which for a time seemed to be untouched — not because God agreed with it, but because He was bringing us on and could not deal with everything at once — now comes under His eye, and we can no longer do what we once were able to do.

May I illustrate? I remember quite well how, in early days of preaching, I used to cite a great deal of secular literature to illustrate my point. I would bring out the poets and many other secular writers — oh, wonderful illustrations of my point to get it home! Well, the Lord let that go on for a time, but I do know there came a time in my spiritual life when I tried to give a bit of Browning in a sermon, and the whole thing went flat. My sermon was gone, and it was as though I had to start preaching over again; but I could not. I learned a lesson. All right, no more of that! Sometimes there was the inclination to drop back, but I registered the same awful sinking sense inside and knew that I had touched death. I remember how true that was in relation to the late war. Some of us were in the thick of things in that war, and we saw a great deal. We had to deal with conditions right on the spot. Well, afterwards when I came home, I would sometimes take something out of the war to carry home a point in a sermon. But I discovered that God was not in it, and whenever I touched that war in relation to the things of God, spiritual things, I registered that same terrible sense of death within, and I came definitely to the conclusion, that God did not want me to mix that war up with heavenly things, but that I was to leave it alone. Well, I had to let go. It was the working of the law of life. No one ever said to me, You must not do it; it is best not to refer to such matters. No, the Spirit of life in me witnessed against that, and told me, in effect, "That is death. If you want life, if you want your message to go on in life, if you want to get through to God's end, leave all such matter out. That was never born out

from God, and only that which is born from God accomplishes God's purpose and gets back to God. Therefore rule out all the other.' I say this law of the Spirit of life is a directive law.

If only we have life and that life is allowed to have its way, we are going to reach God's full end. It is not an abstract thing, it is a Divine Person resident within; Christ, who is the life, governing from within by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life. Thus we see that, in the very outworking, in the very process, in the very exercise of this life how altogether other it is. It will not cohabit with other things.

Isaac and Ishmael

Now to come to Isaac. You remember Abraham tried to help the Lord to realize His intentions. He recognized how impossible this purpose of God was on any natural basis, and then his faith failed and we know the painful story of Ishmael — Abraham trying to help God out, trying to realize Divine ends along natural lines. Ishmael came in. What is he? The fruit of nature. Isaac came in, the fruit of God. These two are found in the one house. Two things result, but I leave the one for a moment and go on to the other.

The hour and the day came when the word of the Lord to Abraham was this: "Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." Have you got that? That which is born of the flesh cannot inherit with that which is born of the Spirit. That which is born of the Spirit has a Divine inheritance which the flesh cannot come into. This, which is of God, is altogether other than that and cannot share its substance with that. One must go.

Now, you come back to the other thing. Unless you do as God has bidden, what will happen? Ishmael will oust Isaac; because it says that Ishmael laughed at Isaac, mocked Isaac, sought to make Isaac's life a misery, all with the object of putting Isaac out and having Isaac's place. That is the flesh always; it is over against the Spirit. Give the fruit of nature any place, and it will very soon oust what is of God. The two cannot cohabit, the two cannot be co-heirs. It is quite true that this natural life always laughs at the spiritual, because the spiritual is always so altogether other. I suppose I had better follow that right up at once.

Go over to the Lord Jesus again. There were numerous things that the Lord Jesus literally could not do. I mean, by reason of His relationship to, and dependence upon, God, He could not. He Himself said so. "The Son can do nothing out from himself." "The words that I speak, I speak not out from myself." The Lord Jesus had to draw everything from the Father. "What thing soever he (the Father) doeth, these the Son also doeth," but none other things than these. So He had to wait upon the Father before He could make an utterance. He had to wait upon the Father before He could do a work. He had to wait upon the Father before He could go to any given place. "Go ye up unto the feast: I go not up yet unto this feast...." That is the present registration of His being bound. He has not got the witness that liberates Him and directs Him to go up to that feast. Yet it says, "But when his brethren were gone up unto the feast, then went he also up, not openly, but as it were in secret." Was that a subterfuge, a trick, to get rid of people whose company He did not want, not wanting to go with them, wanting to go alone? We cannot talk like that. We have to find a holier explanation than that. The explanation is that He had not yet got through from the Father that the Father wanted Him to go, and He had to conclude it was not the Father's will, at any rate at that time; but when they were gone up it came through, He was released in spirit, the Spirit of sonship got the witness that it was all right, the way was clear that He should go up and He went. The point is that the Lord Jesus is limited altogether by His relationship to the Father, His voluntary dependence, the law of life that everything must come from God and nothing out from self. That is the law.

You try and live on that level and see if the natural man does not laugh and mock. Mark how they question you. What are you going to do? I do not know! Where are you going? I do not know! When are you going? I do not know! I shall go when the Lord tells me I can, when the Lord bears witness to me, when I am released of the Lord. Put this spiritual language in any form you like: what does the natural man say to that? He laughs, he mocks you. Not only is that true from outside, but you find that inside yourself. Very often you are inclined to call yourself a fool, and to question yourself — Why do I not do this? Then you have to stay — Why do I not do it? Because I cannot. Why not! Well, it would be doing it myself. The Lord is not doing that, I am not conscious that the Lord is doing that. That is the language, the consciousness of sonship. That is the way of life.

So Ishmael mocks Isaac, as the natural life laughs at the spiritual, and tries all the time to get the upper hand and to oust that which is of God. That is sonship working out. Of course, if you are not a son, you do not know anything about this, but if you are a son, you know something at least of what I am talking about, and you can tell right away whether you are a son. This language is not strange to sons; it is perfectly intelligent, at any rate up to a certain point.

Sonship is gathered up in fullness in the Person of the Lord Jesus, and His whole life is an exhibition, an exposition, of sonship, of what it means spiritually. Then, when that sonship has been perfected by Him as Man, in the humanity which He took upon Him, the Spirit of God's Son comes and takes up residence in the new-born child of God and begins to live out that perfect sonship of the Son of God. "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." If the Spirit of sonship is ruling in our hearts, we shall know what we may do and what we may not do, how we may talk and how we may not talk. Believe me, beloved, if the Spirit of sonship is ruling in our hearts, there will never be the slightest contradiction between our conduct, or our course of things, and what is written in God's Word. We shall find that what is in God's Word spontaneously becomes expressed in our lives. We do not, in the first place, take God's Word

and try, by outward application, to conform to it. By the indwelling Spirit we are conformed to the image of God's Son, and that simply means conformed to the revelation God has given, whether it be in the Person or in the Word, for there is no contradiction. Sonship demands that. If, between our conduct, our course, our way, and anything in the Word of God, there is contradiction, something has happened to injure the life, to check the Spirit of sonship: somewhere we have got out of the way and ours is not a way through, is not a living way. It may seem to us to be right, but "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man and the end thereof are the ways of death." Oh, the Spirit of sonship is an illuminating and enlightening thing to keep us in the way of life.

Yieldedness the Mark of Sonship — the Spirit of the Lamb

We will close with one reference to that outstanding episode in Isaac's life when his father, Abraham, by the command of God, took him on that journey to Mount Moriah to offer him as an offering unto the Lord. I think this is one of the most beautiful unveilings of what Isaac stands for. "My father... Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." God has His eye on Isaac: Isaac is chosen of God; Isaac is to satisfy God in this matter. What is in view is something that is for God, for God's pleasure, for God's satisfaction. Isaac is in that line. The moment comes when Isaac is apprised of the fact that he is the offering. Suddenly perhaps, or on the way, nearing the altar, Abraham apprises him: My son, the Lord has made you the offering. Then the moment comes when Isaac is bound. Let no one think that Isaac was a little, helpless child at this time. He was a grown youth. His father was a very old man, and had Isaac chosen to rebel, naturally speaking, Abraham would not have stood a chance. Isaac could easily have set his father at defiance. But you have no sign or suggestion of anything like that. This young man, in the strength of youth, lets himself be bound and laid upon that altar, and allows that knife to be raised and virtually plunged into him, allows himself to be slain; for, so far as his will was concerned, it was accepted. In spirit it was an accomplished end; there was no resistance. So we have to say that in Isaac we find expressed the offering up of himself in a perfect yieldedness to the pleasure of God. That is sonship.

Here, beloved, a wonderful subjection of soul or self-life is manifested, a wonderful subjection of soul-life, self-life, to the pleasure of God. Listen to One who said, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself"; and the One who so spake turned to His disciples and said, "He that saveth his soul-life shall lose it; he that loseth his soul-life for my sake shall find it." That is Isaac. That is sonship. Oh, sonship, what a yielding thing it is, what a submissive thing it is, what a lamb-like thing it is! "God shall provide Himself a lamb."

Would you know whether sonship is increasing in your case, whether there is a development of the Son of God in you? Your yieldedness, your decreasing resentment, resistance, self-will, decreasing bitterness under trial, will afford you proof of it. The lessening of the uprising of self in assertiveness, in self-interest, self-preservation, self-justification, self-pity, every form of self, the decrease of all this is the evidence of sonship; subjection under the hand of God, even though the trials may come through His own children, through an Abraham. Your slaying may come at the hands of one who is no enemy of God. Under adversity, under trial, under slaying, under cutting, under the knife, for there to be no repining, no kicking, no reasoning, but yieldedness to the hand of God, this is sonship. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him" (Heb. 12:5). "God dealeth with you as with sons." "Shall we not be in subjection to the Father of our spirits" — and die? No, never! that is not God's end: "and live"! Oh, under the chastening hand of God, we never expect to survive. Surely it is the end! No! — "and live"! God will see to that. It is the way of sonship. It is the way of life. I am content to leave it there for the time being. Life will spontaneously work out along the line of sonship and sonship is that.

CHAPTER 6

Jacob and the Law of Life

Reading: Gen. 28:16–17,19; Gen. 31:13; 35:1,6–7; 29:15–18; Col. 1:24.

We come now to the sixth of these operations of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and we are brought to Jacob. We come to see the working of the law of life in another and still more advanced aspect; for you will have recognized that each of these steps is in advance of the other. We are moving forward, we are reaching unto God's end, we have the goal in view. Fullness of life is before us, and we reach the fullness by these successive steps, each of which brings us nearer the end and, with itself, increases the fullness. So we have to see what this further advance in the matter of life is as represented by Jacob.

There are three things which stand out more clearly than others in the case of Jacob. The first is the birthright, the second is Bethel or the House of God, and the third is service. These three are really one in essence, or three phases of one thing. The birthright is the blessing; the chief blessing, the highest blessing, the first blessing. The House of God, or, using the New Testament designation, the Church of God, is that which takes the supreme blessing, and that blessing means pre-eminence. You notice how it worked out

with Jacob, what the birthright meant to him. It was not only that he got a form of words from his father which represented a blessing, not only that he got certain things, but that blessing brought him into the first place, so that the elder served the younger; it gave him pre-eminence. The House of God, the Church, which is Christ's Body, is elected to that. "Jacob have I chosen"; "Jacob have I loved". The service is ever related to the House of God. We have, then, three aspects of one thing.

The Foundation of Service

Now we are going to begin with the third aspect. I suppose, when we contemplate Jacob, the thing about him which strikes us very forcibly is his intensely active nature; active in mind, in brain, in wit; active in will, active in transaction, in execution; active as one ever alert, ever on the move, ever watching for an opportunity, an occasion. His life is indeed a life of activity, and withal he has his eye upon high things; yes, upon Divine things. If this were not so, then we could find no saving feature in Jacob. It was his perception of the transcendent value of Divine things which gave him his place and upon which God was able to work, in so far as there is anything in a man which forms the basis of Divine activity. That birthright — he understood the nature of it, the range of it. He knew what it meant, he knew whither it would lead him. He had a sense of the value of Divine things which his brother, Esau, did not possess. When he came to Bethel and had his dream and awoke in the morning, he did not merely say, Well, I have been dreaming. He said, "Surely God is in this place.... How awful is this place"; and he turned a dream into a very practical expression and set up a pillar and anointed it and called the name of that place Bethel, the House of God.

If you move on with Jacob, despite all that you may deplore, you will find that the big steps in his life are all marked by some perception of Divine things, some spiritual discernment. He is in heart in the right direction. His thoughts were right; the trouble was with his mind and his will. The end was a right one, but the way by which he sought to reach it was all wrong. If you analyse Jacob in this way, you will not be long before you arrive at his signification in this matter of life and death. You will remember that, although he had secured the title to the blessing by his wit, by his cunning — yes, but do not overlook the fact of his spiritual perception — he never came into the blessing until that which he had employed to secure the title to it had been thoroughly dealt with and brought to an end. It is one thing to be in the way of the blessing, to have a heart in the direction of God's purpose and highest will, but, between the perception of its value and our stepping into the way of it, and our reaching it, there may be a great deal to be got rid of. We may discover that there has to be a great working of death before there can be the life which is bound up with that which we have seen. We have seen, we have reached out for it, we have striven after it, we have laid ourselves out with all our human resources to achieve it; but we never do. Something has to be done in us before we come to that which in itself is God's will for us, and it is the "Jacob" in us that has to be dealt with, so that we come to the "Israel" position. That self-energy, that wit, that self-resource in relation to Divine things has to be slain, and we have to come to the place where it is perfectly clear to us, where we know it as we know nothing else, that God's end is reached by God's strength alone, that the resources for the accomplishment of Divine purposes are not in us, but only in Him.

Now, then, you can see what arises at once as the operation of the law of life, the first law of service, for it is that which the activity and the energy of Jacob represents; work, service, doing, and all with Divine things in view. The first law of service is subjection. If anything is patent in the case of Jacob, it is this. On the one hand, he is the man who stands out more than any other as the man of action, the man of activity and the man of service. He served Laban for two periods of seven years. It took quite a bit out of his life, that service. He is a man who is ever doing, active from the beginning of his story. Yet, as clear, as obvious as that is the other thing, that subjection was the lesson Jacob had to learn. That is as simple to grasp as anything in the Bible. The great crisis of his life upon which everything turned as to Divine purposes was that hour in which he came finally to take his place of subjection under the touch of the finger of God, and it was not until that had happened that he could go back and dwell at Bethel.

Service Inseparable from the House of God

You see, these two things went together. The Lord said, "Arise and go to Bethel and dwell there". Jacob had never been able to dwell in Bethel. He had made a fleeting visit to Bethel and Bethel had become an established fact. Bethel was there, the House of God was there, but Jacob could not dwell there; because no one can dwell in the House of God until they have come to the place of subjection. So he went on to learn the lesson which is basic to the House of God, and then God said, "Arise and go to Bethel and dwell there". He had to meet that crisis, where self-strength was exhausted and broken and he was weak; but where God became his strength — a prince with God. It was thus he was rendered suitable for God's House. You see how all of a piece this is. The House of God is the object and sphere of Divine service.

Now, if ever I have said a thing which is true, that is such a thing. I am going to challenge you on that: I defy you to show me and prove from the Scriptures that there is any service to God which is not related to His House. All service to God is bound up with, and inseparable from, His House. The Old Testament is full of it; the New Testament is emphatic. The Church, which is Christ's Body, is the object and sphere of all the service of God's people and there is no service apart therefrom. Oh, that the Lord's people had kept the object of service in view. They have so much service which is not consciously related to the House of God. You may be called to serve the Lord especially along the line of soul-winning, but you must remember that such

service relates to the House of God. If you make it something in itself, you are going to dwarf it, to limit it, and to deprive it of all that it is intended to come to. Oh the tragedy of great evangelistic efforts that do not issue in the full purpose of God! Souls are saved and left; and they are put into Gospel missions, which are in no sense local churches as seen in the New Testament, and after twenty or thirty, or even fifty years in these Gospel missions, you will find these saints knowing nothing more than that they are saved. They were saved so many years ago and beyond that point they have not progressed an inch. There are multitudes of these missions all over the world. They are delightful; you meet saved souls rejoicing in salvation: but there is a tragedy. "Oh, I was saved under Moody all those years ago, and I am still rejoicing in the Lord today." That is typical of the position of many and, when that testimony has been given, it represents all that these can say. It is very good, of course, to know the Lord as your Saviour and to be rejoicing in salvation; I am taking nothing from that. But that is something which has been made an end in itself; it has never gone further. Why is this? Because the Church was never brought into view. I am not speaking now of "going to church," of congregations in certain places called "churches". You know of what I am speaking, of God's full thought about the House of God, the Church, which is the Body of Christ, with all that means as revealed especially through Paul, the great unveiled mystery of Christ's spiritual Body and its eternal destiny in the purposes of God. All service, in God's thought, must be consciously related to the Church, to the House of God.

You may be used and blessed in just moving round comforting and cheering saints and doing all sorts of kindly things for the Lord's children. Are you quite sure that is leading to real spiritual increase, the increase of Christ, leading on to God's end. It may be a help, it may be a blessing, but what about the real building up of the House of God? In our comforting, consoling, helping ministry, we have to be able to impart spiritual increase, not just to help lame dogs over stiles. There has to be a goal to which it is all moving, namely, the House of God.

Whatever may be the form of ministry or of service, all service, from God's standpoint, is related to the House of God, and that is what is made so clear in the case of Jacob. What is service, after all? A little child, in all good intention, all innocence, may do lots of things to help mother, and mother of course is very patient, mother does not punish the child. She knows quite well the child means well, and really means to help: but poor mother! At times you hear mother saying, "Of course, she means to help me, but she little knows how much work she makes for me, what a lot I have to clear up after her, and really how little help it is after all." That is all right for children. When we really consider the question of service, how do we resolve it? Surely we would say that service in truth, in reality, is that which realizes the end we have in view, and we say to all those who so contribute, Now you are really helping, now we are getting somewhere!

What has God in view? Upon what is His heart set? It is His Church. The Lord Jesus loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. That is why we have read the passage about Rachel, and we will come again to that in a minute. It is real service to secure the Church. Yes, the Church is His Body, and real service to God is that which secures the Church and secures God's full thought in the Church. That is true service to God; not a hundred and one other things unrelated and nice and good and kind, but never really reaching God's end, not really serving the purpose of His heart. So far as God is concerned, it is in that way that life operates.

The law of the Spirit of life operates when we come actively into line with God's end, God's purpose, God's thoughts, and they are all concerning His Church. You see, we saw Abraham's faith issuing in sonship in Isaac, and now in Jacob sonship is taken up and carried on, and in Jacob we see the true spirit of sonship in service which can never be truly satisfied with less than a Church after the Spirit.

The Lesson of Leah and Rachel

Now, that brings us to Leah and Rachel. Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and then Laban deceived him and gave him Leah. Leah was not the object of Jacob's heart, and he could not be satisfied with Leah. He might have been. There were pleasant things about Leah. Leah was tender of eye. Evidently it was something calculated in a certain realm to appeal to a gentleman! something attractive about her: and there were other things too. Leah, without any difficulty, provided Jacob with a family, and Rachel was unable to do that. Jacob might have said, Well, Leah is not so bad: Leah is not what I wanted, but there are good things about Leah; I will settle down and be satisfied. But no, Leah was not the object of his spirit, his heart, his inner man, and he could not be content with anything less than that, and he said, "I will serve thee yet another seven years for Rachel". He doubled his labour and went the second mile in order to have a wife after his spirit.

Now, the spirit of sonship, true sonship, can never be satisfied with anything less than that which is of the Spirit — of the heart, of course, in the type, Jacob; but speaking in New Testament language, after the Spirit. Leah might have been, for Jacob, a wife after the soul, after nature, but Rachel was something more than that, as she proved to be. Oh, I think there is a wonderful lesson bound up with Rachel and Leah. The true service of sonship will stop short at nothing less than that which is wholly of the Spirit.

The Lord Jesus, the true Son and Servant of Jehovah, in whom is the true spirit of sonship, and in whom is the true spirit of the servant, can never be satisfied with a Church that is merely outward and formal and natural, however many good points there may be in it. When He looked at the seven churches in Asia, He was able to say, as Jacob could have said of Leah, Yes, some very good points, some very nice things. But, like Jacob, He further said, in effect, I cannot be satisfied with that: that does not answer to My heart, that is not

after My Spirit; it is not for that that I have laboured and travailed. It is something more that I need really to satisfy my deepest and innermost sense of what is adequate, what is right, what is according to God's thought. Thus the good has to be subordinated for the best. The spirit of service is always set upon God's full thought as to the Church, the wife, the bride, and can never be satisfied with anything less. Sonship works in that way. I do not know how it comes about other than like that. I am quite sure that if some of us were to have a little conference on this matter, and say, Now, how is it that we came to be so concerned for God's full thought as to the Church? as we talked it over we should have to say, Well, it was not because we heard a series of addresses on the nature of the Church, nor because we found something in the Bible about it, but somehow, somewhere in our hearts there came to life a sense of Divine concern in this matter. It is a thing of the Spirit, and we have had to labour hard amidst much adversity, enough adversity, enough opposition, enough suspicion to have quenched anything less than something begotten of God. Long since we would have abandoned this matter because of the difficulty of the way, had it not been of God in us, had we not realized that we were not holding it but that it was holding us. We had not taken up something, but God had taken us up in this matter, and what could we do? Can we, in view of the cost, the suffering, can we be content with things as they are among the Lord's people? No, a thousand times! We must labour on.

I believe, beloved, that is the spirit of sonship, the spirit of service. The deeper God's work is in us, the more we shall travail for the Church, the less shall we find ourselves able to settle down with any contentment with things as they are amongst the Lord's people. So Rachel was the result of suffering, the suffering of the Spirit.

But then, Rachel could not do what Leah could do. We have said the family, with Leah, was quite a spontaneous, easy thing, but it was far otherwise with Rachel. What a disappointment, after all! Naturally speaking, there was no fruit possible. But oh the wonder of this sovereignty of God! How often the sovereignty of God is represented in the Scriptures by natural things, and this particular thing so frequently. We note it in the case of Sarah, the case of Hannah, and others, and here with Rachel. Well, Rachel does have children eventually, but they are the result of a Divine intervention. They are of God in a special sense, by the act of God. You see how strictly God keeps to His principles; that real service, real sonship service, can never be fruitful out from nature. The natural life can provide no spiritual fruit, no fruit unto God. It is only that which comes out from God which is really spiritual fruit, the fruit of spiritual service. You remember what Paul said in his letter to the Galatians: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). The Galatians were the Lord's children, and Paul might have said, Well, you are the Lord's children, you are saved, it is all right. I am sorry that there are these unhappy things that mar your walk. I would rather they were not there; but still you belong to the Lord and so it is all right. Oh no! That would be too much like Leah, that is too easy. There is need of something more, and for that something more of the Spirit (and that is the key note, as you notice, to the letter to the Galatians) Paul says, "... I am again in travail till Christ be fully formed in you." That is God's thought for His people. So again, we find Paul, this great Israelite in the fullest, highest sense, saying, "I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). That is service, that is sonship, — His sufferings in me for His Church.

A Summary of the Practical Issues

That is the way of life, that is the operation of the law of life. It is simply, and not by any means exhaustively, stated. God's fullness is going to be expressed in the Church, therefore God's satisfaction is centred in the Church. All real service to God is that which relates to the securing of what is most precious to God, namely, the Church, and all service to God begins with subjection, and subjection is a thing which is seen in the House of God. That is where God establishes the law of subjection. I have to be as subject in the House of God as any other member of the House of God. It is not the subjection of one and another more than of others, but in the House of God we have to find our place in subjection. I can no more act independently as a minister in the House of God than any member of the House of God. We shall find our life as we learn to be subject. In so far as it is not true that we are in subjection in the House of God, we are not in the way of life, we are in the way of death. It is the first law of service.

Herein is the importance of the Church as locally expressed. One of the things for which a local assembly serves God is to be a sphere in which its members can learn to be subject to the Lord. Very often you know that subjection to the Lord in the Church becomes a very practical thing, and a very testing thing.

I have indicated things, that is all. That is the way of life. The blessing is there. Yes, this is the House of God, this is the gate of heaven. "Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel"; because there God revealed Himself unto him. That is life, the gate of heaven where God reveals Himself. The Lord open our understanding.

CHAPTER 7

Jacob and the Law of Life (continued)

Reading: Genesis 28:10–12,19; John 1:47; Genesis 31:13; 35:1,6,7; I Corinthians 1:20; 2:14.

We have been considering the sevenfold operation of life as represented for us in the book of Genesis by seven persons. In our previous meditation, we arrived at the sixth, namely, Jacob, and it is with that which Jacob represents as God's way of life that we shall again be occupied in this meditation.

The House of God, the Church, Bethel, is our particular object in view, and if we take Jacob again as our illustration, we are brought to see that everything, so far as the Church is concerned, must begin from its heavenly side and not its earthly. That is a governing fact in the life of Jacob, and we shall see how that interprets his life.

The Law and Rule of the Heavens

It is significant and impressive that, as Jacob goes on his way at the beginning of his pilgrimage, not only of his pilgrimage on earth but of that spiritual history which was behind all the happenings and events and incidents of his earthly life and walk, the first point at which he stops, though only for a night, is Bethel, and Bethel comes in for the very first time in the Bible as from heaven. This is the first reference to the Church in the Bible, and it comes in with Jacob; and it comes in as out from heaven, that is, from its heavenly side, and that becomes a law which governs and interprets all the rest of Jacob's career and spiritual pilgrimage. What is instituted at that point is the government of that which is heavenly, and, when that government is introduced by God, you expect that what is merely earthly will, from that moment, come under the condemnation and discipline of God to its destruction, so that the whole may become progressively heavenly according to its origin, its source, its inception. We have to ask this all-inclusive question: Where does everything begin and whither does everything lead? The answer is one. Everything begins in heaven and everything leads to heaven and is consummated in heaven. That is only another way of saying, that everything is of Christ. Everything that has come out of heaven is of Christ and is in Christ. "All things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and in him all things consist (Colossians 1:18–19). Though the corresponding truth is not given, there are plenty of statements which also set forth the fact that He is after all things, and not only before all.

Now that, you see, is symbolically gathered up in Jacob's ladder: something from heaven reaching down on to the earth, with the Lord above it, and the angels of God ascending and descending. Carry that over to John 1 and you see the principle at work in this word: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" (no Jacob!). And then to Nathanael: "Thou shalt see greater things than these... Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." It is Christ who links heaven with earth, and earth with heaven, and in whom all the Divine communications are made to man. It is Christ who fulfils the word "where God revealed Himself unto thee".

The House of God is Christ. But remember, while that is true of Christ personally, what we are made to see as the unveiling of the mystery is that the House of God is Christ corporately expressed in the Church, which is His Body, and it is in Christ corporate, in the Body of which He is the Head, that there is the revelation and the communication of God. It is there in that House of God, the Church, that we have what Jacob called "the gate of heaven". That is God's Bethel.

So, while recognizing that everything has first to be seen from its heavenly standpoint, and as being out from heaven in Christ, we have to see this second thing, that Jacob must be ruled out in order to make room for "Israel". That is to say, all that is of man must be ruled out so as to make way for a Divine order of things in the House of God. Jacob, as Jacob, was impinging upon Divine things, upon the birthright. Yes, it was quite true that in the sovereignty of God Jacob was the chosen one for the birthright, but no Divine election can ever be taken as a one-sided thing. There are always two sides to Divine appointments. One is the sovereign act of choice, the other is the fitting of the elect vessel to come into that for which it is chosen. So, although Jacob may, in the line of Divine sovereignty and election, be the one to whom the birthright is secured, as is also the case with the Church as the antitype, there is another line which Divine sovereignty takes, namely, the clearance from the ground of all that which is Jacob; because it is not Jacob as Jacob who can inherit. It will be "Israel" who will inherit.

Let us note this other thing which is both important and interesting, that it is in a particular way with Jacob that the "house" comes in. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, and they are always called "the seed of Abraham". But you never read of the "house of Abraham," although he was the father. Then, although God again and again announces Himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," you never read of the "house of Isaac": but you do read of the "house of Israel". So all that goes back to Jacob.

Now I think you see the significance of this. Israel represents that which is heavenly and Divine, which has supplanted that which is earthly and of man. Jacob typifies the earthly. You know that in the days when Israel was out of the way, when there was spiritual declension, the Lord addressed Israel as "Jacob," but

when according to His mind as “Israel”. That is the heavenly side. So really the House of God comes in, not with Jacob as Jacob, but with Israel; the same man, but now translated to heaven, so to speak, now the heavenly man. “Behold an Israelite in whom is no guile” (no Jacob). I think that was a tremendous commendation of Nathanael. The Lord, who knows all things, was able to say, There is a truly spiritual man, a man with a spiritual insight and judgment and appreciation of things. There is no “Jacob” there. I think that is what He meant.

Well, I think that is enough for the principle. The House of God is that which demands the setting aside of all that is according to man and the bringing in of that which is according to God, that which is heavenly.

Heavenliness Part of a Divine Order

Then we find that heavenliness is not just some abstract sort of thing, but that it comes in as part of an order of things, a heavenly order; an ordered life, an ordered relationship, everything according to a heavenly order. What it is necessary for us to see next is what a perfect Divine order would be. I suggest that to you as something to meditate upon, to contemplate.

You see, beloved, so very much now is corrective, because of disruption and disorder. There was a beautiful Divine order at the outset, an order in every realm, in every direction. Everything was in its place, in its right relatedness, functioning in perfect order; no friction, no contradiction, no unrest, no strain, everything full of rest. God declared it to be very good. If God says that, then, in the light of His standard of things, such an order must be very good, for His standard is so much higher than ours. To have a certain measure of order, without friction and contradiction, strain and stress, makes us feel we have something very good; but oh, how much higher is His standard! When God says of a thing, “It is very good.” it really must be good.

But then disruption came in. Everything became disordered and the harmony in God’s universe was destroyed. There is strain, there is conflict, there is no more rest, and since that time things have continued to be governed by this element of disorder and disruption, and the Divine order has never been recovered in the world. Disorder is everywhere. Disruption is everywhere, in everything. It is in the elements. It is in humanity. It is in all relationships. It is everywhere. And now, so far as God is concerned, all is on a corrective line because of that disruption.

First of all, the disorder, the disruption, is in man himself. Man is no longer a harmony, a unit; he is all in disorder. Then the disorder is found in man’s relatedness. All the relationships of man are disordered and upset. Then it is in the world that man has made. Man has made this world and set up the present order; which is disorder from God’s standpoint. Everywhere in this world there is disorder. I need not stay to show how true it is. Everywhere in this world we find what is not God, and what God did not mean. The order has gone and is no longer seen.

So now, when we come to the first letter to the Corinthians, the first thing that is introduced is the world; and the second thing is man, natural man; whilst the third thing is the relationships or related life of man. Then you recognize that the whole of that first letter to the Corinthians is a corrective letter. It touches the world, it touches man, it touches man’s relationships; it is all corrective. Then what has it inclusively to do with? Its concern is with the Church, which is Christ’s Body. Is Christ divided? is a question it will put to us; and as directly it will answer that in Christ there is no schism, no disorder. So you move on through the letter and you find that a true spiritual apprehension of the Church according to God’s mind will see the correction of all the disorders that have come in through Adam: and these are dealt with in the letter one by one.

We will put that in another way, and perhaps a little, more simply. Where the Church, the Body of Christ is spiritually expressed according to God’s mind, nothing of the disruption and disorder that came in through Adam has any place; it is ruled out. The world is ruled out. The natural man is ruled out. This disorder in human relationships is ruled out. The Church represents a perfect Divine order, and that makes demands upon all who claim to be in it and we find one fundamental demand right here at the beginning of this corrective letter: “I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” The one fundamental and all-inclusive demand made upon these who claim to be of the Church, which is Christ’s Body, is that, through the Cross of the Lord Jesus by which the world is crucified, and by which the natural man is crucified, and by which all that is disruptive in human relationships is crucified, only Christ shall be known, only Christ shall be recognized; for here we touch the mystery of the very nature of the Church. It is Christ from heaven, nothing of this world, Christ corporately expressed. It is a Christ according to God’s mind as the heavenly Man, and not according to man here. It is Christ as the embodiment of a heavenly order. I dislike the word system, and I very often use it in its bad sense, but it can be used in a right and good sense, and, if you will bear with it, I would say that Christ is the embodiment of a heavenly system; and when we come into the Church, which is His Body, we come into a heavenly system of things, a Divine order. So that the sphere of this perfect, Divine order is the Church, the Body of Christ, which is called “the Christ”. Now, that leads us to some practical applications of the general truth.

The Increase of Christ the One Object of the Divine Order

The first is, that order, this Divine heavenly order in the Church, is governed by the law of Christly increase.

Whatever obtains in God's appointment, only obtains with one object in view, namely, the increase of Christ. Everything that God has ordained as a part of the heavenly order in the Church is ordained with that end in view. With much that is meant by an expression to which I am about to refer, I will not stay, and certainly not for purposes of criticism; but, by way of illustration, we sometimes hear the phrase used of certain men that they have "taken Orders". By that we understand them to have entered into a certain ecclesiastical realm, or that they are "priests in Holy Orders". Now, my point is this, that when it comes to the heavenly order of the Church, all ministries, all appointments, all positions, all relationships exist solely for the increase of Christ. That is the thing which governs all. No one has any position or ministry which is merely official. What is position in the Church from the heavenly standpoint? What is ministry in the Church from the heavenly standpoint? What is the significance that attaches to all the relationships of the Lord's people? They are all, by Divine intention, for the increase of Christ. I suppose that we will accept that, so far as the special ministries are concerned. Yet that might need examination. Such as exercise those special ministries are not there to give addresses or to preach sermons. In the heavenly order, there is no ministration of any kind which does not mean a ministration of Christ to the increase of Christ, so that the Church becomes more fully Christ in expression, and any ministry that does not, or that cannot, lead to that is not in the heavenly order. Office in the Church is something wholly other than that which is merely ecclesiastical, by vote or appointment. The thing which governs any office or position in the Church, as according to the heavenly order, is that this one and that one have something of Christ to give, have that which represents an increase of Christ; for the Church is Christ in corporate expression.

Are you aspiring to office, to position in the Church? I will tell you how to get there. Aspire to have a measure of Christ more than your brethren. The Holy Spirit will see that, in a Spirit-governed church, you have a place and a ministry. That is the law which governs position in the Church. It is not that the Church votes with a show of hands as to who the officers shall be. The Holy Ghost singles out men who have something more of Christ than the average to bring the Church up into a fuller measure of Christ.

What, then, of all the members of the Body? The same law governs. You may put all the responsibility on to such as may minister the Word, and say, It is their business to bring Christ to us, to build us up in Christ. Well, they will point you the way, they will minister to you the Word of God in life. But then, your very membership in the Body of Christ involves you under this very same law, that you personally are also committed to be a joint of supply in the Body. You are committed to the work of the mutual building up of the Body and the increase of Christ. Our very partaking of Christ, our being members of His Body is governed by this, that we are a contributing factor in the increase of Christ. We have to get away from this "pulpit and pew" conception of things and have an entirely new mentality. The Church builds itself up by its mutual ministration, and such building up is through an increase of Christ. Beloved, let me emphasize that and underline it. Take hold of it if you forget everything else, that your being in the Church, which is His Body, means that your being there implies an increase of Christ. It must be that. Is there something more of Christ there because you are there? That is the law which governs. Do stir yourselves up to this. Recognize your personal and individual responsibility. The Church is Christ in His corporate expression; you are the Church. How much of Christ is represented by you for the general increase and building up of His people? The law which governs everything in the Church; ministry, position, relationships, is the law of the increase of Christ.

Now, I have used the word "relationships". Yes, you see how far from being merely technical and ecclesiastical and official and legal all this is, and how it resolves itself into one thing, namely, life. When you get the Church according to the heavenly thought of God, according to the heavenly order, governed by this law of the increase of Christ, then you have life; not ecclesiastical systems and orders, but life. It is the way of life. It is the course of the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We will come at this question of relationship from a fresh position, or by a fresh proposition.

The Divine Features of Authority and Subjection

There are two main aspects of the Church, the Body of Christ. The first of these is authority and the second is subjection. These are the two things which mainly govern the Church as principles.

Now, Jacob, when he supplanted his brother with his wit and cunning and guile, was after authority, the place of supremacy. He, as the younger, was seeking to get ascendancy over his brother. Well, God had ordained that, and Jacob need not have used any cunning or wit whatsoever. God would have seen to that had Jacob trusted Him. Nevertheless, it was this that was in his heart, to get authority, pre-eminence. What he had to learn in the course of twenty years was that authority is reached by the way of subjection; and for Jacob, prince in Bethel, the House of God, those two things go together — authority and subjection. You cannot and you must not separate these two. God has joined these two together. Authority is by subjection; subjection leads to authority. I believe moreover that God has chosen a very beautiful way of setting that forth.

God originated it (as Paul tells us in the great Church letter, Ephesians,) right at the beginning in the Garden — "Male and female made he them": husband and wife; the man and the woman. Have you ever recognized that to be pre-eminently a Church principle. If you trace that to heaven, to the mind and the heart of God, you will find He has the Church in view; Christ and the Church, His members: the Husband, the wife; the Bridegroom, the bride. The relationship, this human relationship of husband and wife, is seen therefore, in the mind of God, to have to do with a much bigger thing than that which is merely personal, individual, as amongst men on the earth. It is but the setting forth, or it is intended to be the setting forth of a great sublime conception of Christ and the Church, and the two governing laws of Christ and the Church

are authority and subjection. How will the Church come to reign? By subjection to Christ. How did Christ, the Head, come to reign? By subjection to the Father. Authority and subjection are inseparable. It is a dual law, established in heaven. These two things, male and female, are both very sacred in God's sight, and neither of them must be the other. If so, you have upset the Divine, heavenly order. They are there to represent something very holy, something very sacred.

If you look more closely, you will see that both these features are to be found in the very person of Christ Himself. Oh yes, how much we owe to the subjection of Christ to the Father! What do we owe? Well, to this, on the one side, we owe all the revelation of God in Him. By His subjection to the Father, the revelation of God in Him came forth. "The Son can do nothing out from himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19). Subjection to the Father meant that He saw what the Father was doing and did the works of the Father. In the works of Christ we see the works of God, we see what God is like; we see God's mind, God's thought, God's desire.

It is to His subjection that we owe the revelation of Divine love. The Father's will was that He should lay down His life, and the laying down of that life was an expression of the Father's heart for us. He laid down His life for our sins that He might redeem us unto God. All the love of God is brought to us by the subjection of the Lord Jesus. Remember that.

Then, what fruitfulness has sprung from His subjection. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die...." Is not that subjection? What is the opposite of that? I refuse to die, I refuse to give up my life, I refuse to let go my soul; I cling and cleave to myself, to my own. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die (that is, if it surrenders itself, if it lets go its own life, if it denies its own rights) it bringeth forth much fruit." This is immediately succeeded by the statement, "He that loveth his life (his soul) shall lose it; and he that hateth his life (his soul) in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:24-25). That again, in a word, is subjection.

Follow the matter through with this word: "He became obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Obedient — that is subjection. That is the female side, that which is represented by the woman. What we owe to it!

Yes, but then there is the other side. Oh, the power, the mighty power, that we find in Christ! Oh, the life, the positive, risen life that we have in Christ! Oh, the deliverance that is ours through the mighty deliverer, Christ! Oh, the keeping power that is to us-ward because of the Cross! That is the side of authority. The side of subjection is His love for us; the side of authority is His defence of us. The side of subjection is His tender compassion, His merciful kindness to His own. His authority is the coming forth of His power against the enemies of His own. That is the man and the woman.

The Practical Expression of the Divine Features in the Church

Now, that is brought right into the heart of the Church. So you come again to the first Corinthian letter. You know all that is said about man and woman and their respective places in the Church. If this heavenly relatedness for the increase of Christ is established, it will work out to tremendous enrichment and not impoverishment. What is the woman's place in the Church? It is to express that side of Christ which is always the gracious, sympathetic, helpful side. Do you think that the woman is to be suppressed? I do not, and I do not think the Word of God teaches that. It is a matter of order and position unto life, and if I were to put it in quite ordinary, common, everyday, human, language, I should put it like this: Man is there to represent the authority of Christ, but he cannot exercise his authority without subjection. Otherwise what happens? He becomes a lord in the House of God. He does that of which the Apostle speaks, he "lords it over God's heritage". He needs the woman, as representing subjection, to come along and say, "Now, my dear, gently: do not do damage, do not hurt the Lord's interests by that assertiveness, that officiousness. Remember that you need bearing with by the Lord." Do you see the principle of subjection at work? The two cannot be broken asunder, the Lord needs them both; and I believe the Lord has expressed this relationship in the Church to gain, not to loss; to increase, not to impoverishment; that there shall be always maintained according to this principle of the subjection of Christ that tenderness, that gentleness, that care for susceptibilities which takes the rough edge off government. Oh, we have to govern, to use authority, if we are called to do so, as men who ever remember how much we ourselves are in need of the mercy of God. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Can you hear a woman's voice in that? That is a side of Christ that is necessary to right government.

I am only able to hint really at what this means. What I have all the time in the background of my mind is that all things, relationships and everything else, in the House of God are for the increase of Christ. You dear sisters, do not think that the New Testament anywhere says that you are to be suppressed and ruled out. You have a very essential ministry, as representing something in the House of God which is for the increase of Christ, and those who are on the other side need you and cannot fulfil their ministry without you. It is not good for the man to be alone, said the Lord, and that has a very much deeper meaning than just having human companionship. Put that in the positive way: it would be very good for a man to have a woman if she is the right kind according to God's thought. You must keep the balance.

But neither of these must be the other: otherwise if it is so, you get the heavenly order upset at once. That is why the first letter to the Corinthians is corrective of disorder in every realm. You see, the world is

ruled out because it is in disorder. The natural man is ruled out because he is disordered. The relationships which are according to that disordered realm and which have come into the Church, must go out, and heavenly order must come in. I do not believe that anything that Paul said about woman in the Church can rightly be interpreted as meaning that she has no place. I believe it to be just the other way round. But all that he said was to get order where there was disorder. It was a matter of heavenly order. In your right place you can function fully: but you have to be in your right place and keep it: otherwise life goes out. Perhaps I have not satisfied you altogether on these matters, but I am dealing with principles. The law of life operates along the line of a heavenly order.

So then, we are able to see that everything rests upon God's purpose concerning His Son, and everything is governed by the consideration of how His purpose can be realized. The method which is approved of God is that which is most directly calculated to bring about an increase of Christ, and all else is ruled out by God. Order is not technique. It is not arbitrary. It is an embodiment of heavenly principles which are established for the increase of Christ; or, to put that in another way, Order is the way of life when it is the heavenly order. Disorder is the way of death.

Now you understand Jacob's life. He started out with the disorder that inheres in the natural man. He started out with the wisdom and cunning of this world. He was chosen to bring into view the House of God, and service in relation to the House of God — Bethel, and a dwelling in Bethel. Therefore this man must be taken in hand and all that is of the natural man must be got rid of as disorderly, and all the worldly element in him must be destroyed. If there is to be a House of God, it cannot be the house of Jacob; it must be the house of "Israel". That is the spiritual and heavenly side of things.

A Vital Lesson

I wonder how much of this is recognized by you to be of practical value. You may have many questions, but I think it does at least bring before us one thing, that in order to there being movement toward fullness of life in Christ, there must be a spiritual relatedness of the Lord's people. There must be that fellowship between the members of Christ which provides an opportunity for the increase of Christ in an ordered way. That is a matter which ought to exercise us very much. I am quite sure there are a lot of people who are suffering far more than they need because they are out of relatedness with the Church, the Body of Christ, in a working and practical way. I believe that merely personal, independent, unrelated life and movement of the Lord's people exposes them to great evils. If only there were a bringing in among the Lord's people, there would be a curing of many ills, and deliverance from much unnecessary suffering. The word that was spoken by Haggai still holds good: money is put into a bag with holes; there is dearth, there is barrenness, there is an altogether inadequate result to your spiritual energies. Then as the Lord questions with His people about the cause, His answer to them is, Because of My house. If you have My house as the central, governing object of your life, there will be many blessings where there are no blessings now. There will be life where there is death now; there will be deliverance where there is bondage now; there will be light where there is darkness now; there will be safety where there is deception now. We little realize how much suffering in all of these ways there is today because of independent action and a want of relatedness with the Lord's people. Ask the Lord about that. If it is His mind, and you have exercise with Him about His end, He will most surely show some way in which this can be remedied.

CHAPTER 8

Joseph and the Law of Life

Reading: Romans 8:2,17. Philippians 3:10.

We now come to the last of the seven out-workings of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We have followed the stages of that operation as illustrated for us in men in the book of Genesis, from Adam to Jacob; and now we come to Joseph, the seventh and the last. Joseph gathers up into himself all the preceding six and carries them in himself to the final fullness of life.

Let us ask whether in Joseph's case there was the first thing, namely, everything as unto the Father. You see, it is just on that matter that Joseph is introduced to us. The beginning of the narrative about Joseph is that Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons. Why was this? Because, as you will see manifested very soon after, Joseph had a special concern for the father's interests. He took up that first thing — all as unto the Father.

Did Joseph further take up the matter of spiritual discernment and understanding in respect of what would please the Father? Was not that the cause of the trouble between him and his brethren? His brethren were doing things very contrary to the mind of the father, and Joseph saw and felt how dishonouring this was to the father. He discerned what was wrong with his brethren. There was trouble about it, and he himself sought not to walk thus, but to walk well-pleasing unto the father, in the spirit and not in the flesh.

Then you can clearly see how the resurrection principle was operative in Joseph's case. His life was largely based upon that principle. Did he go into death? Yes, but he knew resurrection. It is a great factor in Joseph's history, the resurrection principle.

As for faith, if ever a man had his faith tested, Joseph did. All through those years in Potiphar's house, in the prison, in the dungeon — oh, how great was the test of faith! The Psalmist says that his soul entered into iron, the word of the Lord tried him. Yes, faith was both called for and tried, and it is wonderful how he trusted God. We see no trace of bitterness, resentment, rebellion; faith is triumphant in Joseph.

Yes, he is a true son. The spirit of sonship is there, in his giving of himself in service for the House of God, as represented by his brethren. He was concerned for his brethren's well-being. He went to see how they fared. He took them bread. The great goal of his life was service to his brethren as is seen later in Egypt.

Well, it is quite clear that Joseph embodied all these former things: and then what? Then he carries them through; through suffering to reigning, through rejection to exaltation, through humiliation to the throne. Oh, beloved, if the life of the Lord Jesus in us has a free way, it will produce all those things. That life will take the way which is all unto the Lord spontaneously. It will take the way of growing spiritual discernment as to what is of the Lord and what is not, and you will never have to say, You must give up this, and not do that. The law of the Spirit of life will teach what is not the mind of the Lord. It will separate us from the world, and we shall find that we are separate. It will not be a case of our having to give up the world, but of the world giving us up: we are out of it, we are strangers in this world. The law of the Spirit of life produces that. Test yourself by this law. If you can be happy, comfortable and satisfied in this world and in your own natural life, then you have serious cause to question whether the life of the Lord Jesus is in you at all. You will find that, as that life works in you, you will more and more be a stranger here. You will find yourself more and more, in spirit, outside of things, and sometimes you will be subject to the most terrible shocks.

Yes, you realize how far you have moved from that world by going on with God. What a far-removed world it is! That is the working of life. It is going to be like that. It is going to make for difficulties, but that is how it is going to be. The law of the Spirit of life will ever more and more widen the gap between you and the world and this life here on this earth. It is bound to do that. It will inevitably put you outside. Then, of course, when you are in that position, what have you to count upon, what support is there for you but God? He has become your life, your resource. The world's pleasures have receded and He has become your pleasure. For everything you have to look to Him; and that is a life of faith. No longer is your satisfaction here. But life brings it all about, brings you to the place where you discover God as your exceeding great reward, as Abraham did; God, El Shaddai, the mighty pourer-forth of fullness.

The Throne and True Destiny

I must come to Joseph very closely. All this working of life along these various stages, bringing spontaneously these various things to be the realities of the child of God, is all moving toward one destiny, one end. This law of life, given free course in us, is going to bring us to the throne. It is going to issue in the throne, in reigning with Him. But how? Through suffering, through humiliation, through rejection. That is the way of this life to the throne. This is what Joseph sets forth.

The Unique Relation of the Chosen Vessel to God

But notice that Joseph had a very special place in the father's affections. It is as well to establish that before you begin to take up the trials of Joseph. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," and Satan always contends against that. When we are in difficulties, in sufferings, in humiliations, in rejections, there is always a voice at our ear to tell us that the Lord does not love us. So it is as well to notice that Joseph had a very special place in the affections of the father. Why? Well, for the reasons that we have already seen. First of all, he was the result of that double labour. The father had laboured twice over for him. It had been a very costly thing to bring Joseph in; and the Church, which is Christ's Body, is the fruit of the deepest anguish of the Father's heart. God was in the agony of securing the Church. It is the Church of God. What a wonderful statement! So often it is termed the Church or Body of Christ, but here the designation is "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). That is why the Church is dear to Him in a special way. But not only because the Church is the result of His double service or agony or labour is this so, but also because it is the fruit of His Spirit, that which comes out of the travail of His Spirit, that which answers most deeply to His innermost being. It is a wonderful thing. That is how God views the Church. He does not view us as we are in ourselves, but He views us as we are in Christ and will be in eternity. A marvellous thing!

One most astonishing illustration or foreshadowing of that is in the case of the compelled utterance of Balaam over Israel, where Balaam was not allowed to speak his own words, but compelled to speak God's words; when under compulsion which he could not resist, as he looked from the mountain across the valley where Jacob was spread abroad, he said, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob". Look at Jacob, look at the life in the wilderness, look at the rebellion, the murmuring, the turning back in heart to Egypt, the unfaithfulness, and, in face of all that, this astonishing statement right from the very heart of God forced through the reluctant lips of an unfaithful prophet: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob." What grace!

So the Lord looks upon His Church as the fruit of grace, as the fruit of His travail, and the Church somehow answers to His heart in a way that is difficult for us to express. "Christ loved the church." He loved, and

loves the Church, because, in some mysterious way, in the Church He gets what His heart desires. May we be inspired more deeply with the desire that He should have it in us. There, you see, is the placing of Joseph with the father.

The Outworking of True Vision

Then what follows? Suffering, rejection, humiliation! But this is not a contradiction of what we have just said, not a denial of the father's love. That the Lord Jesus went the way of the Cross was no argument against the love of God for Him. Not at all! Why did Joseph suffer? How did Joseph suffer? Well he was hated of his brethren to begin with. He suffered their hatred. Why? Well, there are two sides to that. On the one hand, he suffered because they were carnal; on the other hand, because he stood against that which he perceived to be the way of grief and dishonour to his father. This is a difficult thing to say without incurring misunderstanding; nevertheless it is a true position. That which really goes on according to the law of the Spirit of life, and in which that law is operating, will have spiritual discernment in respect of carnality in even the Lord's children, the Father's family, and, because it has such discernment, will inevitably come to a place where it cannot accept that, but has to repudiate it, has to stand against carnality in the people of God; and immediately you do that, you are ostracized, you are regarded as thinking yourself superior. You are cut off and put out; you are rejected; you are made the object of sneer and reproach; you come into suffering. Carnality hates to be exposed. Well, that is why Joseph suffered, and that is the way of suffering. It is standing for God's best, which ever means standing against that which is less than God's best.

Then, you see, there was this further thing with Joseph. His aspirations were too high. His heart was set upon a throne. He dreamed dreams about a reigning life. These principles are wrapped up in a very human story. The Lord is not one to give Himself to painting artificial pictures. Were we writing this for the sake of bringing out spiritual principles, we should write it very differently. The Lord, for His part, tells the story in very human terms, and He just lets us have all the details of the unfortunate way in which Joseph went to work with his brethren. But, nevertheless, hidden behind this very human story, in which all the defects of this one are seen even while he is standing for the highest thing; hidden behind the human story are principles. Behind those dreams and the telling thereof, there is a principle. The throne is in view as God's intention and purpose for those who will go all the way for Him. The throne is God's destiny for that life which has come out from Himself. It must, if it has its way, come back to its source: it must return to the One from whom it came. The only thing that can come back to God is His own life, that which is of Himself, nothing else. That life has been given to bring us through the sanctifying process of suffering to the throne. That is the destiny of that life, and it was that principle that got Joseph into trouble. Oh, this reigning life, this throne life, this overcoming life, what hostility it provokes — You evidently think you are going to be something special, something better and higher than everyone else! In such terms will men rail at you.

The Animosity of Satan to the Chosen Vessel

I think there is something deeper than that about it. If Joseph was a type of Christ, and there is no doubt that he was, he was destined, like Christ, to come to the throne. But there is someone else who has aspired to that throne, someone else who will make things impossible for the aspirant to that throne, someone else who will stand at nothing to make the life of those called to that throne a life of suffering and agony. I think, lurking in the shadows behind this whole scene, there was ever one who saw what this was illustrating, what this was prefiguring. I think Satan can always discern Christ anywhere, even in a shadow, in a figure; and this was, in a figure and a shadow, God intimating that there was One who was coming to the throne most surely. Satan is against that and he will use all carnal means to make that impossible and to frustrate that: and here were carnal brethren giving Satan just the ground that he required to turn upon this one whose eyes were toward the throne. His aspirations were too high for Satan. If the Church has aspirations like that, according to God's intended purpose, the Church will have a bad time at the hand of Satan, not only directly but through carnal Christians. The greatest obstacle and hindrance and cause of suffering to those who are going right on with God will be carnal Christians. You will suffer more at the hands of the professing Church than you will at the hands of the world, if you mean to go right on with God. This is a suffering way, the way to the throne.

The Spiritual Preparation Wrought by Suffering

But then, you see, God was in the sufferings of Joseph. We see the necessity of the suffering under the sovereign hand of God, as being that which was to prepare him for the throne. We reign if we suffer; but not because of the mere fact of suffering, but because of what the sufferings accomplish in us. The sufferings of Joseph were effecting great things in preparing him for the throne.

He had to learn how to serve, because service is the mark of the throne. When at length he came to the throne, it was to serve his brethren. Let us not think of our eternal destiny as being just a life of idle leisure. The glory of it will be service. "His servants shall serve him." He had to learn service and he learned it in a hard school. Potiphar's house was the school in which Joseph learned to be a servant. His was a very hard and difficult school — a servant down there in the house of an Egyptian; a child of a prince with God, the son of Israel's heart, learning subjection in service in Potiphar's house; emptied of everything in order that he might learn how to reign and how to have fullness without pride. Emptied to be filled; humiliated to be ex-

alted; serving in humiliation in order to serve in exaltation. The sufferings were effecting something. I cannot go over all the sufferings of Joseph, but there they are as the way to the throne.

Joseph represents, then, the true spiritual Church and its destiny, which is, to reign with Christ: and in the meantime its pathway to the reigning position is the pathway of rejection, of suffering, of denial, of humiliation, and that largely at the hands of the carnal elements amongst the people of God, the unspiritual.

Well now, what more can we say? We have reached the end when we have reached the throne. We see the way of life, we see the working out of life.

A True Foundation and its Issue

I think the last thing that I would say by way of repetition and re-emphasis is just this, that, in the first place, we have to make sure that we have received Christ as the life and as our life. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." To have received the gift and then, as we go on, to remind ourselves of the exhortation "Lay hold on eternal life"; for the whole thing is so grimly and terribly withstood that at times it would be easy to accept death. I mean that literally. There are times in the life of the Lord's people when Satan offers them death and makes them want to quit this scene, to accept an end of everything, to say, It is all finished! and to begin to ask the Lord to take them out of things altogether because they have come to a place of despair. Sometimes you get there. I do not know whether you understand what I am saying: Satan stands at nothing. He gets them under depression and wants them to accept death. Thus, again and again we have to lay hold on life by an act of faith, and as our attitude is one toward life, one which lays hold on life, one which responds to the law of life, one which goes on with that which is bound up with that life, that life will bring us through all its successive stages of development. That very life in us, which Christ is in us, will prove not only the hope of glory, but the realization of glory in the throne. There is that in you and me which is destined to bring us to the throne if we will let it.

May the Lord teach us how to comply with the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

CONVINCING EVIDENCE

CHAPTER ONE

This Matter of Christian Unity

“By this shall all men know...” (John 13:35).

“That the world may believe...” (John 17:21).

Unity as a Priority in Witness

Some battles are lost before a blow is struck or a shot fired. Others are only partly won and much enemy territory unoccupied because of sabotage behind the campaign. To change the metaphor, which is quite in keeping with the matter in hand, some buildings which have cost much in time, labour, and means, become leaky, discredited and sometimes disintegrate, because of — as Ruskin puts it — a lie in the foundations. Sooner or later it finds the builders out. It is therefore a matter of considerable, if not absolute, importance that we have a right and adequate basis of assurance for certain success *BEFORE WE START*. For, if a start is made without this basis, early reverse or arrest may take place, or at most some way will be made only to find that crippling troubles bring serious limitations and heartbreaks. The *FULL* end can never be reached if the beginning or basis is faulty.

Let us firstly look at this matter of Christian unity as it is viewed today. That there is a real and considerable regret for the existing condition needs no arguing: there is! But while that is so, there are different or various reactions to it. Many feel that the situation is so far gone and established that it is just pure idealism and a counsel of perfection to think and hope for an adequate change. They have therefore surrendered to a counsel of despair and taken the attitude that we must do the best we can under the circumstances and make the best of a bad job. Others have resolved the problem — to their own satisfaction — by saying that there is good in every part, however divided the parts may be, and we must take the good, make the most of it, and try to ignore the bad. Such a position carried to its logical issue could result in a rapprochement in the most diverse realms, and there is no end to it. There are yet others who take a purely spiritual position and say that we are “all one in Christ”, and the earthly situation must be ignored. This is an unreal, unsubstantial position which evades or bypasses facts which are a contradiction to it, and still leaves the world without what Christ said is needed “that the world may believe”. This does not mean that the last mentioned position is not the true starting point for the rest; it is, but it is not enough, and falls short of the world-convincing evidence. There are other more or less definite reactions to this situation, but they are all as superficial as those mentioned.

Many, taking one or other of these attitudes, because of the immensity of the difficulty, have decided that the thing to do is to get on with the job, be “practical”, and leave these matters to those whose inclination it is to spend time on them. For such it is not “practical”, but a waste of time, to go back to the chart room and make sure that, with all the good motive, the labour, cost, and devotion, we are after all on the right course or in a position to achieve the purpose. To return to the metaphor used earlier, it is of *SOME* consequence that we do not carry in our very make-up, though not realised, the elements of defeat and disintegration.

Through the centuries and at this time in a very saddening way the work of God is handicapped in so many of its fresh efforts even before they are launched. In his sermon class, when students were preaching sermons with a view to advice and instruction on how to preach or *NOT* to preach, Mr. Spurgeon listened while a young man built up a sermon on “The Whole Armour of God”. Graphically and with some zest the student pictured himself as taking up and putting on the armour piece by piece, and waxing more and more pleased with his effort he flauntingly cried at last: “Now, where is the devil?” Mr. Spurgeon cupped his hands round his mouth and called in an audible whisper — “He is inside the armour!”

Is this not so very much the case in the church on this earth? With all the grandeur of her message, the truth of her doctrine, the cost of her work, she is so largely defeated. There is something inside telling against her. The convincingness of oneness, real unity, is sabotaged.

The fact is that the church — by which is meant Christians in their relatedness — is much more ready to do, launch out in, and undertake Christian work, than she is to secure the essential for its success.

But we must get to grips with the situation, for this is not an accusation, or mere statement of a case; we have to do something to at least indicate ways of healing of this open sore.

Let us look closely at the situation at the beginning. It is clear and needs no stressing that the mission and commission of Christ was to all the world. That means that, whether all the world would believe or not, the appeal was that “*ALL* should come to a knowledge of the truth”. There were few, if any, new facts of an

objective kind added to potential witnesses once the resurrection and ascension or glorifying of Christ were established realities. All the essentials of the message were in hand and a full gospel could there and then have been preached. But the Lord commanded them that they should wait. The reason given was until the Holy Spirit should come and they should be empowered for witness. Yes, true, but we may be too superficial as to our apprehension of what that meant. We hurry on with a “power” mentality, and do not look deeply enough to see what it means. The obvious things are taken to be all. Tongues, boldness, convincingness in proclamation, and such like things are regarded as being the chief marks of the Pentecostal baptism. But there was something more than public ministry or verbal testimony with its manifestations bound up with the tarrying issue — the advent of the Holy Spirit.

The Prayer of Christ

Christ had prayed about this witness to the world. The issue involved was the proof that He had been sent from the Father. He knew what the subsequent centuries have proved, that it would not get far with men — the world — to just preach that God sent His Son into the world; stupendous a fact as that was with all its implications. And whatever may be the other and accompanying features of the Holy Spirit’s coming upon them, the fact is that, in His prayer, Christ concentrated upon one factor as fundamental to effective witness — the oneness of His own.

The convincingness of testimony, the impact and registration of heavenly truth, the evidence by which reactions would be judged, was — in His heart — behind the things said or how they were said; behind their courage and their ecstasies (which would sooner or later be turned down as fanaticism, psychological, etc.). That background to all else was — with Him — this, “that they may be one”. His prayer went deeper and to the very root of all else. It is not good enough to say that He meant something that was a basic, spiritual, and heavenly fact without any manifestation and evidence to the world or concrete earthly expression. We cannot, in all honesty, take refuge from the problem in such construing of His words. No, we have got to face the truth and the present problem and be perfectly honest in our dealing with it. The primary work of the Holy Spirit would be to constitute a “Body”, and to *MANIFEST* its organic oneness. All else would come out of this, and hang upon it. Apart from this all else would fail of fullness, and the measure of life and power, therefore of effectiveness and fruitfulness, would be governed by this oneness. Any injury to this would be a challenge to, and arrest of, life, and a contradiction to an undivided Christ.

When we take the deeper look we see how very true this was in those first months of the church’s testimony, and we are not surprised that to arrest or weaken this mighty campaign of victory — to say nothing of bringing reproach upon Christ — the great enemy saw that discord, division, and internal disaffection was the essential strategy. The more he succeeded along this line, so the more difficult became the work, the weaker the testimony, the less the authoritativeness, the more unconvincing the doctrine, the fuller the self-occupation, and so the straitening of resources, and the creeping in of other unspiritual methods and institutions. Men have had to take responsibility for, and bear the burden of, a whole fabric of organisation and its maintenance extra to that for which the Holy Spirit once took custodianship. Questions which arise and must be answered are — Did the Lord only mean a spiritual or “mystical” oneness apart from — so far as the church is concerned — an expression of it? When, at special times the Spirit has given a wonderful and convincing manifestation of this oneness and something akin to the beginning has taken place, many souls saved, all barriers between Christians completely out of sight as though they had never been, is this to be taken as the divine idea for all time, or is it meant to be only in periodic visitations? Is it the heavenly normal or abnormal?

Sooner or later such a situation arises, either between two, a local company, a wider body, or in the world at large, where *EVERYTHING* for any future at all hangs upon a *MANIFESTATION* of mutual love, *SPIRITUAL* and expressed unity (not organised union!). Preaching and the “Work” may have to be suspended. Public meetings may have to discontinue. All the external may be driven from public procedure. Persecution and national laws may suppress all forms of organised activity. The very life and continuance of the testimony will then hang upon this one thing, spiritual and practical unity.

Having said that, we are committed to the main business in the present situation of assailing the problem, and here we must summon up all the honesty and courage possible. There never was a matter in the church’s history which called for more honest and courageous facing than this one, for it makes the most stupendous demands; no less are these demands than is the magnitude of the established system which contradicts the Lord’s mind as expressed in His prayer. To proceed to the practical demands of the situation without defining the real basis of unity, and securing an adequate dynamic for action, would be foolish and futile. Therefore we must look at the spiritual foundation as we have it in the New Testament.

We have seen that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon or into the first nucleus of the church, or the church at its beginning, brought about an inward and organic unity and oneness which was more than — and basic to — any outward and objective expressions. The statement that Peter stood up with the eleven is more significant than perhaps we have recognized. It may have been spontaneous and undesigned; or it may have been the custom when preaching, but it at least indicates the dismissal of all reserve on the part of any one, and that they were really moving together in a spontaneous way. It was the impromptu expression of a common and corporate power and principle which had taken up inward residence and control. Given this inwardness of union by “one Spirit”, and fully recognizing that, before all else, they were baptized in one Spirit, and therefore themselves of one Spirit, we have our starting point. There is no hope for Christian

unity, and Christ's prayer cannot find its answer, apart from every Christian being definitely in possession of, and possessed by, the Holy Spirit. The absolute Lordship of the Holy Spirit sets aside all other lordship. The meaning of this we have yet to show in our consideration of practical demands, but it will be hopeless unless this inclusive starting point is accepted and experienced. Too much is taken for granted on this matter, and sufficient concern must be felt for unity as to lead to real exercise of heart before the Lord that the Holy Spirit shall really be Lord and produce the fruit of His Lordship. Thus, before all else, Christian unity is the result of a definite and mighty work of the Spirit of God in believers. When this is granted we look to see the first and predominant feature of this unity as manifested at the beginning. Is there one thing that can be seen and recognized as the hallmark of the primal oneness? We think that there is. It was *THE GLORY OF THE NAME OF JESUS*.

Spontaneously the one expression, unifying passion, concerted action, and characterizing feature was enshrined in "The Name". Christianity was *NOT A NEW TEACHING*.

Not a New Teaching

There is nothing in the whole story upon which to rest an argument or affirmation that the apostles went out to the world with "The teaching of Jesus". They were not propagating new doctrines or a system of truth. Although they were charged with preaching a "strange doctrine", they were really only affirming certain facts. To Jews they expounded the Scriptures. The doctrinal parts of the New Testament mainly come out of the acceptance of Christ, and were for the instruction of believers. Ninety percent of the New Testament is for believers. The teaching was a result, not a cause. The most the apostles ever did was to substantiate their testimony from the Scriptures, and affirm certain facts concerning the person of Christ.

Not a New Religion

Christianity was not set over against or alongside of other religions and made "comparative". It was some time before some of the apostles themselves realised the implications of their testimony in the matter of their being emancipated from Judaism. Great as the change was, they did not realise that they had changed their religion. They found themselves out and committed against their own prejudices, and had to do their thinking and discussing after the thing had become a fact in embarrassing experience. See Peter in the house of Cornelius, and the events of Acts 10, 11, 15, etc.

Not a New "Movement"

No plans were laid. There was no policy. Pre-organisation was entirely absent, and any which subsequently had to be admitted was forced upon them by the embarrassment of the very vitality of things, and then it was of the simplest, and always spiritual, not merely official.

A thought-out campaign did not exist. To set up, launch, form, bring into being, or found a new society, sect, "church", community, was not in mind. They did not set out for such, and although their testimony gave distinctiveness to all who believed, and outsiders labelled them and misinterpreted their motive and purpose, the distinguishing feature was life, producing an organism.

All-inclusively it was the proclamation and affirmation of a fact. That fact was — and is — the universal sovereignty and Lordship of Jesus Christ as the Son of God established and vindicated by the resurrection from the dead; and this was all summed up in "The Name". Everything was "in the Name of Jesus".

The issue of the first preaching and response thereto was the command to "Repent, and be baptized... in the Name of Jesus". James seems to indicate that this was the time — i.e. the time of their entering into Christ — when that name was called upon them (James 2:7, margin). This is in keeping with much in both Old and New Testaments as to the church — or House of God — having His name put there. From that point onward there is a very comprehensive range of activities in the Name. Healing, prayer, preaching, agreement, being gathered together, authority over Satan and demons. It was "for the sake of the Name (that) they went forth". They rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name".

But with all the activity there was firstly the fundamental unifying bond of the Name, and then the living, working, and having their conduct governed by the honour and glory of the Name. Our point here is that if the passion for the honour of the Name were as it was then there would be no room for other names which divide, whether of people or things, and there would be the most powerful dynamic for dealing with everything contrary thereto, especially division. The question which would decide every issue would be, "Does this glorify the Name of Jesus?" If not, *NOTHING* must stand in the way of that glory. The Holy Spirit — the Custodian of the Name and its glory — would signalize His good pleasure by doing again what He did then.

Reverting to the prayer of the Lord in John 17 it is important to note that the matter of oneness has two phases. Verse 11: "that they may be one". Literally it is: "that they may keep on being one". Verse 23: "that they may be perfected into one" — perfect state as the goal. There is a basic present state of oneness which is to be known, recognized, cherished, diligently preserved, by "all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love", for "there is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:2,4). This procedure upon the basic oneness will issue in a being "perfected into one"; "till we all attain..." (Eph. 4:13).

It is at this point that all the difficulty and trouble begins. Right here we find the gap in which the whole history of divisions began and has its occasion. Few will disagree as to the *BASIC* unity “In Christ”, but few will agree that the *MANIFEST* unity is as it should be. Between the two there certainly is a big gap with a tragic and grievous history. Argue as we may to justify much of it, if we are spiritually minded and honest we shall have to acknowledge that one thing is responsible for it: that is that *DIVISIONS ARE THE RESULT OF SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY*.

Spiritual Immaturity

That can be said in different ways: delayed or arrested spiritual growth; a low and weak spiritual condition; a state of spiritual ignorance or unenlightenment; a failure to walk in the Spirit; a living in the “flesh”; a misapprehension, or a limited apprehension of the real nature and meaning of the new birth; a blindness to the real heavenly and spiritual nature of the church; and, inclusively, not seeing the meaning and significance of Christ as in the eternal conception of God and heaven. These are all matters of the most profound and vital importance, and they touch the issue of spiritual oneness in manifestation most positively. While in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians we have the church presented as in completeness, and with regard to its calling, conduct, and conflict; with certain practical features of its life here: when we want to know something about its building we have to visit a locality like Corinth, for there we shall find all the cause of the situation in which the church so largely is in our time, and the principles by which alone that situation can be changed. That divisions, contentions, jealousies, etc. are due to spiritual immaturity, or unduly prolonged spiritual babyhood, is definitely and positively stated there. The whole section of chapters one to four of the first letter to the Corinthians has to do with this; and chapter twelve is its remedy.

But when we have noted all the features of this condition, one thing is shown to be the key to everything — malady and symptoms. That fundamental factor and principle is the mind or mentality of those concerned, and the upshot or issue resolves itself into *THE DEMAND FOR A MENTAL REVOLUTION*.

Renewing of the Mind

That mental revolution is what Paul calls “the renewing of the mind”. It was the mindedness of the believers in Corinth that resulted in *ALL* the spiritual arrest and painful disorders. It was Jewish mindedness and Gentile mindedness, i.e. nationalistic (1 Cor. 1:22,23). It was man-mindedness, i.e. the mind of the natural (soulical) man (ch. 3:3,4; ch. 2:14). The natural and carnal mind is continually set over against the spiritual mind in this letter. It is all a matter of the “earthly” man overshadowing the “heavenly” man. It has not yet been sufficiently realised by the Lord’s people that the natural mind is the realm in which the evil powers — Satan himself — have the foothold.

In Matthew 16 we have a most startling example. Peter, on affirming Christ to be “the Son of the living God” had been told that “flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven”. Only a few verses further on Jesus is found addressing the same Peter thus: “Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumblingblock unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.” What a crash from heaven to hell! “My Father” — “Heaven” — “Satan” — “Men” — “Flesh and blood”. In this Letter to Corinth Paul contrasts the natural man with the spiritual, and the natural and “earthly” with the heavenly (ch. 2 and 15), and says, “flesh and blood” cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. (“Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.”)

Satan is allied to the natural man, and when we live on that basis Satan can do his work of blinding and dividing. But we must remember that Paul was writing to *BELIEVERS*, which means that believers can live on that “natural” level and therefore give Satan his ground for his evil work. What a large field of spiritual instruction this opens up! But we must come to practical points. It is the entire mentality which is responsible for the state of Christianity today, and evangelical Christianity as much as any other.

Let us be perfectly frank. The present organised system which Christianity has come to be has involved Christians and their leaders in a set of situations which make it — to say the least of it — exceedingly difficult to escape a false, totally false, conception of unity and division. The work of God has become very largely sectional under names, titles, and designations, which represent either doctrine, technique, country, method, or nation. It would not be difficult to arrange “Churches”, “Missions” and “Faiths” under such headings, but we refrain. If the reader will do it, the situation becomes obvious. But that is not all. The sections have their own clientèle. They must have their own personal and financial support. Funds must be obtained for their maintenance and development. There are many in them as “ministers” and officers whose livelihood hangs upon the increase of the number of “supporters”. The piece of work, the church, the undertaking just *MUST* be supported and kept going. Clientèle is a tremendous factor, relating to many other factors.

It is this crystallisation of Christian work into a fixed system, settled, and so generally recognized and accepted, *AS TO LEAVE NO PLACE FOR ANY OTHER* — any other being at once suspect — that has set up an entirely wrong and pernicious situation with regard to unity. It is the “church”, i.e. the denomination, sect, local congregation, mission, movement, form, order, doctrine (extra to the basic essentials of salvation) which now determine unity or schism. To leave one and go to another, altogether without a consideration for spiritual values is immediately named division, “sheep stealing”, etc. We are going to pursue this to its roots, and seek to lay the axe there.

CHAPTER TWO

In order to deal with the roots of division we must know what and where the roots are. They are only known by their fruits, and are themselves so often unseen or unrecognized. So we must go back to Corinth.

When we look more carefully at that wretched state we find that it resolves itself into divisions over things which really were — and are — meant to constitute a glorious unity, but which things were made evils by the miserable spirit of Christians. That in itself is something to take note of. The Bible is full of paradoxes. Things which are at the same time demanded and forbidden by God, things which are of great use against the devil, being used by the devil against God. It is one of the marks of Satan's triumph at the beginning that grand things have been taken into a realm where they are of evil account and serve the devil's ends. Well, what were these things at Corinth which have grown to such dimensions unto this time?

Persons — Ministries — Functions

These things were persons, ministries and functions "...each one of you saith... Paul; and... Apollos; and... Cephas; and... Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4). "Wherefore let no one glory in men... whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas" (ch. 3:21,22). There was evidently something seriously enough wrong about this personality matter to call forth rebuke and castigation from the apostle. What was the wrong? It is clear from Paul's own admission that these names belonged to men through whom the Corinthians had believed. It would be very natural and unblameworthy if those who owed everything spiritually under Christ to a certain servant of His had a special and very great regard for such a one. Indeed, elsewhere, Paul seemed to use this very fact of his being a spiritual "father" as a ground of appeal for a hearing. So that was not the trouble. The element of human preferences no doubt got near to the cause of rebuke. The preference for a certain kind of man, or his particular ability, style, manner, or matter, has often led to grouping of Christians even in a great convention, and it has not been a far cry to the creating of a group complex from such personalities, nor yet to that forbidden "glorying in man" mentioned above. But when we have said all that can be said regarding such details we have been trivial compared with the great background of it all. We have to remember the great revelation of Jesus Christ which Paul possessed and which governed all his approaches to situations, so that there was nothing trivial or merely "human" or "natural" with him. Paul's mentality was constituted by the one all-overshadowing revelation of the one new-creation Man. While fully recognizing that transformation is a process and conformity to Christ a lifelong business, there were ever present with him — as shown in all his writings — two basic factors: one, that in Christ the old disrupted, divided man is wholly put away and has no place, but a wholly new Man, different and corporate is in being, a new creation in very truth where there *CANNOT* be anything that belongs to the havoc made in man or the race by the devil. In Christ there cannot be Jew and Greek, etc. (Col. 3:11), and the principle must be carried to many more classifications than Paul mentions, seeing that the divisiveness has worked out to such a much more numerous progeny than existed then. "In Christ" there is "one new man", only one, and utterly new.

The other thing with Paul was that there is a point at which any merely natural or human features must definitely end, and that period should be a *VERY* brief one indeed. He calls it babyhood, and considers its extension beyond a very short time something grotesque and abnormal. The real trouble therefore was the bringing down of otherwise heavenly things to earthly levels, the level of earthly men: "Are ye not men?" and "...walk after the manner of men" (1 Cor. 3:3,4). Even Christ is taken hold of in this way. It may be that those who said, "I am of Christ" thought that to be a degree above the others, and looked down on them as inferior. But they are classed with the rest in this matter of divisions, for Paul comes back with a sounding slap: "Is Christ divided?" Their use of Christ was after the manner of men to give glory to their spiritual (?) flesh. In his second letter Paul touched this at its core. "Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more" (2 Cor. 5:16). The death-union with Christ just referred to takes this matter of man's place as such back to the very beginning of the Christian life. So then, these divisions are: —

- a. A mark of failure to apprehend the meaning of union with Christ.
- b. Failure to apprehend the significance of Christ Himself.
- c. Failure to emerge from infant conditions.

It is all a matter of still moving on the line of the first man, Adam; a pulling everything down to that level. "Are ye not men?" means not humans, but as men in the disintegration of mankind, and not the integration of the "one new man". This is the kind of stuff being put upon the foundation of Christ and its doom is foreshown as going up in the flames and smoke of the final judgment of works. Let it be fully recognized that the "wood, hay and stubble" part of Paul's letter (1 Cor. 3:12) is connected with this whole argument or corrective concerning divisions, and means that to build upon Christ the predilections, preferences, likes, dislikes, natural appraisals, prejudices, partisanships, partialities, etc. of even Christian people is to "be saved: yet so as by fire". This latter solemn warning has usually been used for Gospel purposes, or for "worldly Christians" in a general way, but its use by Paul was specifically related to this matter of disunion by partisanship.

Then we come to the question of ministries. There is every reason to believe that ministry and ministries had a large place in the Corinthian mentality. To read the two letters with this thought uppermost is to be fully convinced of the fact. Indeed, the letters can be said to relate entirely, in the final issue, to the church's ministry. But here again the painful contradiction is found. The very thing that was provided and intended for building was being used for unbuilding; the means for unifying and consolidating was being turned to divide and disintegrate. We shall touch upon only one aspect of this here.

The root weakness and therefore the expressed evil was not only the personal bias, i.e. the bias to persons, but to ministries. There was distinct failure in the matter of recognition of and rejoicing in the value and importance of *EVERY* form of God-given ministry. The evangelistic bias and preference would reject and criticise the teaching ministry, and probably say, "There is no gospel for the unsaved with him or with them." The teaching bias would take the attitude toward the evangelistic that it was "elementary", "not feeding", etc., and so despise it. Thus you go round the clock to every aspect and emphasis of the whole ministry, and people make ministries the means and ground of divisive groups. This is pernicious in every case! Why do not the Lord's people recognize that what is true of the Body as being one, yet having many members (1 Cor. 12:12), is also true of the ministry; it is one, yet having many aspects. Why say of any, "I (or we) have no need of you"? Then again, is it so inconceivable that the Lord will raise up specific ministries in a corporate way to be complementary to the other things that He is doing? What is the reason for the suspicion and ostracism existing in relation to ministries that the Lord is undoubtedly blessing and using? Let us ask the all-inclusive question regarding this: Is it really, honestly, transparently, and utterly a jealousy that *CHRIST* shall not lose anything, but rather that He shall have all the increase in spiritual life that is absolutely possible? Is it? Let us test ourselves honestly before God!

If any people in whose spiritual welfare we are interested could really find more of Christ and grow spiritually more fully and quickly in another circle of believers or under another ministry, so that there would be a greater measure of Christ in this world as represented by them, are we willing and happy that they should leave *OUR* church, mission, group, etc., and go there? Are we really ready for the Lord to deal with *ALL* that limits Him in us or our connection so that *THE DRAW AND THE HOLD IS HIMSELF*?

Are we trying to hold up, maintain, and conserve some *THING* that is not clear, free, open, and adjustable for the ever-growing fullness of Christ? It all amounts to a question of whether the Lord really has sovereignly ordained and determined our ministry. If He has, so long as spiritual principles are not violated, it just must be fulfilled, and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"; but let us be sure that it is the gates of hell against which we are warring and not the come-back of a false conception and mentality as to what the Lord is after!

Can we not rejoice in *ANYTHING* that truly ministers Christ, without an inward reservation born of fear as to how it may affect *OUR* interests? Let us beware of putting *OUR* hand upon the ark to preserve it intact. The Lord will only confound us if we do.

When we come to functions, we are only coming to an extension of ministry. While the *SPECIFIC* ministries are represented by the specific function (not offices) of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, the whole Body is brought into view as a ministering Body. Every member is an organ and therefore has a function. Interrelatedness and interdependence are the laws of its ministry, and a vast diversity is in an equally vast unity known as "the unity of the Spirit" or "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit". Thus, the apostle gives much prominence to this great spiritual truth in relation to the impact of the church upon the world, just as did the Lord in John 17. All the strong things said by the apostle about "not discerning the Lord's body", and "destroying the temple of God", etc., are seen to have a corporate aspect, and therefore involve the church in the question of its world-testimony and impact. We just cannot say to any real member of Christ, "We can do without you." Perhaps we would not *SAY* that, but do we act that? Is ours a negative or a positive attitude? Surely what Paul meant was "We just cannot do without you!" "We must have you!" The need is not to maintain some earthly thing with a Christian title, but for the expression of Christ and His increase.

CHAPTER THREE

"That the World may Believe"

We have said that Christianity as it now is has set up an entirely false basis — an impossible basis — of Christian unity, and divisions among Christians are viewed and judged from a standpoint which is utterly wrong. That standpoint is the one that views the whole question in the light of the system which Christianity has become. It is no longer the all-dominating *EXPERIENCE* of the absolute sovereign headship of Christ over a living spiritual organism, His church; but it is now a matter of churches, missions, movements, enterprises, organizations, with their respective memberships, clientèle, officers, funds, etc. It is very largely what in the world is termed "vested interests", in localities, countries, areas, personalities, personal interests, proprietorships, and so on and on. The supreme concern for the *SPIRITUAL* measure of Christ is governed by all this, instead of governing it or making it completely subservient, if not unneces-

sary. Realism and honesty demand that we face facts and do not deceive ourselves with false hopes and expectations.

An expression of Christian unity in any adequate way is absolutely impossible while the present position obtains!

We have got to start all over again. Until we do, the mission and testimony of the church is going to be increasingly sabotaged by suspicions, prejudices, ostracisms, and factions. This smoke from hell will stifle and paralyse, and bring increasing limitation, so that Christianity — yes, evangelical Christianity — paralyses itself. The disagreements on points of doctrine, interpretation, the taking up of one point and enlarging it to eclipse ninety-nine other wholly acceptable points on the one hand, and the wearing of blinkers regarding many unscriptural things to get benefits from a small proportion of what is good, on the other hand, is a case of putting the hand upon the ark by those who have no spiritual rights for governing the Lord's interests, and by their limited spirituality are both standing in the Lord's way, and ministering to this enemy-action to fill the air with questions as to "soundness" and "safety".

We have said above that a new beginning is the only way to an adequate expression of unity. *WHAT* is that beginning, and *WHERE* is it to take place? This is a much happier line of enquiry and presentation than that wallowing in the morass of the facts, causes and nature of divisions.

The Starting Place and Basis of Unity is the Cross

Is it the dark shadow of legalism threatening to strangle, or actually strangling, the life of the church as in the letters to the Romans and the Galatians? Then see how the Spirit of life leads the apostle to bring the cross into full view as the only but sure means of deliverance!

Is it the many-sided carnality, the reasserting of the natural man, even unto the realm of the spirituals as at Corinth? Again, see how "Christ crucified" is the *EXCLUSIVE* remedy!

Is it petty jealousies and standing for rights as at Philippi? Then see the humbling of Himself by Christ, and "obedience unto death, yea, the death of the cross" which is presented as the example for victory! So it ever is: a vital union, a union with Christ in His death which has also become a critical experience in believers, in "ministers", in "workers", and in "the work", is the one and only ground and way to an expression of unity.

We shall have to die, not only to the world and to ourselves, but to our work, our denomination, our mission, our enterprise or our movement, *AS SUCH*, and in all have only one object which obliterates all other interests and consciousness; that is Christ, His increase and fullness! The "I" of Galatians 2:20, which is supposed to be crucified with Christ, covers a much larger area than a merely legal death, or the legal aspect of Christ's death. It touches the whole matter of religious and traditional relationships, as the context shows. Paul was really saying that the "no longer I" meant his death to the Law and its ordinances, which meant Judaism as a system which had been transcended by Christ. The Cross not only makes Christ superior to "Christianity" (as we know it) but completely subjugates it to Him.

The church — according to Paul's statements — is no combination of nations or nationals, or classes, or denominations; it is not "inter" in any respect, it is "uni"; it annihilates *ALL*, and brings up "*ONE NEW* Man", only one, and entirely new — as Christ is the *FIRST* of a "new creation".

This has to find its very beginning in a new consciousness of a new-born child. Not this-or-that-conscious, but Christ-conscious, and "all one in Christ" *CONSCIOUS*, not mere doctrine or slogan. Until this ground is really taken or occupied, and Christ-consciousness just does transcend our religious connection or tradition-consciousness, there will remain inner and outer divisions.

The Cross is a mighty power, and it has to be applied right at the root of our being and of our system of things.

The question is as to whether our measure of Christ is really so much bigger than our particular Christianity-complex that the latter fails to affect us in our attitude toward Christ's own, just because they are His. This is the only way of manifested unity.

POWER WITH GOD

CHAPTER 1

Power with God Exemplified in Noah

“Righteousness Which Is According To Faith”

“And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when a land sinneth against Me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out My hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord Jehovah.... Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out My wrath upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast; though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, they should deliver neither son nor daughter; they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness” (Eze. 14:12–14,19–20).

“Then said the Lord to me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth” (Jer. 15:1).

God Takes Account Of Those Who Have Power With Him

It is a remarkable thing that the Lord is doing when, in this way, He selects certain names and brings them to the fore over against such a very dark and hopeless situation, and says of them: ‘Although these men were there, and although these men stood before Me, it would make no difference; they alone, by themselves, would be saved.’ In doing this, He has selected from all the men who had ever prevailed with Him those who, more than any others, had power with God. If anything could be done, if God could be influenced, persuaded to intervene, to change the situation which was so desperate, these men would do it, and would be the ones who would have power with God. The very first thing that strikes us is just that — God taking account of men who had power with Him. The Lord carries that a very long way. He says, in effect: ‘I take that right to the very limit of possibility — where possibility ends these men go; if anything could be done, however desperate the situation, these are the men who will bring it about.’ It is something to note that God takes account of men who have power with Him. God knows them; He knows what He has had to do, what He has been compelled to do because of such men.

God Puts Himself Into The Hands Of Men

By inference, this carries the truth that God puts Himself into the hands of men. God is not going to move unless there are those who prevail with Him, and the inference is: ‘I am your hands, if you will press the matter far enough, if you will learn how to prevail.’ God will, or will not, move according to knowledge of how to prevail with Him in a situation or a matter. That is something to think about. If a situation could be altered God says: ‘Such and such are the men through whom I would do it.’ Of course, I am not dealing with the situations in the contexts of these two passages in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. That is not the point. I am not taking up the situation in Israel, which had become an impossible situation, and its handling and solution was one which could only be done through judgment, and the terrible judgment of the seventy years’ captivity. God would deal with it in that way. But He had reached the point where no man could ask the Lord to deal with it on the spot, and it would happen. That is not our concern at the moment.

It is this: That there are situations which do go a very long way, as we shall see, which are still open to be dealt with by heaven, but which never will be dealt with unless there are those who know how to prevail with God. God offers Himself to be prevailed with, to yield Himself in all His sovereign power, in all His grace, in all His mercy, to men and people who know the secret of prevailing.

Now let us note at this very point, lest our hearts begin to lose assurance and hope, that the men here mentioned as being the most outstanding examples of prevailing with God were not taken account of for what they were in themselves. There were two things which made it possible for the Lord to take account of them.

A Heart Relationship With The Lord

One was their heart relationship to the Lord. Look at the men: Noah, Daniel, Job, Moses, Samuel. Well, there are some grand things about those men. The Lord has not covered up the other side. You are sometimes a little surprised at what the Lord does say about some of them. If you read the whole story, you do feel that there may be some ground of contradiction here in these men. You know the end of Noah — a very sad

picture. You hear a New Testament Apostle saying: “Ye have heard of the patience of Job” (James 5:11), but when you read the Book of Job, you sometimes feel that if ever there was a man without patience, it is Job. We know about Moses, and even Samuel seems to have passed out almost under a cloud. Well, I think it is clear that in their case, as in the case of so many of the others who are held up by God as examples of this or that, it was not because of what they were in themselves that God singled them out, but in every case you do see this: that in spite of their humanity, their weaknesses, their failures, their lapses, there was a heart relationship to the Lord which cannot be questioned, and when you look at the context of these very passages, that is the thing which first of all is impressed upon you — the heart of these people. God is troubled about the heart of this people. The prophetic word about Israel at this time was: ‘The heart of this people is turned away from Me, and turned to idols.’ “This people draw nigh unto Me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me” (Isa. 29:13). It is a heart question, and it was that state of heart which at length brought about this impasse — that God could do nothing. Over against that, men are mentioned who, despite their human weaknesses, were men whose hearts were in a very utter place with the Lord.

But that is not all. That is a beginning point, but there is another reason why the Lord singled out these men. It was because of certain spiritual factors which were the great characteristics of their very life, factors which do count with God. When you look at each of these men, read their story and sum it all up, you have to say: That is the thing that marks that man’s life, and that, and that. Each one of them is the embodiment of something, and it is that thing which counts with God and which was the basis of their having power with God. That is what we are after at this time — that which makes for power with God.

Two Ways Of Estimating Men

May I just stay here, after what I have just said, to add this. There are two ways in which we may estimate men, by which we may judge them and their history and arrive at a conclusion about them. There is the natural side, the way in which men naturally look at men. When the world reads the story of some of these men, such as David, and others, well, they sum it all up with a sneer and pass it all out as utterly unworthy. It is the natural way of judging men and appraising their value, and that was the point upon which the Lord came down with Job’s friends. They judged Job naturally, by the sight of the eye, by what appeared on the surface, and summed him up as a bad lot. You can look on men of God like that, just taking account of the flaws, the weaknesses and all that human side, which is, after all, poor stuff in the best. Very few men, if any, have ever come out of the judgments of men completely free of that sort of thing. But there is another way, and that is as to their spiritual values, to judge spiritually. It is just here that the Lord says: “Touch not Mine anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm” (I Chron. 16:22). Why should they touch the Lord’s anointed? Only because they have misjudged them and had come to wrong conclusions about them. The Lord will not let us touch any one of His, however much they may be at fault in our judgment. It is a very solemn thing to remember that: that our hand must not come down upon any of the Lord’s own in judgment; that has to be left with the Lord. It may be that there is plenty from our point of view and to our judgment that would justify our taking such an antagonistic or opposed attitude, but the Lord will not have it. That comes out in the case of Job. Moses was a frail human vessel capable of making mistakes, but see what the Lord will do with those who assail Moses, and touch his acceptance with God, his standing before the Lord! I do feel it is necessary for us to remember that, because who belongs to the Lord is very precious and must not be touched. There are always two ways of looking at and judging men and people of God. There is this natural side which has plenty to criticize, but the Lord will disapprove if we do it. There is the spiritual way of judging, and it is necessary to look further and see how far these count for God, whether there is not something there that is of the Lord.

Noah Singled Out By God

Having said that — and it is only introductory — we can come to the first of these men, Noah. This is not a study of the life of Noah, and certainly not of the deluge, but just this particular point — power with God. God singled Noah out from amongst a great host of men and said: ‘If I could be prevailed upon, if I could be persuaded, Noah would do it; of all men, he could do it.’ Noah is amongst the few. Perhaps you have not thought of Noah as being so important as that, and all that you know about him is that he made an ark. You always associate the ark and the deluge with Noah, and that is all it amounts to. But here the dispensation is closing, the whole existing order of things is passing, the antediluvians, patriarchs, the Mosaic economy, the whole monarchy, the prophetic ministry in the old dispensation are coming to a close. God looks over the whole and sees men who have prevailed with Him, and brings five out from amongst them. The first one He mentions is Noah — a man who stands over a great extent of time. God says: ‘If I could be moved, Noah would move Me. I would have to yield to him.’ Well, that surely forces us to look to see what it is in Noah’s case that represents that which prevails with God.

I think the key is in Hebrews 11:7: “*By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*” That is the summary of it, but it wants breaking up.

Noah Stood Alone For God

First of all, we go back to Noah's time. You read chapters 6 and 7 of Genesis and this whole situation concerning Noah is introduced. The statement is that God looked and saw, and what did He see? A whole race of men, in every imagination of their hearts corrupt, evil, a universal state of iniquity and departure from God, of godlessness and of positive iniquity so utter, so terrible, that God repented that He had made man on the earth, and He said: "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground; both man, and beast, and creeping things, and birds of the heavens; for it repenteth Me that I have made them." God has said that, and then the next sentence is: 'But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord.' "But Noah..." — the exception. Then at the beginning of the seventh chapter you have the reason why: "... for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation".

Well, the first thing about Noah is that: that he stood true to God as one solitary, lonely man in a universe of iniquity, one man amongst all men, distinguished from them by righteousness over against utter unrighteousness. One man true to God when all others had departed. How easy it would have been for Noah to have been carried away, not only by the sin and the atmosphere and the general course of things, but by this: "Well, everything has gone. God has not got anything, and what is the good of trying to stand true? What is the use of MY trying to hold on when everything has gone?" So often the Lord's people have given up, not because there were no other people of the Lord on the earth, nor because there were no other righteous people, nor because there was not another Christian in all the world, but because things have gone so largely astray, have departed so extensively from the Lord's revealed mind, and have got into such an appalling condition that they say: 'Is it any use trying to stand for what is of God in any full sense? We may as well accept things as they are and capitulate, and make the best of a bad job.' — the kind of argument which is the result of the seemingly impossible situation, prospect, and outlook. Death and departure: what is the good of our trying to stand up to this? Probably you, as an individual Christian, placed in a setting of so much that is contrary to God, often ask your heart: Is it any use trying to hold on, to stand for God? You see, the question of power with God does immediately arise. It is a tremendous thing that God is saying: 'Here is one man in the whole human race, one man in the whole world, alone who will not capitulate, and that is the basis of power with Me. If anything can be done, that is the kind of man who will bring it about.'

May we not be tested by the situation in which God places us, so difficult, so contrary, as to whether we are going to stand with God so that we come to a place where we do know the secret of prevailing with God and are able to say: 'I have been in very difficult situations where the whole thing seemed hopeless and impossible, but I have learned that it is possible to prevail, to triumph, to bring God in, and I have seen those hopeless, impossible situations touched by God and dealt with by Him. I have come to know the Lord over against a very dark and seemingly impossible background.' God needs men and women like that. Alone — yes, desperately alone!

Noah Had No Precedent

"Moved with godly fear, prepared an ark." He built an ark, as the context shows, without a precedent. That, I think, is the point here. "Things not seen as yet." First of all, it is fairly generally concluded that rain had never been seen up to this time. "There went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground" (Gen. 2:6), but rain was an unknown thing up to Noah's time. They had never seen it, so he had not a precedent for this. Probably there are other things covered by that little statement: "Things not seen as yet." The point is that nothing in history up to this point gave any ground of justification for taking the course that he did. He could never say: 'You see, this happened at such and such a time; this happened there; we have examples of this.' We, today, have examples of almost anything and everything that may come, but Noah had no examples, no evidence, no precedent, nothing to give point. He was simply told by God that it was going to happen, and he could not in the realm of his whole knowledge say: 'Well, I know what that means!' There was nothing like that at all. It was going to be something altogether new, something that had never happened before.

Every individual life with God is something so much by itself. Ten thousand, or a million, may have gone that way before, but when it comes to us, we always feel that no one in all God's universe has ever had this experience before. We feel that we are the only one who has ever gone this way. People can say to us: 'I know all about it. I have been that way.' 'Yes,' we say, 'but you don't understand. You have never really been in my position.' That is our immediate reaction. It is like that — the utter loneliness of a personal walk with God. Noah had no precedent, nothing to go upon. Faith is tested like that. Noah, "moved with godly fear" — and you know what that word means in the Scriptures: fear of the Lord, that is, just believing God and obeying Him because He is God; not because of any proofs or evidence, but because He is God — "prepared an ark".

A Prolonged Test Of Faith

But then, remember the duration of it. He did not start this thing, get so far and say: 'Well, I have been at this for a good long time now. Month passes into month, the months are mounting up and it is getting into years now and nothing has happened. No one takes any notice, no one is influenced and I am making no impression at all. I think there must have been a mistake. Surely there ought by now to be something that indicates that I am on the right line and that I have not taken the wrong course!' One hundred and twenty

years! Of course, that was not much out of his whole life of nine hundred and fifty, but a hundred and twenty is enough to test faith. Now the point is that for one hundred and twenty years he went on with it without anything coming in. He went the whole of that time of required, demanded activity with nothing whatever to prove that he was right or to support him in his way, with nothing that looked like some effect of his message (because one writer speaks of Noah as a “preacher of righteousness” (II Pet. 2:5)), with nothing happening through all his preaching, whether it was by word or act — but what was happening really? There was something happening, but it was one of those things that you and I do not ever feel happy about. It says that he condemned the world. By his faith and his works of faith, he put everybody else in the wrong and prepared them for judgment. In Paul’s words, he was “a saviour unto death” (II Cor. 2:16). There is always that effect of faithfulness. It is not ineffective and neutral. It does have an effect, although it is a very disheartening kind; nevertheless it counts, is effective, is tremendous. His work of faith just prepared the world for judgment. God has to do that to be justified.

For A Time To Come

But over it all there is this element — and you see we are getting at the question of faith and analysing it — this element of the future aspect of ministry, of service to the Lord. It was for a time to come, and I think there is nothing so testing as that. If only we are going to live to see the result of our ministry! If only it is all going to come about in our lifetime! If only we are going to know here our vindication! If only something is coming to us before we pass from this scene to prove that we have been right, well, we can go on. But note: This, with all the rest, is summed up by the writer to the Hebrews in this: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises” (Heb. 11:13). Oh yes, Noah saw the flood, he went through it and came out on the other side, and made a sorry mess of things afterward. Is that all? No, not a little bit of it, really, there is something very much deeper and greater than that about this whole matter.

But I want to emphasize that it is this ‘for a time to come’ feature which is so testing to faith. We are told, and as frankly as Jeremiah was, that we give our lives, spend our strength and go through all the travail and sorrow and suffering and see very little. We go home to the Lord and do not see all that we hoped for. There is the ultimate test. How far do we come into the picture? What place do we have in it all? Can we eliminate ourselves altogether and go right on without any reservation, and give ourselves for that which we shall never see, for a time to come?

There is a lot of that in the Old Testament. You remember that Jeremiah gave his prophecy. We read in II Chronicles 36:22: “That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished,” but Jeremiah did not live to see it. His word was fulfilled, and people did go back from Babylon according to his word, but he did not live to see it. He worked for a time to come in which he had no place, so far as this earth is concerned, other than a spiritual place. The spiritual values of his life and work were there. It is a test of faith, because we do, humanly and naturally, crave so much to see something for it all before we pass hence, just to know that it has been worth while. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises.” Noah was really living and working for a time to come.

Now let us get right to this thing. By this kind of faith which, to begin with, would not capitulate to what was practically universal departure from God, but, in effect, said: ‘Although I may be the only one left standing for God, and for God’s full rights, and God’s full place, I have that faith in God that it is worth my standing alone for Him. God has something bound up with my aloneness for Him.’ That is faith, tremendous faith, the faith which would not surrender, to begin with, a faith which was not passive in standing in a world which was so contrary, a faith which was active, and went on, seeing nothing, with no precedent to work upon, went on building for one hundred and twenty years, and a faith which believed that, although he saw no converts or anyone coming over to the side of righteousness, something was happening. ‘This is not all for nothing. Something is happening even now. These people are being brought under the effect of my stand and my ministry without an argument, even if it is to take all ground from under their feet and leave them condemned, without any preaching, without an excuse.’ That is something which God must have before He can judge, and that is why He has sent us to preach. He is going to judge the world, but He cannot judge those who have never had an opportunity, those who have had no light and have had no witness. He must be justified. That was Noah’s faith. It was not a happy side of faith, but again the faith which believed that this thing related to something very much more somewhere ahead in the future. That was the kind of faith that Noah had, and it says: “he... became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith”.

‘He became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.’ Now we can link up with that Hebrews 11:39–40: “And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (the word is ‘complete’).” Here is the great, future, prospective factor in Noah’s faith. He, with the rest of these men, was not made complete. Why? Because completeness belongs to our time, to this dispensation. It is the whole argument of the Letter to the Hebrews: “nothing perfect” (Heb. 7:19). But now that which is perfect is come. This is the age of completeness, perfectness. Noah’s faith looked on, and he had to die in faith, not receiving BECAUSE this perfectness, this completeness, belongs to OUR dispensation, the day in which we live.

You come over to Hebrews 12:22–23: “Ye are come... to the spirits of just men made perfect” (complete). Noah’s spirit is amongst them. What has happened? The Lord Jesus has perfected the work of righteousness, the Son has fulfilled all righteousness. Noah’s faith linked him with Christ, with this dispensation,

with us, in perfect righteousness. Peter talks about Noah and the flood in chapter three of his first letter: "The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." John the Baptist would have refrained from baptizing the Lord Jesus, but Jesus said: "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). The flood, the deluge, says Peter, is a figure of baptism in which all righteousness is fulfilled. But all righteousness stood *AGAINST* the men of Noah's day, but all righteousness stood *FOR* him through his faith. Baptism was not his doom, but his way into life, a new creation. "All righteousness"; "the spirits of just men made perfect." So Noah in faith came right into this age of perfect righteousness and inherited it. We are come to the spirits of these just men, Noah and all the rest, made complete.

Now what does it amount to in this particular connection? His life work, after all, was not just that incident of the flood. It ran right on to Christ, and on to the Church. "They"; "we"; these are the two words here. 'They without us.' "They", "us", brought together in the perfect work of Christ in fulfilling all righteousness.

Righteousness According To Faith

'Though Noah stood before Me.' What is the first mighty ground of power with God? It is the ground of righteousness which is according to faith, and you can test it any day that you like, because power with God is not just a matter of somehow persuading God to do something you think ought to be done. Let us get this right over. Power with God is not cajoling God into moving, getting a God, who is reluctant to come in and help, to change His mind and to be kind and intervene. That is all wrong, completely wrong. We have a magnificent picture of this whole thing in Zechariah 3: "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary." Satan has established himself there in the place of power, which the right hand always represents. Christ is now at the right hand of the Majesty in the heaven (Col. 3:1), the place of power and honour, but here Satan is getting honour and has power because Joshua "was clothed with filthy garments." One who stood by said: "Take the filthy garments from off him... I will clothe thee with rich apparel... let them set a clean mitre upon his head." Now the scene has changed. Righteousness like filthy rags (Isaiah 64.6) have been put away; righteousness which is power has been placed upon him, and: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; yea, the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." Satan's rebuke, his dethronement, and his removal from the place of power and getting the honour is related to a change of condition from unrighteousness to righteousness. It is only this that can move God.

That is the background of those passages in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Why did there come deadlock and impasse? God said it was because unrighteousness had become so universal and absolute that 'I cannot do anything. I just cannot. Even though these men stepped in, it is only righteousness that would save *THEM*. If there was righteousness here, they would be saved, but there are none righteous and I can do nothing. Remove unrighteousness and I am released. I can repent and come in. You who want to prevail with Me must provide Me with a ground of righteousness.'

That is very practical. We are paralysed so often and Satan is so often getting the glory, the honour and the power, because he gets us to move off this ground of the righteousness which is according to faith, bringing us under condemnation, bringing us back to that old ground outside of Christ, nullifying all this wonderful work of perfect righteousness fulfilled by Christ and our appropriation of it by faith. So often it just heads up to a situation like this. The enemy has got possession, he has fastened upon us and has made all kinds of suggestions and accusations. 'I do not know whether I am right or wrong, whether I have grieved the Lord, or not. I do not know whether the Lord is for me or against me. I do not know where I am.' Satan holds us there until we take positively a position of righteousness in Christ by faith, and put that to the enemy. 'I do not know in what I am' — and neither did Noah, nor Job, nor Daniel, nor Moses, nor any of them. Their faith was counted unto them for righteousness. 'I do not stand on the ground of what I am; I stand on the ground of Christ's perfect righteousness.' It is the only way to begin to have power with God, and we are nullified while we have a question on that matter. Oh, for a beginning, a foundation of a mighty settled faith in the righteousness of Christ as ours through faith in Him to put us in a place of power with God! Because it is not just persuading God, it is moral power with God. He must have a moral ground for all He does. If there is a question of unrighteousness, He cannot do it. That unrighteousness is dealt with in the Blood of the Lord Jesus: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). Therein is our power with God. It is moral power. He is not a reluctant, unwilling God. He is a God who is only too ready, but He is bound by His own nature of righteousness. Have you that ground? Show Him on the ground of righteousness that He should do this, and on the ground of His Son why He should do it. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isa. 1:18). How are you going to reason? Not like Job in the transition stage, reasoning about your own righteousness and why God should do it for YOU. No, let us reason together — on what ground? What is the issue? "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." How? On what ground are you reasoning? In what way are your sins made as white as snow? We know it is by the precious Blood. That is the reasoning ground with God. It speaks, it works with God. Oh, plead the Blood and you have the greatest argument with God and against Satan, the adversary and accuser. I know this is elementary. It is the beginning of things, but, dear

friends, it is a thing that follows us through to the end. What is the fear in your own heart that arises so often as to whether right at the end you will be able to hold out and get through triumphantly? Yes, it is the battle right through to the end. The enemy will never leave us alone, but are we just going to be under this condemnation of Satan, with the hand of God paralysed, because we have taken Satan's ground instead of God's? God's ground is righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Satan's ground is unrighteousness through doubt, through unbelief.

Well, if Noah begins the great line of examples of power with God, it is that: righteousness which is according to faith, but what a faith! — tested, tried, proved, but faith. I feel that we are in the great test of faith in this day as much as ever the Lord's people were.

As we close this first chapter, let us be reminded that, for power with God, there must be conduct, behaviour, and "walk", which is the *EXPRESSION* of righteousness. If there is practical unrighteousness in behaviour we shall be in weakness with God.

CHAPTER 2

Power with God Exemplified in Daniel

"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when a land sinneth against Me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out mine hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.... Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out My fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness" (Eze. 14:12–14, 19–20).

"Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth" (Jer. 15:1).

The situation in relation to which these Scriptures occur is indeed a desperate one; it is one of hopeless extremity. God is represented as stating that He Himself has come to the end of His human resources as far as the salvation of His people is concerned. He says that there is not a man who could avert the judgment which must come upon Israel. In such a state He says that if that averting *WERE* possible there were certain five men who could do it; and in mentioning the five by name — "Moses, Samuel" (Jer. 15:1). "Noah, Daniel, Job" (Eze. 14:12–14), He pinpoints that which those men signify which would prevail with Him, if anything could do so.

We are therefore seeking to put our finger upon that particular feature and factor which God Himself indicates as having power with Him up to the last degree. We have considered Noah; now we move to the second in the order in Ezekiel — Daniel.

Incidentally, it is impressive that, with the acceptance of Ezekiel by Hebrew authorities for inclusion in the Old Testament Canon, they should have made such heavy weather over including Daniel. Only after much debate and controversy was Daniel admitted to a place in the Bible by those higher critics. The reasons for this attitude are full of interest, but not to be considered here. The point is that, as always, prejudice results in contradiction and inconsistency. Admit Ezekiel, yes, but overlook the fact that in Ezekiel God sets the very highest importance upon one whom you will not admit without a battle — Daniel.

From Noah To Daniel

It is a very far cry from Noah to Daniel. Noah stands in the book of beginnings — Genesis; Daniel stands so near the end of the Old Testament era. Are we straining the truth when we say that that fact really brings us to the very significance of Daniel as an ultimate factor in power with God? We must remember that when God speaks there are very deep and eternal thoughts beneath His words; they are *SPIRITUAL* thoughts. We have seen that with Noah the vast eternal and fundamental spiritual truth of the righteousness which is by faith was the power by which believers were delivered from universal judgment and secured a new, regenerate world. How far-reaching that truth is in the light of the New Testament 'Genesis' — the Letter to the Romans! If that is foundational and at the beginning, what is it that is ultimate as indicated by Daniel?

The book which bears his name may be regarded as a book of history and apocalypse; of prophecy, and history written in advance; but that is surely not the point made by God when He singled out Daniel as a man of pre-eminence in power with Him. No, we must think again.

We have to begin by reminding ourselves of why Daniel was in Babylon at all; that is, why the people of Israel were there. That brings us to the point that Daniel was physically and temporally — though not spiritually — involved in Israel's situation and condition. Was it not because Israel had forsaken their high and distinct position as God's 'Peculiar People'? All distinctiveness of life and testimony as "not reckoned

among the nations” had been wholly violated and forsaken. They had become like Babylon before they were in Babylon. They were not only in the world, they had become of it. To this position and condition Daniel reacted with deliberation, positiveness, and faithfulness. His decision regarding the king’s meat; his refusal to bow to the king’s image; his persistence in rejecting the king’s edict about praying to any other god; and his acceptance of the penalties of all this — in fellowship with his other three friends — was all related to one principle: “The heavens do rule”. The inclusive truth of Daniel, in himself and in the effect of his life with God in secret (remembering that it is in the age of “the times of the Gentiles”, that is, the era when the “kingdoms of this world” are in *WORLD* power), is that after all “the heavens do rule”, and that any power with God over “the world rulers of this darkness” demands a heavenly position on the part of any vehicle of that power.

This means, as in the case of Daniel,

Absolute Spiritual Distinctiveness

of life and testimony, *AT WHATEVER COST*.

It may involve the lion’s den, and there are many kinds of lions’ dens. It may mean the fiery furnace, and there are many kinds of fiery furnace. It may be the fire of jealousy and spite on the part of men, as with David. In His great and spiritually instructive prayer (John 17) Jesus had *VERY* much to say about the world as *THE* enemy of His Church. How He prayed for the Church to be saved from the world; to abide in its “out of the world” position, and so be kept from the evil one. This kind of praying was based upon His immediately preceding words: “I have overcome the world”, and this because (as seen throughout that Gospel) He Himself maintained His heavenly position.

It is therefore so impressive and significant that the Letter which speaks so forcefully about the Church’s warfare with “world rulers” is the Letter which is based wholly upon the heavenly position of the Church. The measure of powerlessness in the Church, in preaching, in the prayer-life, in the testimony, within and without, will be determined by the measure of the “world” in the methods, means, behaviour, habits, accommodation, compromise, etc., in its members and corporate life.

This is an age of imitation of the world by the Church, and the power of the Church is pathetically small. If the Church were what it is really meant to be there would be neither need nor thought for imitating the world. We have to recover “the rule of the heavens” by recovering our heavenly position spiritually.

Daniel is a kind of summary of the Old Testament and a prophetic voice to the New. The one battleground of all the Old Testament is that of the heavenly distinctiveness of the people of God. That battle was lost in Israel, and the hopelessness of their position *AS A WHOLE NATION* (apart from the Remnant) at the end, with the desolating judgment of God, was on this one issue — compromise with the world! The Lord has thus thundered in history and through all the Prophets to warn His Church of the calamity of this lost distinctiveness through compromise with the world. The whole Gospel of John, his Letters, and the Letters of Paul make unmistakably clear three things:

One: there is a “Prince of this world”; a “Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”; that “the whole world lieth in the wicked one”, etc.

Two: that there is a spiritual realm where Christ is Lord, and not Satan, and where “the prince of this world (has been) cast out”. Into that realm, by birth “*FROM ABOVE*”, believers have been related and spiritually, inwardly, located, so that, as Jesus said: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

Three: there is a fierce and relentless warfare between the two realms and their two Lords. But *THE* point is this: Satan, for any success at all, must have his own ground. Therefore, to rob Christians and the Church of prevailing power, he *MUST* get Christians and the Church in some way, on some point or points, on to his own ground — this world.

Why did Daniel “determine” not to touch the provision from the king’s table? Why did he and his friends refuse to have anything to do with the king’s image? Why did he keep his prayer window open three times a day? It was all to avoid compromise with the world and its god, and to maintain his link with heaven. He knew that such was the secret of spiritual power, and he is the very personification of the law of power with God.

If we were *DESPERATELY* concerned about power with God in life and testimony, we should be stretched out to know by the Holy Spirit where “Achan” (Josh. 7:1) links, contacts and ground are in our lives, sabotaging our spiritual strength. The Holy Spirit would very faithfully say: “There, here, this, that!”

Power is a matter of position.

Have you noticed how dominant in Daniel is the phrase “The End” (11:27,35; 12:4,13)? This spiritual position to prevail is peculiarly characteristic of the end, and who shall say that it is not *THE* issue in our time? The Church is feverishly trying to recover power, but is it by *SPIRITUAL POSITION*?

CHAPTER 3

Power with God Exemplified in Job

The Fellowship of His Sufferings

Reading: Job 1:6–11; 2:9,10; 42:7,8,10

Job's Spiritual History

Job is introduced to us as a man in great fullness: fullness of possessions and of wealth, fullness of good works and of personal righteousness, and standing before God in acceptance. Then there begins a course in his experience, the meaning and the secret occasion of which is altogether hidden from him. He knows not the why nor the wherefore, but he finds himself suddenly in the course of being stripped of everything. One thing after another is stripped from him – all his possessions, all his relations, all his friends and all his righteousness which is of works – and with it all come the investing, the encompassing, the onrushing of those hostile forces with their suggestions of accusation, condemnation, judgment. There is an encompassing of spiritual antagonism and of a spirit of death, with God hidden, withdrawn behind the clouds, and Job is left stark, bare, apparently alone, a stripped and afflicted man, oppressed in spirit, bewildered in soul and in anguish of body. The circle of all his relationships narrows to the closest, the nearest – his own wife – who bids him renounce God and, in so doing, surrender his life, for that is what is meant. The man has come right down from a great height and a great fullness to a very deep depth of utter emptiness, weakness, helplessness, and is as good as dead.

In the course of that history a transition takes place. You can hardly perceive it, but it does take place. It is a transition from a righteousness which is of works to the righteousness which is of faith. Whereas earlier he pleads his own cause on the basis of his own righteousness and his own works, you find him being stripped of all that and at the end of it all he is saying, "Wherefore I abhor myself" (Job 42:6) And yet he is still holding on to God, but this is a righteousness which has no foundation in his own goodness and works now. It is a righteousness which is by faith in the mercy of God. With that transition, that change from one basis to another, something else has happened. Satan has gradually been edged out of court. At the beginning Satan is there in full power – or almost so – with a great deal of liberty, doing pretty much as he likes. Then there is an almost imperceptible point at which Satan has stepped out of the scene and Job is left alone with God. Satan has had all his ground taken away, he has had to withdraw and give up the fight, he is completely worsted. Then comes resurrection from the dead into a place of new spiritual power, opening the door for God to come in in a new way, investing Job with a new fullness which is not now the fullness of his own works, but the fullness of Divine grace; not the fruit of his own labours, but the gift of God; not what he himself has brought about, but what God has given him. That is Job's spiritual history in a few words.

Christ's Humiliation and Exaltation

In saying that, we are able to look further and discern Another, a greater than Job, standing in His own fullness and in all His own rights, accepted with God, of whom God could say 'There is not another – not only in the earth, but in the universe – like Him'. And then, because there is something in the universe that is evil, something that has to be undone, to be robbed of its power and put out of court, that One in all His fullness is steadily stripped and laid bare in the vortex of this terrific controversy. Picturesque words are used to describe these forces of evil: "They compassed me about like bees" (Psa. 118:12). The whole scene is set in a spiritual realm where the forces of evil are rampant, accusing, condemning, judging, appraising. It is an atmosphere of terrible antagonism and terrible spiritual death. He is brought right down, "crucified through weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4), stripped stark naked, emptied, with God's face hidden behind the cloud. "Thou hast forsaken Me!" You can almost hear that in Job from time to time, "Thou hast forsaken me!" How much more real was that in the case of this greater One. "Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). They are ruled out of court, the great spiritual opposition has been brought low. And up from the grave He arose, back to a place of new power, opening the door for God to come in in a new way and make Him a minister to His own brethren with a new significance, investing Him with all the heavenly fullness. It is in *PRINCIPLE* the same as Job's experience.

Paul's Stripping and Filling

The principle is repeated in limited, much more limited, ways. Read that little Letter to the Philippians and hear the Apostle speaking about the fullness which was his, the righteousness of works. He could speak about being full, about the time when he had all things, things which were gain to him. And then this man was stripped of it all. There is no man in the New Testament who speaks more of his own unrighteousness and unworthiness and of the worthlessness of the righteousness by works than does Paul. He was stripped

of it all, everything in this life, everything natural, his own ability to accomplish anything, to achieve anything. And yet, with all the suffering and all the terrific assaults of evil powers upon that man, we see him living in the power of a resurrection, of an ascension union with Christ which says, "I have all" (Phil. 4:18); "All things are yours" (1 Cor. 3:21). All things are ours. You see, this is the same principle.

Through Suffering to Glory

In saying that, you have got to the heart of this whole matter of what is power with God, what is the ground upon which God comes in. It is just contained in that phrase, through suffering to glory. Job suffered for the rights of God, that is the point. He did not know it, but that is what it meant.

What was all this about in heaven? Satan had come to God and God had indicated His servant Job. "Hast thou considered My servant Job?" "Oh, yes, I have considered him all right, I know all about Job!" – You can see the sneer, the leer – "Yes, I know Job. There is not another like him in all the earth! Him! DOES Job serve God for nought? I have so spoiled all your work, God, that even the best among men have an ulterior motive. Even the best of men, as you would call them, on the earth are time-servers. You think that Job serves you because he is devoted to you? He is only serving you for what he gets out of you! You have not a man after all, even Job, who is so disinterested and selfless as to trust you and serve you without the idea of reward. I have spoiled that whole lot for you and your best are like that!" This is what is implied, this is the sneer of the devil, that he has spoiled God's work to the very last man, even to the best. "All right," says God, "you claim that there is nothing whatever in the whole creation that will satisfy Me, that will provide Me with ground for My pleasure? I accept your challenge. I take away the hedge that you talk about. You go and touch him. Touch all that he has first of all." You know the story. One thing rushes upon another. Read that first chapter again and see the repetition, "While he was yet speaking, there came also another..." Someone else came with another terrible tale of woe, one thing on another. Before one thing is through, there is another. All that he has is taken – sons, daughters, cattle, camels, sheep, everything – yet, in all this, Job sinned not with his lips.

Satan has to come back again. "Well, what about it?" says the Lord. "What about Job?" "Oh, yes, but you put forth your hand and touch his body!" "Very well, go and touch his body, but touch not his life." Yes, it is becoming very deep and terrible. You know what happens – the terrible physical affliction and then his wife saying, "Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? Renounce God, and die," "Put an end to it all." Oh, Satan is behind all this so subtly. Satan has been forbidden to touch Job's life, but he has come round in such a way as to try to get him to take his own life. It is the same thing. Satan cannot take it, but he thinks he can get Job to take it. Satan is after his life, but he does not get it, and Job goes through this terrible experience, this devastating time. We do not know how long it lasted, but it must have been a long time and been very drastic, but in the end Satan has not proved his case. Through the very work of Satan, through the very discipline, God has only changed the ground from one which could not ultimately stand up to Him – that of righteousness which is of works – to a ground which does stand up to God. It is a marvelous thing to see that the very ground that makes it possible for God to be glorified and justified and vindicated – the ground of righteousness which is according to faith – was the ground on to which Satan forced Job. There is the sovereign hand of God. The Lord is – may I use the word? – very clever. Satan thinks he is clever; the Lord can outwit him.

What we must get at is this point. We see the spiritual history in the transition from the objective to the subjective, from the outward to the inward, from the hearing of the ear to the seeing of the eye – "I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee" – from the righteousness which is of works, to the righteousness which is according to faith. We see that transition as an essential thing to give God His ground.

God Served Through Suffering

Now the point is that there is a service to God which lies in an altogether different realm from the realm of things earthly and temporal. "My servant Job." He is God's servant, but the real service of Job's life was fulfilled in a spiritual realm, out of sight. It was fulfilled through temporal things, it is true, but there is a background to all this. These were not just happenings in his life, the ordinary misfortunes which could overtake any man. Something is happening in the unseen, in another realm where, through all this, God is being served in a peculiar way. What is the object? What is the end in view? It is just this: God must eventually be vindicated in creation by having glorified humanity. When God undertook to create man, He undertook all the responsibility and all the liability of creating man, and it was a tremendous liability. You get down into the depths with Job and sometimes you will ask ultimate questions, 'You created me, I am your responsibility, I lay the responsibility at your door.' God says, 'I accept that, and when I undertook responsibility for creating man, I did so with the unalterable determination to have man glorified at the last; a glorified humanity is the only thing that will vindicate Me.' Satan has done everything in his power to defeat God in that intention of a glorified humanity. The whole battle in the unseen has to do with that, and the very work of Satan is being sovereignly used by God toward that end. Job's last state is only, of course, a figure, a suggestion, of man raised from the dead and exalted to a very high position and filled with Divine fullness – all through grace, all through the mercy of God acting sovereignly. That is the end in view.

Now, in the unseen something is going on in relation to that, and God is being served through the sufferings of His own people in this way, that He is being vindicated. What do we mean? We are the Lord's people and we have not only been saved in order to be saved, but, in that old, very hackneyed phrase, we have been "saved to serve". God knows that means a great deal more than most people think when they talk about serving the Lord. Read the Book of Job and see what serving the Lord is. The very highest service that could be rendered to God was God's own vindication, the rights of God in man, God's vindication in creation. This was not a matter of running about, taking so many meetings, preaching all over the place and doing many things which are called service. Sometimes it means being stripped of everything and being put through a deep and terrible experience in which God can do something in us that makes possible the glorifying of humanity, investing man with glory so that, at the last, with a glorified humanity, God can say, 'I am vindicated, I am justified in having created man. Does this not justify Me?'

While we, at the moment, cannot grasp all the eternal significance of it, we know this thing in principle. It is working out in principle in minute forms and ways with us. The Lord allows us to come into very deep and dark affliction and suffering where we are deprived and stripped of so much. We go down into the depths and Satan seems to be having it all his own way, just riding over us. The Lord seems to be so far away and so hidden and yet, in His faithfulness, He is doing something in us. We do not know what it means. Our constant cry is, Why? Why this? We go through it and then we come out of it. It is a phase and we come out with measure, with spiritual wealth, with a new knowledge of the Lord; we come out with our souls purified into a new place with the Lord and as we look back on it we say, "Well, it was pretty bad, but it was worth it; it was terrible, but I have something which justifies it; I know today as I could not have known by any other way and really I justify God; I go down before the Lord, saying that He is right, He has effected something that would not have been effected in any other way and it is worth having. What is more, I am now in a position, like Job, to stand before God on behalf of others.' There are others in desperate need and they are not going to get through. Job's friends could not get through with God and they would not have got through but for Job. He stood before God for them in a place of power and influence. God was right, after all, because of the outcome of that experience, the values that have come from it, the knowledge of the Lord, the spiritual strength, the ability to help others – that justifies God in His ways.

That is true of many of the Lord's people in fragmentary ways, but it is also the whole history of Christ in union with His Church and of His Church in union with Him in a true spiritual position. It is the history of the Church – the Lord's people going through a terrible grueling time at the hands of the devil, under the sovereignty of God, out of which the Church becomes "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27); "when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed" (2 Thess. 1:10). That is the Lord having all the glory out of all the suffering. Is that your experience in a small way? I think you can see something that touches you, but do you recognize the upshot of it? God is saying that this is what He requires in order to be able to move in. Job represents the ground that He needs. Job represents that which is power and influence with Him. What is that? It means being prepared to suffer with Him, prepared to suffer for God's rights.

We have a great deal more light about this than Job had. Job did not know about that interview in heaven, he knew nothing about Satan appearing with the sons of God and all that took place there, the challenge and the permission given. All he knew was that these things were happening. His cry is the cry of a man in the dark without any explanation and that is very helpful to me. There is a difference drawn here between the bewildered, perplexed, confounded arguments, statements and words of a man under terrible pressure, and sin. Job says some pretty hard things, even to the Lord, and you wonder how God can support that, stand alongside of that. Yes, when we are down under the pressure, the enemy lying to us and God seeming to have hidden Himself and left us, we are bewildered, perplexed and confounded and the whole thing is so terrible that we begin to cry out and challenge God as to His faithfulness, as to His love, we begin to question God. Take heart, God does not call that sin. I do not mean that we can take liberties with God, but we may get to the place where, because of the intense difficulty of the way, the deep suffering and affliction, because God seems to be outside of His universe and Satan seems to be doing all he wants and we are involved and everything that is ours is involved, we cry out even against God and question His faithfulness. These are the cries, the groans – almost the screams – of a bewildered, perplexed, baffled soul passing through an experience which has a spiritual meaning beyond the understanding or knowledge or apprehension of that soul, and God does not call that sin. He understands our frame, our humanity. It would have been sin if Job had done what his wife told him to do, to renounce God. That is sin and Satan would try to drive a soul there. But God is sovereign here and that is not Satan's right. We may go a long way towards that point, but God has the matter in His hands; He has not allowed it to come to pass. I think it is a wonderful thing, when you read all that Job has to say, to hear God saying that in all this Job sinned not with his lips. God is standing by Job.

This is, after all, a marvelous triumph of faith in God because, although Job does go down and does say some very hard things, it is not long before he is up again and saying other good things. His faith is having a terrible time, but he is constantly coming up again and his faith triumphs through it all! "And after my skin hath been thus destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:26). That is faith in resurrection.

What is it that prevails with God? Power with God does necessitate our standing for God's rights and serving Him in that intensely spiritual sense. There are all kinds of things here on this earth which may serve the Lord, but there is a service to the Lord which is deeper than things, deeper than our activities here. The greatest service we can render to God is His own vindication and that can only come by Him

redeeming, transforming and glorifying humanity. That is what He is doing with us and He is doing it through suffering.

CHAPTER 4

Power with God Exemplified in Moses

Responsibility Born Of Love

Reading: Exodus 32:31–32; 11–14; Numbers 14:11–20.

“Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people” (Jer. 15:1).

God Seeking To Make A Man Utterly One With Himself

“Though Moses.... stood before Me.” We have to get right into the heart of this matter as quickly as we can, and it seems to me that the best way of doing that is first of all to look at this God who is presented in these passages. What impression does it all make upon you when you see a man, who himself is shown to be a man of weaknesses and imperfections and human frailty, seeming to exhibit more patience than the Lord with whom he is dealing, and trying to persuade the Lord to be gracious, to be merciful, not to be ‘unChristian’, not to be so impatient, and not to be so revengeful, so swift and utter in His judgments? How does that impress you? It almost looks as though Moses is, in grace and character, superior to God. It almost appears that Moses is trying to bring God up to a higher standard. That is how it looks. Taken just by themselves, lifted clean out of the whole Bible and context, such passages of Scripture would put God among the gods of the heathen — cruel, swift to anger, needing to be appeased from His wrath, and persuaded to be kind. But, of course, you all shrink from such an ideal. There arises in you, perhaps, something of indignation that one should even say such a thing, but I want to get into the heart of this thing as quickly as I can, and I think that is the best way of doing it.

Is that the Lord? Is that the true position? Is it really a fact that Moses had more of those graces than God had, and had to win God over to his side, to his point of view, to his position? Was it true? No, not in the slightest, not for a moment! Oh, but here it is! Here is God saying that He is going to do something, He is going to blot them out and destroy them, and Moses comes along and says: ‘No, don’t, Lord! If You do that, You see what it means. First of all, the Egyptians will hear about it and they will say: “See the kind of God that they have! He is one who starts on a thing and finds He cannot carry it through, and so has to wipe it all out” — the God whom we have declared the only true God above all! They will say it just is not true, that is all. He is not the only God, and He is not any better than any other god.’ Can you imagine for a moment, while Moses argues with the Lord like that and presents the situation, the Lord saying: ‘I had not thought of that, Moses! That is a new idea. Thank you for reminding Me! You have saved Me.’ — Moses saving the Lord from getting into trouble and disgrace with the nations of the world! Do you accept that? It looks like it, does it not? No, we cannot have it. There must be some other explanation, for that is not it. Then what is it? Well, it is just this. The Lord is Himself taking that line deliberately in order to get this man over to His side. The Lord had no intention of blotting this people out, or disinheriting them. He said: ‘Let me...’, but Moses said: ‘No, I will not let you’ — and that is the point. The Lord wanted to get this man to the position where he was so truly one with the Lord’s deepest intention that he could not entertain the slightest suggestion that God should not stand up to His Name, His honour, and carry through His purpose. You will notice all the way through the Bible that that sort of thing is happening. What is He doing? He is out to make a man so utterly one with Him as an absolute necessity for the realization of His purpose.

You see, MAN is involved in this. This is a great heart principle of redemption. God could have dispensed with all instrumentalities and mediators and intercessors and go-betweens, and Himself, sovereignly from heaven, acted directly and have done the whole thing. He could have done it, but that is not the principle, and that is not the way. The whole Bible comes in to show and to prove that, man himself being involved in this, it requires a Man to redeem man. We sing the hymn: “A final Adam to the fight, and to the rescue came.” The Man Himself, Christ Jesus, the redeeming Kinsman, the Mediator — that is the principle. Moses is called the ‘mediator of the covenant’. Moses, the mediator, had to be in that position where, on the one hand, he was so truly one in heart with God’s purpose, and, on the other hand, so truly one in heart with the object of God’s purpose, that he brought the One who purposed and the object of the purpose together in his own person. He took the hand of God and the hand of man and brought them together in his own person. That is the whole work of the Lord Jesus, and the principle is here. God is testing this man in the same way as Elijah tested Elisha: “Tarry here... for the Lord hath sent me as far as Bethel. And Elisha said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel... And Elijah said to him, Tarry here... for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee” (II Kings 2). Elijah was apparently trying to shake this man off, but was really

testing him because of something tremendous in view. He had already cast his mantle upon Elisha, who was to come into the good of that mantle on Elijah's ascension and do greater works than Elijah had done, but he is going to suffer a tremendous testing. But he went on and refused to be put off.

God is working on that principle with Moses. 'Let Me destroy this people, disinherit them.' Supposing Moses had said: 'All right!', what sort of mediator would he have been? And, mark you, the point is this — that God would have lost the essential basis of His work and purpose, and the essential basis was a man whose heart was so deeply and terribly in this matter that he himself would rather perish and lose all than that, on the one hand, God's Name should be dishonoured and, on the other hand, God's purpose should not be fulfilled.

That is a ground of power with God — a tremendous thing! He is saying: 'Oh, I acknowledge it, I perfectly agree and I make no excuses for them. "This people have sinned a great sin." It is quite true. "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—".' He does not finish... "And if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Could anything be more utter than that? 'You disinherit *THEM* and You disinherit *ME*. I have nothing to live for. I do not want to go on in life at all if you disinherit them.' What a oneness! And that is the kind of thing that God requires in order to do His great things. You notice that God went on and did His great things because He had that ground. That ground prevailed with God again and again. And the Lord said: "*I have pardoned according to thy word.*" ... "And the Lord repented of the evil which He said He would do unto His people." That is only a way of putting it. God said: 'All right, I will not do it — *ACCORDING TO THY WORD*'.

Absolute Oneness With God's Purpose

Where do we begin, then, with this? It begins here. Moses had become, in heart, deeply one with God's purpose concerning His people. God had indicated and intimated what His purpose was concerning this people. Moses quotes that to the Lord: 'Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and what You said.' He has become one with God in His purpose concerning His people, he has seen what that purpose was, his heart has espoused the Divine purpose for the people of God, and he has involved himself in that utterly and without a reservation. For him his eternal destiny is bound up with that and he has nothing else to look for, or hope for if that fails.

I expect you are wondering what that has to do with us! How does it apply to us? It is all very true about Moses, but I think this indicates something to us of what the Lord's will and desire is, and also it is a searching and challenging word. If God, for the realization of His purpose, must have an instrument or instruments (personal or corporate) like this, because He has bound Himself to this kind, and cannot get on with it without such instruments, may it not explain why the coming of the Lord's people to the inheritance, to the fullness of Christ, the attainment of the Church unto the glorious purpose of the ages in which it is called, is so retarded and delayed, and why there is something wrong in this respect? Dear friends, this, to me, is a most searching thing. It has searched my heart tremendously as I have dwelt upon it. It is not just some Bible teaching; this is something which will search us very deeply. What are we committed or devoted to?

God Needs Those Committed To His Purpose In And Through The Church

Shall we go back a step before that and say: are we committed? Are we devoted? Here is a company of the Lord's people; not a large company but a representative company, and sufficient to stand right here before the Lord to meet this challenge and to hear it said in the Name of the Lord that the Lord needs people like this, constituted on this-wise, like Moses. He absolutely needs them. He cannot get on with His work until He has this at His command — people who stand in this relationship to Him, to His purpose and to His people, those who are the people of the eternal purpose. God must have people like this, men and women who have seen God's purpose concerning the Church and who know what that purpose is.

It is not just a matter of doctrine, teaching, or Bible study. God needs people who have seen it in their hearts. And then He needs such people who, having seen it, are committed up to the hilt to it without any reservations. God is needing such people, committed utterly to Him for His purpose in relation to His people, the Church. Have you seen? What is it that you are doing? This is where I think the thing is so searching and challenging. There are many people of God who are committed to the work. I am not asking you if you are committed to Christian work or Christian service. That is not what I am after at all. There are any number of people who are up to their eyes in Christian work. Let the work test them out, and they will resign from the work. Let the conditions become too hard, and they withdraw from the work, or they will change their sphere of work, or the nature of their work for the Lord. It is the work. The work has an appeal. Oh, the appeal that is made for the work of the Lord, and how appealing it is made to be! The romance of it all, the fascination of it all, the idea of realizing something, expressing yourself, of being in the work, is the force of the appeal.

Moses is not there. Ask him about the work! He would say: 'Oh, may the Lord have mercy upon me and deliver me from the "work!"' Moses said he was not able to bear the people (Deut. 1:9), and that is the 'work'. Moses was not interested in, or concerned with the 'work'; he was concerned with a people for the realization of God's purpose. We can get this abstract idea of the 'work' of the Lord. We do not stay to define it, but, somehow or other, it is something we get into. We come up against difficult people and we begin to despise and criticize them. We think of them according to their natural constitutions and put them into 'pigeo-

nholes' — 'THIS is a worthwhile person, THIS is not.' There is all this sort of thing — human judgments about people. We have no room for certain people. All that, however, is false to this principle. No people on God's earth have ever been more difficult than Israel! Yes, all that you can say about the Jews is true, and yet look at this man! It is not the work; it is the people. He loves the people and his heart is bound up with them. Oh, what a people — and yet the marvel of this love for them! Not the WORK, but the people, just as they were and as bad as they were. He put his whole destiny at stake for that people. Why? Because he saw that God's purpose was bound up with the people and not with the work and not with organization.

It is challenging! What am I committed to? Is it a ministry, or a teaching? Am I interested in the teaching of the Church, this teaching and that teaching, this kind of work and that, and this kind of ministry and that? The people may be another thing. Do you see the point? You can divide between those two things. You can be thoroughly in your work, in your ministry, in your teaching, in your system of things — but the people! There is something else when you really come to think about it. How much pains are you going to take with the people? How much are you going to give yourself to the people, to *THAT* difficult one, and *THAT* difficult one, and *THAT* awkward one, those who show so little response to it all, those who turn upon you when your heart is really burdened and say: "Who made you a ruler?" That is what they did. And when Moses went to them in Egypt, they turned against him. We sing: "From Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand" — all wanting you to come. If only you will go to China they will all rush to you and be saved. Go and see! They will begin to stone you.

Well now, what about the people? Moses met that affront on the very first movement into Egypt to bring out the people. God needs those amongst us who are not interested in teaching, and orders, and Christian work as such. It can all be so abstract and can all be a fool's paradise when you come up against facts. God needs those who are right in this thing for His purpose, and who will meet the affront and the discouragement, and who will not suffer the shock of disillusionment because they have been building 'castles in the air' about the Lord's work. Those who know that this is a life and death matter, that it is going to cost everything, and they are in it to that degree. They have no illusions. "I know this people have sinned a great sin." You do not make any excuses for them, but nevertheless your purpose is bound up with this 'bad lot'. 'I am committed to the purpose.' That is what the Lord was trying to get.

You can follow it through to His Son, the inclusive, supreme example of this very thing. Oh, He has given all, and He has been cast out by those for whom He had given all and for whom He had left the glory. What is the end? "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). His heart still yearns. He is not invoking Divine judgment upon them because He is a disillusioned and disappointed man, and they had not responded. His heart is in this.

Hear Paul! "I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake" (Rom. 9:3). That is the sort of thing. It is that that has power with God. That is why Moses, to speak after the manner of men, caused God to repent, changed the mind of God. It is not true when you know the real truth, but that is how it looked. He had that power with God. God said: "According to thy word."

What are we committed to? Are we committed to the interests of the Lord like that? Have we seen His purpose concerning the Church? Are we in it? — and do remember that the appeal is for servants of God. Two great titles used more of Moses than of anyone else are these: Moses, 'the man of God', and Moses, 'the servant of God'. Outstandingly Moses carries those twin titles: 'The man of God', and 'Moses My servant'. The Lord is wanting men of God, servants of the Lord.

But this is the nature of service. I do not ask you to come and give yourself to the work of the Lord, to go out and begin to organize Christian work here and there, near and far, and to do this and that and other things for the Lord. The appeal is: the Lord needs people, not necessarily to go out in the romance of missionary service, but just where they are to be committed right up to the hilt to the Lord's own honour as bound up with His purpose in the Church and through the Church, and upon whose hearts in the first place is the Church. I am very emphatic and careful in saying that — in the first place, the Church. If only that were recognized there would be a very great deal of difference in the situation today. God's instrument of evangelization is the Church. God's means of realizing His purpose is the Church. The Church has been ignored, and the thing has been attempted on a wide scale without the Church. The result is, for one thing, a terrible failure to accomplish the purpose, and you have to say that in a large degree the Church has failed. And what about the type of Christian that exists? A vast number of converts do not go on very far. You cannot leave them alone. You have to hold them up, support them, and put them on crutches all the time. And so you find that, whenever people try to organize an evangelistic campaign, they have to start with getting the Church right. Very often the whole thing resolves itself into a mission to Christians first.

Israel was not an end in itself. If Israel failed, if God let Israel fail, or let Israel go, the nations would be lost. But by means of Israel being kept and strengthened and built up, and moved on, the nations will be compelled to confess that God is in the midst of them and God is with them. That is Moses' argument: God is amongst you, and this is the kind of God He is. That is revealed by a people living in the good of Divine fullness.

Responsibility Born Of Love

What does it amount to? It just amounts to this: coming into a place of the responsibility born of love. Not busy responsibility, nor official responsibility, but the responsibility born of love. It is the responsibility

which a mother feels for a child, a parent for a child, and a parent's sense of responsibility for a child is not a business responsibility, nor an official responsibility, but a heart responsibility. The heart is bound up with this. Will you not agree with me that the most terrible and tragic thing of which we can conceive is a parent without a sense of responsibility for his or her children? And here the relationship between Moses and Israel was the responsibility born of love. Something had been wrought deep down in the soul of Moses, so that he and the people were one in life, and one in destiny. It was a great love.

"Christ... loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25). There is a relationship there which is the deepest, most sacred of all the relationships God has ever created: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church." Moses loved Israel; Christ loved the Church. And if you want to see all that summed up in few words, you have only to look at Hebrews 11 and read: "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." That is the first thing about Moses — he refused. "*CHOOSING* rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Refusing all the honour, reputation, status, resources, and choosing, definitely choosing, to be evil-entreated with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. "Accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." ... "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible." Just make a sum of those words: He refused, he chose, he accounted, he forsook, he endured. There is a heart in something. It is a *HEART* that is the ground of power with God. That is the kind of servant that the Lord needs, concerning whom He can say: 'If Moses stood before Me... Moses My servant'.