

Collected Writings Of T. Austin-Sparks (Vol. 2)

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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 3:10).

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 whence 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."

1. The All-Governing Passion: "That I may know him."

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.

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.

2. 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 oft" he had known it. Perhaps greatest of all were his experiences in Asia and Lystra (II Corinthians 1:9; Acts 14:19-20).

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.

3. 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.

4. 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-centered 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.

From “A Witness and A Testimony”, September–October, 1969

“A House of Prayer For All People”

Reading: 2 Chronicles 6; Isaiah 56:6–7; Mark 11:17; Ephesians 6:18.

“My house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.”

The sixth chapter of the second book of Chronicles is a magnificent example and illustration of these words of the Prophet. In the dedication of the House by Solomon, prayer of a universal kind inaugurated the ministry of the House, introducing its function. The characteristic words of that chapter are: “This house” and “thy name”. “When they shall pray toward *THIS HOUSE*, because of *THY NAME* which is upon it...”.

You will remember the words of the Apostle concerning certain people, that they ‘blasphemed that holy name which was called upon you’. The House is the link between the two passages historically and spiritually, and the Name called upon the House.

What was true of the temple of Solomon, as the House with the Name called upon it, is true of the Church, the Church of Christ, with the Lord’s Name upon it. We have no difficulty in identifying the anti-type of Solomon’s temple as being the Church. You are no doubt sufficiently acquainted with the Word to make it unnecessary to quote Scripture in this connection. Many passages will come to your mind which bear out that statement. The Church is God’s House; “whose house are we”, says the writer of the letter to the Hebrews; “a spiritual house to offer up spiritual sacrifices”, says Peter. The identification is not at all difficult. And that the Name is upon the House is also quite clear. It was because of the Name which they bore at the beginning that the Church was so mighty in its going forth. The power of the Name was ever manifesting itself in their ministry. That is all very simple and needs no labouring. Then there are these other factors.

Sonship Marking The House Of The Lord

The temple of Solomon was really the temple of David. It came in revelation through David, and in realisation in sonship, David’s son. We know that in the Word both David and Solomon are types of the Lord Jesus, that He is great David’s greater Son, and that He combines all that is spiritually represented by David and Solomon of sovereignty, kingship, exaltation, universal triumph and glory. You will remember how the Lord sent Nathan to David, to tell him that though he himself should not build the House, he was nevertheless to be the one to gather all that was necessary for it, and so be the instrument of making it possible. This so satisfied David that in the inspiration of it, and the tremendous stimulus of it, he went out and subdued all those nations which had been historic thorns in the side of Israel. And when he had subdued all the nations round about, and a universal triumph had been established, then the House came into being through Solomon.

We carry that forward into the triumph of the Lord Jesus by His Cross. He possesses the universal victory. He is exalted, enthroned, in virtue of all His enemies being overthrown by His Cross, and on resurrection ground the declaration is made: "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten thee." A fresh declaration of sonship is made, by reason of resurrection, and in resurrection, and in that sonship He builds the House, and the Spirit of sonship enters into every member of that House, and it becomes a 'sonship House' (Acts 14:33; Galatians 4:6).

The Ministry And Vocation Of The House

That all leads the way to this particular thing, namely, the ministry and vocation of the House, of the Church. The House itself has to provide the Lord with a place, a sphere, a realm, a vessel, through which He can reach all people. That is the working outwards; that is God securing to Himself a means of universal blessing. God moves universally through His House, and therefore He must have a House constituted on a prayer basis. Do you notice the two movements in this chapter of 2 Chronicles 6? There is a movement outwards, and a movement inwards. The outward is through the House, with Solomon, so to speak, ministering the Lord. He is, as it were, bringing out from heaven the gracious goodness of God, the interventions, the undertakings and resources of God, world-wide. He is making the House the vehicle of what God is, and what God has, unto all peoples. When you reach a certain point in the chapter the movement changes, and you see people coming to the House because of the Name. That is the movement inwards. They shall "pray toward this house, because of thy great name", said Solomon. That means that the circumference is going to find, not a direct access to God, but its blessing through the House of the Lord.

I suggest to you that those two things very greatly govern the New Testament revelation of the Church, and the Church's vocation. The one thing which embraces all is that God in Christ has bound Himself up with His Church, the Body of Christ, for this world's good, and that the fullness of the Lord will never be known nor entered into in an individual or individualistic way; that anything like mere individualism, separatism, will mean limitation. Any kind of detachment and isolation leads to being deprived of the larger fullnesses of the Lord, or, to put it the other way, to come into the fullness of the Lord we have to come into the fellowship of His people as the House of God. That is one law, and that is established.

That is the line which is more severe. There is a frown, perhaps, about that. It sounds hard. But it is the warning note which is very necessary, and especially in the light of the fact that there is a continuous, unceasing, incessant drive of the adversary in the direction of separation, isolation and detachment. It seems that at times the devil releases his forces and concentrates them upon people, to get them to run away, to get out of it, to break away, to quit because the strain seems so intense. Their whole inclination is to get away alone. They think that they are going to get an advantage by that. They are sometimes deceived into thinking that it will be for their good if only they get right away alone. They sometimes put it in this way: that they 'want to get away and think it all out'. Beware of the peril of thinking it all out! You can never think out spiritual problems. The only way of solving them is to live through them. If you have tried to square down to your spiritual problems, and bring your mind to bear upon them, and to solve them by 'thinking it all out', you know that you never get anywhere, and that the Lord does not meet you in that way. Spiritual things have to be lived through to clearness. We can only get through to clearness in spiritual things by living through them. If you do not understand that now, you probably will understand when you come up against another experience of this kind. Thus one aspect of the enemy's drive is to get you to run away. Why does the enemy want us to get away? Why is it that this whole force, this whole pressure, is to make us quit? He has a very good reason. He knows that it means loss and limitation. The Lord, to put it in a word, has bound up all His greater fullnesses with *SPIRITUAL* relatedness, and there can be nothing but grievous loss in failing to recognise the House-law of God, the fellowship-law, the family-law. There can only be loss if we *TAKE OURSELVES* out of God's appointed relatedness. Be very much aware of any kind of movement or tendency which is in the direction of either detachment or putting you into a place where you are apart. The enemy has many ways of getting his end. If he cannot drive us out from the midst of the Lord's people, he very often tries to give us a too prominent place in the midst of them. He can isolate us just as much by our being too much in the limelight, and we at once become uncovered, exposed. There is no more dangerous place than to be made too much fuss of, to be *SOMEONE*. There is such a thing as finding a hiding within the House of God.

But our particular consideration at the present time is this vocation and its outward direction, the House of prayer for all peoples. The Church, the Lord's people, form for Him a ministering instrument by which He has ordained to reach out to all the ends of the earth, a universal instrument wherever gathered together, even when represented only by two or three. The test of any company of the Lord's people, and of our position, is this vocation.

The Fact Of Representation

You begin with the representative fact, the fact of representation. Representation begins with two or three, and that immediately swings us completely clear of all earthly grounds of judging and estimating. It indicates the essential heavenly nature of the Church. In the Lord Jesus every member of the Church is included. If Christ comes, the whole Church comes. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the whole Body, uniting all the members in one. You cannot be in the spirit and in Christ anywhere but what you are there in the

SPIRITUAL REALM, in the *HEAVENLY REALM*, with the whole Body, and the whole Body is there spiritually. Two or three? "There am I"! The whole Body, then, is bound up with the two or three. The fact evidences the heavenliness of the Church, the Body of Christ. This is not a possibility on the earth. You cannot bring the whole Church together in any one place on this earth literally. It is not the Lord's way, and it cannot be done. The Church is scattered world-wide, so far as the earthly aspect is concerned. And yet the Church is a heavenly thing gathered up in Christ, its Head, by one Spirit baptised into one Body, and when we come into the Spirit, into the heavenly realm, we are in the presence of the whole Body; not with earthly intelligence, that is, the whole Body is not conscious of the fact from the earthly standpoint, but spiritually it is true. That is the whole Church represented in the two or three if truly "in the Name". What the two or three may do in the Holy Ghost becomes a universal thing.

The Prayer Meeting

What we are seeking to press home is that this is so different from having a local prayer meeting, in the usually accepted meaning of that term. Suppose that where such an outlook obtains the announcement is made: 'We will have a prayer meeting on Monday night.' Who will come to that prayer meeting? People will say among themselves: 'Shall we go to the prayer meeting?' or, perhaps: 'Well, it is only a prayer meeting!' That is one way to look at it, as a local thing in a certain place at a certain time. But if I were to say: 'Will you come and minister to the whole Church of Christ universally in such-and-such a place at a certain time, and your business is to go and minister in that range to the whole Church!' that puts another point of view. It gives an altogether new conception of what we are called to. Let your imagination take flight, if you like, and see the whole Church from the ends of the earth literally gathered together, needing to be ministered to, and the Lord saying to you: 'Now you come and minister to the whole Church! Thousands of thousands, and tens of thousands gathered together, and I want you to minister to them. I have placed the resource at your disposal and will enable you to do it.' Perhaps you might shrink, and be fearful, but you would see the tremendous significance. You would not stay away because you were unimpressed with the importance of it.

This is not exaggeration. We are not straining the point. We are seeking to get to the heart of this ministry which is ours. When two or three are gathered together in any place, and they pray in the Holy Ghost, that is what is possible and it happens. They represent the whole Church, and become the House of prayer, functioning for all peoples, a universal ministry. We need to lift the prayer business on to a higher level. When we see the range, the significance, the value of a time of prayer together in the Name of the Lord, we shall stop our trivialities and take things seriously. We shall come together saying: 'Now, here are nations to be entered into tonight, and things which are world-wide and of tremendous significance to the Lord Jesus, and we are called to deal with them in this place!' There is no greater ministry. It is a tremendous thing to have a ministry like that.

It all comes back to asking whether this is true of the Church. What does this mean? Is it merely a passage of Scripture? Is it a nice idea, but falling short of any real meaning? What is the meaning of: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people"? It certainly does not mean that the whole Church can literally be gathered together in one place to pray, and it certainly cannot literally mean that the whole Church can pray together at the same time, though scattered. The situation is different in all countries. Day and night govern different parts of the world, and other factors come in. It is necessary to get away from the earth to explain this. And if you get off the earth and see that where two or three are gathered together into the Name all the rest are represented, and because the one Spirit is there the whole is therefore touched through that one Spirit, as well as involved, then the possibilities are tremendous. "A house of prayer for all peoples" is God's ordained way of ministry.

The Need For Prayer Ministry

Leaving the great spiritual truth, and coming to what is immediate, so far as one's own heart is concerned, in this word, I do feel that there has to be a fresh registration in our hearts of a call to this ministry and the need for it. We may pray a lot, but I feel that we have to take this matter of the prayer ministry even more seriously, to regard it as our supreme ministry. The order is *EVERYTHING BY PRAYER*; not everything and then prayer, but everything by prayer. Prayer comes first. Everything comes by prayer. Prayer is the basis of everything, and nothing else must be attempted or touched except on the ground of prayer. We have to gather into our prayer the universal interests of the Name of the Lord. "Because of thy name"! The Name is in view, and is involved. It is the interests of the Name which govern the functioning of the House, and all the interests of the Name of the Lord have to become the definite and solid prayer business of the Lord's people. Oh, the Lord cut clean across that thing which makes us so casual, and which makes corporate prayer times so optional, and bring into our hearts, with a strong, deep, set conviction, the witness that prayer is universal business, and that we are called to it!

It may be that before long there will be very little else that we can do. It may be that before long the Lord's people world-wide will find that their other activities are brought to a standstill, and they are shut up. What is going to happen then to the Lord's interests? Is that the end of ministry? Is that the end of functioning, of value, of effectiveness? It may be that before long the Lord's people in all the earth will need, as they have never needed before, the prayer co-operation of other members. It may be that the

Lord's Name has suffered because we have not regarded this ministry as we ought to have done. We are not blaming anyone, but simply saying that there is room for far more serious entering into this tremendous thing which the Lord has appointed for us. Only to dwell upon the words quietly and thoughtfully will surely mean that their implication will come upon our hearts? The Lord has not said that He is going to move directly out to the universe. He has said: "My *HOUSE* shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." To put that in other words we might state it thus: 'I have ordained to meet universal need through an instrument, through a vessel, and My people, My Church, form that vessel. That is My appointed way. If My Church fails Me, if My instrument does not take this matter seriously, is occupied with itself rather than with the great world-wide needs of My Name, then I am failed indeed!'

Now this means that we must recognise that where but two or three gather into the Name, where it cannot be more, there is nothing merely local about such coming together in prayer, but that the farthest ranges of the Lord's interests can be advanced, helped, ministered to, by the twos and threes. If it is possible for more to gather, then the Lord desires that, but it is ministry to the Lord by prayer for which He looks to us. We must see to it that it is our first, our primary business to pray. It is strange that so many more will come to conference meetings than to prayer meetings! Is the mentality behind that, that it is far more important to hear teaching than it is to pray? Would it not be a great day and represent some tremendous advance spiritually, something unique, if the prayer gatherings were bigger than the biggest conference gatherings, or at least as big as the biggest?

Let us lay this to heart! Remember that the enemy is always seeking to destroy the essential purpose of the House of God. "Ye have made it a den of robbers." That was one attempt of his to put out the real purpose by changing the whole character of things. God forbid that anything like that should be true in our case, but it is just possible to allow the primary thing to take a secondary place. The primary thing is prayer for all peoples. That, the Lord says, is what His House is for, and that is our real ministry. We cannot all be in the ministry of the Word, but we can all be in this ministry. We can all be in spirit out to the Lord for the interests of His Name.

There seems to be weakness and failure along this line: that we are not functioning in prayer to the point of seeing things through. We pray about many things, and we preach many things, but we do not see them through in prayer, and the Lord's Name is involved in that. You will know whether the Lord is speaking to your own heart. I believe this is a fresh call to the primary ministry which is so very, very much needed. All those who go out into the nations need very strong prayer support. If we fail them we do not know what may happen. They may be in all kinds of difficulties which they need not get into if we were wholly faithful in this prayer ministry. The Lord lay it upon our hearts as a burden!

From "A Witness and A Testimony" July–August 1968.

A Saviour To The Uttermost

"Wherefore also 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" (Heb. 7:25; RV).

Howsoever viewed, this is a great and heartening statement. The ability of our Lord Jesus Christ to save at all times and in all circumstances is the sheet anchor of the faith of God's people. A Saviour who never fails, who can never be confronted with a situation too difficult for Him, is a fundamental necessity to all who are seeking to live to the glory of God in an end time, and who are, therefore, continually meeting the fierce and unceasing antagonism of the forces of darkness. Here the glorious declaration of His power to save *to the uttermost* is made for our comfort, and for the strengthening of faith.

We shall look at this in two ways: firstly, regarding it as a statement by itself and seeking to gather its rich and full meaning; then looking at it in its context and noting the immense reinforcement that is brought to faith as the statement is seen to be the culminating point of one section of the whole great argument concerning the person and work of Jesus our Lord.

1. The Great Statement

This is a favourite text for evangelistic sermons. It is indeed "good news" for the sinner. No one, however sunken in sin, is beyond the reach of His saving power. He is able to save all who come, and to save them to the uttermost. Let the message go out to the furthest bounds of human sin and need, and be sounded in the ears of the most hardened and degraded of the sons of men. No case is too hard for Him. Hallelujah!

But this is written as a message to the Lord's people. It is a glorious declaration of His saving power in relation to those who draw near to God, and is based, not only upon His death on Calvary, but upon His present life and ministry as the High Priest of His people. It is because "*He ever liveth*" that "*He is able to save to the uttermost*" (or completely — RVM). This is the gospel for the saints. What a joy to declare it! The more dire the need (and some of the Lord's people are in desperate need) the greater the comfort of the declaration. What a consolation to the heart, when involved in some situation of acute, and humanly hopeless, difficulty, to remember that, interceding for us at the right hand of Divine power, we have One Who,

because He ever liveth, is able to exercise saving power to the full range and depth of an uttermost need: and not only able but willing to save, and in the bitterest trial to “make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it”. To trust Him is to find salvation. “They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.”

“*To the uttermost.*” This is a translation of a very rich original word. Like many of the words God employs in Holy Scripture it is a word with a big content. Someone has truly said that the words the Holy Spirit uses are great words in that they have God behind them. They are often much bigger than we realise. This word combines two separate ideas; first that of quality, then that of reach. It speaks of His ability to save *completely* in the present, and also to go on saving thus *for ever*; fullness of resource for present need, however dire, and also for every future need to the end of our earthly history. It may be expressed thus: Whatever the depth and complexity of present need, in whatsoever realm that need may be, whether in spirit, soul, or body; in Him, as exalted at God’s right hand, there is complete ability to meet it: and further, by no possibility can there arise a situation to the farthest reach of time where that ability will be diminished, or His saving power be other than an abiding reality.

We are living in days when the outlook for this world is gloomy indeed and when fear might well grip the heart, even of the believer. No man knows what is going to happen today, or tomorrow, still less the day after. Fear is gripping the hearts of men everywhere. Many of the Lord’s people are afraid that they will become involved in some situation beyond the power of human endurance. Many in war-torn lands are going through trials and sufferings which strain endurance to the breaking point. Not a few, even in peaceful lands like our own, are tried in circumstance or physical suffering which seems to be beyond measure. How shall such endure to the end and be joyful in the midst of their tribulations? Only by an experience of His saving power, entered into on the basis of faith in His ever-present and never-diminishing ability to make His salvation a glorious reality. Faith asserts in the face of the most extreme difficulty and of human impossibility: “*He ever liveth! He is able to save to the uttermost!*”

This is true in every realm of human need. Whether the problem be related to sin, self, the world, the Devil, or to death and him who wields it as a potent weapon, the power of an uttermost salvation resides in our Priestly Intercessor on the Father’s throne. Fearful heart, take comfort: He ever liveth! He is there in the full value of His Calvary triumph. Nothing has been lost in the process of the years. All that He won as the mighty victor in the hour of His weakness and seeming defeat, He holds on our behalf. It is all available to faith.

“And now He lives
Proclaim the joyful story, the Lord’s on high;
And we in Him are raised to endless glory
And ne’er shall die.”

Death has no dominion over Him, nor can we be brought under the power of it while we keep Him in full view. He lives, and has said, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” Living, He is abundantly able to save.

2. The Statement In Its Setting

The comfort, consolation, and strength-giving power of this declaration, are immensely reinforced as we view it in its context, and see it as the culmination of a great argument. We miss a great deal of the value of the Word of God by our habit of reading short portions or single chapters. It is always worthwhile to take time to see the scope and range of the particular book we are reading, to note its divisions, apprehend its arguments, and see where the climaxes come. The ‘wherefores’ and ‘therefores’ of the Word are most helpful in this connection. They always cast us back on that which has preceded the passage in question and indicate the foundation of the statement made. So this great declaration of the unceasing ability of the Lord to minister an uttermost salvation commences with “Wherefore”. That is linked in the first place with verse 24: “But He, because He abideth for ever, hath His priesthood unchangeable” (Hebrews 7). This, in turn, is the culmination of the whole argument concerning our Lord’s priestly ministry in contrast with the Aaronic priesthood of the old economy.

It will help if we seek to see something of the scope and range of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It was written to Hebrew believers; men who had been reared in the old Mosaic order of things, with its outward and visible worship, its sacrifices and priesthood, laws and ordinances. All this was passing away before their eyes and they had not yet become fully alive to the inward and essentially spiritual character of that into which they had entered as they passed out of Judaism into the Christian Church. Hence the Holy Spirit was seeking to demonstrate to them the immense superiority of Christ, in every aspect of His person and work, as contrasted with the old order of things and the leaders they held in reverence. The key word of the Epistle is “better”. There is a *better* hope, a *better* testament, *better* promises, *better* sacrifices, a *better* resurrection, a *better* country, etc.

Firstly, then, the Lord Jesus is declared to be God’s *final* message to men (chapter 1:1–2) and as such is superior to the angels and messengers through whom the old covenant was given (chapters 1 and 2). Then He is placed in contrast with Moses, the revered leader of the people from Egypt to Canaan, and the one through whom the Law was given. Christ is shown to be superior to Moses inasmuch as, in God’s house, the Son is superior to one who, however great, was after all but a servant (chapter 3:1–6). Joshua takes up the position of national leader on the death of Moses and conducts the people into the promised land; but

though he gives them a large measure of possession, he was not able to give them rest therein. Our Lord is shown to be superior to Joshua in that He is able to lead His people into 'the rest that remaineth to the people of God' (chapter 4:8–10). Then comes the long section dealing with the great matter of priesthood, commencing with chapter 4:14 and going through to chapter 10. Christ as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek is set forth in contrast to the Aaronic priesthood, and the superiority of His office and ministry is found to consist in the fact that, whereas the priests of old were men whose lives were short and their ministry constantly interrupted by death, He lives by the power of an endless life and hath an unchangeable and age-abiding ministry. The great declaration in relation to His priesthood is a twofold one (chapter 5:5–6).

1. "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee."
2. "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

And, further, this declaration is confirmed by God's oath:

"The Lord sware and will not repent Himself, Thou art a Priest for ever..." (chapter 7:21).

Priesthood is an office, but one based upon moral suitability, upon sonship. The priests of the old Aaronic order were able to deal gently with the ignorant and the erring, because they themselves were compassed with infirmity, and therefore were compelled to offer sacrifice, not only for the sins of the people, but also for their own. They had the power of sympathy strongly developed because of their personal experience.

Our glorious High Priest was sinless and needed not to offer sacrifice on His own behalf. Nevertheless His power of sympathetic understanding is in no wise inferior to that of Aaron and his successors. Though He was a Son, He entered into the school of suffering and therein "learned obedience". He came to His perfection as Man, and therefore to His suitability for the high-priestly office, along the road of discipline: it was not that there was ever in Him a disposition towards disobedience. But it is one thing to be disposed to obedience and another to learn what obedience really means in the discipline of life. His delight in the will of God, declared when He came into the world, must be proved by treading the thorny road of life in dependence and active obedience. As another has well said, "The progress from the disposition to the deed of obedience is a practical learning of the virtue of obedience." So having come to His perfection along this difficult and painful road, He not only "became the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him," but is able fully to sympathize with those obedient souls in all the trials and conflicts they endure, as they also tread the hard road leading to their perfection.

The fullness of His experience, gathered in the school of suffering, and the certainty of His moral suitability to be the unchanging High Priest of His people, is seen in the fact that God, in making the double declaration, "Thou art My Son... Thou art a Priest for ever," confirmed His appointment to the priestly office with an oath.

Now this is a remarkable thing. It is an altogether new note in relation to priesthood. The priestly order of the old dispensation was of Divine origin, but God never spake of it in terms like this. What is involved in this really startling statement?

The purpose for which God employed this surprising method is clearly stated in chapter 6 with reference to Abraham: "For men sware by the greater: and in every dispute of theirs the oath is final *for confirmation*. Wherein God, being minded to shew more abundantly... *the immutability of His counsel*, interposed with an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, *we may have a strong encouragement*, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:16–18; RV).

The oath of God was taken for the strong encouragement of the heirs of promise.

Here then is finality and unchangeability. God has sworn by Himself and will not repent. "Thou art a Priest *for ever*." Here is a fact altogether beyond the reach of the rebel forces in the universe, one which nothing in heaven or hell can change. After the order of him who was without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, our blessed Lord, "the Man Christ Jesus," having entered as our forerunner within the veil, "abideth a Priest continually".

Having reached this great climax in chapter 7:24–25, and making the declaration that, because Christ abideth ever and hath an unchangeable priesthood, He is able to save to the uttermost, the writer sums the matter up thus:-

"Now in the things which we are saying the chief point is this: We have *such a High Priest*, Who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (Heb. 8:1–2; RV).

Two points are to be noted. (1) He sat down. (2) He is a Minister of the sanctuary. Priests of the Aaronic order never sat down in the sanctuary: their work was never completed; the same sacrifices had to be offered year by year continually. But our High Priest offered one sacrifice for sins for ever. Having made propitiation for sins, He has passed through the heavens and is seated on the Father's throne. He is King as well as Priest. He is in the place of supreme and universal power. At the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, all authority is committed into His hands. The work of redemption is finished.

The claims of Divine righteousness are fully satisfied. His victory over the rebel forces is full and final. In Him everything in the purpose and program of God has been secured. But all that has to be made good in the experience of ‘the people for His Name’ who are being gathered out from the nations of the world, and who, in the wonderfully gracious purpose of God are to share His throne in the coming kingdom. He is their representative, their forerunner, but they have not arrived where He is. Hence we have the paradoxical statement that, though He has sat down, He is nonetheless a Minister of the sanctuary. He is in full activity as the High Priest of His people, perpetually ministering on their behalf before God, in order that they may be maintained in their heavenly life, and may overcome all resistance even as He overcame.

It is His ceaseless and untiring ministry in “the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man,” that is the ground of His people’s sure confidence and triumphant boldness. “He ever liveth to make intercession.” His ministry is a twofold one. On the one hand He maintains us before God by the virtue of all that He is in Himself, and by the value of His atoning sacrifice in all its range and power; and, on the other hand, He mediates to us of His fullness continually, so that as we ‘draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, we find grace to help in every time of need.’

Thus we are able constantly to experience His ability to save to the uttermost. There is no reason why we should be fearful in any circumstance, or despair in any situation of acute and desperate need. If we are conscious of uttermost need, He is presented to faith as an uttermost Saviour, on the basis of God’s immutable oath. He is Redeemer, Saviour, High Priest, and Sovereign Lord. We have *such a High Priest*. Let us evermore rejoice in what He is in Himself, where He is in His Sovereign Lordship, and what He is doing in that tireless ministry on our behalf in the very presence of God.

“The Lord swears and will not repent, Thou art a Priest for ever...” He is able *to save to the uttermost*. Hallelujah!

From “A Witness And A Testimony” March–April, 1939

“By My Spirit”

Reading: Zechariah 4

The golden lampstand which Zechariah saw was the symbol of the divine testimony, the outshining of the glory of God. Lying behind all God’s activities with men, the very reason for man’s creation, is His desire to display His glory. The human race, as a whole, failed to realise this grand design, but the testimony was taken up by individual witnesses, like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and others. In a very real sense the testimony of the glory of God rested on their shoulders; they carried the enormous responsibility of being here on the earth where the enemy had almost entirely succeeded in marring or veiling that glory. These lonely figures were the men who stood for the preservation of that testimony to God’s glory. Then the testimony passed from individuals to a nation, when Israel was brought into being to be a corporate vessel of the divine testimony, a people in whom the glory of God could be displayed. Ultimately Israel failed, so the testimony was transferred and passed on to the Church, consisting of Israelites to whom Gentiles were later added. The glory of God certainly blazed up anew in the Church at the beginning. In the course of time, speaking generally, the Church has also failed, and it is not without significance that one of the seven churches of Asia was threatened with an entire removal of its lampstand. The article, however beautiful in itself, has no significance by its mere form or profession, but only as the light of God blazes out from it. This is what God is always seeking, the display of His glory in and through His people.

The great concern and business of the Church is to be a testimony to God’s glory. The one plumb-line which measured Jerusalem was that of the glory of God in the midst (Zechariah 2:8), and this measurement is what matters for us today. The final judgement will be based on the degree of glory found in our lives. Nothing else will be of lasting importance. Those who have lived most of their lives already and perhaps been active for God, still do well to face this challenge concerning God’s glory, and those who are only just beginning should know the real standard for all Christian living. We may well wonder how it can be. Zechariah had the same problem in his day, and this vision gave him — and us — the answer: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts”.

Glory In The Face Of Jesus Christ

The only true Witness is the Lord Jesus Christ. Through all those early individual witnesses, through Israel, and through the Church, all is gathered up into one glorious witness, the Lord Jesus. All who went before Him, pointed on to Him; all those who followed (if there was any true testimony to God’s glory in their experiences) took their character from Him; the glory of God is to be found in the face of Jesus Christ. It is there, of course, by the Spirit. The testimony of God was taken up at Jordan, where the Spirit of God came upon Jesus, who was immediately challenged by Satan’s offering Him the kingdoms of this world and their glory in exchange for the glory of God. It always happens in this way: man is offered this world’s glory in exchange for the glory of God. But by that same Spirit of anointing which had come upon Christ at Jordan He met the challenge, and He never swerved from the straight path of seeking only the Father’s glory.

It was often a trial, a fiery trial for Him, but the Spirit sustained Him and kept the testimony untarnished. Later Peter interpreted the fiery trial of fellow disciples as being connected with this same Spirit's work of glorifying God, "The Spirit of glory... resteth upon you" (1 Peter 4:14). How can it be that in suffering and adversity the Spirit of glory, not of grace only but of glory, rests upon us? It can only be because the same Spirit who came upon the Lord Jesus to enable Him at great personal cost to glorify God, has now come to our lives for this express purpose of establishing and maintaining the testimony. Wherever you find the Holy Spirit coming, whether in symbol or in reality, you will find that the immediate outcome is always the glory of God. So it was that the tabernacle was filled with God's glory. The temple, also, was filled with this glory. At Pentecost the Spirit came in fullness to the Church, and the result was glory. That day was a wonderful day of glory for the men who had such a living experience of God being glorified in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, and the days following were equally wonderful as every new touch of God's Spirit upon them brought fresh evidence of God's glory.

Although we accept the fact of Christ's eternal sonship, we are told that as Son of man He was enabled to glorify the Father by means of the anointing Spirit. From the beginning of His public testimony to its completion when He offered Himself through the eternal Spirit, He carried through triumphantly His Spirit-given testimony to the glory of God. As representative Man, He lived and suffered for the one purpose of glorifying God, and so perfectly fulfilled this task that in Him the testimony to the glory of God has been secured forever. So, then, our fears and sense of weakness must not cripple us, for He has sent His Spirit into our lives so that in us, too, the testimony might be maintained and the glory seen. We can claim the promise, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit".

This also gives us the answer to the interrogation, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10). Out of the large numbers who went into exile, just forty-two thousand odd were ready to pay the price of letting go the comforts and security of life in Babylon to return to the land where God's testimony could be established. They were small in number, weak in themselves, despised by their neighbours, and they returned to a land which was desolate, impoverished and afflicted, so that it was indeed a 'day of small things'. But they were not to be despised, for God was backing them up as they truly sought His glory. It is no small thing to be involved in the testimony of God's glory. We should not make a virtue of smallness, as though there were something important about being despised by others, but at the same time we shall find that whenever God has called people to display His glory, He has chosen those who have no glory in themselves.

God has always been obliged to strip His instruments of their own glory. A Moses, full of Egypt's sufficiency, must go for forty years to the backside of the desert to be emptied out and made to confess his complete inadequacy before he can become an instrument for the display of the glory of God. There were times when some of the Israelites did try to despise this now humble Moses, and he made no attempt to stand up for himself, but God soon made it manifest to all concerned how wrong it was to despise him. The glory of God appeared at the gate of the tabernacle and took up the challenge. Sometimes it takes the Lord years to get us sufficiently emptied, weak and small, so that we can bear His glory in our lives, a fact which may well explain some of His dealings with us. When He has got us small enough and empty enough, then there is a chance for the working of His Spirit in glory.

Glory In The Heart

The testimony to the glory of God must of necessity be a heart matter. Ezra tells us that when Cyrus made his decree that the house of God should be rebuilt in Jerusalem and every facility be granted to those who would return to do the building, he did not make it a command that all Jews should go back. Had he done so, they would all have been compelled to return, and such compulsion would have given little prospect of glory for God. The decree was really an appeal for volunteers, "Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go..." (Ezra 1:3). Like the original work of the tabernacle, it was entrusted to those who were of a willing heart, for God's testimony will always be a heart matter. Those who have personal interests in view are entirely out of keeping with the objective of God's kingdom and glory. So it was that only a comparative few returned to the land when the opportunity arose, the great majority having settled in and largely become a part of the life in Babylon where all the glory was for man. Their interests and future was so tied up with that realm that it would have involved a tremendous upheaval to extricate themselves and return to a land of poor and unpopular people with only God as their security and hope for the future. It was because so many were not willing to pay the price that for those who returned it was a day of small things. Nevertheless it was not to be despised — far from it.

The Lord Jesus Himself always stressed this heart aspect of discipleship, pointing out that without the denying of self and the daily taking up of the cross, the kingdom could never be fully possessed. The end which God has in view is something much more than mere personal blessing. He is looking for those who will share with His King the responsibility for the glory of His kingdom. Such a calling will find us out if we have personal interests, for it demands hearts which are consumed with jealousy for the glory of the Lord. The Holy Spirit will always support such an attitude, for He Himself burns with the same intense jealousy. This has nothing to do with a craving for special teaching or mere negative dissatisfaction with things as they are, but signifies a real heart hunger for more of God's glory. I am not referring to the people who are eternally disgruntled and full of criticism, those who will never be contented anywhere at all; but I wish to

concentrate on the believers whose hearts are really groaning in travail for the full will of God. Such people sense that there are divine purposes which are not being realised, and they are on full stretch for a testimony of greater glory for God. It was a similar concern which stirred men's hearts to obey the decree of Cyrus. The Jews who remained in Babylon were not without God's blessing, but the remnant were full of concern not for themselves but for greater glory for the name of the Lord, and this made them ready to rise up and leave everything, if only that could be realised. To them — and to us if we are their spiritual counterpart — the promise is most reassuring, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit". We cannot pay the price, nor go through with all that is involved, in our own strength. We do not have to. The Holy Spirit is ready to take full responsibility for the glory of God, both in our own lives and also in the testimony of God through us.

Glory In The Church

The message of Zechariah's vision is that the testimony of God, which is the glory of God, can only be established, confirmed and perfected by the Holy Spirit. The testimony of God is not a teaching, a system of truth, but an experience in life. We must be very clear about this, for we may have a great grasp of doctrine, knowing all the explanations of divine things, and yet miss the essential, which is spiritual glory. It may be true that divine glory will require sound teaching and correct order, yet these in themselves may constitute a dry technique, a mere framework, an empty shell. It is true that the tabernacle was constituted and constructed according to God's own commandments, even down to the last pin, but it did not and could not function until the glory of God came into it. Again, the temple's plans and arrangements were given by God in a detailed pattern, yet it stood empty and valueless until the glory of God filled it. The testimony is not technique; it is glory. What a sad thing it is when would-be upholders of God's testimony are legalistically and meticulously preoccupied with people's procedure, and even their dress and appearance, carrying heavy burdens themselves and imposing those burdens on others, when what God wanted was just a chance to display His glory.

It is possible, of course, to argue that just as the Old Testament insisted on correct form before the glory came, so in New Testament days the coming of glory will be dependent on careful insistence on right doctrine in the strictest correctness as well as on a perfect form of procedure, but surely Pentecost was the other way round, so far as men here on earth were concerned. In heaven, it is true, everything was perfectly according to God in Christ, and that was how the glory came down to the Church here on earth; but so far as the disciples were concerned, the doctrine and the procedure followed. The Church began with the glorious fullness of the Holy Spirit. Because of Christ's exaltation the glory was available, the anointing Spirit was released. The Church's experience was that it was the dynamic which came first, so that it was after they had the glory that they began to know what they should teach and how they should act. We must have it this way. It must be 'by My Spirit'. We can do nothing about the testimony until God acts. I cannot help to glorify God; you cannot help either; nothing that we can prescribe or provide can do it. The most perfect order will not bring glory. The most correct teaching will not ensure it. It does not come by our abilities, our understanding, our personality or drive, for nothing from man can produce this glory — it is only by God's Spirit.

The glory is itself a testimony. If we are bringing in the glory, people will want to know how they can get it. What is the use of answering them with the 'Thou shalt's' and the 'Thou shalt not's' of legalistic teaching when they find no glow, no radiance, no power, but only an empty shell? The plumb-line which will show up their deficiencies is not that of Christian ideas or religious practices but the testimony of the glory of God in Christ. We begin with the glory; the whole emphasis is as positive as can be — glory by the Holy Spirit. The only negatives in this verse are connected with the futility of human power and ability.

As we have said, the testimony of God here on earth is to be found in the Church. This is variously described as God's house, God's temple and Christ's body, but in each case the essential factor is the indwelling Spirit. This is really what is meant by the phrase, 'the glory of God', namely the reality of His presence. The vessel of Testimony has as its sole object the making immediate and actual of the presence of God and fellowship with Him. Of course God is everywhere, and can be met anywhere, even in the most isolated and remote spot a man can encounter God. The Scriptures indicate, however, that God has a wish for something more immediate than His universal presence. They speak of God dwelling with men; making His habitation among them; and then they describe the final triumph in the words, "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them" (Revelation 21:3). This is something more immediate and actual than the all-pervading fact of the deity, and so the Church has as its object the presencing of God in a more personal and conscious way for the purposes of His fellowship with man.

This is what the Holy Spirit has come for, to make the presence of Christ a vital reality. The titles of 'house' or 'temple' are mere finger-posts, all pointing towards the person of the Lord Jesus. His very name, Christ, means the Anointed One, and it is by the anointing of the Spirit that God is present. The Lord's name is not only 'Jesus'; it is also 'Emmanuel', God with us. Christ is the true house of God, but since we are 'in Christ', we share in the reality of God's glorious presence.

So it is part of the Spirit's work to build us and hold us together so that there may be a united testimony to the glory of God. God needs something more than a heap of stones — even if they are living stones — if He is to have a properly constructed dwelling. Christ needs more than many members, even though

they are living members, since a body can only function if its members are co-ordinated and integrated in vital relationship. Now although there are many members there is only one anointing; we either share His anointing or we do not know its power. The anointing upon Christ is the same anointing as that which we receive, and in us as well as in Him its one purpose is to express God's glory.

It is the anointing Spirit who makes the Church to be the house of God, and the house is one because Christ is one. We must never be caught in the mistake of imagining that those who hold the truth of the one body are more in the reality of it than those who do not. Those who know nothing of the teaching are as much part of Christ's body (if they are in Him) as those who feel that they have received so much light on the subject. We must beware of the schisms which come because of the things which we know and others do not, for light alone can easily cause divisions. "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). That was a challenge made to the church whose members were so ready to boast of their knowledge and so partisan in their attitude to various spiritual teachers. These were the very people whom the apostle described as being a temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16), and also warned very solemnly against destroying that temple. How is the temple destroyed? It is by trying to divide Christ, by making parties and groups among the Lord's people, often by wrongly imagining that they are superior to other Christians because of the teaching they have received or the teacher whom they follow. This is an offence to the Holy Spirit, and a sure way of thwarting God's desire to show forth His glory. The Lord Jesus has so identified Himself in the Spirit with all who are His own people, that what is true of Him is also true of them, and what is done to them is really done to Him. So it is that practical love towards any of His members opens the way for His Spirit's working and, conversely, carelessness, indifference or antagonism towards other members of Christ is a sure way of quenching the Holy Spirit. It may be that this is the explanation of there being so much less glory among God's people than there ought to be. The moment we grieve the Spirit, we begin to dim the glory. It is in their life together that God's people form the golden lampstand into which He will pour the golden oil through His own golden pipes. Let us not accept any less objective than God's glory when we seek His fullness, for the Holy Spirit's presence among us is specifically promised for the express purpose of providing a testimony to that glory. God's negatives ("not by might, nor by power") are but to make way for His glorious positive — "but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

From "Toward the Mark" Nov-Dec 1972.

Christianity — A Process of Transformation

Reading: 1 Corinthians 2.

"We... are transformed into the same image" (that is: 'We pass from one form to another') — 2 Corinthians 3:18.

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 under-

standing 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 2 Corinthians 3:18 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 judgement 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 sent 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 thoroughgoing 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 2:4-5). What can have happened? Well, I put that in by way of emphasising this possibil-

ity, 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 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 book shops 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" (1 Corinthians 4:10). 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 well-being? 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 naught. 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 mean-

ing 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".

From "A Witness and a Testimony" July–August 1969.

More Pioneers of the Heavenly Way

Genesis 45:5,7: "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 recognise 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 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 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.

From "A Witness and A Testimony" March–April 1969.

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?

1. 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 "baptised into His Name", and to have His Name called upon them. (Matthew 28:19 James 2:7). 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!"

2. 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 7:9).

"I wrought for my great name", said the Lord (Ezekiel 20:9).

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.

3. 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 another generation and realised 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 18:10).

"They that know thy name will put their trust in thee" (Psalm 9:10).

"In the name of our God we will set up our banners" (Psalm 20:5).

"I will set him on high, because he hath known my name" (Psalm 91:14).

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

“The Lord is With Him”

“Then answered one of the young men and said, Behold I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is skilful in playing, and a mighty man of valour, and a man of war, and prudent in speech, and a comely person; and the Lord is with him” (1 Samuel 16:18).

This verse gives us six features of the life of David, the man who came to be described as being after God’s own heart. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that there are five virtues and that the last, “the Lord is with him”, is really explanatory of the rest.

1. “...skilful in playing...”

This introduces us to a main feature of David’s whole life, which was worship. We owe many of the Psalms to him. The title for what we call ‘The Book of the Psalms’ was originally ‘The Book of Praises’. It became the book of worship, first for the nation and then for the whole world. There is an indication of what was to be an outstanding characteristic of David in this description of him as a skilful player. Where had he learned? How had he developed this talent? In solitude. When these words were spoken, David was unknown, living out his days in the fields of Bethlehem where he cared for his father’s sheep. It was there in obscurity, and perhaps in loneliness, that he developed his spirit of praise. Afterwards it became public and the whole people profited from it, but it had its first beginnings in a simple humble life with God. How was the young man who recommended him to king Saul aware of this gift? It seems that he had somehow overheard David, for he appears to be the only one who was informed about him. We do not want to make too much of this point, and yet it is clear that what happened way back in those fields of Bethlehem did produce the foundations of David’s later life. He himself referred to this when he offered to go out and fight Goliath. It was in the ordinary affairs of life that he proved the reality of the presence of the Lord and learned the secrets of an anointed life.

From this fact there immediately emerges the reminder that in the Lord’s work we neither need to push ourselves forward nor to be pushed by others. Our first concern must consist of exercise Godward. If in your secret history you minister to His good pleasure, without the stimulus which comes from public applause, it will sooner or later, become apparent. God will see to that. Do not worry too much about your lifework; if you have a hidden life of worship, then that will show itself in the outward service to which He has called you. God has always described His service as worship and regarded worship as basic to His service. “Let my son go, that he may serve me,” He demanded (Exodus 4:23). And how did Israel serve Him? By worship. The important point is that this does not begin in public. David’s life of song was the result of a heart attitude of worship, in songs of praise which expressed his heart devotion to the Lord. Sometimes, perhaps, it was a case of songs without words, inner melody to the Lord for which there were no words.

We note that this first mention of music in David’s life is associated with evil powers in king Saul. Saul had been given the highest opportunity, but he had been disobedient, taking into his own hands those things for which he should have waited for God. “Tarry till I come unto thee” — but Saul could not tarry. He was restless, impatient; and in taking hold of the things of God for himself he had allied himself with evil powers. As Samuel told him: “Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft...” (1 Samuel 15:23), for it links a man with that other evil world. So by seeking to grasp at things for himself, Saul not only forfeited them but allowed Satan to gain a foothold in his life. This has been Satan’s objective from the first, to draw things away from God and to himself. In his ultimate manifestation in the person of the Antichrist, he will sit in the temple of God, giving out that he is God and being worshipped as God. That is his ambition. David was just the opposite, for the motive in his music was that everything should be for God’s glory. That explains the clash. There are the two kingdoms, one taking from God and the other bringing everything to God. No wonder, then, that Saul became David’s greatest enemy.

From the first beginnings of his life David turned everything into music. All his experiences, all his history, he turned into song. It is a most helpful study to look for those Psalms of his which have an introductory explanation of the circumstances in which they were written. Even when Absalom drove him from his throne, David turned that bitter experience into a song (Psalm 3). The whole value of his Psalms is that they arose from a vital experience of God. The volume of Psalms then became the book of Israel’s praises, until at last David organised the whole thing for temple worship. He drew together a choir of four thousand voices, and so organised their singing into twenty-four courses that praise was never silent in Israel, day or night. No sooner had one course finished than the next took over, and so round the whole twenty-four hours of each day, every week and every month, throughout the entire year. In this way there was an unbroken flow of continuous worship to God.

Even the deep and dark things of his life were turned by David into Psalms of praise to God. He had his failures, his tragedies, and even his desperate sin, but in all this he found forgiveness and restoration as he turned back in heart to God. This is why he was so beloved by God, because he never failed to find his way up and out through worship. And worship has always proved a most powerful weapon against the kingdom of darkness. “The lion of the tribe of Judah... hath overcome” is part of the heavenly song, and since Judah means ‘praise’, this suggests that there is a victoriously militant power in spiritual praise. Many a time Martin Luther found his escape by this means. He knew much of the onslaught of satanic powers; he

seemed sometimes to be engaged in hand-to-hand conflict with the Devil. His only but very effective answer at such times was to say: 'Let us sing, brother'!

Psalm 22 is one of David's great Messianic Psalms and, although it opens with a dismayed cry at being forsaken by God, it soon breaks through in an appeal to the one who inhabits the praises of Israel (verse 3). It seems that God is provided with a throne for ruling when His people worship and praise Him. This is no small thing. Again in Psalm 114:2, speaking of the glorious procession out of Egypt and on towards the inheritance, the psalmist tells us that: "Judah became his sanctuary". This is only a figurative way of saying that the praises of the Lord provide a holy dwelling place for Him. Praise brings God into a situation as nothing else can, and it puts Him in His right place which is over all. It is a tremendous thing to be able to put the Lord over everything, over breakdown, over perplexity and suffering, over your enemies, over your failures and even over your sins. That was what David did, and that is surely the spiritual reality which lies behind the description: "skilful in playing".

Praise, real praise, means that we are on the victory side. Of course there is a kind of singing which is really a confession of defeat, singing to keep up your spirits, whistling in the dark to pretend that all is well. There was no need for David to do that, for the final statement about him was: "the Lord is with him". That was both the reason for David's singing and the result of it. Yet worshipper as he was, provider of praise as he might have been, David sometimes went down into the depths of despair and had to confess that, as he sang, his soul was cast down and disquieted within him. But he had an answer for this. It was to look on to the day of deliverance which must surely come: "Hope thou in God; for I shall *YET* praise him..." (Psalm 42:5). The end of the story is written for us in the book of Revelation which gives us glimpses of the glorious choir of the redeemed in heaven. In that day we shall all be skilful in playing and it will be true in the fullest sense that the Lord is with us. So let us praise Him that we shall *YET* praise Him, and this in itself will bring us a present experience of victory.

2. "...a mighty man of valour..."

This brings us straight on to the second feature of this anointed man's life, namely that he was a great man of courage. David may not have been as impressive in physique as those brothers of his, but because he had spiritual and moral courage he was rightly considered as a mighty man. Valour begins by getting on top of ourselves, by conquering our own moods and feelings; it begins within and not in outward things. At times it is not so difficult when you have an audience, and are inspired to courage by the fact that people are looking on, but it is much more difficult to be brave when you are quite alone. Once again we note that David first acquired his claim to valour when he was in the background, largely unobserved.

Of course there are also new challenges to the man who is exposed to public testing, but when that came, David confirmed that the original assessment of his valour was a correct one, for by God's grace he kept true through many temptations to doubt and fear. When the Philistines seized him in Gath he declared: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psalm 56:3). It is fear which robs a man of his courage. Fear entered the world when sin came in, and it has governed human behaviour ever since, just as it exercises a dreadful rule in the ranks of evil spirits (James 2:19). If sin brings in fear, then courage often depends on having a good conscience. The most fearless or courageous Man who ever walked this earth was the Lord Jesus, whose remarkable moral courage was based upon an absolutely clear way between Himself and His Father. A bad conscience makes us small and makes us cowards but a good conscience gives stature and boldness. David was far from being a sinless man, but he had learned the secret of getting right with God and a great theme of his Psalms is the blessing of forgiveness and justification by faith in our Saviour God.

Valour also depends upon a complete faith in the Lord. David believed God implicitly; he believed and he loved. The Psalms are full of this fact. Only perfect love can cast out fear. Every new experience of God which came to David made him the more ready to trust God's great love and to love Him in return, a fact which doubtless established him more and more as a mighty man of valour. The Lord built up his strength by taking him through difficult and adverse circumstances in which he proved the steadfast love of his God. Then as he grew in courage, he was able to undertake things altogether beyond his measure in the interests of the Lord. Tremendous odds mattered nothing to him provided he could be sure that the Lord was with him. He also proved his courage in waiting for God and enduring without complaining when things seemed to be against him. For a man of action to be powerless, just to endure and be patient while he waits for God, demands very great courage. There were times when David could have acted in desperation to rid himself of his great enemy Saul, but he refused to do so. He was prepared to wait for God. When we learn such a lesson then we are learning valour of a very high order.

3. "...a man of war..."

In the third place David was a warrior. This reference is the first intimation of the constant warfare which was to be a feature of his life. David had to be a fighter, not because he was personally aggressive, not because he needed to be relieved of superfluous energy, and not because he was trained or qualified in military matters, but because he was jealous for the rights of God. It is quite clear that what stirred his spirit was both indignation that God's name should be dishonoured and concern for the good of God's people. It was a sense of responsibility for the Lord's interests which made him a fighter, and as we speak of

this we seem to hear the words of that other great spiritual warrior, Paul: “Knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel” (Philippians 1:16).

As we have said, it all began in the simple and humble affairs of David’s daily life. His first fight was over a lamb. Only a lamb! Why risk your life for just a lamb? Your father is a man of some substance — witness his gifts to the king and the older brothers — and he would never miss one little lamb. Surely the lion could have that one! But no, that lamb was David’s responsibility, it was part of the father’s possessions which had been committed to his care, and it was this sense of concern for Jesse’s interests which led him later into concern for God’s interests and made him the fighter that he was.

Warriorship, however, demands utter selflessness. Those who have personal problems and interests may be fighters in a wrong way but they will never be good soldiers of the Lord nor fight the good fight of faith. Those who spend their time complaining and criticising are doing the enemy’s work. In the wilderness Israel was defeated not by outward enemies but by their internal complaining and murmuring. You may think that you have plenty to murmur about; David himself had times when he felt that he was being very badly treated, but he found — as we shall do — that wholehearted devotion to the Lord’s interests is the sure way of victory. God’s man of war is also a worshipper; his mouth is filled with the high praises of the Lord. If worship is to come first, then this will mean a turning aside from selfish or personal problems and a total concentration of the whole heart on the honour of the name of the Lord. Only so can God’s man be a true warrior. This brings us to a very practical point which is that the first phase of spiritual warfare and every subsequent skirmish and battle calls for a new letting go to the Lord. This is very often the secret of success, and especially so for the Christian whose enemies are spiritual and who is called not to personal conflicts or triumphs but to share in Christ’s battle with evil and to share His victory.

4. “...prudent in speech...”

David was known to be prudent in speech or, as the Authorised Version has it, “prudent in matters”. David was a man of discretion, a man of wise counsel, and a man who could speak for God because he had first learned to listen to God. Perhaps teachableness was one of his outstanding qualities. The person who is self sufficient, who thinks that he knows so much, will never be able to speak wisely for God.

Some of you may have felt at times that God can make no use of you, since you lack the qualifications or natural abilities which men regard as necessary for serving Him. The prudence of which we are now speaking is not a natural quality at all, but that which becomes a spiritual feature of the one who truly knows what it is to have the Lord with him. The Lord is not looking for cleverness. Indeed He often cannot use people because they are too clever in their own estimation. Teachableness, however, is a quality which He greatly values, and this is a matter of the spirit as well as of the mind. There is often a big difference between knowledge and wisdom, or prudence. Knowledge may consist of a mass of correct information, but wisdom means the application of that knowledge in ways which are good. It is possible for a Christian to have a vast amount of spiritual information, information as to what the Bible teaches and what the commentators suggest, holding all this in the mind or in the notebook yet with little evidence of it in the practical values of life. Wisdom is a matter of using the information correctly by turning it to account for the glory of God.

What is more, such wisdom will always be constructive. There are those who seem to think that they show their superior wisdom by their ability to criticise. If they can put their finger on a fault or discover some flaws, then they consider that they are being wise. But the effect of their activities is destructive, whereas the Scriptures make it plain that true wisdom is always constructive. Solomon, the wisest king of all, was a great builder, and it was he who wrote about wisdom building her house (Proverbs 9:1). So much is written in the New Testament about speech which is for building up or edification that the implication seems to be that if our tongues cannot contribute to positive helpfulness in this way then they had far better remain silent. Wisdom is always shown in its building values.

In fact wisdom is always actuated by the ability to discriminate as to what is for the glory of God. Nothing else matters. The Spirit’s presence in a man is made evident by the ways in which he can avoid that which grieves God and devote himself to God’s pleasure. If the Lord is with him then he will be prudent in matters.

5. “...a comely person...”

The final verdict on David was that he was a comely person, a man of good presence. It is clear that God intended that this should be true of every human being. From one standpoint this is the Bible’s theme. “Let us make man in our image” God said. So far as man is concerned God always had perfection as His purpose. Through sin, however, man has become stunted, deformed and repulsive to God, and he would always remain so but for the fact that the Lord Jesus has brought a salvation which makes men perfectly whole. As the Saviour passed along the way He met the blind, the paralysed, the deformed, and He spoke the words of deliverance and transformation which left them whole again — they were saved. His eternal purpose in salvation is to have sons conformed to His eternal Son, who is indeed the Comely Person.

David is a foreshadowing of this mighty work of salvation. He who would by nature have been repulsive to a holy God (born in sin and shapen in iniquity) became a man after God’s heart, a man of good pres-

ence who could be looked upon and admired. It may be helpful to consider some of his features, and the first one is undoubtedly meekness. David never claimed to be as good as the other man. He always thought himself to be the poorest of men. Emptiness of self is the very essence of meekness. See also how David suffered when things went wrong. Never for a moment did he blame someone else, but condemned himself outright. If ever a man was filled to overflowing with the consciousness of the marvellous mercy of God to a sinner, that man was David. See again how he suffered wrong without becoming vindictive. It is a mark of meekness to bear unjust wrong and not be embittered by it. For years David bore so much evil from Saul and yet he refused to take revenge, even when it could have been so easy. When Saul died in battle David did not gloat, he did not express relief but he made one of the most beautiful laments of grief over Saul as well as over his son, Jonathan.

Another thing which made David great was the way in which he accumulated wealth for the house of God. He took hold of every experience of suffering and wrung out of it something for God and God's people. Did he go into a deep and dark experience? Then he took hold of it and extracted from it that which would be for the enrichment of generations that were to follow. That is how we got our Psalter. That is not the little person's way of looking at things. He gets under his troubles, turns in on himself and gives way to self pity. The big man, however, does what David did, uses his own adversity to bring comfort and help to others.

One further feature of David's spiritual and moral stature was his single unifying passion. "...for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face... For the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up" (Psalm 69:9). David's supreme concern was for the Father's house, and in that he was a true type of the Lord Jesus to whom these very words are applied. He had a mighty concern for the Father's glory, and tremendous courage to carry that concern into action. David was like that. So much is written in the books of Samuel and Chronicles about his concern for the house of God. This was his one unifying passion. His life was a unity governed by a singleness of purpose, and that was what made him great. He had spiritual quality; he was a man of a good presence. God does not get glory out of our littlenesses, our petty jealousies and selfish pre-occupation. But when we grow up spiritually, leaving all those childish things behind, then the glory of God begins to be seen in us.

All this, then, because the Lord was with David. He himself was aware of that Presence, though at times he was tempted to question and doubt. What is more important, other people took note of it. This is what matters most. When people meet us, do they meet the Lord? When the Lord Jesus came to this earth He was called "Emmanuel" — God with us. The verdict upon His life after He had gone back to the glory was: "God was with him" (Acts 10:38). And the Holy Spirit has come to make this our experience. His anointing signifies that the Lord is with us, and this should make effective in our lives those five qualities which were observed in the young David. To have the Lord with him cost David dearly. It cost him his home; for a time it cost him his rightful place as king; it cost him comforts and popularity. But it gave him that which is more valuable than all earthy treasures. It gave him the supreme joy of bringing pleasure to the heart of God. The Lord was with him.

From "Toward the Mark" Nov-Dec 1975.

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

CHAPTER ONE

“As It Was In The Beginning...”

There are probably few fragments of liturgy more subject to repetition than that from which the above first part is taken. At the same time, it may be an example of the ignorance and meaninglessness with which many phrases are constantly used in Christianity.

What is the *IT* that was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be? The only true answer would be in changing the “it” to a “He” — “As He was — so is He now, and ever shall be”.

For the rest, there are few, if any, things that can carry this declaration. It is just this change from the beginning that is causing an immensity of concern and consideration in Christendom, and especially in evangelical Christianity. The beginning is the basis of a very great amount of review, reconsideration, recall, and effort to recover. For, as to Christianity, it is just not true that “as it was in the beginning, it is now”. True, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever”, and the foundation truths of Christianity are the same but for the more part Christendom is very much astray from “as it was in the beginning”.

This is not a new digression. The declension and departure began before the apostles themselves had finished their course, and their later writings are marked by correctives, recalls and reforms.

This had to do, not only with the character, words, and ethical standards, but primarily with the spiritual principles upon which Christianity *AT FIRST* rested and by which it was initially constituted. It is therefore the fact that the very spiritual constitution, the very essence and nature of the “beginning” has changed, or been lost, which accounts for the deplored change, and — what is no less than tragic — loss of impact, authority and accountability.

It is to some of the elements of the beginning that we shall draw attention here. When we say “elements”, let it be understood that we are not meaning the “elementary” in the sense of being just the simple rudimentary rules of Christianity. Rather do we use the word in the sense of “elemental”, which carries with it what the dictionary calls “like the powers of nature, great, tremendous, uncompounded, essential”.

Not only is it the first *FEATURES*, but the elemental, inherent, concentrated essence and vital potency of spiritual principles behind the outward expression. To this we shall seek to give attention, for we are convinced, after long and wide contact with Christians and Christian affairs, that it is here that the real key to the situation lies.

The mistake in most efforts to recover the original impact, dynamic, and authority of the first half-century of Christianity is in the point at which attention is applied. Such things as doctrine, form, procedure and work are the points of attention or debate. While these things *MAY* be seriously open to question in various respects, to start with them is to start at the wrong end, and to do that is either to add to the confusion or to come to deadlock. The best that might accrue would be compromise, and compromise is *ALWAYS* failure to face and deal with root causes honestly and courageously. We live in an age of compromise in every realm, and we are in an age of “confusion worse confounded”. We Christians know that the world situation will never be right and straight until He comes whose right it is to reign, but He will have no compromise, no middle course. He will go to the root of things and deal with them *THERE!*

For *ANY* measure of recovery of lost power we have to get behind results and effects, whether it be in doctrine, procedure, form or work and get our finger upon causes. There was a reason and cause for the world-upturning or overturning impact of Christianity “in the beginning”, and, as we have said, this lay with the eternal, heavenly, and spiritual principles or “laws” which lay within and behind what happened. It did not lie with a fully-fledged doctrinal knowledge. That was still in process of being made known.

When God is in the way of initiating or forming, He acts first and explains afterwards. The explanation is the “teaching” or “doctrine”. This is the safe way. The teaching is the explanation of experience. It is only the reverse order when the teaching has been given and forsaken. Then, as in the case of the prophets, God says what He is doing or going to do, and acts accordingly. Initially, just enough light is given for God to act upon. This method and principle of God can be seen in both the Old and New Testament. It is always of value to have God giving light on what He has *DONE*, so that we come into *UNDERSTANDING* of His ways, rather than have a lot of teaching without experience. We should put ourselves in the way of God’s dealings and acts, if this was so.

The original impact did not lie within a fixed and established form of procedure. It certainly did not rest upon organisation and institutions. These hardly existed, if at all. We repeat that it is folly to start toward hoped-for recovery of power by dealing with such things as the effects rather than the causes.

Let us then excavate through the accretions of Christian tradition and history, down to the bedrock principles.

The writer, over a period of nearly forty years of personal contact with evangelical Christianity in many parts of the world, has been terribly impressed with one basic weakness or defect. This defect undoubtedly is indicative of a whole set of deflexions from what was the conception in the beginning. While the *DOCTRINE* of the Holy Spirit is well known, and a great deal of teaching on that doctrine has been received, both from expositors personally, and through an immense amount of literature on the subject, there is a great deal to make real the question as to whether or not, after all, multitudes — even the majority — of Christians know anything about the Holy Spirit as a positive, active, indwelling presence. This question is supported by conduct, conditions, and ignorance which glaringly deny the teaching of the New Testament.

Jesus said of the Holy Spirit that “He shall be *IN* you”, “He shall guide you (as within you) into all the truth”, “He shall take of mine and show it unto you”, and so on. John, by the Spirit, said (to all true Christians, not to special ones, or leaders or teachers): “The anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but... his anointing teacheth you concerning all things...” (1 John 2:27). While this related to a specific matter, i.e. Antichrist, the principle, according to Jesus, — is of wider application, and is just that the Holy Spirit is an arbiter *WITHIN* making believers aware of what is of God and what is not. It is something that is not for an advanced point in spiritual life, but relates to the very beginning: “The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). The law of the Spirit of life is of constant growing reality and application as the very law of spiritual progress. It is no less a matter than that great factor of spiritual understanding and intelligence with which the New Testament is so largely occupied.

Let us say at once that this principle does not make the Christian independent of instruction through anointed teachers, neither does it by any means create an above-the-Scriptures position. The Holy Spirit will always work according to the Word of God, and *NEVER* on any account make us superior thereto or independent thereof. Nothing but the utmost peril of deception could come from such an interpretation or “enlightenment” or “leading” (?) that makes for such independence or superiority. Nevertheless, the *INWARD* government, enlightenment, and witness of the Holy Spirit is a primary factor in that which “was at the beginning”. Indeed, it goes to the very root of the very nature of the New Testament Christian life; the essential *BEING* of a true child of God. This both determines and defines what we may call the new and distinctive “species” which Christians are intended to be.

When the apostle Paul uses the phrase: “he that is spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:15), he is describing the very difference of two distinct categories of people. Not only is he dividing them but he is describing them. One category, he says, is deficient and defective in certain faculties, endowments and qualifications, relating to knowledge, discernment, judgement and understanding. The other category is distinguished by this very ability and qualification. But it is not an endowment given subsequent to new birth. Rather is it inherent in new birth, and a constituent of the new life. It is “he that *IS* spiritual”; he that is a certain kind of being. This being is said to have been born of the Spirit as differing from born of the flesh, begotten of God, as differing from by the will of man. This difference is the result of an advent. It is the advent of the Holy Spirit *INTO* the spirit of the committed believer. Surely, it stands to reason that the indwelling presence of such a one as “the Spirit of the living God”, God the Holy Spirit, is meant to be more than a passive, inactive, unenlightening, unendowing power and intelligence.

It is a very gratifying thing to see people changing and adjusting their lives, their conduct, their manner of speech and dress, their habits, their attitudes, etc., not because the law has been laid down to them by others — be he preacher or some other person — but because the Holy Spirit within has spoken and made His mind known to them concerning such matters. There are numerous matters in the Scriptures concerning which there are most flagrant contradictions in so many Christians that we might well ask the question, “Where is the Holy Spirit in them?”

This is the *BASIS* of everything “as it was in the beginning”. This is what came in with the advent of the Holy Spirit. This is what was intended and taught to be the very nature of the new dispensation.

Not that it was universally and perfectly lived up to, even in those times but it was truly there, accounting for very big and drastic changes in lives, even in the apostles themselves. This, more than the outward happening, was the true nature and power of “The Acts of the Holy Spirit”; which is a truer title to the book called “The Acts of the apostles”.

This bedrock principle worked out in every connection and direction, as to Christ Himself, the church, procedure, function, work, and so on. And it is our purpose to show this, as we are enabled by the same Spirit, for we are convinced that this is “as it was in the beginning”.

Sometimes we hear people say, “Oh, don’t look back to the past and to what has been. Look on to God’s new thing”; and they quote Paul in saying, “Leaving the things which are behind”. This is very superficial talk, to say the least of it. It can be very dangerous and misleading. Provided that there has been no departure, no forsaking, no loss, no relinquishing of anything that was of God, and that the foundation “principles” still obtain *WITH WHAT THEY MEAN*, there is room for the exhortation: “Let us go on to full growth, not laying again the foundation...” (Heb. 6:1–6). But the New Testament, the risen Lord, the Spirit, have strong things to say regarding “repenting and doing the *FIRST* works” (Rev. 2:5), and the

Lord has to sadly remind of a position from which His people have departed, and call them back to their beginnings.

There WAS that which — grievously — is *NOT* now.

CHAPTER TWO

“As It Was In The Beginning...” (continued)

We have seen that the “beginning” relates to the earliest part of New Testament times, not even to the latest parts of the New Testament. The latest writings are characterised by correctives, recalls and appeals for recovery, showing that all too soon in apostolic times, things began to deviate from the first principles and to change in both nature and form. These changes will be given more detailed consideration here as we go on.

For the present we confine ourselves to one more general and basic factor from which all else takes its rise. We have already pointed out that the possession of the Holy Spirit within the spirit of the believer produces a new and different “species” or genus, a new kind of person, the kind referred to by the apostle Paul as “he that is spiritual”, which he differentiates from “the natural [soulical or psychical] man”. This is the new man which is the subject of all New Testament concern.

It is not just that an element called “spirituality” has been taken on, but a fundamentally different kind of man has been born by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Albeit, the natural or psychical man remains, and remains a force to be reckoned with. On one side, spiritual education consists of the growing realisation and understanding of how utterly different from the Spirit of God the natural man is. The tendencies, proclivities, directives, conceptions, etc. of the natural man work in ways that are just the opposite of those of the Spirit in the new man. This is one of the most obvious things in the early chapters of the book of Acts. In those chapters we have the essence of what came in on the day of Pentecost as the very nature and principle of the new dispensation. It is an education to observe the way devoutly religious and wholly sincere men were being educated in regard to this fundamental difference between the natural, even though religious, man and “he that is spiritual”. The inclusive and all-embracing factor was the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit as the executor of the risen and exalted Lord Jesus.

A strong, very strong, carry-over of the Old Testament system and mentality was present in those first responsible men such as Peter, James and John. Largely because of this one factor, this mentality, the advent of the Spirit had to be “like the sound of a mighty rushing wind”. Not only a sound, but the force. The one initial necessity was that those concerned should realise that things were taken altogether and absolutely out of *THEIR* hands; that whatever their hands might imply — e.g. mentality, predisposition, reasoning, tradition, conception, interpretation, etc. — the Spirit of God was above that, either as contrary to it or as having a meaning which they had never seen. That is the first factor in the practical meaning of “As it was in the beginning”.

It would seem that, while those concerned realised the force of the happening, they had yet to learn the meaning of it, for from then onwards the conflict between the natural man and the spiritual man, *IN THEM*, was the way of their education. The transition from Judaism to the full implications of the new dispensation of the Spirit was fraught with some hard and painful battles and revolutions. Repeatedly we see a crisis presenting itself on this issue and the balances trembling between the old order and the new. Not, let it be emphasised, between the world and evil men and Christianity (that was another aspect), but between the inheritance, training and tradition of good and committed men (“devout” they are often called) and an altogether new heavenly meaning and mindedness.

Let us repeat: the drastic actions from heaven, as in the case of Pentecost in general and of Peter and Saul of Tarsus in particular, demonstrated that the new order was new and not a carry-over of anything. It was a mastery, a domination, a Lordship!

Peter, on the ground of his interpretation of Old Testament Scriptures about eating the unclean, might remonstrate with the Lord, but Peter’s entire apostleship and usefulness would depend upon allowing the Lord to know better, and submitting. It was a crisis in which Peter was on the threshold of a discovery which absolutely amazed him and left him without any explanation except: “God did it”, and “who was I that I should withstand God?” The principle herein contained is the battleground of the continuous question of less or more power and spiritual fullness.

The natural, psychical, man is positively incorrigible and inveterate in the matter of crystallising, fixing, legalising, and putting into final forms. He just *MUST* systematise and finalise. Although he may not know what he means, he will sing with gusto, “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be”, because he is wedded to formulas. He resorts almost mechanically to “drawing up something” to put it into a framework and make a box for it. Never has the Holy Spirit done something but men have subsequently taken the features of it and compiled therefrom a manual or textbook and have sought to impose it upon the Holy Spirit and the church as binding and essential. The beginning shows that the Holy Spirit will have none of this. For Himself absolute liberty of action and method is demanded and never to be denied

Him. From a consideration of historic and organised Christianity it is well-nigh impossible to realise that there are certain things that Christianity was *NOT* at the beginning.

For instance, it was *NOT* a new religion. Christianity was not set over against or alongside of other “religions”, so that it would be included in “Comparative Religions”. Although some of the apostles themselves were tardy in realising that Judaism was finished with by Christ and set aside, “lock, stock and barrel”; and only Stephen, and perhaps a few with him, had seen the completeness of the break, for which he had to pay with his life, yet this fact had steadily to be faced, and its acceptance — fully or reservedly — determined the degree of their spiritual measure. Paul is to be accounted for on this one issue supremely. Their thinking, reasoning and handling of their prejudices had to be done *AFTER* the embarrassing experiences and accomplished facts. They started with “acts”, not with a new religion.

Further, Christianity was not a new “teaching”. There is nothing in the whole record upon which to build a theory or affirmation that the apostles went out with “The Teaching of Jesus” as a stereotyped system. They were not propagating in the pagan, heathen or Jewish world new doctrines as such or a new system of truth. Explanations, which became the teaching or doctrine of the church, were reserved for those who had responded in faith to the declaration of certain fundamental *FACTS* relating to the person of Jesus Christ and these were few. The most that they did was to support and substantiate their testimony *TO HIM* from the Scriptures.

Once again: Christianity was not originally thought of as a new movement. No plans of campaign were laid. There was no policy. organisation was almost entirely absent. The very small degree of this was subsequently forced upon them by the embarrassment of the very vitality of the spiritual life. A thought-out campaign did not exist. To set up, form, launch, or bring into being, or found a new society, sect or community, was not in their minds. Outsiders put the labels on, perhaps because of the *SPIRITUAL* distinctiveness of the believers, but they never adopted a special title for themselves. The really distinguishing characteristic was not the name of a movement, but the presence of a mystery to all the outside world. Every attempt to explain them by a label, such as Christians, The Way, Sect, just missed the point. There does not exist a formula for or an explanation of life, whether natural or divine; and if there were, it would be like trying to put the Pacific Ocean into a bottle. So much the worse for the bottle, as Jesus said about the new wine and the old wineskins. It was this “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” which accounted for the experience, explained it in teaching, energised the action, and produced the “form” — the *ORGANIC* form *at* the beginning.

Here, then, we have confined ourselves to the overall, inclusive factor at the “Beginning”, that is the absolute sovereign liberty, government, mastery and direction of the Spirit of the enthroned Christ in heaven. This demanded a transcending, superseding, and subjugating of all the assertions of the natural man. This is a crisis and then a progress. As we have implied, this had an effect both as to the relationship with the world and the developments within the church. The former of these two aspects will retain us in our next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

The Church And The World

In our quest for the secrets of the power in the church “As it was in the beginning” — that is, in the years immediately subsequent to the great Pentecost — it is inevitable that we come to its relationship to the world. This inevitability is forced upon us both by its spirit and conduct and by the large place of reference to the world in the New Testament writings. The Lord Himself is recorded as having some very strong things to say about the world. John in his gospel uses the word seventy-seven times. In chapter seventeen alone it occurs fifteen times. In his letters it is used some twenty-one times. In Corinthians it is found twenty-two times, and it is referred to in almost every other letter.

Concerning the world, it is said:

1. That it is something that Christ had to overcome, and which He said that He had overcome.
2. That in its entirety it lies in the wicked one, and has a Prince.
3. That it is hostile and inimical to God, and that to be its friend is to be the enemy of God.
4. That it is something out of which Christians have been taken, and are prayed for that, although in it, they may be kept from it.
5. That it lies under condemnation and is to be destroyed.

Many more things are said about it, but we do not propose to enter into an analysis of the word itself or the difference in Greek words translated into this one word “world”.

But some may perhaps quote John 3:16, over against the above: “God so loved the world...”. This great Scripture indicates the real meaning of what we are going to say. There is really no contradiction. In order to understand the contrast we have to ask the question: What is this thing that is so out of favour with God and on the other hand, what is it that God so loved?

As to the first question it can be said at once that, in this sense of disfavour, “world” does not mean the framework, the sphere, the material and geographical structure. Neither does it essentially mean the people within that structure. God does not hate mankind! “World” must therefore mean something other, and we can perhaps indicate this by certain terms such as: a nature, a disposition, a mentality, a system, a constitution, a way! It is in all this that what is alien, hostile, and contrary to God is inherent.

The “world” in this respect is outlawed by God because foreign to His own nature and constitution. It is here that this whole matter of worldliness rests. This matter has suffered lamentably from oversimplification, and has resulted in many people being put into a false position.

For instance, worldliness has been made a question of where people go (theatres, cinemas, dances, etc., etc.), or how they dress and behave and talk. It has been said that to become a Christian such things must be abandoned and certain other things *MUST* take their place. Pamphlets have been written on: Should a Christian go to the theatre? — Smoke? — Drink alcoholic drink? — Use make up? and so forth. This is to miss the point entirely and can become as legalistic as Judaism. Really, in all this, no less a point is missed than that of the new birth itself, which, if genuine, — resulting in the indwelling Spirit and life of God — will answer all such questions *FROM WITHIN*.

Let us look more closely at this term “world” in the light of the Bible.

1. The World Is A Nature

If, as we have noted, the world is hostile to God, and God to it, if it is something to be “overcome”, and from which the Christian must be separated, if friendship with it constitutes those concerned “enemies of God”, then there *MUST* be something *VERY* evil about it, and what is more evil than Satan himself? The Bible represents Satan as having become “the *PRINCE* of this *WORLD*” and its “god” by the *CONSENT* and conquest of man, to whom the created earth was committed as a trust.

But let it be clearly understood that this change of government was no mere “official” and formal thing, so that Satan came to rule merely from an external position. He captured mind, heart, and will and inoculated man’s soul with his own nature. Man’s nature was changed. What is that nature?

All-inclusively it is shown to be rivalry with God, that is:

- (a) To take the place of God.
- (b) To take God’s rights from Him and not let God be everything.
- (c) To be independent of God and *SELF*-sufficient, knowing better, able to do better, or to do without God.
- (d) To be possessed of power, to control, to master, to rule, to be superior; a revolt against subjection and servanthood.

This is the nature with which, in greater or lesser degree, humanity has been impregnated. The heart of this whole issue is “selfhood”, rather than “Godhood”. How does it work out?

- (a) It makes much more of the material and temporal than it does of the spiritual.

With God all things are viewed from the standpoint of spiritual value. That is His very nature. God is a Spirit, not impersonal, but a spiritual person. The significance of persons in the Bible, and even after, is the measure of the spiritual effect and fruit of their lives and work.

Satan will absorb and obsess with the material and temporal in order to rob of the spiritual or to squeeze it out.

- (b) It makes everything of the present and blinds to the eternal.

What we have and can get *NOW* is the main consideration. This life is everything! This is the real; the eternal is unreal to the natural man.

This is a great point on which Satan tempted Christ and offered Him the world. On this point Jesus overcame the world! In the world the *SEEN* is what matters; the natural senses of perception and evaluation wholly govern. The standard of success is that of what can be shown.

In many other ways the nature of this world is in contrast to that of God; its standards, its point of view, its values, its aims, its thoughts, its ways, its spirit. One of the greatest features in Christian spiritual education is that of learning how altogether different are God’s thoughts, standards of values and ways from our own.

2. The World is a Prison

The keeper of that prison is Satan himself.

The Bible represents the souls of men as in captivity, in bondage, in fetters, in prison, in the power of Satan. It represents Christ as the anointed Redeemer breaking into the world to “proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound”. He is the Stronger than the strong man keeping his house!

The escape or deliverance of a soul from the world is fraught with very intense conflict, and forever after it is a battle to keep free of its influence, its power and its down-drag.

3. The World Is A Lie

As man was at first trapped by a lie, so he remains the victim of what is false. The more a person has of this world, the greater the disillusionment at the end. Its pleasures are a deceitful stream which will fail at last. Its riches bring no deep heart satisfaction, and the soul goes out as naked as it came in.

Jesus said that to gain the whole world at the expense of the soul is no bargain. The subtlety by which man was first captured was in the fact that the *TRUTH* as to the ultimate result was not disclosed but hidden. Jesus left the people of His day in no doubt that they were blind and demonstrated it by miracles, that is by acts which only *GOD* could do.

There are degrees of blindness. There is the natural blindness which is universal, but which can be remedied by the grace and power of God. And there is the double blindness of prejudice and pride added to nature, which is fatal. Such was the blindness of the ruling religious class of Christ's time and it cost them everything of hope.

All that we have said and all that it implies can be tested by history and for Christians by experience.

"In the beginning" the church knew all this, stood in the truth of it and taught it. Moreover, the Holy Spirit made this very real. In those days a spiritual complicity with the world was disastrous. When those who had marketable goods and properties were turning them to account for the furtherance of the Gospel, there were two who took advantage of the "going" to get profit for themselves. They took hold of the commercial element of the world and linked it with the things of heaven. It is later declared to be something put into the heart by Satan. The result was disastrous for them, and the swift visitation of judgement laid down for all time the principle that commercialism in divine things is fatal.

It was because of the allowed invasion of the world into the churches that their judgement was effected, as recorded in Revelation, and in some cases the lampstand removed. The great deception which is costing the church so much power is, that in order to influence the world, it is necessary to be one with it, to come down to its level; to employ its methods, to use its means and to remove all distinctiveness between the church and itself. The truth is that the church's power over the world is in proportion to its separation from it. The question of attraction is to be answered along the line of a perfectly joyous and satisfied church without any of the world's playthings. This, we have seen demonstrated. There is a magnetism about the joy and enjoyment of wholly committed and consecrated Christians which makes the world's methods vain.

So it was "in the beginning" despite persecution, ostracism, and much adversity. The secret of the early power and growth of the church was the greatness of the new world which had been opened in Christ, and the church's entrance thereinto. Christ *ENTIRELY* filled their bill, and they needed no plus. What it meant was the greatness of Christ and their apprehension thereof.

Their independence of the world was their power over it. The sufficiency of Christ made that independence. It intrigued the world, led to enquiry, investigation and wistfulness, even if it did provoke the prince of this world to bitter jealousy and antagonism.

The church may have to travel a long way back to recover its power and influence, but there is no alternative and the world will prove its undoing, disillusionment, and shame.

CHAPTER FOUR

Churches And Workers

We have laid great emphasis upon the fact that, in the beginnings, everything was under the government of the Holy Spirit who had taken over the whole purpose of God and was its custodian. As in the case of the tabernacle of old, the complete pattern was conceived in heaven to the last detail, and shown. Then Bezaleel and Aholiab were filled with the Spirit of God for all workmanship. Nothing whatever was left to the conception of man, and because eternal, spiritual, divine conceptions lay behind every fragment, God was meticulously particular.

So it was in the first phase of things in the beginning of the new Israel. Man has a great propensity for putting his hand on things, and nothing is too sacred to escape it. The great precaution taken by God when Adam began this kind of thing was: "Lest he put forth his hand..." When that was done, as in instances like Nadab and Abihu, Uzzah, Uzziah, Ananias and Sapphira, etc., the Lord showed His disapproval by swift judgment. Man's hand is always a possessive, a controlling, an arranging hand. His way is to bring things within the compass of his own mind and judgement. There is no compromise between the hands of the Holy Spirit and the hands of man, and any attempt on man's part to compromise will result in disastrous consequences sooner or later.

There is a clamant need for a deep revision of our mentality regarding what we call New Testament procedure. The starting-point will have to be at the parting of the ways between causes and effects, that is, how and why things began, and the things themselves. We begin at the wrong end, at the place where things are in existence, and we take the things as a pattern, a blueprint, a textbook, and proceed to imitate, to copy, to reproduce. Thus we resolve the New Testament into a handbook of organisation. In so doing we

overlook the fundamental, elemental, and vital fact that what we have in the New Testament never came that way. Whatever there is in the New Testament which is called an “order” was the normal, natural, spontaneous issue of a kind of life which had been miraculously imparted by the direct act of the same Spirit as brought about the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary: “Begotten, not created”. It was the growth and formation of an organism: “*Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*” (John 1:13). This was as true of the whole as it was of the individual parts.

Let us take:

The Case Of The Churches

The most general idea is that the apostles, Paul in particular, believed that they were to go and form churches all over the world, that when they entered a province, or a city, their thought was to form a local church there. We shall look in vain for any command of the Lord or intimation from the apostles that this was to be their object. What they did know to be their business was to bring Christ wherever they went. If Christ was rejected there was no church. If Christ was accepted those who accepted Him became a vessel of Christ in that place. The one conception of a church in any place is not a representation of the Christian religion, but an embodiment of Christ. Wheresoever it may be, though it be but two or three present in the content of His name, He is there. It is the presence of Christ which constitutes a church, and it is the increase of and conformity to Christ which is the growth or development of a church. In the book of the Revelation the Lord does not hesitate to threaten the removal of a candlestick if its essential function ceases, however much of Christian form and activity may be present. The essential function and the final criterion is the presence of Christ. The presence of the Lord has *ALWAYS* been the determining factor in eternal values. It is the Holy Spirit’s supreme function to bring Christ into all things and all things into Christ.

Churches, as such, are only a means, and as earthly *THINGS* they will pass with time. What is of Christ in and through the means will be gathered in a spiritual way into the great church universal which Christ will present to Himself — “a glorious church”. We are not here dealing with the full organism which comes out of the life-seed — the sowing of Christ — but just with “as it was in the beginning”. Of course, a challenge is involved: How did this and that come into being?

The principle which was to be extended world-wide was inherent in the choosing and sending forth by Christ of the “Seventy”. They were sent to every place “where he himself would come”. A local church, then, is not *IN THE FIRST PLACE* something constituted or formed according to a pattern of procedure, but by the presence of Christ in the several or more in that place. These “baptised in one Spirit into one body” are, in effect, Christ in that area, holding that ground as a testimony to His rights, and sending forth “the sweet savour of Christ in every place”. Failing this, with regard to its true function the organism is dead.

Carry on the form if you will, but a “church”, as such, is no more sacred in the eyes of the Lord than was the tabernacle in Shiloh, or the temple in Jerusalem, once the glory had departed, that is the presence of the Lord.

The Workers

The principle to which we have pointed above is the same in relation to all who have any place of responsibility in the work of the Lord. It is a far cry from modern methods to the beginning. The selection by popular vote, the choosing of “likely” people to hold office, the influence of title, degree, business acumen, success in the world, money, “interest in Christian work”, the choice of “novices”, and giving or allowing public recognition *ON SUCH GROUNDS*, is a system which has no place at the beginning. It is usually fraught with trouble sooner or later, and is a dangerous thing for those concerned.

A simple, practical issue arose early at the beginning. It was just a matter of seeing that certain widows were not overlooked as to their daily temporal needs and the righteous ministry of money available. It might be thought that any good man or men with a little business ability could attend to that, but not so at the beginning. The prescription was: “...men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom”. “And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (Acts 6).

The matter was carried through with scrupulous care, and the fundamental essential was “full of the Holy Spirit”, so that all might see it. In this most elementary phase of procedure the imperative was *SPIRITUAL* men, recognised by all as such. The “office” did nothing to make them that. They were that before they were entrusted with the most elementary things. Evidently they had proved themselves in the church and were approved by the church before ever they were “appointed”. If this was so in the case of the first elementary responsibility, how much more so would it apply to the greater responsibility of elders or overseers.

Before the apostles had finished their course, things began to change in church order. Signs of incipient ecclesiasticism as we know it today, were showing themselves. It is overlooked that when Paul wrote his last letters — to Timothy — and said that he wrote that “men might know how they ought to behave

themselves in the house of God”, he was writing correctively of misbehaviour. That misbehaviour related in the main to those in responsibility, the elders. Paul’s corrective was the recognition that elders are not just officials, but they are essentially *SPIRITUAL* men; men of *SPIRITUAL* measure and no novices. They *ARE* elders in character, *SPIRITUAL* qualifications and gift before they have the title of Elder. The title never makes a man an Elder. If he is not that already, no title will ever make him that! As in the churches, so in their responsible men, it is the presence and measure of Christ which determines everything.

We have done no more than point to a vital principle. Vital in that it will determine the life, course and destiny of anything bearing the name of the Lord.

CHAPTER FIVE

Christ And His Church Incognito

“...the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1).

In our pursuit of this enquiry into the differences between things now and as they were in the first years of Christianity let us at once make it clear that this is no idle wish to make comparisons and just leave it there. It is always a very easy and usually unprofitable thing to find and display comparisons and it is not very clever to do so.

In our quest there is one object which governs: it is to discover whether the differences represent real gain or loss.

We may find that we are led to a more than general conclusion relating to Christianity at large. The probability is that spiritual problems in the life of the individual Christian may have light thrown upon them. But we must begin with the fundamental principle and major difference. This difference is easy to see and very great indeed.

The quotation from the letter of John (alongside of which much more could be ranged) contains a categorical statement: *“the world knoweth us not”*, and it is linked with a larger, drastic, and sweeping indictment and explanation: *“because it knew him not”*.

This is a simple and plain statement of fact; the fact that both the Son of God and the church of God could be here in this world in closest touch with its people, with all the wonder and miracle of the divine purpose, and the world be in a state of complete inability, or disability to identify them — “know them not”.

That does not mean that the world was unaware of their presence. Very much to the contrary! The world was far from being able to ignore them. It had to take account of them. But as to their true identity and significance, the world could give no explanation. From time to time the world, which must reduce everything to a formula, a label, a name, made an attempt to confine this inscrutability within a word or phrase or epithet. It coined a term and dubbed them “Christians”, or people of “the way”, or a “sect”. That is the way of the world. It must reduce the infinite, the eternal, to the measure of its own mind.

But the question which is vital to us is whether this incognito position was gain or loss. We beg to earnestly affirm that it was of unspeakable gain in the case of both Christ and His church that the real nature, virtue, power and significance of their presence in this world was in the very fact that there was a secret which was beyond all natural comprehension. Much as they desired that men should come by the way which would make that secret true of them also, it was just in the knowledge that a divine miracle lay at the heart of that experience that the strength of Christ and the church lay. The mystery intrigued, baffled, defeated, angered the world or made it wistful. Flesh and blood could not reveal that mystery, only God Almighty! *“The world knoweth us not”* was no complaint, no lament of defeat and no confession of something faulty with them. They were sorry for the world, not for themselves.

Their power lay in this fundamental difference. That the time came, all too soon, when this distinction began to be surrendered in exchange for “standing” with the world, gives the force to our question: Has the church or Christianity really gained by this exchange? Christianity now resorts to every conceivable means by which it can gain position, recognition and prestige, and in which the world can easily understand it. For its very success it must have names, titles, designations, honours, etc. Unless Christians “conform”, “belong”, take a name, and explain themselves, they are suspect, outsiders, and of no “standing”; no matter what their *SPIRITUAL* value may be. “Sect” has become an epithet, an expression of scorn, as in apostolic times. On this line Christianity has expanded, become big, but the question is pressing on many honest and serious minds as to whether the *INTRINSIC* value will stand comparison with that of the beginning.

Is it not impressive to see how, whenever that which had a strong, deep, rich, and effective beginning has been “accepted” by the world, especially the religious world, marks of *SPIRITUAL* loss show themselves? Of how many God-initiated ministries and instrumentalities this is true. From something of heaven containing a deep and costly spiritual history and possessing the dynamic and impact of the divine presence, with its later development as an “institution” standing well with men, with all its bigness and

natural impressiveness, it has become a mere shadow of its origin, so far as depth and spiritual strength are concerned. There is now little or no “mystery” about it. It has nothing inscrutable and inexplicable in it. It can be mainly attributed to human ability.

Let us hasten to insert a protective word. We are *NOT* saying that it is a wrong thing for Christians as private persons to have *EARNED* honours, degrees, titles, or designations. We are aware of an ultra-exclusive movement which for fellowship, recognition, and participation at the Lord’s Table demands a repudiation or relinquishing of all professional, academic, and other degrees. This we are definitely not countenancing. *IN THEIR REALM* these things have their place. What we are saying is, that if Christianity seeks to make these things the basis of its strength, its appeal, or its status, it has gone astray and will resultantly suffer the loss of spiritual power. “*The world knoweth us not*”, and any attempt to put human importance in the place of that supernatural secret will prove disastrous. When the term “institution” begins to loom large in the Christian vocabulary, it can be taken to mean that a change has taken place which is not for the better.

The challenge to many hearts is as to whether they are prepared to be misunderstood, unacknowledged, unsung and unapplauded in this world and live only for eternal values. It has been said of the apostle Paul that “he lived with eternal values only in view”. Was he right?

One apostle says: “*The world knoweth us not... it knew him not*”. Another says: “*The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God*” (Romans 8:19). There will be some surprises when that happens — both ways!

Only the Spirit of sonship, and those who have Him, know the sons. God has hidden them from the world. It is painful not to be recognised, because it is contrary to our nature — as it is.

The world must see the embellishments, honours, vestments, titles, in order to take account. In the beginning it was not so. “*They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.*” There is a right way in which the world must know us, that is, know that we are here, and that is that we are something that it cannot comprehend.

CHAPTER SIX

The Meaning And Reality Of Things

The Book of the Revelation — a book which discloses the changed spiritual conditions in the early post-apostolic days, and perhaps, prophetically, the state at the end-time in the church — speaks of certain losses. It reproachfully uses the words: “first”, “first love”, “first works”.

This is only another way of saying: “As it was in the beginning”.

We are, in these reflections, seeking to note some of these changes and losses, with a view to creating exercise for recovery.

A further very evident change from the beginning, especially in Western Christianity, is indicated by the two words at the head of this page — meaning and reality.

Perhaps because of long tradition and familiarity, our accepted system and established order, or perhaps because of an oversimplification and superficial presentation of the involvement, we are in a time and condition when Christianity is very largely a matter of things without their meaning. “Conversion” is something less — if not other — than regeneration, a new creation. Baptism is something *DONE*, either as a bit of ritual, the requirement of association, a compliance with a demanded ordinance, an adherence to certain parts of Scripture, or — at most — the expression of a desire to follow the Lord. The “Communion service”, “Lord’s table”, is very much in the same realm and of the same nature as baptism. Membership of the church or of A church, and Christian work are the expected things, and things to be maintained.

How great is the loss of the tremendous and demanding meaning of these matters.

It is not possible to read any part of the New Testament without being made aware of the costliness connected with *ANY* step in relation to Jesus as the Christ. The very contemplation of association with Him raised the most serious issues. Confession of Him and baptism involved in deep and far-reaching difficulties. Testimony to Him and just representing Him in the world produced spontaneous trouble. The further the believers and servants of Christ went, the more costly the way became. The believers, the churches, just had to stand and fight for their very lives spiritually. It is so manifestly true, even in our time, that where it is costly to stand true to the Lord — as in East Germany, Russia, etc. — there you find the most real and true kind of believers. It is known that some have deliberately chosen to return to such places and accept the suffering after having tasted or seen the spiritual poverty and unreality of Christians in what are called “free countries”. It is not necessary to go behind the “Iron Curtain”, or the “Bamboo Curtain”, or to “heathen lands” in order to know persecution and thereby find reality. In such case millions of Christians in the West would never find it.

Utterness for the Lord *ANYWHERE* will produce spiritual conditions which will test, challenge and make for reality and bring out the real and deep meaning of everything. Utterness means willingness to let the Lord dictate every aspect of life and, when He faces with a question or test, to go through with it, what-

ever the cost. It means being committed to knowing the deepest and fullest meaning of every bit of our Christianity.

What does the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures mean by new birth, baptism, the Lord's table, fellowship, the church, ministry and service, etc.? Indeed, what does it mean to *HAVE* the Holy Spirit? There is such a great amount of assuming and taking for granted, which *MAY* work out in presumption — *PRE*sumption.

Most Christians accept the doctrines, the traditions and the ordinances, but, in the beginning, it was the implications, the significance, and the meaning which gave reality to everything. This reality provided a place for a wholesome fear. Violations or ignoring of vital principles can go on with impunity in our times and because the judgements of God are not prompt sudden and apparent but work slowly and almost imperceptibly on a long-term course, it is assumed — if thought about at all — that it does not matter. There *ARE* many conditions and situations, confusions and frustrations, limitations and complications, which — if we but knew it — *ARE* judgements. May we not have taken far too much for granted?

One thing is very clear: the apostles and their fellow-workers sought to make the believers take their Christianity very seriously and left them in no doubt as to serious consequences following — sooner or later — if they did not do so.

We may take up some of the matters mentioned in a more specific and fuller way, but for the moment we want to put the emphasis upon this: that the Lord has never made provision for anything less than downright reality.

Stresses are certain to be brought to bear upon our profession which will find us out, and we shall be tested on the threshing-floor. The disciples understood the implications of the Lord's teaching when they asked "Lord, are there few that be saved?"

Dr. Billy Graham has reason for asking why it is that, of all the thousands that make "decision", so few go through, and so many go back. The answer might very well be that the full implications and the deep significance of what it *MEANS* to be a Christian are not generally presented.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Great Transition

Much has been written, and is still being written, about the difference in the progress of the Gospel in the first three decades of Christianity and the much longer time since. That the progress then was nothing less than phenomenal is impossible to deny. We have more than once quoted the words of Dr. A. M. Fairbairn:

"In the year 33 A.D. a few Galilean fishermen were seeking liberty of speech in Jerusalem and were hardly handled as men poor and ignorant. In the year Paul died (about 30 years later), how did the matter stand? There were churches in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Caesarea, in all Syria, Antioch, Ephesus, Galatia, Sardis, Laodicea, in all the towns on the west coast throughout lesser Asia, in Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Rome, Alexandria, in the chief cities of the islands and the mainland of Greece, and the western Roman colonies."

With all the tremendous organisation, expenditure and propaganda since and particularly in the last century, there is nothing to compare with that, especially when it is observed that in those first years we do not read of any machinery, appeals, "drives", deputations, exhibitions, demonstrations and all the organization of missions and missionary efforts with which we are so familiar in our times. It is not that there is a lack of concern for evangelisation or a lack of sacrifice and suffering on the part of many devoted servants of God. Whatever we may say, we must guard against belittling or undervaluing the very great outpouring of life and strength which has characterised the outreach for the salvation of souls in these past centuries. Contact with many such devoted servants of God in these spheres of service means a sound rebuke to any spirit of criticism.

But, recognising every bit of that sacrificial devotion, there are very few who are not aware of the difference above mentioned, and masses of literature are being published on the matter. Our object, under deep exercise, is not to criticise or cast aspersions but to ask whether — if the comparison and contrast is right and true — there are any factors and features which constitute the change? Were there characteristics in the beginning which do not *GENERALLY* obtain now? Where there has been a really living and effective work to which all may point as approximating to the first days, is it because of the presence of those first factors? Let us look at one or two notable examples and see if they point backward to something in the original.

In the first place let us call to mind the amazing and heart-stirring story of the Moravian Brethren.

In their first twenty years (twenty years only, mark you) they actually sent out more missionaries than *THE WHOLE PROTESTANT CHURCH* had done in *TWO HUNDRED YEARS*. Of the closed lands entered, the sufferings gladly endured, the range covered, the lives lived and laid down, the grace of God manifested, it stirs wonder and shame to read. Someone has said that if members of the Protestant

churches had gone out in corresponding numbers there would have been a force vastly in excess of the number estimated as necessary to evangelise the whole world.

What was the secret and what were the factors?

In the first place the cross had been deeply wrought into the very being of every one of those people. This had been through deep suffering. Their country was made a field of blood by massacre. They were driven from their homes. From three million they were reduced by persecution to one million population. Indeed, it sometimes appeared as if they would be entirely exterminated and their testimony extinguished.

Out of this fire of affliction there arose a company purified, with another fire burning in their bones. It was the fire of a passionate love for the Lord Jesus. The meetings of these brethren, when later possible, breathed the atmosphere of the upper room in Jerusalem when the tension was similar. Covenants were made that self in all its forms should be entirely banished: self-will, self-love, self-interest, self-seeking.

To be poor in spirit would be their quest and everyone would give himself or herself to be taught by the Holy Spirit. A prayer-watch was set up which should burn day and night, and in relays an entire twenty-four hours was occupied in seeking the Lord. Their motto was: "To seek for the Lamb the reward of His sufferings."

All this is its own argument. A deep inwrought work of the cross issued in a mighty personal love for the Lord Jesus. Personal considerations were lost and no persuasion was necessary. Is it necessary to argue or even indicate, that this was a real correspondence to those early days of Christianity?

So much for our first example. We turn to another, in which much of what we have said was taken over with other features. How often has the early story of the China Inland Mission been pointed to and how much appealed to as a great example of a work truly of God in its spiritual life and effectiveness! Books are still being published in retrospect with the object of inspiring and recovering by the example of that work. But it would be a mistake to make everything of the work, the "Mission", and overlook the spiritual background and explanations. With all his vision and passion for the evangelisation of inland China, it is well known that as he went from place to place with his heart-burden, addressing gatherings of Christians, Mr. Hudson Taylor said comparatively little about China, often nothing at all. He poured out his spiritual message to bring the Lord's people to the fuller knowledge of what their union with Christ meant. The central and supreme thing in his message and with the Lord was his emphasis upon *THE UNIVERSAL EFFICACY OF PRAYER!*

Listen to him: "In the study of the divine Word I learned that, to obtain successful workers, not elaborate appeals for help, but earnest prayer to God... and the deepening of the spiritual life of the church, so that men should be unable to stay at home, were what was needed."

Were we to put the inner history of that work — the original spiritual background — into a few words, we should say that it was not by organisation, advocacy, propaganda, appeals or advertisement, but through a man with a deep knowledge of God born of the Cross being deeply inwrought, with a living spiritual message for the Lord's people as to their fullest life in Him, and the practical outworking of such a life through prayer. Mr. Hudson Taylor did not rank with the outstanding Bible teachers in the sense of presenting truth in a systematised form. He was not one of the number of great Bible teachers in the generally accepted sense of that term in his generation. His was a message which immediately led to two issues. One, the relationship of the believer to the Lord and then the practical outworking of that relationship in prayer and other forms of service; to bring the gospel to those who had no chance of receiving it except by consecrated effort to reach them.

Mr. Hudson Taylor's life turned at a given point upon a deeper realisation of what oneness with the Lord really means.

In our last chapter we referred to the close connection between the convention movement, such as "Keswick" and the world-wide evangelisation. In this connection we could point to the rich spiritual ministries of such servants of God as Dr. Andrew Murray and Mr. Charles Inwood, through both of whose ministries strong and fruitful evangelising missions came into being.

In what way, then, does this link up with those first years of Christianity? The answer surely is found in a right understanding of the meaning of Pentecost.

What was Pentecost? We have lamentably failed to rightly and adequately answer that question. The cumulative and external effects have been made to obscure the deeper elements. We have interpreted Pentecost in terms of activity, signs, waves of emotion, excitability, tongues, healings, etc.

There was something that explained all the manifestations and was more than these. It was — **The enthronement of the Lord Jesus as absolute sovereign, without reservation or rival over and in the entire life, in all its interests and activities of committed men and women!** What had happened with the Lord Jesus Himself was made true by the Holy Spirit in the church at its birth. That exaltation to and in heaven meant that Jesus had been released. The book which we know as the Acts of the apostles could well be renamed *The Lord's Release*.

Up till the time of His death, Jesus had been severely limited. He Himself said so. His statement regarding this was:

"I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I, if it is already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:49, 50). ("Straitened" there means "under strain and stress".)

His spirit was longing for release; straining against the limitations of His present position. The incarnation in nature and purpose meant geographical and physical limitations. It meant national limitations. It meant the limitations in the men whom He had chosen; their present lack of spiritual intelligence and understanding; their inability to see the nature of the new dispensation which He had come to inaugurate; their earthboundness; their self-interest and ambition; their pride, assertiveness, and natural judgments. Then the terrible limitation of the unfulfilled Law in Israel, the reign of legalism, crushing and imprisoning the souls of those under its rest-destroying power. "O", He cried, "that the baptism (of the passion) were accomplished, so that I, and they, could be released."

That release came through death and resurrection — ascension. After the passion no more was He subject to physical, geographical, national, and natural "straitness"; He was emancipated and free. Universality was the new order, and the "earth could know the scattered fire". No longer by outward persuasion and command did He have the limited and restrained response of His men. Now by an inward dynamic and illumination they too were escaping their chains and traditional prison walls. Not fear, but courage! Not shame, but glory! Not self-defence, but readiness to suffer, even unto death for His name's sake! In one strategic stroke He touched men "of every nation under heaven" in Jerusalem on one day. What a story follows that release! How the fire spread!

The Lord's release meant the release of the Holy Spirit and the release of the Holy Spirit effected the release of the church. Two things therefore arise for consideration and exercise. One, a new apprehension of the release through death; that is, what the Cross really means in the church's freeing; and two, what the real nature of the present position of Christ is. It is here that Christendom has fallen down, where the church in the beginning rose up. These two things will be our focus in the next chapter. It is here that, undoubtedly, there has to be a spiritual return movement if effectiveness and power are to be recovered.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Great Transition (continued)

That all the elements of a great transition were present in those first years following the resurrection and ascension of the Lord and the advent of the Holy Spirit, is unmistakable.

Although those immediately concerned and in responsibility were not fully awake to the meaning of what was happening and were slow to grasp the implication of things, there is no doubt that they were conscious of being precipitated into waters strange, deep and unaccustomed. Strange things were happening, and the cumulative meaning only slowly broke upon them. True, there were *ACTS* of divine Sovereignty which could not be ignored, but their inclusive meaning only *GREW* upon them. For instance, the death of Stephen was an event, but what Stephen and his death implied only a very few seem to have recognised at the time. It took the "apprehending" of Paul by Christ, and the full purpose of his election to explain Stephen.

"The persecution which arose about Stephen" was under the sovereign government of heaven, but it seems to have been looked upon only in that light and not as a part of a *DISPENSATIONAL* plan. This, with the crisis event of Peter and Cornelius, was not seen to be related to heaven's intervention to change the base of operations, and the "headquarters" from earth to heaven. There was a clinging to Jerusalem.

Dr. Campbell Morgan has a fine paragraph on this in his "*Acts of the apostles*". It reads thus:

"The martyrdom of Stephen created a crisis in the history of the church. In reading the Acts, we find that from this point onward (chapter eight) Jerusalem is no longer the centre of interest. It almost fades from the page. This is not loss, but great gain. When Jerusalem ceases to be the centre of interest, the record does not suffer in any way, nor does it reflect upon Jerusalem. **The local, the temporal, the material, are of little importance in the church of God. The universal, the eternal, the spiritual are supreme.** It was of the very spirit of an old and past economy to fasten upon a geographical centre, and to depend upon material symbols. The church now moves out upon the great pathway of her victorious business, independent of Jerusalem. **That is the supreme revelation of the book of the Acts of the Apostles.** Not easily did they learn the lesson, for the apostles clung to Jerusalem; but the great spiritual movement, independent of Jerusalem, and the apostles, went forward, not slighting Jerusalem, nor unmindful of Jerusalem, nor careless of its past history and early contribution, but far more influenced by the vision of Jerusalem from on high, the mother of us all... **No longer hampered by localities and temporalities, the surging spiritual life of the church swept them all away...** Church failure has invariably resulted from an attempt to check that spiritual movement which is independent of locality, and of all things material. Whenever the church is governed from Jerusalem, or from

Rome, or from anywhere else other than heaven, it is hindered and hampered and prevented from fulfilling the great functions of its life.” (Emphasis ours.)

We have said that there was a slowness at the beginning to recognise the meaning of heavenly trends. This was probably due to two things. Firstly, when we are close up to events and happenings we only see them in themselves: the element of perspective and relatedness is obscured or blurred. The things themselves are all we see. We, in later times, are able to see how the steps and incidents fitted into a divine pattern. Or, are we so able? Perhaps inability to so discern is the reason for so much confusion when the pattern is before us.

Then, secondly, they were thus slow because **GOD’S way of teaching is more by experience than by theory**. Often they only drew their conclusions from accomplished facts and not from reasoned theories. God did something and explained it afterwards. This is something which should be helpful to us all in events which, at the time, are “out of our depth”. Heaven has the meaning and what is not explained now will subsequently be made clear.

What then was the great transition?

It was the passing of all government, with the seat of government, from earth to heaven; from the hands of man to the hands of the ascended Christ. Henceforth all reference and deference was to the exalted Son of God. Henceforth man was an instrument, a vehicle, a recipient. Man was not an originator, a projector, a source, a deviser, a planner, a master. He had to *GET* everything, be absolutely subject.

There is a very indefinite and nebulous belief in the sovereignty of God. It is a kind of fatalistic generalisation which takes everything into its own hands, and “trusts God that it will turn out all right”.

This is not as it was in the beginning. Prayer was made regarding every question and not until it could be said with assurance: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”, or “The Holy Spirit said...” would they move. Those are things which it is most rare for the church to say in our time. The custodianship of the Holy Spirit regarding the world-mission of the church, local and universal, was not taken for granted or assumed, but specific and definite reference was made to Him.

But, when we have pointed to the fact and general nature of the great transition, we are obliged to say something as to the great difficulty in which it involved the new dispensation. This probably was a further reason why, on the one hand, the change was so slow in being made or entered into and, on the other hand, why the Lord did not impose it on them all at once. He seems to have nursed them into it, with certain crisis precipitations. The change was so radical! The new position was indeed all so new. By way of illustration consider Israel in the wilderness. Under heavy testing, they may later have given to Egypt an illusory and sublimated adornment, when they hankered for “the fleshpots of Egypt”, for the garlic and the onions, but still there *WERE* fleshpots! They took their “kneading-troughs”, so there must have been dough to knead, and the frequent reference to leaven indicates tasty bread. Crushed, oppressed, and in bondage as they had been in Egypt, their support was tangible and sure. The wilderness was a new position and an extremely testing one. Life was placed upon a supernatural basis in all temporal matters. If this was true of an earthly Israel, how much more so of the heavenly!

In this new dispensation all our spiritual blessings are in heavenly places. Our city and citizenship are in heaven. Our Priest, altar, and sacrifice are in heaven. Our calling is a heavenly calling. Our entire spiritual support has to come from heaven; and so much more. Only those who are wholly committed to God know how testing this life of faith is. And yet, and yet, what a miracle it is that we go on and not under, even after many years of trials and sufferings! Our place is by no means an easy one. It is so contrary to the life of nature and the flesh! But it is carried on by the power of his resurrection.

We may add that the further we go on with the Lord — not in time merely, but in depth — the more testing our position becomes. It is impossible to take a position with God without having that position severely and perhaps repeatedly tested. It might be thought that to move with God will carry with it His defences against serious trials and adversity. In fact it works the other way, but He keeps and is faithful. Justification will be found in spiritual, heavenly and eternal values. Because many have not had the spiritual measure to stand up to a position **mentally, doctrinally or objectively** taken, they have reverted to an easier, and what they call a “simpler” or more “practical” way, and this explains so much weakness among Christians in our time.

Undoubtedly the Spirit of God is pressing many Christians up into reality. This is true, even amidst much activity to popularise Christianity and to eliminate the hard way of the Cross. It may be necessary for some hard blows to be struck at traditional fixity, but this would only make the end of the age correspond to the beginning, both in the Spirit’s method and His object. Systems will have to collapse in order that the Person shall be all in all.

When we have said this we have touched one point at which things radically differ in organised Christianity from what they were at the beginning. The organised so often takes away the opportunity of proving God and letting *HIM* get *ALL* the glory.

When we refer to the “beginning” — meaning the beginning of Christianity — we, of course, instinctively think of Pentecost, that advent of the Holy Spirit. We then proceed to think of the early record of the Holy Spirit’s “Acts”. For a return to or recovery of such a condition there is often expressed a desire, even a longing, and in many basic respects rightly so. We here are seeking to underline some of those fundamental factors. So, we come now to point to the one which is very vital and important to the whole of New Testament Christianity. Doctrinally this would arouse little controversy among Evangelicals, but the very acceptance of the doctrine as a matter of course may mean an inadequate recognition of its cruciality. We can only trust that as we proceed, a new recognition of the greatness and imperativeness of this truth may break or dawn upon our readers.

This great truth is that

The Holy Spirit has one court of appeal from which he will on no account depart.

The Holy Spirit has an arbiter, a judge, an umpire, to which He will unswervingly appeal for a verdict on every matter. As in a game or contest with two opposing sides the appeal of “How’s that?” is made to the umpire; or as in a court of law the appeal for a decision is made to the one who is there to give judgement: so it is with the Holy Spirit. He has a fixed basis for His verdict, and His verdict is fixed as to death or life, as to rejection or acceptance. It is of supreme importance whether the Holy Spirit says “Yes” or “No”. Go through the Book of the Acts and note where and when that verdict was given, one way or the other and see the result. There was a sensitiveness to the Holy Spirit then which meant everything for arrest or release by discovering whether His finger indicated “Yes” or “No”.

What was the Holy Spirit’s ground of arbitration, judgement and verdict? It was ever and always the Cross. The Cross combining the death and resurrection of Christ was God’s almighty and categorical “No” or “Yes”. The death of Christ was that eternal “No” to an entire order and source of things. The resurrection was His wonderful and glorious “Yes” to another order.

The Holy Spirit Always Appealed To The Cross

This is seen — if we have eyes — everywhere in the New Testament. Take in your hand the fact that the Cross set aside one entire humanity in Adam and gave the only place to another “Adam”, a new and different humanity, and with it go through each book of the New Testament. Often, most often, you will find the Cross definitely mentioned in some way, such as “The Cross of our Lord Jesus” or “Christ crucified”, etc. Sometimes it will be by implication, such as in Philippians 2:5–8. Sometimes an exhortation, a command, an admonition, an appeal, will involve the Cross for a response. The Cross runs the whole way through, and it has a very great many applications and connections. On *ALL* matters of life, conduct, service, movement, spirit, speech, judgement, etc., it is as though the Holy Spirit is saying: “That was crucified with Christ”; “That does not live before God”; “That belongs to a source which was ‘buried with Christ’.” Or, on the contrary, “That has My verdict of life and peace because it is ‘risen with Christ’; it has God’s ‘Yes’.”

At Corinth there was so much carnality that sensitiveness to the Holy Spirit’s judgement was dulled or numbed. Hence the apostle — before coming to them — made a positive resolve “to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, **and Him crucified**”. “Christ crucified — the wisdom of God and the power of God.” “We preach Christ crucified.”

This is an example of what we mean when we say that the arbitration, the judgement of the Holy Spirit is always by reference to the Cross. This can be noted in its manifold and specific connection in every other book. Violation of this position invariably resulted in confusion, complications, and frustration. Lapses there were, and sovereign acts of God saved the situation ultimately, but the record leaves these lapses as warnings for all time.

We cannot relegate the Cross to history, as an event, a bit of Christian doctrine. It is an abiding judgment-seat; the Lamb is on the throne now, and will be the final verdict of judgement. The last view is of “The Lamb in the midst of the throne”, and the whole scene will be one of God’s mighty and eternal “Yes!”, when everything of the “No!” of God will have been actually removed.

Let us come with the Holy Spirit to the Cross with all our matters, and ask Him to register its verdict as to whether it is alive or dead unto God.

CHAPTER TEN

Release By Illumination

In this quest for the secrets of power and effectiveness as characteristic of things in the book of “The Acts”, we are seeing that these secrets are so largely found in what happened in the apostles themselves, not in a complete system of teaching and practice or order in a Blue Book in their hands. It is still quite impossible to know exactly how they conducted their meetings. There are certain features mentioned and a number of details given as to things that happened, but so much was just spontaneous and unarranged. There is enough known to make a present-day conformity to it so revolutionary as to upset very much of our common forms, acceptance, and procedure. For instance, our present form of the “Holy Communion”

or “Lord’s table” bears very little resemblance to the New Testament way, and the meetings of the local church were almost entirely different from our “church services”. Apart from a very few major and basic factors and features, and even those more general than specific, such as baptism and the *FACT* of the breaking of bread, there is no rigidly specified blueprint in the New Testament. It is therefore a false hope and effort to try to “form” perfect “New Testament churches”. This does not mean that there are not very definite spiritual principles which, if really governing, will produce the power and effectiveness of those early times. It is to unearth these that we are giving ourselves in these considerations.

The spiritual principle to which we are now giving attention is one around which there rages the strongest controversy and opposition. That is usually true in the case of the matters of greatest importance, and we are convinced that this matter now before us is of *VERY* great importance indeed. It is what we will call

Release by Illumination

In this connection we must begin with what happened to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

It is surely clear to everyone that, in spite of all the teaching and explanation given personally by Jesus to His disciples, they neither understood Him nor their Scriptures. Even when He gave two of them what must have been a masterly and matchless discourse on the key to all the Scriptures, from Moses onwards, and for the moment, “opened their mind that they might understand the Scriptures”, it is evident that the “root of the matter” was not *IN* them. It was like Peter’s transient illumination as to the Person of Christ, of which Jesus said that flesh and blood had not revealed it to him, but His Father, who is in heaven. The fleeting illumination did not save Peter from the most tragic and terrible thing that a man could do: deny the knowledge of Jesus with anger and vehemence. No, up to the burial of Jesus and for fifty days afterwards, their Bible was largely a closed book.

But look and listen on the day of Pentecost! Peter and the eleven are in the good of an opened Bible; the Scriptures are all alive. Look at the quotations, citations and interpretations. The Bible was all alive and was pricking men’s hearts and making them cry out.

The closed book had meant bound and imprisoned men. Spiritual illumination was their release. The Lord was released by the Holy Spirit and thereby they were released men.

So far, no one will raise any objection. But we have to go further. What we have as our New Testament is the product of the continuance of that illumination. How glad we Christians ought to be that our Christianity is not a matter of treatise and handbooks on religious subjects, discourses on the philosophy of religion or doctrine, but divine truth revealed to meet crucial situations arising in real life. Light given by the Spirit of God in the midst of battle, adversity and absolute necessity. Spiritual history hammered out on the anvil of deep experience. The New Testament is revelation given over against conditions and situations needing nothing less than sheer salvation, life or death as to destiny. It is not a volume of abstract theories but of light from heaven to deliver souls. Therefore its value is practical, not theoretical; it is vital, not static; it is consequential, not optional or capricious.

So far, so good. But now we come to the vital point.

Let us hasten to say quite categorically and emphatically that, as a divine revelation in substance and instrumentality, the Bible is closed and complete. There is no adding to it in substance and content. God will give no more Scripture any more than He will give an extra Christ. In giving His Son He has given in Him all! With the Scriptures He has given ALL in content.

But when we have said that we can be just with the New Testament as were the disciples with the Old. We may have the letter, the Book, the record, and still not have the *MEANING*. The work of the Holy Spirit was twofold in this connection. Firstly to give the all-sufficient substance and seal as final in that respect. Secondly to reveal or illuminate what is in the substance. The first reached its climax and finality when the last apostle left this earth. The second goes on. The New Testament uses two words in this matter. It speaks of “knowledge” (i.e. of Christ) and it also speaks of “full knowledge” (“of him”). One is by initial eye-opening; the other is by continuous illumination. Hence, the apostle Paul prayed for *BELIEVERS* that “*He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the (full) knowledge of him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened*” (Ephesians 1:17–18). It is by such illumination that life is maintained, growth is secured, and release is made.

The disciples on the day of Pentecost were emancipated men and a mark of their emancipation was the coming alive of the Scriptures by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But it did not end there. See Stephen’s discourse. See Peter in the Cornelius episode. See Philip and the Ethiopian, and so on. This is no claim to special or extra revelation to add to the Scriptures, but it is a declaration that “the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His word”.

In this matter hear what a highly respected and accepted servant of the Lord has to say:

“The inward kernel of truth has the same configuration as the outward shell. The mind can grasp the shell but only the Spirit of God can lay hold of the internal essence. Our great error has been that we have trusted to the shell and have believed we were sound in the faith because we were able to explain the external shape of truth as found in the letter of the Word. From this mortal error Fundamentalism is slowly dy-

ing. We have forgotten that the essence of spiritual truth cannot come to the one who knows the external shell of truth unless there is first a miracle of the Spirit within the heart.” (A. W. Tozer in *The Divine Conquest*.)

Many a servant of God has had his entire life and ministry revolutionised and released — like the apostles — by the illumination of the Holy Spirit of the Word of God which had for long been in his hand and very familiar as to its language and substance. This is certainly one of the secrets of the power and effectiveness of life and preaching “As it was at the beginning”. The same Scriptures can be used by two distinctly different preachers or teachers with as distinctly different results. One with an opened heaven and anointing ministering by spiritual illumination in his own spirit, with the result that heavenly impact is registered and life imparted. The other with but a mental apprehension, studied and more or less clever, but spiritually unproductive, leaving the heart empty.

Thus far, in this particular connection, we have only stated facts. We cannot be too strong in this statement. There remain two things to be done. One is that the Lord’s people, especially His servants, should realise that the gift of the Holy Spirit (which is for *ALL* born-again believers) is definitely for illumination, or, as the apostle says — “A spirit of... revelation”; to uncover, to interpret, and to guide into “all the truth”. John makes a very definite point of this in speaking of “the anointing which ye have received”. He says that “the anointing teacheth you all things”. All believers should be living in the good of new eyes and new sight as an integral part of their new birth. This faculty of spiritual sight and apprehension should be increasing in strength and depth throughout the whole life. It is not an extra; it is the growth of a capacity given at new birth.

However, there may be a certain necessity, even a crisis, which results in the release of the Spirit, and the release of the disciple. It is to be recognised that the ministry of the apostles, so very largely to believers, had this spiritual illumination and understanding as its motive, which means that even true believers can be limited in this matter. Let us, however, believe in our birthright of spiritual illumination and have definite exercise about it before the Lord.

THE ISRAEL OF GOD

CHAPTER ONE

The Principle Of Travail

The seed plot of this series of meditations is found in a little fragment at the end of the letter to the Galatians:

“And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

We will put alongside of that some other passages.

“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:10,11).

“Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? shall a nation be brought forth at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children” (Isaiah 66:8).

“Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the residue of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel” (Micah 5:3).

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And... we ourselves groan... waiting for... adoption... the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:22,23).

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but when she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for the joy that a man is born into the world” (John 16:20,21).

“My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you...” (Galatians 4:19).

Now let us bring together particularly that phrase from Galatians 6:16: “The Israel of God”, and the fragments in Isaiah 53:10 and 11: “He shall see his seed”; “He shall see of the travail of his soul”. “His seed... the travail of his soul”.

We have before us a very full, deep and far-reaching matter: nothing less than that of the producing, securing, training, and using of a spiritual seed — a new spiritual Israel. We begin with a brief consideration of a principle, found in a word occurring in all but one of the above passages — the principle of travail.

Let us first of all remind ourselves that this is a law which God established after the fall. There is an established law of travail. You will recall what the Lord said, first to the woman, and then to the man, as recorded in Genesis 3:16–19. He there linked this law in two realms with production and reproduction: in one connection with children; in the other connection with the earth. And in these two connections of the law of travail we find three things.

Reproduction, and Hence Travail, the Justification of Life

First of all, the very justification of life is in reproduction, in multiplication, in a seed. Life is never intended to be an end in itself. Its only justification, according to God’s law and principle, is that it reproduces. And so the law of travail is linked with reproduction. That runs through the whole realm of grace, and through a large part of the realm of nature. But if there is no reproduction without travail, then the travail becomes the basis of the justification of existence. That is something much deeper than perhaps appears. One might put it like this, quite bluntly: If we are without travail, there is no justification for our existence. We shall come back to that later.

That was implicit in what God said to the woman. Then He turned to the man and spoke about the travail of his labour — of the ground bringing forth thorns and briars, that it would be by the sweat of his brow that the ground produced, and that this was the preservation and sustentation of life. This was the justification of life: the preservation and sustentation of life on the principle of travail.

And then, of course, in both cases the issue is a triumph. That is made perfectly clear in both connections. Paul puts his finger upon that, you remember, in his letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 2:13–15). Yes, travail, but triumph. God will see you through in spite of it. It is the triumph of life in both connections — the children and the earth; it issues as a testimony to something having been overcome, a victory over forces at work which would prevent or make it infinitely difficult. Travail, you see, is God’s law by which He is not defeated. That is where the test comes always for us: *HE* is not defeated. Out of the adversity, out of the difficulty, out of the suffering, something stands as a great testimony to triumph, to victory.

Travail Implies Something Costly

Now note the implication of this principle of travail — and there are many connections in which the law of travail operates: just go through the Bible and see the great number of connections where struggle and conflict and pain and anguish presages the emergence of some tremendous new thing of God. But note

the implication of such a law. What did God mean by it? I think simply this — and perhaps much more, but certainly this — that nothing was going to be easy and cheap. To put it another way: that God was really establishing the tremendous value of everything. He was saving man from regarding things as being of little concern or value, forcing him to recognise that this thing is costly because it is valuable. Surely this is the offset to the whole tendency of man's nature to get things easily and cheaply, not to pay a price for them, to escape suffering, to escape labour, to get it all without any cost. And God has written in the universe this law that anything that is of Him, whether in creation or in grace, has a price attached to it, is a costly thing; it is infinitely precious and valuable, and worth suffering for!

Note, it is intended to bring the soul in — “the travail of his *SOUL*”; “My *SOUL* is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” — to bring the soul into relation with things; and when we say that we mean love. What we get cheaply and easily we do not really love. But that which costs binds our hearts to it — it becomes a matter of the heart, of love. And so by travail the soul is saved from lightness, carelessness, frivolity, cheapness, and brought to recognise that there is something here that is infinitely precious. How far-reaching is that truth and that law! What a lot of ground it covers! God is not going to let the creation off in this matter. This is the explanation of so much. And nations and peoples that just give themselves up to frivolity, to cheapness, to escapism and all that sort of thing, are on the high road to a bad time in their history. It will not be too long before they pass through some fiery ordeal, in order to bring back the preciousness and the seriousness of things.

And if this is true in the realm of nature and the world, how much it explains in the realm of God's spiritual things! Oh, the infinite tragedy of trying to make the things of God cheap and easy — even salvation, and the Christian life! — appealing always to the pleasure side of men, trying to eliminate the cost. The Lord Jesus never did that. Salvation is something of infinite cost: everything to do with salvation is infinitely precious, and there is not one fragment of all that is of God which is not of surpassing and transcendent value. It is not just going to be had willy-nilly. “Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Yes, suffering is attached to anything of value, and that is particularly true of spiritual things.

At that very point, you and I need to have our minds “converted” — we need a tremendous change of mind. Unless you recognise that, unless that has become true for you, there are some things in the Bible you cannot understand. They sound flippant, garrulous; they sound as though they are just words, words, words... Listen: “Our light affliction, which is for the moment...” (2 Cor. 4:17). What are you talking about, Paul — “our light affliction”? Well, listen to his catalogue of sufferings! Listen to him as he tells us of all that he had to go through for the Gospel's sake, and read the much more that Luke tells us, that Paul never mentions personally. What that beloved servant of God went through for the Gospel's sake — ! And yet he talks like this: “Our light affliction which is but for a passing moment”. You cannot talk like that in the presence of suffering unless you have seen the infinite preciousness of that toward which God is working and bringing you. “Though now for a little while... ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, yet... ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory...” (1 Pet. 1:6,8). Now look at the context of that: fiery trials. You cannot get through, understand, endure the travail, unless you have some sense of the value of things.

All Divine Operations Effected Through Travail

a. Initiations

This law is carried through from nature to the purpose of God, to the divine purpose, and is seen in the Scriptures to be the principle or law of all divine realisations. If you look again, you will see that in all new beginnings, in all the initiations of God, this law is ever present. Everything of God emerges from some agony, from some convulsion, from some death struggle. Look at your Bible again. It is like that all the way through: without or within, some tremendous travail marks every new beginning of God. Can you put your finger upon any instance in the Bible where God began again and there was no association with the principle of travail? You will have difficulty. It is the law of birth, you see, and it relates to the spiritual world, the purpose of God, just as much as to any other realm.

b. Enlargements

And what is true of God's beginnings and initiations, is true of every enlargement. Whenever God sets Himself for increase, for enlargement, to get something more than that which He has already got, it seems that He plunges things anew into travail. Every springtime, for instance, is to see nature enlarged, growing beyond what it was before, and in its increase there is a new travail. Perhaps you will think me unduly fanciful, but you can almost hear the trees travailing at certain times as you walk in the woods. Probably if our ears were more attuned to that realm — and there are sounds, real sounds, to which our ears are not attuned — we should hear the groaning of the creation. Paul says this: “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth...” (Rom. 8:22). Why? It is pent up, it is held back, it is under arrest; it is groaning for its expansion, its enlargement, its liberation.

That is a law in spiritual things. Every fresh measure of Christ, every bit of spiritual increase, is fraught with a fresh baptism into His passion. We should recognise that, because so often we do not understand why it is that, when we ask for spiritual increase and enlargement, we immediately are plunged into

a bad time. The increase comes that way, does it not? Some of us have learnt that so well that, if we say these things to the Lord, it is so to speak with our tongue in our cheek! We are very, very careful what we say to the Lord. We have learned that the way of enlargement is at cost, through fresh travail, and we cannot get away from it. Yes, there are successive baptisms into the passion of Christ. The law of His universality is the law of His passion. "I came to cast fire upon the earth... But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:49,50). By the travail of His soul, the passion of His Cross, the straitening was removed, the fire was scattered, and the enlargement took place. But that is equally true of the church as of Himself. The church has never expanded and been released without some convulsion. That is a matter of history.

c. Consummation

Again, what is true of God's beginnings, and of God's continuations and enlargements, is true of His final consummation: that in the finality of things there will be one mighty convulsion. If you like to change the word — travail. I am not sure that the church has not entered upon that already. It is certainly coming, and it will be, at the end, the explanation. It is true to the Word. That ultimate, final, intrinsic thing of glory and preciousness, God is going to bring out of the fiery ordeal at the end. Yes, the travail of the church at the end will issue in the final emergence of the church in glory and in the consummation of the divine purpose. The Bible sees a great travail in the church and in the creation, out of which the Kingdom in fullness will finally come. "When these things begin to come to pass... lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). It means your escape, your release, your exodus, your *WAY OUT*.

Travail Has Universal Significance

Now this principle is, of course, comprehensively gathered up in Christ Himself and in His Cross. Christ's Cross — His passion — is central to the whole universe, and it is central in this particular respect: it is travail through which the universe is redeemed. Yes, the heavens and the earth. The Cross of the Lord Jesus affects the whole range of things in the earth and beyond the earth. His travail is of universal significance, of infinite reach. And in every experience of true spiritual travail there is something that is of far-reaching significance and account.

Here is this one little man, Paul, thought very little of, despised, by the world both in his own day and through centuries since. A certain writer — a great man in his own eyes — calls him "the insignificant little Jew", Paul of Tarsus. Well, that is the world's estimate of him. Here he is saying: "I fill up... that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). In other words: "I sip His cup, and, in so doing, I touch the whole Body of Christ." It is a tremendous statement, is it not? But was it true? Has history proved that it was true?

I would like to stop here with a parenthesis on the historical side of things. Fifty years ago, the whole realm of biblical scholarship, as it is called, "finished" Paul. They wrote him off; they decided that Paul's teaching was not Christ's, that it was in another realm altogether — it was not Christian. That was Paul finished, they thought! But somehow or another, he has had a mighty resurrection. The remarkable thing is that the whole realm of biblical scholarship is now anew giving Paul his place, seeing the immense significance of the man. It is a quite fascinating thing to follow the course of biblical interpretation, and to be able to see today the tremendous comeback that is taking place. Why it is, of course, we know, and they are all going to be made to know that this man, because he shared the sufferings of Christ, has a universal significance for the whole Body.

While that is interesting — and I could add so much more to it — the point is this. Here is the principle: that, if you and I really do share in the spiritual travail of Christ, we are lifted out of anything that is local and small and placed right in the universal. It is a value secured for the Body of Christ beyond anything merely earthly and parochial. That is the principle of His travail, which is placed at the centre of the universe; and to share that does mean such enlargement, such release. You see, we come back to that again: release, enlargement, expansion, fullness, reproduction — use what words you will. The law is always the law of travail.

Travail Reveals "Heart" Or "Hollow"

The Lord allows travail — indeed, He not only allows it, but appoints it — in order to find out whether really there is a heart-relationship to His things. A few months ago, I found a tree lying at the side of the road, not far from my house. The day before, it had been upright and growing, and looking like all the other trees. It had all the leaves of profession, all the proximity of association with other trees, and outwardly it could pass off as being the real thing. But a storm came, and now it was lying there; and when I looked at it I found that it had no heart: it was a completely hollow thing — there was only a framework. That is a parable. That is what is happening, and what is going to happen, and what God will cause to happen everywhere. The travail will come — the suffering, persecution, trials, whatever it may be; and, whatever may be its form, whether it be within or without, it is going to come in order to discover whether there is a heart there for God, or whether, after all, it is hollow, it is profession, it is simply association on the outside, and not real on the inside. God must expose what is not real, and God must test everything to prove it.

But what had happened to the other trees — those that stood near the fallen one? Well, they survived the storm, and they are still standing. But is that all? Not a bit of it! The next storm that comes will probably find that it has got a little harder work to do than last time to move these. Those roots have felt the strain and they have reached down and taken a tighter hold. They have got a grip on things; they have realised that storms are realities, and that it is a matter of life and death as to whether they stand.

It is so easy, is it not, when things get difficult, to walk out, give up? How often we pray that the Lord will protect from difficulties and troubles! — but the Lord never answers prayers like that. These things come to us personally, and they come to us in our little companies — storms, shaking storms, things calculated to devastate and scatter, destroy and finish what is there — and the Lord does not protect. But what is He doing? On the one side He is finding out whether there is a heart for Him, and whether there is reality in every member, or whether it is only outward show and hollow inside. On the other hand, He is seeking to bring out the expression of preciousness: that this thing is too precious to let go easily; it means far too much for us to abandon at the first onset of adversity and trial. That is the meaning of it, and it explains very much, does it not?

The Two “Israels”

Now this comprehends God’s whole conception of a spiritual Israel. Why have we taken that fragment — “the Israel of God”? You know, Paul was almost invidious when he used that phrase. If you look at the letter to the Galatians, you will see that he is dealing with two Israels, and in that phrase he is saying that there is a true Israel and a false. I think Phillips, in his *“Letters to Young Churches”*, has put in a word which, while it is not in the text, is what is generally believed to give the meaning of Paul. His rendering is: “To the *TRUE* Israel of God”. That is exactly what Paul meant. There is another Israel, which Paul says is not the true one. But there are those who “walk by this rule”, this measure, this standard. What standard is this? If you look at the letter you will see. “My little children, of whom I am again in travail till Christ be formed in you...” (4:19). “As many as walk by this measure... the true Israel of God.” The measure of Christ is made complete by travail. The true Israel of God is the “seed” which is “of the travail of his soul”.

We see, then, that, whether we like it or not, this is an established law. We can, of course, do many things in order to avoid or get rid of the travail, but God’s law means that there is something of preciousness that comes out when it is suffered for, when you suffer for it. May we never get to the place where we try to make the Christian life cheap and easy — a perpetual holiday. While there is the joy — and it should be there; while there should be the deep worship, thanksgiving and praise to God: surely the truest reality even of the joy is that it comes from deep experience through suffering. It is not the superficial, flippant, frivolous kind of Christian who really knows the Lord most. No: “We rejoice”, said Paul, “in our tribulations” (Rom. 5:3). There is something precious for the Lord bound up with suffering, and you and I have to face that.

A few months ago I received, as out from China, a message given by brother Watchman Nee just before he was put in prison about four years ago. The subject of that message was — the necessity for the breaking of the vessel in order to reveal the preciousness of the treasure within. It is true. Now he is experiencing it. But: “He shall see his seed... He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied”.

CHAPTER TWO

A Spiritual Seed

“When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed... he shall see of the travail of his soul” (Isaiah 53:10,11).

“They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are Abraham’s seed, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed” (Romans 9:6–8).

“Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16).

“And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

For our present consideration many other fragments of the same kind could be added, but these are sufficient, surely, to impress us. Of course, they will not impress *US* in the same way as they did those to whom they were first written. We are not able, without some very real illumination by the Holy Spirit, to recognise and appreciate the tremendous implications, the profound meaning of these statements of Paul. No, we have not yet fathomed all that Paul had come to see of what Christ meant, of what came in with Christ, of what happened when Christ came in, of what turned upon the advent of Christ. May the Spirit of God register something of those tremendous implications, even now.

It was this revelation which came to Paul, and his apprehension of the significance of Christ, that was the cause of all the trouble. If ever there was a man who got into trouble; around whom trouble circled and seethed, wherever he went — who seemed to make trouble, it was this man Paul. But when you ask what the cause of it all is, it is just this with which we are now occupied. It is a matter which in principle will always set up a furor; and as to its significance it comes from the realm of greater intelligence than the human.

Now Paul did, of course, recognise that there was such a thing as a nation of Jews, a Jewish nation. That sounds far too trite and obvious. With a wave of the hand, and mark you, a significant wave of the hand, a kind of objective wave, he said, “Behold Israel after the flesh”. Whilst that is something to take account of, it is, nevertheless, objective — “Behold Israel, after the flesh”. He recognised that that nation stood in a special relationship to the sovereign ways of God in history. Indeed, he was proud and very glad that he had been born in that nation. He had a deep heart-love for his nation, and he longed, as he said, that they might be saved: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God is for them, that they might be saved” (Rom. 10:1). Notice how objective is his attitude; he is not saying: “that *WE* might be saved”. Note that, because it is a feature of this whole matter.

But, with all, with all his recognition, all his pleasure, and his longing and praying in that direction, he had come to see that they were not by nature “the Israel of God”. That is the root of all the trouble. I underline the words *BY NATURE*; they were not by nature *THE* Israel of God, which, of course, they claimed to be. It is true that Israel was something, but the *TRUE* Israel, the true Israel to which he referred in that fragment “the Israel of God” or the true “Israel of God” — was not a natural thing at all, and it is not. It is spiritual. It is not a Jewish, historic, earthly thing; it is not Abraham’s *NATURAL* generation. This is what Paul is saying, and it is only what his Master, the Lord Jesus, had said. This Israel is Christ’s generation; this “seed” is Christ, and those who are Christ’s, begotten, born out of His travail. Christ’s seed is essentially spiritual. No one was ever born of Him naturally. And yet, through those many centuries, the world has become occupied by His seed, which He is seeing, as of the travail of His soul. This seed is not begotten of Abraham, but begotten of God; it is not descended from Abraham through Jacob, the man with every feature of that which is natural (“supplanter” his name means, that is, “one who takes hold”, whose nature it is to be possessive — a very clear mark of the natural man) not through ambitious, scheming, cunning, clever, opportunist, unscrupulous and self-strong Jacob. This seed does not come through Jacob, but through Israel. What a great deal that means spiritually; that, having encountered God, and being virtually dead, through the grace of God he has survived. He said “I have seen God face to face, and my life is spared” — the most wonderful thing has happened; I have seen God face to face, and my *LIFE* is spared! To come into an encounter with God, as did Jacob, means death: yes, and virtually that is what it was: and typically, Israel must be born, or there is no future — there is no future at all — *Isra-EL!* Surely this all leads us to the true “seed of Christ”, the true “Israel of God”.

The Significance Of Abraham

We begin therefore with the true significance of Abraham. Abraham represents a terminal point in the history of the Old Testament, and then, from him, an unbroken course of national existence proceeded up to Christ. Through Abraham a race was reborn and marked out in special relationship to God’s eternal desire. There is much that is technical, interesting and instructive in that study, but we leave it. You know that the first name, designation, of that nation or race, was “Hebrew” which means “that which has come from beyond”; “the man from over there, beyond the river”, meaning, beyond the Euphrates, simply, “the man from beyond”. The Hebrew race then, is that which has migrated over, come from beyond. Later, they became known as the “Jews”; that is quite a limited title, and just means the “descendants of Judah”. In the beginning it just had that limited meaning of “descendants from Judah”, in their country of Judea, but it became more general. Later still they became known as Israel — the descendants of Jacob *AFTER* his crisis at Peniel.

Knowing all this, Paul nevertheless says that this was not the true Israel. He, like all the others, at one time believed that it was; but he had come to see that it was not the *TRUE* Israel, that the true Israel is *INWARD*, and not natural or outward. And that opens up a large field of very important consideration, which we will deal with later.

Israel — A Great Object Lesson

As the tabernacle in the wilderness, and later the temple in the land, with all its components, was the embodiment of spiritual and heavenly principles and realities; as the priesthood, the sacrifices, the feasts were likewise the embodiment of spiritual realities, and not the realities themselves — so it was with Israel. These are the things which make up the nation, they make up the life of the nation; they *ARE* Israel. The point is this — it was possible, and is possible, to separate between the things themselves and those spiritual thoughts and principles. So that it is possible to have a tabernacle, replete with priesthood, sacrifices, and feasts, and yet not have the spiritual reality. It is possible to separate these things, because they are not one. Even God has no place for those symbols when they have lost their spiritual power and meaning. He will vehemently reject the *THINGS* — ark, tabernacle, and everything else — without compunction.

Paul carries this right through to Israel. He says: “Israel after the flesh” is one thing, “Israel after the Spirit” is *ANOTHER*; these things can be divided, and God has set aside “Israel after the flesh”. Put it another way — what God is after, what He is concerned with, what He is going on with, is that which was represented by them, the reality.

The cry of all the prophets is that this divide has taken place. Israel is going on with the temple, going on with the services, going on with the sacrifices, but it is all hollow. There is a tremendous difference between the seed of Abraham after the flesh and the seed of Christ. What is the seed of Christ? It is something essentially, intensely, spiritually *REAL*! It is not something that bears a name; it is not something which holds certain doctrines and truths — the Law, or what corresponds to that in Christianity. It is not something that performs certain rites, and goes through certain ceremonies. It is not something along that external line at all — be it intellectual, emotional, volitional, or physical — it is something inwardly real. It is “Christ *IN* you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). This is what God is after. And if Israel was raised up for a purpose, it was to set forth these realities in a pictorial, symbolic way. God’s object is not a Jewish nation as such, but a heavenly people, constituted on spiritual realities. Israel is for all time a great object lesson which God has set in the midst of the nations to indicate spiritual principles. They will remain that object lesson to the end. God, in preserving, keeping that nation, does so, not because of that nation itself, but to maintain an object lesson in the midst of the nations, especially to Christianity.

Unmistakable Features

Let us look at Israel after the flesh. There are some features which cannot be mistaken! Many years ago, I knew an outstanding and well-known Christian Jew, who had travelled all over the world. He said to me on one occasion: “It does not matter what nation I go into, and how much they have become apparently absorbed in the nation where they are living, I can always tell a Jew; he may have fair hair or dark hair; there may be differences arising from their living in different countries for generations, but there is something that I can always recognise, and I never make a mistake.” What does God say about that? He says to us, as being of the seed of Christ, that this true Israel should be at least as pronounced in its features, in its distinctiveness, as they are! There should be no mistaking a child of God. Everybody should know when they have met a child of God. By means of that, God says to us that this seed, which is the true Israel of God, born of the travail of Christ, is to bear the unmistakable character of Christ. All who meet that seed know they have met, not father Abraham, but another Father — they have met God in Christ.

This is very searching; but it is the true exegesis, the true interpretation of this word — “his seed”, “he shall see his seed”: every one betraying His features, bearing His characteristics, being recognised; not because they bear a name — whether that be Israel or Christian; not because they observe the law and the customs; not because they hold the oracles and the truths; not because they do or do not certain things — but because they bear the likeness of Him of whom they are born. That is what God says — unmistakable features! “By this shall *ALL* men know... if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

The Law Of Separation

Another thing about “Israel after the flesh”, which goes very much along with that, is that law which God laid down for them, so firmly and so severely, and upon the observance or violation of which their very national existence hung — the law of separation. Abraham is in Ur of the Chaldees, in Babylon, with all the Baalite worship, the two thousand deities, on the other side, over there. God calls him “Abraham the Hebrew”; he has come across, passed over, come out, been severed from his country, and then brought into another land which God is going to purge of every other seed. That is His intention, to purge that land of every other seed, and to populate it and fill it only with this seed; and then to lay down, in the strictest possible way, the law forbidding intermarriage with any other people or nation on pain of unqualified rejection. There were, of course, deep reasons for that. There was the spiritual reason of “other gods”, and the opening of the door to that other spiritual realm. That is what is meant by “iniquity” in the Old Testament, what the prophets spoke of as “fornication” — the marring of “the virgin daughter of Zion”. But here it is: no intermarriage whereby there will be loss of distinctiveness of life and character. It is the severest law of God. Because of the violation of that law God had all His long-drawn-out controversy with Israel through the prophets, and, at last, sent the nation where they chose to be — into another land — and let them feel something of what that means. The bringing back of that remnant is so full of significance, when you recognise that it is reconstitution on this very principle.

Indeed God has written this large — and “the things that were written aforetime were written for our learning”. He is saying by Israel: On the positive and on the negative side My seed is different; My seed is distinct; My seed must have no intermarriage, it must not lose its distinctiveness, it must be a separate thing. The seed of Christ is like that — spiritually separate. It seems that right from the beginning, in the case of Adam and Eve, and from then onward, the one determined intention of Satan has been to destroy that distinctiveness of what is of God. All Israel’s history is just that; and he did not stay there, he pressed it through to the very case of Jesus Himself. That is the focal point of the temptations of Jesus, in some way to insinuate something that would destroy His separateness from everything that was not of God. Satan’s efforts to destroy distinctiveness, so successful in the case of Israel, so unsuccessful when concentrated upon Jesus Himself, have been continued throughout the history of the church. God’s spiritual law

is written so deeply here for us. This seed is something not of the flesh, not of this world; something different, something quite other; a divine seed that does not belong here, has not originated here, has not its roots here. “If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is... for ye *DIED*” (Col. 3:1,3). Now Paul saw quite well that Israel after the flesh had become something very other than that, very mixed up and compromised here in this world.

The Cohesion Of Israel

Another thing about Israel which is quite apparent even now, and has been all the way through history, is their cohesion. There is no doubt about it. If you deal with these people, you meet “clannishness” (if you like to call it that), something very loyal to itself — *VERY* loyal to itself. They are a people bound together in blood and in consciousness and in jealousy, about whom there is a unity, a cohesion and an integration which is unique. Though scattered over the earth, and seemingly broken up, they are one people. What a lesson! What an object lesson!

Turning to the New Testament we find that this seed, having one origin, one source, one life-principle, is one. That is the meaning of John 17, is it not? The secret of oneness, of unity, is not in doctrine, in practice, in tradition or in names — God only knows how true that is! It is something deeper than that — it is in *BIRTH*, and what that means, inheritance in the blood. How pathetically tragic that there is not this jealousy, this loyalty, among those who claim to be of this seed! What a breakdown! We ought to be very jealous for every child of God; we ought to be loyal to one another, because we are of the same family. There ought to be something here that is stronger than all the outside forces. That has proved true in “Israel after the flesh”, for the most violent action of outside forces has only brought out their inward cohesion. Their unity is manifested and even strengthened by opposition and antagonism and persecution — what a lesson!

Discrimination As To Food

Then there is this whole question of food — a very acute question with Israel after the flesh. The Law required them to be very particular, very careful, very discriminating — but all that is written only as an object lesson. It says something of which the children of God, the true Israel of God, must take note. Have we a spiritual faculty which corresponds to their natural one in selectiveness of food? *DISCERNING* — this is exactly what John was talking about in his letter, when he said: “The anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you” (1 John 2:27) — “you know... you know...” — this is a spiritual instinct or faculty of knowing what is of Christ and what is not of Christ. How important it is to keep the seed pure through spiritual discernment!

Israel’s Governing Hope

There is one further undying feature with “Israel after the flesh”. It has persisted all down the ages, and is as strong today as ever it was — their hope! Why is it that those who are able still go to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem? These people are characterised by this deep-set, deep-rooted hope! Hope! Something; sometime; someone; one day — they live for that; it is that which has carried them through, supported them, sustained them, kept them — their hope! If ever that should fade in Israel, they will disintegrate indeed, and they will fall a prey to their enemies. It is this that holds together, and this that gives the power to stand up and go on. With us, it is a spiritual thing, something that is part of our birth. The true spiritual seed of Christ is dominated, mastered, by what the apostle calls, “the blessed hope”, “the day of the Lord”, “the promise of his coming” — a master-hope. Is it not true to spiritual experience, that when we are really born again, a sense of prospect, of a future, is born in our hearts, and it remains a strong thing throughout. This is not something taken on as teaching, not even the teaching of the “Second Coming”, the coming again of the Lord, but there is something beyond the teaching, the Spirit Himself has given birth to a hope within us. We are living for a Day, and that Day is our strength; it holds us on our way. How true that is, and how rich it is in the suffering people of God in all times, and in our own.

The Turning Point Of The Dispensations

In the light of what we have been saying hitherto, I want to turn you to the Gospel by John, and in particular to the third chapter.

In spite of many years of familiarity with and much reading of that chapter, I feel there is still much in it that I have not yet grasped. All that we have said, and more; all that is indicated and signified in the whole of the Old Testament and of the New Testament is implicit in this third chapter of John’s Gospel. It is a chapter upon the meaning of which two mighty dispensations turn. The tremendous change which has been indicated, which Paul came to see by revelation — this tremendous change from “Israel after the flesh” to “Israel after the Spirit” — centres in that chapter.

This Gospel by John has been more of a bone of contention, controversy and conflict, than any of the other Gospels. The popular trend amongst Bible “scholars” now is to rank Mark’s gospel first and highest. Mark is the key to everything; Mark is the sum of everything; they are making a tremendous amount of Mark! We are not saying they are wrong. After all, there is not much difficulty about Mark, is there? Matthew and Luke — well, they do not present much trouble, they provoke very little dispute or conflict — but John! Some of them have written him off altogether, ruled him right out, they will not have him. Is that

not significant? When you are dealing with the Gospels of Mark and Matthew and Luke, you are dealing mainly with the historic Jesus, the earthly Christ, what they call the Jesus of history. When you come to John's Gospel, you come into the absolutely spiritual realm — it is the heavenly Christ that is here — not born of Adam or Abraham, but — from eternity. Look at the word “heavenly” on his lips in this Gospel. Everything here is in the spiritual realm. John, as you know, calls all the miracles “signs” — things that have another meaning, that signify something else, and we cannot see the other, the something else, unless God opens our eyes; it is spiritual and is set in the spiritual realm. That is what Satan hates, that is the cause of all the trouble. Men who only operate in the realm of human intellect and reason, even in their approach to the Scriptures, cannot come into this realm at all without a sense of uneasiness, for it exposes unspirituality. When we come into the realm of the spiritual seed — or to put that another way — when we come into the realm where God is after, not an earthly, a traditional, a historical, but a spiritual people, we come into the realm of the intensest conflict and controversy. Notice how this very Gospel proceeds in an atmosphere of antagonism — it is like that. There comes a time when, because of that, Jesus has to withdraw with His disciples in order to have them alone, to prepare them for a day that is coming. This controversy, this conflict, is constantly surrounding them.

The Securing Of “True Israel” — Tthe Realm Of Intensest Conflict

Now that is very significant in the larger application. The securing of a spiritual, a heavenly, a divine seed, in Satan's domain, is fraught with the bitterest conflict, an opposition, the intensity of which can only be explained on this ground. The more the children of God are found going on with Christ in a spiritual way towards God's full end, the more diverse and inexplicable conflict will they meet, and that from every realm. It just happens! If we really get off the traditional, historical basis of life, even in Christianity, on to those higher levels of what is spiritual or what is of Christ, essentially and utterly of Christ, we shall come into the realm of the bitterest conflict.

That is why this all leads back to the matter of travail which was before us in the previous chapter. We find in the New Testament that the travail was not all over when the child was born. It was not all over typically and symbolically when Israel was secured out of Egypt — it went on. When Moses came back and met Hobab, his father-in-law, it says they greeted one another, and asked of one another's health, and that “Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done... for Israel's sake, all the travail... by the way” (Ex. 18:8). After Egypt! So the birth is not the end. Paul says: “I am again in travail until Christ be [fully] formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). The church was born out of the travail of Christ, but what a travail she has been in again and again, and will be to the end. It all comes back there — the securing and perfecting of this spiritual seed is fraught with conflict. Whether we see the implications of what is signified by that statement or not, we need to think about it — it will explain a great deal. There is the difference of two worlds between spiritual Christianity and traditional Christianity, just as much as there is between “Israel after the flesh” and “Israel after the Spirit” — a tremendous difference. It is going to be seen eventually that the obtaining of the perfected seed of Christ was a very, very costly thing.

May the Lord just write something of this on our hearts, and show us very, very clearly what it is He is really after, that His heart is set upon a people for Himself — a people according to Christ, a heavenly people, a spiritual people, whose life is not comprised of outward things at all, but whose life is the corporate expression of God's Son; those who bear His unmistakable features. Oh that it might be possible for people to say: There is no mistaking that one — no mistaking what he is, what she is — he is a “Jew”, she is a “Jew”, in the spiritual Israel — he, she, is a member of Christ!

CHAPTER THREE

The Foundation Of Faith

“When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed... he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:10,11).

“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are Abraham's seed, are they all children... That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed” (Romans 9:6–8).

“Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7).

In our further consideration of this matter of “his seed”, “the travail of his soul”; in our seeking of a fresh apprehension of that upon which the heart of the Lord is set — a divine and spiritual seed, born out of His travail — we will turn to another fragment of Scripture: “Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham.”

There is one supreme characteristic of this divine seed, and that is faith. Whether we like it or not, Christianity rests upon one word and that word is *FAITH*. The beginning, the continuation, and the consummation of the Christian life rests upon that one thing — faith. It relates to salvation, initially; it re-

lates to and governs the whole course of progress, spiritually; it relates to service; it relates to prayer; it relates to the perfecting of the believer; it relates to final victory. There is no phase, no aspect, no stage of the Christian life which is not bound up with this issue. It is, from beginning to end, at all times, in all things, just a matter of faith, and it is just here that we find the weakest point in human nature. There is no doubt about it, sooner or later, we discover that this is our weakest point. There was a time when I used to look at certain people who seemed to have natural faith, with whom it seemed not to be a difficult thing at all to believe in God; it seemed quite natural to them to believe in God, they seemed to have no difficulty about it. Here was I, born with an unbelieving heart and an infidel mind, and they seemed to have none of those difficulties. But I have lived a few years, and I have watched those people, and I have seen them come to a time and a place where the most difficult thing in all the world for them was to believe God. Sooner or later we discover that this is our weakest point.

Faith And God's Good Pleasure

But, on the other hand, this is the strongest point in the divine nature. This matter of faith, then, is basic to our union with God. This strength of faith in the divine nature, and weakness as to faith in our nature, cannot exist and obtain together in a true union; they are contradictions, they are quite against one another. And the issue is: it is either God or ourselves. Union with God always rests upon this matter of faith. The same is true of communion, the continuation of union and living in the good of it, the expression of union — communion. It is all a matter of faith. It is a matter of God's pleasure in us, and that is an important matter: "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him." Now that goes very deep. It is possible for God to bless us and to use us as instruments, but at the same time not to take pleasure in us; we are just being used by the Lord, and yet we know that the Lord is not taking pleasure in using us: He is doing it all in sheer grace and mercy. You may not be able to understand that, but it is true. Somewhere, even in the servant, there may be a reservation about the Lord, which holds up the Lord's good pleasure in His servant. There is something more than having blessing from the Lord; something even more than being used by the Lord — the Lord having delight in us. And, mark you, the point at which the delight factor comes in is just this matter of faith. It does not say "without faith it is impossible to get any blessings from the Lord, it is impossible to do any work for the Lord", but it does say, "without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing to the Lord."

Faith And The Divine Virtues

And then what a great number of other things depend upon and rest upon this foundation of faith. I only mention them and leave you to think them out. Love rests upon faith. Think about that. It depends upon faith, does it not? Joy rests upon faith. We know how miserable we are, if we have lost our faith, or if we have got any doubts or questions. It is only when faith is clear and bright that we are really happy. You see, joy hangs upon faith. And does not peace hang upon it? If you like, change the word for rest, that is the biblical way of putting it — rest. Peace just rests upon faith. There is no rest or peace unless there is faith. Then again, meekness. What is the opposite of meekness? Well, it is a trying to force things, to assert ourselves; doing out from ourselves, trying to hold our own ground, vindicate ourselves. Faith undercuts all that, does it not? We need not worry at all about anything; we can be perfectly restful about issues if we have faith. Patience — well, it is so obvious, is it not? Patience rests upon faith. Those two things are put together in the Word of God. And so are all the other things — hope and longsuffering and kindness — all the divine virtues rest upon the foundation of faith. And if the faith is not there, these other things are either wanting or they are weak. It is a tremendous matter, this matter of faith. If you look in the Bible you will see that all the tragedies and the calamities there resulted from a lack of faith. The first great tragedy and calamity of what is called the Fall came about simply because faith failed, was not there. Israel's tragedy in the wilderness? — it was the same reason. Israel's going into exile and captivity? — the same reason. And perhaps worst of all, it is the cause of Israel's present setting aside. There are personal instances, such as Abraham's lapse resulting in Ishmael, and the bringing in of a perpetual open sore in the history of God's interests in this world. There are many more, but we pass on: the tragedies and calamities, whether personal, national, or collective, can all be traced to this one cause: a breakdown somewhere in this matter of faith.

Faith And The Character of God

Now faith is always faith. That may sound like a platitude, but faith will always be objective; it will always focus upon the very character of God. That is faith's focal point — the very character of God. And remember that any weakness or absence of faith — I am speaking of course about spiritual faith — is an impugning of the character of God. That is where our Bible begins: "Hath God said...?" Man's initial and all-inclusive breakdown began with an impugning of the character of God, a calling into question of the character of God, a throwing of doubt upon the character of God. And so it has always been, because, you see, the focal point of faith is nothing less or other than the very character of God. Whether we will believe that God is what He says He is — that is the ultimate matter in relation to faith. But it is always *FAITH*. We are always wanting faith to be something other than faith, trying to substitute something else, either sight, or experience, or what we get, what God does for us. But God always keeps things in the realm where, after all, it is faith. He never moves out of that realm.

“True Israel” — The Seed Of Faith

Look at the tremendous implications of this one fragment of Paul’s statements on this matter of faith in Galatians 3:7: “They which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham” — are Abraham’s seed. He has said that not all they that be of Abraham are children — are the seed: “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). This is the true seed, the seed which is of and by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The Covenant

For a moment or two let us look at this further implication of Abraham’s seed with whom the covenant was made. We are referring now not to “Israel after the flesh”, but to the spiritual counterpart which, as we see in the Scriptures, is that which is born out of the travail of Christ, the fruit of His Cross, the reproduction and multiplication of Himself as *THE* corn of wheat, the fruit of His having fallen into the ground and died. This is the seed. All the covenant promises made to Abraham are fulfilled and realised in Christ and His seed. We inherit all that. Of course, we are familiar with this as truth, but it all comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ, because we are the true seed promised to Abraham. Let us, then, look briefly at Abraham as God’s great example of faith. God carried through the whole system of His purpose from eternity to eternity — in creation, in redemption and in established fulfilment — through the soul of one man. Yes, Abraham rightly has a large place. It is as though God, in prospect, forced through the very soul of that man the whole plan of His divine purpose and redemption, and it was all on the principle of faith, by a long succession of demands for faith. It is here written for our instruction.

2. The Land

First, there is the promise of a land. “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto the land that I will shew thee.” Then He promised him that land — “I will give thee” was His promise and His covenant. Abraham left his country and, subsequently, his father’s house, and came into the land. All his lifetime he went up and down in it, dwelling in tents, and never obtained a foothold. That is true, if we view things in strict accordance with the covenant and promise. We can read the story in a few minutes, but the record covers many years.

There was plenty of scope for question and doubt through the years with all the demand for patience. The difficulties, the trials, and the adversities of many years, provided plenty of evidence for saying, “I have made a mistake, a fundamental mistake, I had an idea: evidently I was wrong. Something happened and I have come out on a wrong line altogether. Nothing that I imagined I was told is being supported” — there is plenty of room for all that sort of thing. We could enlarge upon it, but I do not think we could exaggerate what Abraham had to encounter in his own soul on that one question of the land.

3. The seed

But that is not all, he was promised a seed — “In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” — “thy seed”, “thy seed”, again and again that word is spoken by God in covenant to Abraham. He was promised a seed — and, not a child, not one! On natural grounds, there was little or no prospect of anything like that. His own situation utterly contradicted God’s promises concerning this seed. There is plenty of room there, is there not, to have a controversy with the Lord and to have all sorts of tangles in the soul? What a mess one could get into with a situation like that! And it was not just for a day, or a week, or a month, or even a year, that Abraham had to cope with this problem.

And further, God came and repeated this, reiterated this, and focused down this matter of faith upon the child Isaac. He promised him this child when all natural hope had receded, and went away and left him with the promise for a few more years! It was just something said to him, and there was nothing to support or bear it out in actuality. God went away and left him! If the hope had receded far back to the horizon before the promise was actually crystallised, surely it has gone beyond the horizon now. God had said it would come to pass and is leaving him with *THAT* situation! And then, the child is given. Yes, the son is born. We know the great test of faith that came in with that period between the promise and the realisation. Even Abraham broke down and failed. We know about Ishmael, but we leave that. In spite of everything, the child is born, there is the infant, and with what wonder they must have looked at that child. There is the little child growing up in their home, and how they must have cherished him in the light of all that God had bound up with his life. He grows up to youth, no doubt an object of great love, care, devotion, watchfulness and expectation. And then the blow fell: “Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest” — God seems to be rubbing salt into the wound, does He not? “Thine *ONLY* son”, he had no other, “whom thou lovest... and offer him”. Well, we need not press this further. Abraham went on, came to his very old age, and died — not having received the promise. “These all died in faith,” says the writer to the Hebrews, “not having received the promises.” No, he had not inherited the land, he had not seen the seed in any commensurate way, but he died in faith — that is the point. Through it all faith survived.

Now we must break off there. “They which be of faith” are Abraham’s seed, *THIS* seed, these children, this people, this true Israel of God is on that basis, on that principle, and after that kind. Let us make no mistake about it. I started by saying, “whether we like it or not”, and we do not like it. It is the hardest, the most difficult thing, but there it is — the matter of believing God, not because of what He can do or will do, but because of what He *IS*. That goes a long way, and very deep down; it tries us on everything — God’s

postponements, God's delays, God's seeming contradictions and paradoxes, a thousand and one things. The end is, after all, what are we going to do about it? *IS* God? And is God *WHAT HE SAYS HE IS OR NOT*? Our interpretation, our argument, our position, our mind about things — does it really set God aside? Does it? Or is our attitude that of faith? — *GOD KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING*.

We could carry that into the realm of spiritual life. You know, in our spiritual lives, in our spiritual growth and the perfecting of us in the likeness of Christ, there are many things that we think the Lord ought to have removed long ago, and He has not removed them — even matters of our character. If we could, we would have God make us absolutely sinless this very moment, and He does not! He is dealing with us on the matter of faith, even over spiritual transformation. And how many other things would we have God do for His own glory, and He does not do them; for the facilitation of His own interests and work, and He does not do them. Well, either God is, or He is not; either He is faithful or He is not; either He is consistent or He is not. You see, after all, we are brought back to this question of faith. “They which be of faith” are Abraham's seed. What is Abraham's seed? — Christ and those born out of His travail. And what travail there is related to the fruit of faith! Now there is no real fruit that is not the fruit of travail, and travail is always a matter of faith.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Great Invitation

We turn now to Luke 14, to what is called the story of the Great Supper and the Great Invitation. It might be thought that this story has very little relationship to what we have been considering. But I want to correct that idea immediately and to say that it is an integral part of this very matter of the kind of people that God has set His heart upon, who are to be the fruit of Christ's travail.

There are two applications of this story. There is what we may call the dispensational interpretation, and there is the wider interpretation and application in relation to the Kingdom of God.

A Time Of Transition

The dispensational interpretation finds this story closely related to what was happening at the time that the Lord Jesus spoke these words. It was in the time of the great transition from Israel to the church, from Judaism to Christianity. The utterances of the Lord Jesus in these chapters, including the so well-known fifteenth chapter of Luke, containing the parables of the lost things — the lost coin, the lost sheep and the prodigal son — these utterances were all of a piece, and were probably gathered into the last week of our Lord's ministry.

If you go back to the Gospel by Matthew and take it up at say chapter 21 and move right on, you will recognise that these are undoubtedly the closing days. What is being said here has to do with His going and the great crisis which was immediately in view — the crisis of the Cross. In chapter 21 He has made that statement to the Jews, to Israel as a nation after the flesh: “Therefore the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”, and then straight into chapter 22, and to a story about a king who made a marriage supper for his son, very similar to this one in Luke 14. The same kind of invitations went out.

Now this story in Luke is all of a piece with that: it circles round the great crisis. Israel is about to be set aside, rejected; the Kingdom of Heaven is about to be taken away from them, and to be given to a nation which would bring forth the fruits of that Kingdom — the nation to which Peter later referred when he spoke of believers in Christ as a “holy nation”. It would be not another nation on this earth, but God's own people out of the nations of this world, the people for His Name. So you see, this story in its historic setting relates to that great crisis, that great transition, that changeover: the rejection of one people and the putting in their place of another. We have to read the story in the light of that, for here we have the death-knell of Israel after the flesh.

Who Shall Enter The Kingdom?

And, as I said, it is in keeping, in the main, with what we are considering at the present — a people, a kind of people, secured by God through the travail of His Son in the Cross. I think that is the outstanding thing in this story and in these stories: the kind of people that will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. There is a much larger application and interpretation than the immediate, for it applies to the whole meaning of the Kingdom of God. And that is a matter of supreme, of superlative importance — who will be in the Kingdom of Heaven? Here we have the Gospel of the Kingdom, there is no doubt about it.

There are certain very clearly defined features to this story of the Great Supper and the Great Invitation. Firstly, we find here God in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, and speaking as by His mouth, for what He says is what came from God. God is here taking up a common, social custom, a feast, and bringing it into use in relation to the Gospel of the Kingdom. We notice, of course, that Jesus was, at the time when He gave this story, at a feast. If you look at the earlier part of the chapter, you will see that He went to a feast that was made by a prominent Pharisee, evidently a wealthy man, in a good position, because certain very important people — in their own eyes at any rate — came in and took the top places. Jesus noted all

that and had something to say about it. But the point is: it was a feast and Jesus went to it, and it says that they watched Him. Now there is a great deal of detail that we leave untouched, but we note that Jesus took hold of this and enlarged it in relation to the Kingdom of God. That is, He took up this common social custom of a feast and used it for Gospel purposes, to interpret the Gospel, to interpret the Kingdom of Heaven, to interpret the whole matter of who would and who would not get in at the feast.

The Significance Of Acceptance

Appreciation — appetite — fellowship

There are certain things about this feast which, although not exactly stated, are quite evidently implied. We might note three of them. A certain man made a feast and sent out his servant with invitations. The implication is that that man would be respected and honoured. He would not have done it if he had thought that he was in disfavour and that no one would accept his invitation. He was assuming that they would respect him and his invitation, and be quite glad to go to his feast and to be with him in his house. Now that is quite simple, but you will see what it means as we go on. It is the assumption that the invitation would be welcomed and that he would be in good standing with them, and they would give him respect and honour and respond suitably to the invitation and would go to his feast. The second thing that is assumed is that the invited people would have an appetite for a feast. A feast might not interest some people very much: they would turn down any invitation purely on the ground that they have no appetite for such things, or there is something wrong with their digestion; they just could not face it all. But it is assumed here that the people who were invited would have an appetite for the feast, for the provision. That is very simple. And then, of course, the third thing that is assumed is that they would be quite happy to meet other people in this house and have good intercourse and fellowship, have a good time together. These are things which are part of any feast of this kind. We are glad to go and meet the host, glad to go and meet the other people, and we are glad to have what is provided. That is the atmosphere; these are the elements of this very thing. Dismiss any of them, and you dismiss the whole point of a feast: the feast breaks down at once.

The Forbearing Grace Of God

Jesus is not speaking casually. He knows; He has a very deep and comprehensive knowledge, indeed: He knows God's mind. Now note this: God foreknew the refusal that would come to His invitation: the foreknowledge of God, His omniscience made Him to know that this would be the reaction — they would not accept, they would not come. And Jesus knew that, otherwise He would not have said all these things, especially perhaps that consummate thing: "Therefore... the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." He knew what the issue would be, God knew what the reaction would be, but God did not act upon His foreknowledge in this matter — He sent out the invitation. In that is one of the great gospel principles. God, who foreknows all about men and their reactions to His invitation and His great provision, does not begin from that point and say, "I know they won't accept, and I know it will be to their doom: therefore I will never invite them; I will doom them right away in My foreknowledge." "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world..." Whatever God may know about men's refusal, He leaves the door wide open; He always takes the positive line in grace, never the negative line in judgment. That is one of the great things about the gospel. Though He knows, nevertheless, God comes right out in infinite grace and opens the door wide and makes His appeal and says, "Come, for all things are now ready." You see, God keeps back that foreknowledge of His while He tries in grace to make a way. It is a tremendous thing that, the grace of God holding back the judgement of God until the thing is settled by man himself. He knows the truth, and yet He does not, in the first instance, act according to His knowledge of men's reactions: He acts in grace to give them an opportunity to respond.

But note that there is something else involved in this. God removes all ground upon which man's doom could be laid to His charge. In the end it will never be possible for any doomed man or woman to say: "You never gave me a chance; You never gave me an opportunity; the door was never opened to me; the way was never provided." No, God removes all that ground. You see, in His grace and His mercy He takes all the ground of the possibility of His own condemnation away and puts the whole issue upon man. If anybody misses all that God has provided and calls them unto, it will be their own fault entirely. God is seeing to that. He puts it back on us.

Condition Indicated By The Choice

As we read a story like this, it looks on the face of things as though — and now put God into the place of the man who makes the feast and sends out the invitations — it looks as though He assumes that those invited will respect Him, honour Him, and give Him credit for being worthy of their acceptance. It looks as though God assumes that. Of course, He knows, but nevertheless He proceeds upon this basis, and in His procedure He is appealing to man to give some expression to and some proof of his respect for God; and if man does not respond to God's appeal and invitation, it means that man has no respect for God: he has not given God His place, he has put Him out, he thinks He is not worth considering. The implications are tremendous, are they not?

Further, it means that man has no appetite for the things of God. We have only to imagine these people, when they received the invitation, saying, "Well, now, I don't care about his feast, I don't think I want

to go, I have not much of an appetite for that.” Ah, yes, but look: that very desire or absence of desire for the things of God is the deciding factor — the Kingdom or not the Kingdom. Jesus had elsewhere said, “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.” There is something bound up with this appetite or the lack of it. The same applies to this matter of the people of God. It is very discriminating. To refuse means, not only that I have no interest in God and His things, but that I do not want to have any association with His people. All this, you see, is forcing a choice.

God The Only Joy Of His People

Now, if we turn that round, it is surely not difficult to see what kind of people will inherit the Kingdom, what kind of a seed this will be that He shall see as of the travail of His soul. A people, in the first place, who, above all other things, desire God: and then, who desire God’s things, to feed upon them: and then, who desire God’s people. It is a remarkable thing, is it not, how that takes place and becomes the very constitution, the make-up and nature of children of the Kingdom of Heaven. One thing that is pre-eminent with them is their love for God, their desire for God; that He is their joy — not only their chiefest joy, but really their only joy. It is a wonderful thing that happens in us. Something happens, something takes place so that we come to the state where we just cannot live without God. If there should be an hour in our life when any shadow comes between us and God, that is the darkest hour, the most wretched time. He has spoilt us for all but Himself, He has made Himself indispensable to us, we cannot get on without Him. It is not only a matter of being able to, having a desire to — we just long to be in His presence. Our hearts cry with the Psalmist: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” It is like that; something happens inside.

The Oneness Of The Children Of The Kingdom

That is a test as to whether we are children of the Kingdom or not, and a test as to whether we are going to inherit the Kingdom. It would be a poor lookout for anybody who had not that disposition to have to live in the presence of God for all eternity; it would be a very miserable thing. But it will not happen, of course. And what is true in that connection is true in these other two things. Something happens to us so that *OUR* company, *OUR* people — may I use the word? — *OUR* set, is the people of God. We have to move in this world, and we have to live with others, but we are not happy with them; there is no deep, basic, fundamental oneness between us: we belong to two different worlds. But with the people of God it is different: we are at home, we are in the family. It is something that happens to us, it is not something that we decide upon: that we are going to be Christians and mix with Christians, and have meetings. It is simply this: we long for the fellowship of God’s people, and if we are deprived of it, we are deprived of our very life. I think that those who have very much of it are sometimes in danger of losing the sense of its value, but if you were to ask some of those Christians who have to live in isolation, with little or no Christian fellowship, you would soon discover that something has happened in them. They long for this fellowship. These are the children of the Kingdom!

And as for the feast, the things of God spread for His children! Is not the coming together of the Lord’s people, in some places in such large companies, an evidence, not only of the Lord’s desire to provide, to spread a feast, but also of a deep hunger? There is something constitutional about this; there is an appetite. These are the children of the Kingdom. You see, God is working on that principle; discriminating, selecting, in order to give the Kingdom.

Now, we must go back to the story, to the other, disappointing, aspect. God in His grace, putting back in His foreknowledge the doom which He knows will most certainly come upon many who will react unfavourably to His invitation, putting that back and saying nothing about it for the moment, goes out in grace, inviting, inviting, inviting, in spite of His knowledge of them. It is a question of who will respond. So we see here what is really shown to be the case with many. They are totally indifferent to all these things: to Him, to His feast, and to His people; they are totally indifferent. They are not touched by the invitation, it makes no appeal to them; there is no sense that they are either under obligation or in peril of losing something of vital importance. And that is their judgement: that is their condemnation: that is their doom.

The Wilfulness Of Human Choice

Let us look at this setting as to Israel, as to the Jewish nation. You remember how the Lord Jesus put this to them in another way. Weeping over Jerusalem, He said: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” ... “because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Luke 13:34,35; 19:44). Now note two things: “ye would not”, “thou knewest not”. But that was something in themselves. It was not that they *COULD* not, but that they *WOULD* not. It was not that they could not know, it was because they would not know. They did not want to know. And they had decided that they were not going to know.

God knows the heart, and it is not merely that we are like that. Somewhere, somehow we have taken an attitude: we have taken the attitude, “I am not interested in that, I don’t want that; that is not for me, I am not going that way.” “Thou wouldest not... thou knewest not...”, when you might have known. That is always the ground of judgement.

Let us then look at these people. Whether they were actual people, whether it was a real story from life or what is called a parable, does not matter. The Lord Jesus knew what He was saying. They were not only indifferent, but would, when it came to the test, reject the invitation. And this is where we are found out, you know. When it really comes to it and someone says, “Look here, the Lord wants you, the Lord calls you, the Lord has sent His Word to invite you to come”, then we are found out; then the real attitude is disclosed. “And they all with one consent began to make excuse.”

EXCUSES. I don’t really know how far the Lord Jesus had a sense of irony or of humour. He presents one as saying, “I have bought a piece of land and I must go and see it.” Now may I be quite blunt here: that is a thing that not one of you would do. If you did you would be a fool! Who would buy a piece of land without first of all having seen it! That is very lame; oh, no, that won’t pass, that is not good enough. But you see, when we are really run to earth it is found out that we have no solid basis. We are just evading, we are trying to get round, we are looking for a backdoor way out. It is an excuse, it is not a reason. Another man said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen and I must go and prove them.” Well, what would practical farmers say to that! Is that the way of going about business, buying before having seen? You see how empty it is. The third man said he had married a wife, and therefore he could not come, but the Lord Jesus said that that was an excuse all the same. How was it an excuse? Something in the realm of natural affections was accounted of greater value than the Kingdom of God. And that is a poor excuse at best.

The point is, if we face the matter squarely, there is no really solid ground for this kind of reaction. It is a “don’t want”, it is a failure to recognise the infinite seriousness and value of this Kingdom of God, this gospel of the grace of God. It discloses a state of heart and mind and will which in itself is the ground of rejection. “Therefore... the Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” And what are the fruits? Hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Thirsting for the living God, a sense of real business, not this prevarication and excuse. These are the conditions of inheriting the Kingdom.

And, of course, these conditions are capable of very far-reaching, widely-extending application. They touch so many things, they are principles. But it is not just the immediate connection, it is that which is betrayed, the attitude of heart.

“Well”, says the Lord, “none of those shall come to my feast, none of those shall enter or inherit the Kingdom. Go out”, He says to His servant, “into the streets and the lanes of the city, and call the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame”; and the servant comes back and says, “It is done, I have brought them in and yet there is room.” “Out again into the highways and hedges, compel them to come in, the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame, the vagabonds, the wayfarers.” Jesus said to the Jewish leaders: “The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom before you.” On this principle we see who they are that will inherit the Kingdom, and not only get into it initially, but who will come into all the fullness that the Lord has provided. And what a vast fullness it is! We could profitably dwell upon this feast and what there is in it. Paul speaks much about it himself: “Blessed... with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). How much there is in this inheritance, this Kingdom!

The Contrast — A Consciousness Of Need

And who is it that enters in? Those who know their own poverty. These people did not know that: they were independent; they did not need the provision that had been made; they felt they could get on quite well without it. They had no sense of their own poverty. They were in the grip of pride, not poverty. The maimed — those who had suffered in life, whom life had treated cruelly, who on the way had met with hurt, damage; who were marred and marked. The blind who longed to see; from whom a whole world was shut out — if only their eyes could see. The lame — poor people who found it very difficult and very hard going, who were limited in their capacity and were knowing it. And what shall we say about the vagabonds and wayfarers from the highways and the hedges? You see, they are all people who, in some way or another, had a consciousness of need, and that is the great contrasting factor here. You will go a long way if that is your consciousness. You will go a long way in the things of God, if you really have heart hunger, if yours is really a heart set upon the Lord and His things and His church.

Now this is a challenge, a solemn challenge to us all — both to Christians and to those who are not the Lord’s alike. He calls; He has made a great provision; He is dealing with us in infinite grace and not in judgement. He has placed everything open to us and said: “Come, for all things are now ready.” Oh, we Christians know that little phrase “all things”, do we not? Go to Paul’s letters again and collect up all the occurrences of that phrase, “all things...”, “all things...” “All things in Christ”, that is the great theme, is it not? And what a vast “all things” that comes to be when we look into it. All things! “Come, for all things are now ready.” It is a challenge to those who have not come at all. But it is a challenge to us who have come. There is a range and a depth of those “all things” that you and I have never yet fathomed. It is all so much a matter of where our heart is — whether we really mean business, or whether we can be put off, be like these people and make excuses. It is a challenge.

And it is a test of capacity for appreciating the things of God. May I say this as the last word: Blessed be God, when we get there, we shall no longer be poor and maimed and blind and vagabonds. There is a wonderful healing that goes on as soon as we get into the Kingdom: all these things clear up. Now you see, Jesus had taught the Kingdom of God in action. He was teaching the Kingdom of God in action as much as in

word. His life and His work were a demonstration of the meaning of the Kingdom. He healed the maimed and the lame, He opened the eyes of the blind, He called the poor and the needy, publicans, sinners and harlots, and cleansed them. He demonstrated in action the Kingdom of God. And that is what happens. When we come, we find that in that Kingdom there is a tree, and the leaves of that tree are for the healing of the nations. He is the tree, and there is a healing that takes place. And when we are in, thank God, humbly we are able to say, "Yes, my eyes have been opened, my faltering steps have been strengthened, my wounds have been healed, my wanderings in the highways and byways have ceased, my vagabond life has been redeemed." That is what happens, that is the Gospel of the Kingdom. Are you going to make excuses to avoid all that? It is not worth it, is it? It is nonsense. They are mere empty excuses. May God give us to see the tremendous divide made by the invitation.

God's offer can be missed, it can be lost, it can be put beyond reach. Do not forget, there stands in this world the greatest object-lesson that ever God has given to men of this very thing. You remember the place that the Jewish nation once had with God in blessing and prospering, yes, in favour. What a place they had! And then God called them into the Kingdom of His Son, and they began to make excuses; they showed that they were not interested in that. Look at them! For these two thousand years, vagabonds on the earth, without a kingdom and a home, wounded, blinded — Paul says, "Blindness hath happened to Israel" — they are all in these conditions. They are in rejection, and what suffering, and what they have lost! They have lost the Kingdom of Heaven. That is the most terrible demonstration and object-lesson of what it means to lose the Kingdom of Heaven. But mark you, that is only an illustration in the temporal realm. Our peril is of it being in the eternal realm. One does not like speaking like that, but there it is. Here is a tremendous issue.

Well, there was one of their own number who responded and came. His testimony afterward was: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." And that man went a long, long way. That was none other than the apostle Paul himself. The Lord incline our hearts to respond. He says: "Come, for all things are now ready." May our heart say, "I am coming, Lord, and I am coming now."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Great Transition

"When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed... He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:10,11).

"But it is not as though the word of God hath come to nought. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are Abraham's seed, are they all children" (Romans 9:6,7).

"Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Galatians 3:16).

As we come to this further stage in the matter of the divine seed, this fruit of Christ's travail, this new spiritual Israel, I want to make one or two preliminary remarks of a general nature.

God's Dealings Have One Basis

In the first place, it is necessary that we should be quite clear that, in the Bible, there are not two distinct things, as represented by the two Testaments, the Old and the New, or even more, if the Old Testament is subdivided into eras. There may be two, or more, methods of expression, but throughout the Bible, from its beginning to its close, there is only one thing expressed. Our habit of handling the Bible by dispensations, and emphasising the different characteristics of different times, may have had the effect of making us mechanically minded, just as can a preoccupation with typology and symbolism. I want therefore to underline this anew: that, in these several and varied forms of expression, God is actuated, from beginning to end, by one thought, and one thought alone: **that everything throughout, at all times, shall express and be subservient to His Son.**

HE governs everything, in the realities of His Person and of His redemptive and perfecting work. It is one Person and one Work, from the first book of the Bible to the last. The change from the Old Testament to the New is simply and only the change from the indirect to the direct; from the symbolic to that which is symbolised; from the temporal representation to the spiritual reality. That is all. It is not a change of purpose or object, not a change of basis or foundation; it represents no change of principle in any way.

Perhaps you feel you know all that; but there is very much more in it than any of us have yet realised. For example, all God's dealings with the patriarchs were, in principle, as much upon the basis of His Son as are His dealings with you and me. That was true also of Israel. Israel in the Old Testament was dealt with as much upon the basis of God's Son as we are in this dispensation. God has never, at any time, by any means, worked on any other ground than that of His Son. His creative activities were on the ground of His Son. "In Him, through Him, by Him, unto Him, were all things created" (Col. 1:16); and from then everything has proceeded on that basis, and will be consummated in Christ. By whatever means, in whatever

way God has worked, His ground has always been the same. And on into the ages to come, that ground will be unchanging. It is the ground of Christ. It is very important that we should remember this and be quite clear about it.

A Transition

I want now to return to the point where I broke off in an earlier message in this series (see Chapter 2), when we had begun to refer to the Gospel by John, especially chapter 3. I was saying that we think we know something about John 3. Is it not the great chapter of: “Ye must be born again...”, and of: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son...”? Do we not know it? Have we not heard it a hundred times, a thousand times? And yet, and yet... what do we know about it?

Now this part of the narrative, marked by chapters 3 and 4, embraces all that could be said about this matter of the transition from the indirect to the direct; the transition from God’s old method to His new method. It brings right into view the nature and principles of the heavenly seed, and much more. Let us look, then, at John chapter 3.

The chapter opens with these words: “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews... Jesus... said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel...?” (John 3:1,10). “A man of the Pharisees”, “of the Jews”, “the teacher of Israel”. Here you have in a person, an individual, the full embodiment, the full development, of Israel after the flesh: a Pharisee. I must push back the temptation to dwell upon details, for half an hour could easily be spent on the history of the Pharisees, and that to great profit. Let us simply note that the sect of the Pharisees represented the very essence, the intrinsic meaning, of “Israel after the flesh” (1 Cor. 10:18). They gathered into themselves all that Israel claimed to be or was supposed to be. If you met a Pharisee, you would meet the last word in Israelism and Judaism. This man Nicodemus was said to be “a ruler of the Jews”, and then “the teacher of Israel”. Note the form of the latter phrase, for the definite article is literally there in the text. Jesus did not say, “Art thou A teacher of Israel?”; He said: “Art thou *THE* teacher...?” This man evidently stood out; he was perhaps recognised above all others as the foremost teacher of that time in Israel.

I indicate these things in order to point out that here we have Israel present after the flesh in a very full way — *par excellence*. He is of the natural seed of Abraham, a full-grown son of Abraham after the flesh. Three things are main factors here: he was born after the flesh as a son of Abraham; he was circumcised in the flesh as the seal of the covenant made with Abraham; and his all-absorbing and consuming interest, as a true Israelite, was with the kingdom that was covenanted to Abraham’s seed. All the natural seed of Abraham, with all its marks and features, is gathered into this chapter. It is not just Nicodemus — the nation of Israel is present. With this man, there are present in representation all the children of Abraham, “according to the flesh”, from the time of the patriarch himself right on to this very hour. He is really a most significant figure. Much more could, of course, be said about him. But that is where the matter is introduced.

Now the Lord Jesus, with a wave of the hand, repudiates the whole thing. He is not listening to it, not opening the door to it, not giving it a moment’s consideration or attention. “Verily, verily, I say unto you: You must be born again.” “Really to be the seed of Abraham, you must be born from above” — for the phrase can bear that meaning also. The true seed of Abraham, to whom are the covenant and the promises and the prospect and the kingdom, is that which is born from above; not this at all.

Two Great Contrasts

a. Two Births

The Lord Jesus makes here, either by direct statement or by clear implication, some fundamental contrasts. Firstly, a contrast between two births: “that which is born of the flesh”; “that which is born of the Spirit”: that which is born of the earth and that which is born out from heaven. These belong to two kingdoms, two worlds, two regimes, and there is nothing in common between them. The door of the Spirit is closed to the “flesh”, and the Lord Jesus is not discussing this matter at all. He is simply saying that the Kingdom of God is so different, so other, it belongs to such a different realm, that there is no getting into it except by way of an utterly new beginning out from heaven. And the rest of the New Testament is built upon that fundamental truth. All Paul’s ministry is built upon that. I said earlier that that was the cause of all the trouble where Paul was concerned. It was a most drastic, devastating thing to confront Israel with a statement like that — “You are not Israel after all! You have not begun to see the real meaning of the Israel of God!” “Except a man be born anew, he cannot see...”

“Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Here is not only the natural birth contrasted with the spiritual birth: here is a fundamental difference between, on the one hand, the Red Sea and the pillar of cloud and fire, as symbolic representations, and the spiritual reality on the other. “Born of water” — yes, symbolically in the Red Sea. “Born of the Spirit” — yes, symbolically in the cloud. They “were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:2). “But, Nicodemus, you know all about that, or you think you do. I tell you, you have not begun to see the meaning of it. There is a difference between the symbolic and the spiritual, the typical and the real. Being born of water and of the Spirit has a far, far, deeper meaning than you have ever seen, or can see, Nicodemus.”

b. Two Kingdoms

The second contrast related to the Kingdom. Of course Nicodemus had not mentioned the word. But let me remind you of the last words of the preceding chapter. “But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24,25). “Now there was a man...”, and Jesus knew him and what was in him, “...a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus.” Jesus knew that this man’s one interest in life — no doubt an honest, sincere interest, indeed a passionate interest — was the Kingdom. That was, of course, the great hope of Israel. And the Lord Jesus, knowing the man’s absorption in that kingdom interest, made it perfectly clear that the kingdom about which Nicodemus was thinking was one thing, but that the Kingdom itself was quite another. The Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, is quite another thing from the kingdom of Israel on the earth.

What is the conclusion that we are to draw from all this? Just this: that the historic was not the real — it did not conform to what the Lord meant by the “truth”. We find the same thing in His conversation with the woman of Samaria, in chapter 4, where the Lord Jesus brought in a clear contrast. “The hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father.” Here is coming a change, a transition, a passing over. “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21,23). With that statement, the Lord rules out a whole order and system, and brings in something altogether different. All that which was historic was not the real thing: to use His word, it was not the “true”. “This mountain... Jerusalem...” — yes, but it is not the true. This birth after Abraham — yes, but it is not the true. This hope of the Kingdom — yes, but it is not the true! This is very searching.

The Principle Of Death And Resurrection

The fact is that everything had to be put on to the ground of Christ, and that could only be, and can only be at any time, through death and resurrection — in other words, new birth. “In Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen. 21:12). That is a symbolic statement. Why? Because Isaac is the embodiment, in type, of the principle of death and resurrection. Everything had to be put on to the basis of Christ in death and resurrection, and that was no less true in the Old Testament than in the New.

In connection with this, I was recently reading again the fascinating story of Joseph: the famine in the land, the coming of his brethren, and the subsequent removing of the whole family — Jacob and all his sons — seventy souls — from the land into Egypt. The whole story of Joseph is, I think, one of those things that holds you to the end once you start reading it. It is just full of overmastering interest. But I found myself brought up short with a question. The Lord had brought Abraham into the land and given it to him and to his seed, by covenant, as an everlasting possession. Then what is this? The whole seed, every soul of them, is vacating the land, leaving the land of covenant, and moving into Egypt! Now, we know that the Lord had told Abraham that his seed would be in a foreign land in bondage for four hundred years, and would be ill-treated, and so on (Gen. 15:13). The Lord said that it would be so, and here it is. But leave aside for the moment the fulfilment of the prophecy. Here is a strange thing: the whole family, to the last soul, is uprooted and evacuated from the very place of covenant and into *EGYPT*. What is the meaning of this?

I think I see the answer. Look at the seed of Abraham in the land; just look at those sons of Jacob. What sort of people are these? Yes, they are the seed of Abraham after the flesh, the historic line — but look at them! The incident with Joseph alone is enough to betray what sort of people they are. And the whole story of those men, throughout, is not a very nice story, is it? Their behaviour, their disposition, is a poor showing up of the seed of Abraham. Do you think that God is going to allow that kind of person to follow through to His end? Not at all! He will bring them into Egypt and put them first of all upon the basis of the travail of Christ — the cross — and then, when they are there, let the principle of the cross deal with the self-life, the flesh, until they groan. But then, out of that travail, see the mighty energies of God bringing that seed out from Egypt.

The principle, you see, is this same great principle — that of travail unto a new birth through death and resurrection. God is putting them off the ground of nature onto the ground of Christ, and that can only be in death and resurrection. Unless they go through this ordeal, this terrible ordeal, they cannot inherit, they cannot come through to possess the land. God is true to His principles: God is true to His Son. God is not play-acting; He is not just making meaningless history. God is writing, in very purposeful history, the eternal laws of His Son in Person and redemption.

The Principle Of Circumcision

Here I must put in a rather long parenthesis on the matter of circumcision, a matter fraught with the greatest significance. Let me turn you to a few passages.

“And he gave him” (that is, Abraham) “*the covenant of circumcision*” (Acts 7:8).

“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28, 29).

“Is this blessing then pronounced upon the circumcision, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say, To Abraham his faith was reckoned for righteousness. How then was it reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision: and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be in uncircumcision” (Romans 4:9–11).

You almost hold your breath as you read the next:

“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing” (1 Corinthians 7:19).

Imagine a Jew saying that! We shall come to that in a minute.

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6).

“For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15).

Finally, that tremendous statement and exposition in the letter to the Colossians:

“In whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:11,12).

The Importance Of Circumcision To The Jews

Let us remind ourselves of the immense importance attached to circumcision by the Jews. It is something that could hold us for quite a time, and it would be well if the full force of it could come home to us. It was the very sign of their national oneness, of their national existence, of their belonging to the people of God. Anybody without that sign was altogether outside the pale of promise and covenant and hope. It was the door, for them, into everything of value: everything for them rested upon that. No one, for instance, would ever be allowed to partake of the feast of the Passover who did not bear that sign.

We can realise a little of what they placed upon it when we come into the New Testament and consider some of the events after the day of Pentecost. On the one side, think for a moment what it meant for the apostles themselves — Peter, James, John, and the others — to have to deal with this matter and weaken their position regarding it. It was a real battle, for it meant uprooting something from their very being, something that was a part of them; and it was cropping up all the time. On the other side, there were the Judaizers — those men who pursued Paul over the face of the earth, tracking him down into every town and city, on this one issue. They followed him up and said to those to whom he had ministered: “Unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). That is a positive statement, and this was the cause of all the trouble.

There is very much, both in the Scriptures and outside of the Scriptures, that shows what a great thing this was. Even today, the celebration of this in a Jewish home is preceded by festivities and sacred rites. Yes, there is for them something about this ordinance that is big, tremendous. It was rooted deep in their very being as a most sacred thing, upon which everything of ultimate value hung. And here is this man who comes along and says, “Circumcision is nothing!” A Jew of the Jews, “of the stock of Israel”, “circumcised the eighth day” (Phil. 3:5), and he says it is nothing! What has Paul seen?

The Significance Of Circumcision

Well, of course, he has seen the spiritual significance; and when you see that, the other is nothing. In his letter to the Colossians (among other places), he lays down precisely and concisely what that significance is. Let us read the passage again.

“In whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:11,12).

Now there are two things here. First of all, we have God’s full thought about circumcision and about baptism, and the relationship between the two. And then, secondly, we see what is the real significance of baptism in the life of the child of God.

Circumcision, Like Baptism, Points To The Cross

The relationship between circumcision and baptism is here stated by Paul. In both these words — “ye were... circumcised”, “having been buried... in baptism” — we are brought right to the cross of the Lord Jesus. In principle and meaning they are combined as one, and they point to the cross. “Buried with him... raised with him”. The whole thing is put on the basis of Christ crucified and risen. Of course, we who are Christians know that to be the meaning of baptism. But what was the meaning of this other sign? Perhaps we may put it like this: that the cross is here brought in as — so to speak — the instrument of circumcision. It does that which must be done — it is the means of actually carrying it into effect — and it is drastic.

If Israel had only seen! If they had only seen, nothing would have been given away. They would not have had to lower their idea or lessen their estimate; they would not have made less of circumcision, if they had seen. For, after all, this *IS* a big thing, it is a great thing. After all, national existence does rest upon it:

but it is not this nation, it is the heavenly one. Entry into all the blessings of the covenant, the eternal covenant in His blood, rests upon the principle that is here. The whole Kingdom, as covenanted, is entered into and inherited by this door. Yes, it is a big thing. Nothing has been exaggerated as to its importance. If only they had seen Christ crucified and risen! It was only because they did not see the real meaning of this pre-eminent rite in their own life and history that they lost everything. They lost the Kingdom; they lost their place as a nation, in the purposes and counsels of God, for the time being at least; and all because they separated between a thing and its meaning. Now, in John 3 we see the Lord Jesus taking up the meaning of things for Nicodemus. By nature, of course, he is blind, like the rest. But Nicodemus is of the circumcision — that is the point. He is a Jew indeed; he is a representative, in a very full way, of Israel after the flesh. And the Lord Jesus makes it quite clear to him that — so far as acceptance with God is concerned — he, as such, is ruled out.

What is the meaning of all this? In the life of the true seed of Abraham — which is Christ's seed — what does it mean? It means simply this: that circumcision is, as Paul says, not a matter of the flesh, but of the heart (Rom. 2:28,29). It is a severance that has to take place right down in the inner man, deep down in the innermost being of the person; a radical, fundamental putting of two things apart. You will be able to follow through the implications of this more fully than it is possible for me to do here. There is an encircling of the blood which makes a separation, puts two things apart, and for ever after witnesses to the severance that has taken place, declaring that those two things are no longer together: God has put them asunder. And how much of the New Testament comes in when you say that! That is the spiritual meaning of baptism. You cannot say all this to everyone who is going to be baptised — they would be frightened and run away! — but God means all this. And God does not let us off. If we really mean business, He does not let us off any of His meaning, even though at the beginning we may not see it all — and thank God we do not! But even so, it might be well if we knew a little more than we often do.

The Flesh, Or Self-Principle

What is it that is severed in and by the cross of the Lord Jesus? From what do you and I accept severance, when we come to the cross of the Lord Jesus and, in the symbolic act of baptism, take our position with Him there? There are various terms for it in the New Testament. It is sometimes called “the flesh”. Paul uses it here: “the body of the flesh” (Col. 2:11). He is not talking about our physical body, our body of flesh. He is using that word “flesh”, as he often does, in a symbolic way. A definition that he gives to it in the Corinthian letter is “the natural man”. Perhaps we think: Well, “flesh” is a difficult word, but “natural man” is still more difficult — it seems more technical. What do these terms really mean?

They mean, purely and simply: the *SELF*-principle in man. That is at the root of everything. That is where all the trouble began with Adam; that is where all the trouble has gone on; and that is where the trouble is with you and me. It is a protean monster that has awoken, stretched itself, risen up and taken hold of the heart of man. It will assert itself, make itself known and felt, in every conceivable and inconceivable way. We shall never be able to conceive of the unnumbered, unsuspected ways in which this monster will show itself. It is no use trying to track it down. Every hour, every minute, every second, almost, of our life, in some form or other, this many-headed, many-membered thing — the self-principle — will assert itself.

a. In The Mind

It is found in the mind. It makes use of our intellect and our reason in order to overpower opposition and bring things our way, to argue and to substantiate our own position. And therefore, before you and I can ever get into the true realm of heavenly things, we have got to have a “circumcised” intellect, reason, mind. Is that not exactly what the Lord was saying to Nicodemus? Here is this teacher of Israel, coming to argue, to discuss, and the Lord says, “It is no use. You may have been circumcised in the flesh as a good Jew, but what you need is to have your intellect circumcised”. “Except a man be born anew, he cannot *SEE*...” “You have got it all in the mind, all as an intellectual apprehension. If I have spoken of earthly things, and you do not understand them, where will you be if I begin to talk to you about heavenly things? Out of your depth altogether! Devout son of Abraham though you may be, you need to experience a radical severance between your natural mind and the things of Heaven.”

That is the trouble with many people. It is their head that is in the way all the time — the one thing that is obstructing their progress is their own head! Their stubborn-mindedness, or their clever-mindedness; their intellectual superiority, or their argumentative disposition: you meet it all the time — there is no way through. If you try to take them on that line you are simply beating your own head against a wall. The Lord Jesus never attempted such an approach in trying to win souls. He simply said: “You must be born from above”.

b. In The Feelings

In other cases the circumcision needs to take place in the realm of the feelings, the emotions, the desires. That is the part of the being that gets in the way of so many people. They are controlled entirely by the feeling-life, the affection-life — they are in bondage to that part of their being; and they are very difficult people to handle. But a true child of Heaven, the seed of His travail, is one in whom there has taken place, in that very realm of the feelings and desires, a deep work of circumcision.

c. In The Will

And what is true of the intellect and the emotions is true in the realm of the will. With many people it is their will that is in the way. They have got a position, and they tenaciously hold to it and support it; they have got a grip, and they just cannot let go. They will support their position with Scripture, or even with a “revelation” superior to Scripture! Their will is the cause of all the trouble. The cause of the setting back of all God’s purposes in their lives is just there: in their choices, their decisions, their position, their way; in their natural self-strength, that has never been broken. And so it is just there that circumcision must take place.

It applies in so many other ways. The cross, as the instrument of spiritual circumcision, has to be applied to this self-life deeper and ever more deeply, because there seems to be no end to it. But that is the painful side, the dark side. What is happening on the other side? Is it not that room is being made for Christ? The real seed, the seed of Christ, is growing, becoming more and more manifest. The opposite of the characteristics which we have been considering — strength of intellect or emotion or will — is meekness. He said: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Pursue this right through, and you cannot fail to recognise that there was something radically different in the very depths of His being.

I have said that we cannot calculate the whole range of this self-principle, in its myriad forms of self-expression and self-occupation and self-attention and self-pity and self-consciousness and self-satisfaction. Even in our Christian life, in our devotion to the Lord, we are so happy that other people see how devoted we are, and how humble we are! And it is the self, the wretched — may I use the word? — the *stinking* self, coming up all the time. For a true child of God is oblivious of himself, has lost consciousness of himself in every way. If other people point out something good about them, they had not realised it, they were not aware of it. They are surprised that anyone could say anything good about them; they are not conscious of that. And on the other side, should people be critical and point out failings, well, they only say, “Yes, I know: I had that out with the Lord”, or “I have got that before the Lord right now. I am not deceiving myself about that.” This is the true child of Heaven.

So we could go on. That is the meaning of circumcision. In the light of that, the true meaning, the true principle, think of a Pharisee — a child of Abraham — saying: “I am better than anyone else”, or making long prayers for everybody to see and to hear! A child of *ABRAHAM*! You remember all that the Lord said about them. Oh, they have missed the point! Ah, but do not let us criticise and blame. It is a very searching thing for ourselves, is it not? Paul says that circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but a new creation. True circumcision is not of the flesh, but of the heart. The Lord give us circumcised hearts, and give us grace to have this severance pursued to finality.

CHAPTER SIX

Apprenticeship For The Kingdom Of God

“And he goeth up into the mountain, and calleth unto him whom he himself would: and they went unto him. And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:13,14).

The thought of “apprenticeship” is, of course, something included and implied in the words “disciple” and “discipleship”. “He appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth...” You will notice the very precise terms in which this statement was made. This choosing of the twelve was a quite deliberate, calculated, considered, far-reaching and significant act. At another time the Lord Jesus said: “I know whom I have chosen” (John 13:18). And again: “Did not I choose you the twelve?” (John 6:70). From Luke’s account (Luke 6:12,13) we know that His choice followed a night spent alone with His Father in prayer. Yes, it was a very deliberate act, prayed over and considered, with a very large background in His own mind; it was far from casual. These are not just independent comments upon it or statements about it; they are supported by, and are indeed the very teaching of, the Scriptures. We shall see that as we go on.

“And he chose... twelve” (Luke 6:13). What a dangerous thing for Him to do! But what a significant thing for Him to do! That number was a well-understood number in Israel. Were there not twelve Patriarchs? Were there not twelve tribes? Twelve is one of the great, dominant numbers of the Bible, particularly in relation to Israel. Now that is deliberately laid hold of by the Lord Jesus, and brought over as the very beginning of the movement into the new dispensation; and so we have the twelve apostles. And in many other ways that number comes into view, both in itself and in its multiples, in relation first of all to Israel. In the new Jerusalem, at the end of the Revelation (Rev. 21:10 — 22:5), we have twelve foundations to the walls. The city itself is 12,000 furlongs in each direction. It has twelve gates of twelve pearls. There are twelve angels. In the seventh chapter of the same book the number of the sealed is a multiple of twelve: 144,000 — twelve times twelve thousand. And so we could go on.

Are you beginning to see something more in this deliberate act of the Lord Jesus? I say, it was not casual. He knew what He was doing. When He did this, He was doing, in one sense, the most dangerous thing

that He could do. For of course all the nation of Israel, and especially their rulers, would jump to but one conclusion from this that He was doing. In their minds there would at once arise the thought: “Oh, he is setting up another Israel, is he? I see!” *AND SO HE WAS!* That is just the point. With Him, the Israel that has been is set aside and repudiated. With Him another is brought in. To the twelve He said: “You shall sit upon twelve thrones” (Matt. 19:28). Now this number, twelve, in Bible symbolism, as you probably know, is the number of government, of administration. Israel knew that, and so, of course, immediately grasped the implication of choosing twelve. “He is setting up a new government, a new administration!” Yes, He was! — but a very different one, as we shall see.

Twelve is the number of government. Consider its factors — three and four. Three is always the number of heavenly government, divine fullness of government, the very Godhead over all. Four is clearly the number of earthly government: earthly conditions are characterised by the number four. North, south, east and west comprehend the earth; spring, summer, autumn, winter comprehend the seasons; and so we could go on. Heavenly and earthly government are embodied in this number twelve. And that is very significant as to this act of the Lord Jesus. We recall that, when the covenant was made to Abraham, he was told that his seed should be as the sand on the seashore, as the stars of the heaven (Gen. 22:17). But now we call back the words of Paul: “To Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). Heavenly and earthly government meet in Christ.

The choice of twelve, then, brought into view, first of all the new Israel, and then the new government by that Israel of heaven and earth; and that new Israel is the church, as represented by the twelve. But this Israel, we repeat once more, is something very different from the old. It is a spiritual posterity, the fruit of His travail, the seed that He should see because of it (Isaiah 53:10,11). It is spiritual, as being a people who inherit, take over, the real spiritual meaning of that nation that was called “Israel” — “prince with God” (Gen. 32:28). There, inherent already in the very name, is the governmental element.

Now, of the “Israel after the flesh” many things were said, as to their pre-eminence, being the head of the nations, “the head, and not the tail” (Deut. 28:13), and so on. As we know, they failed in this. But God’s principles do not go when His instruments fail. When anything which God chooses, in order to express His principles, fails to do so, He does not abandon the principles. He may have to abandon the vessel or the instrument, but He will go on with His principles. And so it is in this case: the principle is taken over, and the fulfilment of this conception — a prince with God, the head and not the tail, the head of the nations — is found in the new Israel.

That, then, is the setting. Let us get closer to it. It has two major aspects: firstly, the essential nature of this Israel, and then the essential apprenticeship unto the Kingdom.

The Essential Nature Of The Israel Of God

We have said that this seed of Christ is spiritual in constitution. We spent some time on that, as seen in John 3, in our last meditation, but let us just touch on it again. In the Israel after the flesh, you have an actual people on this earth whom you can recognise. You can see that they are — physically and in other ways — a nation, a people. Now, however physical features may manifest themselves in us, the constitution of the new Israel is not a physical constitution, a constitution of physical features: it is essentially a spiritual constitution. That is, it has in the first place nothing to do with anything outward at all. It has to do with *CHARACTER*. This Israel is constituted on the basis of another character, and that character is Christ. Its very constitution is Christ.

A New Knowledge

It is a nature constituted, in the first place, with a faculty for *KNOWLEDGE* which is altogether outside of the reach and range of any other kind of person. Here again we come back to John 3. “Except a man be born anew, he cannot see... Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom...” This thing is beyond him in sight, in knowledge, in understanding, to say nothing of inheritance. This Israel is an Israel that has a seeing capacity which the old had not and no other has. It is constituted this way.

This is, mark you, not merely a statement of truth. This is something very searching for *US*, as to our being children of God, being the spiritual children of the travail of Christ. This is not something that is extra to the Christian life, or for those who advance to certain heights and degrees. Right from our new birth, you and I, every one of us, ought to have a faculty of spiritual understanding and perception and knowledge that is possessed by no other person outside this Kingdom! We could spend much time in pointing out the tragedies that have come into Christianity because of failure to recognise or live up to this. I would go so far as to say that the largest proportion of all the trouble between Christians is due to either a lack of, or a failure to live on, the basis of spiritual understanding, spiritual discernment, spiritual perception, spiritual knowledge. There is any amount of natural knowledge in the Christian world: Bible knowledge, prophetic knowledge, and what not. But spiritual knowledge is a rare commodity; and yet it is supposed to be a constituent of our new birth from above, a faculty that we ought to have.

Now, if you are thinking: “Then woe is me — I don’t know much about that!”, the Lord is simply saying to you: “Look here, this is yours by rights. It is not some extra thing to which you attain by struggle

and effort, or by years of laborious Christian living, or by some specific act, some terrific upheaval in your spiritual life. It is a *BIRTH* thing, it is a *BIRTH* right: you have a *RIGHT* to this!" But it may be that, after all, you *DO* know in this way, although you do not know that you know! You have a new sense, a new faculty, a new "something" in you, that causes you to know — in some measure at least — what is of the Lord and what is not, what is spiritual and what is not. But oh for the increase of that! It is the development of *THAT*, the increase of *THAT*, which is the apprenticeship in the school of Christ. We learn by mistakes, we learn by blunders, but the thing that we are learning is not something objective. We are learning inwardly that such and such is not the way of life and we should do well to avoid it; and that such and such *IS* the way of life, and that is the way for us to go. We learn it inwardly. It is a new kind of knowledge.

A New Power

This spiritual Israel is constituted also with a new kind of *POWER*. This particular kind of seed, or divine progeny, has a power, an ability, a strength, which is quite different. One of the things that we learn in this apprenticeship, in this school, if we are apt pupils, if we are really abandoned to know the Lord, is that the Lord will deliberately undercut and undermine our natural strength. He will bring us to positions where the very best natural strength of any kind cannot cope with the situation; where, if we are to go through, we shall require a strength that is not in us by nature at all, even though we might be the very best specimens of humanity. We come back to Nicodemus. "You just cannot", said the Lord to Nicodemus, "you just *CANNOT*. You may be as willing as anybody could be, you may be as anxious and as interested, but what stands over you is *CANNOT*." The great question, arising again and again from Nicodemus' lips, is: "How...?", "How...?" He cannot. But this seed has something of a strength which is different, quite different from all that. Peter speaks of it as: "the strength which God supplieth" (1 Pet. 4:11). It is an ability of another order.

And so we could go on with the constitution. But it will all amount to this — that it is of another generation. It is of the generation of Christ. There are here capacities and possibilities and resources which are from Heaven, which cannot be accounted for on earth at all.

In point of fact, the old Israel was put onto that basis, though in a symbolic or typical way. We pointed out in our last study that they were put onto the basis of Christ, and we saw just what it meant for them to be put onto that basis. When everything went wrong with them spiritually and morally, and they were unworthy of the name of Israel, they were just rooted up from the land. Those twelve sons of Jacob, behaving as they did — putting Joseph in the pit, deceiving their father, and even counselling murder, and then the exposure of them before their brother whom they did not recognise in Egypt — it is a sorry tale. What breakdown! What failure! And so Israel must be put on to the ground of Christ, through death and resurrection; they must come into the meaning of His travail, be born out of it. Then their life afterwards must be constituted on the same basis, the basis of Christ, so that, for those ensuing forty years in the wilderness, there is no accounting for their bread or their water, or for anything else, on any other ground than that of heaven. "It was not Moses that gave... the bread...; but my Father..." (John 6:32). It was heavenly. You see the point: they were constituted according to Christ, with resources that are not explicable on any other ground than that they are from heaven.

Thank God for that! It is the most wonderful thing to live on Christ — to live on heavenly ground! Perhaps you are thinking that this spiritual life must be a very difficult one. Well, for the flesh, of course it is! For the natural man, of course it is! To the self-life, it certainly is. But the spiritual life is a romance. What the Lord does — oh, it is just wonderful. How my heart went with a brother whom I recently heard speaking about ministry! Would not our flesh always like to have everything well worked out and mapped and planned in advance — have it all there, so that to give the word is really no trouble at all! But the Lord shuts us up and holds us up, and gets us into a perfect travail over a message, waiting so often until the very last minute — and then it comes! That is a personal testimony of over thirty years. It is something wonderful. This is no theoretical matter. It is marvellously real, and really marvellous.

That is the nature and constitution of this new Israel. This seed is a mystery, this Israel is a mystery; everything to do with it is a mystery. It cannot be understood by natural means at all. But do not take that the wrong way, interpreting it to mean that we have got to be very "mysterious" people! There are many people trying to be mysterious, under the mistaken idea that that is spirituality. But this mystery is the mystery of a *LIFE*.

The Mystery Of Spiritual Life

Of course, even life in the natural is a mystery. We cannot explain life; we do not know what life is. It is the greatest reality, and yet it is the thing which is most impossible of explanation. But in the real realm of the spiritual there is another life, and this life is an even greater mystery. It is a life that persists in spite of everything that can be set against it. The mystery about the church, about the people of God, is the mystery of this life — how it survives, how it goes on, how it increases. There is nothing in all this universe which is so assaulted, so set against, as this life of the people of God. All the dark, sinister forces of Satan seem to have but one ultimate object — namely, in some way to quench this life. All the experiences through which the Lord allows His people to go (and sometimes takes them), which, looked at naturally,

could be said to be death, are only allowed in order to bring out this wonderful reality — that there is a life which, when put to the test, subjected to every kind of trial, survives, overcomes.

The power, persistence, and progress of this life are a mystery. The more the children of Israel were oppressed, the more they grew. Carry that over into the spiritual Israel. It looks today very much as though the evil forces — hell and men — are reducing the church, by putting to death, or by driving out of triumphant faith, many of the Lord's people. Ah, but that is not the end of the story. These blind instruments of evil are fools — they cannot read history. If they could, they would see that what they are doing is the very thing that is going to accomplish what they are trying to frustrate. Oh, no — make no mistake about it: long centuries of terrible ordeal have proved this, that there is a persistence and an increase here that is a mystery; you cannot explain or account for it naturally at all.

That should be true of every child of God. So take hope, take heart, dear tried one. If you are feeling that your way is more death than life, that the ordeal is tending to be one of total reduction, remember that that is not the end of the story.

The Essential Apprenticeship For The Kingdom

I come now to this matter of the “essential apprenticeship”, as I am calling it, for the Kingdom of God. That is, the Lord Jesus chose twelve — and we have seen the significance of His act — “that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth”. Here are two halves of one thing, essential halves. “Be with him” — why? That He might teach, that He might instruct, that He might equip, *IN ORDER THAT* He might send forth. All going forth must issue from the closest association with Christ in His school. And all association with Christ in His school must issue in going forth! The Lord does not want people shut up in monasteries and cloisters, and places like that, always studying and learning, accumulating knowledge of things, even though they might be heavenly things. Every bit of God-imparted knowledge is to be for practical purposes. And no practical activity which does not come out of God-imparted knowledge will affect the Kingdom of God. So these are the two things.

Note that all Christ's teaching, instructing, training of the twelve came out of His own spiritual life. It did not come out of books; it did not come out of the schools. This was a thing that baffled the scholars of His day. “Whence... hath this man all these things?” (Matt. 13:56). “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” (John 7:15). He was not a man of the schools; He was not a man of the library, of the study. It all came out of His own spiritual life. He had a spiritual knowledge which was unique. It differed entirely from every other kind of knowledge.

The Fatherhood Of God

For one thing — and this was the basis of everything else — His knowledge of the Father was unique. Consider this statement: “No one knoweth who the Son is, save the Father; and who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him” (Luke 10:22). “No one knoweth who the Father is, save the Son”. That is a sweeping statement, a tremendous claim! But His unique knowledge of the Father sprang, not out of studying, not out of contemplating, but out of the inward spiritual oneness between the Father and Himself.

Now note this: the Fatherhood of God was not a *DOCTRINE*, preached by Jesus to the general public. You can confirm that from the record in the Gospels. It was a *MYSTERY*, disclosed to His disciples in private. The Fatherhood of God was no doctrine with Jesus, no theory: it was a reality in His own spiritual life and in His own spiritual being. To the twelve He made the Fatherhood of God real — not by argument, nor by much speaking, but because the Father was to Him the supreme reality in His life. All His training of the twelve came out of that; His teaching came out of that. And you note how much there was in His teaching of them and training of them which centred in the Father. How often did He refer to or address the Father! If you are not impressed, look it up again. This was the heart of everything in His training of these men. His teaching on prayer was all based upon that. “After this manner... pray ye: Our Father...” (Matt. 6:9). I repeat: this was not for the general public. It was something on the inside of the school; it was a mystery disclosed alone to those on the inside. But it was made real.

This new Israel has to be constituted on that basis. Just as the Lord Jesus trained the twelve on the basis of His union with the Father, so all our training will be through our union with Christ — a union as vital as was His with the Father: so that we, in union with the Son, may ourselves come into the mystery and wonder of the Fatherhood. It is a secret within this spiritual seed, within the Israel of God: the wonderful secret of the Fatherhood, not as a title, but as a great reality. How much we should be saved from if that became as real in our beings as it was in His! From beginning to end His reference is to the Father, His deference is to the Father; His appeal is always to the Father. The controlling reality in all His movements is the Father; everything for Him comes from the Father. The last words that He uttered were addressed to the Father: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). It was this that kept Him strong, it was this that kept Him right. It was the great motive force in His refusing everything that the Devil offered Him; it was His motive power in enduring suffering. The Father was everything to Him, in every way — “all in all”; a deep inward reality.

I suggest that we lack something vital in constitution if we lack an adequate sense of our spiritual union with God as our Father in Christ Jesus. When we get as near to Him as that, or get Him as near as that,

we begin to see something. Because, you see, the Lord Jesus sought to inculcate into the disciples, the new Israel, the meaning of this relationship between Himself, as Son, and the Father. It was something of practical account in their relationship with one another. For He was not constituting a kind of *clientele* or following, a new movement of people of common interests: He was constituting a family

That is made so clear by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews: “He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my *BRETHREN*... I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb. 2:11–13). In effect, and in definite statement, the Lord is saying: “Now, I want you to realise that you are all brethren, you are all of one family, because you are children of one Father in the deepest reality of your constitution. That is the basis on which you should regard one another and behave toward one another. You are to cherish and care for one another, even as I have loved you.” You see, this is the same thing: “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” — to the uttermost (John 13:1). That was only making practical in their corporate life the relationship between Himself and His Father, the Father and Himself. It was a training.

Discipline

Mark you, it was a discipline, too, a real discipline: for if ever there were twelve diverse kinds of people on this earth, it was these twelve. Yes, there was something there of every kind. Temperamentally, constitutionally, naturally, they would fly into fragments at any moment. There is nothing here naturally of cohesion, integration. But under His hand, in His school, something is going to happen. At any rate, if the symbolism of the book of the Revelation means anything at all, there is something fairly solid in its last chapters! For we read that “the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21: 14). Here they are making one solid basis for the everlasting Kingdom. Something has happened.

Now that is what the Lord is trying to do with us. If you feel that you cannot get on with another child of God, just ask Him to move them away, or move you away, and see what happens! You will find that you have got into the realm where the Lord takes no notice of your prayer — at least until something has happened in you. The Lord lets us go through all the “sand-papery” and difficulty of these contradictory dispositions and temperaments amongst His children. We think: “Oh, wouldn’t it be good if only He would take that very difficult person away!” But it seems that the Lord does nothing about it, on the outside. No, He is going to do something on the inside. He may eventually take them away, but not until that something inside has been done. That is a part of the apprenticeship to the Kingdom. How can we rule or reign together in the Kingdom, if we are all in a state of mutual contradiction and conflict? No, the Lord is not going to have a kingdom like that, nor a government like that.

So, their being “with Him” was for the purpose of deep practical instruction and teaching in all this meaning of the Fatherhood of God, that this deep secret and mystery might find its expression in a corporate life.

This matter of training covers a vast amount of ground, and many other aspects than the one that I have mentioned. Let me just point out this. While it is true that the Kingdom came on the day of Pentecost, the New Testament speaks of the Kingdom in three tenses — past, present and future: it has come, it is coming, and it has yet to come. It is with a view to that coming now and yet to come that you and I are being trained. We are in school now for the present coming of the Kingdom. It will not come, except through the discipline of those who are called into fellowship with Christ. And the final manifestation and appearing of the Kingdom is something for which a great preparation is going on, a preparation of us all. Whatever may be involved in this apprenticeship, this training, in relation to the Kingdom, in every one of its aspects, it is of the greatest importance that we recognise this. We are in school with a view to the Kingdom.

No Realisation Without The Cross

Whatever may have been the aspect of the training in the case of the disciples, notice how Jesus held everything to the cross. He leaves the multitude, He leaves the world, and takes these men apart with Himself: He speaks to them of deep things, wonderful things — and then He heads it all up to His going to Jerusalem, being delivered into the hands of the rulers and crucified. (See Matt. 16:21; 17:22,23; 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–34; Luke 18:31–33.) That was something they could not accept, they could not understand; that was the thing that stumbled them. But He held everything to that, as though He would say: “All this that I have been saying to you, all this that I have been holding up to view, all this for which I have chosen you, all this for which you have been in the school with Me, is based upon the cross. Not one bit of it can be realised apart from the cross. You can come into not a fragment of it, except by way of the cross. The cross is essential to your being this Israel. You will be born out of that travail, and before that you will be scattered, every man of you.”

How true it was! But out of His travail, out of His tomb, out of His resurrection, they were born as an organic entity. How they stood up together on the day of Pentecost! I do not think they had ever been together quite like that before. This is a new togetherness. They are born on the day of Pentecost. The new Israel is here. It has been spoken about and prepared for; it has had much instruction, much teaching, and much handling; but it required the cross to produce it.

So for the Israel of God the cross is essential. The cross is essential to the Kingdom, the reign; the cross is essential to the service, the administration. I am deeply impressed by something in that part of the prophecies of Isaiah from which we have taken our basic passage — Isaiah 53:10,11. The real beginning of that chapter is, of course, not as marked in our arrangement, but at verse 13 of chapter 52: “Behold, my servant...” And then we read on about the suffering Servant. But what is said of Him immediately? “He shall be... very high.” How? The next verse says: “His visage was so marred more than any man...” A few verses later we read: “He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: we hid as it were our faces from him...” “*WE* did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” But we were wrong: “He was wounded for our transgressions...” And then on to our passage: “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”

Who is this? The Servant of the Lord. “Behold, my *SERVANT*”. And He chose twelve who were to be “with Him” in the service of the Kingdom. They were to be the servants of the Kingdom — His fellow-servants. You notice from the margin that some authorities add (as in Luke 6:13): “whom also he named apostles”. Here, then, is the whole service of the Kingdom fully in view: but it is only, as in Isaiah 53:10,11, by the travail. It all comes out of the travail — there is no other way. The natural disposition has to be undone by the cross, disintegrated, broken up and scattered. It is a false thing that cannot stand and will not go through; it is proved to be unsubstantial. Another thing must be brought in which is spiritual — that is, of the Spirit — and which can go through. The cross is the instrument of God to bring about the new Israel, the new Kingdom, and the new servants of the Kingdom.

May the Lord say something to all our hearts: show us what kind of people He is after, and why He is taking the way with us that He is. He has in view a service — here, and more so hereafter — which requires a people after this kind. The Lord make us like that!

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Object Of His Travail

In this concluding message, beyond bringing forward a number of fragments from the Word of God, I shall do little more than make some statements, and leave the Lord to speak out of those statements Himself. The message itself will lie deeper than anything that can be said.

First of all, we will recall the passage that has been running through this whole series:

“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:10,11).

Then:

“Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? shall a nation be brought forth at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children” (Isaiah 66:8).

“So the angel that talked with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy” (Zechariah 1:14).

“And the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great fury” (Zechariah 8:1,2).

“But ye are come unto Mount Zion” (Hebrews 12:22).

(Note those two statements: “I am jealous for Zion”; “Ye are come unto Mount Zion”.)

“And he saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death... And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:34–36).

“Christ... loved the church, and gave himself up for it” (Ephesians 5:25).

Its Infinite Value To God

All these passages, in principle and in ultimate meaning, relate to one thing. In them and by them certain things, in themselves altogether inexpressible, incomprehensible, are somehow brought to our hearts. In the first place, you notice that they all have to do with the travailing love of God in Christ, the passion of God in Christ. Therein lies a mystery — the mystery of the infinite value of the object of His travail. There *MUST* be something that justifies it; there must be something of unspeakable preciousness to Him that would lead to this — the travail of His soul. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death.” “I am jealous for Zion with a great jealousy... I am jealous for her with great wrath.” Because of this tearing of the heart of God to its very depths, something of infinite preciousness and value must be in view.

Of course this is all centred in the Cross, as we know. The Cross forms the link with that which is of eternal, supreme importance to the Son of God; it links with His inheritance in the saints. It is not some inanimate, insensate “thing”; it is not that God has an objective interest in some *THING*. It is quite clear

that a heart-relationship is here involved — the kind of thing that just tears your very being to pieces. It is as though this inheritance were a very part of Himself. That is borne out, as you will see, by these Scriptures. Not to have it would mean that a very part of Himself would be missing. It is a heart matter, a soul matter; it is something that touches all the sensibilities of God. The inheritance is, in fact, a *LIVING* thing. Paul speaks of it as corresponding to the wife. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it”; and the law that governs the husband-wife relationship is: “And they twain shall become one flesh” (Matt. 19:5). Divide them, and you tear apart and in pieces something that is one thing; and that is the relationship here. But, of course, such a character transcends any human analogy. We are here touching the eternal.

All this, then, about His love, His suffering, His travail, His anguish, at least implies, if it does not declare with a very loud voice, that the object of it all is of infinite value to Him. What is it? “He shall see *HIS SEED*... He shall see of the travail of his soul.” It is this of which we have been thinking all through these messages; this that is represented by that phrase, “his seed” — a people for Himself. It is beyond us, altogether beyond us. We might hear it, and have some kind of objective acceptance of it as truth — yes: but the wonder is that this comes right down to us — to you, to me. *WE* are in this. It is a question of the infinite preciousness and value that you and I are to Him. It is beyond us.

Our Difficulty In Believing It

That is one thing — I speak at least for myself over this — one thing that gives the greatest difficulty to believe when it comes to oneself. Is it not so? Perhaps there are two things, in the main, that constitute our difficulty in believing a thing like this.

The first is, just what we are in ourselves. We know something of ourselves — our sinfulness, our worthlessness. When it is really true, and not put on — not just language, not feigned or pretended, but really true — that we know our utter worthlessness, realise how abjectly worthless we are; and then we are told that all this is true, that it relates to and applies to *US*: ah, then we are presented with a problem; we are called upon to believe something that is not easy to believe! But I could take you through the Bible and show you how, after all, it is so. I wonder what you find the most comforting fragment in the Bible. May I tell you which I do? “Faithful is the saying... that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15). It is brought right down to the personal. Yes, there are many comforting things in the Bible, but you cannot get deeper than that, you cannot get behind that. All this infinite passion and travail for such as we! The Bible says it! I said that I would simply make statements, without attempting to define or explain.

That is one reason why we find such difficulty in believing and accepting. The other probably is the mystery of God’s ways with us. So often, in the mystery of His ways, we are sorely tempted to wonder whether anything like this can be true. It may be true, we feel, of some people, but His ways with us do not seem to bear it out at all. A love like this? Unto death? An estimate or valuation of a soul to this degree? Is that really borne out by these strange, mysterious dealings of God with us? — by these darkneses, these perplexities, these problems, these disappointments? Satan is always at our elbow to say, “That is not His love for you!”

I am not attempting to argue that out philosophically, or even from the Scripture; I am simply making the statement: *THE BIBLE SAYS*... Here it is! What is all this — this about the travail of His soul? What is it for? *HIS seed*. Who are His seed? *Those who have believed on Him unto eternal life*. No more than that, no less than that. And they become enwrapped in this unspeakable thing — His soul’s travail. Oh, that we could believe it, at all times! — that you and I could believe that, behind all the mystery of His ways, the strangeness of His dealings, the bewilderment and perplexity as to what it is that He is after, there lies such a love as this!

That is the second thing — and, again, it is only a statement. But, oh! the infinite suffering behind our belonging to the Lord, the infinite suffering behind a soul’s salvation — a soul that might be yours or mine. What suffering! Peter draws this contrast: “Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold... but” — here is the contrast — “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18,19). As you know, the word “blood” is a simile for “soul”. In biblical symbolism, the soul is in the blood (Lev. 17:11, mg.). And so, when He poured out His blood, He “poured out his soul unto death” (Is. 53:12). His soul is set forth by Peter as something that is infinitely, transcendently more precious than gold or silver; and He has given that for our redemption! Behind your belonging to the Lord and my belonging to the Lord there lies that whole travail.

In saying this, I am trying to redeem this whole thing from cheapness. We have made our salvation too cheap and too easy; we have pulled it down to such a low level. We need to ponder the infinite cost and suffering which lies behind the salvation of one soul.

Christ’s Infinite Love For His Own

Further, there is the infinite love which Christ has for His own when He has got them. Paul seems to make some tremendous statements. Sometimes they almost sound like exaggeration. “Who shall separate us from... the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus...?” he asks (Rom. 8:35,39). He catalogues every conceivable thing that might be thought to be capable of doing that, and then, lumping them all together, he

says: “Nay, I am persuaded that *NONE* of these things”: in them all and over them all the love will triumph. The love that He has for those who are His own, when He has got them, is a tremendous thing, is it not? Sometimes we are prepared to believe, or inclined to think and accept, that the Gospel of our salvation is based upon all this in order to get us; but then, as we go on a bit further, we may sometimes feel tempted to wonder whether He still loves us as much now as He did at the beginning, whether He is still as concerned to have us now as He was then. I trust that that statement will not be misunderstood.

There is a wonderful picture of this in the Old Testament, in that temple that Solomon built — perhaps the most magnificent structure that had ever been built up to his time. The predominant feature of that temple was gold: everything was overlaid with gold: there was pure gold everywhere — gold, gold, over everything. It symbolises the obtaining by the Lord, at last, of something that He had set His heart upon. At last the Lord has got that toward which He has been all the time working with His people: a place in which He can dwell. Now gold is always a figure of the divine love; and so everywhere His dwelling-place is simply covered and smothered with gold. He has got what He wanted, and it is to Him exceedingly precious; and so He writes that preciousness everywhere, lavishly. Oh, the lavishness of that gold in the days of Solomon! It is just a picture of God’s love for and in something long desired, when He has come into possession of it. No, His love does not change after He has come into possession. It is still the same.

The Infinite Importance To Him Of The Church

So we are led to the next thing: the infinite importance attached by the Lord to His church. The word “church” is only another title for that which is elsewhere referred to as His temple, His wife, His bride. They are all in reality the same thing, and they all emphasise the infinite importance of the church in the eyes of the Lord. There are many people, I fear, who think that “church” is “teaching”. It is what they call “church teaching”. There is nothing that makes me shudder more than to hear people use that phrase, “church teaching”! I have even heard people speak about “the church teaching of Honor Oak” — “church teaching”! The Lord pity us, the Lord save us! The church is not a truth, it is not a teaching, it is not an idea. The church is a Gethsemane — the church is a bloody sweat. The church is a Golgotha — the church is the cry of a broken heart from the Cross, the pouring out of His soul unto death. The church is the great sob of God in this universe.

I am not exaggerating; that is not just words. I could take you to the prophets, and show you from them that all that is true. Oh, go back to some of those prophets and hear them! Do you not hear the sob of God as they speak? “O Ephraim... O Judah... How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?” (Hos. 6:4, 11:8). God is broken-hearted, just broken-hearted; and that broken heart is reflected in the words of the prophets, as they cry and weep over the Lord’s people, as an unfaithful bride, a wayward daughter, a prodigal son, a family repudiating the best of fathers. Do not talk about “church truth”, “church teaching” — oh, no, “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it”. “I am jealous for Zion” — that is only a title for the church — “with great jealousy... with great wrath”.

He loved the church — there is an infinite importance to Him in His church. Again I say, I cannot explain it; but there is the truth. Oh, that you and I might see *THROUGH* the truth and the doctrine and the teaching, to the *REALITY*, *might* see that *THIS* is the thing involved in that ruptured heart, in that agonised cry, in that sweating as it were great drops of blood. It is the church that is involved. That is not a “thing”, not a “theory”, not a “line of truth”. It is something tremendous.

The Infinite Motive For Our Response

What, then, does it lead to? Surely it leads, finally, to the infinite motive for our response to the Lord. To a first response, yes, for any who have never yet responded to Him: there is an infinite motive for your responding to Him — no less a motive than all this that we have seen. But then, there is the infinite motive for our own response — His own people’s response to Him on all matters. Why should I settle any controversy with the Lord, why should I set aside my own personal interests, why should I do this and that? Why...? In the light of all this, *WHY NOT?!* Is there anything that can really be set against this? For going on with the Lord, for responding, being obedient, giving Him everything, we have an infinite motive.

And this is the infinite motive for service. Why should we give Him our life in service? Just for this reason. In the first days of the Moravian Brethren, when everything was so pure, so true, the Lord used them marvellously all over this world. It was a wonderful thing that happened. At the Edinburgh Conference in 1910, John R. Mott said that, if the whole Christian church had proceeded on the lines of the Moravian Brethren, the entire world would have been evangelised long ago. They had one missionary for every ten members of their fellowship. Yes, it was a wonderful story of sacrifice, of suffering, of giving themselves. What was the secret? They had a motto, which was written on everything and which they took with them wherever they went. It was this: “To win for the Lamb that was slain the reward of His suffering.” That is the infinite motive — the reward of His suffering for the Lamb that was slain.

I make the statement — that is all. It is something that is altogether beyond us; but this is what is here. That is the heart of Isaiah 53, and of all these other Scriptures. If this is true, He is not going to give us up easily; He is not going to abandon and forsake His purpose. He is going to return to it again and again. He will say: “I am returned unto Zion” (Zech. 8:3); He will come back again and again for what He

has set His heart upon. But oh, may we have something of this same love of God shed abroad in our own hearts by the Holy Spirit.

DIVINE ORDER — IN CHRIST

CHAPTER ONE

There is a very old hymn called “Tell me the old, old story”. When we have sung “Tell me the old, old story” so heartily, we are confronted with the most difficult thing that has ever been called for by angels and men. To put the story of Jesus and His love to music is to employ the whole range and compass of every note of every octave, and then to want more notes. It reaches the highest; it goes down to the deepest. It is the very range and compass of His Person and His work that show how great He is; so much greater greatness than all others. It is the universality of the Lord Jesus that is His supremacy. There is no language or tongue in all human speech into which that story cannot be interpreted, which cannot grasp something of its meaning. That has been proved, and is being proved continually — it compasses all language and all languages. Although it has taxed and overtaxed the greatest intellects of all the ages, it is enjoyed, appreciated and loved by the simplest and the most unlearned. It meets the problems and difficulties of the mature and the aged, and yet it is the delight of little children. Of all the various temperaments into which the human race is classified, there is no temperament that does not find in Him something to meet its own peculiar problems and demands. Jesus and His love are an ocean of the profoundest mysteries and treasures. He is a mine of inexhaustible wealth. In a word, it is going to take all eternity to reveal His fullness. That is what we are up against when we so easily sing: “Tell me the old, old story.” It just cannot be told!

But it may be that in these chapters a little more of the light of that story will break upon our hearts. There is a phrase in the Word: “Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty; they shall behold the land of far distances”, and that twofold statement can quite truly, and rightly, be applied to Him. He is the King in His beauty; and He is also the Land of Far Distances.

To come into a living relationship with the Lord Jesus is to come, sooner or later, to the impasse of the incomprehensible, and we just have to say: “Lord, You are beyond me! Lord, I cannot comprehend; You are too much for me!” That, of course, on the one side, means difficulties, for it puts us into a difficult position in that we cannot trace Him, follow Him, and understand Him. But, on the other side, we would not have it otherwise; we would not have a “little” Christ whom we could comprehend and altogether understand with our little minds. No, He is beyond us altogether, and what you and I, as His people, are destined to come to if we go on with Him, is just this: that He is ever reaching farther and farther beyond us, and drawing us out beyond ourselves, beyond our resources of mind and will, yet drawing us on, and making us know that we have got to go on. We just cannot stand still; we have to go on.

Now, dear friends, the Bible rests upon one tremendous affirmation, upon a truth which it affirms in a thousand different ways, and that truth is this: that everything related to the great destiny for which man was created is bound up inseparably with the knowledge of Christ. You have two tremendous things there: the greatness of the destiny for which man was created — and the Bible has a very great deal to say about that. That destiny, that great divine purpose in creation, demands for its realisation the knowledge of Jesus Christ; it is bound up with the knowledge of God’s Son. Within that compass of divine purpose we have man’s creation, man’s redemption and salvation, man’s transformation, man’s glorification, and then man’s eternal vocation. These are all features of the great purpose of man’s creation and I repeat them: salvation, transformation, glorification, and eternal vocation and all that, rests upon the knowledge of Jesus Christ. None of it is possible without knowing Him.

We look at a little child from the day that it comes into this world, and the one thing the parents are watching for continually, and waiting for, is the sign of intelligence. For the normal development of a human life is marked by growing intelligence, that is, in the first place, the ability to identify objects. It is very simple, but very real, when, first of all, the parent is able to recognise that the child knows him or her — the child identifies. And so its development of its very life is marked by this growing intelligence, this ability to identify objects, and then to interpret and grasp their meaning. It comes so slowly, and yet it is there. To apply those recognised, identified objects to practical value, to turn them to account, to know that they mean this, and that they are meant for this or that; the application of their intelligence to practical needs or situations, these are the indications of normal development and it is along the line of growing intelligence.

If that is true in the natural, it is equally true in the spiritual. The mark of spiritual growth, the growth of the spiritual life, is this power to recognise the meaning of Christ; to identify Him in things; to interpret Him — the power to interpret Him and to explain Him; and then to apply Him to practical situations, our own and others. That is “knowing” the Lord. That is the way of spiritual growth to full manhood, to the fulfilment of the ultimate vocation. And let it be recognised at once that what is true in the natural is true in the spiritual in this sense — God created man with an object. A life has missed its way and purpose if it fulfils no vocation and if it becomes an end in itself. Vocation is the object, the end, of all life and all development. That is true in the spiritual life. The Bible reveals progress toward eternal vocation, and essentially along the line of spiritual intelligence, or the knowing of Christ.

The Pre-Eminent Factor In Life

God has placed supreme importance upon this very basis. Hear His Word: *“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me”* (Jer. 9:23). Above all other things in which men do or may glory, God puts this, with His tremendous emphasis: Thus saith the Lord. The supreme thing with Him is to understand and to know Him.

We have read how the Lord Jesus put this matter in relation to the most vital thing, even that of eternal life, and there is no more vital thing than that. In one sense eternal life is the key to the Bible. *“And this is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ”* (John 17:3). Life eternal, with the Lord Jesus, is placed upon this basis of knowing Him. That man Paul, Paul the aged, with a long life of learning Christ, and of perhaps incomparable revelation of Jesus Christ, is now standing at the gate of eternity and crying, *“...that I may know Him...”* You might say that that was the cry with which Paul entered into heaven. And alongside of that, you remember, he said: *“I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Philippians 3:8). Not to be learning, is to stop growing, for growing, is along that line. The knowledge of Christ is the beginning of salvation; the knowledge of Christ is the whole meaning of the Christian life; the knowledge of Christ is God’s motive in all discipline and training. You and I find ourselves in those hands of the “Father of our spirits”, who is putting us through a hard school, and on a difficult way. And the one question which should always be in our hearts is not “Why?” as to His dealings with us in a general sense, nor any murmuring, but: “What do you want me to learn by this? What is there of Christ that I am to understand by this means?” For, I repeat, all the dealings of God with us have but this one thing in view: our education as to Christ, the knowledge of Christ. The very essence of glory will be the knowledge of Christ. Perhaps that sounds a strange word, but it is not so difficult to understand. When at last we see in Him the answer to all our questions and our problems, and He becomes the answer to every cry of our need and heart, we see Him as He is, and He fills all the vacuum of our longing, that will be glory. It is so now in the smallest ways, is it not? If, after a very difficult time when we have been brought through deep and terrible suffering, we have our eyes open to see something of Christ that meets our need, that is glory! He becomes our glory. Glory is not just something of an external, shining radiance — it is a state of heart, it is full satisfaction, full gratification, and possession of a full explanation and understanding. That will be wonderful! So the knowledge of Christ will be the very essence of glory.

But having said all that, mark you, this is not, in the first place, a knowledge in the reason, nor the satisfying of the natural mind and intelligence. This knowledge of Christ is essentially, in the first place, spiritual knowledge. It is what we might call “life-knowledge”. It means life; it brings life; it is life; we know by life. We may not yet be able to interpret it in human language, even to our own satisfaction, or be able to explain it, but we have come into a knowledge of the Lord which has brought life and which is life. *“This is life ... that they may know.”* This kind of knowing is life-knowledge and is altogether deeper than natural intelligence. We do not say, in the first place, that now we know because the thing has been explained. We say: “I know because that meets my heart need, because something has happened in me through that. It has brought me into life.” That is spiritual knowledge.

And it is by way of experience. The Lord’s school of instruction, training, teaching, is not to tell us things, or to write them in a book for us to study and memorise, and then say: “We know now!” This is not a manual education at all. It is the education, the knowledge, that comes by experience, and experience simply means that something has been done *in* us by a certain process. We know in that way. We know the Lord in our constitution, and how much better it is to know Him constitutionally — that is, in our being. He has become a part of our being, and not just something explained to our minds.

That is the way in which we *learn* Christ. It is very practical, deeply practical.

Christ, The Embodiment Of Heavenly Order

That is all by way of leading up to our present particular consideration. You will realise, in the light of this little that has been said, that Christ is many-sided, vari-sided. He is far too great to be comprehended, though we spent all our days trying to do so. And we can only look at Him from time to time from particular standpoints.

In the light of the situation in the world, and in the church, and churches, I have been very greatly exercised about one thing. I have put it aside as being too difficult, but I am compelled to face it. It is concerning divine order. Of all the ways in which Christ is to be known unto life and unto growth, there is one way in the Word of God which, we might be tempted to say, is supremely important — though we could say that of every way in which He is to be known. However, that one way is this: To rightly understand Christ is to see that He relates to a heavenly and eternal order of things.

That word “order” lies right at the back of everything in the Bible. Everything that the Bible has to say to us is related to an eternal order that God intended to obtain in this universe. And His key to that order, without which nothing of all His glorious purpose is possible, is Christ. The Person of Christ is the very embodiment of all the principles of a universal order. If we could comprehend, discern, understand and

know Christ, we should see that in that one universal Person are gathered up all the laws of a great heavenly order.

We are told that “in Him, through Him, by Him, and unto Him were all things created”. His creative activity at work is marked by a marvellous order, and we shall say more about this as we go on. Creation, as it *comes from His hand*, as it is projected by Him, is a marvellous system of co-ordinated forces and objects in a wonderful relatedness and harmony. Everything is in its own place, everything is in its own time and everything has its own function. And so you could go on, but, I repeat, we will come back to it.

His redemptive work, the whole of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus has this one thing in mind: the recovery of a lost order. He stands in His Person, in His creative work, and in His redemptive work, related to this whole matter of an eternal, heavenly order.

Let me pause here with a parenthesis lest you should be as near despair as I have been in this matter.

Everything seems positively to contradict what I am saying, especially concerning the Holy Spirit; that is, that the Holy Spirit, who is the custodian of the whole purpose of God concerning His Son, is occupied with this matter pre-eminently — a heavenly order; the will of God as it is done in heaven to be done eventually on this earth in like manner. If you want to know the meaning of the Holy Spirit — and this will perhaps be a suggestion to you if you turn again to the Word — the answer is here. The Holy Spirit is meticulous about order, He will not overlook disorder. For divine order to be overlooked, violated, ignored or frustrated, is to perpetuate the loss, the suffering, the disappointment and the despair of the creation, for the hope of the creation lies in the direction of God having it according to His order. This is the matter with which the Holy Spirit is supremely concerned.

You might well interject: “Is that really true, seeing that things are as they are, everywhere and in everything?” The answer is twofold. Firstly, the fact is proved by the condition. Where the divine order has been violated, a condition arises which clearly indicates arrested maturity and a limitation of spiritual measure. It shows that what could and should have been, and what God intended, has been missed and lost. There may be the illusion — the seemingly pleasant illusion — of a false liberty and freedom to do as you *like*, but, in truth, things are less and other than God meant. The New Testament includes for our instruction for all time a document which is the classic on immaturity due to disorder. It is the First Letter to the Corinthians. The situation is summed up in a sentence: “*I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not yet able*” (3:1,2). Then there follows the explanation of that arrested growth. Twice the apostle uses the word “for”, meaning “because”, “for these reasons”, and the reasons? disorder. The rest of the whole letter is occupied with the disorders and the apostle’s labour to correct them. It would be quite difficult to find in the New Testament a stronger proof of this fact that spiritual maturity is governed by divine order.

The second thing to include in our judgement of things is that eternity is governing this matter. While the Lord wants as much as can be of heavenly order in time, especially in the church, the churches and the individual, and there can only be limitation of Christ in each if this order is ignored, violated and disregarded (undoubtedly this explains the poor level of Christian life), it will be in eternity that *measure* will be the criterion of position and vocation. The apostle tries to say something about this eternal difference in glory and position hereafter in chapter 15.

We may be responsible for the upsetting or contravening of God’s order and seem to get away with it, but no Christian believes that what we do in this life is the end. We have always to reckon with Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. The apostle includes himself — “we ... *all* ”.

So eternity bears down upon time, and time is revealed in eternity. When God’s Kingdom comes, it will be perfect order!

Now we return to our main line: God is a God of order. But there is a personal evil intelligence in this universe who is God’s archenemy and, as such, is the instigator of all disorder. He is called “the god of this world” (or age) and “the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (what an enlightening phrase — “children of disobedience”). The hallmark of all satanic rule and influence is disorder. That rule is rapidly moving to its fullness and final judgement. The test of the measure of Christ is spiritual order under His government.

Important as a fuller consideration of this matter is, so as not to overload you at one time, I will break off for the time being by reiterating the four main points:

1. God is a God of order;
2. Satan is the instigator of disorder;
3. Christ in Person and work is the embodiment of the divine order;
4. The church is the elect vessel in which and through which that divine order is to be manifested and administered in the ages to come.

We might add that God’s disciplinary work with us is with a view to measure and position in the ultimate order.

CHAPTER TWO

To those who have a knowledge of the Bible it is evident that the whole of the Scriptures open up along the four lines that we have indicated; namely that

1. God is a God of order;
2. Satan is the prince of a world under divine judgement, and the nature of that judgement is confusion;
3. Christ, in Person and work, is the embodiment of divine order;
4. The church is the elect vessel in which, and through which, that divine order is to be manifested and administered in the ages to come.

The end of God is glory as against chaos, and the Bible shows — comprehensively — that glory is inseparable from order; divine order is the way to glory. The Bible should be read in that light. On the contrary, confusion always leads to shame. This, then, is *the* great issue of the Bible.

Perhaps you are wondering, or asking in your mind: What does this mean where we, simple believers, are concerned? It is all very wonderful, very great, but here we are, a little company of Christian people — how is this a message for us? Will you be patient, dear friends? This is of most vital account to you and to me. We are a part of a great whole. We are not just fragments that have shot off into space, with an independent and unrelated life. We are called by the grace and sovereign will of God into a great purpose. And what is true of the whole is true of every part. You and I are going to learn, if we learn anything about Christ, that we are a part of the disruption of the divine order, and that grace, *grace*, in its deepest and grandest interpretation, is to bring order out of our chaos, is to introduce heaven into us and us into heaven, and is to conform us to that which obtains in heaven. Oh, yes, we are going to learn in many, many different ways that what God is doing with us, and has called us into, is just: to conform us to the image of His Son. But that is not only conformity to a Person, it is conformity to a divine order. His Son is an *order* of God, the *order* of heaven.

I do not know how you read the four Gospels. Perhaps you read them as the life of Jesus here on earth, what He did and what He said — purely as a historic record. I suggest to you that you go back to those Gospels with this one thought: Here is the embodiment of another “order” of things, in constitution and in behaviour, in ways of life and in laws and principles governing the life. Here is heaven in evidence. Here is heaven in control. Here is another world embodied: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” — here is another world that has come in this Person. Read the Gospels in the light of that, and you will begin to see that He does not do and speak as the people of this world would, even the wisest of them. He is getting everything from heaven; He is getting every word from heaven; He is governed by heaven. That is the meaning of the so-oft repeated phrase: “the Kingdom of heaven” — the rule of the heavens. “The Kingdom of God” — the rule of God. As we learn Christ, so we pass more and more from this world in our inward life, and find ourselves more and more in conflict with it, and incapable of accommodating ourselves to it or being at home and happy in it. It becomes more and more a “far country” — something to which we do not belong. That is true in the consciousness of the true child of God, but growingly so. The true child of God, as he or she goes on in this inner, spiritual change of knowing Christ, will often ask the question: “What is happening to me? I used to be able to do this and that, but I cannot now. At one time I had no qualms or difficulties, but today I have a question.” I think if we stayed here long enough we would find this world an utterly impossible place to live in spiritually. We could only live in it as heaven came down to help us stay here at all. Well, that is a way of putting things — we are just “going home” all the time.

Now, to refer again to our great interpreter of these things, the man Paul who had such a full and exact knowledge of the Scriptures in the first place and, added to that, the one to whom was given that peculiar and that so great revelation of heavenly things, especially of Christ. To that man the great issue of all things was this very thing — the recovery of a lost divine order in this universe. He has stated that. Here is one fragment of that great statement: “... unto a dispensation (an order, an economy, a government, a rule) of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth” (Ephesians 1: 10). Here we are faced with a tremendous statement. There is a word here which is almost an unspeakable word in our language. In the Greek it requires no less than nineteen letters! It is a compound which is translated “to sum up”, but in its original meaning is this: “to bring back and centre in One, all things”. To bring back, to recover, and to centre in One, all things. To gather up all that which has been lost and focus it, embody it, in Christ. First of all, the implication is that there was an order once obtaining in God’s universe — a perfect order. Secondly, that that order has been lost; a great disruption has taken place in the universe. And thirdly, the re-gathering, the recovery, the restoring of that lost order in Christ. That is what Paul saw to be the significance of Christ. What a range! What an interpretation of everything! What a word! To gather up all the fragments of this shattered vessel, all the parts of this disrupted and confused universe, to repair the damage and make of it all one beautiful expression of heavenly order! That is the work of the Person of Christ in redemption. Paul uses a word so often — “to *reconcile* all things unto Himself” — to reconcile, implying that the situation is such as to find God not in a state of conciliation with it, and it not in conciliation with God. Everything has gone to pieces, and

is under a terrible strain where God is concerned because things have broken down — the divine order has been shattered. This One, Jesus Christ, came into this world, in the first place embodying in His own Person that which He is going to recover, objectively. He cannot be deflected from that for a moment on any consideration, by any bribe, or by any suffering. He is going through with what He calls the Will of God. And, dear friends, while we use that phrase, sometimes glibly, sometimes seriously, we do not always recognise — if we ever do — that the Will of God is the expression of this perfect order of God. “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” If only we knew how things are done in heaven we would see a beautiful harmony, a complete accord, and the utter absence of any janglings, confusions, contradiction or inconsistency. That is God’s will. He came for that. It could only be, as we shall see later, by the Cross, in which He had to take hold of this enormous force of disruption and confusion, and break it for ever, and produce, or reproduce that order, which we find *commencing* in the New Testament. We must leave that for the moment.

To rightly understand and know Christ is to see that He stands related to this of which we are speaking — this universal, beautiful order of God in the creation. Christ Himself is the Seed of that order. You take your seeds, or your bulbs, and if you get the bulb of the hyacinth and place it in the earth, you do not expect a cabbage to appear! Within that small organism there is the order of hyacinths. That is the nature, the life, the species, the kind of thing that is there. So it is in every organic creation. Every seed has its own life, producing after its own kind. That is Scripture, is it not? — “after its own kind”. Christ is the Seed of a heavenly order. In Him is implicit that order of God: the life is in Him; the order, or the “form” is in Him; the “nature” of that is in Him. The order requires a kind of nature. A disposition, the kind of Person that He is. He is so different! We are always crying and praying to be “like Christ”! Yes, in Him is the nature which, when it becomes universal, will be seen in a certain perfect harmony and order. He is the constitution of everything. Paul finds himself beggared for words in this very thing, and he is a master of language and languages. He speaks about Christ “filling all things”, and “all things filled into Christ”. You cannot grasp that? It is just this. He is going to be the constitution of everything, and that “everything” is to be an expression of this “mind of God”, *how* things should be, *what* things should be, and how they should behave. You and I behave as we do because we have a certain constitution. We are made like that. Make the whole creation like Christ and it will behave like Christ, the nature, the constitution of a great divine system.

God is a God of order. If there is one thing that the Bible reveals about God, it is that. On the other hand, the Bible is a tremendous testimony all the way through against disorder. If you want to see what it is all about, what it means, why this and why that, it is this conflict between a divine order, and a disorder. It is like that all the way through, and that is the battle.

And I say again, before we are through it has got to come down to our own lives in a very intimate way. But take the great truth, for it is capable of having a tremendous effect upon us. We must make it our business — if this is *the* business of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the meaning of the Cross — to come under the rule of heaven, the rule of Christ, the rule of the Holy Spirit, so that all the discords and conflicts go out of our individual life and of our collective life; that we are more and more an expression of Him, whose life, character, work and ways have no inconsistencies, no contradictions and no conflicts in Himself. He is the sum of this beautiful harmony.

Do believe this, amongst other things and whatever else it means, that when that great Song about which we read in the Book of the Revelation is sung by a great multitude out of every language, every tongue and nation and kindred and people, the one thing about it will be that there is not one discordant note! It will be the most marvellous harmony. Why? Because the Centre of it all is one Person, who pervades all. It is the Lamb. His work is done; He has redeemed by His Blood out of every nation. He has brought together all the broken pieces, all the shattered plan of God, and here it is, redeemed. And the mark of His work is this: that out of all the divided peoples of this earth, divided by language, divided by colour, divided by temperament, divided in a score of different ways, He has made *one* harmonious whole, singing one song, with no discord. It is the mark of “order” that is the mark of His redemption “Babel”, which means confusion, is undone!

CHAPTER THREE

We began these messages with a fresh contemplation of the greatness of Christ; and then we went on to remind ourselves that everything which has to do with the realisation of God’s purpose in creating man, and this world, and its universe, is a matter of *knowing God in Christ*, which, of course, means knowing Christ. Every aspect and detail of God’s will and God’s way and God’s end is a matter of knowing the Lord Jesus. All progress, as all life, rests upon that — knowing Him. The Christian life here is meant to be one of continuous growth and development and progress, but that only takes place as we come to know more, and still more, of the meaning of the Lord Jesus. This progress will not stop when we leave this world, and when time gives place to eternity: “Of the increase of his kingdom there will be *no* end.” Stagnation is no mark of life, and life there will be ever manifesting itself in new and more wonderful fulnesses and forms. Therefore, the knowledge of Christ which will, in time and eternity, be the secret of growth and progress,

will continue in heaven, and it will take eternity to exhaust it. Well, that was our next thing — all growth, progress, fruitfulness, rest upon this growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

That brought us to this: Seeing He is so vast, so immense, so many-sided, we can only see Him from one standpoint at a time; we have to move round to see Him from every angle. And at this time we are just looking at the Lord Jesus from one of the many angles, or points of view, which is this particular aspect of His significance: that He, in His Person and in His work, stands related to an eternal, heavenly order. He Himself, in His wonderful, complex Person, is the very embodiment of all the principles and laws of a great heavenly order. When everything is conformed to Christ and takes its character from Him, it will be one glorious, harmonious whole, perfected into one, just one glorious unity.

So that is what we are seeking to grasp at this time: the relationship of Christ to this eternal heavenly order. We have, of course, laid our foundation in the Word of God. We have allowed that to come to us in one marvellous statement through the apostle Paul that “in the fullness of the times — *the fullness* of the times — God has determined to gather together (or, re-gather together) all things in Christ”. Seeing that the very word contains that idea of re-gather, it implies, if it does not declare, that there was a glorious order at one time when everything was as God meant it to be. All the sons of God shouted for joy as they beheld the marvel of His creation and His order. That word implies that that order has been lost, and in its place there has come disorder; and it declares that the order is going to be restored in Christ. That is the great significance of the Lord Jesus from this standpoint. We repeat: He personally is the embodiment of that; and His work is related to that.

That led us to the place where the great river of revelation divides into four.

God Is The God Of Order

We dwelt a little while on the fact that God *is* the God of order, although it altogether defeats us, for it is so great and so full. This fact, of God being such, is revealed clearly, firstly, in His creative work; secondly, in the great representation that we have in type and symbol in the Old Testament; thirdly, in His redemptive work; fourthly, in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In all these four ways there is a wonderful revelation that God is a God of order.

Let us think for just a minute or two on the first of those — revealed in creation.

While, of course, we are confronted with so much in this present world and system which seems to shout disorder, derangement, discord and confusion, even in nature, there is still discernible in nature a wonderful background of an ordered system. That is something which has engaged men for their whole life, and is a marvellous universe itself of instruction and of fascination. Here is an extract from a big work by one of the most outstanding biologists. He writes thus:

“The hosts of living organisms are not random creatures. They can be classified into battalions and regiments. Neither are they isolated creatures, for every thread of life is intertwined with others in a complex web. This is one of the fundamental biological truths, the co-relationship of organisms in the web of life. No creature lives or dies to itself. There is no insulation in nature. One organism gets linked on to others, and becomes dependent upon them for the very continuance of its race. Flowers and insects are fitted together as hand in glove. When we learn something of the intricate give and take, supply and demand, action and reaction, between plants and animals, between flowers and insects, we begin to get a glimpse of a vast organisation in the creation.”

Well, take it for what it is worth. You will see that that gathers up into a few sentences something that is capable of tremendous enlargement. You see it everywhere. Behind this creation there is a mind that loves to have things properly ordered and related. Behind this creation there is a perfect, spiritual system. God is the God of order, and what is true in natural history is seen to be true everywhere else. God has arranged the year in seasons. He has arranged the co-operation of heaven and earth in that the heavenly bodies govern the movements of the earth, the tides; and so on.

We would not know where to stop if we were to allow ourselves to go on with this! There is one hymn in our hymnbook which begins: “The spacious firmament on high...” You notice that the conclusion of that hymn is: “It all declares a Mind Divine.” Well, if we wanted to go on with this we do not need to go far away to the celestial bodies or to objects outside of ourselves. We have only to have a little intelligence about our own human bodies, and to see that the human body, in health, is a marvellous system of related, dependent, interdependent, co-operative functions, principles and elements. Anyone who really has any knowledge of the human body ought to be a great worshipper! It is a marvellous unity in diversity. It all speaks of this “hand in glove” principle, of one thing fitting into another in perfect harmony and symmetry. There is another side to that, I know, and I am going to speak about it presently.

We have done no more than stated a fact: that wherever you can trace the hand of God before the other hand comes upon it — either the hand of man or the hand of the devil — you find this beautiful harmony, this wonderful order.

We come to the Old Testament, and anyone familiar with it will not need an exhaustive proof of this great truth. In the Old Testament representations of God’s mind we begin with Him bringing order out of chaos, for that is where everything begins. God, who is the God of order, reacts against this state of chaos,

and His reaction issues in a remarkable and excellent order. And what is true as to God bringing order out of chaos where the earth is concerned is seen to be a principle that is working all through the Old Testament. You see it at work in a representative people — and here is the glory and the tragedy of Israel. The glory of Israel is that they were taken out of the nations to be the embodiment and the manifestation of a heavenly order on this earth, and the tragedy of Israel is that Israel has come to chaos. You see them in Egypt, and what was true in nature was true spiritually and morally of Israel in Egypt — chaos; no order; barrenness; frustration, confusion; hopelessness. Exodus is the book of emergence from all that, and they are not a rabble, a crowd of refugees going out into the wilderness. They are ordered, and ordered by their ranks. You can trace these marks as you read carefully. No, they are not just a mixed-up crowd, a disorderly crowd, running amok to get out of Egypt. See them marching like an army, in their serried ranks and their appointed order! It is order out of chaos. See them at Sinai, when God has given His pattern for their national life. Just take a look at one of those pictures that we have of Israel assembled around the tabernacle. And then, the order of the service. Leviticus is the book of the ordering of worship. And what a marvellous system that book is of the *order* of worship! It is not just that God said this, and that, and that is to be in the way of sacrifices and offerings and feasts; you will notice that there is an amazing sequence, an ordered sequence, and that need is supplied at every point. It is a progressive, ordered development of worship, of approach to God, under a specified and particularised government. That book of Leviticus is a wonderful book! You move into the book of Numbers, and the very name of the book indicates what it is all about. This is the book of the marchings through the wilderness, and everything is numbered, tabulated and ordered. I just indicate the details and you will pick them up.

Pass over the many years until you come to the temple, and this is one of the things that almost overwhelms you! The marvellous, meticulous order about this temple — every detail, every measurement; the size of everything; the place of everything; the material of everything. And what shall we say about the “courses of the singers” and the “courses of the priesthood” all in course round the clock. Everything is prescribed for. And when the Queen of Sheba came and looked at the order of the house there was no more breath left in her! That was the impressive thing. Everything here was so quietly, harmoniously and beautifully regulated. It all speaks of a mastermind, and that was God. He gave the pattern for that, and He gave the revelation. And although that was disrupted and the people went into captivity, passing seventy years in exile, the return of the remnant, the rebuilding of the wall and of the house were again marked by this order. We have read and studied the book of Nehemiah from other standpoints and have perhaps not been impressed with the wonderful organisation in it. You notice that one whole chapter is taken up with: “next unto him ... and next unto him ...” It is all arranged and ordered. It is, if you like, all organised. We can use that word in the Old Testament if we cannot in the New Testament. Nehemiah represents a master-organizer in the things of God. This is all under divine direction, and it all points to this: God is a God of order. We must be impressed with this, dear friends. It is not something to see objectively and historically. You and I have to be tremendously impressed with this and see that God is very particular about how things are done, what things are done, and *who* does these things, and also about the relationships that obtain amongst those who are employed. God is very particular, and, as we have said, this is not because He loves to have things “just so”, but because He is made that way. We know quite well that real progress, real fruitfulness and real achievement demand order. If we come into a place that is all upside down, disturbed, with everything all over the place, we know that we have got a job on hand, and we begin by saying: “Well, we cannot do anything until we have got this straightened out.” That is God: “We cannot get on until we have got it straightened out! We shall never get anywhere until things are put straight.”

But I do not want just to be piling a lot of data upon you. It is of very vital spiritual consequence that we get it into us that God is particular, and He is not going to overlook anything, or bypass anything. He will have it so, or He will not have all that He desires. He will be patient; He will work; He will wait; He will do a lot to get it so; He may take years to get it so, but that will be our loss. If He could have it His way, He would get on with His job forthwith by having things according to His order. Frustration, delay, unfruitfulness, are always due to this absence of God’s way of doing things, or of His object in doing things, or of what He wants done, or of the way in which He wants it done. Let us never deceive ourselves in false satisfaction because God gives *some* blessing!

That is perhaps enough by way of emphasising the fact that God is the God of order. I have only opened a window to you through which you can see a universe.

We come to the next thing: the disruption and disorder. There is a sense in which the Bible throughout is occupied with the confronting of this long drawn-out, obdurate, incorrigible disorder, and with the evil forces that are behind it. You meet it everywhere — the dealing with interfering forces is found almost everywhere in the Bible. The Bible shows the source of this disruption and disorder. And we are all too aware of this disorder. Everywhere in this universe, in this creation, there is a disrupted order, a disorder. There is a great schism everywhere. That is true, is it not? Well, taking it that you agree that it is so, the Bible shows us where it came from, the range of it, the entrance of it into this world, its development in this world, its nature and its effects, and its main cause.

This disorder, the Bible shows us, began in heaven. It was a rebellion against God; and we know how it entered into this world. The first result was that man himself became a divided creature, a centre of civil war in his own nature. Man is, by nature, no longer a unity. He is himself a clash of two worlds. The Psalm-

ist prays: “Unite my heart” (Psalm 86:11). “Unite my *heart!*” Our hearts are divided things. Man is a division, and he is himself a conflict. And when I speak of man, I am uniting the man and the woman, for with both of them this became true in themselves individually, and then, of course, it became true of them as two. The enemy sought to divide the husband and the wife — and he did it. He struck right home to that marvellous oneness. You see, the Scripture goes out of its way to describe and emphasise the oneness: “They shall be *one flesh*... the twain shall be *one flesh*.” It has so much to say about that oneness of husband and wife, but this disruptive influence and power came in and divided them. It is a real lesson! From the husband and the wife it reached to the family, and it is not long before you find the family disrupted. Cain and Abel — the one murdering the other, and destroying the family life. From the family, it reached out to embrace the whole race; and you know how the book of Genesis contains the story of racial disruption and confusion. This thing spread and it has become universal. The spirit of it is in the lower heavens: “The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” — it is in the air: “the prince of the power of the air”; you can breathe it and you can sense it in this world, the antagonism, hatred and malice, and much more like that. It has come right into the human life of the individual, and into human relationships, into the nearest two. It has come right into the family — and what a problem family life is now! And what a key it is to so much more! — until the race is shot through and through with this disrupting and dislocating spirit and power. Yes, it is here. We have seen where it came from, how it started, its range, its development, its nature and its effects — to set every man’s hand against his brother.

Its main cause. This is something that we must stay with for a moment. Do remember that the Bible always regards this matter as a *rebellion*, for it is the spirit of rebellion. The more we know of our own natures under stress, under trial, under pressure, the more true we know this to be. Right in our constitution there is something that rebels, and would even rebel against God and His ways, would question His wisdom and His love. It is *in us*. And the seat of this rebellion is in man himself. He is a disrupted being, not only disrupted in his relationship with God, but disrupted in his own personality. Man is a divided creature in himself, for the spirit of rebellion came in. The word “iniquity”, which is such a characteristic word of the Old Testament, has its roots in this very idea of rebellion. The real nature of this thing lies here — and perhaps we can illustrate this best by looking at the physical body, because those who know something about this — the laws of physical health and disease — tell us that it is all a matter of the environment of the living cells. This is a quotation: “It is the cell environment that is responsible for whatever disease affects the human body, either in the immediate environment of the cells, the presence of a poison, or the absence of some essential ingredient.” All these millions of living cells are environed by this lymph stream, which provides what is necessary for their life. This lymph stream is their environment. If some poison gets into that stream, or if something essential to their life is lacking, then the living cells fall into disease, and the body in its whole order is upset. And sickness is only disorder, is it not? Now, I have taken this illustration, because God has written His spiritual laws in all His creation, and, I think, pre-eminently in the human body.

You see, all this disorder, and resultant sickness, all the pain and agony due to this disruption, are because man left his environment. God is man’s true environment. In Him there is no darkness at all, and no poison. In Him is all that we need for our life and for our health. But man left his environment. He took himself out of his environment in God, and took his life into his own hands, to say what he would do and not do, what he would have and not have, He became a law unto himself, rebelling against God as his law and his environment. What happened? He entered into an environment of poison and of fatal lack of what is necessary to his very life. Salvation — which is the word for health — is a return into God. Hence Christ emphasised the need to “Abide in Me”.

Now start again with that thought. You see, the whole Bible is about bringing man back to God, bringing him into God, and restoring him to his environment. “In Him we live and move and have our being” is the fundamental truth of the spiritual life. There is one thing I suggest to you, or hint at, which, if you grasp it, would be such a tremendous help to you. When the Lord says anything it may look on the face of it something very simple, and not at all profound and wonderful. But anything that comes from the Lord, though it be apparently very simple, contains all the vast knowledge and understanding that the Lord has, and not to take account of that “simple” thing may bring you into a vast amount of trouble. When the Lord Jesus says: “Abide in Me” it sounds so simple and so ordinary, but it contains all this history, and this great principle and truth: “If you get out of your environment you are exposed to all the poisons and all that creates spiritual disease. Abide in Me for your health’s sake! for your life’s sake! for the sake of everything! Abide in Me, and I in you!” Have you got that? You look again at any seemingly “little” thing that the Lord says, and if you could see you would find that you have a universe of meaning in it.

Well, the main cause of all the disorder is getting out of your rightful sphere in God, and that is what happened at the beginning. The cure, as we shall see when we come to the redemptive work, is to get back into your place, into your cover, in God. Forsake your wandering, which is outside. Leave your independence, and come in.

Now, you see, this carries with it the whole matter of the absolute, undivided, unquestioned supremacy and sovereignty of God in and through Jesus Christ. Put that another way: the absolute surrender, yieldedness, unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as Head. That is the way of life, the way of health, the way of fruitfulness, and the way of progress. And we know so well that frus-

tration, limitation, arrest, barrenness are because there is still unyieldedness to Him in the life. Adam took things into his own hands and said: "I will be the lord of my life", and we are like that by nature. And I am afraid we have not got so far away from it in grace. We meet one another, and what do we meet? We meet a man and a woman who have got a mind of their own, a will of their own, and a way of their own, and will never be taught by you, or told by you, what they should do. Unteachable, stubborn, mulish, knowing best!

Let me close with this: Pain, all pain, is because of disorder. Pain is nature shouting: "There is something wrong!" It is true in the physical. You may kill pain. There are lots of things provided for killing pain, and I am afraid I am one who says: "Thank the Lord for that!" Nevertheless, no sensible person believes that the killing of pain is getting rid of the trouble. No, you may kill the pain and silence the cry, but the trouble that is there may work itself out in your death. The killing of the pain does not mean that you heal the disorder.

The world is trying to silence this cry of pain, to numb this ache, to kill it, and go on as though there is nothing wrong; but it is there. What is true in the physical is true in the spiritual. Pain in our spiritual life, in our corporate life, is the cry that there is something wrong, there is disorder somewhere, and things are not as the Lord intended them to be. There is a dislocation in the joints, there is a fracture in the fellowship, and there is a disease of sin in the Body. We cannot just take something to numb the pain, silence the cry, and go on as though it were all right. No, the thing will work itself out. We have got to stop and say: "What is it? Where is the disorder? Where are things wrong? What is it that is against God's mind?" Until we can get our hand upon that, there is no hope for clearing up the situation at all. That is the need. Remember that the Bible says that the end of the age will see disorder — rebellion — come to the full.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Significance Of Christ In His Cross

We have been giving ourselves to a seeking to see and to grasp something of the significance of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work in relation to the whole created universe. We are really gathered around one thing: that He is the key to everything and that only as He comes into His place will the creation find the explanation and answer to its existence. That has taken us out along several lines. We have seen that there was a primeval order in the creation, of which He was the centre and the sphere, as the Son eternally appointed the 'heir of all things'. There was an order expressive of God, who is the God of order. We have seen that all progress, all fruitfulness, all satisfaction, all fullness, is a matter of Jesus Christ; and that, so far as we are concerned, Christians or mankind, it is a matter of knowing Him.

We have dwelt much upon this matter of order as essential to life, to progress and to the realisation of God's end. Order is a key to everything.

We went on to see something of the disruption of that order, the interference with it and the breaking in upon it. The result: disorder, and all its baneful consequences — pain in the creation, spiritual pain as well as physical pain. The Apostle has put it like this: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain" (Romans 8:22), because things are out of order. We traced the course of that disruption and dislocation, which began, apparently, somewhere outside of this present world — in heaven, where there was an uprising of a leader with a great following of angels, apparently in revolt against God's destined place and purpose for His Son as 'the heir of all things'. It was a bid for that position of equality with God, a bid to displace God's appointed One. That brought disruption in that realm, and the leader and his followers were cast out — "angels, which kept not their first estate" (Jude 6). We saw the leader of them, no doubt with his following, invading this earth and breaking in, so that the beautiful order of the creation was upset. In the first place, the order in the man; the balance, the symmetry, the beautiful harmony in the man's own life and constitution were upset and disorganised. Then immediately to the corporate — in the man and his wife, so that you can, in almost the first mention, detect something that has come into their fellowship. The one blamed the other for what had been done, and that momentous ordinance of God with so much bound up with it in His purpose — the two as one — is severed. And then of course, the family. The family has this schism in it, working out to one brother murdering the other. Jesus went right back to that and said of Satan: "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). From the family to the race, and that book which records all this brings us to the whole race in confusion in every way. The order, universally, in the upper realms of this earth, in the lower heavens, the earth and its environs, what we mean by the cosmos is shot through and through with this disruption, this schism, this strain, this conflict, and is just shattered to pieces. Spiritual progress in the purpose of God is arrested and all the beauty of the Lord is marred. Well, that is where we were in our earlier chapter.

Now we come to the significance of Christ in His Cross in relation to that. The Cross of the Lord Jesus stands right at the very centre and heart of that whole cosmic disruption. The Cross is the heart of redemption, but redemption relates to the whole range of Satanic interference with the order of God. The Cross, and redemption, and salvation are far, far greater things than dealing with men's sins. They deal with sinfulness, which is much, much more than sins, and sinfulness is traced right to that one who made

this assault upon God's appointment, God's economy and God's order. The Cross of the Lord Jesus stands related to that whole realm and range of disruption and disorder from centre to circumference. The Cross is not a small thing; it is an immense thing, and it reaches as far as this thing that has happened in the universe reaches. And we must look upon the Cross and upon redemption in the light of this once existing Divine order, then its upset and disruption, and then its recovery and eternal establishment beyond any more fear of the thing happening again. So far the Cross reaches, and so far Christ crucified has His significance.

The Realms Of Disruption

1. The Cosmic Realm

The redemptive work of the Lord Jesus in the Cross follows the whole path of this mischief. It follows that very course, and it is important that you and I should recognise the order and sequence of this thing. The very first realm in which the Cross has its application is the realm of the spiritual hierarchy of evil. It begins there. On the day of our Lord's crucifixion, or death, the very heavens were affected: "Darkness was over the face of the earth"; "there was a great earthquake"; "the veil of the temple was rent, from top to bottom". Heaven is involved and is breaking in, and there is a tremendous thing happening in that realm. When we read the Gospel account, of course, we only have the events and the associated happenings, but there was a man who was given an insight into something more. This was not in the Gospels and could not at that time be revealed. He tells us that in the Cross 'He stripped off principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it' (Colossians 2:15). That is where redemption begins. The very heavens (by that, I take it, the lower heavens, not God's Presence) were defiled by this revolt, and they were purged by the Cross. The disrupting forces of the order of God were met in the spiritual world by God's Son on the Cross. It is far too deep and full a matter for us to dwell upon at length, but there is a very real practical value in this, for, after all, we are not dealing in the first place with circumstances, nor conditions, nor with effects and results. We are dealing with causes. When there is a breaking in, in any realm, of those disruptive, schismatic, disordering forces, in an individual life, or in a community, or anywhere, the usual way is to find a scapegoat, to blame somebody, to begin to look at one another, to put it down to this, and that, and something else, and in so doing we are missing the point and missing the way, and we will never clear it up like that. We will only make it worse. We have got to get behind it, for there is something behind it all — ah, there is someone behind it all.

I do not know what you feel about it, but with all the desire that we may have — and it is a very real one — not to become demoniacal-minded, you are just more and more forced to realise that there is a whole system of iniquity and animosity to the things of God at work in this universe, and it seems that these forces are more and more at work. They come very near and are like a blanket upon you, especially when there is something of the Lord on hand. It just recurs like the seasons when the Lord has something more in view. It just happens. It is not coincidence, nor chance, nor imagination, for the thing is far too desperately real: it is calculated to put you right out of the fight, and strategically so, at a very, very important moment. Well, we could say much about it, but this is in a realm that is over things, that encompasses 'things', circumstances, happenings, feelings, and all that. They are secondary. It is what is around as the source of them that it is important to recognise.

Now, the Lord Jesus, in His Cross, has something to say to that realm, and you and I will never know victory over things until we know the value of the Cross and the Blood of Jesus in that ground and realm. The victory has got to be won in that realm, or applied in that realm, before 'things' will give place. Oh, take that to heart! Remember that! For we are just being 'played with' by these evil forces, and being made to do just as they want us to do, because we have either lost, or never have had, this key to the situation: that Calvary touches the cosmic realm of evil. That is where the path of redemption begins, as that is where the trouble began.

2. The Realm of Man

The next thing on the way, as you noted, is man. This whole thing, great and far-reaching in its range, and terrible in its nature, is focused down upon man. He is the next point of assault, to disrupt him, divide him, and make him, in himself, incapable of functioning simply because he is divided. You know that it is true, if you are divided in yourself, or amongst yourselves, you cannot do anything. You are just paralysed and cannot get anywhere. That is a fact, and the devil knows it, if you do not! And so he comes in from the outside and brings this disruption down to man himself, and man becomes a paralysed creature simply because he himself is in division. His nature is divided. The order, the beautiful order, balance and symmetry of his own personality is upset. Man was created in an order. I am not staying with the order of spirit, soul and body, but there is an order, and if that order obtains in Christ, you have a man in peace, in rest, in strength, and a man who is accounted for something. Upset that man in himself, in his own constitution, and throw him all out of gear and out of order, and where does he get? Well, that is what the Bible means by vanity. "The creation", says Paul, "was subjected to vanity" (Romans 8:20). That is, 'You shall not get through!' It is imposed and you cannot get anywhere.

Redemption by the Cross of the Lord Jesus is intended, dear friends, to come to us individually to recover and restore a harmony in ourselves. It may be a long process, but we do know that a beginning is

made when new birth takes place; when we come to the Cross of the Lord Jesus as to our condition, our need as to ourselves, and that Cross becomes effective just at the beginning of the Christian life. The testimony of all that have come that way is that there is a wonderful sense of peace that comes into the heart. Peace is only another word for harmony, you know. It is not just that everything has quietened down. Oh, no! It is that now you have got into true line with the purpose for which you were made. You are on the path now. You have been all over the place, but now your feet are on the way and something of the peace of the end comes into the beginning. You are going to have many conflicts presently, but the beginning is like that. Even with a little child it is wonderful. A child does not understand all your theology and doctrine of atonement and justification, but a little child can know what it means to receive Jesus into the heart. And when that is done with a little child you at once see something. Something has happened, and it is not imagination. It is the beginning of a life readjusted, re-harmonized. The conflict has gone out, so far as the person is concerned. It is like that in new birth. It is the beginning of the new creation which, in its completion, will be a beautiful reproduction of a lost harmonious order.

The Christian life, from that beginning, from that starting point, is just the school in which we learn the way of harmony, the way of life. What is it? It is everything centred in, and governed by, the Lord Jesus. You see, we have these statements here. We are so familiar with them that they have almost lost their real meaning to us. "In him all things hold together." He is the integrating centre of this universe. He brings the broken parts together, and forms again. He takes hold of the chords, which are all out of tune and tunes them again into a harmony. 'In Him all things consist.' When Jesus has His place, things begin to be like that. There is a re-conciliating. And, I say, the Christian life is the school of learning to let Jesus have His place, and when He has His place you know, as well as I do that, so far as our inner life is concerned, things are far more restful, more sure, and certainly more fruitful. It is just that, but that is a tremendous thing, because we say: 'Jesus has His place!' It sounds so elementary, but you see how comprehensive it is. He is the centre of a harmonised universe, and when He has His place, He begins to harmonise the inner life. And the more place He has, the more unified we are, and the more at peace we are. We know quite well how true it is in the opposite: that when He is not getting His place in everything, everything is under a strain.

For the individual, and His significance there as the unifying of the heart — one heart, not a divided heart — it is a deep work, a great work, and perhaps it is a long work, but that is the business of life: the unifying of everything in Christ. That is, Christ becoming the single Factor who makes of everything a single factor: 'For to me to live is Christ,' a single factor unifying the whole life. Satan is not going to leave that alone. He is going, by every possible means, to assail it, to interfere with it if he can. But, you see, he cannot, for he just cannot destroy Christ. He has been destroyed by Christ! And the work of the Cross of our Lord Jesus is the ground upon which we stand, and must stand, against all that interfering work of the evil forces to bring us again into inward confusion and uncertainty. Satan is trying it all the time. Stand your ground on the Cross! Stand your ground under the Blood when he tries to rob you of that quiet assurance that all is well, because of what the Lord Jesus has done in His Cross.

3. The Marriage Realm

You move from the personal into the corporate life. This is the pathway of the evil forces, and this is the pathway of the Cross. Yes, into this most sacred relationship which was the true ordinance of God at the beginning — husband and wife. Is it necessary for me to say to young people who are contemplating that union: 'Be sure that it is in Christ! Be sure that it is in Christ to begin with!' There is no guarantee or even hope for all that it means in the purpose of God unless it is in Christ. And there are tremendous things bound up with that relationship in Christ. But, if it has taken place, this is one of the sacred things that the evil forces and the evil one will never cease to assail. You, perhaps, have not realised the tremendous damage that the devil can do when he can separate two in that relationship. It is a focal point of his constant attack to divide there. That relationship is a real battleground through life, for there is so much for the Lord in it. If it has in any way been interfered with, how are you going to put it right? Not by mere human attempts. You have got to get back into Christ, for it is only getting back on to the ground of Christ that will put that right. It may be that the man is pulling in one direction and the woman in another. There is no real togetherness. One has one mind, and the other has another: one will, and another; one interest, and another; one like, and another. And you know it is weakening, it is frustrating and it is desolating. It is only when the two get on to the ground of Christ crucified that that thing can be dealt with and put right. Every one has got to let go their natural ground and take the ground of Christ crucified as to themselves.

But, dear friends, the Word of God makes it perfectly clear to us that, in the beginning, that ordinance of God, that relationship, was a representation of something far greater. This, in its testimony, is a Church matter. 'I speak of Christ and the Church', says the Apostle in speaking of that relationship. The real principle in the principle of 'corporate life' anywhere, anyhow, in Christ — maybe the two, the three, the local company, or the larger company of the Lord's people. The principle is one principle. The enemy will stand at nothing to get in between, to divide. And the only — but the sure — means of preserving that unity is the Cross of the Lord Jesus at work in an inward way in us all. That is a tremendous thing! But it will do it. If only that Cross becomes really a subjective reality in all concerned, that is the end of all divisions.

4. The Realm Of The Church

We can easily see, without dwelling upon it, that this extends, beyond the individual, beyond the two and three, beyond the little group and company, to the Church universal. We can see that, eventually, it will reach the whole inhabited world, when Christ has His place. 'All the great multitude, out of every diversity of nationality, and tongue, and clime, and kindred' will be on the ground of the Lamb slain, the Cross of the Lord Jesus. They will be 'singing one song' in harmony. The high notes, the low notes, and all the notes between will be ascribing worth to the Lamb. Glorious chorus! Redemption follows that course. The Cross of the Lord Jesus relates to that one thing, to an end where all is reunited in Christ.

We have placed John 17 as the foundation of this message, and you know the great, perhaps the highest, note of that chapter is in a little clause: 'that they may be perfected into one'. Perfected into one! That is the end of His prayer, the end of His travail, the end of His redeeming work — perfected into one! Then the great arch-adversary of the Divine order can do no more. His work is finished, his power is destroyed, for the Cross stands victorious over this long history of disruption.

I see no hope for unity anywhere other than in the Cross of the Lord Jesus: Christ crucified, put in His place. And although the battle goes on and the enemy is always trying to make a show of disruption and disorder, if the Cross has really done a work in human hearts, there is a basic something that will triumph over all that.

CHAPTER FIVE

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 3:14).

"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 8:28).

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (John 12:32).

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 judgement 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 17:5). 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 "reconciliation", 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 2:9 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 organise, form, arrange, and control it, disorder — or un-order — 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 13, 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 ministry, 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, organisations, or even 'churches', but representations and expressions of Christ.