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AN EARNEST APPEAL TO ALL WHO RECEIVE THIS MAGAZINE

THE heavy increase in printing and postal costs makes it necessary to ask you that, if you do *not* feel the need of the ministry of this paper, you will kindly let us know. The cost of a postcard will save

us much more if you will so co-operate. But we are only too glad to send the paper where there is a felt need for it.

FROM THE EDITOR

WITH this issue of the paper we enter upon one more year of its ministry. We would convey to our readers our warmest and sincerest wishes for a year of very much blessing and of "His increase". Amidst the world troubles and Christian trials and perplexities we need so much help in light, assurance, and support from the Lord. We pray that the ministry of this little paper may be used in some small measure to meet this need.

In our last issue we used what to some was a rather enigmatical phrase: 'Much prayerful help is needed for the future. Changes are pending and much wisdom is required in making decisions and resolving problems.' We had hoped that by this time we might have had something more definite to say. We may have it before this issue reaches you,

but we can here intimate what we were referring to. The premises in which for so many years we have had our offices and stores, as well as the residence of our two so faithful and devoted secretaries, are in the market and are virtually sold for housing development. It is only the final word of consent by the planning authorities which is awaited, and may come any day—or be refused. This will involve us in a major move, and at present we cannot see how this could be in this same area. Thus your prayer fellowship is much needed. He who has cared for this ministry for these forty-seven years will not fail. No room for more now.

Warmest greetings,
T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE CUP AND THE FIRE

4. THE TESTING OF THE FIRE

WE return again to our basic passage of Scripture:

"I came to cast fire upon the earth: and would that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!—Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: for there shall be from henceforth five in one house divided; three against two, and two against three. They shall be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother; mother in law against her daughter in law, and daughter in law against her mother in law" (Luke xii. 49–53).

I confess that is one of our Lord's utterances that I least like, and that I find myself most unhappy to speak about. If anyone else but He had said it, perhaps we should have turned away. I am quite sure that if that had originated with myself, or with any of my brethren, it would have caused very great offence. But He said it. And it seems to me to be all of a piece with the beginning of that statement.

Perhaps you have noticed that this marks a very abrupt change in the whole course of the narrative. Up to the end of verse 48 you seem to have been on one thing: and then quite abruptly there is this change. I can only think that there was a pause on His part. He said that; and then He was quiet for a moment, and His mind ranged the future—the future of His own influence and effect upon the world. And then He began this part of His utterances, in a quite different, strange realm.

"I came to cast fire upon the earth . . ." "That is why I came; that sums up the meaning of My coming. Why did I come? For what did I come? What is to be the outcome and the issue? I came to cast fire upon the earth . . . and how am I pent up, straitened, limited! What do I want? What is it that is necessary? I have a baptism to be baptized with, and I would that it were over! I wish that were accomplished, and then I should be free of this straitness and this limitation. The purpose for which I have come could be realized. Oh, that it were already accomplished—this baptism of the Passion, of the Cross!" So He thinks and so He speaks. I have said that this paragraph, from verse 49 to verse 53, seems to be all of a piece. We see

here the effect of the fire, and it is very terrible. It introduces the element of judgment. There is no need to argue with anyone who knows anything about the Bible that fire in the Bible is so often the symbol of judgment—as here.

JUDGMENT

But we need to comprehend the meaning of that word 'judgment'. We so often limit it to one of its aspects, especially the final one. We speak of 'bringing to judgment'—meaning by that, to punish—the final effect of judgment. But judgment in the Bible is a more comprehensive word than that. It is, to begin with—and this can be clearly seen in terms of fire, or fire in terms of judgment—a trying of things, a putting them to the test. Now Scriptures will leap to your mind which bear that out. Fire tests, the fire tries, the fire finds things out, does it not? That is the first effect of fire. And that is the first meaning of judgment: to put everything to the test, to try it.

Having done that, it discriminates: that is, it divides; it shows to which category things belong, and it puts them there. Fire has that effect. It says: That is of that kind, and it belongs to that kind; it is of that category, or that realm, or that kingdom: this belongs to another. Fire finds out: it discriminates and it divides.

And then it relegates finally. It says: that has been found to belong to a certain realm; it has been designated, it has been discriminated; it belongs there, we put it there. That is the final effect of the fire.

That is the content of the word 'judgment'. We need always to keep that full meaning in mind when we use the word. We will not dwell upon its application more fully at the moment.

We are told in the Word of God that this judgment—which would come, mark you, with the coming of the Holy Spirit—the effect of Christ's release through the Cross, in the coming of the Holy Spirit was to cast fire. In other words, the effect of Christ's release would be the coming of the Spirit as the Spirit of fire; and as the Spirit of fire His presence would always be in terms of judgment, in this threefold sense of the word. The Holy Spirit's presence is like this and it has this effect. Let us

now look into the Word to see the realm in which that operates.

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Here in chapter xii of Luke's Gospel we have it operating in one realm. We read those terrible words: "Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division." The word in the old Authorized Version is "a sword". Division! It sounds terrible, and we are on very delicate ground; we have to be very careful. But He goes on to explain what He means by division: "There shall be from henceforth five in one household divided; three against two, and two against three." And then He gives examples of division in the family. Here the fire is at work in the realm of human relationships.

Now let me say here at once, in parenthesis, and with considerable emphasis, that this has nothing to do with outward divisions within the Church, divisions amongst those who are in Christ. That is not what the Lord is speaking about or pointing to. He is thinking in a totally different realm, in the spiritual realm. This division takes place entirely upon a spiritual basis. The divisions as we have them in the first letter to the Corinthians are because of other things amongst believers that are not spiritual, but this is a spiritual division, essentially and basically.

Perhaps the classic illustration or example of this is the one that we have in the early part of the Old Testament, in the case of the Levites. You will call to mind how, when they had reached the wilderness, Moses was called up into the Mount. He was there so long that the people came—I think deliberately placed by God—under a very severe test, as to where their hearts really were: whether they were after their own interests or after God's, their own ends or His; whether their hearts were in this matter with the Lord, or whether their hearts were set upon their own gratification and pleasure. They were put to the severe test of that probationary period of the forty days and forty nights in which Moses was in the Mount, and they broke down under the test. When Moses came down, hearing the noise in the camp, you remember what had happened—the calf and the dancing. "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt."

Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and cried: "Who is on the Lord's side?" "Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me." "And all the sons of Levi went over to him. And he said, Gird every man his sword upon his side, and go in

and out and slay every man his brother, every man his friend.' The sword, the fiery sword, has come into the realm of human relationships. It is finding out where the heart is, testing the heart; it is discriminating between motives, "the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews iv. 12); and it is putting these people in the category to which they belong. Here are the Levites, who have been put to the test and have come through triumphantly; and for evermore they stand as representing the full, pure thought of God concerning His people. The point is that this work of judgment, of the fire, of the sword, came into the realm of human relationships, to find out the motives of the heart.

You can take that into Luke xii. That is just what it means. The divisions, even within the family, the home, the household, will be made by the Holy Spirit on this matter of the relationship of the heart. We can see, as we read the story of Israel in the wilderness, that the heart of that nation, that generation, as the Psalmist said, "was not stedfast with God" (Psalm lxxviii. 8). In their heart they lusted after Egypt—the fleshpots of Egypt. Their heart was back there, even while they were in the wilderness; and that generation never entered the Land, because its heart was not with the Lord. It is a matter of inward division, a division in the heart.

Now the Holy Spirit is always a divider in that way; it is a work of the Holy Spirit to do that. In a sense—not in the wrong sense, and be careful how you take me up—in a sense the Holy Spirit is the cause of divisions. There is a realm in which He is the divider.

Let us take our Bible and go right back to the beginning. The Spirit of God brooded upon the chaos, the darkness, the void. What was the first thing done by and through the Holy Spirit? Dividing between things; a process of division between light and darkness. "And God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness Night" (Genesis i. 4, 5). And then God divided between the heaven and the earth. He "divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament" (i. 7). They had got too near; one was right down on top of the other, so that you could not discern or discriminate between the clouds of the heavens and the waters upon the earth. He put the firmament—an expanse, a space—between; and He called it Heaven. In the same way he separated the dry land from the waters, and He "called the dry land earth; and . . . the waters called he seas" (i. 10). And He "saw that it was good."

Now there are Old Testament things which have, as we know, a New Testament meaning. These are

found in their counterpart in the new creation. And when you come to the book of the Acts, the book of the Holy Spirit at work in relation to the new creation, you find all the way through that divisions are taking place as a result of the Holy Spirit's activity. Indeed, you may say that that is the characteristic of the Spirit's work right through the New Testament: a dividing between light and darkness; a judging and a pronouncing. "That is darkness—that is one realm; and that is light—that is another realm; and these two can never, in the right and proper way, obtain together; they cannot co-exist. They are separated and belong to two entirely different categories." The Spirit of God has done that.

Interpret that spiritually, and you see what it means. What a tremendous amount there is bound up with that in spiritual life! It works out in this way, that anyone—and this is the test—who really has the Spirit is very sensitive to light and very sensitive to darkness. They know quite well about the big division that God has made; and, when they touch anything that belongs to the darkness realm, they feel the darkness in their own spirit, they know they have touched darkness, they know they have come into another realm. That is a work of the Spirit, and a very important work indeed.

On the other hand, anyone who has the Spirit will be equally sensitive to light. When there is true light—we will define that in a moment—the spiritual man or woman at once leaps to it. Why? Because this kind of light is not cold light: it is the light of fire—it is living light, that has energy in it. You can have light, but it is cold. You can have imitation fire, but it is cold—like those things that you switch on, with the imitation of glowing coal, but it does not make any difference, other than psychologically! You see the thing, and perhaps you imagine something, but really it is all an illusion. And you can have that kind of light, but it is imitation, it is artificial, it is false. You can switch it on and equally quickly switch it off. But that is not the light of fire, which is energetic. And the light of the Spirit, the light of God, the light of Christ, is always living, energetic light. When you and I who have the Spirit come into touch with light, it is not that we become mentally and intellectually interested, fascinated, charmed or captivated. It is that something within us leaps up and responds, because we have met *energy*.

These are marks of the Spirit, judging which is which and what is what, what belongs to this realm and what belongs to that; and these things are set apart: so that it is something quite abnormal if darkness comes into the day or light into the night. It is not the ordinary course of things at all. Do you

see the point? You can have those differences of kingdom or realm within your own family, your own household; and there can be no fellowship at all because there is the division which is made by the Holy Spirit Himself. Many can confirm and testify to this from their own experience, and some are suffering because of it. But the point is that is how it will be if the Holy Spirit comes in, and the Lord Jesus was faithful and honest enough to let it be known that that is how it would be. You cannot avoid it, you cannot get over it, you cannot bridge it. It is painful, but it is a mark that the Spirit has done something. Would that we, as the Lord's people, might be more and more sensitive to those different realms which are put apart by the Spirit of God! It is a mark of growth in the light of the Spirit to become more and more sensitive to what belongs here and what belongs there.

You may remember that on two different occasions Paul used that phrase: "the things which differ" (Romans ii. 18; Philippians i. 10); and he said it to believers. He would have them know, as Christians, the things that differ. That was the true kind of division that ought to have existed at Corinth. The other was a false and a wrong division; but this was where things had got mixed up. Day and night had been all mixed up together; things which belonged to the night were present among the "sons of the day" (I Thessalonians v. 5), and they were not sensitive to them. And so the first letter to the Corinthians has so much about the Holy Spirit—the real effect and work of the Holy Spirit. We must recognize that the life of the Spirit is a life of spiritual dividing; the course of the Spirit-governed life is that of discerning, being sensitive to the things that differ.

CHRISTIAN WORK

The next application of this is to the whole matter of Christian work. Paul speaks about this in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter iii.

"According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For 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. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive

a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire" (I Corinthians iii. 10-15).

And we place alongside of that a passage from the letter to the Hebrews:

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken . . ." (Hebrews xii. 26-28).

Here we come into the realm of values in life—in life's work; and the discrimination is brought in by the fire. The fire tries "of what sort it is". And remember, this is addressed to Christians. It is not addressed to those who are doing their work, following their profession, as people of the world. This is addressed to Christians, and it is speaking about *Christian* work: Christ as the foundation, and the work that you do on that foundation. Paul is saying about Christian work that there is one realm which will abide the fire, and there is another realm—in Christian work—which will go up in smoke: it will be proved that all that was for nothing: the worker will just get into heaven, and that is all! Saved—yes—"so as through fire".

Here is a division which the Holy Spirit makes in the realm of Christian work. If we want to sum it all up, really get to the heart of it, it just amounts to this: Only that which is done by and through the Holy Spirit Himself will remain, will abide the test, will be "found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Peter i. 7). There can be a tremendous amount of activity and energy, of work and works, engaged in by Christians in relation to Christ, at least in intention, which comes into this category of being consigned to the fire, disappearing in the flames, and leaving the worker at the end with nothing for all his toil.

This is what was happening in the book of the Acts. Look through this book and see the discrimination that is being made. Yes, a discrimination is truly being made. Oh, how those Judaizers laboured! How they travelled and compassed sea and land! It must have cost them quite a lot to make those long journeys. Their movements were far and wide. You are forced to conclude, not only that they were men who meant business, but that, so far as they understood themselves and their position, they were what we would call sincere men. I do not see very much difference between these Judaizers who pursued Paul wherever he went and

gave their very lives to this sort of thing, and Saul of Tarsus as he was. It is just what he was doing; he was one of them.

"I verily thought . . ."—"I truly thought"; if you like, 'I honestly thought'—"with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts xxvi. 9). That is the utterance of an honest man, of a sincere man. 'I verily thought that I ought . . . I considered this thing: this was no mere impulse, this was no mere fanaticism. I thought'—Paul was a man who thought—"I thought that I ought . . . It was a matter of conscientious conviction with me that this was what I ought to do, that it was the right thing to do, that I was called upon to do it. It was a matter of conscience with me. I verily thought within myself that I ought . . ."

Yes, but how possible it is to be as utterly sincere as that and as utterly mistaken! The Judaizers were like that. But their work did not last. Here is the work of the Spirit going on: and it has gone on, and it is still going on. It has stood all the testing and all the trying out, and it survives the fire—the fire of judgment, the fire of testing. It has proved itself to be the work of the Spirit. It shows the supreme importance, as the key to the whole of this thing—not of being sincere, not of being enthusiastic, not of acting on the basis of conscientious conviction—but of being governed by the Holy Spirit. That is the important thing! It is only that that lasts.

This all comes into the realm of Christian work. Perhaps you may have felt a little catch just now about the Judaizers; but you have got to concede them quite a lot, you know. These Judaizers were not anti-Christian. What they really wanted was Jewish Christianity—a Christianity with a Jewish complex. They are prepared to have Christianity, if only Christianity will conform to the Jewish order, to the Jewish pattern. I am not going to argue that out now, but I could bring forward much evidence to show that that is so. Paul shows by his letter to the Galatians that that is not the work of the Spirit. It is something quite different.

CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

The next thought here takes us into the realm of Christian testimony: the fire at work in the realm of Christian testimony. We turn to a very well-known passage:

"But thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and *maketh manifest through us* the savour of his knowledge in every place. For we are a sweet savour of Christ unto

God, in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing; to the one a savour from death unto death; to the other a savour from life unto life" (II Corinthians ii. 14-16).

There is the dividing effect of the fire. You know the picture, the background. Paul is thinking in terms of the Roman procession, the triumphant General leading his prisoners in his train, holding celebrations of his victory from place to place. At every such place the altar was erected, the fire was lit, the flame leapt up, and the incense filled the air, and that had a double effect. There were some who were in the way of perishing, and that was the place where they would perish; they will be sacrificed there. There are others who are not in the way of perishing: they will pass that fire and go on; they will be saved. The background, you see, is very vivid. The fire is discriminating and determining here.

But Paul says that this is the dual effect of the Holy Spirit in our life and ministry, as we go from place to place. Something happens everywhere and every time. One or both of two things happens in every place. On the one hand, those who refuse the light, who persist in fighting against the victorious Lord, who resist the Holy Ghost, are brought to condemnation: they are put into the category to which they belong—condemned. On the other hand, those who believe, those who accept are, by the same Holy Spirit, brought into liberty. They pass the testing fire and go on in life. "To the one a savour from death unto death; to the other a savour from life unto life."

Now the point is this: Paul is saying that this is the effect of the Holy Spirit in our ministry and in our testimony. In other words, the Holy Spirit never leaves things as they were. The presence of the Holy Spirit always brings about some kind of a crisis and verdict. If the Holy Spirit is present, speaking, we cannot be the same afterward as before. Something has happened. We are either more hardened or more softened; we are either more condemned or more saved. In the presence of the Holy Spirit something happens: the fire does this work of judging.

This is what the Lord Jesus meant when He spoke of 'casting fire upon the earth'. What will the fire do? Well, it will make this division, it will bring this judgment; it will determine things and people and their destiny. We know how true that is in history. That is the effect of the Holy Spirit. But what I want to underline in that particular connection is

this: If you and I are really men and women who are governed by the Spirit and filled with the Spirit, the effect of our presence and our passing this way will be to leave things otherwise than they were before. There will be eternal verdicts reached by our having gone this way. That is, of course, the object of ministry. 'Thanks be unto God who leads me on from place to place to celebrate His victory.' The effect is either the one thing or the other; things are not afterward as they were before. Holy Spirit ministry must be like that: it must produce something, it must effect something, it must make a difference. And in fact it does! It does that!

THE FIRE DISCRIMINATING

The fire is cast upon the earth, and, as we go through this book of the Acts, we can see all these things happening; they are happening all the time. The fire is doing it: the fire is finding out, is testing, is discriminating, is relegating. The end of the story is that you have got two realms set apart, and shown for what they are and what they belong to.

There is very much more, of course, that could be said on this matter of spiritual discrimination; the things that belong to the different categories, that essential spiritual difference. But I think we can sum everything up by saying this: that if we are really governed by the Holy Spirit, we shall all belong to one category. That is the point. There will not be so many different categories, or realms, in which we live; there will not be two—there will only be one. The Holy Spirit seeks to secure one category of people, and that is a people wholly governed and led by Himself. And if you have to say: 'I fundamentally disagree with you' on anything, then one of us is not in the Spirit. It is up to us to find out where the wrong is, because the Holy Spirit is not fundamentally of two different minds. He never can be that. To be really in the Spirit means, I repeat, to be of one category, of one kind.

And so the Apostle wrote so much to these churches about this oneness of mind, of heart, of spirit, this 'all speaking the one thing' (I Corinthians i. 10). He said it again, he asked for it again, he was pleading for it (cf. Philippians i. 27, iv. 2); therefore it is possible. The solution to all those problems and difficulties is life in the Spirit. And that, of course, is based on the Cross, where we find an infinite capacity for letting go to the Lord. If we forget all the rest, let us remember that.

GOD DEALETH WITH YOU AS WITH SONS

Reading: I Kings i. 1-37.

WHO is to be the heir? Who will be given the throne? These were the questions in everybody's minds during the dying moments of David's earthly life. One man felt confident that he knew the answer, and that man was Adonijah. In those days of uncertainty and confusion it probably seemed good to find a man with the qualities of initiative and resolution which were so desirable. Adonijah had much to commend him. "I will be king"; he affirmed, and for the moment it seemed likely that he would be.

ADONIJAH'S CLAIM

He had the means. He must have been a wealthy man already. He had chariots, horsemen, and a large bodyguard all at his disposal. He is also described as "a very goodly man", which suggests that he had an excellent appearance and presence; he had the regal carriage and the easy manners which were so suitable for David's heir. More than that, he had the seniority. Absalom, at one time a pretender to the throne, was now dead and Adonijah was next in the succession to him. Perhaps for this very reason Joab and Abiathar, who had remained loyal at the time of Absalom's insurrection, now backed Adonijah and were ready to co-operate in setting him on the throne. With the backing of such eminent civil and religious leaders the matter appeared to be as good as settled. He was the central figure of a great banquet where he was being toasted as the new king.

SOLOMON'S ANOINTING

It was at this juncture that David acted. He was not dead—not yet—and he was the one man who could give an authoritative decision. It may be felt that he had left it rather late, but it was not too late. By his decree Adonijah was set aside and Solomon anointed king.

We may question the reason for this decision, since Solomon was certainly junior to Adonijah. He seems to have made no claim for himself, his cause being taken up by Nathan, who was later helped by Bath-sheba. At that stage Solomon seems to have been a silent young man and when later he talked to God at Gibeon he confessed: "I am but a

little child" (I Kings iii. 7). He neither had Adonijah's self confidence, nor did he seem to have his wealth. No mention is made of his chariots and horses, but only that he was to be caused to ride on David's mule.

Yet it was he who was chosen to inherit the kingdom. David was most emphatic about this choice and ordered that Solomon should be anointed forthwith. Of course, it could be possible that David was mistaken, but the choice was not primarily his, but God's. As Benaiah so aptly commented: "Amen; the Lord, the God of my lord the king, say so too!" But why? The answer is not far to seek. In the course of the description given of Adonijah the illuminating remark is made: "And his father had not displeased him all his life in saying, Why hast thou done so?" He had always had his own way. Because Adonijah had never been chastened he was quite unfit to inherit his father's throne. And Solomon? Well, it was he who passed on the excellent counsel quoted in Hebrews xii. 5 and 6: "My son, regard not lightly 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."

THE TRAINING OF SONS

Solomon ultimately, by God's grace, became a man of very great wisdom, and among other things he came to appreciate the value of his strict upbringing. The quotation is from the book of his Proverbs which on a number of occasions gives quite clear directions as to how children should be educated. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Proverbs xiii. 24). There are a number of similar adages. They are, of course, in direct contrast with modern educational theories, but there seems no doubt that in Solomon's case it resulted in a son who could safely be entrusted with his father's kingdom. Although he deteriorated later—as all types must do—he became for a time the ideal king, and he was made an inspired writer to record truths which surely are as much entitled to acceptance as other books of the Word of God.

It was really a question of love, as he himself came to realize. Solomon had been especially loved from his birth, not only by David but by God Himself (II Samuel xii. 25). And even before his birth he had been designated by name as the son destined to

become David's heir (I Chronicles xxii. 9). It is not surprising, therefore, that David treated this son with special discipline, while he let the others have their own way and never said 'No' to them.

Probably the young Solomon found this chastening irksome, and often longed to be like Adonijah, who was never crossed in any wish of his and never made to do what he disliked. It must have seemed most unfair at the time. Solomon, however, lived to understand it all, and wrote his words of reminder that a true son must expect to find his father's hand heavy at times.

"He that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." The word 'betimes' seems to suggest that there were certain occasions when Solomon deserved to suffer. No doubt this was true in his case, but it is not the meaning of the quotation in Hebrews, for there the matter of chastening circles round the great Son of God Himself.

THOUGH HE WERE A SON

"Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself" (Hebrews xii. 3—A.V.). He certainly was the Father's appointed heir, and it was as such that he learned obedience by the things which He suffered. Note "things"; that is not only the great agony of the Cross, but the many lesser trials and crosses of every day. Because the Father loved Him and had destined Him for the throne He could not lead the relatively comfortable life which might have been His (not that He wished it!) but was subjected to much that was irksome, small things as well as great. If we consider the matter we will agree that there was much suffering in His daily life which does not seem to have been absolutely necessary, even for the One who was destined to die on the Cross for sinners.

It may have been inevitable that the religious leaders should reject Him, but why that extra sneer about His works of mercy being attributable to Beelzebub? It was true that His disciples were faulty men who were bound to cause Him much distress, but why did the sensitive Son of God have to endure over three years of close proximity to Judas Iscariot? Not for Judas's sake, for he got no benefit, but rather condemnation. Not for the eleven's sake, for they never even suspected that there was anything wrong. Surely, then, this appointment was ordered by the Father and continued right through to the end in order that the Lord Jesus might be under a peculiarly testing discipline. It seemed as though a great sigh of relief came from our Lord when Judas went out into that dark betrayal night,

but even then He still had to endure the traitor's kiss in the garden. So this particular suffering went right through to the very end. The same is true of the believer. There never comes a time in the Christian's life when he is so experienced or so old that all further trials are removed. He is moving towards an eternal inheritance and so his discipline can never be relaxed. Indeed, sometimes it seems that the testing increases rather than diminishes.

"Consider him . . . lest ye be weary and faint . . ." Think of how this trying discipline of Judas was watched by Satan as well as the Father, especially on that last evening when his repulsive hypocrisy might have extorted some rash reaction from the sorely-trying Son of Man. But no, in this and in every other temptation He never failed; He treated the traitor with courtesy and even with favour right to the very end. As we have said, it seems that the apparently unnecessary wounds not only continued to the end, but even multiplied. He had to be forsaken, but why Peter's denial and oaths? He had to be crucified, but why the mockery of the soldiers and the crown of thorns? Why indeed, if not for that very chastening which was associated with the Father's loving concern which always kept the throne in view.

WITH YOU AS WITH SONS

The Hebrew believers who received this letter were suffering similar irksome trials. These seemed so severe and so unnecessary that their hands grew limp with discouragement and their knees palsied with despair. There was even the danger of a root of bitterness springing up in their hearts. To them, therefore, God sent the message of explanation and encouragement based on Solomon's words. They were to receive a kingdom which cannot be moved, and therefore they should welcome the loving discipline which was calculated to fit them for their high destiny. Were they foolish enough to envy the Adonijahs who have nothing to cross them? Whether David was right to be so indulgent to Adonijah we do not know, but we can well imagine that he silenced any inward doubts by reminding himself that this son of his was never to be his heir, so that it did not matter so much if he grew up to be spoiled. Would the Hebrews wish God to act in this indulgent way towards them? Did they really want that He should never say 'No' to them when they begged to have their own way? Of course not. They wanted to be truly loved, and they wanted to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. For this it was necessary to suffer with Him.

INSPIRATION FOR US

And we? It is not difficult for us to feel hurt by reason of the trials or even handicaps which mark us out from others. These may seem unnecessary, and sometimes even unfair. We wonder why others can get their own way, or why they seem to have lives so free from the things which irk us. We may well be in danger of losing heart and being tempted to slow down in the race of faith, or even to give it up.

Let us look again at Solomon. No, better still, let us look off unto Jesus. If in His case we have to explain the many painful and puzzling trials of His life by recognizing that these were the Father's loving ways of fitting Him for His place in the glory, cannot the same—in our smaller measure—be true in our case? It not only can, but it is. God is speaking to us as to sons, and He is dealing with us

as with sons. Satan misinterprets our experiences by trying to convince us that they prove that there is some flaw in God's love for us. The very opposite is true. It is just because He does love us so that He never wants us to have the disappointment and mortification which came to Adonijah; He wants us to have an honoured place in His kingdom. Like Benaiiah, let us acclaim His wisdom: "Amen: the Lord God . . . say so too."

At times this may appear to be just superficial optimism. It is nothing of the kind. We are reminded that no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous. Nobody is suggesting that we should like our setbacks and painful experiences, or even pretend to do so. No, for the present they may be heavy to bear. "Nevertheless afterwards . . ." That is the point. God is working for the "afterwards" of eternity. We may trust His love.

H. F.

NOTE. The following is the first of four messages given by the editor at the Aeschi (Switzerland) Conference in September, 1968. They are the beginning of what may become a book to be published in due course. In editing these messages, some little additions have been made because, being given at the time in three languages, time was strictly limited.

EDITOR.

THE MISSION, THE MEANING AND THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

1. IN THE GOSPEL BY MATTHEW

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.

1. 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 cxix. 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.

2. The second thing is this: the whole of the New

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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" (i. 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, saying, 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" (xxviii. 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 x. 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" (xxi. 43). This is tremendous! So Abraham

is to have another nation! A *heavenly* people, and that people is to inherit 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" (viii. 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 v. 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 com-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

manded". 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.

(To be continued)

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

A MOTIVE IN LIFE

YOUNG Lionel went home early that Saturday evening. He was feeling restless and depressed. He had a good home, good friends and a good prospect for the future, but somehow nothing seemed worthwhile. There seemed to be no real purpose in life—nothing to live for, nothing to work for, nothing to fight for.

Mother and Father were watching the T.V. because it was the special November Remembrance Rally at the Albert Hall. Clearly they did not want to talk, so he sat down and began moodily to look at the screen.

The Albert Hall was obviously packed with people, and the arena was occupied by a military

band which was playing and marching up and down, with the musicians weaving their way between one another. Lionel liked the music, but what he liked much more was the precision of their movements. As he watched he began to lose some of his gloom. When the London Scottish came and played their pipes it was, if anything, more impressive, especially as the announcer pointed out that these were not regular soldiers but men who devoted their money and their spare time quite voluntarily to train in this way. Lionel realized how keen they must have been to get themselves to such a high standard.

That, however, was true of all the contributions

made by the various services. To Lionel, though, the last was the best. It was a display of gymnastics by R.A.F. men. Only the leader was a professional P.I. instructor; the rest were just R.A.F. men from various technical branches of the service who had given up their spare time to make themselves fit, and then trained together for a final period of special preparation for the great occasion.

It was thrilling to watch the split-second timing of their exercises together. They were not only superbly fit and skilled; they had so practised their jumps that it almost made Lionel dizzy to watch them. He half expected some kind of loss of rhythm, or clash between one and another, but no, it was perfect. Of course, when they finished there was tremendous applause, but the men did not acknowledge this by bowing or hand waving, but all smartly got into line facing in one direction and stood to attention while their leader saluted.

'Who is he saluting?' Lionel asked. He had noticed that the bands and the other performers had all done the same thing. They seemed not to be aware of the rows of clapping spectators, but just faced in one direction and saluted. Lionel's father answered his question by saying: 'If you had been here earlier you would have seen. That is the royal box which they are facing, and in it is the Queen Mother.' 'Anyone would think', commented Lionel, 'that all their trouble and expense had been given especially for her.' 'Perhaps it was,' his father answered. 'Don't you think that would make any

effort worth while, to know that you were doing it for a Queen?' 'I suppose that she was clapping too,' guessed Lionel. There had been no shots of the occupants of the royal box after he came into the room. 'I suppose she was,' replied his mother, 'and I am quite sure that she would acknowledge their salutes with a smiling "Thank you".'

Lionel went off to his own room, his mind in a ferment. He was a true Christian yet he had been grumbling that he had no inspiring objective in life. Those men had worked hard and long just for the one moment of standing at attention before the Queen Mother, saluting her and feeling that she appreciated their efforts. He could not very well stand at attention before his Saviour, and it would seem like irreverent play-acting to salute, but he knew that he could get down on his knees and tell his Lord that he had devoted the day to pleasing Him. But had he? No, he had been aimless and self-centred. So instead he knelt down and confessed his failure, knowing that the Lord Jesus was ready to forgive him.

From then onwards he made a practice of praying each morning that he might be helped to devote the new day to pleasing his King and Saviour. He never had to search for a worth-while motive for life after that. Like Paul he could say: "I am ambitious to be well pleasing unto Him" (II Corinthians 5. v. 9).

H. F.

THE CHURCH—ITS NATURE, PRINCIPLES AND VOCATION

(With special reference to its local expression)

NEXT to the Person of Jesus Christ the Church has been, and continues to be, the great battleground of history. So much so is this the case that an ever-increasing number of books, journals, periodicals, 'Councils', 'Convocations', discourses, etc., are occupied with this matter as a primary concern. But most of all this is *controversial*, thus justifying the phrase 'the battleground'. This is all very significant, indicating that it *is* a primary matter, and that it is something which does hold a position in the forefront of accountability. Rightly it does, and perhaps much more so than *all* this writing and talking understands. It is a primary concern in the whole cosmic realm, the super-mundane sphere, if we are to take both the practical evidence and the definite New Testament statements seriously. For

instance, the whole letter to the Ephesians, and particularly iii. 10 and vi. 12.

It may seem to be arrogant and ambitious for us, who, being of such little account in ourselves, and by the medium of such an insignificant a means as this little paper, to think that we can handle this immense matter to any advantage. Having had this as a primary concern for so many years, and having seen the Church and the churches in so very many places from Far East to Far West, with much prayer exercise over it, perhaps we may be given something to say which throws some light into the shadows or darkness of the immense confusion which exists in relation to the Church. We are especially concerned with the matter of local-assembly expressions of the Church, for only there

can the real meaning of the Church be brought to immediacy.

We have to begin by asking the question which includes everything else, and which really expresses the problem in many minds:

CAN WE NOW ACCEPT THE POSSIBILITY OF TRUE LOCAL EXPRESSIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH?

This question—and there is not a little, but very much; to give rise to it—has, because of its acuteness, received many answers, or has been attacked in many ways. Some of these are as follows:

1. A large section of Christians have answered definitely 'NO', and they base this upon what they term 'the total ruin' position. They say that the Church is in unredeemable ruins, and therefore a corporate expression is no longer possible. Of course, they especially relate this to the Church universal, but they bring it very close by arguing that at the end-time everything will be individual. The basis of this is that in Revelation ii-iii, where the Lord directs His address "to *him* that overcometh". Well, that is argument No. 1.

2. Then there are those whose answer is that the only possibility now is an approximate expression of the Church. That is, there can be no full and complete expression, but something comparative, provisional, and partial. There can be *some* features, and we must build upon *some* things which we perceive to be in the New Testament. In large instances the major denominations represent this position. Presbyterians base their whole position upon one interpretation of New Testament Church order, as they conceive it. The same is true of Lutherans, Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, 'Brethren', etc. For each and all of these the term 'Church' is employed. But it is a concept which is a convenient solution to the problem, namely, a partial approximation.

3. Then, there is the answer which is expressed by what is called 'Sublimation'. That is, that the Church is a sublime conception and idea. It is idealistic, and we must live in the abstract realm of a sublime conception and not try to bring that 'down to earth', be too practical and demanding in reality. This answer and interpretation is expressed in the term 'The Church Mystical': but not practical.

4. There are those who have written off the whole idea of Church, either as impossible or unnecessary. They are definitely Christian Institutions and organizations, but not a Church or churches. To this category belong the Quakers, the Salvation Army,

and a vast number of mission halls, and 'Missions'.

5. Finally for our purpose, there are those whose answer is a very positive one! Yes, we must return to the New Testament pattern 'and have New Testament churches'! They believe that the New Testament contains a definite 'blue print' for local churches, and they are committed to '*forming*' such wherever possible. Unfortunately, they vary very much as to teachings, emphases, and practices, and some of them are characterized by excesses, abnormalities and exclusiveness.

Well, what are we going to say to all this?

As we see it, all are *more or less* wrong or right (we underline 'more or less', but we would say that some are totally wrong), because the *true* nature of the Church has been either lost or lost sight of.

THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

The history of Israel has a lot of light to throw upon this matter of the Church. Historic Israel was constituted upon the same eternal *principles* as the Christian Church. Indeed, they were called "the church in the wilderness" (Acts vii. 38), and they were termed God's elect. They were intended to represent in time on the earth an *eternal* and *heavenly* concept. In types and symbols to figuratively and temporally embody spiritual principles and Divine thoughts. For our purpose here we have to narrow this all down to the main principles involved in their history. We divide that history into two phases. The one before, and leading to, the captivity in Babylon—the seventy years. The reason for that captivity was purely and definitely idolatry. The captivity dealt with that, and after that there was no more idolatry *of the same kind* in Israel. But then came—and still exists—the second, and both worse and longer, phase of judgment. This is revealed in the second aspect of the ministry of the Prophets. It is obvious that the Prophets prophesied in relation to the immediate future of the Babylonish and Assyrian captivity, and also in relation to a time further on. This second aspect is often taken up in the New Testament and applied—or shown to apply—to those times and events, with the extra feature that post-New Testament times (unto our day) were visualized. But why this second and longer and more terrible relegation to judgment? Why Israel's confusion, weakness, and loss of the *immediate* presence and power of God, and only His sovereignty *behind* their history? The answer is in one phrase—"spiritual blindness". "Blindness has happened to Israel" (Romans xi. 25). There is a great deal about this in the Gospels, and both the teaching and miracles of Jesus were directed to

and against this blindness. The giving sight to the blind was a testimony to *Israel*, as well as to the world. This blindness, however, was particularly related to the Person, the significance, and the purpose of Christ. That intervention in history was a mission to redeem, recover, and re-establish that *eternal* concept in the heart of God, which was as 'the mystery' in Israel; that is, the *spiritual* principles and meanings *hidden* in their temporal election and constitution, and to embody it all in a Person who was to be reproduced by the Church, as the Corn of Wheat, through death, being reproduced in resurrection in a corporate body.

There we have touched the very heart of the true nature of the Church. The touchstone of the Church is a *seeing* by Divine—supernatural—Holy Spirit revelation and illumination—the real significance and meaning of Jesus Christ and His mission. It is so evident that the great Apostle of 'the Mystery'—the Church, came to his knowledge and understanding of the true Church by way of the revelation of Christ to, and in, him (Galatians i. 16).

To truly see Christ is to see the Church, and only so can there be a true church. It was when the Lord was able to say of Peter that 'flesh and blood had not revealed the truth of His (Christ's) Person' that Christ immediately made the first definite announcement about the Church: "Upon this rock will I build my church." This all means that, fundamentally, a true expression of the Church, locally, is not more, nor less, nor other, than the spiritual apprehension of Christ by believers. The Church, local or universal, is not traditional. That would make it second-hand and therefore artificial. The Church cannot be seen through other people's eyes, whether those others be of the past (Apostles, etc.) or present (teachers).

We have known people to live in the presence of the teaching for years, and rejoice in it, repeat it, and think that they were in the good of it, and then eventually to prove that they had not really seen with their own spiritual eyes by contradicting and discarding it all too easily. They had seen it mentally through the eyes of someone else—the teacher or preacher. When Paul *saw*, it effected something in him that became himself, and no amount or form of suffering and outward disappointment could make him depart from the "heavenly vision". We repeat, that all of his rich and full understanding of the Church did not come, in the first place, from a revelation of some thing called 'the Church', but from a seeing of Christ as in the eternal councils of God. As the very foundation this answers the five points which we earlier mentioned, and answers them comprehensively. Can there be local expres-

sions of the Church? Yes, given that such a seeing and apprehension of Christ is present, and we must dismiss the Holy Spirit and His work if we say that such a seeing is not possible now (Ephesians i. 17-18).

But having made the statement, it is necessary to say more as to the essential *principles* of a local church as a microcosm of the Church universal.

The first (included in what we have said above) and the most difficult to explain, although not to experience, is in that misunderstood, disliked, and frowned-upon word—spirituality. It should not be difficult to understand, because any and every true born-again believer knows that there is something about him or her that is not just natural. A change in mentality, disposition, concept, gravitation has taken place in them. They are just different since the new birth took place. (We are talking nonsense about the Church if this fundamental change has not been effected.) But we still have to define spirituality.

As a word and an idea, spirituality is not peculiar to the Bible and to Christians. The world uses it. For instance, in visiting a picture gallery, some pictures are looked at and the viewer passes on. But another picture holds the attention, for there is something more than canvas, paint, and an object depicted. That picture has an "atmosphere" about it; it touches the emotions; it stirs a sense of wonder; it is not just something in itself. There is something more about it than itself. The remark about that something is that there is something 'spiritual' about it. The same thing can be said about a song; the execution of a piece of music; an ornate and beautiful building; a form of service; and so on. This is what the world calls the spiritual. But what they really mean is mysticism. This can be particularly found in literature, and there is a category of writers known as 'the Mystics'. Religion is a special realm of mysticism. Let us say at once, and with emphasis, that mysticism and true spirituality, according to the Bible, are two entirely different things. They belong to two different realms. The one is temperamental, or a matter of temperament. It has its degrees. The simple response to beauty and emotion: or in more intense forms it can be psychic, fanatical. It can be induced by pathetic or tragic appeals. It can be worked up to excitability and paroxysms by repetitions—as of choruses and incantations. Thus, either mildly or extravagantly, *an extra element* can appear or give character. Religion lends itself peculiarly to the mystical in these various forms and degrees.

But the spirituality of the Bible of which we are speaking is different. It is the result of a new birth

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

by the Holy Spirit. It represents *a change of nature* and constitution, not the release and intensification of what is already there. Indeed, it is an “altogether other”, just as Christ was—in the deepest reality of His person—an altogether other. In that ‘other’ He was not known, understood, and explicable. He was inscrutable. Not just mysterious, but of another order. There was another intelligence and consciousness. There was another capacity and ability. There was another relationship. This is all true of the individual believer by reason of being “born from above”. (See John i. 13, iii. 6, 7 margin.) The Church is the aggregate of *such* believers, in which what was true of Christ is true of it—deity apart.

He and it are the spiritual *meaning* of all symbols, and He definitely said that with His coming the old order of material, symbolical representations had entirely given place to that which they represented. It was no longer things to *represent*, but that which they represented *without the things* (see John iv. 20–24) and note that John’s Gospel and the Letter

to the Hebrews are two great documents of the great transition from the historic, the temporal, the tangible, to the spiritual. The Apostles were moved by the Holy Spirit into that transition. It cost them travail to be so born again, but they got through by Divine energy.

So spirituality, which is a heavenly other nature and endowment, is the first basic principle of the Church. Let us repeat that the Church is the vessel and embodiment of “the mystery” so often referred to in the New Testament, especially by Paul, and the mystery *was* and is the hidden *meaning* of things, and of Israel, but which mystery is now revealed to and in the new order, the new Israel, the Church. The “mystery of Christ” is the meaning of Christ, inscrutable to all but those who have “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in *the knowledge of him*” (italics ours).

Our space is gone, so we must continue later. There is much more to say.

DIVINE ORDER—IN CHRIST

5. THE CROSS AND THE DISRUPTIVE POWER OF SIN

“*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up*” (John iii. 14).

“*Jesus therefore said, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things*” (John viii. 28).

“*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself*” (John xii. 32).

IN the Scriptures cited above we have the Lord Jesus three times speaking of being “lifted up”. Of course, it means on the Cross. In connection with that ‘lifting up’ He uses two phrases: “Whosoever” and “All men”. The issue of the Cross, then, is said to be a unifying of humanity. When we think of the Cross we usually, and almost entirely, think of sin. This is right, if we understand what is meant by sin. There are sins, and there is sin. The Cross is His ‘bearing of our sins in His body on the tree’. The Cross is also the judgment upon, and destruction of, the effect of sin.

In the Bible sin is regarded as spiritual disease. There the greatest illustration of spiritual disease is leprosy, and the effect of leprosy is to disintegrate

the body, to break down its unity. It does that first in the individual, and then in the society; for the leper must go outside of his family and away from other people. This breaking up principle and power of sin is also represented in another type which has an embargo upon it when the Cross (in figure) is present, and that is leaven. The effect of leaven is to break up, disintegrate, and inflate.

Jesus says that the Cross and the ‘lifting up’ will be against that effect of sin. Sin separates between man and God; between man and a heavenly society; between the “natural man” and the spiritual man *in the Church*. (See I Corinthians.) It was because of that divisive effect of sin that the Apostle said that he would know nothing among *them* but “Jesus Christ, and him *crucified*”.

The only cure for divisions in any realm is the power of the Cross. We have—in these messages—been seeing the course of disruption, from Satan’s jealousy of God’s Son in the “before the world was” (John xvii. 5), and the resultant schism there, to the earth in its chaos as possibly Satan’s earlier ‘princedom’ (“the prince of this world”), then to—and in the Garden—man and wife; then to the family, the tribe, and the whole race.

That long and terrible history was destined by Divine Counsels to be met and destroyed, and “re-

conciliation", reunification, reintegration, to be accomplished in the same dimensions as the evil. The instigator and his work were to be destroyed and cast out of God's domain of light, life, and love, for ever. The Person to do it, and rightly constituted for it, was God's Son, and the instrument for its accomplishment was His Cross. Every aspect of the cosmic universe was focused in that Cross. The Cross is a factual *position*, basic, fundamental, final as to this schismatic power of sin. Then it is a progressive principle to be applied and made effective in the Church. The final and consummate vision of the Cross is a great multitude *out of every tribe and nation singing in unison or harmony the Song of the Lamb.*

This is all a very great test and challenge as to the place and work of the Cross in ourselves personally; in our relationships; in the local assemblies, and in the Church universally. The heart of the disrupted universe, and the heart of all disrupted situations contains an 'I'. It commenced there when "Lucifer" said *in his heart*, "I will be equal with the Most High". The principle of selfhood, in some form of 'grasping' and not letting go to God, is accountable for all schisms which affect Divine interests and glory. (See Philippians ii. 9 onwards.)

So, coming back to our main subject, the Divine order is in the Person of God's Son. It is secured by His Cross. It is increased by the principle of the Cross at work in believers. It is the real meaning of 'knowing Christ', and it is consummated when the Lamb in the throne is the adored Centre of a new creation.

Let us not just view all this objectively, but continually challenge all motives and situations by it.

THE APPLICATION OF THE MESSAGE TO LOCAL ASSEMBLIES

While the disruptive work of the enemy of Christ is extended to the whole Church—the *true Church*—to effect its disunity by every possible means because the true Church—the Elect of God—is destined in the eternal counsels to occupy the position of administration of the 'new heaven and new earth', it is of particular interest and concern to the enemy to disrupt and discredit all local representations of Christ and His Body. This he will do—and does—by bringing about wrong order. Order—Divine order—is absolutely indispensable to growth, strength, and effectiveness. This fact is greatly overlooked, and therefore much advantage is given to the disruptive forces. Because the Divine order is heavenly and spiritual, only the Holy Spirit, sent

down from heaven, knows what it is and can administer and constitute it. Immediately man puts his hand upon the Church local to organize, form, arrange, and control it, disorder—or unorder—will set in, with the results of confusion, limitation, artificiality, make-believe, and—in time—an end in itself. It *can* be worse—even shame and disgrace.

Therefore, to have the Divine order it is basically essential—as in the beginning—that the Holy Spirit shall be in complete control in terms of the absolute headship and lordship of Christ. This means that *everything* shall be meticulously referred and deferred to the Holy Spirit. This is the *principle* embodied in fasting with prayer. We say the *principle*, because there is no virtue in fasting without its *meaning*. To some men it *might* be costly to go without a meal or two; to others meals are not of such account, indeed, they feel better without a few. The *principle* of fasting (not only or merely in going without food for a day) is the refraining from what is of man *in any way* to give the Lord a *full way* through occupation with Him, which is the function of prayer. The Lord does not want us to go on 'hunger strike' to get what we want, but to go on self-strength strike to let Him have what *He* wants. It was out of *this* 'prayer with fasting' that the Holy Spirit instigated the Divine order at the beginning. (Acts xiii, etc.) Note: the appointments were made firstly through abandoned prayer, then by Holy Spirit direction, then in the midst of the (local) Church, and evidently by the Church's unity. Who will ever estimate the values which issued from that microcosm of the heavenly order? The most impressive thing, and the most significant, is that the local emerged into the universal. Souls saved, companies born, and saints fed in far-reaching ministry, and all-time values. Man's arrangements and appointments do not work out in that way!

Every assembly ought to be a vessel of light and food for *all* the Lord's people, as well as of evangelism to the unsaved.

The law of order as governing development, growth, strength, effectiveness, and reproduction is written large by God in all organic nature, and not least in the human body.

Order is the spontaneous outworking of life. It proves that life is unimpeded, unobstructed, and working normally. What is true in nature is equally true in the spiritual organism—the Church. It is when there is an invasion of something contrary to "the law of the Spirit of life", from selfhood or the world, that the life is obstructed and there is a loss of power, effectiveness, and productiveness. The Bible calls this "the Anointing". Every vessel, every min-

istry, every "office", every *position*, every function in the local Church should *manifestly* be under the anointing. It should be evident to all that that man in that position, doing what he is doing, is unmistakably there and functioning under the anointing; that *God* put him in that position, and therefore life flows through him and his function.

When we have said this (and we could add *very* much more concerning Divine order in the local assembly), we are brought back to an all-inclusive and comprehensive work and meaning of the

sovereignty of the Holy Spirit: it is to reveal Christ. We have said that Christ—the Son of God—is the full embodiment of the heavenly order. By the Anointing He expressed that order. We need to get right away from our man-crystallized systems of Christianity to a new Holy Spirit revealed apprehension of Christ. If the Holy Spirit is really governing He will organically constitute all things according to Christ, and the Church and churches will not be institutions, organizations, or even 'churches', but representations and expressions of Christ.

CHRIST OUR ALL

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" (iv. 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 constitu-

tion, 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 backways 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 every-

thing 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 ii 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 ii: “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 xviii 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 *Ephesus*: "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 cutting 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.

(To be continued)

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FROM THE EDITOR

WE are very grateful for the response that we have received to our 'Earnest Appeal' in the last issue. It was only meant as an effort to keep the paper to a circulation that is really meeting need; but the response has been more than just a 'Yes' or 'No'. Thank you!

It was our hope that, with this issue of the paper, we might be in a position to give something fuller and more decisive regarding the matter of our premises. All that we can do as we go to press is to say that our deadline for evacuation is the 28th of February. We have nothing to inform you as to a new location. If this is known before the final run-off of the paper, we will insert a slip. Failing that, all correspondence can continue to be addressed as hitherto, and if we have moved mail will either be forwarded or collected. You will continue to pray with us over this matter.

We are much burdened for the many hungry and scattered sheep. There is an immense activity and movement in the realm of evangelistic effort on behalf of the unsaved, and we are one with such concern. It has been one of the criticisms against us that we have no such concern. This is utterly untrue, but there is a great need that the saved shall be instructed and fed. This is evidenced by the fact

that so much of the New Testament is occupied with the concern for believers and the "Building up of the Body of Christ". It is to that ministry that we feel that this little instrument has been called, and, while we feel our terrible inadequacy to touch even the fringe of the need, we are seeking to be faithful to this trust. If you really feel that your own need is ministered to by this channel, will you not ask the Lord to put the burden of the hungry multitude upon your heart, and seek to share the "Bread" with those whom you know share your hunger? The time is short; the world is becoming impossibly confused. The god-of this world continues his great strategy of "blinding" and keeping in the dark. The cry is imperative for eye-opening ministry.

The first sermon that I ever preached as a young man was on Acts xxvi. 17b-18, and I feel that burden more than ever now. You ask the Lord to raise up men who have *seen*, and have that commission and anointing.

Warmest greetings,
T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

P.S.—I have very urgent appeals for ministry this year in U.S.A. and on the continent of Europe. *Please pray!*

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE MISSION, THE MEANING AND THE MESSAGE OF
JESUS CHRIST (II)

2. IN THE GOSPEL BY MARK

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 i. 1).

Those are the first words in this Gospel. Now we turn to the last words, in chapter xvi. 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 xii. 12).

"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministration, taking with them John whose surname was Mark" (Acts xii. 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 xiii. 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 xiii. 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 xv. 37, 38).

"Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is useful to me for ministering" (II Timothy iv. 11).

"She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you: and so doth Mark my son" (I Peter v. 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 iv. 10, R.V.). Now I want you to remember these details that I am giving you, for there is a significance bound up with every 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 ii. 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 un-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

profitable 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" (II Timothy iv. 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 xiii, when He laid aside His robe, girded Himself with a towel, the symbol of the bond-slave, 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 xi. 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" (II Peter i. 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 xxi. 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 bond-slave, 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 xxii. 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" (I Corinthians xv. 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 ix. 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 for ever" (Ecclesiastes iii. 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.

(To be continued)

THE GRACE OF GOD

"Exhort servants to be in subjection to their own masters, and to be well-pleasing to them in all things; not gainsaying; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Titus ii. 9-11).

"The word of the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you, even as it is also in all the world bearing fruit and increasing, as it doth in you also, since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth" (Colossians i. 5-6).

"He hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee" (II Corinthians xii. 9).

"MY grace is sufficient for thee." For the Apostle that solved a very great problem in his life, and met a need in such a remarkable way that he was still in the good of it fourteen years afterwards. You notice that he does not say so. He is speaking as if the Lord were continually saying this word to him, as if it were a present experience. In a sense he does not speak of it in the past, as something finished and over and written in history, but it is that past experience which still comes right up to the present moment and stands good today. "He hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee."

Now the grace of God, I believe, is, so far as we are concerned, one of the biggest and most vital truths of Divine reality, and the real burden of what I wish to say to you in the Lord's Name is some-

thing after this fashion. The grace of God—yes, it does express that loving, kind, considerate, thoughtful sympathy of the Lord for us. For the sinner it means that, though God might be angry with him, He is not; that, though He has every reason for hating him, hurling him into the abyss, and feeling an implacable resentment toward him, He does not. His feelings toward the sinner are those of kindness, of desire, of sympathy, of compassion. If you are tempted to wonder whether you have ever known the Lord or not, or if you are tempted to feel that God is against you, those temptations are of the devil, though he may be masquerading as an angel of light. There is a sphere, a realm, into which, in God's infinite mercy, we have been brought, and that means that His attitude toward us is one of grace. In the general sense that may even be said of those who do not know God, for, today being the day of grace, God is not, in the first place, angry with men except as they harden their hearts and refuse His grace.

So, as we touch every realm of human need in our lives as Christians, we are again touching a realm where the grace of God becomes such a precious thing, and in the hour of trial and of deep tribulation, of testing or of perplexity, of loneliness, or whatever be the peculiar trouble and difficulty of any one child of God, it is still true that the Lord has that attitude and sympathy and comes near with His own blessed presence as a balm and a comfort. In that sense (and it is in that sense that

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these words are usually applied), "My grace is sufficient for thee".

GRACE MORE THAN COMFORT

I have said all that because it is very true and very precious, but there is something more that I feel we need to know, for the grace of God is much more than that kindly, comforting, sympathetic love. It is the mighty power of God for the fulfilment of His will in our lives. I believe it is a need that may be found in many of us to know the Lord saying—not just: 'I will comfort you; I will cheer you up; I will pity you; I will assure you of My love!'; but: 'There is no need for the experience through which you are passing! There is no need for your failure, nor for those experiences of which you are ashamed and for which you are sorry, and which you feel need to be covered and hidden! All that sad story of failure is not necessary!' 'Well,' you begin to say, 'look at the circumstances in which I am! Look at those people with whom I have to do! Look at my upbringing and my handicap, my circumstances, myself!' The Lord knows them far better than you do! Nevertheless, He does not accept that any one of them, nor all of them together, are the real explanation of your failure, of your wandering, of your place of difficulty, or of your experience of defeat. None of these things is the true reason why you do not know the will of God being fulfilled in your life. What, then, is the reason? It is that you do not know the grace of God. You may object to that, but I say it again. You do not know the grace of God, and that is your difficulty.

The Apostle Paul, under the peculiarly acute trial which came upon him, was also in danger of failing and fainting, and to his cries to the Lord he received an answer, which was: "My grace is sufficient for thee!" The Lord did not mean: 'It is all right, Paul! You have this trial and this suffering, and it is all very bitter and very hard, but I will just comfort you and give you the grace to bear it quietly!' The Lord did not only mean that. He was saying: 'Paul, in spite of this thing, you will reach the goal. The heavenly vision will be realized. My grace is sufficient, not just to comfort you, but to get you through.' Paul was feeling: 'This thing is like a great stake that holds me to the ground. It is driven in by the devil, and here I am down here when I would be up there. Now, if the Lord, in His sovereign power, would rebuke the devil and remove the stake, then I could get busy climbing up there!' But the Lord said: 'No, you do not get there that way. Let the devil drive in his stake that cripples you,

handicaps you, and makes you, as you have never been before, aware of your own utter helplessness, but My answer is not to remove the handicap. My answer is that there is a spiritual power which I call My grace that will, in spite of everything, in spite of your own more conscious weakness, disability, inability, yet bring you to that heavenly goal. My grace is sufficient!' That was the Lord's word to the Apostle, and it is His word to us.

GRACE FOR SERVICE

Is My grace sufficient for ministry? When the Apostle had that vision, it was not of himself with the Lord in glory. That is some people's idea of heaven, but it is not the Lord's idea, for it would not be very glorious to Him, and does not represent His purpose one little bit. No, the vision was of a great company of redeemed souls brought right through to glory in spite of their own hopelessness, of the tremendous pull of the world, of the power of sin, of the antagonism of the devil, and of sin and shame on their side. Paul saw that vision and his heart was moved with a great desire to serve the Lord in that. He longed to pour out all that he had and all that he ever could be in order that that might be realized, not just in him, but that he might serve the Lord in bringing others there, and then, doubtless just when he was most full of hope as to the glory and blessedness of this ministry, and he left all for the Lord to do that, he was smitten down. Some of us know something of what that means: the bitter disappointment of not being able to fulfil our ministry. And that is how it came to Paul. From a human point of view he was out of the ministry, and it was Satan's work. That was a very bitter thought to Paul, but the Lord came to him after his third appeal, when he was really desperate, and assured him that, far from being out of the ministry, he was now coming into it, and that this experience was a part of it. 'Paul, you shall fulfil a ministry with this suffering, this disability, such as you could never have fulfilled by any other way, but it will not be you. My grace is sufficient for you!'

I have said this in order that we may catch something of the thought of God's grace being a tremendous power, and a practical power, in the life.

GRACE FOR CHARACTER AND CONDUCT

When we turn to Titus, that is just exactly what Paul says. The Apostle, in writing to this younger brother, had gone to some length to set out the kind of life that the Lord's people should live, summing up the whole matter of our duty and life here in the

world in one beautiful phrase in which he speaks of our "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things". Then immediately he comes to the practical power that produces practical holiness, and what is it? "For the grace of God hath appeared." There is the secret of Christian conduct. We do not want to be neglectful of or indifferent to the whole matter of living here on earth lives that are a credit to the Lord and having nothing to be ashamed of before Him and before men, but what is the secret of that? It is the grace of God, and you will notice how the Apostle passes into one or two spheres in which the grace of God becomes a working, effective power.

First of all, "the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men"; and I take it that this thought of salvation refers in the first instance to the inward life. The grace of God is sufficient for our inward life. It comes in the power of salvation for deliverance, and the sphere in which we need deliverance is inside, and not outside. Let us be quite sure about that. You would never dispute it in relation to anyone, man or woman, who does not know the Saviour. You know that, when you begin to speak to them of the Christian life, they will always say that in their circumstances, just where they are, it is not possible to live a Christian life. And the attitude of the natural man is always that it is the outward realm that needs changing, but we all know that it is not there. What we need is deliverance inwardly, and if we are free there, then we will be all right wherever we are.

Now, it is the grace of God which, appearing, brings salvation to all men. The Authorized Version says: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men", but that cannot be the meaning, for it is not true. Of course, the problem arises: Does the grace of God bring salvation to all men? Surely this is what it means: the grace of God has appeared and it is a grace which is capable of saving all men, of bringing salvation to every kind of man. There is none so weak or so handicapped that the grace of God is not sufficient for them, nor is there anyone so strong or so good that the grace of God is not their only sufficiency. It is for all men, and it does not matter where the word of the Lord finds you. There is only one solution to your problem, and that is the grace of God. There are so many realms in which we may need deliverance, but the grace of God comes bringing salvation. "The grace of God hath appeared", has been made manifest. The whole effort of the Spirit of God is to make us believe that this is something that God has in hand—and that is so true of the whole Christian life. Your problem may be (and

perhaps in this very thing you do not know the grace of God) that you have not yet realized how utterly and completely the whole matter of the Christian life is God's concern. It is His responsibility, and it is from His side. How do you know the grace of God? Well, God appears to you with it. You cannot say more than that!

This is what happened to Paul. It is true that he prayed three times, but he did not get deliverance by praying, and nothing was put on the credit side of his life for his helpfulness because he prayed three times. No, deliverance came to him when the Lord appeared. "He hath said unto me . . ." Oh, when the Lord speaks to you, you know it! You see, this does not speak of a man wresting a promise from God. It speaks of the grace of God, unmerited, unexpected, and very often unasked. And it appears to all. Blessed be His Name!

It appeared supremely in the Person of His dear Son, who is the very embodiment of God's grace. Who was asking for Him to come? Who was expecting Him? There were very few who wanted Him, but He came, moved by His great Divine compassion and concern which we call the grace of God. The Lord Jesus Christ came, so that now, by His Spirit and through His word in the Gospel, the grace of God is manifested to us. It is not what we are doing, but God coming to our hearts and offering Himself in grace. You say: 'I wish the Lord would do that to me!' Have you ever seriously faced this fact: that the Lord *is* doing that to you? I think the matter becomes personal very often when we make it personal. "My grace is sufficient for thee!" Is that the Lord's word to you? Of course, if you heard it coming out of heaven you think you might believe that it was the Lord speaking to you. You would not know if this is the Lord speaking to you, because it does not come in some supernatural way. We do not know how it came to Paul, and we do not need to know. Many of us have known the Lord speaking His word to us just by reading it. It has come to us, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God, and we have known that it is the Lord speaking to us. Then we have doubted. Was it the Lord's Word? We have to say in faith: 'It is the Lord's word, and all the promises of God are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus. The Lord is saying to me: "My grace is sufficient for thee." Well, then, I believe it and I stand on it!' That is so often how it happens—it becomes a matter of faith.

GRACE FOR THEE

"My grace is sufficient for *thee*." Now that is just

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exactly the point where the faith wavers a bit, if it does not fail. We have no doubt in believing that the Lord's grace was sufficient for the Apostle Paul, for it is very easy to believe things about him. We may even have no doubt that the Lord's grace is sufficient for other people. Have you never, in another human life, seen things that were unbearable and would altogether have handicapped and made a walk with God impossible, and then have you not seen that person overcoming and walking with God? Of course, the devil will say to you: 'You are different!' But you are not. Why have they overcome? What have you been looking at when you have been looking at a true Christian's life? The value of being brought up in Sunday school and knowing Christian doctrines? No, thousands of people have had that and there is not a sign of the grace of God in them, so it is not that. Is it that you have been seeing people who are extraordinary people and have such a strength of ability that they can walk in the way of holiness and obedience to God? No!

But let us see other people's failures. Why? To encourage us to know that these are fallible people, capable of the most terrible collapse spiritually, and sometimes even morally. It is like that in the Word of God: What is God's purpose in doing that, and why does He allow some of us to be seen in our failures? Perhaps He is just pointing out a truth to some soul. Here is someone whom you thought was wonderful, but they are not so wonderful after all—and yet there is something wonderful about them! They are failing men and women, but the grace of God in them causes them not to fail. However, if they move from the grace of God for one moment, they are miserable failures—and that is true of all of us!

So there is no real excuse for you. God's word is just as much for you as for any other—"My grace is sufficient for *thee*." Would you dare to tell the Lord that His grace is not sufficient for you? Is it sufficient for you? Well, you have been failing—but why have you been failing? The Apostle wrote to the Colossians of a day (and what a day!) "since ye knew the grace of God in truth". Wonderful things had been happening in these Colossian believers. They were growing, and increasing in holiness, and pressing toward the goal of glory, the goal which is set before us here. The goal of grace is the blessed appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and when you have the grace of God in your heart, you have that hope burning brightly. That is the goal—the blessed hope of Christ's appearing in glory, and of our having our inheritance with Him in that same glory. That

is the end, and that end is for you, presented to you by the Lord—and yet you have been failing. Well, what is the matter? It is because you have not the experience that the Colossians had—and what was their experience? It is very simple! They knew the grace of God in truth. That is how they began. There was a day, not when they resolved to be Christians, but when they said: 'Now we know the grace of God!' The Lord had spoken to them concerning their sin and their guilt and their need, and had said: 'My grace is sufficient to save you!' They said: 'Praise God, we believe it is—we are sure it is!' And that was the beginning.

But every step of the way, every phase, every aspect, meant for them a new knowledge of the grace of God, a new speaking into their hearts by the Lord of His word: "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Now the Galatians moved from that ground. They did not give up being Christians. They tried to be Christians, and that was their trouble. The Apostle said to them: 'You have fallen from grace!' That does not mean that they had slipped into sin, though it does lead into sin. They tried to have their salvation by works and by their own efforts. Paul said: 'You have made Christ of none effect! You have fallen from grace!' And that is the explanation of a lot of trouble in Christian lives. It is not that we are not trying to be Christians, but that we *are* trying to be Christians, and we have been deceived into the thought that we can be. We fall from grace, and we fail.

The true path of the just, that path which is 'as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day', is just a simple walk of a continually increasing knowledge of the grace of God. It begins in its appearance for our salvation, whoever we are. It takes us through, whoever we are. It will take us through a life of learning, of being instructed, of being chastened, and of being trained in a way of holiness. It will take us through to that blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us. That is the grace of God—Christ giving Himself, and that is the grace of God at every aspect. He gave Himself for us that He might give Himself to us, giving *Himself* to us to purge us from all iniquity and to purify unto Himself a people for His own possession. That is the same thing as the glory: glory for us being with the Lord, and glory for Him that at long last, after the centuries upon centuries, He has a people who are His own peculiar treasure, precious above all else that He possesses—the peculiar treasure of a redeemed people. If you seek, and if in eternity it be

sought, the secret that lies behind this people, the peculiar treasure precious to the Lord's own heart above all else—for He said: "All the earth is Mine"—it is just this: that they knew the grace of God in

truth. The Lord said to them, kept on saying it, and the good of what He said remained: "My grace is sufficient for thee."

H. F.

THE CHURCH—ITS NATURE, PRINCIPLES AND VOCATION (II)

(continued)

WHEN our Lord made the great pronouncement about His Church: ". . . I will build my Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it", He intimated three things. One, that He would build a definite entity called His Church. Two, that that Church would encounter an opposing force in its full and final enmity. Three, that that power would be taken at its ultimate strength and be destroyed, that is, made incapable of prevailing against that Church. In this full statement there is a very definite indication of the fundamental nature of His true Church. We have been saying earlier that the Church is essentially a spiritual thing, and that spirituality is its basic principle. But can we be still clearer as to what we mean by spirituality? Yes, I think that we can, and that by using an alternative word, the word 'supernatural'.

THE CHURCH IS ESSENTIALLY SUPERNATURAL

The Church is the embodiment of *true* Christianity, and *true* Christianity is supernatural, or it is nothing! It is only when and where that is fully realized and accepted that the Church really exists and can be the power that it is intended to be.

I. SUPERNATURAL IN ORIGIN

First of all, Christianity and the Church (in truth, identical terms) came down from heaven, and have still unceasingly to be received and *entered* from there. This is the very foundational truth of Christ Himself and of the Church in every individual incorporated into it. The teaching of the New Testament everywhere is this. The origin and home of Christ was in heaven. John's Gospel and Paul's Letter to the Ephesians are a particular and emphatic argument for this one thing, and they comprehend the New Testament in this truth. In the former the repeated affirmation of Christ as to His heavenly origin is the basis of *everything* in the whole Gospel. It is a "verily, verily"—'most truly', and everything in the Gospel is intended to bear that out and be evidence of it.

But when that has been recognized, the Gospel, and *the rest of the New Testament* return from that to affirm equally that the Church embodies that truth and fact of Christ. John iii will employ the identical language—"verily, verily"—in connection with any single individual entering the Church. That individual, no matter if he be the best specimen and representative of the Old Testament Israel (such as Nicodemus) just "*cannot*" enter along the horizontal line of this creation; he cannot enter by the door of nature, of tradition, of 'religion'; he "*must* be born from above". By *this* birth he is constituted a *super*-natural being in the *innermost* reality of his being: what Paul calls "a *new* creation".

Then correspondingly the Church is born *from above*, on the Day of Pentecost. The difference between the same persons before and after that event, and the corporate nature of the new entity, are patent to all who have eyes to see. It is supernatural.

II. SUPERNATURAL IN SUPPORT

What was—and *is*—true of the origin and home of Christ and His Church is shown with *overwhelming* evidence to be true of their sustenance and survival. 'Bread from heaven' only means the sustaining, supporting power of heavenly resources. This is seen in two connections. One, in the law of utter dependence upon God and heaven; the very principle of the Incarnation—"He emptied himself" (Philippians ii. 7). Again, John's Gospel is a constant emphatic assertion of this. The double "verily, verily" is employed to affirm this—(v. 19): "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of (out from) himself", etc., etc. For every work, for every word, for every time, He declared that He was dependent upon His Father, upon heaven. It explains His lowly birth, His lowly upbringing, His later homelessness. It explains His being "despised and rejected of men". But was there ever a life and work so powerful as His?

The other connection is that of the Church.

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When we consider the human material of the first nucleus, and *mainly* of its growth; when we take into account what it did *not* have of this world's goods and support; and when we think of all that was against it in every conceivable way, bent upon its annihilation; and then remark its more than survival as an entity, there is only one word for it—supernatural! I confess that I have marvelled at the sustained and triumphant faith of a man like the Apostle Paul when I see him suffering as he did, and when I read his own catalogues of sufferings. The natural mind would say: 'This is not the support of heaven', but we have the verdict of many centuries, and it is the evidence and verdict of the supernatural. Surely all this is contained in that further double "verily" of John vi, where—with an allusion to Israel's life in the wilderness—Jesus declares Himself to be the Bread of God from heaven. Indeed, so strong, meaningful, and imperative is His mind on this matter that in that chapter He uses the double "verily" four times. The wilderness has always been the symbol or figure of a place outside of the world, and the succour and sustenance in conditions so inimical to life demand resources from another realm. The history of the spiritual life is the history of secret supernatural support. Silently, without demonstration; sustained, without failing; sufficient, without poverty, the Manna fell, and the Heavenly Lord of Life has maintained His Church in the same way. Yes, while it has been silent and often almost imperceptible to the natural senses, yet, in *fact*, it has been a working of immense power. The New Testament will teach us that the very birth and sustenance of the Church is the counterpart of Israel's emancipation from Egypt. There and then the power of God extended and exhausted the *whole* might of Egypt and its gods, and then nullified death itself.

The part of the New Testament which most specifically brings the Church into view uses such words as: "The *exceeding* greatness of his power which is to usward who believe."

We have far from understood the terrific thing that was involved in the death and resurrection of Christ *in order to* secure the Church unto God!

Surely we have said enough already to do one or two very—supremely—important things

Firstly, to show what the true Church is according to the New Testament revelation. If this is not a misapprehension of that revelation, it must be a very discriminating thing; that is, it must reveal a very great difference between the true Church, on one side, and that immense umbrella which goes by the name on the other side; an umbrella under

which have gathered so many institutions and conflicting conceptions.

It should be a corrective of two extremes. The extreme of a too great an inclusiveness which overlooks the fundamental and essential nature of the supernatural, of which we have spoken: the supernatural in the new birth from heaven of every individual in the Church. Also a corrective of the opposite extreme of an unscriptural exclusiveness, which makes Christ smaller than He really is in excluding from fellowship truly born-again believers on the ground of some particular technique of 'protection', or some specific interpretation of truth.

Further, if what we have said is a true definition of the Church and its nature, then, surely, it explains loss of power; of impact; of supernatural influence; and it explains the confusion, the poverty of spiritual food for hungry sheep, and the scatteredness which is Satan's special strategy to rob the Church of its vocation to take the Kingdom and reign!

The explanation is that the great power of utter dependence upon God, which is the categorical demand of God for the showing of His own glory, has been surrendered to recourse to the world for means, methods, fashions, etc., to make God's work 'successful'. Satan is not one bit afraid of anything that will use his own kingdom for its glory! He will even sponsor anything that will give him a place. The curse resting upon him and this world will always spell frustration, confusion, and eventual vanity to all that is of his kingdom; hence so much of these very things in a Church which is—*in any respect*—of this world. The Church has so largely failed to discern why—*in essential relation to His mission and ministry*—the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is given a place in three of the Gospels, and *in that specific connection* John's Gospel is so gathered up in chapter xvii, where the emphasis of Jesus is upon His not being of this world, and the same of His Church!

The Church—universal and local—which is constituted on spiritual and heavenly principles will have food enough for its own needs, and to spare for all the world. The hungry will gravitate toward such. It will be a *spiritual* magnet which will draw the Lord's people together in a *spiritual* fellowship. It will therefore be an object of Satan's special attention to undo it. But, even if he succeeds in destroying its *temporal* aspects, by martyrdom, fire, dissensions, scatterings, places, etc., such a church will have held *spiritual* values which are indestructible and eternal—"for the things which are seen are temporal (transient, passing) but the things which are not seen are eternal".

The ultimate test is the eternal!

We said at the commencement that, while we are concerned with the nature of the true Church universal, we have a special concern for the local expression. We shall therefore now concentrate our attention upon that expression.

If we take seriously the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation (and surely we must do so) we shall be impressed with the Lord's serious concern for such local expressions. A matchless presentation of Himself is given by way of judging the churches *according to Himself*. Every feature of that presentation is a factor in judgment. Then the churches are given a twofold symbolic definition; one as of stars and the other as lampstands. Leaving many details until later, we, at the moment, note that the common feature is that of the power of testimony. It is the *positive* element of a challenge to world darkness. All through what follows in relation to the churches the feature and factor of positiveness of spiritual life and influence are dominant and paramount. All controversy by the Lord with the churches—on whatever specified account—is focused upon this ultimate issue: the positive effect of the church being where it is. Is there an impact within (lampstands) and without (stars)? Are they telling, accountable, effective, unmistakable? Have they an influential impact upon their surroundings? Is there spiritual power that has effects? Ultimately, the continuance of their place in the Divine economy—being retained or 'removed'—rests upon this issue. Many things are detailed as the cause of the loss of power, but it is that loss which makes for judgment.

Having noted the inclusive issue which determines everything in a local testimony, we proceed to ask and answer the question: What are

THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF A TRUE LOCAL CHURCH?

We are seeking to keep close and true to the overall principle that the Church—universal and local—is called to be an expression of Christ. It is impossible to read the New Testament without seeing that the presence of Christ anywhere was the presence of

(1) *Heavenly light and power*

This we have just indicated as the basis of His judgment of churches. With Him it was not *only* the light of teaching or doctrine. It was teaching personified. There was the teaching incarnated in manhood. His teaching and His works were one. It was very practical light! It was light from another

world. If the stars *ruled* the night they did so by the reflected light of the sun. If the churches are to have the *power* of truth it must be because they give a rebound of Christ upon human darkness. A local expression of Christ should mean that there is *effective* light, both for the Lord's people (the candlesticks) and for the world (the stars). The people who have contact with such a local church should feel the *power* of the teaching, should be affected by it, and it should be fruitful in them. This is not only a test, but it is a testimony to what the Lord has provided for. A people *living* in the good of the heavenly light received through that vessel? Is sin rebuked and exposed? Are sinners convicted? Do the perplexed get understanding in that presencing of Christ?

(2) *Heavenly life*

The Lord said that His very coming into this world was "that they might have life". Therefore, His presence in a locality by means of the church there should mean that all who come and go register a *heavenly* livingness. Not just excitableness, noise, activity, etc., but a life which is not of this world. There are not dead forms and customs. There is nothing in a rut. Life is mediated by all that has a place and a part. There is a spiritual *lift* as of *resurrection* life! No depression!

(3) *Heavenly food*

Yet again, as we have seen earlier, the presence of Christ meant bread for the hungry. The very "compassion" of Christ meant that He could not bear to have people come hungry and go away the same. A true local expression of Christ will mean that that company of His people will have, not only enough for themselves, but the margin, or overflow, to all the hungry—spiritually hungry. That will be a house of bread where none ever fails to be fed. The food will not be just localized, but will be ministered to many beyond.

(4) *Heavenly fellowship*

An impressive feature of Christ when personally present among men was the way He transcended the things which divide men in this world. He made no *attempt* to make everyone and everything uniform by organization, institution, denomination, class, category, forms, systems, etc. Every type and temperament, if free from prejudice and hypocrisy, and of open heart and conscious of spiritual need, found a *common* ground of fellowship and oneness in Him. He just rose above the dividing things, and in response to Him people found that things which

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had separated them just vanished. Christ became their common ground.

Thus should it be in any local corporate expression of Christ. Questions of association, denomination, sect, tradition, etc., should not arise, but just vanish in the presence of the warmth of fellowship, and entire occupation with Christ. The only effective way of true unity, heavenly fellowship, is that of the higher than earthly ground—the love of heaven.

(5) *Heavenly order*

All the four things which we have mentioned as characteristic of a true local expression of the Church and of Christ will be helped or hindered by the presence or absence of a heavenly, spiritual order. All appointments, positions, "offices", should be by the definite witness of the Holy Spirit; not by man's choosing, whether by others or by the per-

son's ambition. As the result of much prayer by the church it should be manifest where anointing and gift rests, so that the function of those in any position of leadership should definitely mean that the church is inspired, strengthened and built up. Failing this heavenly order, there will exist an element of artificiality, a straining to *make* something and keep it going. The highest level of genius will fall far short of the smallest measure of Divine inspiration. It is this Divine inspiration that determines all Divine service and functions. There is no *effort* or strain where the anointing rests, but spontaneity and liberty and unction. Oil has ever been a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and where He is things should move as in oil. This is not at all an impossible standard, but the normal expression of the Lordship and Headship of Christ.

What God requires He makes possible.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

HE MEANT WELL

MANY years ago I heard of the wonderful work being done in Peru by the LeTourneau road engineers and contractors. For this reason I was especially glad that the past Christmas brought me from America his life-story called *Mover of Men and Mountains*.

Mr. LeTourneau is now an old man and he claims to be the builder of the largest earth-moving equipment in the world. God so blessed him that instead of giving a tenth to the work of Christ, as most of us do, he is able to give nine-tenths. The present story, however, concerns his early days when he was working with his Uncle Bob in a garage in Stockton, California.

One day an elderly customer brought in his old car which needed some welding done on the exhaust pipe. LeTourneau put the car over the grease pit and then climbed underneath with his torch to cut the pipe. The whole undercarriage of the car was thick with oil and grease, which led him to believe that if he were not careful with his torch the boards might catch fire. So he called to his Uncle Bob to stand by with a pail of water, in readiness to help.

Then he started to work. Sure enough the oil-soaked boards caught fire and began to smoulder. "Douse her a little", he shouted from the pit. "It's getting warm down here." Uncle Bob got excited and emptied the whole bucketful in one action. Unfortunately, the bucket did not contain water but

was full of clear petrol intended for use in cleaning automobile parts. Boom! The whole pit was filled with a sheet of flame.

By a miracle LeTourneau was not injured. He jumped out of the pit and rushed for a fire-extinguisher. Poor frightened Uncle Bob soon found another, and between them they were able to put out the fire with very little damage done. But it had been a near thing. Various explanations were put out for LeTourneau's miraculous escape. The simplest one was that because the car had a canvas top the explosion had gone upwards and away from the pit instead of blowing down the burning boards upon him. So far as he was concerned he knew that he had been saved by the Lord Jesus, and all his thanks were directed towards Him.

The great thing, however, was that he had received an object lesson about the insufficiency of being sincere which served him for the rest of his life. His Uncle Bob loved him and certainly wished him no harm. On the contrary, his eager action had been due to his desire to be helpful. He did not lack in good intentions, but he showed just how wrong even the most sincere man can be. He sincerely believed that what the bucket contained was water which would put out the fire. But he was wrong. The very thing which was intended to bring salvation from danger actually made the danger much worse.

When he tells this story Mr. LeTourneau says

that he often hears people claiming that God does not mind much what we believe so long as we are sincere. Perhaps you have heard people say the same thing here in England. Perhaps you have thought that it was right and until now have been confident that nothing can harm you so long as you are sincere. When Mr. LeTourneau hears people talking like this he is able to tell them that sincerity is not enough. He should know, for Uncle Bob's sincerity nearly cost him his life. Not that Uncle Bob was more faulty than other people. Any number of men in the same circumstances might well have made the same mistake. So we must not be led astray by thinking that numbers make any differ-

ence. Large numbers of people can be sincere and yet in the end be found to have been wrong.

The important thing to do is to place all our reliance, not on our opinions or feelings, but on certain facts. There can be no doubts about the facts of the Lord Jesus. He is able to deliver us from all danger and to save us from our sins. Mr. LeTourneau proved this for himself and spent his life telling others and seeing the reality of God's power in their lives. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4. 12).

H. F.

MORE PIONEERS OF THE HEAVENLY WAY

Genesis xlv. 5, 7

"God did send me before you to preserve life"
"God sent me before you to preserve . . . a remnant"

IT is clear from this double statement—"God sent me before . . ."—that Joseph was one of God's pioneers of the heavenly way. His history holds some very helpful things in relation to the goings of God. Let us repeat what we have said before in such connections: that we are not engaged with a biography of the people referred to, but only with what they represent in spiritual truths as to God's pursuit of His ultimate end. We must remind ourselves that God's full and final end is comprehended in His Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore the Bible is the book of Jesus Christ throughout. Every part of it has, in some way, to do with that end and object. There are few cases in the Old Testament that more deeply and clearly foreshadow Jesus Christ as God's end than does Joseph.

This is inclusively indicated in the two fragments mentioned above which gather up the whole purpose of his history. We can only understand the life and history of Joseph as we recognize the purpose governing all. When this has been pinpointed we can see without difficulty how he points to Christ. His double statement is that the sovereignty of God in his history had the one inclusive end and object to "preserve life".

The life of an elect people was the all-governing object. That undoubtedly was *the* mission of God's Son, and it is the fundamental factor in the whole Bible.

Having said that, we can note the course by

which that end was pioneered; only pausing to interject that *all* ministries in the choice and appointment of God are related to the one end of Christ.

The story of Joseph is both a very human story and a very Divine story, but with one key to both. That we shall come on presently.

On the human side, if read *only* from the natural standpoint, there are features which may be regarded as quite regrettable. For instance, a father's favouritism for one member of a large family is really an unwise thing. Whatever argument there may be for it, it only engenders jealousies and complications. Joseph was clearly a favourite with his father, and was perhaps—or evidently—singled out for special partiality. Then Joseph had dreams which put him in a special position of superiority over his brothers. It is quite all right to have dreams, but it is of doubtful discretion to tell your family of them if they are of this sort. Quite naturally they could give the impression of arrogance and self-importance. It would therefore be very natural for the family to develop a dislike for such a brother.

You know, Jesus was a special object of His Father's love. He *did* know the destiny bound up with His life. Further, *not in His case* indiscreetly, He told quite frankly to the family of Jacob (the Jews) both those things—His Father's love for Him, and what His destiny would be as *over them*. This was undoubtedly the ostensible and natural reason for their hatred of Him and for what they did to Him.

There are intimations that He was the lone and suspected member of His own family, for it is definitely stated that "His brethren did not believe

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in him". He was therefore a lonely man, discredited in His family and in the world. "Despised and rejected of men." This in His case, as in Joseph's, led on to deep and dark soul-sufferings, malignings, intrigues, mysterious ways of Providence, and apparent forsakenness of God. "The iron entered into his soul," or "His soul entered into the iron". A long period of patient waiting unto God's time for the completion of His God-appointed mission was involved.

The other details of Joseph's history need not be followed out here. We have to retrace our steps to lay hold of the Divine side of it all. The sovereignty of God is unmistakable. "God sent me before." The sovereign foreknowledge in that word "before" is, at last, clear to Joseph when, in the full light of God's deep and hidden ways—"Mysterious Providence"—he declares to his brethren: "Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." What a "But"—"But God!"

"Thy way, O Lord, is in the deep."

Having mentioned the human side and the Divine, we have not told the whole story. There is an element that is neither of these: it is the satanic. This extra factor is one with which all pioneers of the heavenly way have to reckon. The jealousy and hatred of Joseph's brethren *after the flesh*, and that in the case of Jesus, were not just natural. There was something sinister in it. It is not easy for us to understand how Satan knows, but it is clear from

Scripture that he has an uncanny intuitive knowledge of God's intentions, and, more strangely, of those intentions being bound up with the life of elect vessels of ministry related to those intentions. This is *quite* evident—and fully so in the case of the Lord Jesus. From Herod's satanically-inspired murder of the babes with the sole object of destroying One, right on to the Cross this sinister and devilish motivation is evident because he—Satan—knew who that One was, and what His destiny was to be. It was all *so* unnatural, and can only be explained on the ground between the human and the Divine.

So with Joseph. Say what you will as to the human, there was something deeper in his history than men's attitudes and actions. He was marked out in the Divine councils as a pioneer of life, and Satan knew it. Joseph's life from the beginning was dogged by something that was an element of adversity, although beloved of his father.

The ways of any pioneer of heavenly purpose will always have this involvement in difficulties and adversities which are not the lot of ordinary people. As vocation is the principle of election, so the vocation is the cause of all the trouble. A pioneer in the way of God's eternal purpose will know much of "the fellowship of his sufferings"; but the throne and the crown and the glory are in view, for "God meant (and means) it" so.

"BLESSED IS THE MAN . . ."

Message given at the conference in Switzerland in September 1968

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also doth not wither; and whatsoever he doeth he shall prosper" (Psalm i. 1-3).

WE have been hearing how the New Testament is constructed on a spiritual basis rather than on a chronological one, and that is also true of the Old Testament, particularly the books of the Psalms. As we read the Old Testament, and the Psalms, I believe we need to do so from this standpoint. If you have good Bibles you will find that the Psalms are divided into five books, and I think you will

find that these five books of the Psalms correspond to the five books of Moses.

The first book of Moses is Genesis, the book of beginnings, the book of man. Throughout that book we read of God's dealings with man, and the main content is a man; and the first book of Psalms (i-xli) deals with the blessed man. That is what we are now going to consider. But, for your interest, if you read the second book of the Psalms, xlii-lxxiii, you will find that they correspond to the book of Exodus, for they are the Psalms of deliverance. Then what is the next step after deliverance? It is not service, but worship—the sanctuary. "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary" (Psalm lxxvii. 13). That is the book of Leviticus—and you will find a lot about the sanctuary in Psalms lxxiii-lxxxix. Next we have the book of journeyings—the book of Numbers, and if you read that fourth book of

Psalms (xc to cvi) you will find much about wanderings and wilderness experiences. Then, of course, the fifth book of Moses, the book of Deuteronomy, has the land in sight.

We have also seen this week how God's history is bound up in the history of a man, and the Psalms are the reflections of God's dealings with a man, for we will find here almost every experience that we can possibly know. It is said of David that he was a man after God's own heart (Acts xiii. 22), and he was also a man after God's head, for it says: "He shall do all my will." Thus we find in the Psalms the answer to our needs and our problems.

This first Psalm begins with a very important word—"Blessed": "*Blessed* is the man . . ."

WHAT ARE BLESSINGS?

Now what are blessings? We use the word a great deal. We pray for God to bless us, to bless this one and that one, and I think perhaps it is true to say that we have come to Aeschi for a blessing. Now I believe that there are some Christians who consider that God is like a supermarket. All they have to do is to get their baskets and pick a blessing here and a blessing there; they go to the conference section and think that they can just fill their baskets with this kind of blessing.

No, blessings are not like that. We just cannot go round and collect them. These blessings are to be found only in Christ, and we shall find that we shall be blessed only in the measure that we are ourselves truly in Him and really share in a practical way His blessed life. "*Blessed* is the man . . ." Well, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ is the first and the primary blessed Man, and it is the purpose and intention of God to bring us into these blessings of Christ. 'Blessed' is the first word used in the earliest recorded discourse of our Lord Jesus Christ—"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew v. 3). God put Adam in the garden of Eden for a blessing, and the blessings that he lost are only regained in our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why His ministry has so much of this very important word. We want, and we need, a blessing, so that Lord says: "Blessed . . ."

Another translation of this word helps us to understand what it means—"happy". We can talk about the blessed man as a *happy* man. But then I would like to ask another question. What really makes us happy? What is it that really constitutes true, deep happiness? I think it is the word 'satisfied'. We can take this word 'blessed' away and put 'satisfied' in and it would be quite correct.

Now this kind of satisfaction is not a cheap and

easy thing, but is something that goes right, deep down into our very innermost being, because it is deep in the heart of God Himself. It is the very meaning of the Gospel. If you look at I Timothy i. 11 you will read a verse that will alter your whole idea about the Gospel. It is "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God", or "*satisfied* God". Is that not wonderful? That makes a difference to what you mean when you talk about a 'Gospel meeting', when you are supposed to preach some kind of formula which is the answer to people's needs! No, this Gospel that we have been brought into is the gospel of a God who is absolutely satisfied. Why is He satisfied? Because He has found the way by which He can reclaim man and bring Him back to Himself. After He had created Adam He said: 'It is good!' I do not think that God was finally satisfied after creating Adam, but He was certainly satisfied at the coming into the world of the final Adam—"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew iii. 17). And God is satisfied because of those sons who have been brought to glory. That is why He is a blessed God, and the only basis of our true blessing is as we experience that in which God is well pleased; and that depends upon the measure in which the Lord Jesus Christ reigns within us.

THE LOSS OF BLESSEDNESS

Now we find in this first Psalm how the devil tries to rob this blessed man of the enjoyment of his blessings. The first verse, with its three negatives, gives us an idea of how the devil tries to rob us of what God has given us. The blessed man 'walks not in the counsel of the ungodly; he stands not in the way of sinners; he sits not in the seat of the scornful'. There are three nouns and three verbs in that verse, and they are very important. The ungodly: that represents everyone who does not acknowledge God. The sinners: that represents those who actively do evil. The scornful: those who are directly opposed to God. You will notice that there is a decline in these three kinds of persons.

I want to say a word to all young people under eighty, and it is this: It is vitally important what friends you have and what company you keep, if you are the people of God, if you are those who have a completely different nature, and if you are the blessed people, for this is where the devil begins to work.

Notice those three verbs: Walk—Stand—Sit. Again there is a declension. We do not find ourselves immediately sitting amongst those who scorn God. It all begins with a walk. Some years ago in

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Bombay the Lord brought to Himself a remarkable young Hindu. He came from a very staunch Hindu family, and it was wonderful to see his growth in the things of God. Then he began to lose his joy, his blessings. We found that he began to go right away and his life became quite contrary to the life of a Christian. Ultimately he went right back into his Hindu family. How did this happen? He began by 'walking in the counsel of the ungodly'. He started listening to his worldly friends concerning things like marriage, and began to take advice from non-Christian friends. Then one day I looked in his bag and I found some books. They were not very nice books. He was 'standing in the way of sinners'; and I know many young Christians who have lost their blessings through reading the wrong kind of books and magazines. Eventually he found himself in the 'seat of the scornful'. If we had the time to study the story of the Prodigal Son we would find the same kind of thing.

This matter of walking is very important. Our walk reveals our character. Those disciples in John i did not hear the Lord Jesus preaching, for it says: "They looked upon Jesus as he walked, and said, Behold the Lamb of God!" He was identified by His walk. We can disguise ourselves in many ways. We can wear a wig, or we can paint our faces and do a lot of outward things, but we cannot disguise our walk. The blessed man walks in the newness of life, for we shall walk in the light of that new, hidden life. As we know the Lord so we shall walk. When God revealed Himself to Abraham as El Shaddai, the Almighty God, what did He say? 'Go and preach about it!?' 'Go and write a book about it!?' No, He said: 'Walk!'—"Walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Genesis xvii. 1). This walking is a very important part of our Christian life.

THE LAW OF THE LORD

In verse 2 of this Psalm we find something about the positive aspect of this blessed man. It is very simple: "His delight is in the law of the Lord."

Now we delight our bodies in good food. We delight our souls in a variety of ways—in nice music, or beautiful scenery, but our bodies and our souls do not delight in the law of the Lord. We can only delight in the law of the Lord in the inward man. Paul said: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans vii. 22). The natural man never understands and delights in the Word of God. He may read it and say that it is wonderful literature, but he does not delight in it, because "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (I Corinthians ii. 14).

We also find in verse 2 of this Psalm that this blessed man meditates in this law, and not just for a few minutes in the morning and in the evening. It says: "Day and night". He is constantly meditating in the law of the Lord Jehovah.

But wait a minute! What was David's Bible? What was the "law of the Lord" in which David meditated for such a long time? He did not have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, nor did he have the letter to the Ephesians. He had Genesis—well, that is quite interesting. He had Exodus—yes, there are many interesting things there. He had Leviticus—oh, what can you get out of Leviticus? And he had the other two books of Moses.

If we really have the life of the inward man we shall find a tremendous lot in Leviticus, and, young people, please do not skip these books when you read the Bible! If you want to know the real blessedness, you meditate in these books. What is the key, the secret of them? It is the satisfied God! You look for the satisfied God in Leviticus and you will find a tremendous world of richness.

THE EVIDENCE OF BLESSEDNESS

In verse 3 we find the evidence of the blessed man: "He shall be like a tree." To you people living in Switzerland that may not be very wonderful, for you have so many trees around you. The country is just full of them. But to those of us who live in the East a tree is quite a rare thing, and it was certainly a rare thing in the country where David lived. When you fly over India and look down over the barren plain you will suddenly see a little patch which is all green, and there are many trees. If you look more carefully you will see the reason: there will be a river. This tree here is "planted by the streams of water". Here is the centre where the Holy Spirit is working, and certainly our blessedness will depend a lot upon that. Get near the stream and we shall grow.

We read three things about this tree in this verse—about its root, its leaf and its fruit. These are very important things in this blessed life. Without the root and the leaf there will not be fruit, and the Lord has ordained that we shall go forth and bear fruit. The main purpose of a tree is to bear fruit, and this is the evidence of a blessed man. How does he do this? He must draw his life from two sources. There is the hidden life, the roots that go down deep into the dark earth where the streams are. The more I read concerning the Holy Spirit the more I believe that His work is essentially hidden. We do not read that the Holy Spirit is given to us for sensations! That life which feeds on the Holy

Spirit is a hidden life. David said in Psalm li that the Lord wanted "truth in the inward parts", and Peter talks about "the hidden man of the heart" (I Peter iii. 4). It is this hidden life, this life deep down in the dark that is so important to blessedness. If we had time to read Psalm xvii we would understand more of this—you can read that at your leisure!

Not only is there the hidden life, but there is also the outward life, the life that is derived from the leaves. The leaves draw from the sun's rays, and through the process which is known as 'photosynthesis' they minister life to the tree—and we need this corporate life. You notice that it says: "We all with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord", and then the photosynthesis—the spiritual synthesis—goes on.

Now it is most important that we see that we maintain in balance the hidden life and the corporate life if we are going to bear fruit, and you notice that it is 'fruit in season'. That does not mean that you have only to bear spiritual fruit once a year. Please do not think that! I think it means timeliness. There is a verse in Proverbs xxv which says: "A word in due season is like apples of gold" (verse 11, margin). The timely word, the timely act, the timely bearing of spiritual fruit are the things which bring blessedness.

And then we find, concerning this man, that "whatsoever he doeth *he* shall prosper" (margin). Not '*it* shall prosper', but "*he* shall prosper". Sometimes people think that they only have to do all these things and then go to business, and the business will prosper. God is not interested in our business prospering, but He is interested in *us* prospering.

This immediately takes us to another man in whom God's history is bound up—and I wish we had another hour to study the life of Joseph together. Dear old Jacob, when he gathered his sons

together at the end, did not have very much to say about Judah and the others, but he said this about Joseph:

"Joseph is a fruitful bough. . . . His branches run over the wall" (Genesis xlix. 22).

(Next to the house where I am now living the neighbour has a very nice apple tree and it comes over the wall—and there are more apples on my side than on his! Well, they are blessings indeed!)

Jacob goes on to say: "The Almighty, who shall bless thee, with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that coucheth beneath . . ." (verse 25). There are many more blessings there if you will read that passage. Joseph was a man who was prospered of God. Whatever people did to Joseph, he prospered. We find that in Genesis xxxix: If his brothers put him into a pit, he prospered, and if he was made a servant in Potiphar's house, he prospered—and if you want an illustration of not walking in the ways of the ungodly and sitting in the seat of the scornful, you read Joseph's history in Potiphar's house! You will understand why he prospered! They put him in prison, and even there he prospered.

Now this is the character of the blessed man. It does not matter where you put him, for he will spring up with spiritual prosperity—blessedness. If we had time to study it we would understand that Joseph's life was one that was alienated from his brothers. It was a life that was contrary to a lot of the natural things around him, and it was a life of suffering—and there are blessings to come from the sufferings of Christ. It may be that some of the truest blessings that the Lord will ever give us are those that come through suffering and limitation, but when they are the blessings of the hidden man, the blessings of the satisfied God, we shall go right through and bear fruit, and our blessings will be shared by many.

W. E. T.

"YE ARE MY FRIENDS"

AMONG the various titles by which Christians were called in the New Testament surely the most wonderful is that given by the Lord Jesus—"Ye are my friends":

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you. No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends: for all things that I heard from my Father

I have made known unto you. Ye did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide" (John xv. 13-16).

It is indeed a very wonderful and beautiful thing that the Son of God called such as the disciples were, and such as we are, His friends. I do not think there is a greater or more beautiful word in all our language than that word 'friend'. It is the most intimate title in all human relationships. Every other

relationship that we can think of may exist without this. Perhaps we think that the marriage relationship is the most intimate, but it is possible for that relationship to exist without friendship. Happy indeed is the man whose wife is his friend, and happy is the wife whose husband is her friend. It is a very close relationship between children and parents and parents and children, but it is a great thing when the father can call his son his friend, and when he can say, not 'my son', but 'my friend'. And, again, it is a great thing when a child can say, not only 'my father', but 'my friend': 'my father is my friend'—'my mother is my friend'. It is something extra in relationship. We may admire a person and have a lot of association with them: we may think that we know them and could say: 'Well, I *know* so-and-so very well', but, even so, there may not be friendship. Friendship is always just that bit extra.

When Jesus said: "Ye are my friends", He was going beyond 'Ye are My disciples' and 'Ye are My followers'. He could have called them by many other names, but when He said: "Ye are my friends" He went beyond anything else. And I think that the Lord Jesus found the most complete satisfaction of His heart in this word. To say "Ye are my friends" was as far as anybody could possibly go. Really, there is nothing beyond it. You reach the end of all relationships when you really come to friendship. How rich and how precious, then, is this title!

In the picture of the new Jerusalem which we have at the end of the Bible it says: "The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones" (Revelation xxi. 19). The foundation of that city was that which was most precious, and I think the most precious foundation of life is friendship. The new Jerusalem itself will be built upon the foundation of the friendship between the Lord Jesus and His own.

Well, that is just a little about friendship. But what is the nature of friendship? We have it here in John xv: "No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you." Friendship is that position which makes it possible to open the heart fully, to keep nothing back; and to have such confidence that you can trust the other person with all that is in your heart. Jesus said: "All that the Father has shown Me I have shown you. I have kept nothing back from you. I have put perfect confidence in you. I have had no suspicions of you and have not been afraid to say just what was in My heart."

You know, that is very wonderful. Go back

again in this Gospel by John and in chapter two you will find: "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, during the feast, many believed on his name, beholding his signs which he did. But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man" (John ii. 23-25).

Jesus knew all men, and because of that He did not commit Himself to them . . . "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus" (John iii. 1), and what follows shows that Jesus knew Nicodemus and He did not commit Himself to him. Nicodemus was not in the position of a friend, at least, not at this time. How much he was before the end we do not know. He did act like a friend in the burial of Jesus, for something had happened to him by that time. But at this time he was amongst those men to whom Jesus did not commit Himself. He simply said, in effect: 'Before I can commit Myself to you you must be born again.'

That is the beginning of this friendship. Yes, Jesus has told us that the real nature of friendship is that He can just commit Himself to His friends. He said many things to other people, but He did not put Himself into their hands. And that is all the difference. You may have a lot of fellowship, say a lot of things, and they may be quite true things, but that is not putting yourself into the *hands* of those people. There is all the difference between conversation and fellowship *and* committal. Friendship means that you have committed yourselves to one another—you have really put yourself into the hands of the other person. That is what Jesus said friendship means: "All things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you." 'I have had no reserves where you are concerned.'

I am sure you are feeling that this is a very wonderful thing and are wondering more and more at it as we go on. Just think that the Son of God should do that—that He should be willing to commit Himself to some people!

And these were not empty words. He went on to show that He would prove His friendship. What is the proof of friendship? Well, of course, it is firstly, as we have said, committing yourself to the other.

But then Jesus said this: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That is the proof of friendship. How much are you prepared to sacrifice, to suffer and to put up with? "A man lay down his life for his friends." Now, of course, you are thinking of one thing—of dying in some way for your friends. But there are a thousand ways of laying down your life for your friends. It is a matter of laying down *our* lives all

the time—not just some big act of dying for our friends, but every day laying down our lives, letting something of ourselves go, letting some personal interest go and just saying: ‘That does not matter—it is for my friend. That is not so important—it is for my friend.’ Friendship makes everything else unimportant. If there is real friendship we do not stay to say: ‘Well, now, must I do that? Am I really obliged to do that? Can I not get out of it in some way? Really, is there any harm in my doing this?’

You know, that is the attitude of a lot of Christians. ‘Why may I not do this? Is there any harm in it? A lot of other people do it so why should I not do it? I even know Christians who do it. Must I really not do this?’ Supposing Jesus had taken that attitude! No, friendship puts all that kind of thing away and never talks about ‘Must I?’ ‘Is there no other way?’ This is a laying down of the life for a friend.

So I say that there are many ways of laying down our life. What is laying down our life? It is just holding that nothing is too valuable or important to be kept from our friend. It does not matter what it costs, or how painful it is—friendship makes it possible.

We have the great illustration in the Bible. There is only one man in all the Bible who was called God’s friend: “Abraham . . . the friend of God” (James ii. 23). What a wonderful thing to be said of any man—“Abraham, my friend”, said God (Isaiah xli. 8). It is God speaking about a man, and He is saying “My friend”! How could God call Abraham His friend? What made Abraham a friend of God? “Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest . . . and offer him” (Genesis xxii. 2). What did Abraham say? ‘You have asked too much. Isaac is too precious. He is everything to me. Oh, no, I cannot offer him!’? No, Abraham did not talk like that. I think it is most wonderful when it says: “And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he clave the wood for the burnt offering” (Genesis xxii. 3). I venture to suggest to you that if you were faced with that you would not get up early that morning! You would be staying in bed just as long as you could and putting it off as long as possible. But it says: “Abraham rose *early in the morning*.” What was he about to do? He was about to enter right into the heart of God in giving his only begotten son, and enter right into fellowship with the passion of God’s heart. “God so loved . . . that He gave His only begotten Son.” It was because of that that Abraham was God’s friend. He had entered right

into the heart of God and counted nothing too precious for the friendship of God.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”; and in offering Isaac Abraham indeed laid down his life. “Abraham, my friend.” That is the nature of friendship. And Jesus proved His friendship. This is the proof—that He has laid down His life.

Then we go on to ask another question: What is the basis of this friendship? Jesus knew what was going to happen in the near future, for it was getting very near to the day when they would all forsake Him; and yet, knowing all that, He said: “Ye are my friends.” There must be some basis which is more than just this present time. Jesus was looking beyond the Cross, and He was seeing that the day would come when these men would stand strongly on the ground of the Cross. We now have the full story. Oh, yes, not so long after this they were letting everything in this world go for Him. The Cross had truly entered into their hearts. The spirit of the Cross had truly taken possession of them and they were standing firmly upon that ground. And Jesus knew that that was how it would be. He knew what was going to happen in the next few days, but He was always speaking to them about *afterward*, that human failure was not the last thing and was not going to be the end of everything. To that poor, failing Peter He said this: “And do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren” (Luke xxii. 32). ‘You are going to have a terrible fall, but that is not going to be the end. You will turn again and you will have a great ministry afterward.’

Jesus was always looking beyond the Cross, and He saw that these men would stand upon the ground of the Cross. The Cross means that you do not hold anything for yourself, but only for your friend, and that was true of these men.

But Jesus also saw something else. He knew that before long they would receive the Holy Spirit and that they would be governed by Him. And when the Holy Spirit really takes possession you can be trusted. These men could not be trusted without the Holy Spirit, but when He came in, then you could depend upon them. They would not be governed by personal interests, nor would they have any fleshly considerations, but they would live by the Spirit and not by the flesh. And Jesus said: ‘On that ground ye are My friends, and that day is as though it is now. Ye are My friends because I know that you men are going to stand on the ground of the Cross and are going to be led by the Holy Spirit.’

You see, that is the basis of friendship. If we live on our own natural ground then the Lord will

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

never be able to depend upon us, but if the Cross has done its deep work in our hearts, and if we are really governed by the Holy Spirit, the Lord has all the ground that He requires to commit Himself to us, all that is necessary for Him to say: "Ye are my friends."

I think there was one thing that the Lord Jesus knew about eleven of these men. Yes, they were men of many weaknesses and many failures. They often said the wrong thing and often did the wrong thing, but Jesus knew that He had their hearts. In spite of everything He had captured their hearts. They had a heart for Him. They may have made mistakes, and He knew all about that, but He knew that they had given Him their hearts. They had a heart for the Lord, and that is the basis of His friendship. He is saying: 'Have I really got *all* your heart? I know all about your weaknesses and your failures, but, really, is your *whole* heart over on my side?'

Judas never gave his heart to the Lord. He had a heart for himself and for worldly gain. Jesus could never say to him: 'You are My friend', but He called him "the son of perdition" (John xvii. 12). But with these eleven He was quite sure where their hearts were. He even saw what would happen when He was on trial and crucified, but He told them what to do and where to meet Him *after* that. He knew that they would come through because they had a heart for Him. You have only to look at these people when Jesus had been crucified and was in the grave. How sad they were! It is as though they had lost everything in life, and they *had* lost everything, simply because they had given their whole hearts to the Lord Jesus. That is the basis of His friendship.

It is in these things, then, that the Lord is able to trust us and commit Himself to us. This is the relationship that the Lord Jesus wants more than anything else. The breakdown in friendship is so often because of some natural interest arising, some question of how it is going to affect us rather than how it is going to affect Him.

This is something very challenging to our hearts, and it is a lesson that all of us have to learn. I have to learn it, and am trying to do so. You have to learn it—that the greatest thing in all life is how our behaviour affects the Lord Jesus; how our appearance before the world affects the Lord Jesus; how differences between us affect the Lord Jesus. Yes, everything, how it affects the Lord Jesus. You know, that is the very essence of friendship. True friendship is always governed by this: 'I would do nothing to hurt my friend. That is the last thing that ever I want to do!', and Jesus wants to put our

lives upon that basis. He will never do anything to hurt us, but how much we hurt Him! We must bring everything to the judgment bar of friendship.

The greatest characteristic of friendship is loyalty. I do not think there is a greater or grander virtue than loyalty. You may not always understand your best friend; he or she may sometimes do things that you cannot understand, things about which you do not feel very happy at the moment, but if it is friendship you are loyal to your friend, whether you understand him or not. You will not betray your friend or talk about him to his detriment, nor do anything that would injure him. You will always be loyal. Faithfulness is the heart of friendship and that is the attitude of the Lord Jesus.

But the Lord wants to put His disciples on the same basis. He wants this spirit and nature of friendship to exist between His own. He wants them to have the same spirit as is in Himself and to be friends of one another. We may say: 'Yes, he or she is my fellow-Christian.' As Christians we may speak of one another as our brothers and sisters, but I have said there is something more than that, more than fellow-Christians, more than brothers and sisters. I suppose I must not put it in the Christian realm and say more than fathers and mothers, but the meaning is the same. There is just that something extra—'He is more than my brother, he is my friend.' 'She is more than my sister, she is my friend.' Oh, that the Lord might be able to get that kind of relationship!

May He write this word deeply in our hearts and send us back to the places where we are going with a heart wholly for Him! Nothing held back, but a complete committal to Him, that He has us altogether, and by His grace we will never do anything that will hurt Him. We will always ask the question about everything: 'How will this affect my Lord?' You see, friendship has two sides. It is not one-sided. It is not friendship when I do all the friendliness and you do not do any. No, it has two sides. We must be to Him what He is to us, and we must be to one another what He is to us.

Now this is going to be a very difficult thing, but remember the Cross and the Holy Spirit. They are the two great powers which make this possible. The Cross is not only the crucifixion of Christ many years ago: it is a mighty power in life every day. The Holy Spirit is not somebody who came at Pentecost many years ago. He is here today and can be in us, and if He really has the control of our lives the one thing which will concern us most is: 'How does my life affect the Lord Jesus?'

Take that message away with you, and seek to live by it in all the days before us.

CHRIST OUR ALL (III)

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 no 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 Stephanus 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" (iv. 8) and who "seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ" (ii. 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" (iii. 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 utterance 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" (iii. 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."

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FROM THE EDITOR

OUR last issue of the paper was in the press before we could give fuller information regarding the change of premises, and we had to be content with inserting a slip. We sought your prayers very earnestly on this matter because it involved so much of concern for the right place, and quite a heavy piece of work. The Lord very graciously answered prayer. Every attempt that we made to get new premises was thwarted by the authorities because we are in a residential area. We did have the question as to whether we should move right out of the London area, but there seemed to be no seal of God on this. Eventually, in a very quiet way (just like the Lord) we were reminded that accommodation existed outside the ‘Fellowship Centre’, at the back. A large hut, where years ago the literature was dispatched, still stood empty, and a ‘workshop’ of considerable size was also available. The use of these places is not outside of the law, and so willing hands got to work clearing, cleaning and painting. We have been able to secure a small and comfortable house nearby for the residence of Miss Guy and Miss Read. This all has one particular advantage: for these recent years the element of uncertainty and tentativeness has kept us in suspense, but now there is a sense of

release from this, and we are hoping that concentration will result.

What the Lord means in the larger realm of the ministry we do not know, but this will become clear as we go on. Just now the year seems to be filling up with many calls for wider ministry, and your prayers are much needed if all these are of the Lord.

It is never very difficult to surrender to the *seeming* hopelessness of the situation in Christianity. Indeed, it is a constant battle to believe that there can really be at the end a true expression of the Church as it is revealed in God’s Word, especially when we have seen more clearly and fully what the Divine mind is as to the Church. It is impossible to describe the real state of things, not only in general, but in the churches themselves. If one were asked to put a finger on the point upon which most of the trouble turns, I think that I should say with considerable emphasis: the absence of real spiritual discernment. In such a large degree the Lord’s people do not see! Leaders, and those responsible, do so many foolish and unwise things, constantly making for fresh complications and creating situations which will sooner or later mean confusion and regret. It was because of this that the Apostle fell

on his knees and prayed that "a Spirit of wisdom and revelation" might be given to believers and the Church. Impulse, reason, human judgment, sentiment, and the ways of the world so much govern decisions, choices and procedure, and often, because of disappointment and spiritual death, there is a leaping to an apparent alternative which seems to promise better things, but after a time proves to be an illusion and a mirage. That prayer of the Apostle should be taken up in desperate earnestness, as confusing spirits are so desperately in earnest to deceive and confuse. Ask the Lord to raise up ministries for eye-opening, and ministers whose eyes have seen! But, let there be no mistake about such ministry. Spiritual enlightenment is *the one thing*

that Satan is most positively and vehemently opposed to. He will do anything to prevent this, or discredit it. Because of this the Apostle so much appealed for prayer that "utterance might be given" him, and "a door might be opened to speak the mystery". It was for this that he said that he was "an ambassador in bonds". *Such ministry costs everything!* The battle is against letting something go, lowering the standard, and compromising in order to obtain *wider* acceptance. The Lord keep us faithful to "the whole counsel"!

We thank you again for your co-operation, and for the many letters of appreciation and encouragement.

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS

THE CHURCH—ITS NATURE, PRINCIPLES AND VOCATION

3. THE CHURCH—THE ANOINTED VESSEL

IN the Scriptures there are many ways in which the Holy Spirit's work is spoken of. There is the 'receiving'; the 'filling'; the 'baptizing'; the 'enduing'; the 'gifting'. It is not our purpose to consider the meaning of this variety of expressions, but to dwell upon one other, namely, the anointing. The anointing throughout both Old and New Testaments is shown to be both general and particular; comprehensive and specific.

The first thing about the general aspect of the anointing is that, because it is the Spirit of God who is the anointing Spirit, the anointing is God joining and uniting, and committing Himself to whatever or whoever is anointed. It means that whenever and wherever the anointing rests there God has to be reckoned with. To touch that is to touch God. To obtain a real knowledge of this truth and fact we have only to read those parts of the Book of Numbers which deal with the Levites, the Tabernacle and the vessels thereof. Life and death were bound up with all these as anointed because thereby God was bound up with them. In the New Testament this comprehensive aspect is first related to Christ and then to the Church.

The very word or name 'Christ' means Anointed. "Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed . . ." (Acts x. 38). To Him God was committed. To touch Him was to touch God, as history has proved. In the end everyone is going to be judged and their destiny fixed according to their attitude and decision regarding Jesus Christ. What a tremendous

amount of detail is comprehended by this inclusive truth!

When we pass to the Church we find that, according to the New Testament

THE CHURCH IS THE ANOINTED VESSEL

On the Day of Pentecost a company of over five hundred men and women were constituted the Church of God by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. That company came under the anointed leadership of the exalted Lord Jesus, for *inclusive* anointing was always upon the head. From that time the Church carried into the world the implication of God: and rulers, empires, and peoples had to reckon with God in the Church. All that was true of Christ as the Anointed passed from Him as Head down to the Church, His Body. It was not what the people were, or are, in themselves, but because of the anointing, although anointed people are such because they do not stand on their own ground, but on the ground of Christ.

It is taken for granted in the New Testament that truly born from above, baptized believers have the anointing, and surprise is expressed if the evidence is not present (see Acts xix. 2, 3—R.V.). Place alongside of this reference II Corinthians i. 21, etc. The very place of believers as "in Christ" places them under His anointing, or in Him, as the anointed One.

But while the Holy Spirit is comprehensive and

many-sided in meaning, the *anointing* is everywhere in the Bible the term which has the particular meaning of position and function, office and purpose. Satan (Lucifer) in his unfallen position is said to have been the "anointed cherub that covereth" (Ezekiel xxviii. 14). It was evidently a particular position and function. So, prophets, priests and kings were anointed for their position and their vocation. In the same way the Tabernacle and all its vessels and instruments were anointed to fulfil a particular purpose, and nothing could have a place or fulfil Divine purpose without the anointing. Everything and everyone had to be anointed for *a specific* use and purpose, and no instrument could either choose its own function and position, or do the work of another. All this was God's law of efficiency, effectiveness, harmony and blessing. Life and death were bound up with this principle.

The anointing has always been within the Divine sovereignty, and *never* in the choice, power, or hands of men. It is a very serious thing to either get or be put into a position for which God has not acted by the anointing.

When we come into the New Testament this law of the anointing is very clearly recognizable as to both Christ and the Church. First the sovereign *act*, then the *many* and *various* functions. Both in the major appointments, such as Apostles and Prophets, which mainly relate to the Church universal, and in the particular functions in the local expression of the Church, the New Testament is very clear. The Holy Spirit is seen to be the custodian of the gifts, functions, appointments, and enduements in the churches. It is *God's* order; to overlook, to ignore, to violate, to exceed this law is to mean an affront to the Holy Spirit. This will result in confusion, limitation, and divisions. Where men have put their hand upon a work of God the subsequent history has invariably been twofold: divisions and the relegating of such men to a place where discredit rests upon them, and their place of full usefulness has been lost. On the other hand, there is a no more heartening and inspiring truth revealed in the Scriptures than that,

by the anointing *every* member of Christ has a particular function and value. The anointing is different from natural ability and qualification. The *least* gifted naturally is not thereby disqualified from Divine usefulness; and the most gifted or qualified naturally has no advantage here. The anointing is unique. Just put together II Corinthians i. 21 and I Corinthians i. 26-30, and all of I Corinthians ii.

In the Tabernacle of Israel there were great vessels under the anointing, and there were such humble instruments as the snuffers, but even the latter were anointed. Now, be careful! It was *anointed* snuffers. There are plenty of people who take on themselves the function of snuffing. They will snuff *anything*, and snuff *out* anything. The snuffers of the Tabernacle were not for reducing or extinguishing the light of the testimony, but for keeping it fresh and from making an unpleasant atmosphere. It needs the anointing for such a ministry.

There is another thing that we must always remember, and it is that *every* vessel, function, and place derives its value from its relatedness to all the others. Indeed, no one vessel, however important, has either meaning or anointing apart from all the others. The anointing is *one*, although in a variety of operations. The lamps demand the snuffers, and the snuffers are absurd without the lamps.

All that we have here said is only an indication and pointer to a very large and important realm of Divine truth; many volumes would be required to exhaust and expound it all. But surely, if this be God's truth, it is enough to—at least—indicate

(1) the real nature of the Church, churches, and their function;

(2) why there is so much weakness and confusion, and loss of Divine impact;

(3) why the enemy is so concerned to counterfeit the Holy Spirit and thereby defeat the anointing of which he was once deprived. This latter will be a particular characteristic of the last times. That is why, in the Scriptures, the anointing had such a close and vital place with warfare. Think on that!

THE TESTIMONY OF THE BLOOD

"And the Lord said to the serpent . . . I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: He shall bruise thy head . . ." (Genesis iii. 15).

". . . the old serpent . . . 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" (Revelation xii. 9, 11).

THE Testimony of Jesus is first mentioned in the Scripture by the Lord Himself in the above words (Genesis iii. 15). It is all gathered up in that one clause: "He shall bruise thy head." The two things combine in that clause: "He", the Person, and "shall bruise thy head", the work; and that with a certain special significance: "thy head", which is 'thy dominion, thy government, thy sovereignty, thy crown'. Then we have the Cross introduced immediately as the scene and centre of the establishing fully and finally in Him of this Testimony, the central element of the Cross being the Blood of the Lord Jesus. The Blood; that is the central factor in the Testimony of Jesus—the Blood of the Lord Jesus. I want to remind you of the inclusiveness of the Blood of the Lord Jesus, that in the first place it has to do with sin. It is immediately related in that passage in Genesis to what had taken place and to what had entered into the world. Sin, and sin in all its aspects; sin as transgression, overstepping the mark; sin as lawlessness, revolt against God; sin as shortcoming, coming short of the Glory of God; sin in every form in every way. The Blood of the Lord Jesus has to do with sin in the meeting of it, the destroying of it, and ultimately in the wiping of it from the universe. The Blood of Jesus Christ is directed against sin.

Then, in the second place, it is related to all that is meant by that symbolic word: "the flesh". And the flesh here does not mean merely the principle of sin, but it means the kind of person man is when he has fallen into sin. That is the fallen race, the species which came into existence when sin entered in—an entirely different type of being from that intended by God—"He is become flesh" (Genesis vi. 3). The Blood of Jesus Christ has to do, not only with the sin as the principle and the law of the fallen race, but with the race itself; not only to wipe sin from the universe, but to wipe that race from the universe; to put away that kind and type of man and make possible and secure a new creation, a man, not after the flesh type, but the Man after the Spirit type, such as Christ in resurrection.

The Blood, in the third place, is related to the consequences immediately following upon sin and the race becoming what it did when sin entered. That is death. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." "And," says the Spirit through Paul, "as by one man's disobedience . . . death passed upon all for that all have sinned," and death is the universal and immediate consequence upon sin and the sentence concerning the race. Death in all its range and depth; death in every realm, spirit,

soul and body. The Blood testifies concerning death and has a work to do in that realm.

Then, in the fourth place, the Blood of Jesus Christ not only deals with the consequence and the fruit, but with the cause and the root, and Satan himself is involved in this mighty issue in the Blood of Jesus Christ. He is taken up in the Testimony of Jesus, and taken up in two capacities:

Firstly, he is taken up as "the prince of this world"—"The prince of this world cometh"; "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out."

Secondly, to Satan as "him that had the power of death, that is the devil". It is not only the death, but him that had the power of death, and the word "power" there is neither the familiar word: "dunamis"—force, nor: "exousia"—authority, but it is the other word: "kratos", which means 'to hold'. It is the grip of death; the one who holds in his hands death; the one who has the hold of death; and in that connection the Blood speaks concerning him, that through death—and the Lord Jesus getting for a moment into the hold, the grip of death—He should destroy him that had the hold of death, that is the devil.

So the Blood deals with him in both those capacities. That is the Testimony of Jesus as in the Blood of the Lord Jesus.

THE ISSUE IS THAT OF LIFE AND DEATH

Now we see that the main issue in the Testimony of Jesus, in and through and by His Blood, is the issue of life and death, or death and life. That is the main issue. Oh, do follow me closely, for you will see in a moment some of the great content of this thing. The main issue in the Testimony of Jesus as by the Blood of Jesus is the issue of LIFE AND DEATH. If the Lord's people recognized that enough, they would have their ground set and fixed, they would know exactly what their business is in the world, and they would have a full explanation of all that which they meet in the spiritual realm when they become related to the Testimony of Jesus. It is THE ISSUE OF LIFE AND DEATH. It is not only of sin and sanctification, and it is not only the issue of an old man and a new man, but in all that, and over all that, and around all that is the far bigger issue, the issue of life and death. And until this main issue is recognized the whole question of sin, and of the new man, and the new race, and the bringing in of the new creation, and of the escape of men and women from the power of Satan unto God could never be. You will be held up until you recognize the main issue. Where does the whole question of sanctification begin? Where does the whole question

of a new creation begin? Where does the whole question of the emancipation of souls from the grip of Satan begin? It all begins at the place where the power of death is met. It is not sins with which you and I are contending, nor merely with the old creation. We can be locked up and bound and tied by the absorption and obsession with our old man and never get anywhere. We can be locked up and tied hand and foot with all kinds of truth and teaching about sanctification, the question of sins or sin specifically, and get nowhere because we are not recognizing the main issue. The main issue is death, the power of death, and we have got to come to that central issue of the Blood of the Lord Jesus—the question of life and death. That is the Cross at its heart. Unless the Lord had settled that issue once and for all in His Blood in the Cross, then all other matters would have failed entirely and there would have been no complete Gospel.

Then, that being the Cross and the content of the Cross, we see what the Testimony of Jesus is in essence. It is the Testimony to life, making possible a new creation. That Testimony, when it really is recognized at its centre, is a Testimony concerning life which is brought into being upon the basis of death being destroyed, death having its power broken, and him that had the power of death being nullified. When that Testimony comes into being, and it is recognized, and anyone enters into that Testimony and makes that their testimony, what happens? Immediately the murderer is brought out.

THE ENEMY OF LIFE COMES OUT

He who, as the Lord Himself said, was a “murderer from the beginning”, always has acted in that capacity towards any who were called into the Testimony of Jesus, whether in the Old Testament or in the New.

Abel was the first to take up the Testimony in history. What was Abel’s testimony? The Blood! Whether Abel understood all the content of that symbolic thing or not is not our concern for the moment, but God understood what it meant. He had established it, and it was His way through all history. That fragment in the Hebrew Letter has governed all sacrifice in the mind of God: “without shedding of blood there is no remission.” The Blood was the key from the first movement of sin in this world in the mind of God, and Abel himself stepped into that Testimony of the Blood with all its significance concerning sin, death, the race, and him that had the power of death—and immediately the murderer came out and Abel was murdered, not by Cain, but *through* Cain; and so it has always

been! When later Abram set up his altar and divided his sacrifice, the conflict commenced. You read about it in Genesis xv. The vultures descending, the beating off until the sun went down, the horror of great darkness—and then the coming through of the Lord. What is it linked with? It is linked with the revelation of the Lamb and the Blood of the Lamb by which his seed, after four hundred years in Egyptian bondage, was going to be emancipated. The Lord gave him the revelation of His method in the earth. What was that for? To get a people who should be *in* the nations *apart from* the nations, for the Testimony of Jehovah. Israel was to be God’s corporate testimony in the earth, amongst the nations, and be constituted and sustained upon a principle of blood, the shed Blood. And when the Lord would come forth to reveal the nature of the Testimony in the earth as corporate in His people, Abram meets the impact of the horror of great darkness, and there is set up in the very atmosphere a state of conflict. You carry it on in the case of Moses himself: the conflict in Egypt, and the continual conflict through his life.

This is the explanation of the attack upon Elijah, when he had erected his altar and stood for the maintenance of the Testimony of the Lord in Israel. When he stood on Carmel for that Testimony by his altar, and that Testimony had been established and vindicated against the false prophets, nay, against all that produced the false prophets and their system—the power behind—THEN JEZEBEL THREATENS HIS LIFE. Satan anticipated Moses by the slaughter of all the innocents to get *one*, as he anticipated Calvary in the Lord Jesus by the slaughter of the innocents to get *One*. And here, in the case of Elijah, because he is standing for the Testimony in Israel, the best and most suited instrument to Satan, Jezebel, is taken up, and Elijah’s life is threatened. This is the key to all those murderous attempts in the Old Testament upon individuals and upon companies of the Lord’s people. It is the explanation of the Book of Esther, when Haman would have all the Jews massacred. Why? Because they were God’s instruments in the earth. The devil is against the Testimony in that people; they are the target because they are the testimony. Stand in this true Testimony of the Lord Jesus, *in the power of the Holy Ghost* and not in the theory of the thing; stand in it truly, and as sure as anything is certain the enemy of life will come out, and that is the explanation of all your experience in the work of God, and in your own personal life, in body, mind and spirit. I am saying one of the most tremendous

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and solemn, and yet one of the truest things when I say this.

THE TESTIMONY OF LIFE TRIUMPHANT OVER DEATH

Now we take up the whole thing when we take up a part, because there is no part. You are in it or you are out of it, and you cannot have a bit of it. Immediately, by faith and in the Holy Spirit, you become really, vitally related to the Testimony of Jesus, you are in that great issue, that supreme issue of the Blood—the conflict between life and death, death and life. You are in it, and in that realm there is only one thing, and that is

THE WARRING FAITH OF THE SON OF GOD

There can be no passivity nor generalities in that realm. You cannot afford to take recreation in that realm. The praying has to be fighting prayer, and, oh, there is need for a revival of fighting prayer! The ceasing to say prayers, pray prayers, to take these jaunts in prayer all over the place, and come right to the mighty issues and battle through in the Name of the Lord. There needs to come more

real fighting prayer into the Lord's people. You ask the Lord to give you the warring faith of the Son of God in prayer! It means that there has to be a very strong stand taken in that warring faith, and a refusal to be diverted by circumstances and appearances. Is the Testimony to you something which, if it were taken away and you have nothing left, *you* go with it, or is it something you have taken on and that you can change as you change your clothes? Will you be stripped of everything if that Testimony of the Lord Jesus is taken from you? If it is like that, you will say: 'Well, there is one thing which for me is a matter of life or death, and that is the Testimony in which I stand, the Testimony of the Lord Jesus.'

"And they overcame him because of the Blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death." Does that sound like a contradiction? "Unto the death." Abel was killed. But "they" are not dead, and Abel is not dead. Paul, like Jesus, was slain. But they live in "the power of an endless life" because Jesus has conquered death and "him that had the hold on death". By His Cross and by His Blood He conquered!

THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD'S NAME

THERE are certain truths and concepts which dominate the whole Bible, and which are gathered into a single word. They are like a bunch of keys which, if you possess them, unlock the entire revelation of the mind of God. The most inclusive of these is the word 'Name' as relating to God. You have only to look at the pages of a concordance where the word occurs and you will feel overwhelmed by the number of occurrences in every book. And not just the number of occurrences, but the immense associations and connections of the Name. I wonder how many books would be needed to write something on all these statements about *the* Name! Here is indeed a theme that would keep preachers going for years! It is not only the titles of the Lord; that is wonderful enough; but it is what is meant by *the* Name of the Lord. We can do no more than approach it; never exhaust it.

WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE LORD?

I. The Name of the Lord is the full content of His character. It is what He is by nature and constitution.

This has always been an idea in naming. Sometimes it is prophetic. The Lord led to the giving of a name because the named would be what the name meant or implied. The Bible has much on that line, both as to people and places. Sometimes He changed names with the implication of a changed nature. Without giving a specific designation, such as Jehovah, El Shaddai, etc., on numerous occasions it is just: "The name of the Lord", "My name", "My great name", "My holy name", and so on, meaning just what and who God is.

Allied to this concept God is shown to be exceedingly jealous for His Name. Indeed, the great things which God is on record as having done for or against those concerned are said to have been acts of jealousy for His Name. The effectual ground of appeal to God for intervention and help has been that of His Name, His very character. God *must* be true to His character. To 'take the Name of the Lord in vain' is to use it out of harmony with His character. God has a reputation and He cannot allow that reputation to be injured. He called a people out of the nations for His Name, which meant showing forth what God is like. When that people, in character and conduct,

violated the principle of the Name, He flung them from Him and no more called them "My people".

This was the one and sole burden of the Prophets. They were raised up and anointed for the sole purpose of dealing with what was contrary to the Name—the character of God. The Name of the Lord is a solemn and glorious trust; a trust to be guarded and honoured. But we must remember that it is not only the *title* of a Person, but the very character of the Person, which is to be guarded as a most sacred deposit or entrustment!

This is the clue to Jesus Christ. Note His jealousy over His Father's Name! Note how that affected His own walk in this world. He came in and for His Father's Name, reputation, honour, glory and rights. His life and His work had His Father's vindication as all-governing. God has taken two thousand years to answer the discrediting of His Name as embodied in His Son. Israel has been, and is, God's terrible example of God's jealousy over this fact: that Jesus Christ bore, lived, died and wrought for the Name of God. He was a revelation of what God is like and *they slew Him!* This is a clue to Christianity. Christians are said to be "baptized into His Name", and to have His Name called upon them. (Matthew xxviii. 19. James ii. 7.) Hence, God is jealous over those who *truly* bear His Name. To touch them is to touch Him!

But this is a trust and it should be an incentive to life and conduct worthy of Him. It should be the motive in our attitude toward *any* situation which involves His honour. A proof of this principle of the Christian life is that *any true* Christian cannot hurt the Lord's Name and character without the Holy Spirit giving a sense of grief. The Holy Spirit is the present custodian of the Lord's Name and honour, and He is *very* sensitive to His trust. A mark of spiritual maturity is an increasing sensitiveness to the pleasure or displeasure of the Lord; just as a mark of immaturity is that things contrary to the Lord—in speech, act, conduct, dress, appearance, discourtesy, vulgarity, rudeness, etc.—can be indulged in and repeated without that inward sense of shame. To bear the Name of the Lord means a jealousy on our part for the honour of the Lord, and "They that honour me, I will honour, saith the Lord". As Christians who carry the Name of the Lord, to be true to that Name we ought to be progressively taking on the character of the Lord. Paul said: "And they glorified God in me." The Name, therefore, is a challenge to character.

It must be ever remembered that the one greatest object of the great adversary is to dishonour the

Lord's Name, and this brings the Lord's people into the great battle of the ages.

Both the individual Christian and the Christian Church are the trustees of the Lord's Name. What a lot of history of suffering and adversity is associated with this truth! It explains a whole mass of the troubles which the assemblies experience. If Christians were more awake to what is involved in their troubles—individually and collectively—how much more would their jealousy for the Lord's honour make them act and react differently! Their motive would be: "For the Lord's sake!"

II. The Name of the Lord is the embodiment of His work.

For the sake of His Name He has worked and does work. He makes Himself a Name by His works, and we can count on Him to work for His Name's sake. His works are many: He saves for His Name's sake; He keeps; He gives grace; He sanctifies; He corrects; He delivers; He chastens; He 'leads in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake'.

What a Rock of confidence, assurance, comfort, is the Name of the Lord when we view it in this light! What a ground of appeal we have when we really hold an issue to His Name! "What will you do for your great name?" was the appeal in a very difficult and threatening situation long ago (Joshua vii. 9).

"I wrought for my great name", said the Lord (Ezekiel xx. 9).

All the mighty work of Christ by His Cross is now gathered into His Name. All the power and ability to work by His servants is in virtue of His Name. (See the book of Acts.) All the ultimate overthrow of the adversary's kingdom, and the bowing of every knee will be in His Name. His Name is called . . . because He *saves!* Effectual work is when the workers correspond to, and stand upon the Name.

III. The Name of the Lord is the embodiment of His Purpose.

God is the God of eternal purpose. To that purpose He has committed Himself. Being Who and What He is, He could never undertake anything that He could not finally accomplish. To be defeated in, or cheated of His purpose would mean losing His Name, His reputation, His character. This can never be! Hence, infinite persistence, patience, pains, are components of His Name, and if He is finally resisted by an instrument and vessel of His purpose, He will make another vessel. The first generation that came out of Egypt resisted Him unto death—their death—but He raised up

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another generation and realized His purpose through them. He is the God of Hope because He cannot be *ultimately* defeated. The valley may be full of bones, very many, very dry, and very scattered; God holds the key of hope in the power of resurrection. Resurrection is God's unique answer to otherwise utterly hopeless situations. Hence He is called "the God who raiseth the dead". He *will* eventually stand possessed of His purpose for His Name demands it.

For the weakest soul who pleads His Name He will show His jealousy, if only and truly it is for His Name's sake! His Name stands or falls with such, and it cannot fall!

We are very deeply conscious of how utterly inadequate our effort to extol the Name has been, and we can only hope that, as a part of this ministry, it will serve to make some impression. Our common and familiar language and phraseology concerning the Name of the Lord needs redeeming

from the commonplace. To say: "Hallowed be thy name", and "In the name of the Lord Jesus" to every prayer needs to have the immense significance of what we say restored and recovered. Indeed, the numerous mentions of the Name in Scripture need to have a new impact and meaning as we come on them.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth in and is raised above" (Proverbs xviii. 10).

"They that know thy name will put their trust in thee" (Psalm ix. 10).

"In the name of our God we will set up our banners" (Psalm xx. 5).

"I will set him on high, because he hath known my name" (Psalm xci. 14).

"Dear Name! The rock on which I build,
My shield and hiding-place;
My never-failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace."

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

HOW GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

JOSEPH had a lovely house in Arimathaea, but he liked best to journey up to Jerusalem to the lovely house of God. The Jewish Temple was indeed beautiful, but unhappily much went on there which was not pleasing to God. Joseph, however, was one of those who hoped for the better days when the kingdom of God would really come. He expected it in his lifetime, but in any case he wished to arrange that even if he died he should be buried as near as possible to Jerusalem, which he regarded as the capital city of the coming kingdom.

So he made enquiries and found that just outside the city walls there was a garden for sale. He found the owner and bought it, not because he wanted a garden, but because he knew that in it there was a great solid rock which would serve his purpose well. He arranged for workmen to get busy carving out a great cave from the side of this solid rock and then he had the cave prepared for a tomb, feeling that by this means he could be certain, even if he died, of being near to the house of God. It was a rich man's tomb, but then he was a rich man, and did not have to bother about the great expense.

It may seem strange to us that a man should be planning his own funeral, but to Joseph the place

of his burial was a very important matter. He found comfort in thinking that when he was dead his body would lie so near Jerusalem, which was the nearest place he knew to the kingdom of God.

Now Joseph was not only rich; he was an important man. He belonged to the council of seventy rulers who were in charge of the religious life of his people. When the Lord Jesus came to Jerusalem to preach about this kingdom of God which he was expecting, he naturally listened carefully, and he came to the conclusion that Jesus was certainly the Christ for whom he had been looking.

The difficulty was that none of the other rulers would accept Jesus. They were full of spite and unbelief, so much so that when Joseph's friend, Nicodemus, tried to put in a good word for Jesus he met with a very hostile reception. This made Joseph decide that the best thing to do was to keep quiet about his own convictions. Of course he would never agree to the Council's plots and threats, but would just keep silent. So he became a "secret believer", a man who was convinced of the truth but afraid to commit himself. Even when Jesus was condemned to death he kept silent.

Poor Joseph! As he stood by the Cross and saw

the sufferings of the Lord Jesus he felt more miserable than ever that he had been ashamed to show open friendship to Him. Then when with a great triumphant shout of "It is finished!" the Saviour died, he could bear it no longer, and determined to throw aside his fear and take his stand on the side of the Lord Jesus.

But it was too late! What could he do now? Jesus was dead, and soon His family and friends would come and take His body away from that horrible Calvary and bury it. But no! Jesus had no friends to do this for Him. There were only a few frightened women there, and what could they do? Then it was that he realized that there was something after all that he could do. His lovely new tomb was in a garden just by the side of the hill. He no longer felt any fear, so he boldly went in to the Roman Governor and asked permission to bury Jesus of Nazareth. The permission was given. He and his friend, Nicodemus, heavy with sorrow and full of shame at their previous cowardice, took the body and gave it a most honourable burial.

When Joseph put the stone over the mouth of that cave he thought that his heart would break. He had failed his Lord. And yet, though he did not realize it, he had been used in a wonderful way to fulfil God's Word. Many hundreds of years before either Joseph or Jesus were born Isaiah had prophesied that Jesus would die among the wicked and yet be buried with the rich. The Jews fulfilled the

first part by having Him crucified between two thieves, but how could the rest of it be fulfilled? How could Jesus have His body kept safe in a rich man's tomb? Joseph was the answer. He provided the tomb.

It must have been wonderful for him to find on the resurrection morning that the tomb was no longer needed, and that he could now openly show his love to Christ. No more secrecy for Joseph! He was filled with the Spirit and glad to confess Christ as his Lord.

And no more worrying about where he was to be buried, either. The kingdom he looked for had truly come. With a heart full of love and rejoicing in eternal life, he thought no longer of death and tombs, but of his new brothers and sisters in the faith. So he gladly sold all his possessions—including the garden tomb!

Joseph's story teaches us a wonderful lesson. It is that God can look after every detail of our lives if we commit them to Him. Through Joseph He provided His Son with just the right tomb in the right place, where His body could wait for the Easter morning of resurrection. Which helps us once again to say that "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans viii. 28). The Lord Jesus proved it. Joseph of Arimathaea proved it. What about you?

H. F.

Some years ago a much-used servant of God gave a series of messages which have been a great help to many Christians. From that series we have selected the following, believing that it will help many at this time.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE UNOFFENDED

"Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matthew xi. 6).

"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended" (John xvi. 1).

One of the greatest perils of the Christian life lurks in the common pathway of discipleship. It is the peril of being offended in Christ. The fellowship to which the Gospel summons us inevitably brings a constant new and humiliating discovery of self; an unvarying disturbance of established order in our lives, as His will corrects and opposes our own; and a ceaseless effort to attain to the ideal; that is, to make our lives as followers increasingly corres-

pond with His as Forerunner. And the danger is that we are apt to break down under the test and training of it all, to go back and walk no more with Him, to become, in fact, offended in Him. It is always possible, despite every sincere profession of the soul, that what God meant for blessing should become blight to us by our misconceptions. It is always perilously possible that the light of today may become deep and impenetrable darkness tomorrow, by our failure to obey and keep step with Him, by our lagging behind or turning aside from the compelling guidances of Christ's companionship. Men have, in this way, unconsciously and imperceptibly put themselves far out of the range

of Christ's ordinary influences; and have become, like the derelicts of the ocean, occasions of danger and disaster to countless other lives.

But Christ, with that absolute frankness which is a large part of His attractiveness to men, cannot be held to blame for such pitiful defections. For He never disguises the otherwise unthought-of possibility. In His Evangel He combines welcome with warning as none other has ever done. His Word, while it opens the very heart of God to our consciousness, opens also our own hearts to us. By Him we come to know the Father, and by Him also we come to know ourselves. He reveals the entire faithfulness of God to us, but He reveals also the instability of our own wills, and the untrustworthiness of our own emotions. He treats us not as ideal but as real men; and forewarns us of the destruction that wasteth at noonday, as well as of the pestilence that walketh in darkness. Hence it is that to the most earnest and self-convinced of us all He says: "*Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me.*" The implicate is obvious and ominous. But the reality and richness of His grace is the sufficient and silencing answer to every one of our fears. The blessedness of the unoffended, despite all the danger without and the weakness within, is the possible acquisition of each one. And it is blessedness indeed.

Now it is necessary to remember the meaning of the word "offend". In its original form it is the very word we frequently use—scandalize, and has the force of causing to stumble. So we may translate and expand this saying of Christ as being: 'Blessed is he who does not find in Me any cause of stumbling; who can keep his feet in My ways; who is not tripped up by any obstacles in the path into which I have directed him.', He uses the word quite frequently in this sense; as, for instance, when He speaks of a man's hand or eye being a cause of stumbling to him, when He denounces those who cause little ones to be offended, and when He declares that in the day of His glory all things that offend shall be rooted out of His Kingdom.

But He never uses it so surprisingly as when He declares the possibility of men finding occasion of stumbling in Him. We are prepared to find it in the world, in the opposition of the devil, in the proven insincerity of others—but in Him! This is surely the most startling of all His warnings. For in Him we have already found life and salvation, guidance and peace, inspiration and satisfaction. And now to contemplate finding in Him also any cause of offence fairly staggers us. Had this word been applicable to men of the world, it would have occasioned little, if any, surprise. For instance,

we are not greatly taken aback when those who knew Him so familiarly should treat Him so contemptuously and say: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" Nor are we entirely unprepared to find that the Pharisees were offended in Him when He spoke to them of the evil thoughts, adulteries, murders, and the like, which proceed from the hearts of men; for His words convicted them of sin. We are not much surprised that He should be a rock of offence to those who are avowedly disobedient to His demands. But that His own friends, those who really know Him, and have been admitted into the intimacies of fellowship with Him, should find cause of offence in Him is passing strange. And its very mystery warns us to take heed to ourselves.

The setting of the first of these gives us the key to their significance. John the Baptist was languishing in prison on the shores of the Dead Sea as the outcome of a life of the utmost faithfulness. He had been tremendously loyal to Christ, splendidly in earnest concerning his mission, wonderfully courageous in giving forth the message committed to him, and yet it had all ended in a dungeon.

What a test for such a man!

It seemed as though his faith, his self-restriction, his willingness to decrease that Christ might increase, had all been unrecognized and unvalued. His experience so entirely contradicted God's assurance, that it is easy to understand the perplexity of mind which led him to send his disciples to Christ with the pathetic query: "Art thou he that should come?" For here is One who has avowedly come to deliver captives, and yet He does not deliver the man who, more than all others, seemed to have claims upon Him. He has proclaimed His own mission in terms of sympathy and love for the heartbroken, and yet here is a crushed and heartbroken man of whom He apparently takes no notice.

Is it to be wondered at that at last doubt overcomes faith, so that he sends the messengers to Christ in the hope that He will declare Himself plainly, and interpret such utterly inexplicable and contradictory experience to the one who had at immense cost to himself maintained a devoted loyalty to the Son of God? Christ's only answer to these messengers is an exhibition of His sovereign power over the forces of destruction and death, and an injunction that they should tell John what they had seen, and give to him this message which calls for a new triumphant trust on his part: "*Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*" For it means that in the pathway of blessing the providence of testing will always be experienced. Its implication is that there is true peace only for

that man who will trust Christ when he has no external aids to faith, who believes Him when he sees only the seeming denial of his confidence, and who holds to his loyalty without stumbling when His treatment tests his endurance to the uttermost.

The second of these words of Christ helps us to understand how His message to John applies to ourselves: "*These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.*" Spoken as they were on the eve of His departure, when the fierce tests of discipleship were about to be experienced by His followers, they imply that they will need to stay their souls on the things He has told them concerning His purpose and power, if they are to avoid the peril of stumbling and going back from Him. For they are bound to come into experiences of test and strain as they carry out their consecration vows; and "in those days", says Christ, "be true to your own best experience of Me. Rest on that which no man can take from you—the personal knowledge you have of My grace. Hold to those things I have spoken and shown to you. Be loyal to Me. Trust Me entirely, despite every unexplained mystery and seemingly unnecessary tribulation. And you shall not be stumbled but strengthened by these very things which are all of My ordering."

Now it is not disloyal to Christ to say this: that He not only masters men but mystifies them also. While He blesses them He bewilders them too, so incomparably higher are His ways and thoughts than ours. He persuades us to love and loyalty; but He puzzles us too, often to the point of distraction. He certainly answers the questions of our hearts; but at the same time He arouses even more than He answers. And in the life of every true follower of Him, there will always be, as there was in His own, some great unanswered "Why?" None of us will ever be exempt from the need of acquiring by faith and patience the blessedness of the unoffended.

For think of an ordinary and typical instance of offence. It is not commonly a matter of open backsliding, of heartless renunciation of the truth, or of bitter denial of past experience. Rather does it begin with the disappointment of some hope, the failure of an expectation, the weariness of an unanswered prayer, or the ache of a heart which seems to evoke no sympathetic answer from God. All this generates an unspoken and almost unspeakable distrust; and as we brood over it, a sense of injustice grows, a feeling that we have not been treated quite fairly by Christ, which becomes positive resentment. Until, after a while, His yoke becomes irksome; we challenge His right to control our lives so; and it all ends in a secret repudiation

of His mastership, and often in an outward renunciation also of all spiritual interests and aims. This is a typical cause of offence in Christ. And how many there are all around us of whose lives it is a true description! From small beginnings of distrust the largest disasters grow. If two parallel lines are produced into infinity, there will never be any variation of the distance between them. But let them diverge at any point by only a hair's breadth. Then the farther they are produced, the wider the divergence becomes, until at length there is a universe of distance between them. So with our fellowship with Christ. The smallest distrust or disobedience is charged with the potentiality of the infinite; and if undiscovered and unchecked, will eventually put an eternity of distance between the soul and the Saviour. If, therefore, we can estimate some of the unchanging certainties of discipleship; explore some, at least, of the perilous causes of offence in Christ; and at the same time also establish a new relationship of implicit trust with our Lord, we shall be saved from this threatening peril. And this is surely the aim of His forewarning Word.

There is first of all the severity of His requirements. When we first come to Christ the pathway seems to be strewn with roses, and the air seems filled with sweet and soothing perfumes. For while Christ is absolutely frank with us, and veils nothing of the hardships and conflicts we must endure, our own powers of apprehension are so limited that we see but one thing at a time, and that one thing is that Christ meets all the need of which we are then immediately conscious. Hence we march to a glad strain with which our hearts are in tune. But before long we discover that the conditions of companionship are severe. For instance, we find that a real separation from the world in spirit and purpose is entirely necessary to the maintaining of fellowship. We find that we cannot march to two tunes at once—and the world's strains are seductive indeed. We learn that we cannot keep step at the same time with Him and with popular opinion, with Him and the world, nor always with Him and the outward professing Church.

And when this discovery is made, it often means that men are offended in Him. For His demand involves a costly disturbance in the regulation of home and business and social life, according to His order. It means possibly for some the relinquishing of a kind of popularity which exists only because of shameful silence regarding Him. It involves others in the severance of ties which have become a large part of their life, and the sacrifice of material prosperities which partake of the nature of unrighteousness. It means for all the

end of self-indulgence, a crucifixion in order to a coronation, a dethronement in order to an enthronement.

And when all this comes to be clearly apprehended, then it is that men are offended in Christ. When He says: "Cut off thy right hand; pluck out thy right eye; forsake all that you have; take up the cross and follow Me", then comes the test which determines everything. Then too often men go back to walk no more with Him. Not because they do not understand Him, but because they have come to know Him too well! When He comes to be recognized, not only as the Christ of the sympathetic heart, but also as the Christ of the steadfastly set face, then great is the blessedness of the unoffended.

Then there is the mystery of His contradictions. It often seems as though Christ were unsympathetic with our best desires, with those desires which have originated in our fellowship with Himself. You want, for instance, to do some great service and to fill some great sphere; but Christ's answer to your longing is to set you down to face the difficulties of a small work in a place where there is little, if any, recognition of your toil. You ask for spiritual service, and all that has been granted is a monotonous round of secular duty. And you are in danger of being offended in Him, just because there seems so little justification for His treatment of your high aim.

Or, you have asked the gift of rest, and claimed His great promises on this head; but the answer has come in the necessity for stern and continuous conflict. The fires of temptation blaze around you, not less, but far more fiercely than ever; and you are both puzzled and provoked at such a fulfilment of the Word upon which you have hoped. Or, you have desired to have a life less burdened and strained, but His only response has been to impose other and heavier burdens upon you. And you are well-nigh offended in Him. The mystery of it all baffles every serious purpose, and the temptation to distrust is at times almost too much.

Now it will help us if we remember the simple fact, that He knows and does just what is best both for the development and repression of our lives. In reality, He is only unsympathetic with our egotisms. He only seeks to destroy within us anything savouring of self-love, self-pride, and self-sufficiency, and to reproduce in us something of the beauty of His own character. In His contradictions rightly apprehended we may always see the expression of His perfect wisdom with regard to our own highest interests, and the interests also of the Kingdom in which He has given us a share. Then "blessed

is he whosoever shall not be offended"; who accepts the direction of Christ as His love, and trusts Him, 'when to simply trust Him seems the hardest thing of all'.

Beyond these causes is yet another in the slowness of His methods. We come to Him and put our lives under His control, expectant of immediate realization of a deliverance which shall lift us beyond all concern regarding temptation and opposing forces. But how disappointingly slow is this realization; and how hardly won are our victories even when we are re-enforced by His Spirit.

Quite early we find that life is not a song, but rather a strife; that the grace of Christ is not a mere ecstasy but rather an energy which works painfully for righteousness in us; and that it takes all the watchfulness of which we are capable to occupy the ground already conquered, as well as to conquer fresh territory. And the slowness of Christ in this matter of our own spiritual conflicts is often the cause of offence to us. For it disappoints our hopes, and contradicts our misconceptions as to anything like a passive and easy victory over our strong enmities. But in reality, this method, slow though it may seem to us, is the only one He could possibly pursue, having in view the greatness of His purpose and the contrariety of our nature. And every experience of victory, however small and insignificant, is prophetic of an ultimately complete triumph.

If you go into the Observatory at Greenwich you will see there a delicate instrument, by means of which the astronomers measure the distances of the stars, as well as their magnitude. Upon a sensitive mirror is reflected the light of the star points; and a measurement of the angles at which any two of the rays meet furnishes sufficient data for all the astounding calculations of millions of miles. And so it is in our lives. By estimating what Christ has already done we are assured of His unvarying purpose. Every bit of experience of His power to sanctify, to cleanse, to redeem, to deliver, is prophetic of the whole—"that he who hath begun the good work will perfect it." And if we cling to this fact, we shall find it an inspiration to the steady continuance of faith, and shall not be offended because He works so slowly—and surely.

The same is true also in regard to the progress of the Kingdom whose interests we are called to serve. How often we find in the slowness with which spiritual results are achieved a cause of offence in Christ. We begin by expecting that when we lift up Christ we shall immediately see crowds flocking to Him. We imagine that we have but to

work faithfully in the service of God and man, and results are certain to be apparent. But how different is the realization! How hardly souls are wooed and won! How true it is that tares grow up with the wheat! How certain that he who goes forth bearing precious seed must needs weep as he goes!

And the difficulty of believing that God is on the field when He is most invisible is too much for many who commence to work for Him with high hopes and valiant beliefs which seem all unjustified. Like the disciples, they think that "the Kingdom of God should immediately appear"; and in the discipline of their enthusiasm, and the conversion of their consecration into continuance, they are apt to be "offended". Now it would not be difficult to bring instance upon instance to prove that, in spiritual work, when results are least visible they are often most real. The worker who will go on without the stimulus of outward success, who will continue His witness even when he is met by cold indifference, who will carry out Christ's work in the unfailing inspiration of knowing that it is His work, is the one who gets the blessedness of the unoffended. And part of it is in the certain harvest of all his sowing, and the sure reward of all his service.

But perhaps over and above these suggested causes of offence in Christ is the unreasonableness of His silences. I have every sympathy with John the Baptist in his perplexity: "If this is really the Christ, why does He not act as Christ? Why does He do nothing to deliver His captive herald, or to bring peace to his troubled heart?" One visit from Christ would have changed his prison to a palace. One hand-clasp from Him would have transmuted his gloom into glory. But He did not give it. Just so was it also at Bethany, when He left Martha and Mary to their sorrow for two long and weary days. I sympathize with them in their utter inability to understand His delay in the light of His love; and in the implied protest of the word with which they at length greeted Him: "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." His silence seemed so entirely unreasonable. And still does it seem unreasonable when He apparently pays no heed to our prayers, and we cry as to a silent heaven. Who does not know this bitter experience and the subtle temptation lurking there? You have prayed for the conversion of loved ones, but they are apparently today as unyielding and impenitent as ever. You have prayed for temporal things which seemed entirely necessary, and no answer has come. You have sought relief from some pressing burden, but no lightening of the load has been given; and today it is heavier than ever. And the thought that Christ's

silence is unreasonable is never very far away. Loyalty to Him is strained sorely, almost to breaking-point. It is almost excusable to be "offended" in Him. But as with John in prison, and the sisters at Bethany, and hosts of others in all ages, He is not unmindful, however His silence may seem to point to it. He is training them, and us, to undaunted faith, to live in the realm of the unseen and eternal; to walk in His own steps. Sometimes what we call unanswered prayer proves beyond question a greater blessing than the desired answer could possibly have been. When Christ responds to our requests in the negative, we may be certain that the positive would have been for our undoing. He withholds secondary mercies to teach us the importance and value of the primary. His denials are our enrichments, not our impoverishments. For His purposes are vastly bigger than our prayers; and while His speech may be as silver, His silence is as gold. "*Blessed is he who-soever shall not be offended in me.*"

"These things have I spoken unto you; that, despite the severity of My requirements, the mystery of My contradictions, the slowness of My methods, the unreasonableness of My silences, ye should not be offended." What things were these? What will secure His people against the peril of defection? What are the permanent securities of our faith? In a word, the sureness of His way before us—"I came from the Father", "I go unto the Father", "I am the way." Then the certainty of His love towards us—"The Father Himself loveth you." And the constancy of His union with us—"Ye in Me and I in you." These are the germ-truths of all His forewarnings. And their expansion is in the lives of His people. Blessed is he who, resting upon these facts of God, makes them the factors of his own life; and goes on unoffending and unoffended, always radiant with "the peace that passeth all understanding", and increasingly becoming part of the world's illumination as he reflects his Lord.

But let us beware of putting any undue value upon our mere perception of this truth. Let us beware of over-estimating the strength of our own resolves and resources. Let us beware of saying anything like: "Though all men should be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." Rather, in a sensitive, humble dependence on Christ, which always expresses itself in iron devotion and loyalty to His Word, let us seek to live as men of manifested faith. For this is the condition which governs all the blessedness of the unoffended.

J. S. H.

“AS I WAS WITH MOSES . . .”

Reading: Joshua i. 1-9.

“*Certainly I will be with thee*” (Exodus iii. 12).

“*And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest*” (Exodus xxxiii. 14).

“*As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee*” (Joshua i. 5).

I WANT, as the Lord shall enable me, to bring to you this word as it came to Joshua, who stood on the threshold of an altogether new life, with the land open before him. His whole attitude and purpose was that of Hebrews vi. 1: “Let us go on!” And what would be the secret of it all? “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.” You will remember that there was a moment when the Lord said to Moses: “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward” (Exodus xiv. 15); and the purpose of this word is to remind ourselves that the Lord who calls us to go on is the Lord who is leading us on. It is not our strength and our responsibility to go on, it is His, and He pledges Himself and gives Himself to us for that. So my thought is not so much to open up an exposition of Scripture as to impress this deeply on our hearts: God says, ‘I am with you!’ “The Lord thy God is with thee.” He was with Moses—and how was He with Moses? That is what we want to consider, in order to know the kind of God who says to us: ‘I am with you.’ Moses His servant is dead, but Moses’ God is not dead! He is still alive, and He is still the same! “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.”

GOD’S PRESENCE A MATTER OF DIVINE GRACE

What was the first characteristic of God’s presence with Moses if not that it was altogether a matter of Divine grace? Moses, of course, is the one who is always used to represent the Law, and in some senses he does; but I think he is used very often in that case not so much because he introduced the Law, but because the Law which he introduced and his name became associated, and thus his name became associated with a line of things which were opposed to grace. So in the New Testament it is often Moses, as it were, versus Christ, the Law as against grace; and yet there never was a man in all the record of Scripture who lived his whole life not upon the basis of a

legal relationship with God but upon the basis of pure grace.

Turn to the eleventh chapter of the letter to the Hebrews. Here you will read about a mighty man of faith, but before you read about the faith of Moses you find something that happened before ever he had consciousness. The faith was not first of all in him but in his parents. God was with Moses before ever he made the grand decision to be with God. Just let that come home to your hearts! For it is true of you, if you are a man or woman of faith. God alone knows how true it is of all of us! Before ever Moses came to mature years and decided that he would be God’s, God provided a love and a faith that took him and presented him to God. Is that not grace? God began the movement, where Moses was concerned. If Moses was going on it was because God started him going on, and so he began on the basis of pure grace.

And then you know how he broke into things when he became forty years old, and, as it seemed, spoiled every purpose that God had for him and had to flee for his life. If the beginning of Moses was grace, the call of Moses was sheer grace, for after leaving and abandoning all that could be for God, and the forty years’ caring for sheep, Moses himself did not resolve in the end that, after all, he would go on. God met him and said: “Certainly I will be with thee!” What grace! When Moses went away to the land of Midian he had forfeited everything. Everything was a failure, a breakdown and a miserable fiasco, and he reveals what went on in his own heart by the names of the children that were given to him. Joseph did the same. When Joseph married in Egypt, he called his first son Manasseh—“God hath made me to forget”: ‘The past is finished and my father’s house is all gone.’ He called his second son (and second thoughts are usually best in the spiritual life) Ephraim: “fruitfulness”. Moses called his first son Gershom—“I am a stranger here”: ‘I have lost everything, my home, my own people and my adopted people, my mother’s home, my foster-mother’s home, my prospects, everything that might have been, and even my God. I am a stranger here!’ I suppose he felt that he deserved that, for he had cut across God’s purpose and got in the way, and all this had happened to him. Mr. Legality was belabouring him rather hard! He

had another son—and again second thoughts are best, for he called this one Eliezer: “God is my help.” He remarked when he put that name upon the boy: “The Lord saved me from the sword of Pharaoh” (Exodus xviii. 4). ‘I am not dead. Everything else may have gone wrong, but I am alive, and I am alive by the mercy of God!’

So the whole atmosphere of this call, so far as Moses was concerned, was the sheer grace of God to him. God had pitied him and had been his help. And it was the sheer grace of God to the people of Israel. Make no mistake about that! Stephen says that they thrust Moses from them, saying: “Who made thee a prince over us?” They rejected him. Open the third chapter of the book of Exodus, and what do you find? Does God say to His people: ‘Well, you are a lot of fools! I have provided you with a man who was to be your deliverer and your judge, and you have rejected him. It serves you right!’ The Lord said: “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt . . . and I am come down to deliver them” (Exodus iii. 7). It is the grace of God all round, whichever way you look at it. Neither Moses, nor God’s people, Israel, have any claim upon Him at all. If they ever had, they had forfeited it. Oh, but “who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?” (Micah vii. 18). He wipes the slate clean. He remembers these erring people, and He remembers Moses, and appears to him in a flame, a burning flame that goes on burning.

Moses did not turn aside to that bush because it was a burning bush. He must have seen thousands of burning bushes; but they all burned out. This was a bush that burned, and went on burning—the burning flame of God’s love and His grace. Moses turned aside to that. The Lord was saying to him: ‘I am still here. I still stand by My word and by My promises! Come now, and I will send thee, but not as though I was going away from you; certainly I will be with you!’

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.” Moses had died, but Moses’ God is still alive. The word to Joshua is the word to us, if we will take it. Let us go on! How shall we go on? “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” But He was with Moses as a God of grace, and if you go through the story with that in view you will be struck by how true it was, how at every turn and step of the way somebody failed, somebody, as it were, let God down. The people doubted Moses, they doubted Aaron, they sinned, and yet all the time God went on with His people and He never forsook them. The cloud was always with them by day and the pillar of fire

by night. For forty long years God was with them, and always as a God of grace. When Moses sought the revelation of the Divine glory, you will remember that what he received was a revelation of God’s grace, and his whole basis of appeal to God for the people had to be this—the pardoning mercy and love of God. That is not just a matter of sentiment. It is very precious to the heart, and we can never make too much of it: that the God who says He will be with us is supremely marked by this—that He is the God of all grace. His basis of relationship with us is not a legal one, but of sheer sovereign grace. I say that it is not merely a matter of pleasant thought. Going on depends upon that! Move off the ground of grace and progress is immediately arrested. You see, the Lord said: “Certainly I will be with thee!” What basis is there for certainty except in God’s grace?

Now the people again and again, and yet again, had a question about God. They said: ‘Is the Lord with us? Can God provide a table in the wilderness?’ God said: “Certainly I will be with thee!” The only ground of assurance is the ground of grace. Move off that ground and your life becomes a big question mark; and how many of the children of God today have their life curled up into a question mark, doubting, wondering, sometimes full of confidence, and at other times in the depths of despair! “*Certainly* I will be with thee!” With *thee*! ‘Well, Lord, it must be on the ground of sheer grace if there is any certainty about Thee being with me!’ “*Certainly* I will be with thee!” You see, Moses, at any point of the way, could have given up, and would have given up if he had not lived upon this basis.

If you look at the matter from a purely earthly, reasoning point of view, you will say that the man who lives with the law always before him—what is right and what is wrong—will live a holy life, and the man who says that God’s grace is glorious and wonderful and abounds to the chief of sinners will do all sorts of things he ought not to do. That is what men have always said, reasoning as men. But how does it work actually? Like this: Here is a breakdown and a failure. Legality says: ‘The Lord is angry with me. The Lord has broken with me and it is no good!’ And what does such a man do? He plunges into more sin! After all, that is what the people of Israel did again and again. They had broken with the Lord and so they went headlong on their foolish way. The same failure and breakdown, and yet a sense of the infinite mercy and pardoning love of God, even to me, melts my heart, and I long never to fall in that way again. That is how it works spiritually, though

the opposite is man's reasoning about it. I think it was John Wesley who said that the great mark of people who believe in salvation by works is that they never do works and never have any confidence about salvation. Legality brings a question. It does not bring a passive hopelessness, but a positive drive of despair. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" What a holy life Moses lived, not merely because he knew God as a holy God, but because he knew in his own heart something of the infinite riches of the grace of God to an undeserving sinner, and, knowing that, he was able to say: 'Let us go on!' That was the mark of this man all those forty years in the wilderness. We are going on because God is going on, and God is going on, as far as we are concerned, because He is such a God of grace that He says even to us: "Certainly I will be with thee!"

Then, if Moses had dealt with the Lord upon a basis of legality as far as the people were concerned, he would have left them behind. He would have broken with the people of God and said: 'I am going on alone!' And that is another great danger of legality, and therein lies the saving virtue of the power of the grace of God. It binds us to God's people in love. God went a very long way with Moses, and went so far as to say to him: 'We have finished with this undeserving, miserable crowd of offenders. I will wipe them out, and we two will begin again.' And Moses rejected that. He said: 'No, Lord, it is Thy people, and we are all going on together!' and though some, as we know, fell in the wilderness, the purpose of God went on in His people, and Moses was saved from a spirit of separateness by the grace of God. He never despaired of God's people, though they were enough to provoke despair. He claved to them and pleaded for them before God. He was not blind to their faults. He was a nursing father, but not an indulgent father. Oh, but his heart was full of love to them! He never forsook them, with all their faults; he brought them in intercession, faults and all, to God.

That is very important, dear friends. Let us go on, but not alone. Let us go on in our home, where there are other children of God, but not alone; not cancelling the others out—wiping them out, as it were—and saying: 'They are not going on, so I will leave them and go on!' The grace of God is such that, while it is true these others may have grieved Him and failed Him, He has not forgotten them and has not left them. How can you and I ignore them, in our assemblies, and in all our contacts with God's children, wherever they are found? There is a sense, I know, in which we must

press on, whatever others do, but there is also a sense in which we will not. Because of the greatness of God's grace we will not despair of His people. We will not harshly and critically rule them out. We will bring them to Him in prayer, if by any means we may prevail yet further on the grace of God, that His people may indeed go on with Him.

So this matter of knowing the grace of God is very important, and has far-reaching effects upon our life. Because Moses knew the infinite grace of God, he went on. The people often turned away from him, criticized him, grumbled at him, murmured against him, and slighted him, but that is another great blessing about the grace of God—it produces a spirit of meek patience in the heart: The opposite of meekness, of course, is pride. Pride is the mark of legalism, pride at being different, pride of being better, pride of position, or resentment because of personal injustice. The more we are steeped in the grace of God, the more careless we become about our own little rights, and the more we are able to go on and not be offended, even with those who are sometimes very difficult to go on with. That was Moses' experience, at any rate. He was the meekest of all men. I do not think he was so naturally, but because he was taken up with the amazing grace of God, and that sense of God's grace made him put himself in his right perspective. He saw how little he was, how puny and how foolish, and his attitude to these critical people was jealousy for the Lord indeed, and concern for the responsibility which he had to bear, but also, who was he that he should fight for himself?

GOD'S PRESENCE MEANS REST

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." Do not begin to think that Moses was a wonderful man. If you do you miss the point. Do believe this: Moses had a wonderful God. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. . . . Certainly I will be with thee . . . My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." That was a great feature of God's being with Moses—the rest of heart that He brought to His servant, since the Lord's presence with him was the Lord's undertaking of all responsibilities for him. Let us go on—not in a strained, burdened, worried giving of ourselves to this matter of spiritual progress, but with a blessed casting of all our care upon the Lord. Spiritual progress must be restful, or it is not progress. It is not that fretful worry and questioning, straining, and sometimes, praying, that pro-

duces spiritual progress. There was an occasion when the Lord said to His servant, who was evidently crying to God to come in and work mightily: "Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Exodus xiv. 15). 'Count on Me! My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest!' What a restful life!

Moses was responsible for many thousands of people for forty years. He had nothing with which to make provision for them. He turned to the Lord sometimes out of rest, demanding in desperation what he should do. How could he give them water? They were ready to stone him, but how could *he* give them water? How could the Lord provide flesh for a great multitude like that? But, whatever else the Israelites died of, they never died from lack of water. The Rock followed them—the Lord was with them. And not one of them died from hunger, and not one of them died from malnutrition because they only had manna. They all died, but they did not die of that. The Lord was sufficient. Moses never had to produce anything, for God did it. I am quite sure that as Moses looked back on his life there were incidents that he regretted, and he must have wondered why he was so foolish as to get in a fret and strain and worry, when all the time he had God's presence pledged—"Certainly I will be with thee." That did not mean that he left everything to God and sat back and enjoyed himself. The life of Moses, at least during those last forty years, was not a contemplative life, but a life of action, with many responsibilities which he never shirked. He was a worker. And yet you have only to read the last chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, which tells of Moses' death, to find that he was never more alive. Whatever he died of, it was not the worry and tear of the wilderness life. He was a "hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Deuteronomy xxxiv. 7).

What does that mean? Please do not begin to play foolishly with the Word of God, as God's children do, and believe all sorts of things that the Scriptures do not warrant, such as: 'The Lord will always keep you strong and well and young, and you can always trust Him to send you money from some miraculous place, and to do extraordinary things for you.' It does not mean that at all. The spiritual meaning behind is that Moses had not to contribute his natural energy to carry through the purposes of God. God did it, and Moses was at rest even while he served God.

"As I was with Moses . . ." Do you believe that?

And yet, how lacking in rest are our lives, and what a strain we get into! I think that prayer, and certainly prayer about our own affairs, should never be a matter of strain. It may need persistence, but not strain. You remember the great battle with Amalek, and Moses' attitude—his hands uplifted to God—which brought about the victory. It is true that he tired, and was weary, but it was not his energy that was winning the battle. In a sense, though it was not restful, it was an attitude which betokened rest, a claim upon God, and the strong, maintained affirmation that this was the Lord's battle and He would be triumphant in it. Moses kept his watch and lifted up his hands, but it was not his energy that won the battle. God did it so long as Moses counted upon Him. 'As I was with Moses, undertaking and providing, bearing the responsibility, so I will be with thee. My presence shall go with thee.'

GOD'S PERSONAL PRESENCE

How was God with Moses? Personally! We are told that there was no other such as he who had communion with God face to face. "The Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Exodus xxxiii. 11). "As I was with Moses . . ." Did God mean that? Yes, He did, but the pillar of cloud disappeared just about the time that Moses died. Joshua was entering into the land with no pillar of cloud, no visible presence of the Lord, no opportunity of speaking to Him face to face as Moses did, yet God said to him: 'As I was with Moses personally, Myself, speaking to him face to face, so I will be with thee!' Then the Lord introduces a new element into the situation which has never been there before: "This book of the law . . ." What does He mean? The Lord has many ways of speaking, but it is the same Lord Himself who is speaking. 'Moses had the cloud; Joshua, you have the Book. I spake face to face with Moses in the cloud. Keep tryst with Me, and I will speak face to face with you in the Book.'

It is true that the Lord now speaks face to face with us, not in a pillar of cloud, but through the Book. "As I was with Moses . . ." Oh, Moses did not receive what he had as a mere code of laws and regulations. He received everything as a personal communication from the Lord. This Book is given to you, dear friend, not as a means of rules and regulations, but as a medium by which God wants to speak to you 'face to face, as a man speaketh to his friends'. Of course, if we do not expect that, we do not get it, but when we do expect, is it not

true that we get? The Lord never says: 'Seek ye My face!' in vain. Oh, what a privileged man Moses was! Whenever he was in a difficulty the cloud came down and the Lord told him just what to do. How lovely to be Moses! 'As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee . . . My personal presence shall be the solution to every problem of yours.' It is not a matter of looking in the Bible to see what it says as a kind of principle and rule of life, so much as seeking the Lord in His Word.

"Beyond the sacred page, I seek Thee, Lord,
My spirit pants for Thee, Thou living Word."

God said to Joshua: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth." "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." That is the secret of going on. I think that often the plunges we make in wrong directions are the result of finding something in the Word, or, more often, hearing somebody say that something is 'what it says in the Word', but the safe way is to seek the Lord in His Word. We shall go on, and we shall not turn to the right hand or to the left. "The meek will he guide in judgment, the meek will he teach his way" (Psalm xxv. 9). "As I was with Moses . . ." Do you believe that?

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." Who is the 'I'? You remember the revelation that came to Moses about the Name of God: "I am that I am"—'I always shall be what I am! I always was all that I ever shall be! I am!' The unchanging, unchanging, eternal, faithful, enduring character of God. That is how Moses knew Him. The burning bush burnt on and on—and that is God. The other bushes burn out so quickly. That which is merely natural and human catches fire sometimes in a great blaze, but how quickly it passes and is gone! But God goes on.

More than four hundred years before this Joseph's family had gone down into Egypt. Long before that God had spoken of this very thing to Abraham, and all through those hundreds of years His purpose was to bring His people into the land. Abraham was dead; Isaac and Joseph were dead. Another order of things had come. But God was not dead, and His purposes were still the same. Even if Moses dies, God is still alive, the same God with the same purpose. Do let us take hold of that—He is the unchanging, enduring God. You remember that in the letter to the Hebrews it says that Moses endured and, as you know, the New Testament force of that word is always one of time, and not just an enduring for a moment. Moses endured, and if we are going on, we have to endure. If we are going to reach God's goal it is perhaps a matter

of endurance as much as anything else. Oh, shall we be the bushes burning with a natural flame and burning out, or shall we burn with a Divine flame and burn on, not being consumed? Moses became, as it were, a burning bush, for he endured. How? 'Wonderful man, Moses! Great faith, Moses! Tremendous strength of purpose and will and character!' No! A wonderful God was with Moses: "My presence shall go with thee." I AM is with Moses. God is true to His purpose and faithful to His declared aim. This dispensation has gone on for a long time, and in the Church the flame of revelation and of devotion to the Divine purpose has flickered, has faltered, has sometimes been ablaze, and sometimes apparently extinct, but through these hundreds of years God has never moved one fraction of a centimetre from His own Divine purpose. His flame has burnt on, and will to the end, and we are called to that eternal purpose.

We are called to endure. "Certainly I will be with thee. As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." Oh, do not let us get preoccupied with our side of things. Let us more and more concentrate our attention on the Lord who is with us. That is the important thing.

I have not yet said how Moses endured. How did he endure? "As seeing him . . ." That is the explanation of all those wonderful things you find in Hebrews xi about Moses: faith that chooses, that renounces, that endures. It is all a matter of God's revelation, of His presence, and of Moses simply but firmly putting his hand into God's hand and clinging to the Divine promise of God's presence. That is the other side of the picture, but it is the most real and the most important side—the invisible One who meant everything to Moses.

Just a last word. Moses, we might think, was rather a heavy, grim, burdened, dull kind of man. Do we think that? "Let us go on!" So often that rather sounds as if it is going to be a hard, tough, grim affair, but I do not think that is true of Moses at all. He had many burdens and cares, and doubtless shed many tears, but I read the last words that Moses spoke—and there must be special importance in the last words: "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, a people saved by the Lord" (Deuteronomy xxxiii. 29). It is a glorious life, this life of going on! And I read a Psalm that was written by Moses, the man of God, and in it I find these words: "Satisfy us early with thy mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our life" (Psalm xc. 14). It is a blessed thing to be going on when God is with you. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."

H.F.

THE MISSION, THE MEANING AND THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

3. IN THE GOSPEL BY LUKE

“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” (Luke iii. 23, 38).

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” (II Timothy iv. 11). We know

from the Letter to the Colossians that Luke was a physician, for Paul speaks of him as “Luke, the beloved physician” (iv. 14). I think there is a great deal bound up with that, for it is a little sidelight 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 I is his Gospel, and Volume II 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 iii! 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 xxiv. 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 viii. 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" (xix. 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 xxviii. 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 xv! 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" (I Peter v. 2), and "When the chief Shepherd shall be manifested" (I Peter v. 4). We know that Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd" (John x. 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 liii. 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 xxi. 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 iv. 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' (I Corinthians xv. 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 par-

ticularly 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.

ATLANTIC STATES CONVOCATION, U.S.A.

The Convocation at Wabanna, Mayo, Maryland, is to be held this year from the 7th to 14th July. Ministry will be shared by Mr. DeVern Fromke, Mr. Stephen Kaung and the Editor. Friends wishing to attend should write early to:

*Mr. E. L. Chase,
1370, Ray Street,
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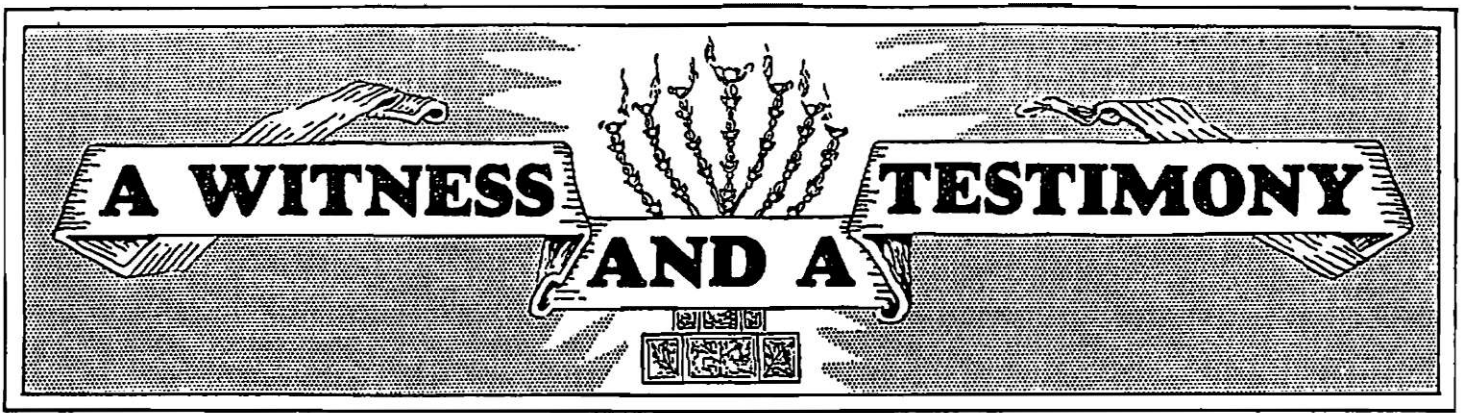
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THE GREAT DIVIDE AND THE GREAT TRANSITION

AMONG the games that used to be played at parties there was one like this. A large circle was formed by the company present, and then someone began by whispering something to the next person. This was passed on right round the circle. The last person of the ring then had to say aloud what he or she had received, or thought they had received. It was then compared with the original statement, and it was both amusing and amazing how the thing had developed, lost its character, both by addition, subtraction, or distortion. Often the original could only with difficulty be recognised.

While Christianity is not a game, it has greatly suffered in this way as it has passed down the generations through the minds and lips of its vast circle of sponsors and adherents. So much so that it is very difficult to recognise the origin in what has emerged in course of time. It therefore becomes necessary and of very great importance to both ask and seek to answer the question: What is it that we have come into in Christianity? The object of these messages will be just to do that as ability may be given by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of *Truth*.

We shall begin on a wide basis and work from the circumference to the centre. We know that the Bible is divided into two main parts, or sections,

the Old and the New Testaments. That is not just a literary division. It is truly a historical division, but it is much—very much—more than that. Upon the difference represented by that division hangs everything that God has said, and wants us to know as to His eternal intention. It is just there between the two Testaments, or halves, of the Bible that the immense significance of our above title stands—the Great Divide and the Great Transition. As we proceed, we shall shortly come to point out that in that gap between the Testaments stands nothing less than the Cross of Jesus Christ.

The first section of the New Testament is that which comprises the four "Gospels". Whatever differences in likeness, context, presence and absences there may be in the four, they all certainly have this in common: they all lead up to the one climax, the Cross of Christ. All that each has contained is shown to be steadily and inexorably moving toward the Cross. From what we learn later we understand that the Cross was fixed in the counsels of God according to His foreknowledge from the foundation of the world. What, then, do we conclude from this climax of the Gospels, the very first section of the New Testament? The Gospels introduce the great Person of Jesus Christ.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

They proceed with His works and His teaching, substantiated by His life or character. All this comprises His mission, which mission is to reveal God and God's purpose for man. The place of the Cross as the inevitable and fixed climax to the Gospels says one tremendous thing: it is that all that revelation of God, in life, work, and teaching, can only be made good for, and be entered into by man through the Cross of Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son. We ought to place many marks of emphasis and exclamation at the end of that statement. Read it again!

That, then, clearly and surely says that the Cross stands right at the beginning of the New Testament, and that again means that it stands between the two. If we just put the figure of a cross there we shall see that its arms stretch backward and forward. Then we should draw a strong line right down the centre of the Cross. By this figure we are enabled to understand the whole teaching of the New Testament, or, in other words,

THE TRUE MEANING AND NATURE OF CHRISTIANITY

That arm with the backward aspect—up to the central line—says FINISH, AN END. The arm with the forward aspect says ALL THINGS NEW (i.e. different). On one side the Cross is the closing of a door upon one whole historic system *related to God*. On the other side the Cross—in the resurrection of Christ—proclaims an open door to an entirely new Divine economy. One side says 'No! positively No!' The other side says 'Yes! definitely Yes!'

Of course, what remains is for us to understand what it is to which the No and the Yes apply. That will follow. For the present we have to come to realise the inclusive and emphatic *fact* that there is a point in the history of God's order at which there is an immense dispensational divide and transition. We do not hesitate to say that the confusion, weakness, frustration, and failure which so much characterises Christendom is very largely due to failure to realise, be really alive and understanding as to this divide and transition! There is a very real and true sense in which the New Testament is entirely occupied with the business of making this divide and transition clear. This will become evident as we proceed. It can be rightly said that the New Testament is built on two aspects expressed in two words, the occurrence of which demands a lot of close study or tracing. Both by actual use and by clear implication these two words and aspects are numerous. These two words—set over against each other—are "Not" and "But". They respectively cover and embody two comprehensive and entirely

different systems in the Divine economy, that is, in God's methods with man, and the means employed by Him. They divide the two main dispensations. All the main works of God are included in those words. As to His works and ways up to the Cross the great "Not" applies. It says: 'Not so any longer.'

We shall at once proceed to note some of the main points upon which the great divide and the great transition rest. The first of these is:

THE NO AND THE YES OF HUMANITY

The fundamental statement is in John i. 12-13: "Children of God . . . born, Not . . . but of God." This is enlarged upon in chapter iii. 3-12, and it runs in close connection with all that is in this Gospel. It is pursued along many lines, as we shall see. But before we follow this, may we be reminded of one helpful matter. When John wrote this Gospel he was an old man, probably very old. At the end—or near the end—of his life he had been exiled and imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos; for exactly how long we do not know, but the point is that, with all of his personal, intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus, His teaching, works, character, death, resurrection, ascension, and the advent of the Holy Spirit, he had much time for quiet detached meditation and thought. His Gospel is the product of this; therefore every word and statement is heavily loaded with much consideration and communion with the Lord. We take it all as just written statements, but we really should give something of the same meditation to even the words employed by John; for, as we have said, they are laden with eternal meaning.

Having said that, we return to the point at which we put in that parenthesis. The "not" and the "but" in its first application to mankind is pursued along various lines. Those lines are:

(a) The title of the Son of God which is *foundational* to all that follows in this connection.

(b) The words which most conspicuously characterise this Gospel.

(c) The "*signs*" which John selected, or was led to select, to illustrate and demonstrate the particular object in view.

We begin with

THE TITLE OF THE SON OF GOD

"In the beginning was the WORD."

"The WORD was with God."

"The WORD was God."

"The WORD became flesh." (John i. 1, 14.)

It is not at all necessary to enter the tortuous jungle of Greek philosophical and mystical thought which is associated with this word "Logos". Whatever help there may be in its elucidation, let the scholars dig that out. The simple facts are that it just means this *in the Bible*. A word is the means of expressing something that is in the mind, a thought expressed. Then (in this connection) it is the mind or thought of God. The next element in the word is that it is not abstract, but an act. God's word in the Old Testament is God's *act*; it is a fiat. "In the beginning God said . . . and it *was*." "He spake, and it was *done*", etc., etc.

The next thing here is that the mind, the thought, the expression thereof took *Personal* form: "Became flesh." The result—and note how this connects with our present application of the divide and transition—is that we have in Christ the personal expression of the mind of God as to humanity; a kind of manhood! A *new* kind of humanity; not only a better, but a different from all other. This is *the* great significance of the Incarnation; a *fundamental* difference. Humanity, yes; but different. Not in bodily or physical appearance. Not in all human *soul-sensibilities* and endowments; but deeper than body and soul, a spirit begotten of God. "The (or an) *only* begotten of the Father" (John i. 14). The "only" is unique. This is an unique humanity, not only an improved specimen. The difference is in what follows, as we shall see.

So, the first meaning of the "Not" and the "But" relates to the title given to the Son of God who became "Son of Man"; that is, a different and unique human emanation and expression of God's mind; an act of God. From there we proceed along the line of

THE DOMINANT WORDS USED BY JOHN

They are quite a cluster, but for our immediate purpose we note these: "Father"; "Son", "Life", "Light", "Truth", "To know", "Believe", "Love".

"Father" occurs 116 times in this Gospel, *more than any other word*. It is therefore the background of all that is here. The very term implies begetting; emanation of those of like nature.

John was particularly dominated by this conception of God. In his Letters as well as here he says much about being begotten of God. The children of God are God's act and their existence is the projecting of His *will*! While they are the children of His love, they are not of impulse, but calculated and preconsidered. The whole conception of humanity was in the mind of God before creation, and "foreknowledge" governed all. But not the

humanity that now is. The Word—"God manifest in the flesh"—is the "But" over against the "Not" in this respect. If Christ's mission was—in the first place—to reveal the Father, as it certainly was, then the Father is revealed in human form in His children; initially, progressively, and ultimately in full likeness, as John says in his Letter. It is a *nature* that we refer to, not His deity. We do not partake of *that*! It will be of great value to the reader if he will trace this word "Father" through John, *and stop to think* in each case.

From the "Father" we proceed to the "Children" (John i. 12).

First, the fact is stated that Jesus gave it to some to be children of God, and that He did this precisely on the basis of receiving Him. Weigh that carefully! Then it says that this relationship to God is a given "right", prerogative, authority: "He gave (them) the authority to become the children of God." The word is 'exousia', and it has a legal meaning. It is the rightful, legal, legitimate, authoritative status of true children. These children inherit rights and claims by their birth. (See all the New Testament teaching on "heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ"; the "Inheritance", etc.)

From there we are led on to the nature of this humanity, these "children". It is here that the first categorical "Not" "But" connects. The great divide, the great contrast is so emphasised. "Which were born (begotten)":

- Not—(a) "Of bloods" (plural),
- (b) "The will of the flesh,"
- (c) "The will of man."

"Bloods" in the plural seems to mean the mingling of sexes, and there may very well be a hidden reference to the birth of Jesus which was not the mingling of the blood of Joseph and Mary, but "of God". "The will of the flesh", according to later New Testament teaching (e.g. Romans viii. 4-8, etc.) is the choice, the decision, the energy of the natural man. So, "not of the will [volition] of man".

This is a tremendous and categorical sweeping away of everything but God's act in new birth. What an 'everything' that is in Christianity! "But of [out from] God." Every *true* child of God can say: 'I am God's act in the deepest reality of my being.' Not by natural birth from earthly (even Christian) parents. Not by the force or strength of any man's will, but God did it! "Not" "But". There is a divide in the race, a difference in the humanities.

(Not to overload this chapter we must leave the further features of this "But" side until the next issue.)

“SO SEND I YOU”

“As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world” (John xvii. 18).

THE world, in the sense in which the Word so often describes it, is not only a sphere where men live, but it is also a sphere which governs men. Their behaviour, their bodies and their very souls are ruled, tyrannized over, by the world. That was the world to which the Lord Jesus did not belong, and that is the world from which, by His wonderful work upon the Cross, He has delivered us, so that in a sense, just as before He entered upon His humanity He stood right apart from the world order; so in a very real sense the moment we are men and women in Christ, we too stand right apart from that world order.

And yet, though it was true of the Lord Jesus that He did not belong to this world, He came as one sent into the world: “As thou didst send me into the world . . .” We know that; we know the life that the Lord Jesus lived here in the world and we know—we notice as we read the Gospels—that all the time the comfort and the strength in His heart was the knowledge that He was not here by chance, He was not the victim of circumstances or of men, but He was here because the Father had sent Him.

Now He makes this most remarkable comparison. As the Father sent Him into the world, so are we sent into the world. You will believe that those who have been sent by the Lord into other lands as His missionary servants have, in times when things seemed difficult and full of problems and, indeed, of suffering and danger, been fortified in their hearts by this knowledge that, however bad things were, at least they had been sent there by the Lord. But I want to suggest to you that such servants of the Lord have no monopoly of that comfort and that it is available for every one of us; for I take it that our Lord Jesus was not speaking merely of the apostolic ministry of these whom He had sent, but of the position that every child of God holds in this world. We do not belong to the world, and are not of it. Well, then, why are we in it? Not because the Lord just suspended the full working of His redemption for us and left us here for a while. It is as though, in a flash when we were saved, we were taken out of it, and then were brought back into it again, not as belonging to it, but as sent here by the Lord.

I want to bring this as a word of comfort, perhaps, to some who may be tempted to feel that

their lives are governed by men, or by the ways and circumstances of this present time, or by their own private conditions of life. So long as we, even for one moment, accept that mentality that makes us the victim either of circumstances or of men or of ourselves, so long do we lack the comfort and the strength that the Lord has for us. So long as we are able, even in the most uncongenial or difficult or apparently unfruitful circumstances, to say: “The Lord sent me here!” so have we all the comfort and strength that Christ had in being in this world.

And let us remember this: even the Lord Jesus did not move about just as freely as He pleased, in spite of the specific guidance which He received from heaven. It would seem to be so much easier a life if we could go here, or move out of certain circumstances, or take a course that was just something between us and the Lord. I suggest to you that the life of Christ was not like that. Christ the babe went down to Egypt under the drive of a force of danger, as it seemed. Christ the boy had to leave the temple and go back with His parents, subjecting Himself to their will rather than to that which seemed to Him to be the opening of a ministry. On certain occasions Christ sought solitude, and the crowds thronged Him and robbed Him of what He sought. At other times He could not go into the cities, but had to withdraw Himself because one whom He told to be quiet published abroad what ought to have been kept secret, or because the people would have taken hold of Him by force to make Him a king. Then there were the last phases of the life of the Lord, when He was taken by cruel and wicked men and led away to the Cross. So, you see, there was something even in the life of the Lord Jesus which was akin to that which comes to us of making us *apparently* the victim of circumstances or of the ways of men. If for one moment the Lord Jesus had accepted what was apparent, He would have lost His joy and His strength; but He never accepted that, and the position He took, not merely when He was on His own initiative taking some step as between Himself and the Father, but even when He was being moved about, hunted, driven, taken prisoner, crucified, was all the time: ‘I am in this world as sent by God!’

Now, can you and I take hold of that just where we are? It is more difficult for us to see the purpose of our being sent, perhaps, than it was for the Lord, but we have His Word on which to rely. For you,

just you, this verse is true: "As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world." 'As the Father sent Me into the world', says the Lord, 'so have I sent you into the world!'

And when the Father sent the Son into the world, did He just leave Him? Did He not give Himself with all the interest and strength of His love to stand behind that Son, to carry Him through? Of course He did, and the inference of all this chapter is that the Lord is saying concerning those whom He has sent into the world: 'I stand behind you! I pray for you!' Well, it means a great deal when the Lord does not just say: 'I will mention

them in My prayer', but: 'I pray for them! I give Myself to that! Because I sent them into the world they are My responsibility!' We are His responsibility just where we are, and even though at times our lives seem to be ordered by circumstances beyond our power where it is hard to see one trace of the hand of God, let us hold fast to His Word. We are where we are because He sent us there, and if He sent us there, He will pray for us and see us through. Always providing that ours is a prayerful life of dependence upon the Lord, as was His.

H.F.

THE WISDOM AND VALUE OF BEING PRONOUNCEDLY THE LORD'S

A MESSAGE TO YOUNG CHRISTIANS

"Whose I am, and whom I serve" (Acts xxvii. 23).

THIS dramatic story of the voyage of the Apostle Paul to Rome has many things in it which form profitable instruction. From among these we are just lifting out one of particular value. It is that contained in our title: the wisdom and value of being pronouncedly the Lord's.

You know that the Apostle was a prisoner on his way to be tried before Caesar. Perhaps it would both help you and make unnecessary the lengthening of this message if you refreshed your memory with the whole chapter and what led up to it. The focal point of the message is that Paul did not leave anyone in any doubt as to where he stood, and because of that God eventually put everything into *his* hands. Paul could have kept quiet. There were several things that might have made him decide to do so. He was Caesar's prisoner. He was under the authority of both the Roman centurion and the captain of the ship. He had a very great deal to think about, for things had taken a strange and unexpected course in his life, and now he might be going to a quick execution. But, no, he looked beyond Caesar, Rome, ship, sea and circumstances to the Lord, and, in the hour of trouble he declared himself boldly and openly, not as the prisoner of men or circumstances, but as the prisoner and servant of the Lord. This openness and courage became

A POSITION OF POWER WITH THE LORD

It constituted a link with Divine sovereignty. That Divine sovereignty had been very real in

his recent history leading up to this situation. There were not lacking those things which could have provided plenty of ground for misgivings, and for the devil's paralysing accusations. This whole threatening disaster could have been looked at as the result of Paul's own mistakes and faults. He had gone to Jerusalem in spite of

(a) The Lord's earlier command that he (Paul) should depart from that city and be sent "far hence" because they would not receive his testimony (Acts xxii. 21).

(b) The fact that his brethren had besought him not to go, and warned him of what would happen.

But his concern for his own people in that city was so strong that he would not be dissuaded, and he went against all appeals and pleadings. When he got to Jerusalem he was caught in a trap, resulting in imprisonment, near death, and the several trials, issuing ultimately in his appeal to Caesar. One of the rulers said that if only Paul had not appealed to Caesar he might have been set at liberty. That 'if only' could have been a forceful point of satanic and self condemnation. 'If only I had not made that mistake!'

The Apostle had much to reflect upon, and when things go wrong and trouble overtakes, the devil is not slow to jump in and say: 'This is God's judgment upon your wrongdoing.' The appearances are that God has left us to our fate, and we see no way out. But this man was no introvert, but one who still believed God; for, whatever *strange* and seemingly contradictory features arose in the process, God had said to him that he 'must testify of Him in Rome' as he had done in Jerusalem. This confidence in the sovereign rule and over-

ruling of God had these two initial effects: it made him bold before men, and linked him with that sovereign rule and grace. There was an underlying factor that gave God a clear way for His sovereignty. Paul had absolutely no *personal* interests to serve. He knew that in going up to Jerusalem he took his life in his hands. He was not going there for anything for himself. He was not actuated by some worldly ambition. There were no prizes for him in this life along that course. It was all a way of cost and suffering and sacrifice. Such a spiritual position is always a way which God will take to overrule our mistakes, and even use adversity to His own end.

Apostles were not perfect and infallible men. God has never had an infallible servant apart from His Son. His best men have made mistakes, and these mistakes have never been kept out of the records of their lives. But be it Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, or Paul, their utterness of heart for God, and the absence of personal interests, have made those records a story, pre-eminently, of sovereign grace and power.

So it was in the occasion under consideration. Utter abandonment to God gave God that wonderful opportunity of exercising His sovereignty, so that this *seeming* disaster turned out to be a Divine strategy.

If the heart is *wholly* set upon God's purpose, our human faults and defaults will be covered by sovereign grace. We are not now thinking of the definite sins of rebellion and self-will. They may arrest or retard the goings of God, so far as we are concerned. But the weaknesses of our humanity can be no hindrance to God if only there is no dominating self-interest.

The next thing which is noted in our chapter is that this pronounced out-and-outness for the Lord is

A POSITION OF MORAL POWER IN A TIME OF CRISIS

For a time the ship's master flouted Paul's advice. Paul was less than a passenger: he was one of a number of prisoners. His opinion could be dispensed with; and so they silenced him and made it necessary for him to be quiet. In any conference which they had, Paul was in the rejected minority. But the hour of crisis came. The day and the hour came when that majority was in sore straits, and now the one man upon whom their only hope depends is the man who had been refused a place; the man who had been keeping a silent vigil with God, and to whom God had been speaking. You know the rest of the story. The man of utterness for

God whom men rejected is God's key to the situation when everything is going to pieces. The lesson is quite evident, and this principle has had many occasions in history. "Be still, and know that I am God."

There is one more very wonderful feature of this sovereign government of God. It is

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

In the narrative we come on the statement by God to Paul: "God hath given thee all those that sail with thee". Does this mean, as it well might do, that God had the *eternal* salvation of the ship's master, the centurion, and the company in mind when He put Paul on that ship? Would we be going too far in imagination if we thought that some of those later referred to by Paul as "those of Caesar's household" (evidently saved believers) came to the Lord on that voyage, and that even the centurion may have been one of "the praetorian guard"? (See Philippians i. 13, iv. 22.) Such a surmise can be supported by another occasion when Paul was "in much fear and trembling". The Lord spoke to him with the same words as those used here: "Fear not, Paul", and then, as to the desperate situation in Corinth: "I have much people in this city." Note: "I have". Not: 'I am going to have.' The Lord foreknows those who will believe and has a messenger on hand. Before the voyage came to its climax in the loss of the ship, and *before any listening to Paul* took place, God had said, "I have given thee". It was a sovereign act out of sovereign foreknowledge. I venture to say that if Paul had never let anyone suspect that he was a Christian, the great co-operation with God would not have followed.

There are times when we wonder why we are found in certain most difficult and perplexing situations. Everything in our expectation has broken down. It is far from rare that, eventually, it is found that God had something of considerable importance to Himself in that situation. Hell has raged like a sea tempest, and, humanly, the way seemed to have come to an end. But, again, if the heart is not divided in its interests, and no other concern than those of the Lord is keeping us from being pronouncedly the Lord's, the issue may be the eternal good of others. Remember, the Lord would not, on the two occasions mentioned, have said to Paul, "Fear not, Paul", if Paul had been above fear, and incapable of it; a superman, utterly without fear. Paul's moral ascendancy was due to God's grace; and that is not for giants in themselves, but for those who are wholly committed to Him.

A closer look at the story will reveal some characteristics needed in anyone whose ways are supported by the Lord. One of these is true humility. There was no proud or arrogant fighting for his own conviction on the part of Paul. However strongly he knew of the mistaken course, and repudiation of his advice, he stood back and evidently left the situation in the Lord's hands, keeping his own hands off. This is vital to the Lord's undertaking. Humility is the evidence that we have no personal or private interests to safeguard. It is also a mark of our not "thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think". It is not *our* vindication that matters, but only the Lord's honour.

Then patience is so very important. Paul had given his advice. It was flouted. Then it seemed that he had been wrong and the others right. Things went in their favour and they seemed justified. "The south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose . . ." (Acts xxvii. 13). This is a very trying element in God's sovereign ways—the way by which alone He can come into His own place, and also brings souls to Himself by way of self-devastation. Sometimes it does *appear* that God is favouring those who have refused His authority and better judgment. They really do seem to be prospered and blessed! This is set in a

much wider context than Paul's voyage to Rome. In the whole range of God's goings from of old He has so often allowed wrong, and His own authority to be set aside and seemingly given rein to man's independence.

"History's pages but record
One death grapple in the darkness,
'Twixt old systems and the Word.
Truth for ever on the scaffold;
Wrong for ever on the throne:
Yet that scaffold sways the future;
And amidst the dim unknown
Standeth God, keeping watch above His own."

The phrase "the patience of Jesus" (Revelation i.9) was used by John in a time when that 'scaffold' of Rome's persecutions *did* seem to be the triumphant 'throne' of intense opposition to all that was of the Lord Jesus. But history has shown otherwise, in that phase, and in many others. Patience is Divine power.

So we conclude this message, with its deep eternal principles of God's sovereign rule, and its showing of the wisdom and value of being *pronouncedly* the Lord's.

"Whose I am"—absolute proprietorship.

"Whom I serve"—absolute obedience.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

PAYING THE PRICE

THE Queen could not get in! One would imagine that even if lesser people were kept out, there would be no difficulty in arranging for her to pass the barrier. But no! The rules could not be changed even for the Queen of England. Her sixpence was underweight and so she had to stand outside with her group of attendants while it seemed for a moment as if she would be forced to return to her palace without every enjoying the experience which lay the other side of that barrier.

Perhaps I should explain. Here in London we have recently had a new underground railway put into operation. It is called the Victoria Line and is the most up to date in the world. Queen Elizabeth II was asked to open this line, and as she had only once ever been on a Tube train, and that when she was still a girl, she was no doubt pleased to undertake this task.

Among the many electric devices used on this line is one which makes it unnecessary to have

ticket-collectors in attendance. A slot machine issues special tickets which are made to cause the barrier to open to those who present them. The gate opens automatically and the ticket holder is allowed to pass.

Consequently when the London Transport officer took the Queen to enter the gate he expected her to put her sixpence in the machine like everybody else. He not only expected it but knew that it was essential, for even he, important though he was, could not get the gate open without the suitable ticket.

Now queens do not carry money about with them—they do not need to—but their helpers do. So Her Majesty turned to her Equerry to ask him for the necessary sixpence. Fortunately he had one, but unfortunately it was an old, worn sixpence which was underweight. The machine rejected it. He tried again. Once more the thing slipped straight through the machine and dropped out at

the bottom. The poor Queen still had no ticket. There was no prejudice against the royal family in that machine; there was simply a demand that everyone who wished to travel in the train should provide herself with a coin which weighed the correct amount. The sixpence which Queen Elizabeth had provided was weighed in its delicate balances and found wanting. So she was not allowed in.

The whole situation might have been very awkward if the London Transport officer had not intervened. It was not a question of waiving the demand. He could not do that. He could not excuse the Queen, however much he might have wished to do so. Even she had to accept the laws. He could not excuse her; but he could provide the very coin which his Company demanded as the price of admission. So the official put his hand in his own pocket and drew out a sixpence which he had there. This was placed in the slot of the machine, and it worked perfectly. The Queen withdrew her ticket, presented it at the barrier and was allowed on to the platform and so into the train.

We can only hope that she enjoyed her journey. I think that we can be quite certain that the donor of the sixpence was pleased and proud to have been able to make it possible for her. He it was who paid the price. Did the Queen order her Treasurer to repay him the money? Probably not. He would not have wished for that. What must have caused him a pleasure which money cannot buy was to receive the Queen's gracious thanks for what he had done.

What God most desires from us, too, is that we should thank Him for paying the price for us. For

we too have been "weighed in the balances and found wanting" (Daniel v. 27). However good we may feel ourselves to be, or however important we may be in this world, God has to deny us entrance into His eternal kingdom of life if we come short of the perfection which is the condition laid down by His law.

He cannot excuse us. He cannot accept anything less even from the Queen of England. We would all be shut out for ever but for the fact that He has acted in the same way as that London Transport officer. He demands the price, but He Himself has paid the price. God Himself has provided the necessary perfection to enable us to enter in to His kingdom.

Jesus Christ was also "weighed in the balances". But He was never found wanting. He is the perfect fulfiller of all God's holy law. When He died on the Cross He undertook to pay for you and me, and by that sacrifice He has provided righteousness enough for all who will accept it.

I have said that I doubt if the Queen ever offered to repay that sixpence. In our case we never could repay God even if He asked us to try. But He does not. He only asks us to give Him the pleasure of seeing us accept Christ as our Saviour and then live lives which truly say "Thank You" to Him who paid the price for us.

"There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven, and let us in."

H. F.

THE MISSION, THE MEANING AND THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST (IV)

4. IN THE GOSPEL BY JOHN

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 chrono-

logically, 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

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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 i. 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 xvii. 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

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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 i. 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 i. 5). Later John records that Jesus said: "I am the light of the world" (John viii. 12).

Further, John says that He was the source of life: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John i. 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 vi. 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 all 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 xv. 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 vi. 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 xiii. 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 iv. 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 remain 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 xiv. 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

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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!

THE MOMENTOUSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

Reading: Philippians iii. 1-16.

"I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job xlii. 5).

THIS verse sums up the whole book of Job, for it is the deep explanation underlying Job's life. This book takes a patriarchal character and shows us, in a wonderful way, God's dealings with that man in relation to Christ. Christ takes a very large place in the book of Job; indeed, He is the object in view in all that is happening here.

This verse, then, sums up the whole book of Job and shows us a tremendous transaction which is taking place in the life of this man. Concerning his past life Job said: "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear", so that his relationship to God had only been by the hearing of the ear. Then came these tremendous experiences that he went through. He went down into the depth of sorrow, and this resulted in an altogether different relationship to God: "But now mine eye seeth thee." From hearing he went to seeing, and that is no small thing. It marks a revolution in a life.

Where do we begin with Job? First there are three marks which we must consider:

(a) *Fulness*

At the beginning of his life we find Job in a state of fulness. He was a wealthy man. He had a large estate, with every kind of comfort, and a prosperous, happy family. He was highly esteemed, a

man who was taken account of and who held a position of influence. His life was marked by fulness.

(b) *Goodness*

Job was a good man. God Himself challenged Satan as to Job, saying: "Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and turneth away from evil." So we see that Job was a good man; but the statement is made with certain reservations, and is not absolute. However, as amongst men, Job was a good man, that is, he was not wicked, and God had a high estimate of him.

(c) *Complacency*

We see clearly that Job was quite satisfied with himself. He knew no trouble in his relationship to God, neither did his spiritual state cause him anxiety.

That is where we begin with Job, but what comes out later?

As to goodness, we have to look more intently, and we find that it was an outward and legal goodness, not inward and spiritual. His knowledge of God was more an objective knowledge. There was no question for him as to the reality of the existence of God, but to him God was something outward, someone up in His heaven while he was on this earth. He had just *heard* about God, and he adjusted his life according to the light he had, but it was all

outward. Job's righteousness was based upon his works. He argued with his friends about that. When they said to him that his sin was the cause of his suffering, he gave a whole catalogue of all his good works. So his righteousness was rather of works than of faith.

Thus we see in Job fulness, outward goodness and self-satisfaction.

THE TRANSITION

Now let us turn to the beginning of Job's transition:

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth."

But Satan challenges God, and says:

"Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side?" In effect, Satan is saying that Job does it because it is for his own benefit. It is easy to be good when you are protected from suffering! *"But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will renounce thee to thy face."*

God accepts Satan's challenge and gives him permission to touch Job, except that he may not touch his life. And Satan goes, and does his work. All Job's outward wealth falls under Satan's power: his home, his children, his herds, everything is destroyed. Then Job is touched in his body, and finally his wife and his friends turn against him. And at last he suffers from the stroke of Satan. (We will touch that later.)

Gathering all these difficulties and needs of Job together, we have the spectacle of a man whose life had been very full on this earth. He had had friends, earthly means, a home, a family, a standing amongst men, influence, and a sphere of usefulness. He was not a bad man. But now he is broken and utterly emptied, until he reaches the very bottom of himself. He is emptied of all he possessed, he is broken in spirit, broken in soul, broken in body, and brought down to the very bottom—and at the bottom he meets God on a basis of pure grace. He has learned the lesson of his own nothingness. It often takes a tremendous amount to bring people to that place of recognising their nothingness! Job's knowledge of God had not been an inward knowledge, a knowing Him in his own heart, but some-

thing from the outside, and therefore, as there was no true knowledge of God, there was a corresponding ignorance of his own heart. This is always so! So Job did not, at the beginning, know his own heart.

"I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

This is the transition stage! But what was it all unto? On the one hand, fulness and goodness, a great measure of self-righteousness, and on the other hand, brokenness, emptiness, everything gone—and all that by God's permission!

We must remember that Satan was God's instrument and he was not doing this independently of God. After the first blow, when Job's possessions and family were destroyed, Satan went back to God and challenged Him a second time. Again God asked him: "Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth . . . and he still holdeth fast his integrity, *although thou movedst me against him.*" God did it through Satan, but why did He do all this? We can never say when some trouble comes into our life: "This is absolutely from the devil!" It may be from the devil, but there is the Lord's meaning behind it. What was all this unto?

We have the all-inclusive answer in this verse: ". . . but now mine eye seeth thee." What does that mean? It is Christ who comes into view again and again. Job is in quest of God in a new way. He knew Him—"I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear"—but now he cries: "O that I knew where I might find him!" Job is crying out to find God, for God is not in him. He is crying for a personal, inward knowledge of God; and why does he seek after a personal, inward and spiritual union with God? Because this is the only thing which can save him now. One of his friends says to him: "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace," but Job says: "It is easy to say: 'Acquaint now thyself with God!', but that is just my difficulty. I cannot find Him, so how can I get to know Him? Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!" That personal, inward knowledge of God has been the quest of men throughout the ages, and Christ is the answer to that cry.

"Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"; "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." God is found in Christ, and in Christ the Holy Spirit becomes an inward reality. But first all our own righteousness

and fulness and self-satisfaction have to go and Christ has to be our righteousness, our fulness and our satisfaction.

VICTORY OVER DEATH

Then we see another thing in Job's life, and that is the matter of victory over death. Job came face to face with death. This had not caused him any difficulty before, because the sin question had not been dealt with, but now he had questions about himself. He was shaken and his soul was torn through fear of death. He was not sure about himself and his relationship to God, and he asks: "If a man die shall he live again?" There must be an explanation, or is life only a dream? Is there no answer, no vindication? He had lost all, yet he had believed in God. Is that all now? Is God a myth and life a tragedy? If a man die, is that all, or shall he live again?

Let us turn to the Gospel of John to find the answer to this acute question: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live."

Job wanted the resurrection and the life, and Christ is the answer to his need. Christ governs everything. Job came to see that there is life beyond, a life triumphant over death, and now he is at rest. In the forty-second chapter we find Job as a man who has come through the storms. His heart is at rest and his problems are solved: "Now mine eye seeth thee."

THE GREAT DAYSMAN

Then there is another point. Job's friends were accusing him of sin; Satan, through those friends, was acting as the accuser. In himself Job was not sure and he longed for assurance. On the other hand, it looked as if God had a controversy with him, as if something had gone wrong. His friends could not help him, and Job cried for a daysman to stand between the opposing sides, for such a man who could come in between to see that both sides had fair play and that all got their rights: a man who had no personal interests, neither on one side nor on the other.

We know our New Testament well enough to see that Jesus Christ has become that great Daysman. He is the great mediator. In I Timothy ii. 5 we read: "For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus." Christ answers Job's need and is the One who will see that there is fair play on both sides.

THE GREAT REDEEMER

Just one thing more for now. Job needed a redeemer. He needed to be redeemed from *sin*, redeemed from *Satan*, redeemed from the *power of death*, and redeemed from the corruption of his own *flesh*. He cried for this redemption; then, towards the end of God's dealings with him, there came a flash into his heart—only a flash—but in that flash he saw some One and he cried: "I know that my Redeemer liveth!" And then darkness returned.

"He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews vii. 25). That is what we need—redemption to the uttermost! Here Job saw his Redeemer for a moment and knew that He lives. And because He lives—"He ever liveth"—He can save to the uttermost.

What we want to emphasise is that the great transition of Job was *a transition from himself to Christ*. God thought it worth while to lead him through the depths, to empty him, and to break him completely in order to bring him to an inward knowledge of Christ. God finds it far more important that we should know Him in a deep personal way than to do a great many good works.

Perhaps God has led us that way of taking certain things away from us—our reputation, or the estimation of our friends. Perhaps those who are near to us have lost their confidence in us. We may have known a certain sphere of fulness, many a door has been open to us and we had many friends—and then God has laid His hand upon that and it has all gone. Perhaps we are increasingly conscious of our own nothingness, and we are coming to the place where we do not think we are as good as we thought we were. Our heart, perhaps, is not quite sure about our spiritual state, and it may be that our relationship to God is not quite what it should be. Perhaps friends say to us that we are going wrong and are mistaken. But that through which we are now going may be the way into something much larger, and we may get to know the Lord in a much deeper way. In Philippians iii Paul speaks of himself and of the law. He possessed much by birth, through education and teaching, and was much esteemed by others. But then Christ came into his life, and all these things had to go in order that he might win Christ; yet the knowledge of Christ was far more to him than what he had possessed before.

We are speaking of the momentousness, the tremendous significance of Christ, but it is only

through experience that we enter into these things—not through hearing about them, nor by studying the Bible, nor by going to church. Those are not the ways which will bring us there. Only by being emptied and broken do we come into the fulness of Christ. But the end justifies all: the great place

which Christ has in us. It is worth everything to know Christ in fulness! A good man is broken and loses everything in order to find more of Christ. The floodtide of God is Christ. May we be filled unto all His fulness!

“HOLD FAST THAT WHICH THOU HAST”

“These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand” (Revelation ii. 1).

“Nevertheless that which ye have, hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations” (Revelation ii. 25–26).

“Because thou didst keep the work of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown” (Revelation iii. 10–11).

“And the dragon waxed wroth with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, that keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation xii. 17).

IN those closing chapters of Revelation the Lord Himself is speaking very solemnly to His people, and His speaking is in relation to things coming to an end. He is speaking in relation to the consummation, the heading up of things. Again and again we find that on His heart in this speaking is the imminence of the end, the nearness of its coming. Does not the book of the Revelation begin in that atmosphere? “Things which must shortly come to pass.” The Lord is moving on to the end, and He who holds the seven stars in His hand is saying this: “That which thou hast, hold fast till I come!”

What have we that needs to be held? Well, everything that we have really discovered of Christ meets a challenge. Satan wastes no time on challenging our mere theories, but only if any child of God really has something. God would not say, ‘what you have’ if it were not something which He knows is worth having. He says, ‘Hold on to that which you have!’ There are some things we have that we have received of Him; they are holy things, they are precious things, for they are discoveries of the Lord Himself. If we have nothing of Him that we have discovered, then we have nothing at all. But I do not think many who read this would say:

‘I have not found anything in the Lord!’ I think we have all found something, and from the moment we discover Him to be anything to us, the adversary appears and challenges every bit of that possession; he assails every bit that we possess that really is livingly of Christ.

The very first factor, perhaps, in our knowledge of the Lord is the knowledge of sins forgiven, and some of us remember the joy of knowing that the sin question had really been settled. We gloried, we rejoiced, for we were forgiven people. And then, for many of us, trouble set in. The enemy pounced and insinuated a question: ‘Are you quite sure?’ Some of us escaped a very bad time because we knew the answer to that, but those who do not know the answer very nearly go out. The answer is: “It is written!” And that carried some of us through that time. We just said: ‘The Lord says so!’ When we have that answer the enemy does not waste much time on us; and so we have to hold fast that which we have.

And as we move on to know the Lord better in any way we all need fresh discoveries of Him. I think that so many have taken a deep breath of the Lord, perhaps some time ago, and they have been holding their breath ever since, and now they are very nearly out of breath. The Lord wants us to be taking fresh breaths, really receiving abundance of grace, because the abundance is available every day. There are more discoveries of Him awaiting us once we have tasted—‘to whom keeping on coming’—and the Lord Jesus wants to satisfy all our needs. You remember those who are spoken of as “blessed and satisfied with the goodness of the Lord” (Deuteronomy xxxiii. 23). He wants us to be like that. If ever you are dissatisfied, if ever you are running dry, there is only one explanation—you have been looking in some other direction than Himself. Our first tendency is to be looking at ourselves to try to find some improvement there. You notice that some people who have had an up and down spiritual life, when you meet them, and perhaps rather foolishly ask them how they are getting on, nearly always say: ‘Oh, well, I am

THE LORD'S END

afraid I am not much good.' Well, that is it. They have not yet learned to transfer their whole direction from themselves to what the Lord Jesus is, to look away unto Him, to not expect to be any better, nor to come to that place where Christ becomes the only hope of existence. I do hope that He is becoming that to some of us! If Paul said that love was the thing to aim at, I think it will be nearer the truth when we say that cleaving to Himself is the secret of everything. We cannot love except as we cleave to Him.

And so our discovery of Christ is the outcome of learning by degrees that in no other direction have we any resource. The Lord is constantly pointing us to Himself; and every time we freshly discover that Christ is sufficient and have proved Him, and we have begun to know the Lord better, the enemy will not leave anything like that alone. Have you noticed that when you have really met the Lord, have appropriated something that the Lord revealed and committed yourself to it, and that has become a fact for you, that fact must be challenged by what you meet afterwards? And during that time the Word is saying: "Hold fast that which thou hast!" It is possible to let slip what we have. We all want to have more of Christ and to manifest more of Him. Why do some people manifest little, perhaps some who have had opportunity for many years? Their growth has been negligible and they register very much the same as they did perhaps ten years ago. There is no river, nothing flowing. May it not just be this: that there never was a real taking hold in faith of what the Lord said? They have never said: 'Lord, that is mine now and I praise You for it. I thank You for it.' Then when the tremendous reaction came and the enemy sought to dislodge them from that position, they failed to hold fast what they had. They failed to say: 'This is a bad time, but what You said at that time is still true.' They let it run out like a leaking vessel, so that when it comes to the next series of meetings, they are starting all over again exactly where they were before. After a time they may even become dull of hearing.

The thing is: how much more of the Lord Jesus has really taken up residence in us? "What thou hast!" Have we got anything? We have got something, but we may have more, and God is dealing with us all in order that there may be more of Christ and less of our own strength, by which I mean even our own dogged continuance in what we think. God wants that we should really receive of Himself by faith continually, receive continually what we need morally and what we need of patience and endurance. And the Lord has an end in view.

His end is the Kingdom, the overthrow of the whole régime of the evil one, and His instrument, His very means of doing that, is saints; something done in the Church of which you and I are members that causes the collapse of the whole hierarchy of evil. Now, Satan is trying to prevent our seeing that. He says: 'It may be something to do with some important people, but not you!' I believe that it is to do with each one of us and that your battle lost or won is affecting the whole situation. We are all equal in Christ, and if one member suffers or fails, all the members suffer, and the Lord's end is the overthrow of that terrific stranglehold that is on this universe. We see the forces in their outward display and we think how tremendous they are, but the invisible forces behind them are far more terrible. Millions of men are just playthings! Armies that can stretch for one or two thousand miles are nothing to the powers behind. They can push them along and wipe them out in a night. The powers in the heavens are the powers God is going to shake, and the thing behind is going to tumble to the dust. "He that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations" (Revelation ii. 26). The Lord is speaking simply to the saints. What a privilege that we are of that company! This word is to us. He says to us: "Hold fast that which thou hast!" Are you going to say: 'I have not got much!?' He says: 'Hold on to what you have.' It is that wicked one who is saying that it does not matter about you, and you have not got this or that. The Lord's attitude is one of love. Do hold what you have and you will have more. "Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance" (Matthew xxv. 29). There is plenty more to follow if you will hold on. "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown"—your part in the Throne, your fellowship with Him in the day of His glory.

I think there is another emphasis: that we are not going to win in this battle by trying to be or to do something more. The emphasis of the Lord is: 'Hold what you have.' I do not mean hold some opinion that you have, or hold something that you say is of the Lord. Hold fast to your utter confidence in Himself about every bit of grace that He has shown you. It is grace that we need to grow in, not in some doctrine, or something of opinion, or something of a theory, but grace. There is a measure of Christ in us and that has come through the appropriation of faith, and the Lord is saying to us: 'That is precious to Me. Do not be moved from it!'

THE LINK OF FAITH

And when we come to that next word: "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown", the words 'hold fast' are simply the verb of the noun 'strength'. Be strong in what you have. It is not the same word as just holding it in your hand, but it is: 'You have got it. Now be strong in Me about it!' In Him we are possessed of everything that we need. As we are together here and see one another, we represent the wealth of Christ. "Ye are in him made full" (Colossians ii. 10). And what brings that to pass? The link of faith which says: 'I appropriate Christ as fulness for me. I appropriate all that He is to make up all the lacks.' So, having appropriated by faith, the Lord is saying: 'Hold that! Maintain your ground that in Christ you have all that you need.'

Some of you, I know, are being put into very hot places. There are places which some of us may know where there is great pressure and little relief. All of us know something of battle in these days, but at any rate there is fellowship and a coming together for many of us. But some, without that opportunity, are meeting even more intense forces in the utterly naked way that perhaps others do not meet it. How is that to be countered? How is there to be a going through so that 'no man take thy crown'? I believe the Lord is saying: 'It is all right. You have everything. You have Me, your sins are forgiven, there is no condemnation, you are joined to Me in the Throne, you are in victory.' Do not get worked up, for it is a fact. Just be strong and inwardly, even without the ability to spend time thinking, retain a confidence of heart that Christ is enough, that He in you is all that you need. That is 'holding fast to what you have', and no one can take your crown while you do that. The Lord Jesus is invulnerable. He is Himself the victor, and He is the victor of every field in the weakest saint. The kingdoms and the nations around us may rage, but the crown is on His head. He stands unmoved when everything else rages, and that is the Lord who is joined to you in your spirit. The Lord is saying: 'Do not move! If you will only hold fast and refuse to be moved, you are through.'

"He that keepeth my works to the end. . . ." What are His works? Well, just the work that is of faith, the corresponding action to our confidence in Himself. We have confidence in Him and therefore we walk in a certain way. Spontaneously, out of our relationship with Him, there are certain things that cannot be done and certain things that

can be done. The certain things we do are the works of faith, and there are extra works which are the fruit of our confidence in Him. You are not trying to help the Lord, but you are just counting on Him, and because of that confidence in Himself you actively do the next thing in the light of that fact. You are doing very ordinary things? Well, they are His works. It is rather comforting to know when you have to do certain very ordinary things that they are His works. "To the pure all things are pure; to the defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure" (Titus i. 15).

Yes, we can be unscathed in the midst of the battle because of His hold upon us, and I want to finish with that.

THE LORD'S HOLD UPON US

This is the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand. A little further up it says: "The seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand . . . are the angels of the seven churches." The saints to whom He is speaking are in His right hand, so before He begins to say anything to us He says: 'I have you in My hand. Far mightier than your faith-hold on me is My hold on you!' The Lord is holding us through this warfare. If we were to sink altogether, we would find Him picking us out again. There is a mighty hold in His hand, and He will not let go. You may say as you go into battle this week: 'That word was about holding fast, but I feel I have let go!' Here is the accuser again. He is always at it. The answer is: He will hold you fast. You are in the right hand, the authoritative right hand of Him who has the mightiest hand. I think we need that foundation. We need the rest of knowing that He holds us through all the ups and downs. As that hymn says: "Blest when my faith can hold Him fast." We have a better time when we hold Him fast, when we hold on. And He is encouraging us to hold on—not ordering us to, but encouraging us to hold on. He is saying: 'I will not let you go. If you hold on to Me it is going to make a lot of difference!'

I believe we are all together in this battle of faith just now. The Lord is saying: 'Hold on! Behold. I come quickly, but hold on just a little longer that no man take thy crown.' And there is a crown of glory that fadeth not away which He has prepared for just a little grain of faith. It is all His goodness and His glory, and He is well worthy of our trust.

C. J. B. H.

CHRISTIANITY—A PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

Reading: I Corinthians ii.

“We . . . are transformed into the same image” (that is: ‘We pass from one form to another’) II Corinthians iii. 18.

As I have moved about amongst Christians in many parts of this world, and in many situations, one thing has been growing upon me more and more strongly. In the presence of a great deal of confusion amongst Christians and many complications in Christianity, the feeling has become stronger and stronger that the need is for Christians really to know what Christianity is, and to know what it is that they are in as Christians. That sounds, perhaps, rather drastic, but I am quite sure that a very great deal of the trouble—and I think all agree that there is a good deal of trouble in Christianity generally—is due to a failure really to understand what Christianity is. It may seem strange that I should speak to you, mostly experienced and mature Christians, about the true nature of Christianity. Well, if you feel that it is presumptuous and hardly called for, be patient, and I think that before we get very far you will feel as I do: that although we know a good deal about Christianity as it is taught in the New Testament, we are very often in difficulty ourselves for the very simple (or profound) reason that we have not really grasped the meaning of what we are in. So often, when distressed as to some situation, and perplexed that it should have come about, I have found that that is just what the Word has said would happen.

May I say to you (and I am sure you will agree after a moment’s thought) that the major part of the New Testament, by which I mean all these Letters which make up the larger section of the New Testament, is all bearing upon this one thing: to make Christians understand what Christianity is. If that is true, and all these Letters *were* to Christians, surely we have to conclude that even New Testament Christians needed Christianity explained to them, and even then there was this necessity of just defining the real nature of that into which they had come.

Begin with the Letter to the Romans. Was that necessary for Christians? It was written to Christians, but what was it written for? To put them right in the matter of Christianity! Apparently those people were not quite clear in their position, in their lives and in their hearts as to the implications of that into which they had come by faith in Jesus Christ.

Proceed, as we are going to do, into the Letters to

the Corinthians, and what are they? Set over against a background of real confusion and contradiction in Corinth, those Letters were written really to try to make the Christians understand what Christianity really is. And so on and on through the New Testament that is the object; that we and all who believe in the Lord Jesus should really have a clear understanding of what this is, of the meaning of the name we bear, and the meaning of that which we believe and into which we have come by the grace of God. We can gather it all up in this simple statement: that the whole Christian life is an education as to what Christianity is. Is that true? Do you not sometimes stand in the presence of some situation, some difficulty, some trial, some complication, some perplexity, some experience, and say: ‘What does it all mean? I am a Christian. I have put my faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. I am His, but I don’t understand what it all means. Why this experience? Why am I going this way? Why has this come my way? Why is my life such as it is? These many things are so full of mystery and perplexity. What is it that I have got into? Is this Christianity? Is this really what I have to expect and accept? If so, I need understanding, and enlightenment, and I need help as a Christian, for this thing is often beyond me altogether.’

Well, that is the setting—but is that true? If there is anyone who has never been that way, who has never had a moment like that, and whose path has been so nice and smooth, with everything so right and well adjusted and without any kind of trouble, I will excuse you if you like to read no further, for I have nothing to say to you.

Well now, what is the point on which these words in II Corinthians iii. 18 are focused? “We are transformed . . .”, and it is the present active tense: ‘We are being transformed’; ‘We are in a process of transformation, passing from one form to another.’ There is a sense in which that fragment, that condensed verse put into those few words, touches the heart of the whole New Testament and explains everything.

Having said that, we come back to this second chapter of the first Letter to the Corinthians. This Letter (as indeed are all the Letters, but this is a very good example) is built around two contrasted words, and they are in this second chapter. Those two contrasted words describe two different types of humanity, two different manhoods, and between the two, firmly and squarely the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is planted. Look at the chapter again in the light of that last statement! “When I came

unto you . . . *determined* to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified", and everything after that rests upon that distinction between these two types which the Cross divides and says: "That belongs to one category of human beings and this belongs to another category of human beings." There is a cleavage cut by the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ between those two which separates them and makes them two different species of mankind. That truth follows right through this Letter. Read it through with this in your mind. The Apostle here speaks about a foundation and a building. He says: "Let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ", and then he drives the wedge of the Cross right into the superstructure and speaks of one kind of work or works, which are the product of one type of man, or Christian, and another kind of work, or works, which are the product of another kind. The first will go up in flames and will never be found in eternity. It has gone for ever. The second will abide. It will abide the fire of judgment and the test of time, and be found in the ultimate structure, or building of God.

You see, Paul is applying this principle of the divide between two kinds of Christian people, and to the two kinds of work, or fruits, from each respectively, and the building, he says, as to its eternal value, will be determined by who is producing it, by what kind of man, or manhood, is producing it. Which of the two is producing this building? Think about this! These are not non-Christians. What an immense amount is being built upon Christ that is going up in smoke! Every man's work will be tried by fire, and its real value and its endurance will be determined by and will depend upon where it comes from, that is, from which of these two types of manhood.

Now you are wondering what the two words are which define the two types of manhood. Read the chapter: "the natural man . . . he that is spiritual." There are the two words: the natural and the spiritual *Christians*. They are not unconverted people, not non-Christians. Is it necessary for me to put in all the detail to confirm and ratify what I am saying? May I remind you that the Apostle Paul had been in Corinth for two whole years with these people! I do not know what you think, but if you had the Apostle Paul going in and out for two whole years, you would have plenty of ground for consideration! He *was* there amongst them for two whole years, going in and out, teaching them probably every day, and then he went away for five years. Then he heard things which were reported

to him by the household of Chloe. I wish everyone would do what the Apostle did! He did not take the report without investigating it. He got the report and then immediately despatched a reliable messenger to investigate, either to find that the thing was not true or to find that it was so. The messenger went and came back, saying: 'It is all true, and worse than the report.' The deterioration in five years!

You are perhaps startled and shocked by that, and will say: 'Can it be?' Well, remember the messages to the seven churches in Asia in the Revelation, and how all those churches began. There were wonderful things in those churches at the beginning. Read the story of the beginning of the church in Ephesus, and what a story it is! Against such tremendous antagonism and hostility those people came out clearly, and they brought all their magic books, of which the price is given (and that represented a tremendous amount in human values!), and piled them up in the open street, or it may have been the market square, or some open place, and set them all aflame. That is a thorough-going division! But where is that church in the Revelation? "Thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent" (Revelation ii. 4, 5). What can have happened? Well, I put that in by way of emphasizing this possibility, at least, of declension. Why in Corinth, why in Ephesus, and why in the others that decline? Come back to the two men, the two men instead of one man, the two men instead of each individual. It is not a dividing of a company into this category and that category, but the two things in a person. You know, we are all, if we are the Lord's, in some measure natural and spiritual. Do you agree with that? The question is not whether we are altogether perfect and there is no more of the natural in us. That is not the point. The point is: Who is dominating and governing? Which of the two, the natural or the spiritual? Here in Corinth, as we see by the Letter, the natural man was in control in the men and in the women and had taken ascendancy over the spiritual man.

The two words, then, are 'natural'—and you do not need that I should tell you that the Greek word is 'soulical'—and 'spiritual'; the man of soul and the man of spirit always in conflict. Who is going to have the upper hand, the mastery, in every one of us? The two are in each person.

INTELLECTUALISM

Now what is this natural category, this natural species? Look at the Letter again. First of all, the

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

dominance, ascendancy, control of intellectualism, the wisdom of this world. That is the thing that is being marked and underscored as a part of the trouble in Corinth; the control of intellectualism, the natural reason, the natural mind, the idea that you are going to solve the problems of life along intellectual lines. Will you tell me that that is not a peril of Christianity today? Why, it is everywhere! It shouts at you from the religious press. You may not read so much of it, but it is my business to be familiar with what is happening in the Christian theological world, and I tell you, friends, that as I read certain theological magazines I find *death*. They are wearisome to the spirit. All this terrific effort to solve the problems of Christianity by the human intellect; the research, argument, discussion and debate, theses, etc.; philosophical Christianity trying to solve spiritual problems; what a weariness it is! I have to put these papers down sometimes! I cannot finish them, for they are so dead, so utterly lifeless. And that sort of thing is everywhere. It is thought that if you go to our seats and seminaries of learning with a clever brain, able to put out a convincing argument, you are going to save souls. There never was a greater fallacy!

This Letter to the Corinthians says that. Read this second chapter again and you will find that Paul is saying that. Paul was an educated man, so much so that for two thousand years the best scholars have found him defeating them, and they have not mastered him yet! Come to the religious bookshops and look at the shelves on the exposition of the New Testament, and you will find that Paul predominates. I got a book by one of our leading professors of theology in the universities and it was called *A Portrait of Peter*. This man, with all his learning, set out to give us a portrait of Peter. I opened the book and found that the first few pages were wholly occupied with Paul! He could not get to Peter because Paul was in the way, and the issue of his attempt was: 'Well, Peter was a great man, but Paul was very much greater!' Yes, this man Paul was an educated man, an intellectual man, a learned man. You cannot discredit Paul along that line at all, for he will beat you every time in that realm—but listen! 'You Corinthians, when I came to you I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, but in fear and in much trembling. I had determined that I would know nothing amongst you intellectual Corinthians save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.' What was Paul's conclusion? 'It is no use, however much I may have of the schools, whatever I may know, however I might be able to argue with the Corinthians or the Athenians on Mars Hill, I will get nowhere along

that line with a spiritual situation like this. I have made up my mind about that.' It is part of the natural man to think that you are going to be able to build up something by intellectual, scholastic, academic acumen. The fact is that what intellect can build up, intellect can pull down!

POWERISM

Then look at this prominent word: power. It is there in the chapter: wisdom . . . power; and at Corinth there was a worshipping of natural power, ability to conquer by natural strength. You can call it 'powerism', for it was an 'ism' there. Crush by your superior strength, impose something forceful, mighty, upon people, and you will win. Only be strong enough and you can solve all the problems and change all the situations. 'Powerism' is the natural man's idea of how it is going to be done.

EMOTIONALISM

Then emotionalism has a large place with these Corinthians. Going to capture, captivate and master, and gain your end by force of emotion; stirring up people's feelings, playing upon them, working upon them until they make an almost hysterical response. If you do that well and thoroughly you will get some Christians! The Apostle says: 'Not at all!' It is evident that these Corinthians were very emotional people.

FOOLISHNESS

What does the Apostle put over against these three aspects of the natural man? Over against wisdom he puts 'foolishness'. In the first chapter he speaks of "the foolishness of the preaching". You find that 'foolishness' was a great thing with the Apostle Paul! "We are fools for Christ's sake" (I Corinthians iv. 10). What did he mean? Well, he did not mean: 'Be simpletons!', which is what we immediately take to be the meaning of being foolish. What Paul meant by foolishness was the denial that intellectualism could find out God. 'The princes of this world, and the wisdom of this world did not find out God', said Paul, 'and they could not find Him out. They could not find out anything to do with God.' "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: and he cannot know them." Foolishness is the denial that all the wisdom and all the philosophy of the Greeks there in Corinth, where they boasted of this thing so much, could get through the barrier to find God; and that all this

power of mind and will projected and asserted in any way whatever will come up against the barrier and not get through, will not find God, nor the things of God. It is all written off as foolishness when the quest for God is pursued along that line. How foolish it is! And Paul gives a wonderful, almost startling, example of this: "God's wisdom . . . which none of the rulers of this world knoweth: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." There is not much sense in that wisdom, is there? Not much logic or philosophy in that!

So Paul puts what he calls 'foolishness' over against their wisdom, meaning a positive denial registered by the Cross of the Lord Jesus that mere intellectualism can find God and the things of God. It cannot, for the natural man cannot!

WEAKNESS

Over against the powerism of this mentality of the natural man, the Apostle almost glories in using the word 'weakness'. He says even that Christ was crucified through weakness, and he is always speaking about, and glorying in, his own weakness. What does he mean? The denial that this kind of human force, assertiveness, can achieve anything in the spiritual world. What a building we are tearing down!

You know, that has been the test of man right from the beginning. Was it not the test of Abraham to let go even of what God had given him in Isaac? The test of this man's real spirituality was the ability to let go. Was it true of Jacob? Was he not a man of tenacity, of determination, a man who would get what he wanted at any price, at the cost of anyone else's convenience and wellbeing? Was that not the issue of Peniel, or Jabbok? "I will not let thee go!" That is Jacob! He had been like that all his life, holding on tenaciously to what he wanted, what he had or what he wanted to have. But the finger of God touched the hollow of his thigh, and after that you can see that he is a cringing man! See how he meets his brother Esau!

You are not, whether you are Abraham or Jacob or any of the others whom we might mention, going to get through with God fully and finally by your own natural determination and tenacity. One of the great lessons of the Christian life is to learn how to let go to God. Oh, all the exhortation to be strong in the Lord, to endure, to acquit you like men and be strong, does not mean with this natural strength. It is another kind of strength, and a very different kind, a strength which is only seen by our ability to let other people sometimes have their

way, to get what they are after and set us at nought. They hold, grip, maintain things in their hands to our disadvantage, and our real strength is in our weakness. The Apostle Paul put this into words. Read the second chapter of the Letter to the Philippians: "Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant . . . becoming obedient, even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Well, has it proved to be the right thing? 'We are being changed . . .' Do you see the point now?

BALANCE

So, over against intellectualism—foolishness; over against powerism—weakness; over against emotionalism—what? The denial that the quest, the craving, the pursuit of sensationalism will get you there. For I believe that was the heart of these Corinthians' lust, their excessive desire, their outreach of soul for spiritual gifts. It is impressive that it is to the Corinthians, far more than to any other church in the New Testament, that so much is said about spiritual gifts. These demonstrations, this display, these things that you can see and glory in because you can see them, are all out of sensationalism. I am quite sure, from what we read, that if you had gone into those gatherings in Corinth you would have seen some hysterical behaviour as they made these spiritual gifts, as *they* thought, the ground and nature of their spirituality—and they are the most unspiritual church of all. So over against unbalance, lopsidedness in the Christian Church, there is need of balance.

Do you notice one characteristic of these Christians, one defect which is written so clearly and so largely here in the Letter? There is a lack of the power of spiritual discernment, the spiritual perception, the spiritual intuition which warns us: 'Go steady! Don't be carried away! Don't be thrown off your balance! This thing may be all right in its right place and under proper control, but be careful! There is a snare in every spiritual gift, and if you make the *gift* the main thing and not the spiritual meaning of the gift, that thing, which in itself may be quite right, will lead you into trouble.' I am covering a lot of history when I say that. Perhaps some of the biggest problems with which some of us have had to deal in people have been the result of this unbalanced quest for the manifestation of the sensational aspects of Christianity.

Well, perhaps some of you are not able to understand all this, but this is the situation here in Corinth, and I am only saying this to show that

there are these two orders, these two categories of what I have called species of humanity which have their residence within one shell of the human body: soul and spirit. They are there, and the Apostle writes to these same people—for the second Letter is only a continuation of the first—‘We are being changed from one form to another.’ What is going on? What is the process of the Spirit of God in the believer? What is the meaning of all this that the Lord allows to come our way, this discipline, these adversities, these trials, these sufferings, these difficulties, these ‘strange things’ (to use Peter’s words, for they are strange to us as coming from

God, or being allowed by God)? What is the meaning of it all? To bring about the change, the transformation from one species to another, from one kind of humanity to another. There is something in each trial, in each adversity, in the suffering, which, under the sovereignty of God, is intended by Him to make a difference in us. ‘We are being transformed.’

It is certainly not wrong to have a soul! It is *that* which has to be saved. In the course of that salvation, the great lesson is how to keep the soul under the control of the spirit. This is what is meant by being ‘spiritual’. This is truly “He that is spiritual”.

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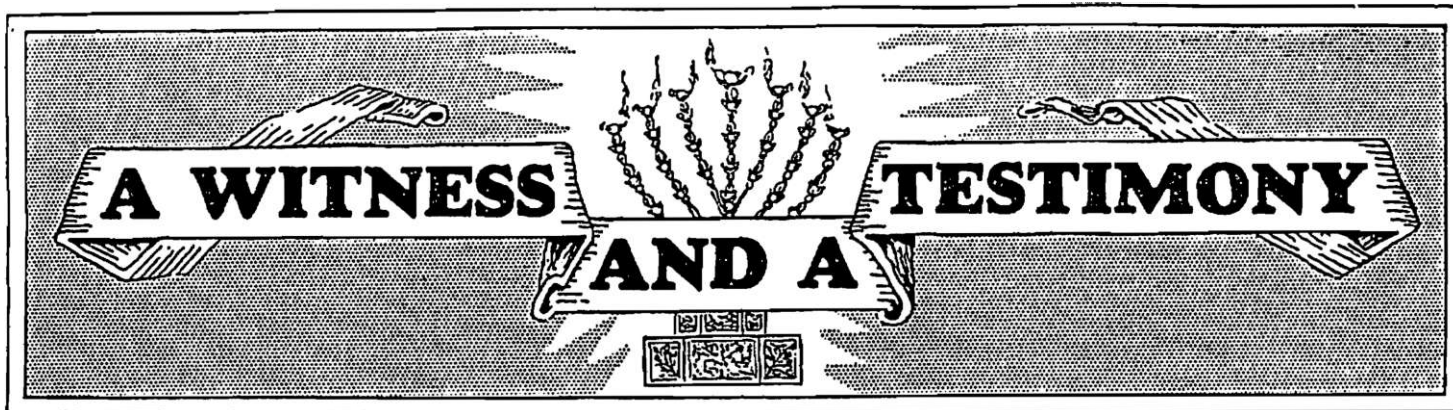
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AN APOSTLE'S SUPREME AMBITION

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death" (Philippians iii. 10).

THERE are few words in his writings which reveal how committed to the Lord Jesus this man was. The whole context is one consummate outpouring of his heart to the One whom he said had "apprehended" him, and he focuses all in a brief half sentence: "That I may know him."

The impressive thing about this expressed ambition is the time at which it is made. Here is a man who has had a revelation and knowledge of Jesus Christ greater than any other man up to that time. That knowledge commenced when, as he said, "it pleased God to reveal his Son *in me*". That beginning devastated him, and sent him into the desert to try to grasp its implications. Later he had been "caught up into the third heaven and shown *unspeakable* things, which (he said) were not lawful to be uttered". Between, and around those two experiences, there is evidence of an ever growing knowledge of Christ. Here, after all that, near the end of his life, he is crying passionately: "That I may know him."

The very least that we can say about this is that the Christ in view was a very great Christ indeed, who outstrips the greatest capacity and comprehension of man. This stands in such tremendous contrast to the limited Christ of our recognition and apprehension! How very much more there is in Christ than we have ever seen! But we must break down our verse. It is divided by its main words, and can be stated in its four phrases.

(1) The all-governing passion: "That I may know him."

(2) The effectual power: "The power of his resurrection."

(3) The essential basis: "The fellowship of his sufferings."

(4) The progressive principle: "Conformed to his death."

I. THE ALL-GOVERNING PASSION

Here a little study in words is both helpful and necessary. In the original language of the New Testament there are two words for 'knowing' or 'knowledge' or 'to know'. They run in numerous occasions and connections right through the New Testament.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

One of these words has the meaning of knowledge by information; being told, reading, by report. It is more the knowledge which comes by observation, study, searching, or talk. It is rather knowledge about things, persons, etc. The other word carries the meaning of personal experience, intimate acquaintance; and *inward* knowledge. Sometimes there is a prefix which gives the meaning of "full knowledge" (*epi*). The second of these words and meanings is that which Paul is using and employing here: "That I may have or gain more of the knowledge of Him which is personal experience by personal acquaintance, by living, firsthand relationship with Him."

---This removes everything from the realm of mere theory, the intellect, and being told. It is the result and effect of an act of the Holy Spirit within. That is why Paul links with this knowledge "the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings". It is powerful knowledge, born of deep experience. And this is the only *true* knowledge of Christ! It is planted or wrought deep in the inner life.

II. THE EFFECTUAL POWER

"The power of his resurrection." While there is a future aspect of the whole statement, that is, the consummation in glory, we *must* understand that in each of these phrases Paul is thinking of this life. Even in the next verse, where he speaks of *attaining* to the "outresurrection from among the dead", he is thinking primarily of present spiritual and moral out-raising. He had known something of this power already. His conversion was such. Again and again, in what he called "deaths off" he had known it. Perhaps greatest of all were his experiences in Asia and Lystra (II Corinthians i. 9; Acts xiv. 19-20).

Resurrection power and life *are* the knowledge of Christ. This is how we know Him, and this is available for every believer. It is for endurance, for overcoming, for fulfilment of ministry, for maintaining the Lord's testimony in the world; for every need which demands it in relation to the interests and glory of Christ. It puts life on a supernatural basis. It is the power of *His* resurrection, the greatest miracle in history.

III. THE ESSENTIAL BASIS

"The fellowship of his sufferings."

In this connection there are some things that we

must at once set aside. There were sufferings of Christ which we do *not* share, and are not called upon to share, although sometimes there seems to be a very fine and thin line between them.

We do not share the atoning sufferings of Christ. There is a whole realm of suffering which was His alone. The work of man's redemption was His alone, *for* us. When He who was without sin was made sin for us He was alone, even God-forsaken in that eternal moment. Upon that fact the whole truth of His unique Person hangs, and the whole system of *perfect* sacrifice rests; the *spotless* Lamb.

But when all that is accepted and established, there *are* sufferings of Christ in which we have fellowship with Him. We also, *for His sake*, may be despised and rejected of men. We can be discredited, ostracised, persecuted, mocked, tortured, and even "killed", both in an act and "all the day long". Paul speaks of a residue of Christ's sufferings which he was helping to fill up for "His body's sake which is the church". This is another, and different, area and system of suffering. Paul looked upon this as an honour and something in which to rejoice, because it was for the One whom he so deeply loved. But he also saw that this suffering *with* and *for* Christ provided the basis for knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection. This Apostle would agree that only those who know *this* fellowship truly know the Lord. We know that! It is perfectly evident that real usefulness in a spiritual way comes out of the winepress, and "they that have suffered most have most to give". There is nothing artificial about the fruit of Christ.

IV. THE PROGRESSIVE PRINCIPLE

"Becoming conformed unto his death."

It is important in understanding the Apostle to realise that he was not thinking of conformity to Christ's death as the end of all else. His real meaning was that he should increase in the knowledge of Christ, know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings by becoming conformed to His death. His death—Christ's—was behind, something at the beginning, and the spiritual history of the believer is a working *back* to what that death meant. It meant the end of the "old man", crucifixion to the world mind and will; the closing of the door to a whole system which was not Christ-centred and Christ-governed.

All this had been stated and presented in Paul's earlier letters; but it was a meaning which had to be progressively made real and true in spiritual experience. The meaning of Christ's death—Paul

taught—was to be the inner history of the believer, and this would work out—progressively—in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. So that, *by* being conformed to His death, he would come to the fuller knowledge

of Him and of that Divine power. It is ever so. The all-governing passion opens the way for the effectual, and effectuating power, by the essential basis, through the progressive principle of conformity to His death.

THE MISSION, THE MEANING AND THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

5. IN THE BOOK OF THE ACTS

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 ourselves 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

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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 viii. 4), and what was the chief note in their preaching? Jesus Christ is *Lord*! (Acts x. 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 viii. 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 xvii. 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 xii. 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

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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" (I John v. 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."

GOD'S SPIRITUAL TEMPLE

Reading: I Peter ii. 1-10
John ii. 13-22

THE TRUTH SOWN AND HIDDEN

YOU will notice that the incident referred to above took place at the commencement of our Lord's ministry, and it is very remarkable that there is nothing in the other Gospels of this nature which sets forth so clearly the determined counsel of God concerning the crucifixion and resurrection. He began to disclose to the inner circle of His disciples how He must be crucified, and rise again on the third day. Here we have quite a public statement right at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. This surely brings into view something of extreme importance, which gives a very big and comprehensive explanation of the mission of Christ in coming here, being crucified and being raised again—"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

You will notice that the disciples, after the resurrection, remembered that He had said this, and we are told that they believed the scriptures, and the word which Jesus had said. When the Lord Jesus did rise again, so unexpectedly to these men (although they had been told so often), they naturally would remember that He had told them that He would rise again. But we are expressly told here that it was not the fact of His resurrection that they remembered, nor the fact that they had been

told about it beforehand, but that after He rose again they remembered this particular saying. It came back to them—not just that Jesus was going to rise again, but this particular utterance of His. Surely that means something more than that they believed that it was written that Jesus should rise again! They came to understand something of the implication of the resurrection, and I think we find that in this particular chapter of the first letter of Peter.

Here is the real implication of Christ's resurrection, and a scripture is brought forth. He is to rise again. Yes, but His resurrection means this: that God now has, by the resurrection, a spiritual, heavenly, eternal temple in which to dwell. "Destroy this temple," the Lord Jesus said, "and in three days I will raise it up." He raised up God's temple, which, in the first place, was the Lord Jesus Himself. The disciples remembered the scripture, and here in Peter's letter we have the Spirit's explanation of that abiding work done by the resurrection in the sense that God now has a spiritual, heavenly, eternal temple in which to dwell; and when we touch that we surely touch the final, and ultimate, and full purpose of God.

Peter tells us what the temple is for. On the one hand, it is that spiritual sacrifices might be offered up to God. On the other hand, we are told that it should be that from which His excellencies should be shown forth. It is a place for God's dwelling, in which He is to abide and find the satisfaction of His heart (represented by the spiritual sacrifices),

and from which He is to manifest His excellent glories to the universe. That is the result of the resurrection.

Now we may see something of the value and importance of this expression of the Lord's from the way in which it was taken up and twisted by His enemies towards the end of His time here on the earth. You remember that when they sought false witnesses against Him, nothing very much came which seemed to offer any particular charge against Him until two men came and said: "This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days" (Matthew xxvi. 61). Why did they lay hold of this saying? Surely there were many other things which might equally well have been brought forth as charges against the Lord Jesus! Well, of course, as Jews that hit them and it rankled in their hearts. That is the human explanation. They could never forget a word that seemed to be against their temple. But there is something even deeper. Surely Satan's hatred is being manifested in this, and since it is to be shown what his finger is out against, there comes up this question of the destroying and raising again of the temple. It would seem that there is something there against which all the powers of darkness are ranged, something which, as far as they know, is of supreme importance and value. It comes up again when the Pharisees complain about the tomb not being sufficiently guarded: "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I rise again" (Matthew xxvii. 63). That had remained in their minds and was something they could not forget. When we touch this question of God's heavenly dwelling-place, the corporate heavenly Man, immediately we come into a realm of intense and bitter conflict. This is God's ultimate purpose, as it is His first purpose. His heart has always been set upon this very thing, and that is confirmed by the way in which Satan rages against it.

THE TRUTH APPREHENDED

Now we pass into the time of the Pentecostal Church in the book of the Acts. We find there men who, because of their witness concerning the Lord Jesus and His resurrection, are in a realm of persecution and suffering, trial and difficulty. But it seems that, when we get beyond those first few chapters and meet this servant of the Lord called Stephen, we come into a peculiar realm of antagonism. Stephen comes forth as a man, and the first thing we are conscious of as he comes into his public ministry is that all hell is against this man. They have been persecuting the disciples, but they

gnash their teeth on Stephen, and there is a tremendous uprising of all the rage and bitterness of hell against him. It is surely not going beyond the scripture to suggest that Stephen had a clearer vision of this very thing than the apostles had. We are not suggesting at all that there are any differences between these servants of the Lord, so far as their experiences are concerned. As we know, the Apostle Paul later on brought, by the Holy Spirit, a very clear explanation of the heavenly nature of the Church, and there have been some dear children of the Lord who have mistaken the explanation for the experience, and think that the Apostle Paul brought in the heavenly Church.

I think there is no doubt that these first chapters of the book of the Acts reveal that the saints of the Lord at that time had not the clear vision of what was involved in this heavenly temple, but that did not alter the fact that they were in the experience and value of it, and were living in fellowship with their blessed Lord, in heavenly union with Him; for we must always remember that the experience is one thing, and the explanation of the experience is a further thing. The experience does not wait upon the explanation. Let us not be too concerned if we have not the clearest understanding or explanation of things, but let us rather be deeply concerned that we shall be in the heavenly value of them and in the experience of them—though, of course, the explanation as given by the Holy Spirit is of great value.

Then we come to Stephen. Stephen has met the awful force and power of the devil against him, and then he is brought before the Sanhedrin. Notice the terms of the accusation! The witnesses are false, but they are as usual distorting something which is true. "This man ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place . . ." (Acts vi. 13, 14). Well, as in the case of the Lord Jesus, they were false witnesses, distorting his words, but there was something of truth in what they said. Follow through Stephen's explanation. Many good people imagine that Stephen did not answer the charge, but went off into a long story and then levelled a hot-headed explanation against the Sanhedrin, and suffered for it. Not at all! Stephen is a man filled with the Holy Ghost. He goes through the history of God's dealings with His children from the time when the God of glory appeared unto Abraham, and keeps this charge in view until he comes to the end of the story. He tells how Solomon built a house and said: "The heaven is my throne, and the earth the footstool of my feet: what manner of house will ye

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build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?" (Acts vii. 49, 50)—and he stopped there. If God does not dwell in a house made with hands, where does He dwell? Stephen was reciting a well-known passage of scripture to men who had quite probably studied the scriptures and knew them. Now you know that when a passage of scripture is quoted, and the one who is quoting stops before it is completed, how instantly in your mind you finish the quotation. This was a very familiar passage and perhaps every man in his mind said: "But to this man will I look . . ." (Isaiah lxvi. 2), and the Man who was very much in view was the Lord Jesus. That was why Stephen did not have to say any more to ram home the explanation!

Here is the point. You are speaking against the temple—but what is God's concern? What is God's plan and place? What position has He in this great building? Well, the Almighty does not dwell in houses made with hands. Then where does He dwell? ". . . to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." You do not have far to go before Stephen says: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts vii. 56). A heavenly Man at God's right hand in the power of resurrection? They would not forgive Stephen for that! All hell rose up in an awful ferment of fury against him. Why? Because this is the ultimate, full thing of God. Where is God's holy, heavenly, eternal dwelling place? "To this Man will I look"—the Lord Jesus Christ! He always was, of course, God's heavenly Man; but the value and the purpose of the resurrection is that—as we see so clearly in I Peter ii—by His resurrection God not only has the Personal Man in whom He dwells, but also His corporate Man, His heavenly, holy, eternal dwelling-place.

Now this is the emphasis in my own heart. The Lord Jesus said that if that temple were destroyed, in three days He would raise it again. That raising again of His temple, His body, of Him who was, and is, the eternal temple of God, has resulted in this: that God has secured in Him, beyond any doubt, that which His own heart has sought from all eternity—a spiritual temple in which to dwell, wherein to find His own heart's rest, and from which to manifest His glory.

THE VIOLENT REACTION TO THE TRUTH

You notice the reaction of the Jews to what Jesus said in relation to the three days: "Forty

and six years was this temple in building." Herod was the man responsible, and he would not be forty-six years at a job without making a very good job of it! As a matter of fact, that building in which our Lord stood was one of the wonders of the world, and yet that was not where God dwelt. So the forty-six years and the three days not only stand in contrast as to time, but set before us this great contrast of what a wonderful building for God can be as against the heavenly temple which God has built for Himself. Oh, what a contrast! I cannot describe that temple at Jerusalem, but most of us have probably read some account of its beauty and wonder. But that was not where God dwelt. Where did He dwell? Peter tells us: "Unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men. . . ." See the contrast! Here is a great, overwhelming, impressive, beautiful, magnificent building, and over against it a very ordinary Man. The Word describes Him as 'a root out of a dry ground, with no form nor comeliness, and when we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him'. No value was set on Him, and He was not esteemed—and yet this is God's heavenly Temple. We need to pull ourselves up over this, for we have so often imagined that God's temple must be a world wonder. If it is full of God's glory it must impress people! We have to learn that God's glory is a very different thing from the world's glory, and does not impress the people on earth, for it is not revealed to them.

THE TRUTH STILL LARGELY HIDDEN

How many of the Lord's people are straining, striving, praying, and desiring that the Church here on earth should be a world wonder, impressing people by its magnificence, by its form, by its standing among men! No! That is not where God dwells, and that is not what He is doing. It is this Man, rejected by the builders, disallowed, despised, who is God's Living Stone, His heavenly Temple.

That refers not only to the life-time of the Lord Jesus, but, if you pass over to the time of the Epistles, you see a glory of God in man joined to Jesus Christ; but it is not very glorious and magnificent so far as earth is concerned. You remember the account that the Apostle gives in II Corinthians iii in which he contrasts the glories of the Gospel with the glories of the law, and he tells how there was a great glory associated with the law when Moses came down from the Mount. That was a very impressive sight, but the whole point of the Apostle's account was to show how very much the new covenant excels that in glory.

It is of surpassing glory, so that that old time of the first covenant seems to have no glory 'by reason of that glory which excelleth'. So we might ask: If Moses was such an extraordinary sight, and this is a glory that excelleth, where is the man that is the herald of such a covenant? He is a despised-outcast, broken, pressed, trampled on, beaten, imprisoned, scourged, discredited, poor, as having nothing. And yet, was not Paul, above all who have been on this earth, a wonderful example among men of the heavenly glory of those who are associated with Jesus Christ? There was no earthly magnificence about him, and he became even more discredited and despised; but that is always the way.

SUFFERING AND GLORY

Peter is the Apostle who speaks of glory, but he is the Apostle who speaks at the same time of suffering. He is amongst that company in the glory of God's heavenly, wonderful work, but you would not think so to look at them. They are going through fiery trials; they are suffering, and it is not a very heroic suffering so far as the world is concerned. They are suffering as Christians, and "Christian" was a very nasty word by which to be named in those days. We do not realise how much contempt a name can convey. Here are people suffering as Christians and they are people filled with the glory of the Lord. That is God's heavenly temple. There is a wonderful inward glory of fellowship with Him, but so far as the world is concerned, the Stone which the builders rejected is an unworthy thing. We need to remember that!

Even when we have laid aside our more wonderful ambitions concerning the Lord's work, and even when we come to realise something of the heavenly and spiritual nature of the Church, there often lingers with us a desire to make, perhaps of our little local assembly, a world wonder, something that shall impress people. Not to impress them in the sense of wealth and influence, of course, for we may have got beyond that realm, but there is still sometimes the desire to impress people with the very spirituality and efficiency of the thing. 'This is an example of the heavenly Church here on earth!' No! If you are trying to get a spiritual work that shall be a world wonder, you are not doing what God is after. 'Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone'—but it is rejected of men, though held in great honour by God and by those who believe. It is an honour which this world can never understand, and which the Lord does not allow to be displayed here on earth. It is quite obvious that in some cases He takes pains to remove those very

things which might present something to be recognised by men. Thus He takes Moses and makes him a nothing, a nobody; He takes Paul, and all the things in Paul which might seem to be of value, even for the Church of God, have to be cast away, until he becomes this messenger of the Gospel, a despised, rejected outcast. But Paul knew it was all right, for he had the vision of the heavenly side of things.

Forty and six years it took them to build the temple, and I understand that it was not finished then. That is the sort of thing that happens when you are trying to build something *for* God! It has not taken the Lord two thousand years to build His temple. He did not even take those three days of which the Lord Jesus spoke. We know His resurrection did not take three days, but was actually on the third day. What did God do? In the twinkling of an eye there was a finished work by the resurrection. It did not take the Lord Jesus time, for this raising of Him was a timeless thing, though actually there was a moment in time when He was raised from the dead. Man's building takes a long process and period, and then it is not finished. What God does He does in a timeless way, and it abides for ever.

The Jews were afraid that the Lord Jesus would rise again, because they knew that Lazarus had risen from the dead. When Lazarus arose the stone had to be removed and the grave clothes taken away, and they thought that, if only they could seal the tomb, even if Jesus did rise again He would not get very far because the tomb was blocked up. The angel rolled the stone away, but not for the Lord to come out; he rolled it away so that people could see that He was not there. In a moment God raised Jesus from the dead, and in a moment God had laid in Zion His Living Stone. By that raising He had in Christ that upon which His heart had been set through all eternity. In the resurrection that great and wonderful and eternal work was a finished thing.

FINISHED AND YET PROCEEDING

Looking at this from another point of view, we read about the whole temple growing and the Body making increase of itself. Look at it from a heavenly side and we see that this building is finished and the work is done. If, by the Holy Ghost, we can lay hold of this it will mean a tremendous strength to our hearts. God is not taking forty-six years, nor any time, to build His Church. There is a sense in which, by the resurrection, this is completed. It was as secure in Christ on that

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resurrection morning as it ever will be. What strength to the heart of a despondent, struggling servant of the Lord who sees so little and desires to see so much of God's true, spiritual building! May the Lord show us, and give us grace to be ever reaching out to Him in earnest faith and prayer, that He may do His work; *but* we shall find strength for our prayer and strength for our ministry if we get God's viewpoint, which is that at the end of that third day Jesus Christ raised up God's holy, heavenly temple, a finished thing. Praise His Name!

BY MEN OR BY GOD

Now notice these forty and six years during which these men were building. They were trying to build something for God—and that is just the trouble. God's heavenly dwelling-place is not like that. We read that it is a spiritual temple, and we shall understand something of that which is involved if we see the contrast. This great wonder of the world was what the Epistle to the Hebrews calls: "Of this building" (Hebrews ix. 11). It was made with hands, with laborious planning and straining and effort to build up something with a good, strong foundation here on this earth, that God might have something for Himself. That is the opposite of His spiritual temple. And yet, how many of us have been engaged in that very thing!

You notice what happens when people try to build something for God (*for God*, mark you!). Then they have to go on and try to maintain it for God, and before long they have got the thing in their own hands and are grasping it for themselves. You get a feeling that things are not quite right as soon as you open the Gospel by John, but you have not got very far before you find this most significant phrase: "Now the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand" (John vi. 4). You do not find that term in the Old Testament, for it was Jehovah's Passover. Now it is the Jews' Passover. They have got it themselves and are holding it, and that always happens when people try to build something for God. And look at the state the building was in! Contamination had come into it, and it was a defiled thing.

Oh, the defilement and contradictions that come into anything that we try to build up for God! We may do it with the very best intentions, but it is a very dangerous thing to be a builder. These builders rejected the true Stone, and whenever people on this earth try to build up something for God, what eventually happens is that they reject the Living Stone. It is a sad thing, but true. The very fact that they are so busily engaged in trying

to build something for the Lord brings them into the realm where they really reject the Living Stone and make their own edifice. You see the contrast. The Lord says: "Behold, I lay in Zion. . . ." It is not the earthly Zion now and is not built by human pains. It is a poor conception of the Lord's work to imagine that because the Jews would not have Him and He was driven out, He had to found a temple amongst the Gentiles. That at its best, when it was pure and spiritual for God, was only a type, but it was a shadow of the things which are to come. God says: "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone. . . ."

A RESURRECTION TEMPLE

There are very practical issues from all this. It is by the resurrection that God's heavenly dwelling-place is obtained, which means that we need to know the resurrection. To know the resurrection is to be made conformable to His death, and in the final summing up it is, as the Apostle says: "That I may know him." Therein we have what is involved in being in that which is God's true, heavenly work—to know Christ and to come into an ever-increasing knowledge of Him. That is the way, and that involves in actual, continual experience, this basis of death and resurrection. That was how God's purpose was obtained. There had to be the death; and then He rose from the dead, and in actual experience it was as a practical working thing. Our life in that heavenly temple means for us a continual series of experiences on this basis: of coming to a place which seems to be utter destruction, and then God raising from the dead.

THE DEVIL'S HATRED

For one reason this is because the devil is always out against the thing that is God's chief concern. So, right up to the very end, when the Man-child is caught up to the Throne, it is in such an atmosphere, and that rapture is a resurrection from the dead. The dragon stands there ready to devour, and here are the saints of the Lord brought to the last extremity. And then God's purpose is fully and finally realised as, out of the very jaws of Satan, He catches up His Church. And this principle is the same all the way through.

This is encouragement for us, because it explains a lot that would otherwise be inexplicable. Why do we go through such terrible experiences? Why does everything seem to collapse and break up? Have we failed? Is it unbelief? Are we wrong? The principle of the heavenly temple is death and

resurrection, death and resurrection! For us it means a series of experiences when, for the moment, we seem to be utterly swallowed up. It is as if once again the challenge has gone out from the Lord to His enemies: "Destroy this temple!", and the devil takes Him at His word. But the Lord continues: "I will raise it up." That is the experience through which the Lord is bringing us, and it is necessary for this reason: that, so far as our personal and practical experience goes, God's building is largely a matter of His being able to break down that which is not of Himself. Perhaps that is the three days—death really working; and the delays in our experience are often, not solely because of His building, but because through a certain period there is some breaking down process going on. We shall probably see that growth is more in the nature of swift acts of the Lord. We come to a new place, but the process is one of disintegration, of breaking down and despair. That is the way the Lord leads because, in practical experience, this resurrection can only be on the basis of death, and it is a continual application of the Cross making the death real, and putting out of the way that which hinders God. But let us always hold in view this fact: that it is by the resurrection that God has secured everything.

In one sense we are not waiting, and God is not waiting to be able to build His heavenly temple, to have His heavenly Man, for He has Him there already. The resurrection has done that, and our strength consists in laying hold of that, and believing that with all our hearts. Notice the abiding meaning of that which God does! The temple was forty-six years in building, but it did not last another forty-six years. The disciples could not believe that. When the Lord said: "Your house is left unto you desolate!" they came back and said: 'Lord, look at these buildings, these great stones!' Then the Lord said: 'See these great buildings—and there shall not be left one stone upon another!' Looked at from a human point of view: there is here a well-grounded and founded piece of architecture, so strong that it would seem to last for ever. On the other hand, here is a poor, frail Man, whose life, it would seem, could be taken away in a flash. Which is going to abide? From an earthly point of view the building will abide, and the human life is snuffed out like a candle. Those poor Hebrew Christians to whom the Apostle was writing were tremendously attached to all these things, and they found it hard to leave them, go right outside the camp and be united to Christ, whereas when they had a temple and recognition by the Roman Government they seemed so secure.

They little knew how few years were to pass before not one stone of that temple would be left on another. The Lord said through that very Apostle that He was going to shake once more the heavens and the earth, and He reminded them that they were inheriting a Kingdom which could not be shaken, but it looked so different. It looked so precarious just to be in that heavenly position. There was no security for them here on earth, no recognition, and that is a very real consideration today for many servants of the Lord.

How we do want something that has a standing before men and is recognised, a kind of something that we can fall back on and feel secure! This attachment to a heavenly Christ is all very well, and we are hoping for it in the future, but while we are here on earth we want something more solid and more reliable. Not many years passed before that whole temple was in ruins, and a ploughshare was being driven through them. It was gone, and now these people were really in a desperate plight, for they had nothing. But those who are united with the Lord, in heavenly union with Him, are unmoved, even though everything is reduced to ruins with not one stone upon another, and though perhaps the visible thing that represented the Lord here has gone. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Psalm ii. 4).

AN ETERNAL TEMPLE

Which is the most reliable? The temple looked such a great place, but the Lord said one day that a greater than the temple was there. It is worth while to be united with Him. When everything else is shaken, He is unshakeable, He abides, He is eternal. Having come to the Living Stone, we know that blessed position of being united with Him, where nothing can ever move or change God's eternal purpose.

We are not striving nor trying to climb up towards that position, and our strength is to recognise it. In the Epistle to the Ephesians we read that we are raised, we are placed there. It is true that there are plenty of enemies, but in Christ we are above the enemies. So in the Epistle to the Colossians we are told to seek the things that are above. What is the basis? That we have died and are risen with Him! That is why we are to seek the things that are above! It is something which was done once and for all in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Let our hearts lay hold of that. God has laid His Living Stone in Zion, and there we stand by His grace.

H. F.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS REGRET CANNOT FORGIVE

ONE day in 1955 Mr. Macmillan's Private Secretary was walking up and down in his room at the Foreign Office with deep concern on his face and a letter in his hand. When a friend came in and asked him what was the matter he explained that the letter had come from somebody whom he had been at school with at Winchester.

When they were boys the writer of the letter had bullied him terribly. Perhaps the cruellest thing that this bully had done was to put Hancock in a trunk and sit on the lid, knowing very well that the boy suffered badly from claustrophobia and was terrified to be so shut in.

The years had passed and the bully had now written from his death-bed. He was suffering from cancer and apparently only had a few days to live. In his letter he was asking Hancock to send him an urgent message of forgiveness for all his cruelty at Winchester. He said that since he had grown up he had become a clergyman and had often been troubled at the thought of all the wrong done to Hancock, though he had never done anything about it. Now he was dying, and he only asked one thing. He longed for forgiveness and would be grateful if Hancock could send him a message by telegram.

This was the explanation of Hancock's present concern. It would be easy just to send a telegram of forgiveness only because his persecutor was now dying. It would be easy, but it would not be true. Patrick Hancock was not only a very gifted man; he was so truthful that he could not bring himself to tell a lie.

So he paced up and down his room, wondering what he should do. He thought over the matter all through the day, and then let a night's sleep pass before he finally made up his mind. This was the telegram which he finally sent to the dying man:

"REGRET CANNOT FORGIVE. (Signed) HANCOCK." It must have been a hard decision to make, and a sad message to be received, but it was truthful. Though he regretted to say so, the fact was that he could not forgive.

Why not? Perhaps because he felt that a death-bed repentance was not good enough. Perhaps because the injury done to him was so deep and lasting that it could never be forgotten. We do not know. None of us dares criticise this action of Hancock's, but what we can do is to rejoice that we have a Saviour who is able to forgive.

The Bible tells us that God cannot lie. That is good, but if it turned out to be a truthfulness like that of Hancock's, it would leave us all with the sad message from heaven: "REGRET CANNOT FORGIVE." Instead of that the good news of the Gospel tells us that God is able and ready to forgive all our past misdeeds, however they may have wounded Him.

It might be that the real difficulty was because the confession was only made from a death-bed. If the offender had gone to Patrick Hancock before he became a clergyman and had apologised like a man, he might in time have found himself able to forgive. Perhaps the bully had left it too late.

Be sure that you do not make the same mistake. Without waiting for the time to die, without waiting any longer at all, come straight to the God whom you have wronged and ask Him for His forgiveness. It is not only important to die in peace; it is important to live in peace also—peace with God. This peace comes from forgiveness, and God who cannot lie has promised it. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mightest be feared" (Psalm 130. 3-4).

H. F.

THE MOMENTOUSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST (II)

"God . . . has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by (in) the (a) man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts xvii. 31).

"For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son . . . and he

gave him authority to execute judgment because he is the (a) Son of man" (John v. 22, 27).

HERE we have a comprehensive and emphatic statement concerning the place that the Lord Jesus occupies by the appointment of God His

Father. That place is shown to be inclusive and exclusive. That means that

1. God has summed up all things *in* Christ. Ultimately there will be nothing outside of Christ, and all that eventually is found to be outside of Christ will be removed from God's domain.

2. Nothing of God can be had outside of Christ. In the Bible we have two revelations: one of man outside of Christ and the other of man in Christ. The emphasis is upon the word *man*. The Scripture above says that the final judgment of the world is in a *man*; a God-ordained, God-horizoned man. And it is not *by*, but *in* that Man. What is in that Man in the matter of righteousness will be the criterion of judgment.

MAN OUTSIDE OF CHRIST

We know, not only by the statements of the Bible, but in our own hearts that man is marred and spoilt by sin. It is an ugly word, hated by all, refused acknowledgment by many, excused by many more, but, apart from those in Christ, not confessed or allowed recognition. In this connection it is very significant that, in a time of moral landslide and increasing depravity, there is a great revival of humanism—the theory of man's inherent goodness and moral greatness: the total dismissal of the fact of sin *as sin*. It is called by any other name; even good in the making. It is not difficult to see through this artifice of the devil. It is to construct a humanity which, *in itself*, is its own saviour, and to wholly dispose of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. This is almost the last word in human blindness. It is blindness to history. It is blindness to the moral *devolution* of recent times. It does not allow that the last decades have uncovered a depth of iniquity, wickedness, and "man's inhumanity to man", beyond description, *and that in the areas which have had more education, scientific research, discovery, and "culture" (?) than anywhere else on the earth*. Such is the master-deception of the devil! "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving", says the Word of God. We must ever remember that Satan's rebellion against God was on the decision of God to make *man*. He knew that the intention of God was to give dominion over the world to man, and *that* dominion he—Satan—both coveted and usurped by the deception of man. This is all very clearly implied in the titles given to Satan in the Bible as "The prince of this world", "the god of this age", "the world-ruler of this darkness", etc. Hence the double issue of man's deception, seduction, and ruin: man's separation from God: and the defeat

of God's intention. Man, out of Christ, is such a man, even at what he—man—thinks to be the highest levels of intelligence, "culture" and "progress". The Bible says much about the sinister nature of "the wisdom of this world", and even foretells that apostasy will go hand-in-hand with the increase of knowledge. The subtlety of sin is that to try and eliminate its malevolence it has to be called by other names. The Bible does not hide the fact of man's sinful nature, not even to omit mention of the sins of the greatest of its men of God: Abraham, Moses, David, etc.

It is now possible to discern the momentousness of Christ. For this we have to go a long way back, even to a cosmic event before man's creation, when, the Bible tells us explicitly, God appointed His Son "Heir of all things". That was the point of cosmic controversy then, and has been ever since. The focal point of the conflict of the ages is the predestined place of Christ as Son of Man, the humanity according to God's intention, of which Jesus the Christ is the "Firstborn", Progenitor, "Pioneer" and "Head". Countless are the ways and means pursued to prevent, frustrate, and defeat Christ from coming into His own in a humanity conformed to His image. In other words, (a) to discredit and displace Christ; and (b) to prevent there coming into being a people truly, by new birth, coming "into Christ". The great revelation of the New Testament is what is represented by that phrase "In Christ". The "fall" was not only a fall in level, from one higher level to a lower; it was a fall *out of God!* The momentousness of Jesus Christ is in His reversal of that, and in Himself restoring man 'into God', his right place.

This is the meaning of that darkest and deepest eternal moment at the end of the Cross when Jesus went out from God—"Forsaken"; out into the direst distress; *out*, that in 'lostness' He might find us just where we are in God's knowledge and bring us back into God. "Christ died once, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (I Peter iii. 18). His body broken was the reality of which the veil of the tabernacle and temple was the type. Its rending, as between heaven and earth, man and God, opened a fast-closed way back into the realm of God. Surely that was a momentous moment; a momentous act!

Every aspect of Christ's person and work, and every aspect of the Gospel has to do with this. Moreover, every activity of the evil powers upon the Christian is with the object of cutting in between him—or her—and the Lord by weakening or damaging the one tie of that union, namely faith.

Hence Christ's imperative "Abide in me". Satan "abode not in God" and see the consequences! Hence the momentousness of being in, and abiding in Christ, which is in God.

We return to where we began. God binds Himself up with His Son for man. All judgment is, and will be, on the basis of what Christ is and whether man is *in* Him or not. The whole Christian life, if it is true and under the government of the Holy Spirit, is a lifelong education as to the significance of Christ; the knowledge of Christ, and, seeing that it is not merely theoretical, doctrinal, theological knowledge, but very practical, wrought on the anvil and by the fires of deep experiences, it is knowledge which is a part of our being, our constitution. It is knowledge which represents

something that has taken place in us. We *are* that knowledge.

When we first come back to God through Christ we have only a more-or-less understanding of the depth, the cost, the momentousness of what we have come into. But as we go on, the dealings of God with us bring us to an ever-deepening realisation and appreciation of what Christ is and has done. On the one side, the depth of our worthlessness becomes more terrible to our awareness. This is not for our desolation as the end, but to make us "*know*" how great is the meaning of Christ from God *to* us, and to God *for* us. The ultimate vision of the redeemed multitude is that of a *worshipping* people attributing *everything* to the Lamb.

THE DIVINE MINISTRY OF DELAY

ONE of the great dangers of life is that of losing sight of God's great design in the details by which that design is worked out; and it has been well said that we entirely lose the value of any experience if we isolate it. That is, if you take your sorrow and regard it apart from the great designing love of God, if you take your losses, your temporary setbacks, your momentary depressions, and dwell upon these things as if they were the only experiences of God's providence, and as if they were not related to the great central control of His love—you will entirely miss their value. It is that we may be saved from such peril that we are meditating together thus on some of God's unlikely but never unkindly ministries.

With this brief recapitulation let me ask you to turn to the word which is the occasion of our thought this morning in regard to the Divine ministry of delay by which God oftentimes tests His people. I will ask you to turn to the words of Jeremiah the prophet, in the book of Lamentations, in the third chapter, at the twenty-fourth verse: "*The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.*" It is especially on those last words that I want our meditation to be based: "*It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.*"

Let us frankly admit at the outset that one of the great difficulties of life with many of us is concerned with the fact that God sometimes seems

to delay His answers to our prayers. The most perplexing problem of many a Christian life is just this: that God apparently does not answer, and apparently does not even heed much of our crying. By His grace our faith in Him has not been finally disturbed. By His grace this conflict has been carried on courageously in secret. Outside our own heart no one even suspects that there is such a conflict. But you know that there is, and I know that there is, and sometimes the only word that rises from our hearts when we come into God's presence is almost the last word which came from the Saviour's lips: "My God, why?" This is not the first question of the Christian life. Faith's first question is usually "How?" There is a stage in Christian experience when we are constantly saying "How?"—"How can a man be born when he is old?" "How can these things be?" "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" These are some of the first questions of the Christian life. But as we go on with God, as life deepens, as its necessities become heavier, its sorrows more acute, and our perceptions more alert also, the question which rises from the heart of many a disturbed and distressed believer is: "My God," not "how?" but "WHY?" I have already suggested that what many of us are seeking at this time is not comfort, nor sympathy, nor even the lightening of our loads. We are seeking some explanation, some interpretation from God Himself as to what He is doing in these our lives. Some of us are distressed almost to the point of desertion—desertion of our

own allegiance, and desertion of His colours, because He seems to delay, indeed almost to deny the things we ask Him.

Yet, I would remind you that there is nothing which the Word of God so amply encourages men to do as to pray. There are promises attached to prayer which do not attach to any other condition. There are riches which are covenanted to men as the result of prayer and waiting upon God, which they can obtain in no other way. And it is just because the promises with regard to prayer are so great, so high, so wide, that these delays of God perplex us, and we cry out this morning, "My God, why?" There are times in life when nothing but sheer belief in God's goodness saves us from despair; when nothing but simple reliance upon God's love, without any present evidence of it, can save us from hopelessness; when nothing but almost reckless faith in His omnipotent wisdom, will prevent us from sinking into positive moral apathy and spiritual lethargy. Therefore, it is my present endeavour to help some here to a re-creation of that sheer belief, that simple reliance, and that reckless faith in God which trusts Him when His face is veiled, and they do not even feel the grip of His hand. Faber well sang:

"Thrice blest is he to whom is given
 The instinct that can tell
 That God is on the field, when He
 Is most invisible."

That is the instinct which may God grant every one of us to have in these days.

Now these words were spoken by the prophet Jeremiah in a day when the nation's desire, its best desire, was perhaps never so evident. The people had begun to see the fulfilment of God's promises and the working of His providence. Their foes were being pushed from their land, the beginnings of recultivation were taking place, and the broken-down altars of God were being rebuilt. But all was being done so slowly that they could not reconcile the slowness of God with the implicit assurances upon which their faith in Him rested. They were impatient and restive under His apparent inactivity. Faith saw God's beginnings and, like the disciples of later days, "thought the kingdom must immediately appear!" There is a great deal to be said for the faith of a little child which cannot understand the reason of delay. But you will not misunderstand me when I say that there is a great deal more to be said for the faith of a grown man who has come to know that God has an entirely different scale for the measurement of time from those we commonly use. There is still

more to be said for the faith of the man who is perfectly content to rest in the fact that a thousand years are as one day with Him, and one day as a thousand years. This was the faith of Jeremiah. He had looked into the depths of the Infinite God, and had seen that He was unhurried, and that His ways were the more certain because they were not the more obvious. So he waited calmly, and sought to renew courage and patience and hope in the people, just because these things were the expression of his own soul. Hence he says: "It is good for men that they are kept waiting, that they have to quietly hope for the salvation of God."

You will readily understand that these words of his are of infinitely wider application than to the Israel of that day. I believe they are apposite to the case of every one of us here today who is perplexed because, for instance, the expected deliverance from sin in his own life does not come as he thought it would. Or the petition he offers for some good of which he conceives himself to be in great need is not granted. Or the loved one for whom he prays is not immediately converted; and though he goes on praying he has almost lost heart about it. Or the revival in his work, for which he has conscientiously wrought to the very last ounce of his strength, does not seem to be even on the horizon. We want to know why this delay, and what the spiritual good of having quietly to wait and hope so long.

I am very sure that when the last word of human experience about prayer has been said, we are still in the presence of the greatest of all mysteries. The man who thinks he knows so much about prayer, that he can frame a philosophy of prayer, really confesses that he knows little indeed. How prayer liberates spiritual forces, who knows? Why God has ordained that men should wait upon Him, uniting their wills with His in order to exert the saving power of His grace both in their life and through them in the lives of others—who can say? With regard to this greatest of all subjects, there is really nothing further to be said than that which Paul said about all knowledge of God—"We know in part, and we prophesy in part." But, thank God, we do know! What we know we know with a certainty which nothing can shake. But we only know in part. Therefore they are mere suggestions that I venture to offer you today, suggestions which have come with some degree of light and encouragement to my own heart in regard to this assertion—that it is good for a man to wait and hope for the salvation of God.

It is almost unnecessary to say that there is no thought in this word of any man having to wait until God is willing to bestow upon him the pri-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

mary gifts of pardon and peace and forgiveness, the salvation which is His free gift in Jesus Christ. The sinner who cries for pardon, the weary and heavy-laden who ask for rest of heart, the lonely who seek the fellowship of love, are never kept waiting for the fulfilment of their desires. The prodigal is welcomed before he utters his prepared confession. The sinking man who cries "Lord, save me", is at once conscious of being grasped by the Hand of power. The Evangel of Christ bears the ageless superscription that "now is the day of salvation". In this respect, indeed, it is never God who keeps men waiting, but men who keep Him waiting. But, in regard to that aspect of His mercy which is concerned with the strain of our present discipline, with the anxiety of future uncertainty, with the relief of immediate discomfort, with the weariness of unremoved burdens—it is in that realm of life that we want to know why God delays. Nor is it unnatural that we should be impatient.

For instance, here is a good man who reads that "All things work together for good to them that love God", but who sees nothing in his life today but chaos. His affairs have been completely ruined. His home has been invaded by sorrow and disappointment, until the nerves of all are on edge, and no one knows with certainty what an hour is going to bring forth of fresh calamity. That man has rested upon that Divine Word with implicit confidence in its truth, but the delay in realising its fulfilment has almost staggered his faith. Is it to be wondered at that he should be asking today what it all means?

There is a young man yonder, and there has been illumined to his soul's vision this word: "In all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." And yet he has been defeated even since he came to Keswick, and this morning his face is toward the ground, and not toward the Lord. He says, "What does it mean? I have rested my whole weight, as I believe, upon this promise of God, and my Lord delays His coming in power to me. What does it mean?"

There is the busy worker—I have met him since I came to Keswick—who has come from some far-off missionary field, in which for the last ten years he has been pouring out his life, seeking to live the life of a citizen of the Kingdom of God, resting upon that word—"My word shall not return unto Me void, but shall accomplish that which I please." And he confesses today that he has seen it accomplish hardly anything. What does it mean?

There is the great promise upon which every member of Christ's Church just now is building

more solidly than ever a temple of hope: "Behold, I come quickly." It seems as though Christ was never so much needed as He is today. It seems as though international relationship can never again be restored as we have known it. It seems as though the scattered units of Christ's Church can never be gathered together again in one, save by His coming. And the Church cries out: "Amen. Come quickly, Lord Jesus." But there is not a sign of His coming. What do these delays of God mean?

I am going to suggest three things, and they are mere suggestions; but may they bring light to you, as they have brought to me in past days. The first thing I want to say about God's delays is this: It is only by enforced waiting upon Him that we come to know God with that knowledge which is the foundation of all character. I use the word *enforced* waiting upon God, because it is only by being forced to wait upon God that some of us ever do wait on Him. We are naturally impatient, we are naturally impulsive, we naturally chafe at anything like slowness; and God, by withholding the answer for which we have looked, keeps us at His feet in order that we may come to know Him. He is infinitely more concerned in the making and remaking of our lives than in the gratifying of our minds. He is infinitely more concerned in making us men and women of His own pattern, and to deepen His life in our souls, than to gratify some of the desires which we often express in unconsidered prayer. For we cannot come to know God, and inferentially we cannot come to know ourselves, in an hour. God's delays do not indicate any caprice on His part, but rather His concern and compassion for us. They are directed toward saving us from hurrying away from His presence before the lessons of His grace have been more than mentally received. God is preparing us, by keeping us waiting upon Him, worthily to receive, to interpret, and then to use the gifts He will yet give in answer to prayer and in fulfilment of His word.

I constantly see tourist visitors to London rushing about from Park to Palace, doing what they call the "sights". And after a fevered week they go back home thinking they know London. But do they? One of Ruskin's students once said to him, on returning from a first Italian visit: "Sir, immediately I entered the Gallery at Florence, I knew in a moment what you had always impressed upon us as the supremacy of Botticelli." Ruskin's reply was somewhat cutting. He said: "Oh, you found that out in a moment? Well, it took me twenty-two years to discover it!" And there are a great many people who think they know God in the light of a single experience! We are kept waiting upon Him

that we may become of the number of those who really do know their God, and who consequently are empowered to do exploits. God is making us; do not let us be impatient under the process. God is making us; do not let impatience and impetuosity take us, therefore, from under the hand of the Master Workman. He is eliminating the flaws, and remaking the marred vessels. The two qualities which we need most—endurance and radiance—are not imparted to any man in a single hour. God keeps us waiting that in His presence, beholding His glory, we may be changed into the same image from glory unto glory.

The second thing I want to say is this. Many of our prayers must be passed through the refining medium of God's wisdom, that is, of God's love; many of them must be edited by God before they are answered. For well-intentioned prayer is not always well-informed. Like those who made requests of the Saviour, God often has to say to His children, "Ye know not what ye ask". If some of our prayers were immediately answered, the consequence would be almost certain moral and spiritual disaster. Our prayers have to be passed, I say, through the refining medium of God's wisdom, sometimes with regard to their motive. "Ye have not because ye ask amiss." There are men and women, for instance, who pray for power, while their real objective is pre-eminence. What they really mean by power is that which will make them prominent in His service. When our motives are altogether unworthy of the words we express, we have to be kept waiting until God turns upon us the searchlight of His love, and learning the untrustworthiness of our own impulses, we yield us to that gracious Spirit who makes intercession in us according to the will of God.

Not only in regard to the *motive*, but in regard also to the content of our prayers, Christ has to say again and again, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of; are ye able to be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?" For often we know not what we ask, and hence God's delay in response. I have seen children—we have all seen them—who have been utterly spoiled by the weak good-nature of parents who gave them at once everything they wanted. For human love may be entirely lacking in wisdom. But the love and wisdom of God are one. When He keeps us waiting for secondary mercies, it is in order to make us know the value of the primary and spiritual. We have to learn that God's "No" is just as much an answer as God's "Yes". We have to learn that God's "Not yet" is just as truly an expression of Divine love as God's "Immediately". The day will come to every one of

us when we shall know that God's silence was in reality His most loving speech to us. For we shall see that while seemingly inactive God has all the time been working in us, bringing us into moral correspondence with His will, which alone capacitates men to receive His gifts.

Well do I recollect, some years ago, in the city of Dublin, a man coming into the vestry-room of a church and saying: "Sir, I want to thank you for that message about God's love. I believe every word of it now, but I did not six months ago." His eyes filled with tears; and as I said: "What does it mean, my brother?" He went on: "Six months ago my home was bright and happy, and the shadow fell. I prayed earnestly that God would save my wife and our infant. But he took them; and I have come to know that He took them only in order to bring me back to Himself, from whom I had wandered." God's silence in that man's life was His richest and kindest speech. And others of us have found this to be true also; and more of us will find it so ere these dark days in which we live have passed away.

The things we try to get rid of by prayer are often the very things we can least afford to lose. Some of those things we call burdens, of which we try to get rid in the Sanctuary, are the things that God has placed upon us for the steadying of life and the guiding of our energies into channels which otherwise we should overlook and miss. Paul learnt that there was something infinitely better than the removal of the thorn-pain—infinitely better! Thrice he besought the Lord to remove it—with what interval between those prayers we know not. But surely Paul, like the rest of us, was perplexed at God's delay. And he ultimately found that God was preparing something far better than the extraction of the thing which caused a throbbing wound—"My grace is sufficient for thee." If he had not had the thorn-pain, like the nightingale which is said to sing sweetest when its breast is pierced, he had never learned the song: "Most gladly will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me!" We learn, as we are kept waiting at His feet, that the cord which we would have had God cut, He disentangles, and so saves for purposes of His service. God's ways are always justified of His children, if they will patiently tarry His leisure.

Ere I pass on to the third and last suggestion I have to make, may I say that surely we get an illustration of all this in the burden of prayer which is increasingly descending upon us for our nation. There are not a few of us who are perplexed that God has not already intervened to stay this

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

terrible conflict. We look out from this place of quiet rest, and see across the Channel the sons of God being butchered upon the fields of France and Belgium; and we cry to God to give victory to the cause which is inherently right, and about which we have no shame. Yet He does not do so. After a whole year, and despite the sacrifice of thousands of precious lives, the battle-line is drawn substantially as it was at first. Why does God not put forth His power through our Forces, and by scattering the nations that delight in war bring this unspeakable strife to an end? Why have we no answer back from Heaven that our cry is heard? Why does He delay His coming when by one word He could end the whole conflict? Ah! it is not that God cannot, nor that He will not; but that an immediate victory for our land might only mean a revival, in the basest form, of our national sins. As a nation we are far from being morally ready for victory, for there are few signs in our common life that we have learned and taken to heart the lessons of this chastisement. That is why God is keeping our nation waiting. We have to be brought infinitely lower yet. We have to learn yet what the law of God stands for. We have to learn yet what the hideousness of sin in a man or nation means. We have to learn that sin brings pain and bloodshedding to man, as it brought pain and bloodshedding to God. Then when the nation is morally prepared and renewed I believe that victory will not be delayed by an hour. But it will not come one hour sooner. Hence the necessity of our quietly waiting for the salvation of God. Though remember, in the last analysis, it is not He who delays the answer to our prayer for victory. It is we who delay Him.*

The third thing I want to say is this. Faith can only be trained by being tested. As a man's muscles are only hardened by exercise, so his faith only becomes strong and ultimately invincible by being subjected to the discipline of strain. For until it accepts the will of God, not under compulsion, nor because there is no alternative, but by free choice and glad surrender, faith is lacking in essential quality. But when we are unmoved by the fact that we are kept waiting, calmly conscious that God's glory is intimately bound up with our lives and prayers, and content that if He can afford to wait, so too can we, one of life's greatest lessons has been learnt. For faith reaches its triumph only when its exercise ceases to be a deliberate activity and becomes an instinctive attitude.

Sometimes we learn this by our own impetuous efforts to hurry God. There are two conspicuous examples of this. Do you remember Moses and his undisciplined effort at the deliverance of his people?

How disastrously it ended for him! God had to take him into the schoolhouse of the desert and keep him there for many a weary year. By his impetuosity he had embarrassed God; and so, too, do many of us. Do you remember Abraham with a wonderful promise to support him, with a vision so great that it staggered him, attempting to expedite God's purpose? You know the dark story of Hagar and Ishmael, and all that it afterward led to. Sometimes God likewise delays the promises of His faithfulness in order that we too may learn the utter futility of our every effort, and all the sweat of our souls, apart from Him. For remember that the faith of God must be vindicated in us before it can be verified through us, and before we can be His effective messengers to the world.

One last word. There is nothing in common between quiet waiting upon God and lethargic indolence. We have known those who excuse their non-participation in the enterprises of Christ's Church because of this necessity of quiet waiting on God. Let me say that there is no greater mistake than to wait for subjective manifestations and to neglect objective opportunities. True waiting upon God expresses itself in the expenditure of every energy of the soul at the clear directions for whose interpretation we do not need to wait an hour. Oh, the supine folly of the man who in these days of tremendous opportunity is content to "wait upon God" to open doors, to "wait upon God" to enlarge opportunities, to "wait upon God" to organise success and influence for him, while he himself does nothing in the way of sacrifice—of giving himself, of losing his life, for the Kingdom's sake! God does not co-operate with dreamers. We cannot live in fellowship with God and let evil stalk unchallenged, by neglecting the wide-open doors of the world which call to our faith and our loyalty.

I cannot forget that God did once say to His people: "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." But I also remember that that word was given to men and women, a great host, who were walking in implicit obedience to His leadership, and who in that pathway had come up against the impassable. There are times in life when God says these words to us, but only when, like Israel, we are walking in the light of His will.

"We are not here to play, to dream, to drift;
We have hard work to do, and loads to lift;
Shun not the struggle! face it! 'Tis God's gift.

Say not, 'The days are evil! Who's to blame?'
And fold the hands, and acquiesce—oh, shame!
Stand up, speak out, act bravely in God's Name.

It matters not how deep entrenched the wrong,
How hard the battle goes, the day how long;
Fight on! fight on! tomorrow comes the song!"

As we wait upon God in this energy of implicit obedience to Him, He will vindicate all His delays. He will do it as we stand, like men who wait for their Lord, doing His will to the very utmost of our power; knowing that when He comes He will perfect that which concerns us; pushing the battle

to the gate, in the confidence that at the strategic moment He will bring up reinforcements which shall mean the final factor in victory; quietly hoping for that we see not; saying to our souls again, and yet again, "We see not yet all things put under Him, we see not yet the fulfilment of our every desire; but we see Jesus crowned. Blessed be His Name for ever!"

(Selected)

J. S. H.

*Spoken in 1915 during World War I.

THE CHURCH—ITS NATURE, PRINCIPLES, AND VOCATION

4. THE LOCAL EXPRESSION OF THE CHURCH

BEFORE leaving our consideration of the Church, I feel strongly that I should say a few things of vital importance as to a true local expression of the Church. I know only too well how difficult it is to find or secure any such *true* expression, but that is no reason why we should abandon the whole matter: rather is it a pointer to its value, for history and experience have shown that this is one thing that is of very great account where the adversary of Christ is concerned. To prevent or destroy such expressions has always been a major concern of the powers of evil. The true Church, universal and local, is a very great menace to the kingdom of Satan. This we have emphasised in earlier chapters. But let us summarise:

(1) *The importance of the Church in local expressions*

We must first remind ourselves that a solid block of the New Testament was written specifically to local churches; which churches had been the first result of apostolic ministry. That ministry, and all the suffering involved, had been vindicated in local corporate bodies of believers. It was for those churches that the apostles travailed, laboured, prayed and fought. The bulk of the New Testament had its supreme concern for such assemblies which, themselves, had known great sufferings in their very birth, and were in "a great fight of affliction" for their continuance and survival.

Then we must remember that the Lord's own personal concern for, and evaluation of local churches is made very evident by His direct messages to the seven churches in Asia with which the book of finalities (Revelation) commences. There is no mistaking the importance to the exalted Lord of local churches when we read those messages, the focal point of which is a clause in one of them:

"These things saith the Son of God." The Psalmist would say: "Selah"—"think of that!"

(2) *This importance is to be seen in the specific values of a local assembly, when rightly functioning*

(a) Here the principle that "No man liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself" (Romans xiv. 7) is enunciated in relation to the local church in the messages to the churches in Asia. It is said of the church in Ephesus that through them "all they which be in Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts xix. 10—see I Thessalonians i. 8). It should be impossible for a local assembly of God's people to exist without it being known over an area far greater than its own locality. A living company will, sooner or later, be known abroad for what it has of the Lord.

(b) To enlarge on this, a local church should have, not only enough spiritual bread for itself, but basketfulls over to spare, and many beyond its borders should be receiving enrichment from its spiritual wealth. Is this not so very evident in history? Have not the Lord's people been feeding down the ages unto this day upon the bread ministered to and through those New Testament churches? Is it not true that multitudes have been fed, and are still being fed by the food ministered in local churches in many places in the last century? So the Lord would have it. The church which only ministers to itself and does not do so to the Church at large is committing a sin against the trust of life; it is a cul-de-sac, not a highway. Of course, it is particularly important that the ministry in a local church is truly anointed ministry. Not by man's appointment, selection or decision from either side. Not by studied-up and made-up addresses, but by illumination and inspiration as through

an open heaven. Not just keeping something going as a *must*, but by revelation of Jesus Christ. It must be evident to all that those leading and ministering are under a genuine burden from the Lord, and the evidence is *life*!

(c) The local church should, and can be a refuge, a covering, a protection to its own members. One of Satan's master-tactics is to isolate believers and then knock them out. This can be done by unwise and independent action, choices, movements, uncounselled decisions. The church by its prayers, and counsel, and fellowship is a Divine provision against the tragedies which lie in the way of independence and isolation. Co-operation and co-ordination in the physical body are a provision and a law against many diseases. So it is in the spiritual body corporate.

(d) The local church should provide personal ministries to the Lord's people, and to the unsaved, near and far, and it should provide an encompassing safeguard and support for the fulfilment of such ministries. Those who go forth in *the church's ministry* should know that they are being upheld and stood with by those from amongst whom they have gone. Indeed, they should go as sent forth by the church!

The lack and absence of these characteristics in local companies is the cause of much weakness in the Church universal.

(e) Finally, a local church rightly functioning is a wonderful provision for the training of its members for service. Training is so largely a matter of being able to work corporately. How to live and work with others, and to sink individualism into fellowship, is a real part of the discipline which makes a fruitful ministry!

There is a real danger in departmentalism; the separation into isolated groups, so that these groups do not come into the corporate life and function of the church. It is possible to have groups associated with a local church which really have no true *church* life. This means weakness and loss. Moreover, the local church should be its own Bible School, for systematic instruction in the Word of God.

Careful reading of the Bible, especially the New Testament, will show that what we have said above is all there as exhortation, admonition, warning, instruction, and example.

Were I to add one more vital and *all-inclusive* thing, I would say that the absolute essential to such churches is a real work of the Cross in everyone concerned.

THE ESSENTIAL NEWNESS OF THE NEW CREATION

"Thou hast heard it; behold all this; and ye, will ye not declare it? I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, which thou hast not known. They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them" (Isaiah xlviii. 6-7).

"Wherefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (I Corinthians v. 17—R.V. margin).

"And no man putteth a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment; for that which should fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made. Neither do men put new wine into old wine-skins: else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins perish: but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved" (Matthew ix. 16-17).

FAMILIARITY with words and ideas very often takes something from their value. Few passages in the New Testament are more familiar to us than II Corinthians v. 17: "Wherefore if any man is in

Christ, there is a new creation . . .", but the full force of the one governing word there has, I am quite sure, not fallen upon our hearts, and we have still very much to learn as to that essential newness of the new creation in Christ. Indeed, we may say that many of our troubles, our difficulties, our weaknesses, our failures, our problems, our perplexities, are the result of our having failed to grasp sufficiently the import of that one word "new". We have, very largely, proceeded into the new creation with a good deal that is old, or we have tried to do so, and we have discovered sooner or later that that cannot be done and we are attempting an impossibility. So it may be quite profitable for us to dwell for a little while upon this essential newness.

We begin by reminding ourselves, or acquainting ourselves with the fact that there are two sides to the new creation. There is the vessel, and there is that which is put into the vessel. It takes both of these to constitute what is called the "new creation", the human side, and the Divine side; but while newness applies to both sides, the newness is not the same newness. There are two main words which are translated into our English word "new", and

we are perhaps familiar with the difference between them. One implies something which is fresh, not necessarily just originated, but bearing the mark of freshness. The other word implies more strictly something which is quite recent, and which was not necessarily there before; it is new in the sense that it has just come in; it is not something revived but something new. It is interesting to notice that the Holy Spirit uses the two words in connection with the two sides of the new creation.

In this vessel in Matthew ix you have both words used. As to the wine-skins (translated in the Authorised Version as "bottles") the word used is that which implies freshness. When the Lord Jesus speaks of new wine He uses the other word, that is, something which is quite new, quite recent. When you pass to the passage in II Corinthians v and it is stated that: ". . . if any man is in Christ there is a new creation; the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new," there the word which means freshness is used twice. That is strictly consistent with the truth as to the real nature of the new creation.

You are dealing, first of all, with the vessel. Now, as vessels in the new creation we are not something which never was before, something quite recent. The vessel of the new creation is our old spirit brought back into life. Our human spirit fell out of fellowship with God, and that meant spiritual death. The new creation activity is to bring back the human spirit from spiritual death into life, and it is the same spirit, raised in union with Christ, becoming the vessel of the new creation.

That is, however, only half of the process. Something which was never in that spirit before is deposited in it; a life which is not fresh but new, recent, absolutely new, which was never in the human spirit before, is now put into that vessel, and that which is so completely new, says the Word, is never put into an old wine-skin. That vessel has to be made fresh, has to be brought into a state of life in order to be the receptacle of this utterly new life of the Spirit of God.

These are the two sides of the new creation. The point is that, first of all, something has to be done in the vessel, as well as something having to be put into the vessel.

That is a principle, to which God has bound Himself and which governs Him in all His activities. It applies in every direction where Divine work is in view. God never builds His new thing upon an old foundation. He never uses the old thing as the material for His new work. That has to be completely renewed. That He does not put *His* life, His new wine, into old skins is a truth which relates not only

to regeneration, to our salvation, to the new creation man, but it also applies to every work of God. Whenever God does a thing the characteristic is newness. Although there may be an old vessel, that vessel has to be made fresh in order to effect God's end.

That applies to truth as much as to anything else. It may be Divine doctrine, God-given revelation, that which at one time, by the Holy Spirit, was living truth; but that can never be taken up at any subsequent date or period of time and used again unless it becomes fresh in the experience and life of those who come into it. It is just there that a very great many of the mistakes have been made: that what in the way of revelation was a living revelation so long ago has been adopted as truth without that subsequent generation, or those subsequent generations, coming into the living reality thereof. That is vital.

It applies to the new creation man. You cannot bring the old creation man over into the new creation without his becoming fresh in a living way. That applies to truth, revelation and doctrine. You cannot carry it on unless it is perennially fresh. Ezekiel's vision of the river and the trees on either side—very many trees whose leaves never fade and whose fruit is continuous—is simply a revelation or a vision of the Testimony being maintained by the principle of life in freshness right down the whole course of the ages. Truth has to be like those leaves which never fade. Truth has to be like that fruit, luscious fruit which is always there. All doctrine is not like that, but unless it is like that its essential element has gone. It is the essential newness of what is of God.

Every fresh step of God is marked by this freshness, this newness. God may have done that same thing again and again in the course of history, but the next time He does it, it is as though it had never been done before in the case of the people in whom He does it. That is the glory of things.

We have seen this work in simple ways. Some of us have been so familiar with certain things, and we have said those things again and again. To us they were living realities, but we have known of certain people who have heard them, who have listened to them, who have been under the ministry by which those things have been declared again and again over a course of, perhaps, years, and then suddenly, as by a touch of the Spirit, they have seen them, they have caught the inner sound, the truth has broken upon them and has become living to them. The result was that they commenced to talk about those things as though no one in all the world had ever heard them before, and as though the very person

who had been talking about them for years did not know anything about them! It is just like that. That is the living Testimony. It is the freshness of things, and things must be like that to be of God, for what is really of God is like that. It is not that we hold the truth, but that we have the life of the truth.

What is true in the case of the new creation man, and in connection with truth or doctrine, revelation or light, is also true in the direction of the work of God—what we call Christian work. For everyone who enters into the Divine vocation, the calling to service, it ought to be as though there had never been any Christian work before. It ought to be as though they were the first ever commissioned. In their spirit, in their outlook, in their passion, it should be as though they were right at the beginning of things, as though the Christian activity, the Christian Gospel, was only just starting on its way. That is the consciousness which they should have, and that is just the opposite of entering into a long-standing, accepted, crystallised system of Christian work and becoming a part of a great existing machine. The freshness about things should be of this character: that in our service we are conscious that the hand of God has come upon us as though it had never come upon any other person, and as though no one else had been called but ourselves. I do not mean that to be taken in a wrong way—that we are the only ones—but that this thing is such a living, tremendous reality to us that we feel as though nothing had ever been done for the Lord before.

Do you understand what we mean by that? Christian work has become an order, as we have called it, a crystallised system of Christian enterprise, activity, organised work, and people are called upon today to enter into it, to take it up, and they do so and become a part of a great Christian machine for accomplishing a certain purpose. Then they go into some kind of a factory to be turned out a Christian worker. You are not surprised that these factory-turned-out workers have not got that thing by which men and women today are fed and brought into the full glory, beauty, grandeur and magnificence of Christ! No! The work of the Lord is something which, to the one who is apprehended of Christ Jesus, is as though there had never been any Christian work before. There is the freshness of life about it.

This applies to the thing which God does, for when He does a thing there is that about it which is fresh, and there is the sense that here is something which, as an element, makes this work of God a new work.

God must have newness of every kind in His

vessels. If the vessel, or the vehicle, is a man; if the vessel, or the vehicle, is a revelation; if it is a collective instrumentality, or some piece of work which God is doing in the world, when it is of Him it bears that hallmark of freshness. There is no staleness about it, nor death. It throbs with vitality.

I believe the Lord has a very definite object in our being led to this thought at this time. Undoubtedly the need today everywhere is just this sense of God in a new way. There is plenty of work, plenty of doctrine, and there are many Christians; but, oh, for this sense of God, this sense of keenness, freshness, vitality, and knowledge of God in all! *That is the need.* Without it things will go on as they are, and they are very dead, and tragically weak and ineffective.

The measure, then, of the newness of the vessel will be the measure of the newness of what God puts into it. God demands the newness of the vessel in order to commit Himself to it.

Look at that passage from Isaiah xlvi: “I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, which thou hast not known. They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them.” Is not that the attitude today toward a great deal? ‘Oh, yes, I know it all! I know, there is nothing new about that! The doctrine and everything else, yes, I know it! We have heard that before! We know it! There is nothing new about that!’ Dear friends, if you have caught the inner significance of this you are not talking mentally like that! You are seeing, and as you see you are feeling intensely that there is this need everywhere today. You have the intelligence of a living insight, and you know quite well that there is no hope whatever in simply propagating doctrine and truth and trying to do the old work in the old way. The need is not more work, more doctrine, more truth and more light so much as more of this living element in all.

There are two sides. There is the vessel, and there is that which is in the vessel. The vessel may be quite a good vessel doctrinally, and in other ways, but there needs to be also the deposit in the vessel, the new wine. So the Word says here quite clearly that there is a hopelessness about the old, and all the hopes in the direction of renewal and freshness on the one hand, and of God’s living, new deposit on the other hand.

What is the ultimate conclusion about this? It is the conclusion to which II Corinthians v. 18 comes: “But all things are of God. . . .” That follows the statement: “. . . we thus judge, that one

died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him. . . ." That is the one side: everything having died as to its own self-productiveness. It cannot produce this Divine end and result. It has died to its own productiveness, and now it is unto Him, and when it is all unto Him then all things are out from God. When all things are of God, all things carry this vital element, this essential freshness of a new creation.

You and I should have heart exercise about everything that the Lord has brought to us. Do we really do that? Do we go back over what has been said and say: 'Now the Lord said such and such, and this and that comes out of it. What am I going to do about it? Do I know that in a living way? Does that really represent the Lord's mind for me, and His people? Is that something that the Lord desires for all His own? If so, on any one of these matters I must get before the Lord and definitely be exercised in heart about it.'

Piled up, mountains high, are words, language, teaching, truth and light, and the percentage of living, effective value in it all is all too small. If there is one thing about which we should lay hold of the Lord it is this: 'Lord, keep this Testimony a living thing! Do not let it become mere doctrine,

mere truth, something to be passed on which will be taken up by others and talked about, and the phrases and terminology used. God forbid that that should be!'

The point is the essential newness of all that is out from God; the essential newness of that which proceeds from the Lord, and which is really related to the Lord; and freshness on the part of those who are concerned, and newness on the part of that which is coming out from God Himself. Let us pray very much about that, because that is the very essence of our ministry, and not only of our life and what we call our Testimony. Bread must have vitamins in it, and it is the same in spiritual food, for there must be a living attribute. There must be the newness; not old things dead but—it may be old things—living. "Therefore every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matthew xiii. 52). But if he brings old things out there is a newness about them that conveys the impression that they never were before, something, at any rate, which is altogether fresh.

The Lord maintain us, and all with which we have to do, in that essential freshness and newness which is the hallmark of Himself.

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GOD'S NEW ISRAEL

Messages at the conference in Aeschi (Switzerland) 1969

No. I. "WHAT SEEST THOU?"

"The word of the Lord came unto me, saying . . . What seest thou? . . . The word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou?" (Jeremiah i. 11, 13).

"Then said the Lord unto me, What seest thou?" (Jeremiah xxiv. 3).

"The angel that talked with me . . . said unto me, What seest thou?" (Zechariah iv. 1, 2).

"The burden . . . which Isaiah . . . did see" (Isaiah xiii. 1).

"And he said, . . . What seest thou?" (Amos viii. 2).

WHAT a very great deal was bound up with this interrogating and challenging method of the Lord with His Prophets! The history and destiny of individuals, of the chosen nation, and of the nations, were involved in what they were able to answer. We are not here concerned with the specific answers that they gave, but we are very seriously concerned

with the principle governing this so great ministry. In what we are going to say we feel that we are touching one of the most vital factors, if not actually the most vital factor in spiritual history. It is with us, as with them, a "Burden", something weighty and demanding, for, as we have said, the spiritual history and destiny of God's people are bound up with it; and who is *not* concerned with *that*?

Extra weight is given to this matter when we realize that at a certain time in the life of God's people the *function* of the Prophets took pre-eminence over all other functions. Kings and Priests came under the Prophet's power. Perhaps it ought not to have been so, but there it was, and it has become the accepted way of defining even the offices of the greatest of all—our Lord Jesus Christ—as Prophet, Priest and King; giving the prophetic function priority. The reason for this is very clear when we remind ourselves that the function of the Prophet was to set forth, represent, and battle for God's *full* and *final* thought concerning His people. The true Prophet has the sovereign

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

support of God in a way that, *sooner or later*, his ministry will be fully vindicated, and destiny will be determined by it. Thus it is that we must recognize that, while God may appoint some servants particularly to this ministry, and qualify accordingly, the ministry itself is to be so embodied in the people that they become its expression, that is, the representation of God's whole mind and intention.

When we move among the *true* Prophets of God we find ourselves in an atmosphere of real and intense concern. It is almost the atmosphere of emergency and crisis. Here everything is positive, momentous, urgent, serious. The Prophet is a man of passion. Reality is the passion of this ministry, and any artificiality or pretence is intolerable.

Having said that, we are brought to the two main things which lie behind this present consideration. They are: the seeing and what is to be seen; the principle and the message. But, *do* let it be understood that, while you may not think of yourself as the messenger or the prophet, your spiritual history and destiny are inseparably bound up with the principle and the message being true in your own case. We embark, then, upon two *very* big and important matters.

THE PRINCIPLE OF ALL SPIRITUAL HISTORY AND DESTINY

This is contained in the second word of the Divine interrogation—"What *seest* thou?"

We shall all agree that seeing governs progress, assurance, and safety.

Without sight progress is, at best, limited. To the blind the range and distance of unaided movement are restricted. There is also a real element of uncertainty, tentativeness, and question. Further, life for the unseeing is an unco-ordinated life. It is lonely and largely isolated.

It was just like this in the time of the Prophets, and we could quote from them immensely as they pronounced upon it. The New Testament very largely has to do with this very matter, and it is most emphatic that spiritual seeing governs all spiritual progress, competence, assurance, reliability, *and service*. The great Apostle Paul with his life and ministry put it all down to this one basic thing: God revealed His Son in him. God shone into his heart; and he said that his life-ministry was "to open their eyes" (Acts xxvi. 18). Jesus said much about it, and, by one tremendous act, showed that sight is a *birthright*. It was to the man *born blind* that He gave sight; this was a "sign" of the spiritual heritage of the 'newborn'.

The New Testament is very positive that we shall

only make spiritual progress, and not be either arrested, turned aside, misled, deceived, or robbed of our assurance, as we "*walk in light*", as we have "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation". In other words, as we *see*! Further, the whole matter of co-ordination in the Body of Christ, the Church, *and* the churches, is itself dependent upon oneness of vision. It is essential to be of one mind by one seeing. Weakness, erratic progress, lack of effectiveness, and marred testimony are all traceable to difference in vision, therefore of objective.

Paul spoke of fighting so as not to be beating the air. There is a touch of humour in that. He had evidently seen some boxers using tremendous force and being desperately in earnest, but landing it in the air and really hitting nothing. Every boxer of repute knows how important his *eyes* are in a contest.

Our spiritual progress, strength, and ultimate attainment depend upon initial and continually growing spiritual seeing! The times sadly need such people. In all your praying pray persistently for spiritual sight!

Now we come to the main part of our present "burden" and purpose; the emphasis is on the first word of God's challenge:

"WHAT seest thou?"

This is going to lead us a very long way, and into very great truths. We must, however, begin here by putting it to you. What would be your answer if you were asked: 'What do *you* see as to the inclusive thought of God for this present dispensation? What is God doing in this age? What are His people now, and what is the explanation of His dealings with them? Who are you? What are you?'

It is the answer to these questions and challenges that engages us now and in the following chapters. May the Lord help us to put it clearly, and help you to see it unto His final satisfaction! If this is really a matter of serious concern to you, you will be willing to compass much ground with us, for "there *is* much land to be possessed". So very much is bound up with that spirit and disposition expressed in those words: "If *by any* means I may attain." The Bible does show us that the people who really 'attained' were the people who meant business with God; and, on the other hand, those who made shipwreck of their lives were those who did not so mean business.

Well: What seest *thou*?

The New Testament is built upon the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is—in the main—the history of God's elect. The first flash of light is in that dark hour of man's deflection when God in-

timated that there would be an elect Seed (Genesis iii. 15). The thin red line of that "Seed" runs on with a few individuals known as Patriarchs until it reaches a man called Abram. With and from him the river broadens into a nation, and from that point the Bible is wholly the book of the history of that nation for forty-two generations (Matthew i. 17). So that the New Testament is preponderatingly built upon the history of Israel. In the New Testament the Old Testament is quoted some two hundred and seventy-three times, and mainly in connection with Israel. The many and varied phases of light and shade in that nation's history are drawn upon for exhortation, admonition, inspiration and solemn warning. Again and again some aspect of Israel's life is taken up to support, illuminate, re-enforce an appeal or a warning being made to *Christians*.

The life and history of Israel are recapitulated and relived in the history of Christianity, but with this major difference: in the Old Testament it is temporal, earthly. In the New Testament it is spiritual, heavenly, eternal.

With the New Testament the days of the historical Israel are numbered, and that nation is rejected.

All its temporal system is wound up and done with, and its spiritual principles are passed into another nation and constitute *it* the new Israel. We make this statement of facts, and presently we shall be enlarging upon them.

In *effect* the New Testament is the continuation of all that was *spiritually* true of the Old Testament Israel on the *Divine* side. The New Testament takes up, not the *things* and literal history of the old Israel, but the *meaning* and spiritual principles of their history.

Consequently, the Church of the New Testament is Israel in a heavenly and spiritual form. Everything that was in the earthly life of the Old Testament Israel is now taken up spiritually for either the constitution of the Church, or for its warning. The Church is reliving the life of Israel on a *heavenly and spiritual basis*. Hence, the Church is called "the Israel of God" (Galatians vi. 16 and context) and Peter, having himself passed through the great transition, transfers the major characterizations of historic Israel to the spiritual Church. (See Matthew xxi. 42-44, and I Peter ii, 6-10.) We are going to take up as many aspects of this as we can in order to answer the governing question: "What seest thou?"

No. II. "THE HOPE OF ISRAEL"

That phrase employed by the Apostle Paul was used to sum up the whole substance and issues of his life-ministry (Acts xxviii. 20). You will observe that in the defence made by Paul before Agrippa he narrated the story of his life as a Jew, and now in his Roman prison he meets the Jews in Rome and tells them that he is there as a prisoner for "the hope of Israel".

What was the hope of Israel? While there were many things included in that hope, the inclusiveness was a Person, and that Person was called (in Hebrew) the Messiah. It would require a whole volume to cover all the ground of the Messiah and the Messianic hope in the Old Testament. Some of it will come out as we proceed, but that Person dominates the Old Testament from Genesis iii. onward. He is implicit in personal and symbolic types; He is "the Prophet" which was to come; He is the Prophet which the Lord told Moses He would raise up 'like unto him' (or, "as He had raised him—Moses—up"); He was "the root of David", 'David's Son', the "Branch", the "Servant of Jehovah", etc. All the many and various titles and designations, functions and offices, intentions and promises were embodied in that One Person—the coming Redeemer, King, and Salvation, whose

name was "Messiah"—and He was "the Hope of Israel".

How very significant and impressive it is, therefore, that that name, *with all its content*, is so fully taken over into the New Testament. This is—for many Christians—somewhat veiled or obscured by the change of language. So often in our own English language we commonly use two words which mean the same thing, but do not realize that they belong to two different languages. For instance, we often hear people trying to give emphasis to a thought or feeling by saying: 'Let it be living and vital!' 'Living' is English. 'Vital' is Latin or French. The meaning is identical in each language. So it is with this word "Messiah". That is Hebrew (Mashiach) and means "the Lord's Anointed". The exact New Testament equivalent or synonym is "Christ".

It is very impressive that this word or name occurs over five hundred and twenty times in the New Testament, and it would be quite correct, and significant, if we did as one version has done, and every time we come on "Christ" just say "Messiah". An extra, and tremendously significant factor is that this Hebrew-Greek name is used so *very* largely in writings to *Gentile* Christians!

What then arises? The Messiah—"Hope of Israel"—is the Christ of Christianity, and Jesus of Nazareth is He. What a content! All that was *rightly* in the Coming One of Israel's hope is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but with this difference: Israel's "Hope" was earthly, temporal, material. The Church's attainment unto it all is heavenly, spiritual, eternal. Israel's expectation was every temporal, earthly blessing. The Church's heritage (now) is "every *spiritual* blessing in the heavenlies".

We are bound to come on this again later. There is the further feature to be observed. Israel lived for the day of Messiah's appearing when all their earthly expectations would be realized. For the Church He has come and accomplished all that is necessary for that realization, but she lives for the day of His appearing when what He did will be the entire order of heaven *and* earth. So Peter who, as we have said, had, after a big battle, made the great spiritual transition, writing to *converted* Jews said: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Messiah), who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Messiah) from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven . . ." (I Peter i. 3, 4).

Every word of that statement should be weighed as a contrast to Israel's hope and inheritance.

"Living hope." "Resurrection" (Old Israel is not now in resurrection).

"Inheritance." "Incorruptible." "Undefiled." "Unfading." "In heaven."

This is indeed a great transition from one Israel to another! One inheritance defiled, corrupted, and faded away. (See I Thessalonians ii. 14b-16.) The other Israel—the Church—(Galatians vi. 16 and Hebrews) with the incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, heavenly inheritance.

What ought to follow now is a long consideration of what was *in* Israel's "Hope" which has been transferred, *in a spiritual way* at present to the Church, but this is not a series of volumes, and we are only indicating *major foundation* facts. Much more will surely come out as we go along. But let us just quote the words of one writer in this connection:

"Jesus of Nazareth needed no outward enthronement or local seat of government on earth to constitute Him of David's kingdom, as He needed no physical anointing to consecrate Him Priest for evermore, or material altar or temple for due presentation of His acceptable service. Being the Son of the Living God, and, as Son, the Heir of all things, He possessed, from the first, the powers of the Kingdom; and *proved* that He possessed

them in every authoritative word He uttered, every work of deliverance He performed, every judgment He pronounced, every act of mercy and forgiveness He dispensed, and the resistless control He wielded over the elements of nature, and the realms of the dead. *These* were the signs of royalty He bore about with Him upon the earth; and wonderful though they were—eclipsing in royal grandeur all the glory of David and Solomon—they were still but the earlier preludes of the peerless majesty which David from afar descried when he saw Him as his Lord, seated in royal state at His Father's right hand, and on which He formally entered when He ascended up on high with the word: 'All authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth.'"

At the end of the stormy and disturbed four hundred years between the Old Testament and the New there existed a small Jewish remnant of faithful and "devout" men and women in Jerusalem still looking and longing for the coming of Messiah. Of these Simeon was representative, and it is said of him that "the Holy Spirit was upon him". He was "looking for the consolation of Israel", and "it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ (Messiah)". "He came in the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus . . . he received him into his arms, and blessed God, and said . . . Mine eyes have seen thy salvation . . . the glory of thy people Israel". And he said: "This child is set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against" (Luke ii. 25-35). That whole passage needs to be carefully considered in the light of this whole subject of Israel's Messiah being the Church's Christ *through the Cross*.

But a question presses for an answer. Who was this Messiah—Christ, and when was He anointed?

We know that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good . . .", and we know that anointing took place immediately after His baptism at the Jordan. But, before He was Jesus of Nazareth, He was the Son of God, and before times eternal He was "appointed heir of all things" (Hebrews i. 2). Further, we know that through, by, and unto Him "all things have been created" (Colossians i. 16).

There was a great and high angelic being who was called "the anointed cherub that covereth" (Ezekiel xxviii. 14).

Two things emerge from all this. One is that the eternal Son was above all other beings, and "so much better than the angels" (Hebrews i. 4), even Lucifer; and the other, that the anointing at Jordan

was related to His work of redemption by the Cross (the Spirit always follows the altar, the blood, the Cross), and that by the anointing He was *spiritually* and officially constituted Prophet, Priest, and King.

This is foreshadowed and typified in the Old Testament, and taught as actuality in the New Testament. This is *our* Christ, the Messiah of the new Israel.

(To be continued)

A message given by Mr. Poul Madsen at the Aeschi Conference, Switzerland, in September, 1969

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

“For the word of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness; but unto us which are being saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians i. 18).

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church; whereof I was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given me to you-ward, to preach fully the word of God” (Colossians i. 24, 25).

I CANNOT tell you how grateful I am to be among you, and to meet old friends whom I have not seen for twenty-one years. Some of us were together at Kilcreggan, Scotland, in 1948, and for me that was a time of very real importance. There the Lord gave me two things: a new Bible—a new revelation; and new friends—a new experience of fellowship in the Lord. And those two things have stood the test of time. It was not just a time of emotion, but some days when the Lord did a lasting work in us.

Some of use have been through many things during the last twenty-one years. We have had many joys, some trials, some sorrows, some difficulties, and quite a number of things which we would not have chosen ourselves; and through all these things we have proved and experienced that the preaching of the Cross is truly the power of God. The word of the Cross has brought us through. A sentimental word could not have done that. A superficial word would not have been able to carry us right through, but the word of the Cross has actually and truly brought us through many, many different things; and the word of the Cross is actually the Word of God, touching all aspects life.

1. A WORD OUT OF DARKNESS

The word of the Cross is a word out of darkness and suffering: “My God, my God, why hast thou

forsaken me?” That was a word out of utter darkness, and you find it throughout the Bible. It was the word of David. Again and again he cried: “Why, my God? Why?” It was the word of the prophets, and it was the word of Job. It was a word of suffering, but not of despair; a word out of deep trial, but not of rebellion; and a word out of that experience has power—and how that word has helped us!

2. A WORD OF THIRST AND LONGING

The word of the Cross is also a word of deep, deep thirst, a longing to see the Lord’s plan of salvation fulfilled. How I long to see the full salvation of my God! That also is a word throughout the whole Bible. The Lord said: “I thirst”, and David did the same; so did the prophets. No one in touch with reality and in touch with God can come through on his own. He has a thirst in him for the realization of the Divine plan of salvation. How often we have been in difficulties and in situations where this thirst was felt in our innermost being! And how the word of the Cross has been a power to bring us through when we felt our thirst!

3. A WORD OF TRIUMPH

The word of the Cross is also a word of true triumph; not a superficial, cheap victory, but *true* triumph: “It is finished!” We find throughout the Bible that in the hours of deepest suffering the Lord’s saints have been enabled to triumph, and I repeat, not a cheap, superficial victory. It is not only an emotional thing, but true victory that can stand even in the sight of God. How the word of the Cross has helped us, even in hours of deep darkness, to triumph through Him!

4. A WORD OF DEEP REST

The word of the Cross is a word of deep, deep

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

rest. The waves were high, the enemy was seemingly triumphant, the darkness was heavy, but, in spite of all that, the word of the Cross gave us the deepest rest in our Lord. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Sacrificing everything, even Himself, He was in the deepest rest in the will of His Father. Losing everything, His rest of faith was triumphant; and you will find that everywhere throughout the Scriptures. It is the word of the Cross, the eternal Word of God. "Though the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail . . . yet I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk iii. 17, 18). How the word of the Cross has enabled us, through many trials, to be quiet in our Lord, the Lord of our salvation! The enemy has been very busy and our nerves were very weak, but the word of His power brought deep rest to our innermost being.

5. A WORD OF DIVINE LOVE

The word of the Cross is also a word of love—not cheap love, but Divine love: "Father, forgive them." One of our leaders in Denmark, who is not a Christian, said publicly: 'I do not know the truth, but this is the biggest word ever spoken to mankind: "Father, forgive them." ' And then he added: 'It might well be the truth!' And you find it throughout the whole Bible. David prayed for Saul, the prophets prayed for Jerusalem and for their enemies. Nothing can create this love in us except the word of His power, the word of the Cross.

In the last twenty-one years we have been tempted quite often to bitterness, or to fight with carnal weapons. How wonderful it is when the word of His power creates in us who are being saved the love of God!

6. A WORD OF FELLOWSHIP

The word of the Cross is the word of fellowship: "Woman, behold thy son . . . Son, behold thy mother." I have not seen my two brethren here during these twenty-one years, and yet I say: 'Behold, my brothers.' That is the power of the word of the Cross, making us a new family; not founded on an emotional basis, but in spirit and in truth.

So I can testify to the power of the preaching of the Cross. "Unto us which are being saved it is the power of God." And it has brought us through. Signs could not help us. Sensationalism had no power to help us. The wisdom of men could not bring us through, but this word has actually proved

its power in bringing all of us through. And now my own great wish is to be enabled to preach that word of the Cross; it may be that the Lord has given us some time here in order to enable us to preach that word, but without some practical identification with those who spoke the word of the Cross fully, how could one expect to preach that message?

7. A WORD TO BE PREACHED

The word of the Cross requires the spirit of the Cross, and thus Paul says that he rejoices in his sufferings. It had something to do with his ministry, for through the many sufferings he was enabled to preach the word of the Cross fully. Preaching is not only saying correct things according to Scripture; it has to convey the Spirit, the life of Him who spoke the word from His Cross. So it is not possible to preach the word of power without one's self being identified with Him who spoke from His Cross. That might explain many things in the past twenty-one years.

We are living through very difficult days. In Denmark, at least, the darkness is very, very heavy, and we have experienced that nothing of a superficial, easy-going Christianity can really bring true help. We are not fighting against flesh and blood, but are involved in some measure in a cosmic warfare, and we do not want only to touch the brains of men. We want really to touch deep down in human lives. As we have ourselves experienced the power of that word, not given us with very great manifestations, but in truth and in the spirit, then we know out of our own experience what to do. We want to be identified with our crucified Lord and Saviour. We want—I have to say this carefully, but I must say it—the sufferings which come out of obedience. We want, in days such as these, fully and truly to avoid the popular and to accept the truth. Therefore, my dear friends, we are not looking for signs, nor do we want the wisdom of this age, but the power of the Cross is *the* thing that we are seeking.

I guess that we are gathered here together during these days for this very reason. I have been to many conferences during the past twenty-one years. I have sponsored many myself. I have forgotten most of what has been said in all these conferences. Very much of it was very wonderful, as far as the emotions were concerned, but what has been left with me, what has stood the test of time and trial, what has kept me in the true fellowship of the Lord's saints, was the preaching of the Cross.

And, as I started by saying, it has been wonderful

to come back now and to look back over twenty-one years with some of you.

The word of the Cross that goes forth from the mouth of the Lord has never returned unto Him void, and so I suggest that we, during these few days, seek the Lord's face together, asking Him to renew all of us, especially those in the ministry of the Word, that we, in our generation, can bring the

word of His power so that, if we meet again in twenty-one years, we shall see then that that word of the Cross was effective and powerful, that it gave us new revelation, a new sense of fellowship, and was so powerful that it brought us through the coming twenty-one years with all their trials and sufferings. It shall be done!

P. M.

A message given by Mr. W. E. Thompson at the conference in Aeschi, Switzerland, 1969

A SAFE STRONGHOLD

"And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis xi. 3, 4).

"Now I Paul myself intreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I who in your presence am lowly among you, but being absent am of good courage toward you: yea, I beseech you, that I may not when present shew courage with the confidence wherewith I count to be bold against some, which count of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strong holds); casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians x. 1-5).

WE are conscious in these days here that we are dealing with things that are in considerable contrast to the Christian world outside. It is the contrast between the heavenly and the human; the contrast between that which is born of the flesh and that which is born of the Spirit; the contrast between the word of the Cross, the Word of God, and just a message from man. If you read some Christian magazines you will find that you can buy sermons for ten shillings each, while if you pay twenty shillings you are guaranteed to start revival! There are many people who do not have the word of God and have to buy these sermons.

We have also seen the contrast between knowledge *about* God and knowledge *of* Him Himself,

and tonight I want to consider something of that which is arrayed against the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, that which robs us of the knowledge of Him.

THE BUILDING OF CITIES

We read in Genesis xi. of the activity of man at, I believe, the pinnacle of his powers, the total of human ingenuity: "Let us build us a city, and a tower." Now cities are phenomena which are quite foreign to the ways of God. A city is something more than a concentration of people, and more than just a centre for essential services, such as hospitals, fire stations, and all the rest. A city is the centre of all man's human powers, and the development of cities in the world today is a very significant feature. The number of people living in cities has increased ten times during the last hundred years, and all across the world cities are increasing and growing at an alarming rate. In India, where I have served the Lord, the growth of cities is out of all proportion to the growth of the population, and these cities are the centre of every kind of wickedness that you can imagine. These great cities are places where ideas are manufactured to brainwash the minds of millions. You do not find an advertising agency in a village! Cities are places where it is becoming increasingly difficult for a Christian to survive, not merely because of noise and people, but because they are the strongholds of Satan. He has deceived men into thinking that their learning in the cities, and their technology is going to help them to reach heaven.

If we are really concerned with the knowledge of God I believe that we must take serious account of this fact. A characteristic of human nature is to build, and it is this characteristic that has hindered the work of God. Even when our Lord Jesus Christ

took some of His disciples up to the mount with Him and revealed to them something of His glory, gave them a glimpse of an opened heaven, what was their reaction? 'This is tremendous! Let us build! Let us hold on to this thing!' And that has been happening all down the history of the Christian church. God works, God reveals Himself, God opens heaven, and man says: 'We must make something of this!' That explains all the ruins that we have of Christian movements in the world today. This is the mind of man, human, and quite contrary to the Spirit of God.

STRONGHOLDS OF WORSHIP

Associated with the cities of Old Testament times were the centres of religious worship, and in those cities there were what were known as 'high places'. These were strongholds of the worship of a heathen god. As I have been reading through the books of Kings and Chronicles in recent months I have been greatly struck with the Divine comment on the life of many kings. These were good men who carried out considerable reforms during their reigns, and of whom it could be said that they "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord". However, they fell short in one thing. In II Kings xii. 2 and 3 we read of King Jehoshaphat: "And Jehoshaphat did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoida the priest instructed him. *Howbeit the high places were not taken away.*" The same was true of King Amaziah, for in chapter xiv. 4 we read: "Howbeit the high places were not taken away." And that was true of many of these kings. They went so far, but there was something that hindered their complete obedience and yielding to God—"the high places were not taken away".

IMAGINATIONS OF THE MIND

What are these high places? What is it that lies behind the city? It is the *imaginations of man*. These are the things that are exalted against the knowledge of God. Where are our strongholds? What is it that really prevents us from knowing the Lord as we want to know Him?

The Apostle Paul puts his finger upon the answer: ". . . Strongholds casting down imaginations." This is what lies behind so much of the false religion that we find around us. What is it that lies behind that which is against God? Before we see the answer which applies to us there in II Corinthians x., I want to turn to Ezekiel viii., where I believe we get an important link between what we

are trying to say this evening and what our brother is saying in the mornings.

Here in this chapter we find that Ezekiel is taken on a journey to Jerusalem. There were no newspapers or television in his day, but God does not depend upon them to inform His servants. He took Ezekiel in a vision to the temple in Jerusalem, and said (in verse 6): "Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel do commit here?" I suppose Ezekiel looked at the temple and thought that it seemed perfectly all right. From an outward point of view everything seemed to be going on in a right way. The people were going through all the motions of their religion, but God said to Ezekiel: 'Come here! There is something for you to see beyond this'; and God brought him right near to the wall of the temple. In verse 7 Ezekiel said: "And when I looked, behold a hole in the wall." Then God said to him: "Son of man, dig now in the wall", and as Ezekiel picked away at the plaster a door was suddenly revealed in what had seemed to be a very nice wall. He opened the door and went in—and what did he see? We read in verse 10: "Behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel." And what does all that mean? We find the answer in verse 12: "Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in his chambers of imagery?" What are "the chambers of imagery"? The world of thoughts, the imaginations of the mind. And what do we find there? We find that of which we read in the first chapter of the letter to the Romans. They turned their backs on the true God and in their imaginations they created a god—"and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (verse 23). And so we see these "high places" behind the façade of man's religion.

What about our own imaginations? What about our own thought life? I am sure that this is where the difference is felt between living in a city and living in a village! How silently and imperceptibly our minds are captivated and become strongholds, high places, exalted against the knowledge of God!

"THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE"

This is the battleground! This is where the battle must be won if we are to increase in the knowledge of God! Paul was one who could testify to victories in this battle. Here in II Corinthians x. he is contending with men who war according to the flesh. There

is a conflict, for there are people who are opposing Paul in his ministry and in his apostleship. There are men who are trying to discredit him as a servant of God. Does Paul use their methods? No, he does not war according to the flesh. He intreats "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ", and that is the exact opposite of human achievement! This is the word and the work of the Cross. Paul meets these men, but not with carnal weapons. His strongholds are not human resources and strength, but the knowledge of God, for he has removed everything that is against the knowledge of God. In Philipians iii. we find out what Paul's 'high places' were.

The first was his race: "Of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews." Was that a qualification for the knowledge of God? As far as his personal conduct was concerned, he was a Pharisee, and was as religious as anyone could be. That was a high place to be destroyed! As far as his knowledge of the law was concerned he was wellnigh perfect—but he cut all that off. He removed all these high places that were against the knowledge of his Lord.

What is it that is hindering us from having that kind of knowledge of our Lord? Has God put

His finger on any high places in our imaginations? Are we seeking to build some great thing? We can say: 'Well, yes, but it is for the Lord.' It is amazing what we can actually do and justify as being for the Lord, when really all it is is some great thing for ourselves! But it hinders us from the knowledge of our Lord. Do we know how to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ? When we begin to do that we find what the battle for the mind really means! Is our stronghold a stronghold of our own imagination, or is it a stronghold that is the city of God?

I want, in closing, to call your attention to *that* kind of stronghold in Isaiah xxvi. i, where we have these words: "We have a *strong* city." In the middle of verse:3 we read: "Whose imagination is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." This is the strong city! The knowledge of our Lord is perfect peace; the knowledge of our Lord is perfect strength; the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is victory. May we know what it is to remove every high place that robs us of that, and may we have that knowledge, for His Name's sake!

W. E. T.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

GUARDING THE TREASURE

THE Finnish merchant was at Helsinki Airport waiting to take a plane to Milan in Italy when he was met by an official who asked him if he would do a favour for the sake of his country. The favour would be to take a parcel of valuable glassware and keep it carefully on his lap during the whole flight. Although not wanting to have the bother, he was a man who was always ready to serve his country, so he said 'Yes'; but he was very inquisitive to know the meaning of this unusual request.

He looked around and found that other passengers were being asked the same question, and it seemed that they also were agreeing, as they, too, were being issued with parcels of various shapes and sizes.

The explanation was that a Trade Exhibition was being held in Milan and that Finland had planned to display the superb glass articles made by one of its great artists. Everything had been arranged in good time, and the artist had provided some of his very best workmanship. It had been crated and sent

off to Italy, but, alas! when the packing cases were opened it was found that the precious objects had been smashed to pieces.

At first those responsible were in despair, but they appealed to the artist in Finland to know if there could possibly be any replacements. The specimens of his work which had been broken were the only ones available, so at first the artist was also near to despair, and then he suddenly had an idea. He had made similar works of art as presents for his friends, and if they could only be collected from the various homes, they could take the place of the broken exhibits, that is, if the friends were willing to lend their precious treasures.

The telephone wires hummed as he called to one and another and explained the urgent situation, asking them to be so kind as to lend their glassware for the Milan International Fair. Each one of them gladly responded, not only out of regard for their artist friend, but also for the honour of their beloved Finland.

So the articles were assembled and each carefully wrapped, but then came the problem of how to get them safely and quickly to Milan. It was a double problem: first, how to avoid breaking anything this time, and then also how to get them there in time for the opening day.

The artist and his friends appealed to the Government, and someone there had this idea: Why not ask patriotic Finnish air travellers to carry them by hand? So this was why the merchant and his fellow passengers found themselves sitting in the plane, each with a precious parcel on his lap.

The idea proved a great success. All the beautiful glass objects arrived safely, and just in time for them to be taken to the exhibition, arranged and displayed, so that they were ready for the opening.

At first it seemed a trouble to the Helsinki merchant, and he was far from pleased to be asked to carry his parcel, but soon he realized that it was, in fact, a privilege. He found, too, that it gave him many new friends. He was no longer a separate and lonely passenger, but one of a party all sharing in

the excitement of their task. They were drawn together by the special parcels which they carried, and in the end they all rejoiced together over its success.

Christians should also be drawn together by the privilege given to them of carrying something precious on life's journey. What we carry is the honour of the Name of our Lord, committed to us to be watched over and kept for Him until we finally hand it over to Him on the great Day of His appearing. Timothy was told: "Guard the treasure put into our charge, with the help of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us" (II Timothy i. 14—N.E.B.).

I am sure that those passengers were extra careful of every movement when they embarked and travelled, and then as they landed. This was no ordinary journey for them. And for us, like Timothy, if we are true lovers of the Lord there is nothing in life which is ordinary. Wherever we go we are privileged to bear about the great treasure of the honour of His Name.

H. F.

"THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE"

Reading: Habakkuk ii. 2-4, 20; Zechariah ii. 1-13.

Do you notice the similarity between the last verses of the second chapters of those two prophecies?

"But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk ii. 20).

"Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord: for he is waked up out of his holy habitation" (Zechariah ii. 13).

WHERE is the Lord? That is a most important question! Where *is* the Lord? Now, seventy years of history lie between these two prophecies, perhaps even more, because Habakkuk's prophecy was anticipating the end of the captivity. He had a vision; indeed, he had something so plainly set before his eyes that we hardly need to call it a vision. He lived in the midst of circumstances which can only be described under one word—destruction. You know how he saw the falling to pieces of his land and of his people, and how that—far from being comforted in the sense of any suggestion that that was just a temporary thing that would not go very far—he was told by the Lord that the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, were

to sweep like a flood over the whole land and destroy it. And you know how he finished his prophecy with those verses that we like to quote, that, though the fig tree shall not blossom nor fruit be in the vines, and everything is going wrong, yet he will still praise the Lord. We need to remember that, when Habakkuk said that, he was not talking about a remote contingency that might or might not happen, but that all these things were going to happen. "This is happening before my eyes, but though it happen as a certain, sure, inevitable course of events, I will rejoice in the Lord!" Habakkuk was given a vision from God that there was that which was yet to be: "For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay."

We have read one of the chapters of this book of Zechariah which speaks to us of the partial and immediate fulfilment of that promise. The vision has come; the Lord is at work; glory, blessing and fruitfulness are to dwell in the land. There is restoration and so the picture is painted in rosy language. There are beautiful portions in this prophecy, speaking, of course, of something far more than Zechariah actually saw, but speaking, in the first place, of what the Lord was doing there, so that he, all those years afterwards, was living in

the fulfilment of the things that had been promised, and he, and those of his day, had ample reason to know that the Lord was in His holy temple. After all, in spite of the captivity, in spite of the destruction of Jerusalem, in spite of the long, dreary, terrible years of scattering and the apparent ending of all things, the Lord has returned and is working; things are happening and glory is back in the land. The people are there, and the house of the Lord is to be built, so he could say: 'It is all right! After all, the Lord is in His holy temple!' But the remarkable thing is that, years before that, with nothing to see, no sign of glory, everything seeming to contradict the promises of God, and surrounded by devastation and destruction, Habakkuk could say the same thing: 'It is all right! The Lord is in his holy temple!'

I trust that I shall be able to impart something of what has come to my own heart as to the need and the blessedness of maintaining the testimony here on earth that the Lord is in His temple and is supreme. As we have said, Habakkuk only saw destruction; Zechariah was seeing construction. When Zechariah saw things happening he could say: "The Lord is in his holy temple", and so could we and so could any man. But when Habakkuk saw nothing happening, but rather the reverse, he could still say: "The Lord is in his holy temple", and for seventy years at least, so far as Jerusalem and the people there were concerned, with no visible token and everything seeming to be contradictory, a strain was placed upon their faith as to whether after all the Lord was in His holy temple—but He was! In the end it is proved that He was.

GOD IN THE WORK OF DESTRUCTION

And so we must believe that the Lord is just as much in His place of heavenly government during events of destruction as He is or will be during the subsequent events of construction. The nations were having it their own way, the Chaldeans were over-running everything, catching men in their nets and destroying the places that were sacred to the people of God, and there was no answer from heaven. The fig tree literally did cease to blossom, there was no longer any herd in the stall, and the whole possibility of tragedy that could be became true. What was happening? Had God withdrawn? God is in His holy temple, and even in the midst of all that was happening faith said: "Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord!" Although they did not know it, these men of flesh were, in a sense, bowing to the Lord in His holy temple. They were serving the purpose of God, and through all that period of

the most terrible destruction He was in His holy temple: and faith looked forward to the day of which Zechariah now speaks, when that Lord in His holy temple (using a human figure of speech) would wake up out of His holy habitation and begin His work, begin to build things, to fashion them according to His own mind and have His will done. That did not mean that He had been asleep and indifferent during that whole time. The whole process of destruction that had been going on was under the eye and the hand of God. God was in His holy temple. There was nothing to see; in fact, everything contradicted it; but there was a day in the future when He would begin to build up that which was after His own mind, and that day would be possible because previously he had used the forces of destruction to prepare the way for Himself, and all through the time He had never for one moment relinquished His hold of things.

The children of Israel were scattered to the four winds. There was a terrible captivity in the land of the north, but Zechariah discloses the fact that this was not something that Nebuchadnezzar did. God did this. "I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven" (Zechariah ii. 6). God is in His holy temple! As those poor people marched away into captivity, weighed down by their sad circumstances and hopeless future, and not less weighed down by the knowledge that it was the just retribution of their failure and unfaithfulness that brought this about, God was still in His holy temple, and the marvel of it was that, in spite of all their unfaithfulness, His hand was upon them and the purpose of good concerning them was still in His heart. 'I scattered you', He says. 'I led you away into captivity'; and then He says a remarkable thing concerning these who are among the nations being spoiled: "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye" (Zechariah ii. 8). They were a failing, unfaithful, rebellious people, upon whom the hand of God had come very heavily because of their sin, but concerning them, away in captivity, it was just as true: God was still in His holy temple.

That does not just mean that God exists, but that He, in the fullness of His love and purpose and power, is controlling things for His own glory. So great is His love that, through all the darkness of the seventy years of captivity, through the apparent hopelessness and lack of any prospect of brightness, when they might have been cast down to the depths and felt: 'Well, God is in His holy temple, but that is a God far off and finished with us because of our sins'; through all that dark period it was still true that he that touched them touched the apple of His eye. In all their afflictions, God was afflicted. It was

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

hurting God as much as it was hurting them. He was still in His holy temple.

I am sure that a good deal of the atmosphere that surrounds the book of Habakkuk is right up to date and true concerning us and the Church today, and that the destruction that we see in the world at present is something of the same kind of thing that he faced. And I am sure I speak the truth when I say that in personal lives there are often such periods when it seems that everything is going to pieces. If the Lord were doing great things in a manifest way, saving men and gathering them together in companies, even though under persecution, yet manifesting His presence and power, it would be very easy to say: 'The Lord is in His holy temple. Look what is happening!' But when none of those things is happening, but rather the reverse, what are we going to say? Well, Habakkuk will tell us still to say: "The Lord is in his holy temple!" And so with our own individual lives, when things are moving and the Lord is doing something with us and for us, and all kinds of things are happening which are expressed in these chapters of Zechariah, we are full of confidence. It is all right! The Lord is in His holy temple, and if the devil and all his legions are against us, well, it is all right, for the Lord is in His holy temple. He is doing something and building something.

GOD IN THE WORK OF CONSTRUCTION

Ah, but that building work that the Lord was able to do after all those years was something that resulted from a period of destruction, and it may be that to make a clearance and a way for Himself to fashion that which is after His own heart, the Lord may have to lead us through a period which is comparable to that of which Habakkuk speaks, when the only signs are signs of desolation, signs of loss and signs of failure. What are we going to do then? Habakkuk says: 'I will rejoice in the Lord! I cannot rejoice in what He is doing for me. I cannot rejoice in what I am doing for the Lord, for it seems that I am doing nothing, but I will rejoice in the Lord. He is still in His holy temple!' And the inference of that is that God knows what He is doing. 'I do not know what He is doing, but I do know that, if faith will abide firm, if the righteous one will live by faith, there will come a day when I shall be able to say: "The Lord is waked up out of His holy temple. The Lord is doing things, for the time has come for Him to build!" When that time comes, well, then, everything will be fitted according to His working.' Surely the need is for this assurance as to where God is! Not just that:

"God's in His heaven, all's right with the world", but that He is in charge of every circumstance. In all the power of Divine love and purpose concerning His people, He is still in His holy temple.

Then there is the added thought that the Lord's activities in this way—destruction in order to build—are always activities that have in view a larger and a better thing than was before. Do you believe that? Will you believe it for your own personal life, for your assembly, for the Church? We have seen a good deal of what Habakkuk saw—scattering, breaking up, loss of power and loss of prospect. By faith we must say: 'No! This is not just an accident. This is but a phase of Divine activity. Things have not got out of hand, for God is in His holy temple!' Can faith go on to say: 'The end of this is going to be something better!'

There is a young man, though I do not know quite who he is, with a measuring line. I know that in other prophecies the measuring line represents the Lord Himself taking note and putting His own standard beside things, but the thought that seems to me to be given here is that this young man was rather precipitate in wanting to measure things. It brings to my own heart the thought of the old folk who wept because the old temple was so much more glorious than the new one. This young man is anxious to know what the size of Jerusalem is going to be. 'It used to be a very strong city, but let me measure it and see what it is now!' And the angel says: 'Just a minute, young man! Jerusalem is going to be inhabited as a place which has expanded beyond its walls. It is going to be so large, so expansive, so full of people, yes, and so strong, that your little measuring line will not touch that which is to be afterward!' God's "afterward" is always something bigger than it was before. As to the walls, they were measured in the past. Now the walls shall be the Lord Himself "a wall of fire"—and you cannot measure fire. This is something beyond measure, something bigger, something in the power of resurrection, something after a different order from what ever was before. The Lord will be the walls, "a wall of fire round about"! The inhabitants shall be without number, multitudes of men and camels. Solomon's temple was a fine one, but is it possible for the preciousness, the beauty, the glory, to be any better? "I will be the glory in the midst of her." Do you catch the thought? God's permission of destruction, and that long period of barrenness which seems to be endless, until Zechariah is forced to cry out and ask: 'Lord, after seventy years, is it not time to begin to move?', has not been without usefulness for the end in the purpose of God, and the end as it shall

be is something far more beautiful and wonderful, and far bigger than ever was before. He is the Lord of resurrection, a new order of things, new glory. "I will be a wall of fire round about and I will be the glory in the midst"—God is waking up out of His holy habitation.

It takes real faith, tried faith, almost desperate faith to wait for God to wake up out of His holy habitation. When the Lord said to Habakkuk: "The just shall live by faith", Habakkuk took up his position: 'God is in His holy temple, and whatever happens, I will trust and rejoice in Him!' I do not know whether he lived during those seventy years, but he was embarked on a very difficult course and he had to wait and wait. But what a reward for those who waited! 'The vision will not delay; it will surely come.' And if you read asking whether it was worth waiting for—well, read the chapters of Zechariah! Yes, blessed be His Name, it was! "God is in his holy temple."

A FAITH MATTER

There is something more to say in conclusion, and it is this. This matter of God dwelling in the midst of His people is for us a matter of faith, and a matter about which we must be quite settled. We must be sure that God is in His holy temple, not merely in the sense of being in heaven and far above all, but in the midst of His people. I know that this diverges somewhat from what I have been saying, because there was a sense in which the vision was only completed when God came down to dwell in the midst of His people, but the secret of the whole book is the Lord Himself dwelling in the midst. For us these two visions overlap in a sense. The vision has already been realized for us, and God has already done His work and does dwell in the midst; and that becomes for us a matter of real faith. I have been struck by the fact that in Old Testament days and in New Testament days the conduct of the Lord's people was governed, not by the thought that if they behaved in certain ways the Lord would come and dwell with them, but rather that, because the Lord was in their midst, they must act accordingly. 'God is in the midst. Therefore I must do certain things in a certain way.'

But when I take up the New Testament and turn to a church such as that at Corinth, where there are all kinds of disorders, I expect the Apostle to take this line: 'Well, you are a poor lot of believers! Do you think the Lord is coming to meet with you? Put your house in order and then the Lord might come and be in your midst!' I do not find him talking like that, but rather, in spite of what he has to deplore in their midst, not only being himself convinced that since they are the Lord's the Lord is among them, but trying to get them to see it. If only they can see it and know it spiritually, he believes that will solve all their problems. Take, for instance, II Corinthians vi. 16: "Ye are the temple of the living God." He does not say: 'You ought to be the temple of the living God, and you may be, given certain circumstances.' No: "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Now he goes on to say: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate." The first letter is altogether taken up with exhortations to change behaviour, attitude and conduct; and this fact is stated as something to be apprehended, to be laid hold of: 'God is in the midst, and many of your problems will be solved if, in the power of the Spirit, you could believe that.' If, in the depth of heart consciousness and conviction, for personal life and for assembly life when we are gathered together, faith would lay hold of this fact: 'The Lord is in the midst!', many problems would be solved.

Well, I have sought as the Lord has, I trust, enabled me, just to bring this little emphasis to you: God is in His holy temple. Sometimes that means there needs to be a work of destruction, but He is just as much in His holy temple and He loves us just as much, and we are just as much the apple of His eye. But faith may wait expectantly for a time of construction when God wakes out of His temple. What a blessed day that is! What blessings have come to our lives, what blessings shall we yet know. and what blessings, in the mercy of God, shall God's people know, when He is a wall of fire round about and He is the glory in the midst!

H. F.

THE MISSION, THE MEANING AND THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

6. IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

IN this series of messages our object has been to re-emphasize 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 v how He is connected with Adam, and in chapter iv 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" (iii. 10).

From chapter v we move into chapter vi, and I advise you to remove the chapter divisions. Chapter vi is not a new chapter, but is the continuation of chapter v. In chapter v 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 vi? 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 iii. 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 vi. 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 vi. 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" (II Corinthians iv. 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 vi

shows the position of spiritual experience. We move on, without dividing into chapters, and presently we come on to what is shown as chapter viii, and here we find what has happened in chapter vi. 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" (vii. 18). The flesh is the self-life in any, or all, of its forms. So that this statement in verse 4 of chapter viii 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 viii: "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 viii it is "conformed to the image of his Son", and in chapter xii. 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.

THE ESSENTIAL NEWNESS OF THE NEW CREATION

Reading: II Corinthians v. 1-21.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us . . ." (verse 14).

". . . that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him . . ." (verse 15).

THOSE are the two fragments which will govern our meditation: ". . . the love of Christ constraineth us . . .", ". . . henceforth . . . unto him". Although these words were penned long after the day when the Apostle was apprehended by Christ Jesus, they clearly reach back to that beginning of things in his own experience, and they form, moreover, a very fitting introduction to his own life; for as we know his life now in a considerable fullness, we are able to see how true it all was to these words. There is a sense in which we can say that these words are a summary of the life of the Apostle Paul. "The love of Christ constraineth us", "not henceforth . . . unto themselves, but unto him . . ." Those sentiments very truly govern the life of this man from the day when he met the Lord to the day when he laid down the earthly task.

What was true in his own case he sought to press home upon all others, that it might be equally true of them. He binds others with himself. He says: ". . . the love of Christ constraineth us . . .", "because we thus judge . . .", "that *they* which live . . ." Whether he had certain people definitely in mind when he thus wrote, we do not know. Possibly this was not the case, and that his use of the plural here is just the expression of his own great longing that it might be true of all the Lord's people. He knew himself to be so truly governed by that constraining love, and he would not that his own case should be exceptional, but that the passion of every heart might be summed up in the declaration: "the love of Christ constraineth us", "henceforth . . . unto him."

I feel we are perfectly justified in taking these words as representing the Lord's will for us, as setting before us the standard which the Lord would have to be true in our own case, that we also should say with the same depth of reality: ". . . the love of Christ constraineth us . . .", "henceforth . . . unto him", not unto ourselves.

If you look at the whole paragraph again, you will see that this is related to the Cross on the one hand, and to ambassadorship on the other. Mark the statements: ". . . one died for all, then were all dead": resultant from that: ". . . unto him . . ."—

"that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (verse 15, A.V.); "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ. . . ." (verse 20, R.V.). You notice the significance of that word "therefore"—"We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ. . . ." That is what it means to be "henceforth unto Him", and the place of the Cross here is, quite clearly, the settling once for all of all matters of interest which are apart from the interests of the Lord Jesus. That death with the Lord Jesus was a death in which all our own personal interests, of any and every kind, were forever buried, and the interests of the Lord Jesus became pre-eminent, pre-dominant, the one passion of our living being "henceforth . . . unto him . . ." How? "We are ambassadors . . . on behalf of Christ." The Cross means that the Lord Jesus becomes the real passion, concern, dominating interest of a life which has been crucified, which has died to all its own interests, *because of His love*. "The love of Christ constraineth us . . ."

THE CROSS AND TOTAL ABANDONMENT TO THE LORD

This says to us in very clear terms that the Cross represents a total abandonment to Christ. We may have heard that many times. It does not concern me very much how many times I have said it or have heard it. What does concern me is that we should be there. I am tremendously burdened, and there is a strong and deep longing in my heart that what is here should, in spirit and in truth, become true of us all; that we should be able to say with the same depth and reality as did the Apostle: "The love of Christ constraineth us", "henceforth . . . unto him", "we are ambassadors . . . on behalf of Christ."

That, then, calls for the same utter abandonment to Him as obtained in the life of this ambassador. That calls for the same meaning of the Cross in our case as in his; complete death to all interests save the Lord's; life only, altogether, for Christ. That is how ambassadors are made. Ambassadors are not officials, appointed on official grounds. The ambassadors of Christ are such because Christ's interests are paramount, are predominant in their hearts; for when we say: "the *love* of Christ constraineth us", this is a heart matter between the Lord Jesus and ourselves. So that, on the one hand, it is the Cross and total abandonment to the Lord, and, on the other hand, it is

THE CROSS AND A PASSION
FOR THE INTERESTS OF THE LORD

Paul was an exemplary ambassador. One thing which he was often found saying was: "I am ready . . ." Far away from needy saints at Corinth he would write and say: "I am ready to come to you" (II Corinthians xii. 14). He was ready to make long, tiring, difficult and perilous journeys in the interests of Christ in His people. Journeys were more difficult in Paul's day than in ours, and involved a good deal more than do journeys nowadays. But he said, with a real concern for their spiritual well-being: "I am ready to come to you."

To far-off Romans he wrote: "I am ready to preach the gospel to you. . . ." (Romans i. 15). From his prison in Rome, where he had fulfilled his readiness to preach to them also, he wrote at the last to his son Timothy: ". . . I am now ready to be offered . . ." (II Timothy iv. 6). To those who sought to dissuade him from going into the very lion's mouth at Jerusalem, he said: "I am ready . . . to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xxi. 13).

That readiness had a considerable background. If it were put to us we should, in a sense, say that we were ready, but I wonder if we *are* ready! Readiness means more than being willing. Most of us would respond and say: 'Well, if the Lord wants it, I am ready!' But are we ready? What constituted readiness in the case of the Apostle? With all our readiness it is just possible that before we got very far we should be stumbled, we should stop short, and the reasons might be various.

Let us face this quite definitely. It is not necessary to press the question of an ambassadorship to a foreign country on some bit of public service. Ambassadorship relates quite as much to the place where we are in our life now. It relates to the business place. It is wherever we are that our ambassadorship is to hold good. Now then, are we ready? Are we thus ready, with this passion for the interests of the Lord Jesus, so that *there* we are found utterly abandoned to Him to secure those interests? It is strange that while so many are prepared to join with others in an open-air meeting, to preach the Gospel to the unsaved, and are prepared even to stand out on a cold night with a group to do so, the very same work is to be done around them every day in their business place, and they are not touching it. It is exactly the same work. There is something about an open-air ring and a platform and preaching *out* to the unsaved which is more romantic, and in which you can feel far more hold, than when you stand alone in your

business place, or place of daily calling. The test comes as to whether it is that aspect of Christian work which is more or less public and official, and puts you in a place of advantage over the others, that draws out your zeal, or whether your passion for Christ is continuous wherever you are. The ambassadorship is not for platforms, for meetings, for public occasions; the ambassadorship relates to all places, all times, because it is constituted not by an appointment, or an invitation to preach, or an official position, but by the love of Christ. "Henceforth . . . unto *him*"; not on special occasions, but on all occasions. Are we ready?

Paul took charge of the ship's company, and made himself responsible for the spiritual interests of the men on the ship. Wherever he was, in his prison, in his travels, in his journeys, and his sojourns, he was all the time bent upon the interests of the Lord Jesus with concern and eagerness. That was one aspect of his readiness, and is perhaps the one of most general application and challenge.

There are other aspects of readiness. The readiness of Paul was constituted by his having settled, once for all, his own personal, spiritual problems. You never find Paul tied up in the knots of personal spiritual problems, going round, and round, and round, and never getting anywhere because his own spiritual problems are all the while bothering him. *Paul had that matter settled at the beginning.* He got over that fence, and went away into Arabia, and when Paul said he was ready, it meant that he was at leisure from himself spiritually. No man is ready, in this sense, who is not free from himself spiritually. We do not mean that every question that can ever come to us has been answered, and every problem has been solved, but that we are so utterly abandoned to Christ that we know quite well that, if we go on with the Lord, sooner or later all those things will solve themselves. Our business is to *go on*, and get free from ourselves spiritually. Those who are self-occupied in a spiritual way are the unready, the unprepared. Why not relegate your 'locking-up' problem to a place where you trust the Lord to deal with it when He pleases, and get on with the business of the Lord and with His interests? Recognize the desperate need that there is spiritually in this world, and give yourself to it? I venture to say you will come back to your pigeon holes and find your problems all solved. You will come back and find that that thing which was laid on the table for the time being has looked after itself and is no longer a problem to you. While you sit there with it all, the Lord's interests are being suspended, and you, in the meantime, are getting nowhere at all. Abandonment to

the Lord in this way in faith is the first essential, the Lord's interests becoming the predominant thing, the passion of your heart. There is nothing like that abandonment to the Lord for solving personal problems. Christ becomes the Emancipator when we abandon ourselves to Him. That is readiness.

Another aspect of Paul's readiness was that he had counted the cost. This, like the former question, was settled once for all. Paul had sat down and faced it out. He had weighed it all up. He had said to himself: 'Now, I have a name for being such-and-such a man. I have a reputation, I have a position, and I have influence. I am known to have taken the line which I have taken without any reservation at all. Having taken that line in the manner that I have, I have gained a position. That position represents a great deal. I know quite well what all my friends, and all the people who, from my present standpoint, are most worth considering, think about the other line of things, of that course which lies before me now. I know what they think. I know their attitude. I know how they treat people who go that way. I know quite well that it will cost everything. It means reputation, position, influence, all gone, and, more than that, that those who are now for me, who have been on my side so strongly, will become my bitterest foes. I know that it may involve my being cast out of public life and out of domestic life. I know quite well that what they did to Jesus of Nazareth they will not hesitate to do to me, but my life goes with this.' He had weighed it all up from every standpoint, put it all in the balances, and settled it once for all. 'If I take this course, I have nothing to expect from this world but complete antagonism. From all my friends I have nothing to expect but the loss of *all* things.' That is how Paul put it. He had settled the cost, so that later on, when things began to work out as he had anticipated, he was not stumbled in his course. He did not come to a standstill in order to go over the whole matter again. He went on. All those matters had been dealt with, and were behind him. So often we are arrested because we come up against the cost of things, the price to be paid, and we find that we are not ready for that. "I am ready to die . . ."; "I am ready to preach . . ."; "I am ready to go . . ."; "I am already being offered, and the last drops of my sacrifice are falling." (That is the literal translation of the words to Timothy.) Paul pictures himself as a drink-offering being poured out for his Christ. That is abandonment to Christ. That is passion for Christ's interests. That is the meaning of the Cross—"henceforth . . . unto him . . ." Dead to self, and all else.

This is a challenge to us. Are we ready? Are we so detached from self, the world, and attached to Him by His love, that His interests really are the dominating interests of our life all the time? The Lord needs more men and women like this. Have you settled down to a more or less ordinary kind of Christian life? Is there a going on from day to day, and week to week, and month to month, and perhaps from year to year, with none of this real passion in our relationship to the Lord Jesus for the seeking of His interests here in this world? Are you watching closely the interests of your Lord every day? Are you making sacrifice for those interests? Yes, it may break in even upon your home life. Sacred as home life may be, if the Lord's interests should challenge even that, are you prepared—nay, not only prepared, but ready in this positive sense? I do not mean that you will never feel the matter press upon you. I have no doubt that Paul very often felt the drain, the weariness, the cost, but there was never any question, never any hesitation, as to what course was to be taken. "I am ready . . .!" Oh, do hear the Lord, the Spirit's call to your heart for this abandonment of the true ambassador of Jesus Christ! Do not regard ambassadorship as being for those special people who go out on special commissions.

We started by pointing out that Paul sought to bring the whole company of believers into this state of concern with himself. To these Corinthian believers he said: ". . . we beseech . . ."; 'we entreat'. We are all called into this position as ambassadors. Paul had a longing to see the interests of the Lord Jesus served at all times.

Are you ready to let your home go somewhat if His interests call? Are you ready to let your worldly prospects go if His interests call? Are you willing, in following out His interests, to lose the good opinion of your friends, the esteem of others, your reputation, the loss of everything, so long as the Lord's interests are served? Are you holding everything here in this world, *everything*—position and everything else—in the interests of the Lord? Are you sure that you are using all that you have for the Lord? Are you using your home? Are you using your business opportunity? Are you using your means? Is everything for Him?

I am aware that this is nothing more than an appeal to your hearts. There is not a great deal of profound teaching here, but I feel this is what is needed: a people of this sort who really do and can say, with a true, conforming background: "The love of Christ constraineth"! No longer unto ourselves, but unto *Him*! "We are ambassadors . . . of Christ . . .!" Those who stay at home, and continue

in business and in the home life should not be any the less ambassadors than those who go abroad. There ought to be in us the spirit of: "I am ready to preach . . .", "I am ready to go . . .", "I am ready to die . . .". 'I am ready in this full sense of readiness, with the result that everything is held so loosely that it will not be able to keep me back from serving the Lord's interests.' Everything is regarded solely in the light of how it can serve the Lord, and if it cannot serve the Lord, then we have no personal interest in it. If we are obliged to be in any given thing as in this world, well and good, but our hearts are not in *that* for any personal interests at all. Our hearts will only have to be in it in so far

as it is our duty. We will do what is our duty with all our might, but the connection must serve the interests of the Lord Jesus up to the hilt, as far as that is possible.

That is the attitude toward life which is called for. It is possible that this spirit, this element, this real concern and passion for the Lord, may have dropped out of the lives of many.

Ambassadors are not ambassadors because they have been appointed, but because "the love of Christ constraineth". We are not ambassadors of churches, congregations or assemblies; we are ambassadors of Christ. The Lord write this in our hearts!

A concluding message given by Mr. Sparks at the Aeschi Conference, 1969

THE TRAGEDY OF THE UNFINISHED TASK

THIS evening we move in thought into the Book of Judges—and how very different it is from the Book of Joshua! I think the Book of Judges is the most terrible book in the Bible! And why is it such a terrible book? Because it is the book of the unfinished task.

In the Book of Joshua the people of Israel went into the land, and had a wonderful history of victory after victory, moving more and more into God's full purpose. Then, before they had finished the work, they settled down. In the last chapters of the Book of Joshua we see the people just settling down before the work is perfect. They had heard the great call of God. God's purpose had been presented to them and they had made a response to it. They had moved so far, and then, before it was all finished, they settled down. The Book of Judges follows, and that is the book of the tragedy of the unfinished work.

None of us will say that there is nothing like that in Christianity today! There are many Christians who make a wonderful beginning. They see the vision of God's great purpose, and certain words in the New Testament make a great appeal to them, such as: "Called according to his purpose" (Romans viii. 28). That is a wonderful vision! "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians iii. 11). Such a thought makes a great appeal to these people and they make a heart response. They go on so far, and then many stop too soon. They lose the vision; they lose the inspiration; they lose the sense of purpose; they lose the energy to go on, and of some we have to say: 'Something has gone out of their faces. What was there with them once is not

there now. They were so positive once, so occupied with the heavenly calling, but something has happened.' These people may not be altogether conscious of it, and they would not tell you that something has happened, but it is quite evident that something *has* happened. They have just lost something, and you do not get the response now from them that you once got. They are not so interested now as they were. The heavenly vision has gone out of their lives. That is true of many Christians, and it could be true of all of us.

And the Book of Judges is our instructor in this matter. What I say now is not in judgment—although it is from the Book of *Judges*! I have a very great deal of sympathy with these people. Oh yes, I know how wrong it was, and how this book spelt the failure of these people. I know how sorry the Lord was about it, but from my own experience I cannot help being sympathetic, for I think I understand.

WEARINESS IN THE BATTLE

Why did these people stop short of finishing the job? I think that very likely it was because they became weary in well doing. The battle was long drawn out. It was spread over years and was very exhausting. No sooner had they gained one victory than they had to start fighting again. They did not have much rest between one battle and the next one. It was a long drawn-out warfare; they got weary in battle, and in their weariness they lost the vision, they lost heart, and they lost the initiative.

I am so glad that with all the strong things that the New Testament says, it says some very kind and

understanding things about this: "Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians vi. 9); "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, . . . your labour is not vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians xv. 58); "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love" (Hebrews vi. 10). What a lot of things there are like that! And Jesus said to His disciples, who were being brought into the battle: "Let not your heart be troubled!" (John xiv. 1), while we can hear the Lord's words to Joshua: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not affrighted, neither be thou dismayed" (Joshua i. 9). Again, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "He that endureth *to the end*, the same shall be saved" (Matthew xxiv. 13).

These people in the Book of Judges were discouraged by weariness—and we are all capable of that! Sometimes it is not easy for us to give up—or perhaps I ought to say that it is not *difficult* for us to give up!—because we do not want to get out of the battle, and yet, at the same time, we do want to get out of it. The battle is inside, and even so great a man as the Apostle Paul had that battle. He said: "I really do not know what to do! I have a strong desire to depart and be with the Lord in order to get out of the battle, and yet I know that duty to the Lord would keep me in the battle. I do not know whether to give up or to go on!" I say that that is a possible temptation to every Christian, and the Lord knows all about that! The New Testament is full of understanding things about it.

The first reason why these people settled down too soon, then, was discouragement. It was not because they had had no victories—they had had many—but because they said: "There is no end to this battle! It looks as though we shall *never* finish!" So in weariness and discouragement they settled down too soon.

I feel sure that this Book of Judges recognizes that. Every time these people stirred themselves again they found that the Lord was very ready to go on with them. This book is a picture of an up-and-down Christian life. One day these people are down in despair, and another day they are up in victory. It was that kind of Christian life which was always up and down, but when they turned their faces to the Lord they found that He was waiting for them. The Lord had not given up. He was always ready to go on. I think that is the first great lesson in this Book of the Judges.

THE LOSS OF HEAVENLY VISION

But what was the effect of this loss, of this stopping too soon? It was the loss of vision. They

only saw the things that were near and lost sight of God's eternal purpose. They lost sight of what Paul calls the "prize of the on-high calling" (Philippians iii. 14). Now this sounds like a contradiction, but they lost sight of the things that are not seen! You say: "What do you mean by that? That is nonsense! How can you see the things that are not seen?" Paul says: "The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians iv. 18). They lost sight of the things which are eternal because they were looking too much at the things which are seen. They lost the heavenly vision for they became satisfied too soon. It was all good so far, but the good became the enemy of the best.

The first thing that happened, then, was the loss of the heavenly vision. It works both ways. If we lose the heavenly vision we settle down too soon. If we settle down too soon we lose the heavenly vision. And what do we mean by settling down too soon? We mean: losing the warring spirit. In this Book of Judges the Philistines resorted to a very subtle strategy: they took all the weapons of war away from Israel, and all that they had left was one file to sharpen their agricultural instruments, so that every farmer in Israel had to take a journey to the blacksmith to sharpen his farm instruments. All the sharp instruments had been taken away, and the spirit of *war* was undermined. The Philistines had made it impossible for Israel to fight and you know that there is a very big Philistine about! The strategy of this great enemy of the inheritance is to take the fighting spirit out of us. Oh, what a lot of mischief the Philistines have done to Christians! What about our prayer life? There was a time when we were mighty warriors in prayer. We fought the Lord's battles in prayer. What about our prayer meetings? Where can you find the prayer meetings now that are out in spiritual warfare? Yes, we ask the Lord for a hundred and one things, but we do not battle through to victory on some situation. There is some life in terrible bondage, there is some servant of the Lord having a hard time, and there are many other calls for battle, but where are the prayer groups who take up these issues and will not give up until they are settled? The warring spirit has gone out from so much of the Church. That is a clever strategy of the devil! Lose the spirit of spiritual battle and you will stop short of finishing the work.

THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

The next thing that caused these people to settle down too soon was the spirit of the world getting

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in amongst them. What is the spirit of the world? It is the spirit of: Have a good time! Let us have a good time! Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die! And these people of Israel looked at the world around them and, if I understand it rightly, they said: 'These people do not have all the hard time that we do. Our life is a life of continual battle. They do not know so much about that, but they believe in having a good time.' I think that is how it was at this particular time. Of course, up to this time Israel had given the people round about a bad time! But Israel had lost the fighting spirit now, and the world was having a good time because the Church was no longer fighting it. Instead of fighting the world, they made friends with the world. They made the world their friends, and so they did not finish the work. Compromise is a dangerous thing to the inheritance! Trying to be on good terms with the world and having an easy time will result in our losing a large part of the inheritance.

RECOVERING THE FIGHTING SPIRIT

But let us finish on a better note. As I said before, God did not give up, and whenever the people took up the battle again and turned again on the Lord's side to fight the enemy, they found the Lord waiting for them. So we have the story of Deborah, the story of Gideon—and dare I mention Samson? However, although Samson was a poor sort of man, if only the Lord gets a poor chance, He will take it. You may not think much of Samson—but do you think better of yourself? We are all poor

creatures! We have all been discouraged, we have all been tempted to give up, we have all stopped too soon, we have all been weary in well-doing, but take the sword of the Spirit again! Take up the battle again, and you will find the Lord is ready and waiting for you.

Gideon—Deborah—Samson—and all the others. But I think there is one who is better than them all—do you remember that beautiful little Book of Ruth? Everybody is charmed with that book! What a lovely book of spiritual recovery it is! What a picture of the Lord's patience, the Lord's readiness to take advantage of every opportunity! How does that book begin? "And it came to pass in the days when the judges judged . . ." The Book of Ruth was in the times of the Judges, which until then was the most terrible time in history of Israel, but God was ready to change the whole picture. There are the two different pictures: the Judges and Ruth, but both were in the same period. Do you see what I am trying to say?

Dear friends, we are in a great battle, and it is long drawn out. We can get very weary in the fight. We can become discouraged and give up too soon. We may have to stop before the work is finished. That is always our temptation, the tragic possibility in the Christian life, but the Lord does not give up. He does not faint, nor is He discouraged, and if we will turn again to Him, rise up again, recover our fighting spirit and continue to fight the good fight, we shall find the Lord is ready every time, and He is always wanting to help us to fight to the end. He will help till the day is done!

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