

A CHILD OVER THE NATIONS

Reading: Jeremiah 1

This title has nothing to do with a youth's conceited idea of his own importance, but the very reverse of any such idea, for it indicates how God selected a weak and insignificant instrument through whom He could bring His own throne to bear upon the nations. The rule committed to Jeremiah was a spiritual one, and God still seeks to influence and govern world events by spiritual means through a praying Church.

Jeremiah has a very real message for us in this connection. We can be helped by all the men of God described in the Scriptures, for they represent spiritual principles which are not limited to any particular time, but are eternal in their significance and abiding in their value. Jeremiah, however, seems to me to have a special application to the time in which we live; and as we study his story we can find how he illustrates a divine instrument which is nothing in itself but has tremendous throne influence on current affairs.

□ JOSIAH'S PASSOVER

One of the most significant and important events in his time was the rediscovery of the book of the law by Hilkiah. The first effect of this discovery was that king Josiah intensified his reforms and summoned a great national gathering for the celebration of the Passover. He himself stood to the Word of God, and all the people declared themselves ready to do the same. Jeremiah, however, a man who could never be content with the merely external, had his reservations; he did not believe in the downright genuineness of it all, so far as the people as a whole were concerned. And he was right,

Josiah himself was doubtless genuine, and meant all he said, but it seems perfectly clear that the people themselves were not wholehearted in their committal. The ground of Jeremiah's reservation was the "notwithstanding" of 2 Kings 23:26, which shows that the long drift away from God's requirements could not be reversed by a mere emotional outburst called revival, but needed something much more radical. So Jeremiah was not carried away by the good and apparently sincere movement. He had spiritual perception which pierced through the outward appearance.

Such perception can be painful. Jeremiah found that his discernment got him into trouble all along the line. His reserve was not due to temperamental or constitutional cynicism, as though he were one of those negative people with a critical and destructive attitude, even towards the best that is. No, Jeremiah was far too sensitive spiritually for this, and would have been only too glad to have found something which did truly represent heart adjustment to God. He was a heart-stricken man, ready to weep day and night for the people's misfortunes (9:1). There is a great deal of difference between the passing of critical judgments, censorious attitudes, a discontented spirit, constant faultfinding, and the sorrowing heart of a man who truly suffers with God. It is easy to see faults and flaws; it costs nothing to criticize; but it is very painful to see with the eyes of God and to sorrow with Him over the difference between mere professions and what is genuinely according to His mind. Let me say that critical people are no use to God; He will give no anointing to them, for they bring in death and not life. Jeremiah represents an entirely different spirit. His suffering ministry seemed to pull down and root up, but it also had a positive building result. All this is made clear in the account which we are given here of his call.

□ JEREMIAH'S I CANNOT

Jeremiah's immediate and spontaneous reaction to his calling and commission was to say, "Ah Lord God, I cannot...". This may not sound very spiritual but actually Jeremiah's sense of personal inadequacy was an indispensable factor in his whole calling. The Lord knows whom He is apprehending and sending, and we can take it as settled that if Jeremiah had been a man full of confidence in himself, God would never have called him. This sense of personal weakness and emptiness is essential to God; this is where everything begins in a life marked out for divine purpose. If the Lord were doing some small things, partial things, He might have used a less empty vessel. There are people who enter God's service full of confidence in themselves, and in some measure they are used by God. Their usefulness, however, is very limited until they realize that God's full purpose requires that the work should be wholly of Him, with no room for man's sufficiency. Most of us begin before we have learned this lesson, but as we come more clearly into the light of God we realize that the height of the value of God's purpose in and through us, will correspond with the depth of our conscious dependence on Him. It is basic that God's servant should be aware of his own weakness.

Had Paul been asked to answer Jeremiah's confession, "I cannot speak..." he would probably have pointed out that God has chosen the weak and foolish things, and even the things which "are not" for His greatest works.

Had he continued, however, with his own testimony, he would doubtless have described an experience in which he was given a new awareness of his personal inadequacy which made him more dependent and therefore more usable. "We despaired even of life" was the negative side of this experience, but its positive value was found in the purpose, namely "... that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead". The man who comes down to zero will find that God meets him at that point, for this principle of conscious personal insufficiency is one which God will insist on, and will take pains to establish in us, even at the cost of deep suffering on our part. While such an explanation may be hard for some to receive, it may well be a comfort to others whose strange trials have made them inclined to fear that they can never count for God at all. It is always the Lord's way, to empty us of self strength so that we be endued with His power. Jeremiah's call suggests that it will always be "a child" whom God will set over the nations.

□ GOD'S I WILL

God's answer is always resurrection power. Jeremiah's perception made him dubious about the genuineness of the people's allegiance to God under the old covenant, but his ministry was far from being negative, for it was he who first propounded the glories of the new covenant. He may have felt as weak and insignificant as a child, but he had a big part to play in the history of God's people, and in fact when the seventy years of captivity had closed, his was the ministry of recovery for, "... that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus..." (Ezra 1:1).

Here, then, was the Lord's immediate reply to His servant's difficulty; He gave him a commission which was based on a vision. "What seest thou?" He asked Jeremiah, giving the prophet the opportunity to tell of the almond tree which was full of miraculous significance. Aaron's almond rod budded, blossomed and bore fruit in one night, so being a type of the Spirit of resurrection in priesthood. All the other rods remained dead, as would have done the rod of Aaron if it had not been given miraculous new life, and so become a symbol of Christ's fulfilling His priesthood in the power of resurrection. It was as if God was explaining to Jeremiah that his ministry was not going to be fulfilled on the basis of what he was or was not; the work would be fruitful by reason of the mighty power of resurrection life. So it proved, again and again. There was so much opposition that at one point Jeremiah determined that he would not speak any more. He found, however, that there was a fire — a divine fire — in his bones which set aside all his carnal resolutions to be silent and constrained him to speak anew in the power and victory of resurrection. How important it is for us all to have the fire in our bones!

Again, he was put into a dark dungeon so miry that it threatened to engulf him and would certainly have died there but for God's merciful intervention through Ebed-melech. At times it seemed to him that God was as a mighty man who could not save, but the Lord never disgraced the throne of His glory and Jeremiah was always delivered. The almond tree means that whatever may happen, God will always see to it that the end is victory by resurrection power. So Jeremiah not only survived but was the means of producing a God-glorifying remnant who emerged from their seventy-year grave in Babylon to come back to Jerusalem and to its true testimony. The vision of the almond tree was a private promise to Jeremiah: the fulfillment was for all to recognize.

The final assurance of this call gave the guarantee that Jeremiah would have a charmed life until he had finished his God-given task. He did not die a violent death; he did not starve; but he lived on until the work was completed. The story is an amazing one, for he had to pass through indescribable vigours and perils, seeming to have every evil force against him. He ought to have died a score of deaths, but he survived every attack and lived on through forty-two dangerous years. So it was that he proved what we can all prove, and that is that frailty and inadequacy are sometimes the very qualifications for a powerful spiritual ministry.

□ FAITH'S AMEN

Unlike Daniel, Jeremiah was never made a ruler by men. He was, of course, a priest, and it was in terms of priestly ministry that he exercised his authority. He did not serve in association with the temple and its sacrifices, but he served in the secret place of heart communion with God. It was there, in that inner life of prayer, that he wept over the tragedy of the blind and stubborn people (13:17); there that he kept alive his vision of God's glorious high and eternal throne (17:12); and there that he found sweet dreams which were no airy optimism but substantial purposes of God (31:26). Even while he was shut up in prison he maintained his prayer watch with God and found fresh inspiration to ask for, and receive, the impossible (33:3). He ruled by prayer.

So fervent and persistent was this man's prayer life that there were times when God Himself had to tell him to stop (7:16; 11:14; 14:11). The last of these references seems to indicate that God did not want to silence Jeremiah, but only to forbid him from asking for a superficial amelioration of the people's lot and a return to the old order. Jeremiah understood this, and kept his prayers focused on the future, and especially on the new day when

Israel herself would seek God with all her heart (29:14).

Although Jeremiah was such a man of prayer he was no recluse. He witnessed fearlessly as well as praying. He wrote messages to the captives in Babylon as well as interceding for their good. He bought his nephew's field, and he visited the potter's house. He lived an active life, but his chief contribution to the current affairs in his day — and far beyond it — was through his ministry of intercession. He prayed before he spoke, and he prayed afterwards. When he had completed his business affairs, he turned to prayer (32:16).

He ruled for God. His prayers not only kept alive a flame of hope at a time when men were in despair, but in due time they rebuilt and replanted God's people in restored Jerusalem. More than this, they spanned the centuries to inspire Hebrew Christians when once again their holy city was destroyed (Hebrews 8:10), and still today they inspire us to take fresh note of the glories of that new covenant which turns away from dead religious observances to a living and personal knowledge of God by the Holy Spirit. Jeremiah's perception of the unreal did not stop at negatives but led on to this blessed prospect of vital, spiritual union with God. It may seem fanciful to speak of a child over the nations, but was it not our Lord Jesus Himself who said, "Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32)? Jeremiah's history may help us to understand something of how God is working with us so that this divine intention may become a reality.

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BETHANY

THE LORD'S THOUGHT FOR HIS ASSEMBLY

The upper room of the first chapter of the Acts corresponds with Bethany, the "house of figs", and Bethany with the upper room. We are going to take up that thought and, as the Lord helps us, follow it out to greater fullness. What is before us is the Lord's desire to have at the end what He had at the beginning — to have in His people, spiritually, that which He Himself constituted by His own presence at the beginning: and if I were asked to put into a word what I feel the object of the Lord to be, I should say, speaking symbolically, that it is 'Bethanies'. For Bethany, to my mind, most fully corresponds to the Lord's thought: He would have things on the basis of Bethany, constituted according to Bethany, and have His universal Church represented locally by 'Bethanies'. Now I am going to ask you to look at seven passages where Bethany is mentioned.

□ THE LORD RECOGNISED AND RECEIVED

Luke 10:38. *"Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village (do not forget that villages represent local assemblies): and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. (You know whose the house was now, who was the head of that house.) And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said..."*

Now here, in this first mention of Bethany, we have one or two things which in principle represent that Church, and that assembly, and that house, which the Lord has His heart set upon, and I fasten at once upon one word: "And a certain woman named Martha *received* him into her house." The word "received" is the key-word to this whole thing, and it represents immediately a great difference. It is a discriminating word, a differentiating word.

One remembers that it was said concerning His coming from glory to this earth: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). We shall remember that He said of Himself: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). And if it really did break upon us with anything like its real meaning, when we reflect as to who it is of whom the first is said, and who is saying the second, it would leave us astonished. Here is the Creator of all, the Proprietor of all, the Lord of heaven and of earth; the Lord who has greater right to everything and anything than any other being in the universe; the Lord, for whom and through whom all things were made — and He came and had not where to lay His head in the world of His creation, in the realm of all His sovereign rights. He was not received, but, as truly expressing the attitude even of His own kinsfolk to Him, He represented them as saying: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance. And they took him, and cast him forth..." (Matthew 21:38,39).

But here we read: *"And a certain woman named Martha received him..."* "My church" — "My church" — His assembly, His spiritual house, is the place where He is gladly received and finds His rest. It is His place, *His* place in a world which rejects Him; it is the place where He is recognised. Do you notice that when assemblies are be-

ing scattered over the face of the earth it is always *that* which is the beginning of an assembly? They “receive” the word. Pentecost was that: “*Then they that received his word...*” (Acts 2:41). At Philippi, “*a certain woman named Lydia... whose heart the Lord opened, to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there*” (Acts 16:14,15). That is the beginning of the assembly — it is like that everywhere. It is a spiritual perception issuing in an openhearted reception. That is the first thing which befeatures His Church: “received”. It is the giving Him a place, *the* place of honour.

Now that is very simple, but it represents much to the Lord, and it carries us a long way, because it represents something more than the Lord coming just to be a sojourner in the midst. It represents that the Lord has got a footing, a foothold, a place which provides Him with that which is necessary to Him to secure all His rights universally. Let me illustrate:

You remember the tragic story in II Samuel 15, of the rejection of David in the usurping of Absalom. It is a pathetic story — David driven away from his place; leaving, passing out of, the realm of his rights. One and another accompany him, and Zadok the priest brings the ark of God with him, but David turns to Zadok and says: “Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation” (vs.25). The inference is: ‘When I come back, I shall have in the city, in the place of my rejection, that which is sympathetic with me, to which I can come back. I shall not come back a stranger; I shall not come back to nothing; I shall not come back to find no place; I shall not come back and find there is no home for me: I shall come back to something that is one with me. Zadok, you are one with me; yes, you wanted to come out with me — this is a perfect sympathy. Now go back into the city, and when I come back I shall come back to something that is with me’.

And that is the principle here. The assembly here provides the Lord with that in which He is now, by His Spirit. It declares that He has a foothold in a rejecting world, and He is coming back to *that*. He will have something to come back to which is on His side and which, being on His side, will provide Him with the ground for re-establishing His universal rights, just as Zadok did for David.

And that is why the Lord would have His Church here in assemblies, local assemblies, over the face of the earth. They are testimonies to His rights, in a world where those rights are disputed and disowned; and they stand there to say: ‘Yes, His rights are the supreme rights in this world, not the rights of the usurper’, and they maintain that testimony. When He comes back, they are to be the means, the instrument, of His recovery of those rights which have been disputed and from which He has been driven out. There is a good deal bound up with receiving the Lord. He is coming back to His own because He is already there in possession.

You understand why the Devil is always out to destroy, if possible, the local expression of the Church; to destroy the little companies of the Lord’s people who are living in heavenly union and fellowship with Him. It is because they represent His rights — the Lord’s rights — and they are there all the time disputing by their very presence the rights of the usurper. The ark of the testimony is there; and while that is there, on the side of the Lord, the usurper has not universal sway. He knows that it represents that his kingdom is defeated, is menaced, and it is a constant thorn in his side. And so, if possible, he will quench it, break it, divide it, do anything to get rid of that local expression which is according to Christ and in which He is. That is what the Church ought to be as locally represented; that is what every believer ought to be here on earth: a foothold to the Lord in this earth, a testimony to His sovereign lordship and right. To *receive* the Lord provides Him with such a foothold and such a testimony.

And so we see that the very first step as related to Bethany is of the greatest significance. It represents a principle of tremendous importance. The Church is constituted, to begin with, upon the simple principle that *Christ has found a place*: amidst all the range of rejection He has found a place.

□ HIS HEART’S SATISFACTION

Now we continue with the passage: “... *received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word.*” Literally the words are: “who also took her seat at the feet of Jesus and went on listening to His word.” “Took her seat at His feet and went on listening.” It was that which irritated Martha: she *went on* listening. What Martha really said to the Lord was in the same tense, the imperfect. When she came to the Lord she said: “*Dost thou not care that my sister doth KEEP ON LEAVING me to serve alone?*” “Keep on leaving me” — because she “kept on listening”!

What is this? Well, it is that which provides the Lord with what He most desires. It is the heart satisfaction of the Lord that is represented by this. The heart satisfaction of the Lord was found in what Mary did. It is here that

we understand the meaning of Bethany. You go over to Matthew 21, and you will find the story of the fig tree. Jesus is moving between Jerusalem and Bethany; He has been into Jerusalem and has seen things in the temple, and His heart has been pained, shot through with the agony of disappointment. He has looked round upon all things, and has said nothing, and has gone back to Bethany. In the morning, as He is in the way, being hungry and seeing a fig tree, He comes up to it, to see whether perhaps it is bearing fruit. But He finds none, and says, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever"; and as they return, the disciples mark that the fig tree is withered and dead; they point out the fact.

Now that fig tree, as we know, was bound up with Jerusalem, and was a type of Judaism as it then was. The heart disappointment which the Lord had met in the temple was one with His heart disappointment in coming hungry to the fig tree and finding no fruit; the two things are one. That order of things, then, passes out of His realm of interest; Judaism goes out for the rest of the age — "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever" (Gr. "unto the age"). It cannot satisfy Him, and it goes; it is a withered tree providing the Lord with nothing.

But when that heart disappointment is felt so acutely, and registered in that way by Him, He goes to Bethany, and Bethany means "the house of figs". Not in the temple, and not in Jerusalem, does the Lord find His satisfaction, but in Bethany. That is why He was always going there. Heart satisfaction for Him now was not in the cold, lifeless, formal religious system of the day, but in the living, throbbing, warm atmosphere of the Bethany home. He always knew that, while His words were rejected in Jerusalem, they would be accepted there, and listened to eagerly, and there would always be someone who would 'keep on' listening.

I am impressed with Acts 2; it says that after Pentecost those who believed "continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching" (verse 42). You see, there the Church came in, and that is its feature: "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching." We are so used to those words that they do not seem to convey very much to us. Will you bear with a simple practical way of seeking to apply it?

In these pages certain things are being said. Now you will read them, and you will go your way, and perhaps you will remember them for a certain length of time; perhaps for a long time you will remember Bethany. Mention of Bethany will bring back something — certain things that you have read. You may speak of this message as a more or less good one, an interesting message, or something like that. What a difference between that and your going away and 'continuing steadfastly in the teaching'! You must yourself interpret this, and say to yourself: 'Now what does it mean for me to continue steadfastly in that?'

The word really is 'persisting'. "They *persisted* in the apostles' teaching". There is all the difference between persisting in the teaching, and going away and saying: 'Well, that was a very nice message'. 'Persisting' represents the practical, positive application of the heart to the truth, and that constitutes His Church; it is where that which comes from Him is received and the whole heart, the whole life, is given to it. There is *abandonment* to it.

And that was probably what Martha did not like. Mary was abandoned to it, she was given to it; and that is what the Lord is seeking. I wonder what would be the result if we took that attitude toward every word of Divine truth that came to us. When I think of the mountains of truth that have been built up, I cannot help asking the question: 'What is the percentage of real application to that truth on the part of those who hear it?' It was because those at the beginning took such a practical attitude toward the things which they heard, and persisted in them, that you had the effectiveness there. They did not go away and say: 'What a wonderful sermon Peter preached today!' No, they persisted in the apostles' teaching.

That is what the Lord wants. That is what satisfies His heart. Mary took her seat at His feet and went on listening to His word, and that satisfied His heart when all else disappointed Him. Heart satisfaction must be a feature of the life of the Lord's people; and heart satisfaction to Him is just this, that we hang upon His word, we appraise it rightly, we regard it as the supreme thing. The assembly must be the "house of figs" for the Lord.

□ ADJUSTED SERVICE

Next let us look at Martha. "*But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said...*" The Greek is very strong: it means that she walked up to Him and involved Him in this. It implies that she regarded Him as responsible, and if she had said all that was in her mind, she would have said: 'You are responsible for this, You are involved in this, and it is up to You to put it right.' That is what is implied by the original words here — regarding Him as the one involved in it, and He could if He would, and He ought to, put it right. It implies that she burst out. She had been bottling this thing up, and at last, able to contain it no longer, she went up to Him and burst out: "*Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.*"

Now I want you to get the force of the situation, and it will help you with Martha. We must understand Mar-

tha's mood and position. "Cumbered about much serving" hardly conveys to us what really was the situation. We get from the translation an altogether imperfect impression, I think, of exactly how things were. The Greek word here is a word which means "was distracted", "pulled in different directions". Probably her anxiety showed in her face. And what was the anxiety over? Many household cares, perhaps many dishes; preoccupations of all kinds. And the Lord said to Martha: 'Martha, you are bothered about all sorts of secondary considerations; you have got more than you can handle. There is but one thing that is really necessary —'.

You are beginning to understand the situation now, are you not? It was simply that there was necessary an adjustment of things on the part of Martha, so that what was most important should have its place. It was not that the Lord was out of sympathy with Martha's providing them with a meal, but He saw that she was causing this meal business to become such an elaborate and extensive thing as to be altogether out of proportion, and to put the more essential things into a place much less than the non-essential.

Yes, a meal may be right, but oh, let us put things in their right proportion. Let us see to it that temporal things do not overwhelm spiritual. Do not let us become so anxious and distracted about the passing things that the spiritual things are eclipsed. For the one thing which ought to be made to keep all the other things in their right places — they are all right in their places — is the thing which comes from the lips of the Lord.

You see, it is a matter of proportion, it is a matter of where you are placing the most emphasis. It is a matter of whether you are allowing the things of this life so to absorb, and to occupy, and to draw you round with anxiety, that the greater things are not getting a chance. And we all agree now, we have no more quarrel with the Master over Mary, when we see it like that. What was necessary was that there should be an adjustment of things: so that, while these other matters had a place, and a right place, they were *in* their place and in their own measure; whilst the supreme things were allowed to predominate and were not submerged in those lesser matters which, after all, are not the abiding things.

Now, that was the whole situation. In the House of God, the thing that matters more than all our business, all our feverish activities to do a thousand and one things of Christian work — the one thing that matters is getting to know the Lord, and giving the Lord a chance to make Himself known. Feverish activities so often, in what is called 'the church', exclude the voice of the Lord, shut Him out; it is all what we are doing, and so little of what He is getting a chance to say. The place that satisfies Him is the place of adjustment to the supreme things.

Well, that is Martha.

□ PRECIOUS OINTMENT POURED FORTH

Now we turn for the fourth thing to Matthew 26:6–13. It is the same village, and now the woman with her "*alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment*". The incident speaks to us in the first instance of the recognition of the worth of the Lord Jesus. The recognition of the *worth* of the Lord Jesus. All who looked on, as good as said: 'He is not worth it'; that is what it amounted to. 'He is not worth it.' Of course they would not have put it like that. She recognised His worth — that He was worth the 'exceeding preciousness'. It was the exceeding preciousness of Christ that was in view here, as something recognised. That, I think, is the main feature. It is a feature of Bethany, it is a feature of the upper room, it is a feature of "My church". It is a feature of the Lord's assembly, it is a feature of the people who are after His own heart: the recognition of His exceeding preciousness, His exceeding worth; that there is nothing too costly to lay at His feet. "*Unto you therefore which believe he is precious (is the preciousness)*" (1 Pet. 2:7).

Now, that is very simple, and yet again it is a thing that draws forth the deep appreciation of the Lord Jesus. It is again a thing which gives feature to a very much beloved village. In other words it is a thing which makes His assembly of great value to Him, that there His worth is recognised, and He is appreciated and appraised at His true value. That must mark the house of the Lord. It is a feature that must be developed more and more. It is a thing to which we must attend, that we have a ready and an ever-growing recognition of the preciousness and worth of the Lord Jesus. Oh, how different this is from the merely formal church system! We can hardly say that the outstanding feature of that is a true heart-appreciation of the worth and of the value of the Lord Jesus. Where that appreciation is, you have the assembly; where it is not, whatever else you may have of ornate and elaborate presentation, you have not got the assembly, it is not the place of His delight.

I think I see something else here. The brokenness of the cruse brings out into expression the preciousness of the ointment. It is the 'vessel of fragile clay' which, being broken, makes possible the manifestation and expression of the glories of Christ. While that cruse is whole, strong, and sound in itself, something which you would look at and take account of in itself; something that would cause you to say: 'That is a beautiful vase, that is a wonderful piece of alabaster'; — you are not getting at the secret. We may take account of men, as splendid intellects,

splendid men, wonderful preachers and so on — be occupied with the vase, the cruse — and the other be sealed, be hidden; but when the cruse is broken, shattered, then you get at the tabernacle secret of the glory of Christ.

You see it in Paul. I suppose Saul of Tarsus was a wonderful bit of alabaster intellectually, morally, religiously. He tells us that he was; he tells us all that he was, all that he gloried in and that men looked at and no doubt praised; but he was smashed and it is no longer Saul, and it is no longer Paul, but it is the beauty and glory of Christ. The fragrance of Christ comes out when the cruse is broken.

And, beloved, it is just like that in our experience. The Church, the true Church, has been allowed to be shattered, and shattered again, and the members individually are so often allowed to be broken and broken again; but has it not proved through history that, for the Church and for the individual, the breaking, the shattering, the smashing, has brought about an expression of the glories of Christ in a wonderful way? It is just like that. We go through a new experience of being broken — we put it in other ways sometimes and say we are being brought more deeply into the death of Christ, coming into a fresh experience of the Cross: however we may put it, it means breaking, it means the breaking of the cruse — but believe me, beloved, it means a fuller expression and knowledge of the glory of Christ, and it will bring us to a new appreciation of Him. We shall discover Him in the time of our brokenness. And in the same way the Church passes through the way of the Cross, but comes by the breaking to the worth of the Lord Jesus.

□ THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

We pass to John and the well-known chapter 11. Here is Bethany again in view, and this time it is the raising of Lazarus which comes before us. We will not go through the whole story and take its details, but simply come swiftly to its one conclusion at the end. Bethany, in this instance, becomes the scene, the sphere, of the manifestation of resurrection power, resurrection life. There are many other things here. There is a wonderful expression of love; there is a wonderful expression of fellowship here in this chapter. Far away from Bethany the Lord said to His disciples: "*Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep*". "Our friend"; not "My friend", but "our friend". You see, it is fellowship. "*Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.*" It is love. All these are features of Bethany; but the outstanding feature here is the manifestation of His resurrection, the power of His resurrection, resurrection life.

And here again Bethany is an illustration of the Church that He is building. We know this from Ephesians, the 'Church Epistle', as we call it. We very soon come to our being "quicken... together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). The Church is the vessel in which the power of His resurrection is displayed; and here again we not only testify to the fact, to the doctrine, but we have to apply the test, that the assembly according to the mind of the Lord is that in which His resurrection power and life are displayed.

Now, I know, when things like that are said, so often there is that vacant feeling that remains: 'Yes, we know it *ought* to be so, just as we ought to be crucified with Christ; we know we ought to be risen with Christ, and it is quite true that we ought to know the power of His resurrection, and His resurrection life'. That is said again and again, but we leave it there. The point is: how is it to be?

Now, we have to recognize that the Lord has brought His Church into being for the specific purpose of displaying the power of His resurrection, and we should dedicate ourselves unto the Lord for that very end. That is the way: in recognizing that the object, the very object of our being in that Church, of that Body, is that He might display in us His resurrection power and life. We, recognizing that, have a definite understanding with our Lord that we are consecrated to Him; now our responsibility ends there, if it is from our hearts, and the Lord will begin His work.

We shall not be able to raise ourselves any more than we can crucify ourselves, but we must recognize that the Lord's dealings with us are with that in view. In order to display the power of His resurrection, He will very often have to take the attitude toward us of letting things get well beyond all human power to remedy or save, of allowing things to go so far that there is no other power in all the universe that can do anything whatever to save the situation. He will allow death, disintegration, to work, so that nothing, nothing in the universe is of any avail, except the power of His resurrection.

We shall come to the place where Abraham came, who became the great type of faith which moved right into resurrection: "He considered his own body now as good as dead" (Rom. 4:19). That is the phrase used by the apostle about Abraham: "as good as dead". And Paul came into that: "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (II Cor. 1:9). Whatever else men may be able to do in the realm of creation, they stop short when death has actually taken place; they can do no more. Resurrection is God's act, and God's alone. Men can do very many things when they have got life, but when there

is no life it is only God who can do anything. And God will allow His Church and its members oft-times to get into such situations as are altogether beyond human help, in order that He may give the display, which is His own display, in which no man has any place to glory.

So said the Lord Jesus: *“This sickness is not unto death, but for THE GLORY OF GOD, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”* Glorified! We have dedicated ourselves to that course of things — that is, we have dedicated ourselves to a line of human despair; but how slow we are to accept it in its outworking. When things get to a desperate situation, we kick so much and think that all has gone wrong. It may be just going right for the Lord! Oh, yes, it is desperate; that consideration does not take away from the desperateness of it, the awfulness of it; but if it is going to provide the Lord with His supreme opportunity to raise His preeminent testimony, then it is right — that is, it will be right in its issue.

When at last, in eternity, we read the story of the Church, which is His Body, and see all that it really did come through, we shall have to confess that no human institution, no man-made thing, could have survived, could have gone through that which the saints went through. When it is understood in the light of eternity and appraised by true spiritual standards, we shall say that none but God Almighty could have achieved that, could have brought it through: that it has undoubtedly become the vehicle of the expression of “the exceeding greatness of his power” (Eph. 1:19); and that is to say a great deal. If “the exceeding greatness of his power” is necessary to this, well, that says much for what we have to be brought out of, doesn’t it? If “the weakness of God is stronger than men” (I Cor. 1:25), what must “the exceeding greatness of his power” represent?

Well, that is in resurrection; as you know, the words are connected with that: “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:19,20). That is “to us-ward who believe”. Now the Church, the Bethany testimony, is to be a testimony to the power of His resurrection, and if His methods with us are making that necessary, then let us take encouragement and comfort from the fact that we are thus to be a true expression of what He desires of His Church.

□ CELEBRATING HIS VICTORY

We pass from chapter 11 of John to chapter 12. *“Jesus therefore six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus raised from the dead. So they made him a supper there: and Martha served”* (evidently she had not gathered, from the Lord’s words to her, that service was wrong; she is still serving — it is all right now); *“but Lazarus was one of them that sat at meat with him. Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very precious, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.”*

Here we have the feast, and the feast has several elements. One, represented by Mary and her action, speaks of worship. Once again, it is the appreciation of Christ that is in view. That is worship. Worship — according to God’s thought — is always simply the appreciation of the Lord Jesus; bringing up before God the sweet odour of a heart-appreciation of His Son. That may sound simple, but worship in its purest essence is what we think of the Lord Jesus, expressed to the Father. That is worship. The assembly is for that. Bethany speaks of that.

Martha — yes, Martha served. But it is adjusted service. She is still serving, but it is all right; there is no rebuke now. There is no circling round of her face with anxiety now; she is not drawn around with care: she is serving in a resurrection house. Here is adjusted service, and service in the Lord’s house is quite according to His mind when the service is in fellowship with, and in right proportion to, the worship. There is an adjustment between the sisters now, you see. They were disjointed before, because things were ill-proportioned and out of place; now the adjustment has been made and they are just getting on constantly together. It is adjusted service.

Lazarus sat at meat, and of course he is the principle of life, resurrection life. That, again, is a mark of the Lord’s spiritual house. So we have worship, adjusted service, resurrection life.

Yes, but there is always some sinister thing not far away: “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?” When you get the assembly just as the Lord wants it you will always find that the Devil is lurking very near. That may be a compliment to the assembly, for anything that the Devil does not cast his eye on jealously will surely not be that which is satisfying the heart of the Lord. But it is always like that. Just begin to get something that is according to the Lord’s heart, and you find a sinister thing begin to circle round with a view to destroying that worship, to divert that appreciation of the Lord. It becomes a feature of the very assembly itself, that the Devil jealously casts his eyes upon what the Lord is getting, and would have that for himself.

You see, the Church is that which brings to the Lord Jesus what He ought to have, and from eternity the Devil has been out to rob him of that, and he will do it in the assembly if he can, because the assembly is that in which

the Lord does get what His heart is set upon.

□ OUTWARD AND UPWARD

Now we close by noting the last thing in Luke 24:50–52.

“And he led them out until they were over against Bethany: and he lifted up his hand, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”

Three words: “led out”, “blessed”, “carried up”: out with the Lord, in His place apart; under His blessing; and linked with Him in heaven — to use Paul’s words, “made... to sit together with him in the heavenlies.”

That is Bethany, that is the Church, that is what the Lord wants to have in the life of His people today.

Go back over Bethany again and just allow your heart to exercise itself on these things, and seek very definitely that the Lord shall have in you just these features which are according to His own mind. And what we do individually, let us seek to do in those fellowships, those assemblies, with which we are connected, that they shall be true Bethanias, the village expression of the great city of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem.

A VITAL MINISTRY IN A DAY OF TRANSITION

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5).

“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.”

“And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Matt. 11:13–14).

Elijah and John the Baptist are in view in these passages of Scripture, and much for our help can be learned from their experiences.

In the first place, we must take account of their ministries. The two men are brought together in a mysterious identification by the Lord Jesus, and from various fragments it is quite clear that their ministries were one in principle and nature; that is, in a day of fairly general spiritual smallness and weakness, these two servants of God were His instrument and vessel for making a way and a place for Himself in greater fullness. They were way-makers for the Lord, pioneers and pathfinders for His larger purposes and desires. In the familiar words used by John: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). That was the key to the ministry of both Elijah and John the Baptist, the increase of the Lord amongst His people.

Both lived in a time of transition. The principle of transition is clear, firstly, in that Elijah is brought over into full view at the very end of Malachi’s prophecies, at the close of the Old Testament, an end-time, a period of transition unto the Lord’s coming; in that case, of course, His first coming. But I do not think that what the Lord said about Elijah, in Malachi and later, was exhausted by the first coming of the Lord; the great and terrible day of the Lord is still to come.

We will not enlarge too much on details, but be content to note that that time of transition was governed by the ministry of both these men, and was marked by the gathering out of a real people from among the professing people of the Lord. Malachi makes that perfectly clear:

“Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His Name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, even Mine own possession, in the day that I do make” (Mal. 3:16–17). Out from the professing, religious realm there is seen in these words to be a true people for the Lord.

Undoubtedly that was the mark of John’s ministry, for tradition, formalism, legalism were the dominant features of religion in his day, and it was against these that he hurled his weight to secure a people unto Christ in fullness, in utterness. He sought a transition from one spiritual state to another, and, in the light of a change of dispensation, to secure a people wholly for the Lord. That wants dwelling upon very much more fully, but I think that is enough to give us the clue to the ministry of these men and to relate them in a vital way to our own day — another end-time transition period that is surely ushering in another coming of the Lord and that also is characterized by the need for the gathering out of a real people from among those who profess to be the Lord’s. We may expect that what was true in the experience of Elijah and John in their day will in principle be found in God’s

dealings with instruments of His choice today.

It become clear then that for such a great purpose, to make a way and to make room for the Lord, God had, and has, His instruments, known to Himself and secretly under His hand being prepared. Elijah comes on to the scene mysteriously, almost out of nowhere, after deep secret preparation and discipline. John has spent all his life in the wilderness waiting for the day of his appearing to Israel. Something has been going on in secret. God has had these men in hand in deep preparation, vessels to meet this particular need in the time of transition — transition from a state which the Lord can no longer accept as answering to His known will to a state which will satisfy Him.

He must have a vessel for such a purpose. It may be individuals, as it often is, but it has also through the ages proved to be a corporate vessel, a company of the Lord's people prepared in this way. These instruments, known and secured by God in secret, have, in a secret history with Him, been learning to know the Lord as their heavenly sustenance. Elijah, at a time when earth could not provide any sustenance, was sustained from heaven. John the Baptist, in the wilderness for many years, where he had to know the Lord in loneliness and apart from men, was having to learn the Lord as his heavenly life and his heavenly provision. Such is the preparation, the equipment, of any vessel to serve God in this greater purpose of His heart.

November, 1949

CHRISTIAN SERVICE FROM GOD'S STANDPOINT

What is the work of the Lord? What is Christian service from God's standpoint? It is contributing to the fullness of Christ. It is in the measure of each several part (of His Body) ministering to that end, that all things shall be summed up in Christ and that He shall be the fullness of all things.

That great Divine goal has many ways and many means of attainment, and it is not a matter of whether you or I are serving the Lord in the same way as someone else. That is not the point at all. We standardize and departmentalize Christian work, and we think of the activities of ministers and missionaries and such like functions and call that the work of the Lord; we think of that when we speak of going into Christian service. But while I do not say that that is not the work of the Lord, it is a very narrow and a very artificial way of viewing things.

The work of the Lord is, and can be, no more than contributing to the fullness of Christ and ministering of that fullness to Him and from Him. How you do it is a matter of Divine appointment, but that is the work of the Lord. So it is not necessarily a matter of whether I am in what is called the ministry, a missionary or a Christian worker, in this particular category or that, or whether I am serving the Lord in the way in which certain others are serving Him. That is quite a secondary matter. We would all like to be doing what certain people are doing, and doing it in the way they are doing it. You might aspire to be an apostle Paul, probably if you understood a little more you would not! But, you see, whether Paul is doing it along his Divinely appointed line, in his Divinely appointed way — or Peter, or John, or this one or that one — the object comes first, the way afterward.

The service of the Lord, whatever may be the means, the method, is ministering to the fullness of Christ and ministering *of* that fullness, and you may be called upon to do that anywhere. It can be done just as much out of public view as in public view. Many who have ministered to the Lord and by whom He has been wonderfully ministered are those of whom the world has heard and read nothing. This, you see, is a 'Body' matter, and a body is not all hands, not all major members and faculties. A body is comprised of numerous, almost countless, functions, many of them remote and very hidden, but they all minister in a related way to the whole purpose for which the body exists; and that is a true picture of the service of God.

So think again. While we would not put you back from aspiring to the fullest place of service, nor say that you are wrong in desiring to be a missionary, to go forth into the world in a full-time spiritual capacity, remember that even before the Lord puts you into that specific work, you are a minister all the same. For 'minister' is not a name, a title, a designation, but a function, and the function is contributing something to the fullness of Christ and ministering something of that fullness.

So it comes back to us as a question: What am I ministering of Christ; what am I contributing to that ultimate fullness? If it be by leading the unsaved to Him, I am adding to Christ, so to speak. That is all it means, but that is what it means. I am building up Christ. If I am encouraging the saints, I am ministering to Christ and of Christ. That is "My servant....in whom My soul delighteth." In whom does God delight as His servant? Those who minister to His Son, and that is the beginning and the end, however that may be done by Divine appointment.

“Behold, My servant....” God calls attention to the servant in whom His soul delighteth. The beginning of all service in relation to God is the servant himself. What makes a servant of God? We think of a servant of God being made by academic training, Bible teaching, by this or that form of equipment; and we think when we have all that, when we have been through the course and have in our minds all that can be imparted of that kind, we are the Lord’s servants. But that is not the way the Lord looks at it at all.

In the first place, the Lord looks at the servant, and He is going to demand that He shall be able Himself to point to His servant and say, “Behold, My servant.” I know that there is a right sense in which the instrument has to be out of view, but only in one sense; that is, that he in his own person, his own personal impression as a man, his own impact by nature, shall not be the registration made upon people; only in that sense he has to be out of view. There is another sense in which he has to be very much in view. If that were not true, all the autobiography in Paul’s writings would be wrong in principle. Paul keeps himself, in a right sense, very much in view. He calls attention to himself very properly and very strongly and persistently. The Lord is going to require that He shall be able to say, “Behold, My servant”, and the servant to whom He will call attention will be the servant who is the impression of Christ. Yes, Christ registered, Christ presenced, Christ apparent, in the servant. The beginning of all service, I repeat, is the servant himself. God is far more concerned with having His servants in a right state than He is with having them furnished with all kinds of academic qualifications and titles. It is the man, it is the woman, that God is concerned with.

If you turn to the letters of Timothy, you find there that beautiful designation of the servant of the Lord: “O man of God” (I Tim. 6:2). Paul’s appeal to Timothy is in those terms. And then, speaking of the study and knowledge of the Scriptures, he uses the same phrase again: “...that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (II Tim. 3:17). But note the order: he says, “that the man of God may be... furnished completely”, not that there may be a complete furnishing to make a man of God; the man of God already exists. Now all his study with the Word is to make him who is the man of God an efficient workman. The man of God comes before all his study. He is that before he has a knowledge of the Scriptures.

You know that ‘man of God’ was the great designation given to some of the prophets of old. Elijah on one occasion, having been hidden by God at the brook Cherith, found the brook to dry up; and the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Arise, get thee to Zarepath... behold, I have commanded a widow there to sustain thee” (II Kings 17:9). Elijah went, and you remember how he found the food situation. She was gathering two sticks to bake her last cake for her son and herself, and then to die. But the barrel of meal did not fail: the Lord was faithful to His word. But then, after that, it came to pass that the woman’s son fell sick, and so sore was the sickness that there was no breath left in him. The woman made her very pathetic appeal to the prophet. He took the child up to his own chamber and called upon the Lord, and saw the child revive; and he presented him alive to the mother, who said, “Now I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.”

What were the credentials of his ministry? That he had the secret of life triumphant over death. He had the words of life and the word of life is not always the mere usage of Scripture. You can use the Scripture and it may have no effect at all, or you can use it and it may have a mighty effect. A great deal depends upon who uses the Scripture. It is the man of God who can use it in that way and be attested as the true servant of the Lord. It is the spiritual power of life that is in the man that makes him (to use Paul’s words to Timothy) an approved servant of God.

“Behold, My servant.” Do you grasp the point? It is with you and me that the Lord is concerned; it is with what we are; it is with our personal knowledge of Himself. It is that we may have within us the secrets of the Lord that it may be true of us as it was of the Lord Jesus and of others that the key to the situation spiritually is in our hands. We, as Elijah hidden away in secret, have been in touch with God. There is a background. God had said to Elijah, “Hide thyself”; and he was a long time hidden before the word of the Lord came, saying, “Go, show thyself...” Someone has remarked that for every servant of God there must be much more of the hidden life than of the public life. How true that is!

The Lord will take pains to ensure that the secret history, the spiritual history, of every true servant of His is looked after. With all the eagerness to get out to do the work, and may it not abate!, with all our enthusiasm to be active, all our desire and craving to be serving, let us remember the first thing is the servant, not the service. The first thing, the beginning of all service, is the instrument. We see that the servant comes firstly into the Lord’s view, that He may have one to whom He may draw attention in a right way and say, ‘Look at that servant of Mine and see My work. See My grace, see my power, see the traces of My hand.’

COMING DOWN FROM GOD OUT OF HEAVEN

□ THOUGHTS ON THE NEW JERUSALEM

Reading: Revelation 21 & 22

The next great event in God's calendar is the return in glory of His Son Jesus Christ. It is the consummation of that coming and the final revelation of the glory of Christ which is shown to us in the form of this heavenly city, "coming down from God out of heaven". This bridal city represents the sum of God's working through the ages. Its many symbols display the features of His Son as they have been wrought into the people whom He has taken out of the nations for His name, a marvellous union of Christ and His Church which has a timeless task of ministering life to the universe. The nations are to walk in its light, and they are to find the maintenance of their health from the leaves of its tree; kings are to bring their treasure into this city, and God's glory will provide its radiance.

John twice affirms that the city was shown to him by God — "He showed me...". Perhaps as we humbly read and meditate God will show us something of its significance and importance, and by means of its symbols give us a clearer idea of the unseen and eternal things which we are to keep in view so that "our light affliction" may work for us "more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

□ THE STREET

The Authorised Version makes a break between the first two verses of Revelation 22 which is misleading. The Revised Version indicates that the river is in the midst of the street of this holy city. The single street is central; a river runs down the middle of the street, and the tree of life grows on either side of the river. Nothing is in the plural, not even this tree, though it is found on both sides of the river. Up to this point things have been in the plural. Life has many ways of expressing itself, as the many trees of Ezekiel's river show (Ezekiel 47:4). At the end, however, everything is gathered up into an absolute unity: one city, one street, one river and one tree. It is a symbolic reminder that at the last all will be summed up into a perfect oneness, the oneness of Christ.

Such unity can only be realized in the fellowship of the Spirit, but this is surely not only for the future but for today. The city is being spiritually formed now, and the work is going on now in preparation for the great consummation which it reveals; if the Church is to be God's metropolis with an eternal vocation at the centre of the universe, then here and now it must learn oneness with and in Christ. One street! This oneness, right down at the very core of the Church, is basic to its present witness as well as to its eternal vocation. The one street has one river, which means that from the inner realm of fellowship with Christ there is an outflow of life. The city is, of course, the ultimate goal to which the Holy Spirit is moving, but the same law holds good for all time. Our vocation on this earth here and now is not primarily to engage in a number of good works, but to provide a way by which the life of Christ may flow out to others. How can this happen finally if it is not beginning now? How can we enthuse about ultimate unity if we are not giving diligence here and now to keep the unity of the Spirit?

This being the case it hardly needs to be pointed out that the enemy's strategic movement against the purpose of God in the Church is to keep that Church divided, basically divided. He does not mind mere professions of unity, nor is he unduly troubled by external illusions of unity; but what he is set against is the deep-down in-wrought oneness which will release God's great river of life to flow out to a needy world. "I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife" were the words of introduction which led John to see the great heavenly and holy Jerusalem in its glorious unity. Undivided love for Christ, as the love of the bride for her husband, is the only sure counter to Satan's wiles, and the only basis for real oneness.

□ THE GOLDEN REED

The city was measured with a golden reed, everything in it being seen to conform to God's measurements. The whole idea is divine, and it can only be measured by divine standards, for it is to express divine purpose. Our calling in Christ makes many demands upon us, but if we can only view them in the light of things eternal, it will be much easier to face them. Not that it is ever easy for our human nature to be dealt with in accordance with this golden rod of divine standards but we can more readily bear the cost if we keep God's end in view. An outstanding characteristic of the city is its absolute clearness. This is true of its way of life, for the water of its river is as clear as crystal. It is true of its substance, which is of pure gold made like unto clear glass. It is true of its light, which is described as being "like a jasper stone, clear as crystal". This stone is also said to be "most precious", which suggests that such a condition of transparency is very precious to the Lord.

It also implies that we, His people, will find it a costly quality, one which can only be experienced as we accept discipline under the hand of God, and are given a spiritual education which makes us refined and Christlike. This clearness is not merely negative, a sort of stainless condition, but it is unshadowed and unclouded light. God is light: Christ is the light of the world, and the ministry of the Church is both to receive and to transmit His light.

The city is radiant with the glory of God. What is the opposite of glory? It is darkness, cloudiness, murkiness; it is all that realm which is not clear, but mixed and shadowy. If you have had to deal with a person whom you cannot trust because of hidden elements which if not actually deceitful somehow lack clear transparency, you will have found it an unpleasant experience, the very opposite of glory. When the glory of God fills everywhere, then there are no such questions or shadows, but perfect, open confidence. "In Him is no darkness at all..." (1 John 1:5). This glory is ours, by grace, and must govern all our ways.

All the portals of the city are of pearl. Pearls are a parable of the preciousness which results from suffering, since they are formed as a result of the agony of the host creatures. These pearls are the only gates. There is no other way into this city than by suffering love, for the elect people who are to reign with Christ are those who have first shared something of His sufferings. It is no use our opting for a casual or easy way into fellowship of this kind, for the love of Christ, purified from all mixture and precious to God demands a committal to Him for His supreme purpose to be fulfilled even though the cost may be fiery trial or deep travail. Let us not be deterred by the cost though, but keep our eyes on the outcome — "having the glory of God". This is our destiny.

□ THE WALL

A further characteristic of this embodiment of God's thought is the fact that the city has a wall "great and high". Much is said about this wall, with repeated mention of its foundations, its dimensions and its strength. It seems to depict the city's distinctiveness. It is true that walls are often used for purposes of defence, but as such a need could never arise with the heavenly city, we conclude that the wall represents a demarcation of what God wishes to be distinguished in a special way. Do you not agree that there is much weakness in Christianity today just by reason of a lack in distinctiveness of testimony and life? Not that God will allow us to think in terms of spiritual conceit or imagined superiority, but it is important that we should not lose that sense of definite purpose and set-apartness which should always govern the life of His redeemed people.

The wall is beautiful; it is high; and it is strong. It marks off in clear delineation that which has special meaning and value to God.

□ ADORNED

"Coming down from God out of heaven, adorned..." If this city is to be the embodiment of eternal values, if it is not a thing but a people, then something must have been happening to shape and prepare them so that such a condition could be possible. You will notice that the wall of the city is adorned, and also that the adornment of the city itself is spoken of as being suitable for a bride. The wall is no ugly demarcation but its very foundations are adorned with all manner of precious stones. The costly gems are simply symbols of the many-sided preciousness of Christ. "For you therefore that believe is the preciousness" (1 Peter 2:7), the very preciousness of Christ Himself.

And the bride is also adorned. Her adornment is something more than external splendour which can be put on and taken off; her beauty consists of those inward qualities which delight the heart of her heavenly Bridegroom. "The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold" (Psalm 45:13). We are apt to pay such attention to externalities, even in spiritual things, but God's objective is a people whose inner life is beautiful with the pure gold of Christ's loveliness, for Christ is coming "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

If these adornments come down from heaven, how did they first get there? They are the outcome of our walk with God here on earth. We live our lives down here, and although we frequently get discouraged, we do enter into new experiences of God's grace and learn more of His Son. The Word teaches us that something is happening all the time in relation to our life down here which is equivalent to treasure which is going ahead of us and waiting for us to follow. As we proceed on our way with the Lord there are heavenly values accumulating for the future. Did not the Lord Jesus tell us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20)? So while there is a temporal life, there are also values being stored up in heaven, features of Christ which will adorn His city. Our spiritual growth, our spiritual characteristics are, as it were, going ahead of us. They are eternal: they are not of time. And all this preparation is going on, so we are told, "while we look... at the things which are not seen... but eternal".

"Adorned as a bride for her husband". What the Lord is doing in us now as daily we learn new lessons of grace and humility, will be manifested in that day, and although this may bring gratification to us and joy to others, it is primarily meant for the pleasure of Christ. The Church's spiritual adornment is to be the reward to our Bridegroom-Redeemer for all His patient, suffering love.

The city descends from heaven, that is, it has been conformed to heaven. It has not been turned out of heaven because it is not suitable, but comes down to bring heaven's values into the rest of God's universe. We must measure everything down here by values which are heavenly and eternal. This brings us back again to the golden reed of God's standards, the reed which measures everything in the light of God's purpose of showing the greatness of His Son to a wondering universe by means of the Church which is in living, loving communion with Him. This is the end of all things. This is where the Bible closes. And this is our vocation in Christ.

From "Toward The Mark" May-June, 1972

EQUIPMENT FOR THE MINISTRY

"And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent... but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

"And the Lord... said go, and thou shalt save Israel... And he (Gideon) said, Oh, my Lord... behold... I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:14-15).

"Then said I, woe is me! for I am undone... And he (the Lord) said, Go..." (Isaiah 6:5,9).

"Then said I, Ab! Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child... The Lord said... Thou shalt go..." (Jeremiah 1:6-7)

"I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son... And the Lord took me... and said unto me, Go..." (Amos 7:14-15).

"And he appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth" (Mark 3:14).

"Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8).

The last words quoted above are the answer to all the others. Although Pentecost marked a new epoch and method of the Holy Spirit's activity, yet throughout all time God's Work has been done through the Spirit's agency. Were we asked what is the essential and indispensable equipment for the work of God we would say unhesitatingly; The anointing and filling with the Holy Spirit!

In the instances cited above we have men of vastly different types, but they are all brought to a common basis. Moses was a man of tremendous natural and acquired ability. There was initiative, drive, passion, devotion and courage on the emotional and volitional side, linked with "all the wisdom of the Egyptians" on the intellectual side, and evidently considerable strength on the physical. Isaiah and Jeremiah were not without a wealthy endowment of inherited social, religious, and ecclesiastical advantages and good training. Then what need we say about Paul on this side? On the other hand, Gideon, Amos and most of the Apostles were of humble and simple birth, meagre education, and few worldly advantages. Of the latter it is recorded that "they were ignorant and unlearned men". All these, we have said, had to be brought to a common basis. Through painful and sometimes long drawn-out discipline and trial the former had to come to the place where they recognized that only God could do His own work, and that He never uses any man or his natural equipment except on the ground of an utter dependence upon Him: that gifts, training, ability as such do not count with God and are only of service when the man has been translated from a natural ground to a spiritual through the deep inworking of the Cross in its principles and laws. Nothing but spiritual endowments can meet spiritual forces, and this is the background of all the work of God.

God may use the gifts with which He has entrusted men by nature or acquisition, but not until they have been brought through death on the natural plane to life on the spiritual. Moses went that way; Paul went that way; and so have all who have really been used of God for *Spiritual* and *Eternal* ends; that is, if the worker as well as the work was to be accepted.

No one will think that we are against all-round training and equipment. Far be it from us to suggest that this is of no vital consequence. What we are emphasizing is that though given every possible natural or acquired endowment, education, natural ability, zeal, evangelical faith and doctrine, a knowledge of Christian work, etc., there may yet remain an essential without which all this is going to fail. This superlative factor is: "filled with the Holy Spirit".

On the other hand, a Spirit-filled man is never one who holds a brief for ignorance or despises and neglects

such acquisitions of knowledge as will be ground upon which the Lord may work. It is one of the romances of the Spirit's activity that under His stimulation and quickening many of the most illiterate have become able and eager to master things for which they had neither desire nor ability before.

Now these simple basic things lead us on further. The Lord Jesus as

□ THE MODEL SERVANT

declared: 'I do nothing of myself; as I hear I speak.' 'The words that I speak, I speak not from myself.' 'The works that I do, I do not from myself.' Here is even a sinless "myself" refusing to speak His own words or do His own works. He was deliberately hanging and drawing upon the Father for everything. It is clear that He realized that even in His own sinless case this was necessary, and to do otherwise was to lay His mission open to infinite peril from without. Thus it was an utterness of God. For such an utterness — which, let us urge, must characterize all who are to most closely approximate to God's ideal servant — there must somewhere at some time be a zero point on man's side. This zero point is clearly seen in the life and ministry of so many of the Lord's servants — the time when despair of everything well-nigh engulfed them, and 'God was their only asset'.

But is it necessary that this point should only be reached at a more or less late stage in Christian life and service, after perhaps, years of activity? Should there be a considerable degree of ineffectiveness, failure and abortion because such a large percentage of the effort and activity is "in the flesh", or of man? It is necessary that at last, perhaps at long last, the big framework, the loud hammering, the feverish busyness, etc., should begin to fall away and the genuine spiritual and eternal result be comparatively small. We may settle it once and for all that *only what the Holy Spirit does will attain unto God's end and remain eternally.*

Surely God would have zero on man's side reached at the beginning! Surely this is according to the experience of men in Scripture! At least it was a definite registering of that point to which they were continually brought back if they tended to move beyond it in self-sufficiency.

This, we believe most earnestly to be the true nature of training for the Lord's work alongside of and in company with, a growing knowledge of Himself in His word and in experience. The only knowledge of the Word of God which is of any profit in service is experimental knowledge. That knowledge is the knowledge of God Himself which makes the Word live.

Moses was trained for His life work in the hard school of inaction. Forty years in a wilderness tending sheep for a man of a tremendously active disposition! He had set out with great visions. His motive was good and the end in view was right. His filling up of the outline, however, was mistaken. How to be patient with wrong without condoning it or losing a passion for right is one of the big lessons to be learned by those who would deliver men. Not to put a halo of romance about service for men and to think that there will be a due appreciation of one's self-sacrifice without becoming cynical by reason of disillusionment is another. Not in any way, manner, tone or conduct to suggest superiority is a third. These were some of the minor lessons which Moses had to learn, but they were themselves big ones. Dependence, faith, obedience, humility were the primary things, and these cannot be got from books or lectures.

Isaiah had to have a vision by which he was overwhelmed with his own unfitness.

Paul had to come off his intellectual, ecclesiastical, traditional, official high horse with a tremendous thud and grovel in the dust in subjection to the hated and despised "Jesus".

The disciples had to learn many lessons as to their own miserable inability to satisfy the heart of their Divine Master, and, at length, they all suffered the shame of having been proved incapable of believing through the cross.

This is all necessary training and preparation. How few there are who would voluntarily accept a course of training like this! But this surely ought to be the nature of the work done in a place for the preparation of God's servants. There should be a handing over to the Holy Spirit to take into and through all such experiences of spiritual discipline as are necessary to a deep knowledge of God. There should be the knocking of the bottom out of our ideas of work and service. There should be the making of everything inward and not outward; spiritual and not natural; from God and not from ourselves. If needs be, there should be the discipline of inaction. It is so easy to be content if only we are busy and active, but often this only gets in God's way, and He has to take our work away in order to teach us that it is *Himself*, and not service as such. With many the Lord has to adopt a wearing-out policy, for they will not yield otherwise.

□ THE IDEAL SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

The ideal 'School of the Prophets' is that in which the spiritual life has first consideration; where the Holy Spirit is dealing with the individual and where the Word of God is being made necessary for light, strength, comfort and direction. If we are going to live by the Word, the Word must live for us, and experience is the meeting-place of life and knowledge.

No training centre is adequate which is only intellectual and practical in the sense of doing work. There must be primarily the attention to the spiritual life, its nurturing and directing, and especially the presence of the Holy Spirit must be sought and guarded for that work which can never be done from without.

Now, having said all this, we come back to recognize that, in *principle*, this was the basis of the mighty activities of God from the time of the fulfillment of Acts 1:8. The Cross, in all its fullness, was brought by the Holy Spirit into the lives of those first believers and witnesses, and the change in the character of the apostles is most noticeable. They became selfless, humble, fearless, full of love, patience, and long-suffering. 'Position' or 'place', reputation, prestige, 'success', popularity, etc., no longer motivated their service. Note how on everything they are directed and controlled by the Spirit! The Lord is released when the bands of the self-life in all its forms in His servants are burnt up by the Fire. As through His Cross He came to His own personal liberation to the boundless so, as His Cross is planted deeply in the natural life of His servants, He is free to do His mightier works. Oh, that we could see early enough in our lives that when Christ went to the Cross He not only took our sins, but He took us! and that not just as sinners, but as men; as preachers, teachers, workers, and everything, so that "henceforth it is no longer I, but Christ". All too late some of us have had to be crucified in one or more of these capacities; and through death preaching has had to be put off the human level and born again from above. And the same with other things. Oh, for a new company of such who right at the beginning are put there! Then God will do His new thing and we shall see a fresh release of the Lord. He is not straitened in Himself, but He is straitened in the natural activities of His servants, which activities are brought over into spiritual things by the horizontal method instead of by the vertical — that is, along the human line, instead of by the Cross, the resurrection, ascension and descent from above.

As it was in the time of the types the strictest laws governed the anointing with the holy oil, and it was repeatedly stressed that "upon man's flesh shall not the oil come", so the Lord, who is no less particular today, will not give His Spirit to come upon man's "flesh" — man's self-life. All that must first come under the power of the Blood and be taken to the Cross to give the Spirit a clear way. The first witnesses had nothing to gain, but everything to lose in this life by even naming the Name of Jesus. There was nothing that could be in the slightest degree a sop for the senses. Those at Jerusalem lost everything very early and were scattered abroad. From without the Lord kept everything pure and free. But He never departs from His principle, His original premise, and where He is allowed He will work this state into the very spirit and life of His servant in order that all things may be of Himself, and "whatsoever God doeth it shall be for ever". The law of the corn of wheat most surely operates: enlargement through limitation, gain out of loss, life out of death.

From "A Witness and A Testimony" July–August 1970.

GOD'S MEANS OF ACHIEVING HIS PURPOSE

By what means does God reach His end in His people? What is God's means of achieving His purpose? It is by the Spirit of sonship through the Cross. There is no hope of reaching God's end, or of even taking the first step in that direction, without the Spirit as the Spirit of sonship.

First there must be the infant cry, "Father"! There must be that relationship brought about by the Spirit. Then the Spirit of sonship, once He is within, must proceed fully to form Christ in us. Thus the Apostle says, "My little children, for whom I am again in travail till Christ be fully formed in you." It is not a case of my struggling toward God's end, but of the Spirit of God's Son in me energizing toward God's end. Oh, that we had faith here! If you really have faith on this particular point, you will have the secret, of a profound rest.

You know, we have our "off" times spiritually — "off" times in the prayer life when it seems impossible to pray; "off" times in many other ways spiritually. No matter how we struggle, we can make nothing of it. What are we going to do? Well, if my experience is of any value to you — and I believe I have discovered just a little of the secret of things — I have come to this position: Through the Spirit Christ is in me, and everything is with Him — not with me. It is not what I can do, nor what I cannot do, nor how I am today; all is with Him. Today, maybe, I am

not conscious of His indwelling, but on the contrary very conscious of other things that are not Christ. Well, that is my state; but He is faithful, He is true. He has given me certain assurances about never leaving nor forsaking me, about abiding through all the days to the end, and about perfecting unto the day of Christ a good work which He hath commenced.

He started this thing — I did not; He undertook this thing. Before ever I had a being, He had undertaken to carry through His perfect work in any one who would trust Him. That was all undertaken for before ever I saw the light of day, so that I did not start this — it is not commenced with me. My one thing to do is to trust Him — trust Him — and, if I cannot break through, to say: “Lord, I cannot pray just at the present; I must trust you to do all the praying.”

No one who really has his heart set upon the Lord will take hold of a statement like that as a backdoor way out of prayer. I am not trying to give you some excuse for giving up praying. I am saying there are “off” times, and I am not sure that the Lord does not allow us to have such times lest we should begin to build again upon works. He takes us right off that basis and throws us upon Himself, where there is no alternative but to trust Him. You are not surrendering your prayer life in taking that course at a time like that. If you could pray, you would do so; but now in a time of real inability you are just trusting the Lord about it.

I find I have these “off” times, but as I definitely trust the Lord, and say: “Lord, this is Your responsibility, and I know this will not last; that prayer life will come back, and I am trusting you in the meanwhile.” It does come back, and in greater fullness and greater blessedness.

Beloved I have proved that again and again. It comes back. It is not merely that you get better and start again. You know quite well that you may be perfectly fit and yet be unable to pray. No one can make prayer. It is not a matter of health and strength to be able to pray. You may be a perfectly strong man or woman, but you cannot get through to heaven in prayer because you are that.

Prayer has to do with an opened heaven — prayer is fellowship with the Lord; and that is His doing, not ours. He brings that. Trust Him. “I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me”; He has the whole matter in hand. While my attitude is one of faith in Him, He will see that there is a prayer life; He will see that there is a life in the Word. Positive faith in Him is the secret of everything in the will of God.

GOD’S CALL TO THE LIFE ABOVE

*“They that trust in the Lord
Are as mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever.
As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,
So the Lord is round about his people,
From this time forth and for evermore.” Psalm 125:1–2*

Psalms 120 to 134 form a little volume of their own, called the Psalms or Songs of Ascent. They tell of the climb up out of the deep, dark valley on to the sunny heights, which is where the Lord always desires His people to be.

Psalm 84 speaks of passing through the valley of weeping, but in that connection we ought to underline the two words “passing through”, for this valley is never meant to be the dwelling place of the people of God but only a passage through which they pass. Zion, the mountain home, is where God wants His people to abide. It is surely instructive to note that the Lord established periodic ascents as an ordinance in Israel; all their males had to go up to Jerusalem three times in every year. God meant these going-up ordinances to be governmental in nature; that is, the people of Israel were not to be governed by the plains or valleys, but to be a people of the mountains. They might have to spend time, perhaps much time, down below but their normal life was continually interrupted by the command to go up. Their life, their real life, was up in the high places. If we could have joined their caravans as three times a year they made ready and got on the march, leaving the valleys and the plains and going on the upward way to Jerusalem, we would have found that these journeys had a tremendous influence on the life of the people. These songs, for instance, became songs for all time; they were provided for the ascents of those particular occasions, but they were not reserved for the three times a year, becoming the perpetual songs of Israel in which we ourselves find much of abiding value. This is because the Lord’s mind for His people is that they should not abide in the deep and shadowy places, though from time to time they may have to pass through the valleys, but that they should be a people of the heights, with their lives governed by that which is above and not by what is below.

I have been very much impressed with the large place which mountains had in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, as may be verified in Matthew's Gospel, which begins in chapter 5 with the Mount of Instruction and finishes in chapter 28 with the Mount of Commission. It can be noted that all through the Gospel the peak events were associated with mountains, as though these found an answer, a response, in the very heart and nature of our Lord. Is it not true that Jesus came down and passed through this valley of weeping in order to meet us and lift us up out of it?

His whole life, in every aspect and activity of praying, teaching and working, was a life on a rising plane, a lifting, returning move to heaven which would take back with Him as many others as possible. There was nothing in the low level of this world's ways to give Him any pleasure, so it is not surprising that He loved the mountain heights. The very nature and spirit of the Lord Jesus was a complete contradiction of the natural course of human movement which is steadily slipping lower and lower. The Lord Jesus is in direct contrast to this; the whole effect and influence of His presence anywhere being to lift upwards. He only came by way of this valley of tears to lift us up out of it.

□ ASCENDANCY

Mountains suggest and represent elevation, ascendancy — "I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains". To take our eyes off what is here — self, circumstances and the rest — and to set them on the One who is the Lord over all, high and lifted up on the throne, is itself an elevating experience. "Looking off unto Jesus" is the one thing which will bring us up out of the valley of despair, for where our vision rests affects the course of our lives. It is in every sense an uplifting experience to be joined to the Lord in heaven; it is morally elevating and spiritually emancipating.

Perhaps what most of us need is a higher level of life. We are too small. Our valley is a hemmed-in place, it is narrow and limiting. We must get on to the mountains to find enlargement, with a sense of being liberated from the littlenesses of life, freed from its smallness and pettiness. If this is true naturally, it helps to interpret a spiritual truth, reminding us that God has "raised us up together with Christ". Individually and collectively in the Church, a very great deal of the trouble, weakness and even paralysis which we suffer is due to our failure to maintain our true position in the heavenlies in Christ. If we could get up higher, move on to higher ground and leave behind the things which belong to the shadows and miasmas, we should find ourselves living in the good of the mighty will of God in us.

□ SECURITY

Then, as the psalmist indicates, it is not only ascendancy which comes from the mountains but also security. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord round about His people...". The heights are the places for strongholds, for refuges. And our strength, our safety is to get away from the low things, to leave behind what is mean and contemptible, and to get up into fellowship with the Lord on high. On the low levels we become the playthings of bad influences and cross currents — there are always evil powers which are at work down there in the dark. We will find deliverance and security by rising on to higher ground.

The devil and the evil forces are tremendously concerned with getting us down and holding us down, so that they can harass and play havoc with our spiritual lives. Down... down... that is the drive and direction of the evil one, who plans to get us down and keep us down in the place where he has the strength. Our refuge is not to fight on that low ground, but to flee to the heights, to escape to the Lord in the secret place of the most High.

I think that the Lord Jesus did just this. At the time when He was aware of all the pressure and down-drag of earthly conditions and disappointments even with His own disciples, He said: Let Me go away for a while and go into the mountains to My Father. It was thus that He was able to return marvellously fortified, and we can do the same, finding our way of escape by fellowship with God in the heights.

□ VISION

There is a further point about mountains, a fairly obvious one, and that is that they are places of vision, places where one can see the far distances. At the end of the Bible we are taken to an exceeding great and high mountain and shown the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, so that the last scene in the Bible is a mountain scene, and the mountain is truly one of vision, showing the Church in the full expression of its heavenly glory. Surely it is of supreme importance that God's people should have their vision enlarged. Our vision is too small, our purpose in life is too small; our conception of our salvation is often too small. We tend to narrow our thoughts so much that it is important for us to ascend into the Mount of Vision, for the loss of vision always brings about a falling to pieces. Those Christians who have no great sense of God's purposes and of His ability to reach His end and fulfil

His intentions will find themselves at the mercy of the doubts and fears which defeat men down here on this earth.

□ GRAVITATION UPWARD

The reader may agree with all that has been said and yet still be puzzled as to how such elevation to the heights can be realized. The answer is that it is already a working power in the new nature of the Christian. The beginning of the Christian life is the discovery that Christ has come from heaven to take us back to heaven, and so has given us life from above. From the day that a man really comes into vital union with our risen and ascended Lord there begins within him a process of gravitation upwards. He now discovers that he does not really belong to earth, but has a heavenly nature which responds to God's call to the life on high. As he progresses, he finds that his new life leads him further and further away from the world in which he lives, and although this involves him in some difficulties and even embarrassment, he cannot find himself at home here as he once could. This very inward pull is evidence that he is a child of the heavenly country.

The consummation of the believer's life is certainly upward — for he is to be caught up to be forever with the Lord. So the life is a constant movement upward, from its first beginnings to its glorious end. This means that, like his Lord, he must learn to respond to the heavenly gravitation, not clinging to earthly interests and possessions, not being bound by earthly considerations, but giving always an inward answer to the call of heaven.

So far as Christ was concerned even His physical going up into a mountain illustrated how eager He was to respond to this call. And I believe that when at last He ascended to the Father, His heart was filled with the deepest satisfaction at home-going. It will surely be the same with us. We shall not go reluctantly and with regrets; no, we shall be rising to where we belong and what we were made for; we shall be rising to the final ascendancy, and in doing so we shall be answering to everything in our new constitution. Spiritually we are a mountain people. Let us now seek grace day by day, so that we may repudiate all earth-boundness and refuse to dwell in the valley. We may often have to pass through it, but we must never settle down there, for we belong to the heights in Christ. "Here we have no abiding city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

From "Toward The Mark" Jan–Feb, 1972

GOD'S MIND ABOUT THE CHURCH

In the Divine scheme of things it is the Church which has the ultimate effect in the spiritual realm. I mean that individual Christians, though they may be born again, as individuals will not get very far in touching the outermost realm of spiritual forces. There a real registration has to be a corporate one. It will be the Church eventually which will be the instrument of Divine government in this universe.

Spirituality means what the Church is in God's mind. When we come to contemplate the Church in its wholeness and entirety, of course, we come mainly to the letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians. There we find God's mind about the Church. We must realize the necessity for our seeing and apprehending what the Church is in God's mind, not as we find it in the churches, not as it actually is here; and we must stand on that ground, or we shall be helpless in this matter of spiritual impact. I mean that if we are going to accept what we find in the New Testament as to the churches as being the expression of all there is, we are very soon going to give up the fight and shall not get very far. If we are going to accept that as the standard, we are going to be crippled, and the measure of our spirituality will be very small indeed, and therefore the measure of our impact likewise. The Apostle, who was mainly responsible for these churches coming into being, repudiated their condition, would not accept it, was fighting against it. Why? Because he had seen God's mind, that was his position, his vantage ground, his strength. If he had never seen God's mind and only saw this, what a disheartened, disappointed, despairing man he would be! He had seen God's mind about it.

It is the Church that is in view in these epistles, and spirituality in Ephesians and Colossians means first of all an inward revelation of God's mind about the Church. It is a tremendous thing for spiritual strength, for spiritual power, for spiritual ministry, for spiritual impact, for spiritual food — yes, for every spiritual value — to have really had a heart revelation of God's mind about the Church; not simply to have studied Ephesians and Colossians, but for it to have broken in upon your heart, to have seen it in an inward way. I say that is spirituality with an impact; it is spirituality with a dynamic, and what a dynamic it is!

Look at the Apostle. He looks out at the end of his life over the churches. He knows them intimately, and he

has to say: "All that are in Asia have turned away from me" (II Tim. 1:15). They have repudiated Paul, to whom under Christ they owed everything. He looks out, and what a spectacle, what a heartbreak! And the man in his circumstances of imprisonment and isolation and limitation, looking out on that, might well have died of a broken heart or have sunk down into the uttermost despair and written his life off as a failure, and all his work as for well-nigh nothing. But this man is not down there, he is in triumph, he is delivered, he is saved, he is emancipated from all that. The facts are true and real, and yet he is triumphant. Why? Because he sees God's mind about the Church and he knows that if God ever had a mind about a thing He is going to have the thing like that; and no matter what appearances say, in the end God will have His Church like that. God has not conceived a thing and projected it to be cheated out of it. There it is and it will be!

When you have grasped that, you are able to get closer to these letters and see the value of spirituality. A true spiritual apprehension is an emancipating thing. The spiritual is not the unreal, it is the most real of all. It is far more real than the temporal and visible. The eternal, they are the real things. You do not see this Church here on the earth; it is not seen, but it is there in the unseen with God, and it is the eternal thing. If only we saw the invisible, that as an extraordinary statement: "He endured as seeing Him Who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27) — if only we saw the invisible, meaning if only we saw in the spirit what can never be seen in the flesh with our natural eyes, it would be a tremendously emancipating thing, because we should see that that is the eternal thing that must be. When all else passes, that will be. Spirituality buoys you up.

There is so much disappointment in the churches, in the things seen, that you might give up in disgust, close down your work, go and do some other job; but you do not do that if you have really seen. You may tell yourself that you are a fool not to face facts, that you are simply putting on blinkers, not taking account of realities; but because of something that God has done inside, you cannot accept that, you must go on. You cannot accept the total ruin theory if you have had a revelation.

May, 1947

GOD'S NEW ISRAEL

□ PART 1 — WHAT SEEST THOU?

"What Seest Thou?"

"The word of the Lord came unto me, saying ... What seest thou?... The word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou?" Jeremiah 1:11,13.

"Then said the Lord unto me" Jeremiah 24:3

The angel that talked with me ... said unto me, What seest thou?" Zechariah 4:1,2

"The burden ... which Isaiah ... did see" Isaiah 13:1

"And he said ... What seest thou?" Amos 8:2

What a very great deal was bound up with this interrogating and changing method of the Lord with His Prophets! The history and destiny of individuals, of the chosen nation, and of the nations, were involved in what they were able to answer. We are not here concerned with the specific answers that they gave, but we are very seriously concerned with the principle governing this so great ministry. In what we are going to say we feel that we are touching one of the most vital factors, if not actually the most vital factor in spiritual history. It is with us, as with them, a "Burden", something weighty and demanding, for, as we have said, the spiritual history and destiny of God's people are bound up with it; and who is not concerned with that?

Extra weight is given to this matter when we realize that at a certain time in the life of God's people the function of the Prophets took preeminence over all other functions. Kings and Priests came under the Prophet's power. Perhaps it ought not to have been so, but there it was, and it has become the accepted way of defining even the offices of the greatest of all — our Lord Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King; giving the prophetic function priority. The reason for this is very clear when we remind ourselves that the function of the Prophet was to set forth, represent, and battle for God's full and final thought concerning His people. The true Prophet has the sovereign support of God in a way that, sooner or later, his ministry will be fully vindicated, and destiny will be determined by it. Thus it is that we must recognize that, while God may appoint some servants particularly to this ministry, and qualify accordingly, the ministry itself is to be so embodied in the people: that they become its

expression, that is, the representation of God's whole mind and intention.

When we move among the true Prophets of God we find ourselves in an atmosphere of real and intense concern. It is almost the atmosphere of emergency and crisis. Here everything is positive, momentous, urgent, serious. The Prophet is a man of passion. Reality is the passion of this ministry, and any artificiality or pretence is intolerable.

Having said that, we are brought to the two main things which lie behind this present consideration. They are the seeing and what is to be seen; the principle and the message. But, do let it be understood that, while you may not think of yourself as the messenger or the prophet, your spiritual history and destiny are inseparably bound up with the principle and the message being true in your own case. We embark, then, upon two very big and important matters.

□ THE PRINCIPLE OF ALL SPIRITUAL HISTORY AND DESTINY

This is contained in the second word of the Divine interrogation — “What seest thou?”

We shall all agree that seeing governs progress, assurance, and safety.

Without sight progress is, at best, limited. To the blind the range and distance of unaided movement are restricted. There is also a real element of uncertainty, tentativeness, and question. Further life for the unseeing is an uncoordinated life. It is lonely and largely isolated.

It was just like this in the time of the Prophets, and we could quote from them immensely as they pronounced upon it. The New Testament very largely has to do with this very matter, and it is most emphatic that spiritual seeing governs all spiritual progress, competence, assurance, reliability and service. The great Apostle Paul with his life and ministry put it all down to this one basic thing: God revealed His Son in him. God shone into his heart, and he said that his life-ministry was “to open their eyes” (Acts 26:18). Jesus said much about, and, by one tremendous act, showed that sight is a birthright. It was to the man born blind that He gave sight this was a “sign” of the spiritual heritage of the ‘newborn’.

The New Testament is very positive that we shall only make spiritual progress, and not be either arrested, turned aside, misted, deceived, or robbed of our assurance, as we “walk in light”, as we have ‘the Spirit of wisdom and revelation’. In other words, as we see! Further, the whole matter of coordination in the Body of Christ, the Church, and the churches is itself dependent upon oneness of vision. It is essential to be of one mind by one seeing. Weakness, erratic progress, lack of effectiveness, and marred testimony are all traceable to difference in vision, therefore of objective.

Paul spoke of fighting so as not to be beating the air. There is a touch of humour in that. He had evidently seen some boxers using tremendous force and being desperately in earnest, but landing it in the air and really hitting nothing. Every boxer of repute knows how important his eyes are in a contest.

□ PART 2 — THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

“The Hope of Israel”. That phrase employed by the Apostle Paul was used to sum up the whole substance and issues of his life-ministry (Acts 28:20). You will observe that in the defense made by Paul before Agrippa he narrated the story of his life as a Jew, and now in his Roman prison he meets the Jews in Rome and tells them that he is there as a prisoner for “the hope of Israel”.

What was the hope of Israel? While there were many things included in that hope, the inclusiveness was a Person, and that Person was called (in Hebrew) the Messiah. It would require a whole volume to cover all the ground of the Messiah and the Messianic hope in the Old Testament. Some of it will come out as we proceed, but that Person dominates the Old Testament from Genesis 3 onward. He is implicit in personal and symbolic types; He is “the Prophet” which was to come; He is the Prophet which the Lord told Moses He would raise up ‘like unto him’ (or, “as He had raised him — Moses — up”); He was “the root of David”, ‘David’s Son’, the “Branch”, the “Servant of Jehovah”, etc. All the many and various titles and designations, functions and offices, intentions and promises were embodied in that One person — the coming Redeemer, King, and Salvation, whose name was “Messiah” — and He was “The Hope of Israel”.

How very significant and impressive it is, therefore, that that name, with all its content, is so fully taken over into the New Testament. This is — for many Christians — somewhat veiled or obscured by the change of language. So often in our own English language we commonly use two words which mean the same thing, but do not realize that they belong to two different languages. For instance, we often hear people trying to give emphasis to a thought or feeling by saying: ‘Let it be living and vital!’ ‘Living’ is English. ‘Vital’ is Latin or French. The

meaning is identical in each language. So it is with this word “Messiah”. That is Hebrew (Mashiach) and means “the Lord’s Anointed”. The exact New Testament equivalent or synonym is “Christ”.

It is very impressive that this word or name occurs over five hundred and twenty times in the New Testament, and it would be quite correct, and significant, if we did as one version has done, and every time we come on “Christ” just say “Messiah”. An extra, and tremendously significant factor is that this Hebrew-Greek name is used so very largely in writings to Gentile Christians!

What then arises? The Messiah — “Hope of Israel” — is the Christ of Christianity, and Jesus of Nazareth is He. What a content! All that was rightly in the Coming One of Israel’s hope is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but with this difference: Israel’s “Hope” is earthly, temporal, material. The Church’s attainment unto it all is heavenly, spiritual, eternal. Israel’s expectation was every temporal, earthly blessing. The Church’s heritage (now) is “every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies”.

We are bound to come on this again later. There is the further feature to be observed. Israel lived for the day of Messiah’s appearing when all their earthly expectations would be realized. For the Church He has come and accomplished all that is necessary for that realization, but she lives for the day of His appearing when what He did will be the entire order of heaven and earth. So Peter who, as we have said, had, after a big battle, made the great spiritual transition, writing to converted Jews said: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Messiah), who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Messiah) from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven.....” (I Peter 1:3,4).

Every word of that statement should be weighed as a contrast to Israel’s hope and inheritance.

“Living hope”. “Resurrection” (Old Israel is not now in resurrection).

“Inheritance”. “Incorruptible.” “Undefiled.” “Unfading.” “In heaven.”

This is indeed a great transition from one Israel to another! One inheritance defiled, corrupted, and faded away. (See I Thessalonians 2:14b–16.) The other Israel — the Church — (Galatians 6:16 and Hebrews) with the incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, heavenly inheritance.

What ought to follow now is a long consideration of what was in Israel’s “Hope” which had been transferred, in a spiritual way at present to the Church, but this is not a series of volumes, and we are only indicating major foundation facts. Much more will surely come out as we go along. But let us just quote the words of one writer in this connection:

“Jesus of Nazareth needed no outward enthronement or local seat of government on earth to constitute Him of David’s kingdom, as He needed no physical anointing to consecrate him Priest forevermore, or material altar or temple for due presentation of His acceptable service. Being the Son of the living God, and, as Son, the Heir of all things, He possessed, from the first, the powers of the Kingdom; and proved that He possessed them in every authoritative word he uttered every work of deliverance He performed, every judgment He pronounced, every act of mercy and forgiveness He dispensed, and the resistless control he wielded over the elements of nature, and the realms of the dead. These were the signs of royalty He bore about with Him upon the earth; and wonderful though they were — eclipsing in royal grandeur all the glory of David and Solomon — they were still but the earlier preludes of the peerless majesty which David from afar descried when he saw Him as his Lord, seated in royal state at His Father’s right hand, and on which He formally entered when He ascended up on high with the word: ‘All authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth.’”

At the end of the stormy and disturbed four hundred years between the Old Testament and the New there existed a small Jewish remnant of faithful and “devout” men and women in Jerusalem still looking and longing for the coming of Messiah. Of these Simeon was representative, and it is said of him that “the Holy Spirit was upon him”. He was “looking for the consolation of Israel”, and “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ (Messiah)”. “He came in the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus..... he received him into his arms, and blessed God, and said..... Mine eyes have seen thy salvation..... the glory of thy people Israel”. And he said: “This child is set for the falling and rising up of many is Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against” (Luke 2:25–35). That whole passage needs to be carefully considered in the light of this whole subject of Israel’s Messiah being the Church’s Christ through the Cross.

But a question presses for an answer. Who was this Messiah-Christ, and when was He anointed?

We know that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good.....”, and we know that anoint-

ing took place immediately after his baptism at the Jordan. But, before He was Jesus of Nazareth, He was the Son of God, and before times eternal He was “appointed heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2). Further, we know that through, by and unto Him “all things have been created” (Colossians 1:16).

There was a great and high angelic being who was called “the anointed cherub that covereth” (Ezekiel 28:14).

Two things emerge from all this. One is that the eternal son was above all other beings, and “so much better than the angels” (Hebrews 1:4), even Lucifer; and the other, that the anointing at Jordan was related to His work of redemption by the Cross (the Spirit always follows the altar, the blood, the Cross), and that by the anointing He was spiritually and officially constituted Prophet, Priest, and King. This is foreshadowed and typified in the Old Testament, and taught as actuality in the New Testament. This is our Christ, the Messiah of the new Israel.

□ PART 3 — THE FOUNDATION LAW OF GOD’S NEW ISRAEL

“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generation. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every male among you shall be circumcised”
(Genesis 17:1–10).

“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).

“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).

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again” (II Corinthians 5:14,15).

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

□ THE COVENANT OF SEPARATION AND DISTINCTIVENESS

We ought to add Scriptures to those, for there are many more which are of the same nature, but these are sufficient to bring us to the point of our consideration, which is the foundation law of God’s Israel, the law of God’s covenant, and that covenant is symbolized in circumcision. The sign of the covenant with Abraham was circumcision. In the Old Testament it was literal and material. In the New Testament it is spiritual, but the meaning is the same. It is a spiritual law of God’s Israel and that law is separation and distinctiveness. He lays down the law that God’s Israel is a separate people; separate from all other people, and different from all other people – clearly distinguished from all other people. Did you notice, as we read those Scriptures, that God said to Abraham that He would make many nations out of his seed? Now God is taking out of the nations a people for His Name, something in the nations, but separate from the nations, and that law of separation and difference is the foundation of God’s Israel.

We can see God keeping to that law in the Old Testament. It is written that “the God of glory appeared unto... Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said unto him, Get thee out!” (Acts 7:2). Later, Moses was in Egypt, and God just sovereignly took him out before He did anything else. Moses had to be out of Egypt first, and that was a very thorough thing, as you would think if you were out in a wilderness for forty years! Then the Lord set Moses back into Egypt to get the people out, and the Word is: “Out of Egypt did I call my son” (Matthew 2:15). God could not proceed with His purpose until He had got His people to, for there is a place where God will fulfil His purpose, and He will not fulfil it anywhere else. I would like you to put a lot of lines un-

der that statement, for I think it is the key to everything. Let me say it again: there is a place where God will fulfil His purpose, and He will do it nowhere else. God means business. He is a God of purpose, and He is very serious about His purpose, which is a purpose of blessing. To Abram He said: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee... and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:2,3). God's purpose is a purpose of blessing; blessing to the instrument that He will use and to the people to whom He uses that instrument. "I will bless thee... and thou shalt be a blessing". That is the purpose of God, and I say it with a strong voice, because I know that some will say: 'If we are going this way it is going to have to give up everything!' Well, wait a little while – we have not finished yet!

We make this statement: God's purpose is to bless and to make a blessing, but it demands a position. The blessing and the vocation depend upon where we are. Of course, in the Old Testament it was literal. Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees, and God said: 'You must get out of this city. I am not going to do anything here! I must have you somewhere else.' In the New Testament it is spiritual. Where do you live? In Bern, in Zurich, in New York, in London, in Paris, or in some other city? God is not saying to you: 'Get out of Paris!' or any of these cities, but He is saying, just as forcefully: 'Get out!' You may be living in your body in a city, but you may not find your life there. You may have been born there, physically, but now, as a true Israelite, you were never born there. You were born from above.

God's covenant is bound up with this spiritual position, and we must really take serious notice of this. God has made a covenant with His Israel, but that covenant demands that they are out of somewhere and in somewhere else, and for us that means a different spiritual position. God's covenant is a covenant of blessing, of life, of service – that is, Divine vocation – but all that blessing, that life and that vocation are bound up with this matter of spiritual position. Spiritually we are out and we are different. That first Israel is not now in blessing, nor in life, nor is it in the Divine vocation. It is where the Lord Jesus said it would be if it rejected him – in outer darkness, where there would be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and for these many centuries the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem has fulfilled that prophecy! Why is that? There is one little fragment of Scripture which is tremendous but it has a terrible statement in it: "The covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake" (Jeremiah 31:32). Israel broke the covenant of separation and distinctiveness.

□ A CIRCUMCISED HEART

Now we come to this matter of circumcision. I can only touch it very lightly, for it is a very delicate matter.

We have seen that in the Old Testament circumcision is a type, or symbol, for in the New Testament it is stated that circumcision of the heart – not in the flesh, but in the spirit – and it just means this: a heart that is wholly devoted to the Lord. By that symbol the seed of Abraham became God's exclusive people for the time being, and everything that we have in the Old Testament about God's wish for this people shows us how jealous He was over those people. God called Himself their husband (Jeremiah 31:32), and there was never a more jealous husband than He! Let Israel have anything to do with any other husband and you will hear the thunder, and the weeping, of the Prophets, God was so jealous for Israel.

Now see what Paul says about the covenant seed of Abraham. He heads this whole thing up into Christ: "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). "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew (or an Israelite), which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit." So Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham, and Paul speaks of the circumcision of Christ.

Let me ask you a question: Has there ever lived on this earth a person more utterly committed to God than the Lord Jesus? He was indeed separated unto God, and different from all others. No one has ever borne the marks of spiritual circumcision more than the Lord Jesus. He was the Man of the undivided heart.

Let us go back into the Old Testament to that great Messianic chapter, Isaiah 53: "He shall see his seed... He shall see of the travail of his soul." Well, we know more than the Prophet Isaiah knew about that! We have been with Him in Gethsemane in the time of the travail of His soul, and we are with Him, on the other side of the travail. How many are the seed of Christ since then! Dear friends, if ever you are tempted to think that Christians are few, and that we are only a very small people in the millions of this world – open the windows! Look into the book of the Revelation: "A great multitude, which no man could number... ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." The number cannot be expressed in human language – and they have been gathered since the travail of the Lord Jesus. He is indeed seeing His seed! Gethsemane has been the most fruitful garden in all history – and you and I are of His seed! We are born out of His travail and are in the covenant made with

the new Israel.

But do remember that the meaning and the value of the covenant depend upon our devotion to the Lord! This is a thing which is so evident: the greatest fruitfulness has always come from the lives most devoted to the Lord, the people of the undivided heart. This covenant has two sides. As we have already said, the New Testament takes many warnings from the history of Israel, and we may fail of all that that covenant means if our hearts are divided and we try to live life in two worlds. Let us look at a little incident in the life of Abraham.

It is in chapter 15, when God came to make His covenant with Abraham and his seed, and something happened which may people have not been able to understand. The Lord commanded Abraham to bring certain things for a sacrifice either to a large altar, or to two altars, for the Lord told him to divide the sacrifices in two and to put one half on one side and the other half on the other side. Now notice that these are two sides of the covenant. On the one side is Abraham and his seed and on the other side is God. God is about to enter into a covenant with Abraham and his seed, but the covenant has two sides. Now notice what happens! The vultures came down to try and steal the sacrifices. How greatly significant this is! All the powers of darkness are against this covenant, and all those evil fowls of the air are out to rob God and His people of this covenant. It says that Abraham beat them off. His rod was busy that day, and the vultures said: 'It is no good. We had better give up and get away from here.' Then Abraham went to sleep and "an horror of great darkness fell upon him". My point, and, I believe, the point of the Scripture is this: there is always a terrible battle with hell to secure a life utterly committed to God. No one who is going to be utterly for Him is easily won.

It may be that battle is going on in this very room. If the devil can prevent you from being utterly for God he is going to make a great big fight for it. Is that battle going on? The battle of the very covenant, the covenant in heart circumcision, a heart wholly for the Lord, a heart that is right out for God. If Satan can prevent that he will put up a good fight. What is your attitude to this? Are you careless about it? God alone knows how much is involved in it. Oh, take the rod of God and lay about these evil forces! Stand for the covenant! And when you have made that stand the evil forces will withdraw, the darkness will go.

There is a change of atmosphere in this story. At first the atmosphere is full of conflict and fear, for it is "an horror of great darkness". There is a battle in the very atmosphere over this matter, but when Abraham has fought the battle for the covenant the whole atmosphere changes and becomes one of victory. If we put the history of many consecrated believers into this story, there would be many testimonies like this: 'My, there was a tremendous battle over this matter! I was full of fears, but I took a stand, and with God's help I came to a decision. I stepped over on to God's side of the covenant and said: "Lord, I am Yours! I am with You!" then peace came, the peace of His victory. I went to bed that night feeling as though I had come out of a great battle, but it was into great peace.'

That is all in this little story in Genesis xv. May be your story! This is something of what means to have a heart that is circumcised, for circumcised heart is a heart set free from all self-interest. Was that true of Abraham? After many years what had seemed impossible came to pass and God gave him a son; and that son was God's miracle. You would expect Abraham to say: 'God gave me that son and I am going to hold on to him. I will never let him go, because God gave him to me.' There was a little boy once, and a baby came into the home. One day the mother said to the little boy: 'We are going to take Baby to the meeting and give him to the Lord.' The little boy's face fell, and he said: 'Mummy, you can lend him to the Lord, but we must have him back again. You know, that is the kind of consecration that a lot of Christians make; they have some personal interest in their consecration. But about that God given gift to Abraham God said: 'Take him and offer him!' Friends, learn this lesson! Do not think that because God has given you something by miracle you can take it for yourself. I will not try to say what it might be. It might be your very ministry, for there is always a peril of taking our ministry and using it for ourselves. But Abraham was truly circumcised in heart, and the same was true of Hannah. How long she waited for that child Samuel, and how much she suffered! How earnestly she prayed! And then, at last, God gave her the child. What did she say? 'Thank you, Lord. I will never let this child go now!?' No, she said: 'For this child I prayed and the Lord has given me my request. Therefore I have given him to the Lord for as long as he lives.' She, too, was circumcised in heart.

From some of his Psalms we know that the one great ambition of David's life was to build the temple, and he worked and sacrificed for that temple. He said: "I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids until I find out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the Might One of Jacob." (Psalm cxxxii. 3-5). He was collecting private money, as well as material for the temple, for he said: "I have a treasure of mine own of gold and silver" (I Chronicles xxix. 3). Then he received the pattern of the temple from the Lord, and said: "The time has come, and my life's ambition is about to be realized. The one thing for which I have lived is now going to be mine - but what is that? Someone is at the door. Come in!

Oh, it is a Prophet. Yes, my friend, what have you come to say?' 'I have come to tell you from the Lord, David, that you shall not build the house. Thy son shall build it.' What did David do? What would you do? Well, what did David do? He said: 'It does not matter about my disappointment! The thing is that the Lord must have what He wants. My interests are nothing beside His interests.' So he gave everything to Solomon. Perhaps he had seen something more: "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psalm xxiii. 6), and that is better than any earthly house!

We never lose anything when the Lord has everything, and that is what it means to have a circumcised heart. May that be true of everyone!

□ PART 4 — GOD'S NEW ISRAEL

At the commencement of these messages we made one statement which was to cover all that follows. That declaration was that the New Testament is built upon the ground of the Old Testament; that is, that what God was doing in a temporal and earthly way then, He is doing in a heavenly and spiritual way now. There is no change in His purpose, nor in His principles: the change is in His method. His one purpose is to take out of the nations a people for His name (Acts 15:14). In this part of the world's history God is working to secure out of the nations a new spiritual Israel (*Galatians 6:16 and the whole context of I Peter 2:4-10 – note verse 10*). He is constituting this spiritual Israel upon the principles of the old Israel. The first Israel failed Him, violated all His spiritual principles, and broke His covenant (Hebrews 8:9). (*Note the whole nature and purpose of the Letter to the Hebrews!*) This is the nation to which Christ referred when He said to 'official' Israel: "The kingdom of heaven shall be taken away from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof", i.e. the fruits of the Kingdom of heaven, a phrase which always related to the Gospel to all the nations. This is a nation out of all the nations.

I am fully aware that there is a large body of Bible students standing at my elbow – so to speak – feverishly wanting to challenge me regarding the future of the Jewish nation with all the questions about Palestine and present developments there. This whole matter has divided Bible readers and their respective followers into two main schools. Dr. Scofield leads the one school, i.e. the "Suspended Kingdom" school with a definite future for the Jewish nation. Dr. Campbell Morgan (*preeminent as a Bible teacher in his generation*) categorically denied the future for Israel (as *such*) teaching. We refuse to be drawn into a contention for either view. What we are saying with emphasis is that for this dispensation, "upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (I Corinthians 10:11), "Once at the end of the ages..." (Hebrews 9:26), the earthly Israel is in rejection, and the new heavenly Israel – the Church – is in the forefront of God's work. Touch this earth and world in any way and you touch confusion, frustration, and death! So we say with Nehemiah: "I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down".

No one will think for a moment that what we have said implies that we have no concern for the Jews. Jews are to contribute as much to the New Israel as are the Gentiles, but not as Jews or Gentiles, but a New Creation. We are as much concerned for the salvation of Jews as we are for anybody!

Let us proceed with the matter immediately on hand. We are now going to be occupied with THE EMANCIPATION OF ISRAEL

There are few things in the Old Testament which are given a greater place than the emancipation of Israel from Egypt, and the New Testament makes it very clear that God is taking His new Israel out of the nations on exactly the same principles as those on which He took out the old Israel. If this is not clear to you, then you must read your New Testament again in the light of what I have just said. All I can do is to put my finger upon some of these spiritual principles of emancipation; but the old Israel's emancipation was a tremendous thing, as we shall see as we go on, the emancipation of the new spiritual Israel is still greater. That means that to be a true child of God is a far greater thing than being a Jew of Israel.

Well, as you see, we are in the early chapters of the book of Exodus, and perhaps later on we shall move into the book of Numbers.

Now for some of these spiritual principles.

1. The emancipation of Israel from Egypt had spiritual background.

How did God Himself sum up that emancipation? He comprehended the whole thing in one statement in Exodus 12:12: "Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments."

It was not Pharaoh in the first place, for he was only an instrument; nor was it the Egyptians in the first place, for they were but the victims. It was the gods of the Egyptians. Behind Pharaoh and behind the Egyptians there was an evil spiritual system – and there is one verse in the New Testament which tells us all about that: "...principalities...powers...world-rulers of this darkness...spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12). Those were

all the gods of the Egyptians, set over against the one God of Israel, and the Egyptians, but between God and the gods of the Egyptians.

I may not take the time to go into detail, but the Egyptians worshipped the River Nile. There was the god of the Nile – so God turned the River Nile into blood. The Egyptians worshipped frogs. The frog was as sacred in Egypt as the cow is in India. These just indicate that God was getting behind things and was dealing with a great spiritual system. The emancipation of Israel was emancipation from a spiritual system – and that is true of the emancipation of every believer from this world system. This world is governed by a spiritual system which is behind it, and every man and woman in bondage to that system. The Word of God says that “the whole world lieth in the evil one” (1 John 5:19), and if you do not believe that of yourself then I would suggest that you try to get out of this world system. You would find that your emancipation is a much bigger thing than you think!

So the emancipation of Israel and the Church is from a spiritual background of a very powerful system, and redemption is a tremendous thing.

2. The emancipation of Israel was an exhibition of ultimate strength.

Of course, God could have just wiped out Egypt with one word. He who spoke the word and the creation came into being could have spoken and Egypt would have been dismissed from history; but God was teaching men a great lesson. He was not teaching Himself. He was teaching, first of all, this principle in Egypt, and was teaching something to Israel, the old and the new, the nations and the devil.

Here we have, then, an exhibition of final power. God is slowly but steadily drawing out the power of this evil system, exhausting all the power of the evil principalities. Each one of these ten judgments is an increase upon the one that went before. God is saying: ‘If you resist Me on that, very well, have some more!’”, and you notice that in the tenth judgment He has gone far beyond all the ten powers in Egypt. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26). That is the full and final power against God, but the “power of His resurrection” is “the exceeding greatness of His power”, and it exceeds all power in this universe.

Dear friends, have we really understood the greatness of our salvation? Have we really appreciated what it means to be a member of this new Israel? What was the great note of the Apostles as they went over the world? Men and devils killed the Prince of Life! They did the last thing that they could do, but the shout of the Apostles everywhere is: ‘God raised Him! You killed Him, but God raised Him!’ This is something beyond all the power of evil spirits and men, and it is a principle upon which God is constituting His new Israel. No wonder that the Apostle Paul, who had seen this, cried: ‘Oh, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection! If the fellowship of His sufferings will result in that, all right!’ It was an exhibition of ultimate strength, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

3. The emancipation of Israel was an expression of the virtue of the Blood of the Lamb.

You know Exodus 12 in which the Passover lambs are slain, but I wonder if you have recognized where the Passover lambs were slain! There was no temple, no tabernacle and no altar, so where were the lambs slain? They were slain on the threshold of every house, and the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the two side posts and on the lintel. What have you there? A circle of blood – a national circumcision. The nation was circumcised that night, and circumcision was the sign of the covenant, the sign that the people were God’s people. There were in a covenant of blood with God, and that is a covenant of life. The Egyptians were not under that covenant. Their first-born died that night, but Israel lived, and they went out through this circle of blood – the mighty virtue of the blood of the lamb.

Well, all Christians know about that! Our Christian life begins there, with the mighty virtue of the Blood of Jesus, and it will end there. The fullness of God’s new Israel, taken out of every nation and kindred and tongue! What are they singing in glory? “Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain!” (Revelation 5:12). Oh, the mighty virtue of the Blood of the Lamb! Do you not thank the Lord for that every time you pray? I can never pray without remembering the precious Blood, for it is the way out of death into life.

4. The presence of Israel in Egypt was an expression of the menace the elect is to this world.

This battle in Egypt revealed a very wonderful thing – what a menace the elect is to this world. The presence of Israel in Egypt was like a thorn in the side of the Egyptians, and every day poor Pharaoh was feeling that thorn in his flesh. He would say: ‘There is a people in my realm who are a threat to my kingdom. I killed all their male babies and now they have become six hundred thousand men, without women and children. What am I going to do with these people? If they go on like this I will have no place left for myself, or they will take the kingdom of this world.’ Have your minds leapt over into the New Testament? ‘What can I do with these people? I will give them as hard a time as I can and do everything that I can to make them serve my interests.’ Can you see the work

of the devil in this present age? Is the prince of this world making it as hard as he can for the people of God? Is his mind set upon making them serve his interests? That is the nature of the battle, and you only have to leap right over into the wilderness with the Lord Jesus during the forty days and forty nights. The prince of this world came to Him personally and tried to get Him to compromise, to accept the kingdoms of this world on his terms. "All this will I give Thee if Thou wilt worship me." 'If You will serve my interests I will give You a prize!' And behind his word there was this: 'If You don't, woe betide You! There will be a Cross for You! And I will rally all my principalities and powers and concentrate them upon You on that Cross.' The Lord Jesus gained the victory in that battle! The devil did his worst, but what is the verdict of the Word of God? Read it again in the letter to the Colossians: "(He) stripped off from himself the principalities and the powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross."

Dear friends, this applies to the new Israel. It applies to us here. We, as the Lord's people in this world, are a menace to Satan, a menace and a threat to his kingdom, and he knows that unless he destroys us we are going to take the kingdom – and, praise God, we are! "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). But what a big word: "Fear not"!

Well, there are four mighty principles. We could, of course, spend hours on every one of them, but "what seest thou?" Are you getting some light? Are you seeing that Satan will do everything in his power to keep you from breaking away from his kingdom? If you are still in spiritual bondage, do not put it down to secondary causes. Do not say: 'Well, it is because of so-and-so... it is because of my husband... it is because of my wife', or it might be a thousand and one other things. You go right to the root cause of it! If you are in spiritual bondage and darkness, it is the prince of this world who has put you in prison, and you will have to appeal to the victory won on Calvary by the Lord Jesus, and take your position by faith in the virtue of the Blood of Jesus.

If you are a true child of God, if you have come out of bondage, are you seeing now why the devil tries to give you such a bad time? Do you see why he will make it as hard as he can for you? The explanation is that he is afraid of you! Yes, Satan is afraid of the true Church. He is not afraid of the imitation church, of the false Israel, but he is afraid of the elect, and he does not give them an easy time.

□ THE NEW WORLD

Well, the people are out of their bondage in Egypt and are out unto the Lord. What about it? They are in a new place, a place that they have never been in before. They are not accustomed to anything in this place. They are in another world which is altogether different from the one in which they have been living. Yes, they have a real joy in being out and sing the song of redemption:

"I am redeemed, O praise the Lord!"

But what kind of a world is this into which they – and we – have come?

We are strangers in this world! What is it that Peter is saying? "I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims..." (I Peter 2:11). Somehow we do not seem to belong here, and we have to learn everything all over again. Well, in Egypt we could at least see where our bread was coming from. It may not have been everything that we would like but every time we needed food there was at least something to see. We knew that at a certain time someone would sound a trumpet and call out 'Come to the cookhouse!' We could see things in Egypt! Things were such that we could handle them, and we did know that our meals would be provided at the right time, but what kind of a life is this? We cannot see anything here. We just do not know what is going to happen out here! We are absolutely dependent upon supernatural power. This is a most unnatural life! Well, from time to time, God works a miracle. We have a very wonderful experience of Him, and then it is as though He goes away and leaves us, and this unnatural life goes on.

Do you know what I am talking about? Is that true to the Christian life?

We have come into a new place, and in this place God has to be everything. We have to prove Him every day, and we are tested by the very place into which we have come. We say: 'We are going out with the Lord.' All right – but do you know what that means? It is going out to the Lord, and to the Lord only. Out in this new place we seem to be suspended between heaven and earth. What is the meaning of this new place? Well, all our natural abilities and facilities are useless. I have more than once flown over that wilderness in the days of flying boats which did not go very high, and from six thousand feet I could see everything in the wilderness; and I came to one conclusion: it would be a hopeless thing to bring a plough into that, or to sow corn in that! That would soon break any farmer's heart! Fancy living in that for forty years. Only God almighty could keep you alive in that. So it was for these people – but what did this new place mean?

□ TESTING OF MOTIVES

First of all, it was the place where their motives were tested. What is the motive that has brought you to this place? Did you come out to the Lord in your own interests, or for the Lord? If your motive was a 'self' motive, you are going to die out here, but if it really was for the Lord, only He will carry you through this.

□ PROBATION FOR A LIFE OF THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The second thing about the new place was that it was the probation for a life of the power of the Holy Spirit. The book of Joshua is the book of the power of the Holy Spirit, and shows that you will never come into that power if you have selfish, personal motives. Your spiritual circumcision is going to be tested here: Is it all of the Lord, or is there something of myself?

In the New Testament there are two books which are set right in this new place, and in them you have Christians between Egypt and the land; and it is all a question of motive.

In the first letter to the Corinthians the Christians are with Israel in the wilderness. Their motives are being tested, and in chapter ten Israel's failure in the wilderness is used as a warning to Christians.

Then there is the letter to the Hebrews. There was a time when Israel in the wilderness said: 'Let us go back into Egypt! Things are too difficult for us this way.' Stephen said in Acts 7: "(They) turned back in their hearts unto Egypt". You see, their hearts were not truly circumcised. In the letter to the Hebrews, those Hebrew Christians who were having a difficult time, were inclined to go back, and Israel's example is taken as a very solemn warning, and the writer says: "They (Israel) were not able to enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:19). But the word in the letter to Hebrews again and again is: "Let us go on!" "Let us... let us... let us..." "Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience" (4:11). This world is a great power, and that power is set against our going on to God's full purpose. First it will do all that it can to keep us from coming out to God, and then it will exercise its power to turn us back. But there is another power, what Paul calls: "the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20), and that is a secret and hidden power. You want to feel it, but you do not feel it. What is the evidence of that power? How do you know that there is a power working in you which is greater than all the power of this world? How do I know? I have sometimes thought that the devil has almost exhausted all his schemes to get me back to the old place! I say that very carefully – but how do I know that there is a greater power? Because, after all that the devil has done, and after over sixty years of being out with the Lord, I am still going on! Not by might, not by human strength, and not because of anything in us; we are "kept by the power of God", and we know that power because today we are still out with the Lord. That is a tremendous thing, because of all that has been against.

"What seest thou?" Are you getting a little light? I hope this will explain quite a lot!

□ PART 5 — THE GREAT INHERITANCE

"And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

"...to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18).

"...giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Colossians 1:12).

"...knowing that from the Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance" (Colossians 2:24).

"And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place of the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15).

"...unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (I Peter 1:4).

The greatest thing that is taken over from the Old Testament into the New, and from the old Israel to the new Israel, is that which is called "the inheritance". This inheritance governs everything in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament; all that is in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is governed by the inheritance. It is the inheritance that justifies and explains redemption. That was true in the redemption of Israel from

Egypt, and it is true regarding the redemption of the Church from this world. All that is governed by the inheritance. Redemption was never just something in itself. The redemption of Israel out of Egypt was a mighty thing, and we have seen that it was a demonstration of the 'exceeding great' power of God; yet all that was not just to have Israel out of Egypt.

It was the inheritance that explained the tragedy of Israel, and it was a terrible tragedy! Six hundred thousand men came out of Egypt, but only two went into the inheritance. All the rest of the six hundred thousand men died in the wilderness. The New Testament makes a very great deal of that as a matter of warning to the new Israel, that is, the Church. You must read your New Testament in the light of the inheritance, for that is what governs it in all its aspect. The inheritance is the interpretation and explanation of our very existence. It is the positive factor in our very birth.

When I came to the Lord I was a young man and very enthusiastic. You know, there is a saying that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread", and I had a brother who was some years older than I was and he was not the Lord's. He was a very strong man physically and could have knocked me to the ground with one blow. In my enthusiasm I asked him about his salvation. He looked me up and down, and I felt like a grasshopper! He did not knock me down with his fists, but he knocked me down with a word, for he said: 'I was never consulted as to whether I wanted to come into this world. I just came into this world without having any choice. Therefore, my being here is not my responsibility, and I have no intention of taking any responsibility for my life.' That knocked me down and I had no answer to it at the time. I was just a young Christian, but since then I have learned the answer. Why are we born? Why are we in this world? We are here with a great possibility in view, for there is a tremendous thing bound up with a human life. If I had known then what I know now I would have had the answer, and it would have been this: 'Do you not recognize that God has a great purpose in your being in this world? This is not a negative thing, that we just happen to be here. There is a great inheritance to be gained or lost.'

If you ever have time, go through your Bible with that word 'inheritance', especially in the New Testament is the explanation of the word.

With this in view, of course, we come to the Book of Joshua, which is the book of the inheritance for the old Israel, but it is the book of the power of the Holy Spirit to realize the inheritance. Joshua himself represents the energy of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God rested upon Joshua because Moses had laid his hands upon him, and that anointing had the inheritance in view. The word of the Lord to Joshua, after the death of Moses, was: "Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land" (Joshua 1:6). By the anointing Joshua represents the energy of the Holy Spirit unto the inheritance.

Now this is a statement of fact. I am not giving you something that I have studied. I am giving you the stated facts of the Word of God, which says everywhere that there is an inheritance for the people of God which they can miss or gain. I am sounding very forceful. That is because I take things seriously, but this is a very serious matter. There is nothing more serious in the Word of God.

□ WHAT IS THE INHERITANCE?

If I were to begin to explain the inheritance and try to cover all that it is, this conference would be a very long one indeed. So you will excuse me, but I will just say one or two things about this inheritance.

The inheritance is the full purpose and content of redemption, and redemption is a far, far greater thing than we have ever recognized. Redemption is only the beginning of salvation. When we speak about salvation we are really thinking of people coming to the Lord. We ask them if they are saved, and many Christians will say: 'I was saved so many years ago.' So salvation is just a matter of coming to the Lord Jesus, being saved from our sins and receiving the gift of eternal life. But if you look into the New Testament you will see that there are three tenses of salvation. "We were saved", which is the past tense; "we are being saved", and that is the present tense; "we shall be saved", and that is the future tense. Therefore salvation covers past, present and future. If you want to get just a little idea of salvation, look at Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15. At the beginning of that chapter Paul says that he is reminding the Corinthians of the gospel which he had preached to them, and then through that chapter he tells us of the gospel which he had preached and shows that that gospel leads right through to the eternal glory, which includes our resurrection body, and our position and condition in the eternal ages to come. He looks at the sun, then at the moon, and then at all the stars, and says that "there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars... so also is the resurrection of the dead" (verses 41, 42). There is much more in that wonderful chapter, and this is the gospel which he preached. Well, that puts salvation on a very much higher level, does it now? Peter said: "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." This great inheritance is the content of redemption. The writer of the Letter

to the Hebrews calls it the “so great salvation” (2:3). The Lord Jesus said to the first members of the new Israel: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). He also said that the Kingdom of heaven shall be taken away from the old Israel and given to the new (Matthew 21:43). So the inheritance is the Kingdom!

What is the meaning of that word ‘kingdom’? It is the sovereign reign – reigning together with Christ. He is the destined Lord of this unity, so the kingdom is not only being with Christ, though it will be a wonderful thing to be with Him when He comes in His kingdom, but it is more than that – it is reigning with Him, being members of the government of the eternal kingdom; and, more than that, being members of the Royal Family that governs.

It is impossible to describe the inheritance! These are some of the things revealed in the Word of God. In the case of the old Israel, Moses had great difficulty in explaining the inheritance. He was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, but he had difficulty in explaining the land into which the people were going. He said that it was “a land flowing with milk and honey... a land of hills and valleys... a land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year” (Deuteronomy 11:9,11,12), and the Bible tells us that the eyes of the Lord never rest favorably upon anything that displeases Him. So, if Moses could not explain it, and Paul could not do it, I give it up! Paul tried to explain the inheritance: “Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him” (I Corinthians 2:9). I say again, we must give it up, but let us register the impression. To be called according to the eternal purpose is a tremendous thing to gain. It is therefore a tremendous thing to lose, and that is why the Bible is all about the inheritance.

□ THE ESSENTIAL BASIS OF THE INHERITANCE

Now we go back to the Book of Joshua, and here we see the essential basis of the inheritance.

We recall what happened when the people went over the Jordan. I dare not stay now to speak about the crossing of the Jordan, though I may touch it again later, but there is one clause that I like very much: “When all the nation were clean passed over Jordan” (Joshua 4:1). We speak of people making ‘a clean breast of it’, and by that we mean that there is no compromise, no reservation, nothing that they are holding on to. They have made a clean job of it, and that is what the Jordan means. You know that it is a symbol of baptism, being baptized into Christ. When I baptize anyone I always demand that there is enough water to get them right under and I make sure that they do go under! I hold both their hands, in case they put a hand out. No, they must go under altogether, and if I did not bring them up within forty seconds, that would be the end of them! Now, I am not trying to be humorous Paul says: “We were buried with him through baptism” (Romans 6:4), and it says of the Jordan that its banks overflow all the time of harvest (Joshua 3:15). It is a complete inundation, a complete burial of everything. Jordan is only a type in the Old Testament, but that type contains the New Testament spiritual principle, so Paul says: “We were buried with him through baptism” – and if God does not raise us with Him, that is the end of us! That is the spiritual position of the people who are going into the inheritance.

Now there is this interesting thing: When the nation were clean over Jordan the Lord commanded that the whole new generation should be circumcised. While I am speaking about this, remember Paul’s interpretation of circumcision: “Neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh... circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit” (Romans 2:28,29). As we said earlier, circumcision is a sign of separation unto God. It is an interesting and impressive thing that the new generation which had arisen in the wilderness had never been circumcised. The parents had neglected this command of God, and those parents had all died in the wilderness. This means that they had ignored the spiritual law of heart separation unto God, so what arises is this: there is no entering into the inheritance without a circumcised heart. The heart has to be wholly and utterly for the Lord. If that is not true, sooner or later there is going to be a tragedy in the Christian life.

□ THE PLACE OF THE HEIRS OF THE INHERITANCE

Do you notice what the Lord said when this nation was circumcised on this side of Jordan? He said: “This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you” (Joshua 5:9). What does that mean? Have you ever thought about that? The reproach of Egypt rolled away! When they were utterly separated in heart unto the Lord the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. Who were these people? They were the children of Israel, and ‘Israel’ was Jacob’s other name. What does ‘Israel’ mean? It means ‘a prince with God’. These people were therefore, by Divine decree, children of a prince with God, and, as children of a prince, they were princes. What would you think if you saw a man, who was a prince of the royal household and therefore an heir to all that that household inherited, in prison, with his clothes in rags, his food being doled out to him from time to time, never able to choose anything for himself, and without money or home of his own? What would you say? ‘What a shame!’ That would

be a reproach to a prince, would it not? It would be a great shame upon such a person! Yet these children of a prince with God were in Egypt like that. No, princes ought never to be in a position like that! That was the reproach of Egypt, the shame of the whole situation. It is called the house of bondage, and no prince ought to be in that.

These people are now clean over Jordan, the hearts are circumcised, and now they are wholly for the Lord. The reproach and the shame of the past are rolled away.

What a glorious thing to have the reproach and shame of our past life all rolled away! Why are you not shouting 'Hallelujah'? I think it is because you are listening to the word but are not having the spirit – or perhaps I should say that you are taking the word seriously. But our rightful place, dear friends, is where all the reproach of the past is rolled away. That is the place of the heirs of the inheritance.

□ THE CROSS AND THE INHERITANCE

This is the deeper, and inward meaning of the Cross, because the New Testament teaches us that the Cross is the place of spiritual circumcision. And this just says one great thing: only truly crucified Christians, and only a truly crucified Church can meet the enemy in the coming battle with any hope of victory. This entering into our inheritance is something which is withstood by all the principalities and powers. All these evil powers in the universe are set against one thing, that is, God having a people for Himself to whom He is going to give the Kingdom, when the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our God and His Christ. I say that all the spiritual forces are so against that. As we have seen, they will fight to keep the people from coming out to the Lord, and if they cannot do that, they will work to keep them from going on. That is the wilderness story! And if they cannot prevent them from going on, they will not give up the battle. Now you have the story of the Book of Joshua. The people are now in the new possession, and are not fighting with the world. That was in Egypt and in the wilderness. You are not now fighting with the flesh, but you have come through into the heavenly places, and the warfare is in the heavenlies. It is spiritual against the spiritual hosts of wickedness. There is no hope of victory in this realm unless we have come through the meaning of Jordan and heart circumcision.

Now I come to my last point:

□ THE BATTLE FOR THE INHERITANCE

The principalities and powers have the kingdoms of this world in their power at present, but the power is the birthright of God's Son. The kingdom was eternally appointed for the Son of God, and for all who are with Him. Do you think the energy who so strongly controls this world is going to give it up easily? He will not give up one spiritual meter without a fight! Every bit of spiritual progress is resisted by the evil forces. Surely you know something of what that means! For many weeks I had a most terrible battle over the message of this congruence. Night and day, for a long time, I was in that battle. Then some of you know what a battle it was for you to get here! And I can tell you that it has been like that for many, many years! Whenever there is something new of the Lord in view, when there is going to be some new ground taken for the Lord, when the Lord's people are going to move on into something more in Him, there is always a battle. It may be a battle in the spirit, it may be a battle in the soul, it may be a battle in the body, it may be in yourself, or it may be in other people and in other things, but no bit of spiritual ground is going to be taken easily. The enemy sees the implication of the people of God taking the inheritance; his kingdom is weakened, his reign is shortened, and his days are numbered when the people of God go on to the possession. Are you going to let him win? Are you going on? Are you going to take the kingdom? Are you afraid? You notice that in the first two chapters of Joshua the Lord says to Joshua so often: "Be strong and of a good courage!" Why should we not be afraid and of good courage?

Go back to Joshua, and you find that it is not he who is in charge. Joshua looked "and, behold there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand... and he said... as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come" (Joshua 5:13,14). It is the captain of the hosts of the Lord who is in charge! Joshua, as we have said, represents the energies of the Holy Spirit, and it is in this spiritual connection that the Apostle Paul utters some of these wonderful words: "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all ages for ever and ever" (Ephesians 3:20). We can count on the energy of the Holy Spirit! The battle may often be very fierce. The enemies may seem to be very strong, but He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world.

So our last word in this connection is: "Be strong and of a good courage!"

HEART-REVELATION OF “THE MYSTERY”

“.....making known unto our; the mystery of His will....” (Eph. 1:9)

“.....how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery of Christ... to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God.” (Eph. 3:3,4,9)

“This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and the Church” (Eph. 5:32)

“..... that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel” (Eph 6:19)

We have traced through the letter to the Ephesians this characteristic word — “mystery”. What is its meaning?

It has two sides. First of all, “mystery” means something that has been kept hidden, that could not be recognized, clearly seen, or understood. It was a hidden matter, what we call a secret; and we are told that God kept this secret, this mystery, hidden from all ages and generations but now He has made it known. Something which was hidden, a mystery, has now been declared.

But then there is the other side of this which is perfectly clear also, that even after the secret has been declared, people cannot see it unless God gives them illumination about it. Although this is the age in which it is declared, it is still a mystery until God opens eyes and gives illumination. Paul said, “By revelation was made known unto me the mystery”; “you can perceive my understanding in the mystery”; so that it is a matter of the mystery being explained or illumined to our hearts, and it is in our coming to see it that we come to spiritual enlargement. We move toward fullness by way of seeing “the mystery”.

The word ‘mystery’ is used in several connections in the New Testament, but there are two major connections. You may say that they include the others. Firstly, there is the mystery of Christ. We read the phrase: “the mystery of the gospel”; but that comes within this, that is a part of the mystery of Christ. And secondly, there is the mystery of iniquity. What does the mystery turn out to be when you look into the New Testament? Well, in each case, the mystery of Christ and the mystery of iniquity, you will find it is an incarnation of a great spiritual and supernatural being entering into man form. That is perfectly clear and simple with regard to Christ. God was in Christ, that is the mystery. In the days of His flesh no one understood that mystery; it was something hidden. They felt there was something mysterious about Him, something that was different, “other”, superior. They could not get to the bottom of Him, as we say; they could not quite understand Him: ‘There is something about this Man we cannot understand, He is different, He defeats all our attempts at explanation. There is a mystery about Him.’ “The world knew Him not” (John 1:10). It is the mystery of God in Christ — God appearing in the form of man, God made in the likeness of man.

The mystery of iniquity is the same thing, another supernatural, spiritual being coming in man form: eventually Antichrist. The mystery of iniquity is that there is something in humanity, and heading itself up into a humanity, a man or men, which is not just man himself. There is something about this that is evil, sinister, uncanny. You cannot account for it on purely natural grounds. There is a mystery about it. It is an incarnation of a spiritual and supernatural being which is the mystery, whether it be of Christ or whether it be of Antichrist.

But when you come to Christ, you find that the mystery is twofold. Firstly, it is Himself, as we have said. God in Christ personally, so that Christ is God incarnate. But then you find, by what has been revealed to and through Paul, that Christ takes a Body — not a physical body, but a spiritual Body — “the Church which is His Body” (Eph. 1:22–23), and the Church being His Body again becomes the mystery of Christ; that is, here is God in Christ indwelling a company of people, the elect, the Body of Christ. The letter to the Ephesians is particularly taken up with that aspect of Christ, that you have here a body of people called the Church, in whom God in Christ dwells.

There is a mystery about this people, about this particular Church, there is something here that is supernatural, something here that is spiritual. It is not just a society of people called Christians, a number of people who gather together in the Christian faith and believe certain doctrines. There is something more than that about them. If only you knew it and could understand it, in the deepest and innermost reality of their being they are supernatural; they are not merely natural people, they are not earthly people. There is something hidden within them which you cannot account for on any other ground, and you have to say, ‘It is God; it is the Lord.’ When you meet these people, when they are gathered together even in a small company, if you move in there you find something extra to the people, something more than what they are; you meet the Lord. There is a mystery about this, and the mystery of Christ of which Paul is speaking here is not just the mystery of Christ personal, but it is the mystery of Christ corporate, of Christ in His Body the Church.

So Paul is speaking about that mystery, and he is saying, ‘Now this is a heavenly thing, a spiritual thing; this is

not something that is on this earth, which you can explain as you can explain other earthly things. This is something heavenly, and you cannot explain that by earthly standards at all.'

That is the statement of the fact, but of course that is the challenge to the Church. Is the Church that? Just in so far as we are actually what we are called to be, that is our spiritual measure. Spiritual measure is what we are as to Christ, what Christ is in us.

Then we come to this other point, it is not the fact that makes us grow; that is, it is not the truth of the Body as truth, the facts stated about the Church as information, that brings us to spiritual enlargement. We can see all this, as in the Scriptures, and yet it may never make any difference to us, as to our spiritual measure, never result in spiritual enlargement. There are a lot of people who have all the truth of the mystery of Christ and the Church, all the truth of the Body of Christ, but they are very small people. Many of them have it and are still living on Corinthian ground where everything is very earthly and self-centered; and many more are living on Galatian ground where all is very legal. In order for it to mean spiritual enlargement, it has to be on what we will call Ephesian ground.

What is Ephesian ground? It is this. Paul says that there was revealed to him this mystery; it was made known to him. And now he tells these people that he prays for them. They are Christians, there is no doubt about that; but he says that he prays for them "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you (Christians) a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead" (Eph. 1:17–20). All that has to do with the true, eternal vocation and destiny of this Christ corporate. The knowledge of *Him* is not; the knowledge of Christ as separate person. It is the knowledge of Christ now in all that He means in a corporate way. That is the knowledge he prays they may have; and having prayed thus for them, he moves to the matter of spiritual enlargement.

He comes eventually to that great point in the fourth chapter: "till we all attain....unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." How do you attain unto fullness? What is spiritual enlargement? It results from the eyes of your heart being enlightened as to the true meaning and nature of Christ as expressed in His Body, the Church. The point is that you see it, that it breaks on you by revelation. Then you are at once out of a Corinthian position, out of a Galatian position, out of a merely earthly Church with its ordinances, ceremonies, etc. You are in a heavenly position, and now you are going to grow.

Even at the risk of undue repetition, because of the importance of this matter let me say again that the Apostle says as to himself, and as to those believers of his own day, and as to us, that the way of spiritual enlargement is by the eyes of the heart being enlightened. Paul would never have prayed for that if it were not the Lord's will that it should be so; and if it is His will, then we *can* have the eyes of our heart enlightened to know in this way that Paul knew, by revelation.

Therefore the higher position of "Ephesians" is this — that... being quickened and raised together with Christ and seated in the heavenlies is a matter of relatedness to other believers, and in that relatedness you are going to find your fullness. You are never going to find spiritual enlargement just as an isolated, separate individual, but in relation with other believers. "God setteth the solitary in families" (Psa. 18:6), and there is no doubt about it: whether or not you understand or accept the doctrine of it, you can prove very quickly in experience that our spiritual enlargement does come by way of true spiritual and heavenly relatedness with other believers. That is proved by the fact that it is not always easy for Christians to live together for very long. It sounds a terrible thing to say, but you have a lot of other factors to reckon with.

If you were ordinary people in this world, you might get on very well, but being Christians you have to meet the whole force of Satan working upon any little bit of natural life he can find. So he makes for difficulty between Christians that they would not find if they were not in a heavenly position. They are meeting forces in the heavenlies. There are the rub and friction and all the cross currents that try to divide Christians but that do not try to divide other people, because there is so much bound up with true spiritual oneness amongst the Lord's people — so much for the Lord and so much against Satan. Satan is going to break up that spiritual oneness if he can. He knows what that means for him, and the Lord knows what that means for Himself; and hence the special and extra difficulties when it is a case of Christians living together, especially for a long time.

Now what is the upshot? When these difficulties arise we must say, 'It is evidently necessary for me to get a new spiritual position, to get on top of this. If I am not going to give it up and leave, I must come to some spiritual enlargement; I have to know the Lord in a new way, to have more grace, love, and patience. That is spiritual en-

largement, and it comes by relatedness.

March, 1949

IN THE TRAIN OF HIS TRIUMPH

“...and by me sends forth the knowledge of Him, a stream of fragrant incense, throughout the world. For Christ’s is the fragrance which I offer up to God, whether among those in the way of salvation, or among those in the way of perdition; but to these it is an odour of death, to those of life.” (II Corinthians 2:14–16, Conybeare’s translation).

□ THE MINISTER AND HIS MINISTRY

The Apostle Paul is setting forth one of his conceptions of what the ministry of Christ is, and then what is the effect of the ministry. He is thinking here of the ministry of Christ as an incense-bearer. The picture in the background of these verses is one with which we are well acquainted.

Verse 14 brings into view the triumphal procession of a victorious warlord, as he moves from place to place with his captives behind him, celebrating at many points his victory, and using them to provide the evidence of his conquests. But also in the procession there are those who carry vessels of incense, and the incense being diffused everywhere speaks in two ways, to two different classes of people.

There are some who are going to celebrate this day of victory by being slain. It was a custom to hold certain notorious or distinguished captives in bondage until the day of the great celebration of the victory, and then that day was marked by their execution. On the other hand, there were those who were appointed to be released as a distinguishing mark of the day. To the one the incense brought death near, and made them know that their hour had come. To the other the same incense made known that the hour of emancipation, of liberation, was drawing near. The same incense proclaimed death and life, life and death.

In the second part of the picture the Apostle sees himself in a different role. In the first, he has been viewing himself as one of those prisoners, led in the triumphal procession as an object of public exhibition, celebrating the triumph of the great Warrior. He has seen himself as in the train of the triumph of the Lord, being on full view as a demonstration of the greatness of that victory. Now he transfers himself into the second part, and takes the place of an incense-bearer in the procession. He says that he passes on through the world bearing incense, and that that incense is saying two things, having two effects, speaking to two different classes of people. It relates to life and death.

But the Apostle does not think of himself as merely carrying a censer of incense. He regards himself as being the vessel, and even — in a strange, deep, inward way, so as to become a very part of his own being — as the incense itself. He thinks of himself, not only as being the giver forth of the sweet savour, but as being the sweet savour itself; he sees himself as the means by which this effect is registered upon these two different classes of people.

In that presentation of the servant of the Lord, there is a deep, strong and solemn word for all of us who stand in the position of being the Lord’s servants. The thing which should be going forth from us, the thing which should be the effect of our lives, according to these words, is the knowledge of Christ. Everywhere, not just as by us, but because of us, men should be coming to a knowledge of Christ. The very object of our being is that Christ should be known because of us. The Divinely appointed way by which men are to come to know Christ is simply through our being here and moving amongst them.

□ THE VITAL ELEMENT IN MINISTRY

That is simple, and perhaps we recognize and accept it. But the extra point which has to be noticed is this, that it is something more than our giving out knowledge concerning Christ — it is that we are to be to men the knowledge of Christ. There is a very big difference between the giving out of truth concerning the Lord Jesus — even in large measure, in a great fulness, truth which cannot be denied because it is the truth — and that strange, deep, indispensable element of ourselves being that truth: so that the truth itself takes its power, its strength from the fact that here are those who are the living expression of it; who have gone through the depths, have been tested, tried, taken from place to place, subjected to experiences of intense severity, and in the fires have learned Christ, and are therefore themselves the embodiment of the knowledge of Him. Wherever we go, it is not

that they have truth to give — it is that men and women learn Christ because of them. Of them it can be said: It is not what they say only; there is something coming from them. There is an indescribable ‘something’ which is an extra element to what they say. That thing has its reality in their being, and you feel that it is not only the words but the very virtue that comes out when they speak, or by reason of their presence.

It is that of which the Apostle is speaking. That is the real value of any knowledge of Christ which we can give, which others may come to possess by us. It is not that they come through us to know more about Christ, but that there is a ministration of Christ Himself. That is the thing for which we should seek the Lord very earnestly.

□ THE COSTLINESS OF TRUE MINISTRY

We should recognize that this represents the costliness of ministry.

Ministry of this kind is an intensely costly thing. It is so different from being a preacher, as such. There may be a glamour about preaching, a fascination about gripping a congregation, and all that sort of thing, which is not costly but is gratifying to the flesh. The snare of the limelight, the snare of publicity, the snare of the satisfaction of feeling power over other people, has robbed preaching of that essential blood, and passion, and anguish. Paul was not a preacher of that kind. It is all very well to talk about Paul as the great preacher and orator, and to try to be another Paul along that line. But to be a Paul is a desperately costly thing, and to minister Christ is a thing into which our very blood will be poured.

This kind of ministry can bring no satisfaction to the flesh. This kind of ministry is not something for which to reach out for ourselves. This kind of ministry is something from which we should plead to be delivered, unless our life and heart passion is that Christ Himself — not ourselves, but Christ Himself — should be known.

That is the true value of ministry. It is indeed a costly thing, it is a thing of suffering, but it is the thing which goes beyond words, far beyond clever thinking and clever expressing, far beyond that acute needle-like brain that grasps truth and then begins to give it out. It is something which is an extra factor, without which the very best equipment in nature will fail to reach the Divine end. It is, in a word, Christ ministered: not Christ ministered about, but Christ ministered. Paul saw that there was no doubt about it — this ministry was effective, although effective in two directions. Not always did it result in people leaping into life, but it always resulted in something. If it plunged some people more deeply into death it was a proof that it was effective. If it brought death home to some consciences, that proved its power. To have real spiritual effect demands that we shall be ministers after this sort.

LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY

“For that the leaders took the lead....bless the Lord” (Judges 5:2).

While there are few things fraught with more difficulties, perils, and involvements than leadership, there are few things more vital and necessary. The fact of leadership needs no argument. It is in the very nature of things. Every situation that arises of a serious and critical nature either finds its salvation by the spontaneous forthcoming of the spirit of leadership in someone, or becomes a disaster for want of it. When an emergency arises, people are either paralyzed and helpless because there is no one to give a lead, or are galvanized into action or confidence by the right kind of leadership.

But not only in emergencies does this factor show its importance. Both in any enterprise, mission, and service, and in any realm of responsibility, this — which is an elemental principle — invariably shows itself. We have much to say about its nature, its sphere, and its purpose, but first of all it is necessary that we should recognize and accept that leadership is a fact in the very constitution of life and purpose. It has been so from the beginning, and — in Principle (if not in form) — has operated in every realm, not least in the Church.

In its right place, sphere, nature, and relationship it is a must; only chaos, confusion, and frustration can obtain where there is no spirit of leadership. Indeed, even where there may be a pretending to the contrary, it will be there somewhere if things are not completely stagnant or running to seed...

With all the desire and intention in the world to safeguard the unique and sole rights of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Church, we still believe that there is an essential place for, and need of, subject and subordinate (to the Lord) leadership. Moreover, this we believe not to be out of order, but in the Divine order.

The place and function of the shepherd in the Bible is to “go before”, and the sheep “follow after”. The Lord is truly the Chief Shepherd, but there are shepherds in the churches, and they have to lead. While James, John, and

Timothy were apostles of the churches, they were recognized as having particular responsibility in a local church. If this can be proved to be true in any case, it must be accepted as: (1) expressing a certain personal leadership, and (2) not necessarily violating either the headship of Christ, the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, or the corporate nature of local responsibility. To argue otherwise is to say that it is impossible to have a corporate body of responsible men who recognize anointing for leadership amongst themselves — and to honor such — while not being under autocratic oppression. While we most strongly contend against autocracy, we as strongly contend that leadership even amongst responsible brethren is right, provided always that it is evidently anointed leadership and of the kind that is approved of God...

As is always the case, the positive is revealed in its importance by the opposition which it encounters. We have only to consider the leadership function of such as Adam, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Nehemiah, Paul, and a hundred others to understand the intense and many-sided antagonism levelled at them. Of course, the Lord Jesus as “the captain of our salvation” i.e., “the file-leader” is the supreme instance. Break, defeat, beguile, seduce the leader, and the battle is won — the forces are helpless. The focus of adverse attention upon leadership is its own testimony to its importance.

Then in approaching the question of what leadership is, we must say something of what it is not. Leadership (in the work of God) is not firstly on natural grounds. It is not — in the first place — a matter of personality, natural ability, assertiveness, enthusiasm, assumption, strength of mind or will. A blusterer is not a leader. A leader in God’s work is not made or trained in the schools or academies. That may be so in the world’s work, but we are dealing with spiritual leadership. Many natural things, inherited or acquired, may — or may not — be helpful subsequently, but God’s leaders are not essential leaders because of certain natural qualifications.

Whatever may or may not be true in the natural realm, the fact is that God’s leaders are chosen by Him. They, and others, may always have many questions as to Why, but that fact governs. God only knows why! When God does it, men have either to take account of it and accept it, or in repudiating it to be out of Divine approval. This is very true to the Bible, as we shall see.

What we have just said does not imply that there are no qualities in leaders. They go to school with God, and in a hard school the kind of qualities required by God are inculcated. Another general thing about leaders chosen by God is that they, while being human, are in many respects a class by themselves. They are pioneers, and pioneers are lonely people in more respects than one. In some ways they are difficult people. Their standard and measure has to be ahead of others, and as human nature generally likes not to be disturbed but would seek the easy way, the pioneer is often a bit too much for people. He is restless, never satisfied, always pressing and urging forward. The keynote of his life is “Let us go on”. His is not the easy way, and because human nature does want the easy way the leader is not always popular. The whole nature of man is either downward or to a quiet and happy mean and smugness. The pioneer is therefore not always appreciated, but often very much otherwise. He is so much contrary to this mediocre gravitation. A part of the price of leadership is loneliness.

Leadership is a divine imperative. In the work of God, true leadership is not by the choice or desire of those concerned. Very often it is against their inclination or desire, especially when they have been in God’s ‘school of discipline’. Indeed, the man who wants to be a leader, who forces himself into that position, who assumes it, and who would not rather be saved from it, will most likely be a menace. It will be clear to all that it is more the man than the Lord. His leadership — such as it is — will be forced, artificial, and lacking in unction. The God-chosen leader is a ‘cannot’ man in two ways. Firstly — like Moses and Jeremiah — he will genuinely feel and confess, “I cannot.” But on the other hand, he will know that he cannot do otherwise; it is a Divine compulsion, a fire in his bones, an urge and energy not of himself. While he is on his job, he may give the impression of personal strength — perhaps of efficiency or even self-assurance — but he and God know the depth of his secret history: the overwhelming consciousness of need and dependence, the awareness of limitation, and the desolating realization of failure and weakness.

Leaders know deeper depths than any others, and their battle with self-despair is more acute. Yet it is a part of their leadership and responsibility that they hide their own personal sufferings and sorrows. Like Ezekiel and Hosea they have to anoint their face and in the hour of deepest sorrow go before the people “as at other times.” The troubles must not get into their voice or manner; if they do, their influence has gone; for if people are going on to the greater fulnesses of Christ, the supreme virtue is courage, and it is this that a leader must inspire. His boldest times — before men — may be his times of deepest suffering before God. They know that they are involved in the ‘impossible’ but — in spite of themselves — they are committed; and for them compromise is unthinkable.

While writing this, I have come upon “The Making of a Pioneer”, by the Misses Cable and French, and in it these lines occur in reference to the Pioneer:

“They are not an easygoing class of people and are subject to an inarticulate urge, the impact of a driving force pushing them forward to further effort and carrying them into what other men call ‘impossible situations.’ ‘Appointed to pioneer work’ is an expression which is a travesty of the true case, for no man can be called a ‘pioneer’ until he has proved himself to be one. The.... pioneer is heaven-ordained, not man-appointed.”

It is in the very nature of true spiritual leadership that the leader has to have in his own being through experience that to which he seeks to lead others. He has gone the way before. He has tasted what he calls others to taste. He is no book leader; what he says to others and urges them toward comes out of his own life at great cost. The artificial ‘leader’ (?) can say the most extravagant things, can give all the theory and assume all the mannerisms; and he gets away with it and knows little or nothing of the real heartbreak. “The husbandman that laboreth must be the first to partake of the fruits,” said Paul, but while this may apply to the reward of labor, it may also apply to the cost.

When we have said all as to that special class of pioneer-leaders in spiritual things, we must point out that even if we cannot count ourselves among them, you and I should be leaders in the sense that we inspire and are an incentive to others to “go on” with the Lord. While “followers” there are always others who can be influenced by us, and the very essence of leadership is inspiration. May we all be leaders in this sense. Having introduced this matter of leadership in a more-or-less general way, we now proceed to look into it more closely in order to learn from Bible examples the principles which are basic to it and the features which delineate it.

Before coming to our first great example, let us emphasize the two common factors in spiritual leadership:

One is the fact of the sovereign act of God. In His choice of men for specific responsibility, God acts in the absolute right and independence of His own sovereignty. No one is allowed to question His act, His judgment, His reason. Sovereignty is unpredictable. God is answerable to no one, neither is He responsible to anyone. His thoughts and His ways are unfathomable, and in His wisdom He waits long past His acts for vindication. But it is always vindicated in the final issue. The second factor is that of God linking Himself with a vessel — a human vessel — and linking that vessel with Himself for a special purpose. This is the meaning of anointing in both Testaments. Anointing in which God so commits Himself to the vessel is always related to purpose, and man cannot touch that vessel or dispute its work without having — sooner or later, by sudden intervention or the slowly-grinding mills of God — to reckon with God. It is here that we are forbidden to judge God’s instrument on the ground of their humanity apart from God. We may think that they provide ground for adverse judgment, but if God is using them and is with them, it will only bring us into a controversy on the part of God with us if we touch His anointed — in word or deed. The Bible has many instances of this. Provided the vessel remains in meekness, God will take full responsibility for its defects and for its vindication.

Having said that, we can now proceed to the first example of leadership in the Bible. While the principle of leadership was at work from the beginning, leadership only had its full expression when there was a people needing and prepared for it. This full expression of the principle first came out in Moses.

□ MOSES

What we have said regarding the sovereignty of God is unmistakable in the case of Moses. From his birth and preservation at birth right through his history, all the evidences of his being a “chosen vessel” are clear. He was where he was because God did it. Even when, out of sympathy and wrath, he essayed to assume the position of deliverer, that was negative, because this thing had got to be so utterly of God.

The endurance of Moses is a matter that is remarked upon in Scripture, but that endurance — as ours will be — was greatly supported by his later knowledge that he was where he was because God had done it, and it was not of his own choosing. How important it is that Christians — and especially Christian leaders — should be in a position to say emphatically that they know how true Christ was when He said, “Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you.” This foundation of ‘an act of God’ is the only one to support the tremendous weight of responsibility and demand that leadership has to experience.

The second thing that comes out so clearly as making for leadership is the firsthand knowledge and experience of that out from which we are to lead others.

Moses had forty of the years in Egypt when the Pharaoh-complex of Joseph’s time had so utterly changed from favor to hostility. He was born into that hostility and hatred and would have known from his mother and sister of his own Providential escape. He knew the palace and its tensions. He lived in the atmosphere of mingled fear and animosity. He daily saw the conditions of his own people. As with Joseph, “the iron entered into his soul”. No doubt that background contributed greatly to his later reluctance to go back, and his effort to find a way out of so doing.

It is not God's way to send inexperienced people into leadership responsibility. Such people are really handicapped and in serious weakness. A part of the training of any leader should be a firsthand knowledge of the world and its inimical forces, and a life with God in the midst thereof.

Many a servant of God has been profoundly thankful in after years that — in the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God — he had periods in conditions against which God reacted through him. This may apply to various aspects and phases of life. God places His servants in situations which are not His ultimate will for them, and the time will come when they react against what at one time seemed to be wholly or almost wholly of God. It is strange that it is possible at one time to believe a position to be wholly of God, and later to discover that it was only the provisional will of God to qualify for something quite other. Such servants of God take with them through life a very real inside knowledge which makes it possible for them to say, "We speak that which we do know." We could hardly exaggerate the importance and value of this factor in leadership.

The third factor in this leadership is a fundamental lesson that the work of God is essentially spiritual.

Moses was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians". He no doubt had natural endowments. He certainly had rich acquired qualifications. He was evidently a man of considerable physical strength. His natural disposition was to be thorough in anything that he undertook, as see him slaying the Egyptian and separating the quarrelling Hebrews. He was not lacking in zeal nor weak in initiative. But with all this, God did not take him up on those grounds. "Not by might, nor by power" are words which very aptly apply to Moses at the age of forty years.

"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." The real and eternal aspect of God's work is spiritual; therefore only spiritual men with spiritual experience and resources can do it effectively. God's true leaders are spiritual men and men of the Spirit.

All our natural ability, our training, our acquired qualifications; our strength, zeal, and learning will prove of little avail when we come up against the ultimate forces of the universe, which are spiritual. This Moses well knew when he came actually to his lifework.

Leadership is often born of the deep discipline of failure and self-discovery. The second forty years of his life served such a purpose and were no doubt deeply tinged with the bitterness of self-disillusionment. He was in a much safer place when he shrank from the responsibility than when he self-confidently tackled it in his own strength.

A further qualification for leadership as seen in the case of Moses is faithfulness, promptness, and humility in ordinary and unspectacular affairs.

Tending a few sheep at the back side of the desert by an erstwhile royal prince of Egypt for a considerable number of years could be a fair test of patience and lack of bitterness. The opportunity to help some defenseless women to get their flocks watered was neither beneath his dignity nor an annoying interruption in preoccupation with 'higher and more important matters'. He was not so disaffected by his disappointment as to be contemptuous of a humble piece of work.

High-mindedness is a disqualification for leadership. The Lord watches the out-of-sight life and determines His approval there. A true leader is not one who has to be shown and asked to do menial things, but one who sees a need and self-forgetfully lends a hand.

It is quite evident that God knew where Moses was, and that he was not a castaway servant. Moses had been inwardly disciplined in the school of inaction, a very hard school for his active and energetic type. The self-emptying had been a painful process, but it had effected God's intention and put him on that essential ground of spiritual leadership which is "no confidence in the flesh"; "all things are of (out from) God."

But the immediate point is that upon which the Lord's eye was looking during the time of waiting. That is, a spirit of service. It is so easy to be active and energetic when there is some big, interesting, or worthwhile job on hand, especially if it is in the public eye or alongside of others. But the real test is when things are quite otherwise, and we are right down to bedrock principle; the principle of conscientiousness without the influence of relatedness in responsibility and another's eye upon us. Service is a spirit, not an outward obligation. There is very little of the spirit of service left in the world now, but with God it has always been something of which He has taken particular account.

This is His law of trust and approval: "He that is faithful in that which is least."

Say what we may about Moses himself and of Divine sovereignty in his life, but let it be understood that Divine sovereignty does not bypass simple 'everyday' behavior in what may seem to be very insignificant matters. A whole life's vocation may turn upon a seemingly small issue. It is our spirit that God looks at. The few sheep at

the back of the desert, a few helpless women in difficulty had a place in God's esteem which led to a true exaltation.

The episode of the bush was the crisis and turning-point in the life of Moses. We could say that the past forty years found their meaning and issue here, and the following forty their strength. There is an incomparable meaning in this, and the significance was immense; for here we are in the presence of the Triune God in combined operation unto the emancipation of an elect people.

When Moses, many years after, pronounced the blessings upon the tribes, the highly esteemed Joseph was to know "the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush" (Deut. 33:16). Moses came to understand that "good will" in all its redeeming love. What a basis and background for leadership!

Moses may not have understood all the New Testament meaning, but he came into the power.

What Moses was meant to understand — for his great responsibility — was that humanity in itself may be frail, weak, and as vulnerable as a bush of the desert; but if God links Himself with it in the power of the Holy Spirit, it can endure and live and triumph when naturally it should succumb.

□ JOSHUA

Joshua, like the One Whom he typifies, is the link joining the great salvation from, with the great salvation unto. Moses — in the main — had to do with the salvation from; Joshua entered into that, shared it, and then took it to the great 'unto' of its purpose.

The unto broke down in the case of Moses, although he laid its foundation. It broke down with the first generation who came out. They failed to go through. The New Testament repeatedly refers to this failure in the most solemn warnings to Christians of this dispensation. In so doing, it reflects the very great importance of the leadership-work of Joshua, and thereby lifts Joshua and his special aspect of leadership on to very high and vital ground. Nothing less than the whole import of salvation, and therefore ninety percent of the New Testament is represented by the leadership of Joshua. True, in his own case, it failed of full realization, and Joshua did not lead them into the "rest" (Heb. iv. 8). But he did — in eternal principles — lead to the One Who has made his work complete, even Jesus...

There is no doubt that Joshua was the Old Testament counterpart of Paul; each in his different and respective sphere. The one, the earthly, temporal, and limited; the other, the heavenly, spiritual, and universal. In both cases the dominating issue was THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST as being God's supreme and all-inclusive purpose.

This was — and is — the object of the salvation 'out from'. Fail of this, and salvation has lost its most essential meaning and object. Fail of this, and we inherit all the reproaches resultant from the tragedy of Kadesh Barnea. Fail of this, and we are in the first letter to the Corinthians where — with this very example presented — a life-work can go up in smoke in 'the Day', and we be saved 'yet only as by fire'. Fail of this, and the most grievous things in the New Testament (see the Letter to the Hebrews, chapters 6 and 10, etc.) will apply to us. From both the Old Testament history and the New Testament admonitions, it is evident that it is possible to be saved in an elementary sense but lose the 'inheritance'; and it is the inheritance which justifies all.

Thus Joshua represents the leadership which, energized by the Holy Spirit, has in view and all-governing that FULLNESS into which Christ has entered and which He is — and has — for His people: Nothing less or other than that.

This is a tremendous thing, and it constitutes a very great vocation. It gives leadership its highest and fullest meaning... What Joshua really represents, then, is Christ under the anointing Spirit committed to the full purpose of God — the Heavenly Inheritance, God's FULLNESS in His Son. Who will say that to have even a small place in this work is not preeminently important? Here, then, leadership takes on its superlative meaning...

Let it be understood that for many years Joshua himself was in the school of leadership. He was being tested, proved, drawn out to be approved. This aspect of his history was in the wilderness, and forty being the number of probation, Joshua's leadership had its difficult and testing probation. No one leaps suddenly into this vocation. A great deal of history lies behind this ministry.

It will surprise no one that, with such a purpose in view, leadership is fundamentally linked with warfare. We first meet Joshua in connection with the withstanding of God's people by Amalek (Exod. 17). So early in the people's history, as they start with freshness toward the ultimate goal, evil forces arise to bar the way. Amalek took the initiative: "then fought Amalek".

It is in a time of conflict, when the enemy takes the initiative, that there is revealed what fighting spirit there is

hidden amongst the Lord's people. Joshua was the embodiment of this spirit. He knew that this move of the enemy signified a disputing of the inheritance — that it was not just an incidental and unrelated thing. Defeat here had a long-range connection. Everything was involved. There would be many battles ahead and the approach of the full end would be marked by an intensification of conflict from which there would be very brief, if any, respite; but this very early assault involved the whole.

It would be a great thing if the Lord's people saw everything in the light of the full end and weighed what seems but incidental against the whole involvement of a defeat at any given point. How much hangs upon this spirit of leadership coming to light at a critical moment! Leadership, in Joshua's case, was hidden, so far as the record shows, until the hour of real need; then it is found to have been there — but latent. But there is little doubt that Joshua had A SECRET HISTORY WITH GOD.

So we come to a vital factor in leadership. It is a secret history with God which is motivated by a deep and intense jealousy for God's full thought. Later it came out in the revealing occasion when he and Caleb stood alone against all Israel.

The second occasion on which we meet Joshua is equally revealing as to his spirit. It is when Moses was in the mount with God. The forty days had proved too much for the patience of this vacillating and self-willed people. They broke loose, and Aaron's part in it was deeply discreditable (The story is in Exodus 32).

As Moses descended the mount, picking up Joshua on the way down, they heard the noise in the camp. It must have been loud and confused; indeed, very wild. Consistent with his very spirit, Joshua interpreted it as 'the noise of battle.' The war-horse thought he scented conflict. He was right, although the battle element was deeper than the appearance. They were making merry, but their very merriment was a battle against God.

Jealousy for God's honor will sense and see the really inimical and hostile elements in things like this. Anything that threatens to take the Lord's unique and utter place will make one like Joshua instinctively scent battle and rise to it in spirit. Joshua represents utterness for God and of God, and this always means battle. If the whole purpose of God concerning His Son and His Church really captures the spirit, compromise is intolerable and unthinkable. In thin, Joshua does foreshadow his great New Testament counterpart — Paul, and they very definitely meet in the latter's Letter to the Galatians.

The spirit of battle which characterized Joshua on the way down the mountain found its very definite materializing in the immediate act of Moses. His challenge of "Who is on the Lord's side?" found Joshua a wholly committed man. The test was a very grim and exacting one, but it is evident that he was wholly one with "the sons of Levi" in their uncompromising course.

The tent was pitched outside the camp and to it and Moses Joshua, with the sons of Levi, resorted at the call of Moses. This brings us to the next significant mention of Joshua: "...Joshua....departed not out of the tent." Joshua had chosen the place of complete separation and difference at great cost, and there he stayed.

The Letter to the Hebrews takes this incident up and applies it — on the one side to the compromising Judaizers, which it calls "the camp"; and on the other side to the non-compromising, committed devotees to Jesus Christ. It says that to the latter "outside the camp" is the place of "bearing His reproach".

Here, then, we have come on two more factors in true spiritual leadership. One is that the true leader is one who will never, however much it costs, be drawn into compromise. A leader must never be weak. He must never allow policy to override principle. He must never allow popular opinion to weaken his committedness. He must never allow sentiment to dilute his strength. He must never let sociability make him sacrifice supreme interests and spiritual or moral integrity under the cover and pretext of a false usage of Paul's words about becoming "all things to all men." 'Hebrews' says that "outside the camp" where Joshua elected to be is the unpopular place, and it is always very testing to be unpopular. But leadership often demands this price.

The other thing which arises at this point in the case of Joshua is reliability. Moses — not in compromise — returned to the camp. Joshua abode in the tent. This is stated in the narrative evidently with a serious meaning. What the full meaning is may be left for us to consider, but this one thing is clear: you would always know where to find Joshua. If it were asked, 'Where is Joshua?' everybody would have the answer: 'Oh, he is — where he always is — in the tent.' If Moses needed him, he knew where to find him.

Leadership absolutely demands this characteristic of dependableness. What a strength it is to know that a person can be guaranteed to be in a definite spiritual position — right on the spot spiritually; not temperamental, vacillating, variable, or unpredictable. The multitude, especially "the mixed multitude", is like that — not consistently true for two days together. You never know how you are going to find them at any given time. To lead them into anything more of God demands this feature of 'abiding'. Yes, there may be discouragement, disappoint-

ment, provocation, and heartbreak, but true spiritual leadership rests upon an all-or-nothing basis, and deep down there is an abandon to purpose which is stronger than all that is against.

The leader may adjust on points and be open to progressive light, but as to the ultimate Divine vision, he will die rather than betray or recant. He is no timeserver or opportunist. He cannot be bought off. He is going on or he is going out. He has seen, and he can never unsee. He says, "Here I am, I can do no other. May God help me"; or, "this one thing I do".

Such a faithfulness and undeviating committal is something in the very nature of the call and the vocation.

But with all his strength of purpose, Joshua, like his New Testament counterparts, was always in school learning fresh lessons on leadership.

Our next touch with him is very indicative of this. It is in Numbers 11. The Spirit of God is exercising His essential sovereign liberty. Into this sovereign activity certain 'laymen' are caught up; that is, men who are not recognized official prophets; they are not in the recognized place for functioning in such a way. Eldad and Medad come under the spontaneous movement of the Spirit and prophesy in the camp. Joshua is alarmed and scandalized. He rushes to Moses in his jealousy for that great man and cries, "My lord Moses, forbid them." To his amazement and disconcertion, Moses shows no sympathy with his jealousy and conventionality. Rather does Moses rebuke it: "Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets" — 'Do not be jealous for me.' In other words, 'Do not limit the Lord. Do not circumscribe the Holy Spirit.' The Holy Spirit will not be bound by jealous conventionality, nor by human fears as to what He may do next: "The wind bloweth where it listeth."

The situation is quite clear. Peter had to learn this lesson, and failure to do so fully only resulted in fettering the Church and some of its apostles. The absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit was something which meant an immense amount in the after life of Joshua and his leadership. If it is true that 'the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind', that is only another way of saying that the Holy Spirit will demand the right and liberty to overleap our prejudices, our stringencies of interpretation — indeed, anything and everything that makes Christ smaller than He really is.

The very leadership itself can be jeopardized and falsified if this lesson is not well and truly learned.

But our special point here is not the range of the Spirit's work, for the occasion to which we are referring was amongst the Lord's people. What we are especially pointing to as an essential law of leadership is the absolute sovereign rights and liberty of the Holy Spirit to choose His own ways and means, places and times. The government of the Holy Spirit without deference to any one or any thing other than His own nature and authority has to be recognized, acknowledged, and accepted in order to implement the Divine purpose.

Having summarized the general ground of leadership as represented by Joshua, there remains one specific and inclusive factor which is given peculiar prominence and emphasis at the beginning of the book which bears his name. It is THE VITAL FACTOR OF COURAGE. If the first chapters of that book are the preparation for all that follows, or the foundation thereof, then quite clearly courage is the dominant characteristic. Four times in the brief first chapter is this note strongly struck: three times by the Lord and once by the people. Courage is made a command and a demand. "Be strong and of a good courage" is the Divine command and requisite...

There had been the great 'Out.' Now there was to be the great 'In.' There had been the tremendous fact of redemption. Now there was to be the Purpose of it...

If the 'Out' had made immense demands for courage in the case of Moses, the 'In' was going to make equal, if not greater, demands in the case of Joshua. Every value to be secured and every step of advance toward fullness was going to be fraught with powerful and relentless resistance. The issue was no less than absolute dominion, and for this no quarter could be given by either side.

The salvation of the Church from the power of Satan's dominion is a costly and withstood matter. But the collective forces of his kingdom are stirred to any and every kind of resistance when it comes to a growing and additional apprehension of Christ and a larger measure of Himself in possession of His people.

Not only the frontal attack or withstanding, but the paralyzing insinuating of his own character in the form of covetousness, as at Ai; or the deceptiveness of compromise, as with the Gibeonites, are very effective methods. Let it be clearly recognized that the effect of the second of these — with a very long crippling carry-over — was to take the fight out of the Lord's people. It is a subtly effective manoeuvre of the enemy to make the Church accept a compromise without the need for battle.

So there was always the temptation to accept an untimely and too-early settlement and satisfaction. This, in the case of Israel, resulted in the terrible period of the 'Judges' — the disgrace of the Bible. Discouragement, im-

patience, and weariness were ever near to rob of FULLNESS and finality.

All this was in the knowledge of God when He laid such emphasis upon courage at the beginning.

We could say that perhaps the greatest weapon of the foe of spiritual progress and fulness is discouragement, and he well knows the menace to his interests of spiritual courage. We need not stay to do more than remark that spiritual courage is a peculiar kind of courage, and of a higher order than physical or even moral courage. The courage of Jesus when on trial — the courage to be silent — was more powerful than any other kind of courage. The courage of the Apostles on and after the Day of Pentecost was a victory over their own former cowardice and something that was above the natural. To meet the ultimate spiritual forces of this universe requires more than the best natural courage. The best human courage is no match for the Devil and his hosts, with their almost boundless resources of subtlety, malice, guile, cunning, strength, and tireless energy. Only, as with Joshua, a knowledge of the “Captain of the hosts of the Lord” as being in charge, though unseen, will nerve the spirit of those in this battle.

That function of spiritual leadership to keep vision ever in view and to inspire to its attainment is in itself a battle with disappointment and despair. The leader has to infect others, like Joshua, through intermediaries, and be a constant inspiration to those in the battle... The leader has to get his courage at first hand from God, and this means many a secret courageous battle with depression. His temptation is very often and fierce to lower his standard, to lessen his demands, to modify his expectations, and to accommodate the situation so that it is not so exacting, but easier, for everyone.

In a thousand ways and in ever-recurring demands, courage is called for as the only way through.

□ DEBORAH (JUDGES 4–5)

It is a fairly far cry from Joshua to the Judges, and there is a terrible lapse from those days of triumph and conquest, as there was at the close of the Apostolic days. The Book of Judges is, perhaps, the most tragic book in the Bible...

That those were times of spiritual declension needs no arguing. That a primary reason for the declension was the absence of authority is definitely stated four times. It is as though the narrator focused all the trouble upon this absence of an authoritative leadership.

There seems to be more than the statement of a fact. The suggestion or implication is that it was more than an absence of leadership; it was a disposition. When it says that “every man did that which was right in his own eyes”, it seems to imply that that was how they were disposed to have it. They did not like the restraints of authority. They felt that leadership implied limitation; they made their own judgment the final authority. As they saw was the ‘right’ way — “right in his own eyes”. It was independence run amok.

Possibly the loss of true spirituality and the enthronement of the natural mind had resulted — as it usually does — in an inability to see the difference between spiritual and anointed leadership on the one hand, and autocracy on the other. The dislike for, and resentment to, anything autocratic or in the nature of dictatorship makes people throw over and utterly repudiate law and authority, and become a law unto themselves. The unspiritual Corinthians gave this ‘autocratic’ interpretation to the authority which Paul said had been given him in Christ. To read his letters to that church is to see how he claimed and used that authority, but it is also to see that it was absolutely necessary to their salvation as a church. But it certainly was not autocratic domination.

It is only lack of the spiritual discernment as to “things that differ”, although they may appear alike — about which Paul said much to the Corinthians — that confuses things, and loses the values of what is God-given. On the one side, it was disastrous for Israel and meant four hundred years of confusion, weakness, and impotence. On the other hand, the salvation and periods of improvement were because the Lord raised up leaders.

When we come to Deborah, we have a significant and impressive thing. There is first Deborah herself, and then there are those to whom she refers when she says: “For that the leaders took the lead” (Judges 5:2). Deborah overshadows the whole story; therefore she must be seen for what she is: Being a woman in such a position, she must represent a sovereign activity of God. The Bible is quite clear that — in the normal order of God — women are not set over men. Normally it would be disorder if they were... In God’s first order man is given the position of authority. But here in the case of Deborah, we have a woman by Divine consent and approval in that place...

Deborah, while being a real person, is — in effect — the spirit or principle of leadership. This is borne out in that she is called a prophetess. What is the supreme characteristic of prophetic ministry? It is inspiration. So we see that leadership in Deborah’s case was her power to inspire. Both Barak and the leaders who took the lead ful-

filled their leadership by reason of the inspiration received through Deborah. Leadership is a matter of inspiration.

It is an endowment. Not all who take the position can fulfil it. It is a pathetic thing to observe someone in the position without the inspiration or anointing. That is why it is so wrong and dangerous for anyone either to assume the position or be put into it by vote or human influence.

Let our godly women realize that their function is not to rule and govern, but to inspire. Deborah said to Barak: "Hath not the Lord commanded...." She knew the Lord, and out of that knowledge she was the spirit of inspiration.

It is no small thing to see the purpose of God and to inspire to leadership in it. This can be done, as in the case of Deborah, without personally going into the forefront of the battle.

Our lesson, then, from Deborah is that, whether officially in the office of a leader or not, leadership is essentially a matter of the gift and power of inspiration: a contagious influence, an emanating spiritual energy, and a potent example.

How often is leadership regarded as an official thing. The leader must have a title, an office, an appointment. Deborah teaches us that leadership is the expansion of the mother-spirit to embrace the whole of God's people. "Until that I Deborah arose....a mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7). Not 'Till I a leader, a prophetess, a Divinely-chosen instrument arose' but "a mother." Hers was evidently a heart-concern, an affectional concern for the Lord's people.

We have earlier referred to the revolt against Paul's spiritual authority, but his answer to that was his love, even 'as of a nursing mother' (I Thess. 2:7,11), and any seeming severity was born of his very deep paternal or — spiritually — maternal concern for them.

This element must be in all leadership; the element of a jealous yearning over the spiritual interests of those concerned. "I arose a mother," said Deborah. The incentive of her inspiring leadership was the mother-passion for a spiritual family.

Back of all that appears and sounds otherwise in the prophets of Israel, there can always be detected this sigh and sob of a heart-relationship with a wayward family, in trouble because of its waywardness.

□ GIDEON (JUDGES 6)

It is not without importance to note that Gideon had no official position in Israel. He became leader because he had the spirit of a leader. Several details which composed this leadership spirit are evident. Let us note them:

(1) Gideon was characterized by a spirit of responsibility. The times were times of straitness, weakness, and poverty. The enemy was depriving the Lord's people of their bread, their means of sustenance. There was vigilant alertness on the part of the enemy, and it was a perilous thing for anyone to counter his strategy of starvation; for weakness was a great ally of his purpose to suppress. Both courage and wisdom were required in any attempt to subvert the enemy's plan. This whole story shows how few there were who really were ready to pay the price; in other words, how few there were with an adequate sense of responsibility. Of those few, Gideon was chief. He had a sense of responsibility for the Lord's people and their great need — a sense of responsibility for the Lord's honor. The sense of shame and reproach; this sense of jealousy and indignation; this sense of things not being as they ought to be moved Gideon to action — dangerous action. His whole course to find victory was inspired by a spirit of responsibility which demanded dangerous action.

The first phase was his action of beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. Here was exercise in secret to meet vital need. The true leader is not always the one who ostentatiously parades himself in public. Gideon was not thinking of leadership. His action behind the scenes was not a subtle, veiled bit of policy or diplomacy by which he would have control and gratify an equally secret desire for power. It was just an act of disinterested, unselfish concern, prompted by a lofty purpose and largeness of heart. The food question is acute and the people just must be fed, whatever the cost to oneself. That is where leadership begins — in the hidden history of the one concerned. It is to be noted that the eye of the Lord was upon the secret life and exercise. "The Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel" (verse 8), but "the angel of the Lord" came to Gideon...

The Lord knew where Gideon was, what he was doing, and why he was doing it. The Lord knew that Gideon was discerning the works of the enemy and doing what he could to counter them. There was not much that he could do, and practically nothing in public — a very testing situation; but he was being faithful in that which was least.

Gideon passed the first phase of the test for leadership without ambition for it — the test of faithfulness, responsibility, and selflessness in secret.

(2) The test of humility. The second characteristic of great account with God is humility. Responsibility was being thrust upon him without his ever having manoeuvred, schemed, worked, or used any force to get it. Indeed, the record would indicate that leadership was something not desired by Gideon.

Says Dr. Tozer: “I believe that it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule-of-thumb that the man who is ambitious for leadership is disqualified from it.”

To the amazing declaration and command of “the angel”, Gideon could only reply: “my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” His excusable trepidation is displayed in his request for the tokens — easily understood in the presence of so immense a responsibility. It is all the revealing of how little the man had confidence in himself. He passed that second stage in the test.

(3) The test of the home-base. A further test of fitness for leadership had to be passed before Gideon could move out to the task. It was what we can call the home-base. Things were not right at home. There was compromise there. There was mixture there. The enemy had a foothold there. In the home, in the family, in the background there was that which would have put him in a false position and have completely sabotaged his campaign. He could not win on the field if the enemy held the stronghold behind.

In other words, there could be no true testimony in the world and in the heavenlies if the testimony was contradicted in the private life. However those there might resent, contend, of fear, in the long run all who knew him best had to be compelled to say that what he was in public he was at home and in private. How much more could be written in there, but with the Lord and with the ultimate issue, this ‘home-base’ factor is vital.

(4) The sufficiency of the Lord. It was indeed a testing way by which the Lord led Gideon to leadership. The man well knew his own lack of qualification and ability. Like David he was the least in his father’s house, and no doubt despised by his bigger and — according to the world’s standard — more important brothers. But his course under the hand of the Lord was one of continuous and progressive reduction. Elimination and sifting out reduced his resources to a minimum. The Lord was stringently applying the precaution ‘lest’: Lest Gideon should feel, lest Israel should say — By my own power, by our own sufficiency we triumphed.

Gideon does not seem to have disagreed or argued with the Lord. The leaders of the world want plenty of room and plenty of means. Gideon agreed that God was enough. He agreed with God’s wisdom and judgment that a small company of solid value is better than a great multitude of divided heart.

There, then, are the factors which constitute a leadership which has the right to say: “Look on me and do likewise.” The leader must be spiritually all that he wants others to be. He must be spiritually ahead of those whom he would lead...

Other things will come up in other instances, but here we can set a high value upon those four features mentioned because they were the things to which God committed Himself.

□ DAVID

No one will dispute David’s right to be included in the list of leaders in Divine history. It was just a matter of David’s having to come to the function because God willed it. Everything conspired to prevent it in the first instance, and to overthrow it later. His family despised him, and even his father left him out of account. Saul in jealousy sought his life for years. His own son — Absalom — treacherously schemed and acted for his dethronement. The Devil himself seemed to have determined — by any and every means — to undo him. That he came to be Israel’s greatest leader says clearly and eloquently that it was of God.

But it was not just and only naked sovereignty. There was ground in David upon which God could work. The sovereignty of God does not ignore the weaknesses, errors, faults, and even evils in men. David was deeply culpable in quite serious evils and mistakes, and no man was ever more deeply disciplined than he. Nevertheless, the Divine calling had that in the man which meant enough to God to give ground for making a great leader of him. It is to that ground that we give attention as we proceed to gather the factors and features of leadership from the Bible.

There is one characteristic in David which explains everything and includes a very great deal. It is SPIRITUAL GREATNESS. David rose to simply sublime heights of spiritual greatness, and the occasions were of the most testing nature. This we shall see as we proceed.

Let us first examine the spring of this spiritual greatness which made it possible for God to refer to him as “a

man after My (God's) heart".

Beneath David's spiritual greatness there was: (1) A great sense of responsibility. There could much be made of the courage and devotion springing from that sense of responsibility in defending and rescuing the sheep from the lion and the bear. We can take it that in that hour when no public eye was upon him, when there was no other motive or incentive, if God had seen a willingness to save his own life or forfeit the life of a single sheep as a matter of 'discretion' or 'policy', He would never have chosen David as the shepherd of His people Israel and the type of "the great shepherd of the sheep even our Lord Jesus"; Who laid down His life for the sheep, and Who said: "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it."

Then, on the same principle of responsibility, with all that has been written and said about it, not too much has been made of the encounter with, and assault upon, the giant Goliath. This was the stuff of his later concern for the nation.

It is all too easy to sacrifice Divine interests for personal security or gain — to throw away cheaply the things precious to God because of an inadequate sense of responsibility. If it can be said truly that any attitude or conduct of ours meant loss to the people of God, then we have forfeited all right to be regarded as a spiritual leader.

(2) A heart wholly for the Lord. In the instances of the lion and the bear, it is evident from his words to Saul that it was as before the Lord: "The Lord that delivered me". The Lord got the glory.

In the case of Goliath, the Lord and His honor were the motivating and activating interest. This matter of 'the heart for the Lord' carries us into too many incidents, connections, and ways of expression to be tabulated here, but it is not necessary; in a sense it sums up his life and flows out in his Psalms. How much that explains God's great patience and faithfulness! It was a sense of responsibility for the Lord's honor.

(3) A great concern for the House of God. David had come to a clear apprehension of God's eternal desire to have a place of dwelling in the midst of His people. He felt so deeply that he should take responsibility for God's satisfaction in that matter that he expressed himself thus:

*"Lord, remember for David all his afflictions: How he sware unto the Lord,
And vowed unto the Mighty One of Jacob:
Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house,
Nor go up into my bed;
I will not give sleep to mine eyes,
Or slumber to mine eyelids;
Until I find out a place for the Lord,
A tabernacle for the Mighty One of Jacob."
Psalm 132.*

We know of his labors and longings for the House of God; it forms a large part of his Psalms. Such abandon to what was — and still is — so dear to the heart of God brought God alongside of him, and although he went through times of rejection, persecution, discrediting, and — in the episode of Absalom — exile and heartbreak, God vindicated him eventually. Such responsibility for God's satisfaction is a major factor in divinely chosen leadership.

(4) A great respect and regard for the anointing. The anointing was — to David — a very sacred thing. If it had been given even to one who had made himself unjustifiably David's enemy, and who had done him untold harm and caused him unspeakable suffering, David would not put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed; not though it would have been immensely to his advantage to do so, and when that enemy was completely at his mercy.

David may have known that the dishonoring of the anointing, wherever it was, would return upon the head of him who dishonored it, but he sought no such judgment. The anointing was a very responsible matter with David, and he would not touch it in word or deed.

(5) An honest lament over the fall of his enemy. Perhaps at no point did David's spiritual greatness rise to greater heights than in his lament over Saul's death. He was far from the spirit which says, 'He deserved it'; 'it is God's righteous judgment on him'; and so on. There were no innuendoes; no condemnations; no remembrances of Saul's evil deeds; no self-vindications; no gloatings and rejoicings. Sorrow, grief, regret, and kindness almost sobbed themselves out in that lament. In the light of all that he had suffered at Saul's hands, only real greatness could account for this spirit. History may put a very different complexion on the end of Saul, and the chroniclers make no romance of it; but for David it was a grievous thing.

Yes, spiritual greatness was truly characteristic of David.

(6) Disappointed ambition. We have seen what a large place God's House had in the heart and life of David. But when it came to the actual realization of his holy ambition and the building of the House, he was forbidden and deprived of the privilege. In almost peremptory words God said: "Thou shalt not build the house" (I Kings 8:19). What would a smaller man have done? We leave the reader to answer that question. As for David, no doubt greatly disappointed and saddened, he rose above his personal feelings and prepared with all his might for the House (I Chron. 29:2), and gave a private possession in addition to all his public funds and resources.

To see another doing what has been our greatest desire in life is testing of spiritual measure; but to help that other with all our might is a proof of stature — provided, of course, that the Lord has definitely marked out that other with anointing for the work.

(7) Adjustableness when mistakes have been made. More than once did David make a grievous and costly mistake. We do not enumerate these failures. An outstanding instance was the bringing of the Ark up to Jerusalem on the 'new cart', contrary to the way prescribed in Scripture. The motive was pure and the purpose was right. But the method was wrong and disaster overtook the project. Uzzah lay dead. David was angry with the Lord. But he sought in the Scriptures an explanation, and having found it, he forsook his aggrievedness, made the necessary adjustment, and did the thing in the Lord's ordained way. Thus again he showed that he was spiritually big enough to be a leader. He could confess his mistake. He could let all Israel know where he had been at fault. And he could act accordingly.

A very great factor in leadership is this grace and ability to adjust when mistakes are made. Even great men make them, but their greatness is shown in how they deal with them.

Sensitiveness to sin. This needs only to be mentioned for very much in David's Psalms and history to leap into mind. The most plaintive, heartrending, and devastating outpourings of a sorrowful heart in all literature are to be found in some of David's utterances. And these are usually in relation to his sins and failures. Such sensitiveness to wrong in oneself is very necessary in God's judgment.

A forcing on, when wrong should be righted, is to make the spirit hard and callous. The Spirit of God is very sensitive. Finer susceptibilities are a mark of noble souls and spiritual refinement.

I think that what we have said is enough to give further substance to the matter of leadership, and it only remains to be resaid that leadership with God is not official and by human appointment, but — in principle — is always a matter of spiritual measure.

□ NEHEMIAH

Assyria and Babylon had devastated Israel — people and land — and desolation reigned. If Assyria and Babylon represent the power of this world then because the people of God had flirted with the gods of this world, the world had been allowed by God to destroy the power of the (once) holy people. Babylon stands for confusion, and the descent from the high spiritual place in which God had placed them, down to an 'earth-touch', brought the Lord's people into the grip of a confusion which rendered them helpless and ashamed. Confusion ruled, and where there is confusion ruling, weakness and frustration prevail. The time of this condition was made sufficient — not less nor more — to leave those concerned in no doubt whatever that it is a fatal thing to heavenly testimony to descend in spirit to this earth and its ways — even religiously. But having indelibly written the fact in the history of His people, the time had arrived when GOD WAS MOVING FOR RECOVERY. For this work of recovery, leadership was necessary, and Nehemiah was God's man for the occasion.

Having noted the time and occasion, we have next to take note of the significance of this movement of God.

If Babylon represents the confusion — which is ever characteristic of this world — and let it be clearly understood that the mark of the curse that was once imposed upon this earth by God because man chose another god is ever and always confusion in the peoples and nations of this earth — then God's recovery movement will be for the restoration of distinctiveness. It is not necessary to say that in every way Israel was constituted by God a distinct and different race and people. It is a fundamental truth that the people of God are distinct from all others, and with God this is a matter of the most serious account. Seventy years of exile and captivity with all the unspeakable sufferings and distresses are ample evidence of God's serious regard for this basic thing.

The wall of Jerusalem symbolically represented a boundary marking a within and a without, and the gates were the emphasis upon that feature. This feature is definitely referred to in relation to the other great symbolic city, the New Jerusalem. The gates represent the councils and judgments which determine the acceptable and admissible, and otherwise. They are the strength of right judgment. The wall is the symbol of a distinctive testi-

mony to God in the nations and before Heaven. The breaking down of the wall, then, and the burning of the gates, signified the ruin of distinctive testimony on the part of God's people. This, the significance of Nehemiah and his leadership, was that God was on the move to recover that distinctiveness of testimony which was — and is — the only reason and justification for the existence and continuance of God's people.

So Nehemiah and the wall are identical in meaning, and leadership as represented by him is related to this matter of God's jealousy. The book which bears his name cannot be read without recognition of the fact that God's jealousy had been generated in the heart of this man. Nehemiah was not the man to tolerate mixture and inconsistent elements. In this he was truly like his heavenly Lord. Compromise was intolerable to Nehemiah.

The wall declares in no uncertain language that this thing is of God. Nothing which is not of God has any place here. Read the book again in this light alone, and its message is unmistakable.

Another thing which is of the significance of the wall and Nehemiah is DIVINE FULLNESS. Jerusalem, in the thought of God, has always carried this symbolic meaning. It was the place of the abundance of God. In its prime it swarmed with people who regarded it to be the greatest honor and privilege to be its citizens (see Psalm 87). The nations brought their wealth into it. The Day of Pentecost found Jerusalem crammed and crowded with "men out of every nation under heaven".

It was meant by God to be a type of the heavenly Jerusalem — the Church. And this City, this Church — the Body of Christ — is said to be "the FULLNESS of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1.23).

God never did believe in vacuums. He always believed in FULLNESS. It is His nature and His desire, and He always works toward Divine FULLNESS. How much we could bring in here to support this statement! But, alas, in the time of which we are thinking, Jerusalem was empty and desolate — "without form and void" — a vacuum indeed! So leadership as represented by Nehemiah related to Divine FULLNESS to be recovered in and for the people of God.

May we interject here a word regarding this condition today. The spiritual meagerness, smallness, poverty, and consequent weakness of very many of God's people is a crying tragedy today. For years we have been appealed to by Christians in many places: 'We have so little spiritual food in our churches.' There are so many really hungry children of God.

Is this condition to be laid at the door of — those who are ostensibly leaders? Let it be said at once that, whatever other purposes require leadership, this one of spiritual FULLNESS is by no means the least. To fail here is to fail in a matter which is of the very nature and heart of God. Men of God, are the people for whom you are responsible in the way of "the fulness of Christ"?

Look again at Nehemiah and recognize that the fire in his bones was the fire of God's concern for His fulness to be available again to His people and to be characteristic of them. While we speak to the leaders, or responsible men, let us say to the people also that it is positively God's will that you should carry with you the impression above all others that you are wealthy and richly endowed people — that your God is a God of abundance. Be sure that you are availing yourselves of all that is available, and neither neglecting nor despising heavenly food.

As we look again at Nehemiah, another thing should impress us. It is that if we are really in line with that which God is doing at any given time and our hearts are aflame with His own immediate concern, there will be sovereign support given and provision made. To find that support we must be on God's positive line of distinctiveness and FULLNESS as a testimony to Himself. The question of support is a very acute one in organized Christianity, leading to an endless variety of expedients. Surely, if Heaven rules and has all resources, and really wants something, Heaven will meet its demands and requirements. Can we not expect and believe for this aspect of Nehemiah's leadership?

If the work of God is kept in His hands and is not allowed to become earthbound it will have Heaven's support, and while there will be opposition enough, it will be 'finished' in triumph. It is the spiritual life of the Lord's people — the heavenly Israel — which is the demand for such leadership as that represented by Nehemiah. It may not appeal to all, but only to a 'Remnant', but with them will be found the satisfaction of satisfying God in the thing nearest to His heart.

In Nehemiah as an example of this needed leadership, we have:

1. A man with a heartbreak over conditions.
2. A man with the vision of God's specific desire and purpose.
3. A man with spiritual initiative governed by instant and meticulous touch with God.

4. A man endowed with true spiritual discretion.
 5. A man without compromise or who will not put policy before principle — full of holy courage.
 6. A man free from personal interests in the work of God.
 7. A man gifted with spiritual discernment.
- Lord raise up such men for this needy hour.

☐ APOSTLE PAUL

“Be ye imitators of me. even as I also am of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1).

When a man says such a thing as this, he assumes a very heavy responsibility. He involves Christ in his conduct, and for anyone to take his advice and then go wrong would mean that Christ would be implicated in the error. The would-be leader will be committed to a very full and exact understanding of Christ and His ways.

History has given ample evidence that Paul was well aware of the responsibility which he took upon himself and, moreover, to the fact that Paul was a very safe leader in every Christly respect. So that, when we come to a consideration of leadership as in the case of Paul, we are also seeing leadership in the case of Christ in many essential respects...

It would be superfluous for us to spend time trying to prove that the Apostle Paul was a leader. Everyone knows it to be so. No one in the whole of this dispensation, after Christ, has exerted more influence upon minds and lives than he, and he is today making very heavy going for the best theological brains.

But our concern is to bring the salient points of his spiritual leadership into clear definition for all who have any responsibility among God’s people. We shall indicate seven such factors in spiritual leadership.

1. Vision

By ‘vision’ we mean dominating objective and purpose. Paul was a man of immense energy, and his energies covered a vast number of details and items. But Paul was not just tremendously active with a view to getting things done. That is, his was not a life of diffused activities, not even good works. Everything sprang from and was harnessed to one clear positive objective. Paul had seen something. He called it “the heavenly vision”, and for that he said that he had been “apprehended by Christ Jesus”. He was a man who knew very clearly where he was going, what his many-sided activities were unto, and what the end of all had got to be. He has placed on record precisely and concisely what that vision and objective was...

If there is to be that to which history will bear witness as really having been permanent — although temporarily undervalued and perhaps discredited — it must proceed from, and be governed by, a God-given vision of Divine purpose. There must be a seeing clearly of how things would be if God had a true expression and realization of what is His full and supreme intention.

There will be disappointments, discouragements, heartbreaks, and near despair at times, but there can be no alternative or turning to some substitutes. The vision, if given by God, will be so much a part of the leader as to be nothing less than life or death to him. This is evident in all the Seers of old, and as much as in any in the case of Paul the Apostle.

2. Experience

When we mention experience as being an essential in leadership, we are not necessarily thinking in terms of years. It may take time, but leadership is a matter of quality rather than quantity. Leaders are often those who have had a great deal pressed and concentrated into a short time and space. What we particularly mean by experience is that the one concerned has — through a deep, and perhaps drastic, history with God — become himself that into which he aims to lead others. No mere theory or textbook conception is history. His vision, objective, and its principles have been wrought into himself. He is his message! There is a secret power issuing from his personality which comes, not firstly from intellectual conviction, but from God’s ways with him. The man and his message are one. He knows in his very being what he is talking about and aiming at. Experience just means: that which comes out of thorough trial and proof. It is akin to experiment: a thing tested, put to the test. Leadership rests upon this knowing and being as the result of testing and proof.

We have only to look at the Apostle Paul’s particular ministry and note how God dealt with him, not only from his new birth, but even from his natural birth to see how all fitted in to that ministry. Difficult — yes, impossible — as it may be to believe it, there is a secret history of God in the life chosen by Him for leadership — even before

a living knowledge of the Lord — and from the time of new birth there is a history with God related to purpose. In most cases it is a deep history — a cramming and crushing into a comparatively short time of that which makes for reality and makes mere theories almost abhorrent.

3. Originality

Going hand in hand with experience and indeed, just a slant thereof, is originality. This, as its very nature, rules out effort or 'trying to be original'. Indeed, it is not aiming at being different, getting off 'the beaten track' or anything of that kind. Originality is not a deliberate discarding of old or existing orders with a view to starting something new. It is not the effort to think of something that no one has thought of before. It is not being 'smart' or clever. Neither is originality imitation; that goes without saying. The word itself just means 'beginning'. This is not something caught from another or others. This is not something stored away in our unconscious minds and now coming out, even without our recognition that it is not our own. It is in the very nature of a thing that God does in us that it is so real, wonderful, and personal that we cannot believe that anyone has ever known this before.

One may preach a certain matter for years and then one day the Lord brings that life into a living experience of the very thing, and he — or she — will come and preach to you about it as though you were the most ignorant on the matter. But see the life, the strength, the joy in the original! How often it would be pertinent to repeat to many preachers and would-be leaders the question of Christ to Pilate: "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did another tell thee it of Me?" In other words: 'Where did you get that?'

It is essential if others are to be led into experience, and not merely into teaching or theory, that the leader is truly able to say, 'The Lord has made me know this.' In this matter the Apostle Paul has left us in no doubt: "It was not after men..... neither did I receive it from man" (Gal. 1, 11, 12, etc.).

Whether or not in the same measure, the truth and principle must exist in all leadership.

4. Courage

It might be thought to be most unnecessary to argue for courage in connection with leadership. It seems so obvious. But it is not so obvious as all that. Much depends upon what is meant by courage. Physical courage is one thing — perhaps the most common. Moral courage is another thing — far less common. But spiritual courage is still of another order, and the least common. We are not going to spend time on the differences, but rather upon getting right to the heart of the matter. But let us say this — that the kind of courage which is our concern here does not ultimately rest upon anything natural. It may not rest upon either physical or moral constitution. Indeed, these can be quite a minus quantity.

In Pilate's judgment hall — or adjoining it — during Christ's trial, the man who had faced and weathered many a violent storm at sea — and the man who believed that he could face any moral test — was a pitiable sight, reduced to abject cowardice. In Jerusalem — before the same authorities — less than two months later, the one thing noticed and recorded about him was his 'courage'. That is what we mean by 'spiritual courage'. It is not based on temperament, but is above temperament! Temperament or training may act and behave at the dictates of policy and diplomacy. Temperament may hate the way of unpopularity; may fear to lose friends, standing, advantage. Therefore in self-protection and self-preservation, compromise will be the resort or backdoor way out of a dilemma. It could be worse, but this is the weakest way. True courage is a stand — at any cost — on principle; and no compromise if compromise means — in the first place — sacrificing some spiritual value, and — in the last place — merely postponing the crucial day.

Courage is not just unreasoning stubbornness. It is not unwillingness to be adjustable or to confess to having made a mistake. It may be just the opposite of these.

Courage is a clear knowing of essential Divine principles and being willing to let go all personal interests on their behalf. Again, Paul's leadership is so evidently of this sort.

5. Balance

It would at once be thought that when we immediately follow what we have been saying with 'Balance', we are taking something back, because — so often — 'Balance' and 'Compromise' are confused. It could be so, but not always correctly. The best way of showing the difference will be to look again at our Apostle, and in doing so see a clear reflection of our Lord in this particular respect.

Few men have combined strong opposite features in balance more beautifully and effectively than this example. That Paul was a man of very powerful forces is unmistakable. Whatever he did, he did it in strength. His own description of himself is very true:

“So fight I, not as one that beateth the air” (I Cor. 9:26).

There was no air-beating about Paul. If he struck, he struck hard and reached his mark. The forces stored up in that little body and mind were very powerful, and balance with him was not weakness of character or feebleness of presence.

Balance in the case of this leader is clearly seen in the combination of austerity and kindness. He could make the same people feel what he called ‘a rod’, and melt into tears in his sympathy and tenderness. He could — like his Master — leave those who did injury to others, or to God’s interests, just devastated and shamed and — so to speak — ‘without a leg to stand on’. And yet he could win a grim battle — as in Corinth — by sheer love and meekness.

It is not our intention here to list the various contrasts which were harmonized in Paul, but just to point out that a true spiritual leader will not be one who is all will and no heart; all softness and no strength; all cold reason and no sympathetic imagination; all sloppy sentimentalism and no ‘trusting it in love’ (Eph. 4:15).

Balance demands the counterpoise of opposites, and the man who would lead others must win their confidence — if it be possible — by holding strength, firmness, faithfulness — even to wounding if needs be — in even proportion with understanding, kindness, and sympathy.

6. Dependence upon God

Perhaps it would be considered to have more point if this particular feature of leadership were set in the context of natural inefficiency. That is, if the one in view were lacking in the things which naturally make for leadership. For instance: if ‘birth’, training, education, intellectual power, social status, ‘personality’, and such like qualifications, attainments, and abilities were of a very ordinary or meager kind. Then we could well understand and appreciate a real and honest dependence upon God.

It puts an altogether different complexion upon the situation when all of these things are present to any unusual degree; and it opens the door to a very serious conclusion. If it was true of the Apostle Paul that, possessing all these natural advantages beyond most men, he was a man who had to — and knew that he had to — depend upon God for everything, and that apart from God he was really impotent, then we are forced to serious conclusions.

It would be too big and too long a piece of work to gather all the evidences of that dependence. All that we know from his own pen of his ‘infirmities’, ‘weakness’, entreaties for prayer that he would be helped; his acknowledgment of ‘help received from God’; and the one great declaration: “We despaired of life; we had the answer that it was death, that we might not trust in ourselves but in God Who raiseth the dead” (II Cor. 1:8,9). We should have to include all that teaching on “faith” which was the very basis of his life.

What conclusions are we forced to by this case?

Obviously, the first is that, whatever value the sovereignty of God may have in such natural features, by themselves they are no guarantee of spiritual leadership. Should ever a man called to spiritual leadership tend to ‘lean to his own understanding’, he will find himself confounded. The Anointing is an Extra to the fullest and best, and — note this — is of another order of qualification.

This leads on to a further conclusion. It is that natural or acquired abilities are — at most — only servants, not masters. They belong to the soul; i.e., intellect, emotion, and will, for such is the meaning of the word ‘natural’ in the New Testament. The soul is the servant of the spirit, and it is in and through the human spirit “born anew” that the Holy Spirit dwells and works. The soul is that by which human communication is made as from man to man. Reason helps reason. Heart helps heart. Will helps will. This is all good, but it remains on the natural level until the Extra of the Anointing enters by the Spirit. Then things move on to the eternal level with issues that are much more far-reaching. It is just here that dependence has its real meaning; but it relates to the whole man — spirit, soul, and body; as see Paul.

7. Loyalty

It would be difficult to say with finality which is the greatest of all virtues; but in trying to reach such a conclusion, we should find ourselves under considerable obligation to place loyalty very high up, if not at the top. Loyalty includes so many things, like faithfulness, trustworthiness, fidelity, constancy, generosity, and so on. It is so great a virtue because it is in such definite contrast to the meanest and most contemptible of traits. Treachery could be placed at the bottom of the scale, with its evil brood, especially the innuendo. Of all the poison darts in a quiver, there are few more sinister than the innuendo. It is the resort of the coward who hides behind a covey of insinuations and refuses to come right out into the open. Aspersions are cruel weapons.

With all that we know of wrong, weakness, meanness, and disloyalty in churches and people, it is more than impressive to note how the Apostle Paul refused to speak or write of it to other churches and persons. We are much disgusted with a lot at Corinth that was deplorably unjust, unfair, unkind, and grossly selfish. But we never find Paul 'letting them down' to other churches. Rather does he make the best of them. His loyalty finds rich expression in his lists of people. Paul would never stoop to try and strengthen himself by demeaning someone else. He was a man who would — if such could be found — find some extenuating explanation for a seeming — or actual — delinquency when it was a matter of talking to others. To the delinquent he would be absolutely faithful and frank. You could rely on him to stand up for you, even if he knew well your failures.

Whatever might be said against him, it would require the most contemptible of persons to lay a charge of being a 'little' man against him. He was too big a man to be jealous or disparaging. He never thought or acted lightly in the matter of friendship. Friendship was a sacred thing with him, never to be cheaply thrown away. How very much there is to say about this great virtue and factor of loyalty, but with so little said, it is not difficult to see what an important and vital part it plays in leadership. It was so largely this that justified Paul in holding the position of spiritual leader which he had.

And in this respect, as in others, he was safe in saying,

"Follow me, as I follow Christ."

□ THE CROSS AND MINISTRY

The second letter (to the Corinthians), as we know, is the ministers letter! It tells us what a minister is from the Divine standpoint when the Cross does its work. Moses, the minister of God, is brought very much into view, ministering in the old covenant, declaring the thoughts of God, revealing the Divine mind. That is what a minister is. A minister, this word says, is one who shows forth the Divine thoughts, who manifests the mind of God. When Moses read the law, his face shone, the glory of God was expressed through him as God's servant, God's minister. That, mark you, was under the old covenant, the covenant of signs, the covenant of symbols, of types; yes, and a ministry of death and condemnation: and, says the Apostle, we have another ministry, and ministry is the shining forth of God in the face of Jesus Christ in our hearts. That is what a minister is; and let me put that simply, plainly.

There is no such thing in the New Testament as an official ministry as such. God has never, in this dispensation, appointed officials, as such, to be ministers. The ministry is a matter of a revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ in the heart shining out, and what constitutes one a minister more than another is the measure of the revelation of Christ in the life; and we all ought to be ready to give place to that. It must be a revelation of God in your heart, in my heart, that constitutes us God's ministers.

...The credentials of ministry are the shining of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ in our heart, and anybody who has that can be a minister; and anybody who has not that has no right to call himself a minister. The Cross must strike at all ideas of ministry which are merely professional, which are anything other than spiritual. Spiritual gifts, spiritual revelation, spiritual knowledge, spiritual resources, spiritual riches, these alone constitute us ministers.

THE BODY OF CHRIST: ITS HEAVENLY ASPECT

We are going, as the Lord enables us, to meditate afresh on the Body of Christ. We know, when we want to have the larger unfoldings of this "Mystery" where to turn; we instinctively turn to the Ephesian letter. In this letter we note, first of all, the simple preliminary fact, that the Church is designated "The Body of Christ," it is "the Church which is His Body." That distinguishes the Church in this letter from other designations which we find elsewhere. There is the Temple, there is the House of God, and other suchlike designations, but in this letter it is particularly the Body of Christ that is basic to all that the letter unfolds, and what is contained in the letter is in line with the conception of a body. Now the word which seems to predominate through this letter in connection with that designation is the word translated "Together." It is impressive to note how frequently that word occurs. Here we are said to have been "quickened together" in Him. That does not only mean that our togetherness individually was with the Lord Jesus in His rising, but it means that we corporately were quickened, we were together quickened in Him, not only with Him but in Him corporately quickened.

□ THE ETERNAL ONENESS OF THE BODY

In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the whole Church was included together. And then in the same verse, ii. 6, we are said to be “raised together” in Him. Further, in the same place, we are said to be “seated together” in Him. Coming back a step into i. 10, we are “gathered together into one” and then on again to ii. 21, we are “framed together.” So this word “together” brings into view in a very simple way the fact of the corporate nature of the Church, the Body of Christ. We want to get the full force of that as far as it is possible, because this letter undoubtedly emphasizes the fact that the Church is a corporate Body; not that it one day will be when the work of grace is completed; not that it is merely that in the mind and thought of God, the will of God, the intention of God; not that it was intended to be when the Lord started it; but that it is; that in spite of what is seen here on the earth; in spite of the ever-increasing number of divisions and separations, all the unhappy schisms which have entered into the fellowships of God’s people on the earth, in spite of everything that ever has been and ever is or will be along that line, the Church is still a corporate whole. It is that, not as to the people as on the earth, but it is true as to the essential nature of the Church, the Body of Christ, and the sooner we get that rooted and settled in our spiritual acceptance and consciousness the better. No schism, beloved, that is incidental to the relationships of Christian people on the earth can alter that fact. The differences which exist or which come about by the different mentalities, choices and preferences, likes and dislikes, intellectual acceptances or rejections; all those differences do not touch this ultimate fact that there is a realm in which there is a togetherness, a oneness, a corporateness which is unaffected by anything that is of man in himself religiously or theologically. There is a realm of course in which is unaffected by anything that is of man in himself religiously or theologically. There is a realm of course in which there may be a breach of fellowship, that is where it enters into the realm of the spirit and where the spirit is affected. There you may very definitely strike a blow at the Body of Christ, but ultimately the Body is one; which, of course, clearly indicates that this is something other than an earthly thing and that it is a heavenly Body, unaffected and untouched by earth.

We are inclined to accept what we see, to be affected by the divisions that are here, and are almost in despair because of what we see. The sooner we sweep that whole thing aside the better, and let there be fifty thousand earthly departments of Christian people, the Body of Christ remains one. It is a seamless robe, it is a Body which cannot be divided, it remains one. That is the basic fact to which we must come back, that is where we begin. This letter, in which there is the unveiling of the mystery of Christ and His members, The Church, the one Body, states most emphatically the fact of the corporate nature of the Body. It does not argue about it, or discuss it, it takes it for granted, it is a settled thing. Of course there are degrees of enjoyment of it, and there are degrees of the fruitfulness of it as here, but there are no degrees of the fact of it. The fact remains as solid and settled. Our business is to enter into the settled fact and come into the meaning of it: but our not having come into the full meaning of it does not mean that it does not exist. The trouble is that we have to know what it is that makes the Body one, and that is our business. The unity exists; our business is to apprehend it, not make it. We go on to that almost immediately, but note, the letter to the Ephesians is still alive, it is still applicable, it is still true for today. After all these centuries when we have all that we have on the earth, the departments and divisions of Christian people, all of whom may be members of the Body of Christ, still after all these centuries the Ephesians letter remains where it was at the beginning, and it represents the Body as a solid whole, a corporate unity.

□ A HEAVENLY POSITION NECESSARY TO APPREHENDING THE ONENESS

It is only as we get up into the heavenlies and away from the earthlies that we begin to enter into the fact and realize what that fact means to God, to the heavenlies, to hell, and to this world. So, in order that we should enter into the fact with all that that fact contains of effective vocation and life, we have to introduce the whole matter by our position in Christ in the heavenlies, and see exactly where we are placed spiritually: for not until we come to recognize that and to enter into our heavenly position in Christ can we see, appreciate, or come into the meaning of this heavenly reality the Church, which is His Body. We cannot see the Church from the earthlies, we can only see it from the heavenlies.

□ OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS DIFFERENCES

I do not want to pass away from that as having merely stated something. I do want that we should get the benefit of it. You and I may have a disagreement, but it makes no difference to our relationship in the Lord Jesus. The fact that you and I fall out or disagree does not tear us as limbs out of the Body of Christ. No, that is our shame, that is incidental in our Christian life, that this a breakdown somewhere in grace in us, but we shall recover ourselves from that if we yield to the movements of the Spirit in us, and come back to find that we have not to be rejoined in Christ in His Body, that fact remains. You see the working principle is this: that there may be much amongst believers on this earth of division, but we have not to accept that as ultimate, we have not to take

that as meaning that some are in Christ and some are out of Christ, that we are in Christ and others are not, and that we are in Christ and others are not, and that the Body has altogether collapsed and disintegrated. The only hope of enjoying the fact is that we repudiate what looks like another fact, and we seek to get above that which, being earthly, brings these things about, and discover we are in the heavenlies, and fellowship abides. That is a working principle and we should recognize that is the meaning of the fact. We have got to accept the fact, and we have to seek to overcome or repudiate the other things which come in against the ultimate fact.

THE BURDEN OF THE VALLEY OF VISION

Reading: Isaiah 22:1

The word "burden" here just does mean a load or weight, as much as a man can carry. Thus the Prophets felt what the Lord had shown them to be something that weighed heavily upon them and often overwhelmed them.

The prophetic function is brought into operation at a time when things are not well with the people and work of God, when declension has set in; when things have lost their distinctive Divine character; when there is a falling short or an accretion of features which were never intended by God. The Prophet in principle is one who represents, in himself and his vision, God's reaction to either a dangerous tendency or a positive deviation. He stands on God's full ground and the trend breaks on him. That which constitutes this prophetic function is spiritual perception, discernment, and insight. The Prophet *sees*, and he sees what others are not seeing. It is *vision*, and this vision is not just of an enterprise, a "work," a venture; it is a state, a condition. It is not for the work as such that he is concerned, but for the spiritual state that dishonors and grieves the Lord.

This faculty of spiritual discernment makes the Prophet a very lonely man, and brings upon him all the charges of being singular, extreme, idealistic, unbalanced, spiritually proud, and even schismatic. He makes many enemies for himself. Sometimes he is not vindicated until after he has left the earthly scene of his testimony. Nevertheless, the Prophet is the instrument of keeping the Lord's full thought alive, and of maintaining vision without which the people are doomed to disintegration.

While it has so often been an individual with whom the Lord has deposited His fuller thought and made His prophetic vessel, it has also very frequently been a company of His people in which He has been more utterly represented. Such companies are seen scattered down the ages. They were the Lord's reactionary vessels. Such, surely, are the "Overcomers" of every "end-time." The mass of Christians may be too taken up with the externals and accepted ways of Christianity; too spiritually satisfied with the lesser; too bound by tradition and fettered by the established order. The Lord cannot do His full thing with them because He does not put His new wine into old wineskins; the skins would burst and the life be wasted, not conserved to definite purpose. He finds Himself limited by an order which, while it may have been right at a certain time and for a certain period to carry His testimony up to a certain point, yet now remains as the fixed bound, and for want of an essential adjustableness His fuller purposes are impossible of realization. So it was with Judaism, so it has become with Christianity, and so it is with many an instrumentality which has been greatly used by Him. There is no finality with us here, and it is dangerous to the Lord's interest to conclude that, because the Lord led and gave a pattern at a certain time, that was full and final and must remain. Every bit of new revelation will call for adjustment, but revelation waits for such a sense of need as to at least make for willingness to adjust.

The Lord needs that which really does represent His fullest possible thought, and not those who are just doing a good work. But it costs; and this is the "burden of the valley of vision."

May, 1945

THE GREATNESS OF THE CHURCH

There is a painful slowness amongst Christians to apprehend the great purpose and intent of their salvation, to know and to understand the nature of their high calling; and it is in this connection that there is a great divide between the people of God. Christianity at its best has very largely become a general thing a matter of being saved and of going on in a general way as Christians, but not recognizing that in God's mind we are saved with a mighty purpose, not just to be saved and then to be occupied with getting others saved, and stopping there. Both of those things are good; they are fundamental and essential, but they are only the beginning.

From that point something quite different begins, what Paul refers to here when he says, “I...beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called”; and around that phrase, the *calling* wherewith ye were called, he gathers all these immense things about the Church; these immense things which, as to the backward aspect, reach far back over the ages; as to the upward aspect, “in the heavenlies”, with a vocation which is now heavenly; and then the onward aspect, “the ages to come”. These are phrases which indicate the calling wherewith we are called, but how few of us have really apprehended it!

We could say very much about the tragedy of the loss of that vision, the loss of that Divine revelation, and of the building up of something which has made it well nigh impossible for multitudes now to move into that calling, bound hand and foot as they are by a tradition and by a system of things which leaves responsible people not free, too much involved, too much involved for their very livelihood, to move into God’s full thought.

The Church, as the Body of Christ, is the vessel chosen of God, appointed and revealed by God, to be the embodiment of the glory and greatness of Christ, the vessel, the vehicle, by which all that Christ is will be made known through the ages of the ages. The greatness of the work of Christ in His Cross indicates how great the Church must be. If Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, if the work of the Cross of the Lord Jesus is so great, is not that a further indication of how great the Church must be? It has by His own parable been called a “pearl of great price” (Matt. 13:46), and to secure it He, the Divine Merchant, let go all that He had, and He had an ‘all’ which no merchant in the history of this world has ever possessed, a wealth and a fullness, a glory which He had with God before the world was, something indestructible, great, and wonderful. Seeking goodly pearls, when He had found one of great price He sold all to get it. We cannot understand that; it is beyond us; but there it is, it is Divine revelation. And the Cross was the price of the Church. For some unspeakable reason, the Church stands related to God in value like that. Christ loved the Church, the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood. It is evidently a very great and wonderful thing.

Now we must look at some of those features of Christ which are taken up in the Church, in order that we may know what this Church is that we are talking about. What is it? Well, if it takes up the things which are true of Christ, then what is true of Him is, in the mind of God, to be true of the Church; and it *is* true of the Church which is in God’s eye.

And the first feature of Christ is His eternal being, the eternal conception. He was before the world was; He was before the order of time was instituted in the establishment of those heavenly bodies by the government of which time exists, years and months, day and night, summer and winter. These are all governed by heavenly bodies, and these are time factors. Before they were, He was, for He created all things. That is true of Christ.

But the letter to the Ephesians says that that is true of the Church: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself” (Eph. 1:4–5). This letter to the Ephesians is not set in time, it will have its effect upon time matters, the practical matters of everyday life, of our walk and conduct here on this earth, but it is set in the timeless realm. It goes back, and it goes on; it bridges all time in the Divine conception. That is where this letter is set, and until we recognize the implications of that, we have no real apprehension of the Church; and when we do recognize that, what nonsense all this ‘churchianity’ becomes, how small and petty, and how we feel that from God’s standpoint we are just playing at some game of churches when we make so much of what has traditionally come to be called ‘the Church.’ One real Divine glimpse of the Church and all that other becomes paltry, petty, foolish; and a mighty emancipation takes place inside of us, but it requires revelation.

Christ as the foundation, as the rock, as the basis of everything, is founded, planted, and rooted in eternity, and nothing that time can bring can affect that. He is outside of it all. He is over it all. He is beyond it all. Nothing that can come in, even with Adam’s fall and all its consequences through history, can interfere with that. The Church takes that feature of the absolute stability of Christ. It is something outside of time, before the world was, chosen in Him. The stability of the true Church according to God’s mind is the stability of Christ Himself. This thing, on God’s basis, in God’s realm is an immovable and indestructible thing. The Church embodies the eternity and indestructibility of His very life.

Christ passed through this world unrecognized, unloving, making the positive affirmation that “no one knoweth the Son save the Father” (Matt. 11:27). There is a mystery here. He is manifested as God in Christ, but in such a hidden way that it demands an act of God in specific revelation to see Jesus Christ. You cannot see Who Jesus Christ is truly unless God acts sovereignly and opens the eyes of your heart. That has been demonstrated by His whole life here on this earth. When one apostle was able in a moment of revelation to say, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” the rejoinder was: “Blessed art thou, Simon BarJonah; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father” (Matt. 16:17).

And what is true of Christ is true of the Church. It is heavenly; it is unrecognized, unknown, unless God reveals it. I want you really to grasp this. I know in what a realm of helplessness it places us on the one side, and rightly so, it is as well that it is so; and therefore what it makes necessary on the other side: God must have a Church which exists on the basis of His own sovereign act of revelation. The purity of it demands that. If everybody could see and understand and comprehend, and the Church could be brought right down to the limited compass of human apprehension, what sort of Church would it be? The Church, in its heavenly character taken from Christ, is something that can only be entered by revelation, because it can only be known by revelation. "No one knoweth....." We can only state these facts. No teaching can accomplish it; we are powerless in the matter. All that is given to us is to state Divine facts; it is for God to reveal. But, thanks be unto God, He has revealed and He does reveal; and some of us can say He has shined into our hearts in this matter, and the revelation of Christ and of the Church has made an immense difference in every way.

God cannot be really known by the things which He says, however many they may be. There is such a difference between mental, intellectual apprehension and conception of God, and living, heart-transforming apprehension. God must come to us Himself in a living, personal way if we are to know Him livingly, actually. You may read a biography or an autobiography, and you may afterward say that you thereby know the person concerned; but how often it is true that when you actually meet that person, there is something that was not there in the book, and which makes all the difference. You were not really changed and transformed by reading the book. You had impressions, but they did not make any difference to you actually in your very life and nature; but you meet the person, and the impact of the person makes a deep impression and has a great effect. That is so often the case, but that is a poor illustration.

Now the greatness of the Church is here, that God has ordained and appointed that the Church now, in this dispensation, should be as the living Person of the Lord: where He can be found, where He can be met, where He can be touched, where He makes self-manifestation. Rome has the 'truth' regarding this, but has dragged it down on to a temporal, worldly level; but nevertheless the fact remains, He is found there, in the Church, and only in the Church. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). God can be met, found, touched there; there is the vehicle of His manifestation. So the Church is called to be here in this dispensation, and in the ages to come, the very Body through which God in Christ manifests Himself, makes Himself known. Is that the Church that we know, that is commonly called the Church? (Oh, no! But that is God's thought, and how different!)

I have been reading a book by Adolph Keller, a man who traveled all over the world to visit all churches, to see what could be done along the line of church union. I came on something like this in his book: "I must admit," he says, "that oftentimes when I sat in magnificent church buildings, with their stained-glass windows and carved organs, I was less conscious of being in the Church of Christ than when, for instance, I was in one of those Ukrainian peasant-rooms crowded with men and women who had come barefoot from afar to hear the Word of God. These poor little congregations and churches widely scattered in the hills of Yugoslavia, in the lonely villages of Wolhynia, in the coal-mining districts of Belgium, in the taverns and barns of Czechoslovakia, these churches truly humble us, because they show us again and again the true poverty and the true riches of Christ; and that in a way impossible in the securely established, self-sufficient church that we know today." Then he makes this statement: "The entire Church no longer represents its nature as originally intended, neither is it able to do so."

How different from the Church of God's thought! The true Church is nothing less, in the intention of God, than Christ Himself present and going on with His work, now without those earthly limitations of His life before His death and resurrection. The Christ risen, ascended and exalted in all the fullness which God has put in, is now in the true Church, and that Church exists. I say, you cannot identify it; you can only see where two or three are gathered. You cannot say of this or that or some other thing called 'the Church' that that is the Church. No, the true Church is still this mysterious thing. It is Christ in active expression. How great is the Church if it is Christ! I say, we can only state the facts. There they are. What we have to do next is to pray to the Lord: O Lord, reveal the true Church and save me from the caricature!

There is one last word. It concerns that always present and always governing factor about Christ which is not taken sufficient account of, I think, in its meaning. You notice that when Christ was here His aspect was always the forward one. He was always thinking and talking of a time to come. That is a governing factor and feature of Christ. "In that day...." (Matt. 7:22). He is looking on, talking about a coming day. All the time His eyes are upon the distant horizon and He speaks of what will then be then you shall know, then you shall see, then all will be manifested, then all that has been so hidden and mysterious will be perfectly clear.

When you pass into the Epistles you find the same thing dominant in the case of the Church. Mighty things now, big possibilities now, big issues and responsibilities now; the Church is now, even now, unto principalities

and powers an instrument of the revelation of the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). But the onward look is prominent, governing everything: "...that we should be unto the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:12); "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7); "...unto Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of the ages" (Eph. 3:21). I am only bringing that in here at this moment with this object: to remind you of the tremendous end to which the Church is called. How great the Church is in the light of the vocation which it is to fulfill! What a great vocation!

We might spend much time considering what the calling of the Church is, or is going to be, in the coming ages; but we must be satisfied for the present with making this one observation. It is one thing to be a citizen, and a blessed citizen, of a noble country and of a noble king. There may be many blessings in that for which to be grateful, but it is an infinitely greater thing to be a member of the king's household and family, a member of the reigning house. And that is the calling of the Church: not only to be inhabitants of the land, but to be members of the reigning family. We are called with that calling, to be in that inner circle.

The Church is this specific company, elect from all eternity to all eternity, not just to be something in itself, to know satisfaction and gratification, but to be instrumental in the hands of God in serving Him in His universe throughout all the coming ages, in close relationship with His Throne.

How great the Church is!

January, 1948

THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF GOD-GIVEN VISION

"Come hither, I will show thee..." (Revelation 21:9)

At times of crisis in the Church's history there has always been one factor which has been decisive; that is, the presence or absence of God-given vision. Again and again, such vision has been, by its absence, the cause of calamity and disaster; or, by its presence, the turning point for good or ill, according to the attitude taken to it. God has many times reacted to either actual or threatening tragedy by the presentation of a new vision: new, so far as His people were concerned.

The need and importance of such vision is found in its various features. In the first place:

□ IT IS CONCRETE WITH GOD

Such vision is something which has existed with God in clear-cut definition in the eternal counsels from the beginning. It is not something abstract or nebulous, something that is what people term 'visionary' or mystical. It is quite definite, clear and real in the mind and intention of God. God-given vision is not something subsequent to eventualities, an afterthought because of things having arisen unexpectedly; a kind of alternative to what God originally meant. It is not a substitute for His original plan. It is not an emergency expedient because of a situation unforeseen. God-given vision has its roots outside of time and circumstance, eventualities, contingencies or emergencies. All those things have been already taken account of, and have — so to speak — been swallowed up in the vision of God.

To be brought into such vision is to be brought on to a ground of confidence and assurance when the sands seem to be sinking and everything giving way. This, surely, is of no little importance and value. Then again:

□ IT IS COMPREHENSIVE

Things, whether they be good or whether they be evil, are not ends in themselves. They are either embodied in or overcome by the vision. Under the sovereign government of the Spirit of God all things are made to serve that purpose which is the substance of God's vision. That is just the significance of the words so familiar and so often used about all things working together for good (Romans 8:28). We so rarely see them in their setting, and stop short of the full import. We just say: "All things work together for good..." and stop there. The context has two aspects. Lives wholly under the Holy Spirit's government are in view, and "His purpose" is governing. Unless these two things are implicit, all things do *not* work together for good! Given that being "called to his purpose" we, in response, are lovers of God, then all things are the sphere of His sovereignty which makes them work together for good. Purpose governs all, and the purpose is the substance of God-given vision. It therefore requires

a vision of God's purpose in greater fullness, not in part. The purpose comprehends all parts. No phase or part is an end in itself. One wheel of a machine has no adequate meaning in itself. There lacks a real motive if all the other parts are not in view. We must not be too obsessed or taken up with the part or the phase. If we are, the whole becomes bound up with that phase so far as we are concerned, and we see no more. This may put us completely out of commission if any one phase has served God's purpose and He is now moving on. Sufficient motive demands sufficient vision, and we must see much more than that which is immediately before our eyes. Then, further still:

□ IT IS CONSTANTLY ENLARGING

It is very important to remember that God-given vision is never given in completeness at any one time. This is something borne out by an abundance of Scriptural evidence and instances. Such vision is always subject to enlargement. It will always be developed and fulfilled through new phases. This is a law in nature, and nature embodies spiritual principles.

The means employed by God at one time may — and very likely will — pass or be changed. In the sovereign order of God one particular phase, method or means will pass out, though greatly used and blessed so far. This does not involve a *change* of vision (unless it is ours and not God's) but an enlargement of vision. With God all that He uses and blesses, however wonderfully, is only relative and not final or ultimate. Therefore we must not cling to what has been, and regard that as the form for all time. So often this has been a most disastrous attitude of mind, and has resulted in God having to go on with His full purpose in other directions and by other means, and leave that fixed thing behind to serve a much lesser purpose than He wanted with it. Eventually it has *spiritually* died, although perhaps carried on by human effort and organisation. It just lives on its past and tradition. Further:

□ IT ALWAYS MOVES UPWARD

In its first apprehension it seems to have such immediate, temporal and earthly significance. The implications of any movement of God are not always recognised at the beginning, but if we go on with Him we shall find that much that is done here and is of time is, and has to be, left behind. The spiritual and the heavenly is pressing for a larger place and becoming absolutely imperative to the very life of the instrumentality and those concerned. It is spontaneous, and just happens. We wake up to realize that we have moved into a new realm or position, and no amount of additional earthly resource can meet the need. It is not only something *more* that is demanded, but something different. This is a crisis, and it will only be safely passed if there is vision of God's ultimate object. This demands spiritual mindedness, capacity for grasping heavenly things. Our world may be tumbling to pieces, but the full and final outcome is what matters. The great pity is that so many just cling to the old framework or partial vision. God presents His heavenly pattern in greater fullness and demands adjustment. He does this with foreknowledge, knowing of a day which is imminent when this vision alone will save. But because it seems revolutionary or unlike what God has blessed in the past, it is rejected and put aside. Then the foreseen day comes and all sorts of expedients have to be resorted to in an attempt to preserve any values for God.

Abraham had a vision of "the city which hath foundations" and he looked for it, but he never found it on earth. He found it at last in heaven, but only as the climax of a walk which was ever upward. Ezekiel was another man of vision. In his "visions of God" he saw the glory lifting from the earthly scene and moving up and on, finally culminating in a spiritual house and river which find their counterpart in the final revelation given to John. It was heavenly, spiritual, universal. What a significant phrase that is about the house seen by Ezekiel — "there was an enlargement upward" (Ezekiel 41:7). God-given vision is always heavenly and always moves away from the merely temporal and earthly. To understand this is to be found in ways of vital fruitfulness.

God never works for reduction or limitation, even though at times He may seem to be doing so. When we are able to see as He sees we find that what looks like trimming and reduction is really His way of leading to more spiritual and heavenly enlargement. It was "the God of glory" who appeared to Abraham (Acts 7:2). It was "the pattern in the heavenlies" that was shown to Moses (Hebrews 8:5). It was "... above the firmament... a throne... and upon the throne... a man above upon it" that Ezekiel saw (Ezekiel 1:26). It was that "the heavens do rule" that Daniel apprehended (Daniel 4:26). These are not only sovereign factors in government, but heavenly conceptions in the nature of things.

These two things proceed as one. God in sovereignty will run the risk of shattering, or allowing the shattering of much that He has used of scaffolding or framework, in order to realize His fuller purpose. It is not that what went before was wrong, but only that He now desires something more. We thank God that ever He took Paul away from his ministry of travelling evangelism and let him be shut up in prison, for it was then that the full glori-

ous vision and revelation of the “heavenlies” and the “eternal” was given. This seemed to eclipse all the earthly and temporal. It was worth it. What might have seemed a tragedy was not one after all. Satan may have had a lot to do with Paul’s imprisonment and with John’s banishment to Patmos, but from these troubles the Church has gained very much in heavenly values. The Holy Spirit is the custodian of the full purpose of God and under His government the Church and the individual believer will move ever on and up. Once again:

□ IT IS THE GROUND OF OUR TRAINING

When God does give vision it is that which becomes the occasion and basis of our testing, our education and our discipline. This is far more important to God than easy fulfillment and realisation; than that kind of facilitation which is made possible by God’s overruling. Look at the prophets! They were men of vision. They stood in the gap between threatening disaster and the survival of God’s people. But what discipline they endured because of their vision! It was their vision which brought all the inward as well as the outward suffering upon them. Look again at Habakkuk. How he cried to God about the situation and then took his position in relation to the vision. It is faith and patience which are the virtues to be perfected, so he realized that “the just shall live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). Similarly John, the man of the Patmos visions, described himself as the brother “in... the patience of Jesus” (Revelation 1:9).

So we may find that although things may be taking a new and different shape, the purpose of God has not changed. We may be presented with His vision in new and more advanced aspects, but it is only what God originally purposed. Can we adjust? Can we leave the things that are behind? Without raising questions as to the right or wrong of what has been in the past, can we go on and grow up as we move towards God’s end? Finally:

□ IT MAKES MEN OF PRAYER

This is almost too obvious when we remember the men of the Bible. It was vision which got them away from the trivial and petty. It required vision to get prayer on to the major lines and to make it a matter of real travail. What a bound and range those prophets had in prayer! But what immense issues were precipitated. It is not our vision for God, but His vision in us that will be dynamic, and that will determine lasting values.

I cannot conclude without pointing out that what could have been voluntary with a minimum of loss has often had to be made compulsory with gains that are less than they could have been. This is because we do not from time to time stand back and in detachment wait upon God so that He can adjust and enlarge our vision. Many a work which has mightily served the Lord and been a great spiritual testimony has lost much of its glory and impact by becoming an organised routine which has made no provision for the further light from God which could have come from periods of retreat and waiting upon Him. Perhaps the Lord would send more prophetic vision which would lead into fuller spiritual values *if we were not too busy* to receive it. Without renewed vision there can so easily be a leakage of spiritual power.

From “Toward The Mark” May–June, 1978

THE INCENSE-BEARER

“...and by me sends forth the knowledge of Him, a stream of fragrant incense, throughout the world. For Christ’s is the fragrance which I offer up to God, whether among those in the way of salvation, or among those in the way of perdition; but to these it is an odour of death, to those of life.” (2 Corinthians 2:14–16, CONYBEARE.)

□ THE MINISTER AND HIS MINISTRY

The Apostle Paul is setting forth one of his conceptions of what the minister of Christ is, and then what the effect of the ministry. He is thinking here of the minister of Christ as an incense-bearer. The picture at the background of these verses is one with which we are well-acquainted.

Verse 14 of 2 Corinthians 2 brings into view the triumphal procession of the victorious warlord as he moves from place to place with his captives behind him, celebrating at many points his victory, and using them for the purpose of evidence as to his victory. But also in the procession there are those who carry vessels of incense, and the incense being diffused everywhere speaks in two ways, to two different classes of people.

There are some who are going to celebrate this day of victory by being slain. It was a custom to hold certain notorious or distinguished captives in bondage until the day of the great celebration of the victory, and then that

day was marked by their being slain. On the other hand, there were those who were appointed to be released as a distinguishing mark of the day. To the one the incense brought death near, and made them know that their hour had come. To the other the same incense made known that the hour of emancipation, of liberation, was drawing near. The same incense proclaimed death and life, life and death.

In the second part of the picture the Apostle himself passes from the first, where he has been viewing himself as one of those prisoners, led in the triumphal procession, as an object of public exhibition as to the triumph of the great Warrior. He has seen himself as in the train of the triumph of the Lord, being on full view as a demonstration of the greatness of that victory.

Now he passes himself into the second part, and takes the place of an incense bearer in the procession, and says that he passes on through the world bearing incense, and that incense is saying two things, having two effects, speaking to two different classes of people. It relates to life and death.

But the Apostle carries that thing inward, and he does not regard himself as simply carrying a censor of incense. He regards himself as that vessel, and as — in a strange, deep, inward way, so as to become a very part of his own being — the incense itself. He thinks of himself as being, not only the giver forth of the sweet savour, but that sweet savour itself; that he is the means by which this effect is registered upon these two different classes of people.

In that presentation of the servant of the Lord there is a deep, strong and solemn word for all of us who stand in that position as the Lord's servants. The thing which is going forth from us, the thing which is the effect of our lives, according to these words, is the knowledge of Christ. Everywhere, not just by us, but because of us, men are coming to a knowledge of Christ. The very object of our being is that Christ should be known because of us. The Divinely appointed way of men coming to know Christ is by our being here, moving amongst men.

□ THE VITAL ELEMENT IN MINISTRY

That is simple, and perhaps we recognize and accept it, but the extra point which has to be noticed is this, that it is something more than our giving out knowledge concerning Christ; it is that we are to men the knowledge of Christ. There is a very big difference between giving out the truth concerning the Lord Jesus — even in large measure, in a great fullness, truth which cannot be denied because it is the truth — and that strange, deep, indispensable element that we are that truth, that that truth itself takes its power, its strength from the fact that here are those who are the living expression of it; who have gone through the depths, been tested, been tried, been taken from place to place, been subjected to experiences of intense severity, and in the fires have learned Christ, and are therefore themselves the embodiment of the knowledge of Christ.

Wherever they go it is not that they have truth to give, but it is that men and women learn Christ because of them, and of them it can be said: It is not what they say only; there is something coming from them. There is an indescribable "something" which is an extra element to what they say. That thing has its reality in their being, and you feel that it is not only the words but the very virtue that comes out when they speak, or by reason of their presence. It is that of which the Apostle is speaking. That is the real value of any knowledge of Christ which we can give, which others may come to possess by us. It is not that they come through us to know more about Christ, but that there is a ministration of Christ. That is the thing for which we should seek the Lord very earnestly.

□ THE COSTLINESS OF TRUE MINISTRY

We should recognize that this represents the costliness of ministry. Ministry of this kind is an intensely costly thing. It is so different from being a preacher as a preacher. There may be a glamour about preaching, a fascination about gripping a congregation, and all that sort of thing, which is not costly but gratifying to the flesh; the snare of the limelight, the snare of publicity, the snare of that satisfaction, feeling power over other people, which has robbed preaching of that essential blood, and passion, and anguish. Paul was not a preacher of that kind. It is all very well to talk about Paul as the great preacher and orator, and to try to be another Paul along that line. But to be a Paul is a desperately costly thing, and to minister Christ is a thing into which our very blood will be poured.

This kind of ministry can bring no satisfaction to the flesh. This kind of ministry is not something for which to reach out for ourselves. This kind of ministry is something that we should plead to be delivered from unless our life and heart passion is that Christ Himself — not ourselves, but Christ Himself — should be known. Suffer that word thus to you who minister in the Name of the Lord.

That is the true value of ministry. It is indeed a costly thing, it is a thing of suffering, but it is the thing which goes beyond words, far beyond clever thinking and clever expressing, far beyond that acute needle-like brain

that grasps truth and then begins to give it out. It is something which is an extra factor, without which the very best equipment in nature will fail to reach the Divine end. It is, in a word, Christ ministered, not Christ ministered about, but Christ ministered.

Paul saw that there was no doubt about it, that this ministry was effective, although effective in two directions. Not always did it result in people leaping into life, but it always resulted in something. If it plunged some people more deeply into death it was a proof that it was effective. If it brought death home to some consciences that proved its power. To have real spiritual effect demands that this shall be the kind of ministers that we are. The living knowledge of Christ brought near to us in vessels which have been shaped and wrought through the fires will, in the first place, discover our state and then intensify our state. It is bound to do those two things. The two states are here presented as: In the way of life, and, In the way of death.

□ THE EFFECTS OF THIS MINISTRY

1. FROM DEATH UNTO DEATH.

A) As to the unsaved.

Let us get quite clear on this matter. This does not for one moment suggest — let alone support — the idea that some are elected to death and perdition and some are elected to life and salvation. That is not the thought. What is here is this, that there are those who are refusing life, and therefore put themselves in the way of death. There are those who are open to life, and therefore may be in the way of life. It is really a matter of the attitude of the heart. It has nothing to do, in the first place, with the Divine predestination. It has to do with our attitude toward Christ, our attitude toward the knowledge of Christ brought near to us in a living way. It is very simply explained. It can be possible that there are those who are not open to Christ. They have no intention whatever of giving their lives to the Lord. It is far from their meaning that they shall be saved or shall become Christians, however they would put it. It is not their thought or intention. They are not open, they are quite closed. It is quite a settled matter with them that they are not going to be Christians, or religious, or converted, or however they express it. For them the situation is as bad as any situation could be. Christ in a living way is being brought near, and they are not open to Him, and they cannot remain as they are. They are going to be intensified in their position, and more definitely and positively shut up to where Christ has brought death by being near, unless they change their attitude.

They may not be any more conscious that they are more set, but they are. The coming near of Christ is going to be according to the Word, and according to truth, death unto death, from one measure of death to an intensified measure of death, from one point of distance from Christ and salvation to a removed point, further away from Christ and salvation. If ever the day comes when they do turn and desire the Lord, they will have a tenfold more difficult time than they would have had, and their salvation will be fraught with the most terrific suffering. The infinite peril of that sort of thing is that: "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth.... shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Pharaoh hardened his heart once, twice, thrice at the call of God, and then God came in and shut his heart, and Pharaoh was incapable of opening it, though he may have wanted to. That is the danger of being where Christ is livingly brought nigh and our hearts being closed, unresponsive.

B) As to the saved.

That does not only operate in the matter of our salvation in the first instance. That operates in the case of believers. It was not only Pharaoh who fell into that awful and tragic and disastrous state; but Israel in the wilderness, who had been saved from Pharaoh, fell into it. The words of Hebrews 3 were addressed to Israel in the wilderness, and that whole generation failed to come into God's full purpose and thought. Why? Because there was brought near unto them the purpose of God, the will of God, and they stopped short in their response. They had gone so far, they had come out, and had moved to a certain point, and then they went no further. For some reason or another they ceased to go on with the Lord from a certain point. Do you think they remained the same? The Word of God makes it perfectly clear that they did not just stop there but, having stopped, there set in an intensifying process which eventually made it impossible for them to come into what God had appointed.

The door had been opened to them and set before them. Their hearts had been imperfect in response and abandonment. That led to the issue that when they wanted to enter and made an effort to do so they had not the spiritual life necessary, and the consequences were disastrous. "Too late" is a terrible reality to face. This may apply to the unsaved sinner; but it may also relate to the full object of salvation — the inheritance, the fullness of Christ. Truth received and not responded to means spiritual declension and loss of capacity. It is just possible that we should belong to the Lord, and have gone so far, and then stopped; and yet from the day that we stopped,

when we ceased to be obedient, to follow the Lord, to respond to His revealed will, Christ has been brought near to us again and again in a living way, all with a view on the Lord's part to getting us to move from that position, to move on; but, No! Every time there has been the recoil instead. There has been a failure to rise up and say: I am going on with God! Those people do not remain in that condition. All the time, perhaps unconsciously, there is a hardening within, which presently will be manifested as a situation which is impossible of overcoming.

There is a passage in the Word which speaks of those who even touch the fire and are not conscious of it; of those upon whose heads there are gray hairs and they know it not: the marks of lost vitality, lost life; time going and not conscious of it. It is a terrible thing to suddenly wake up and find that your life has gone, all that could have been for God no longer possible.

As we become older, and are naturally more occupied with the past than with the future (spiritually we do not do that), life holds a great deal more in the past than in the future; we see how much more there might have been, and we regret that we have not made more of the opportunity and of the years. We wake up to the fact that no longer have we the powers for mastering, no longer is it possible for us to make good. Think of that in relation to eternal things! Christ constantly coming near in a living way, and yet all that that means never being entered into. But, more; that only strengthening our position in death. Oh! terrible thought! That which is meant for life working out in death.

Is this not a very strong appeal to our hearts, that we should rise up and go on, that we should consider our state and say: Am I locked up? Am I becoming incapable of moving? Whereas at one time it might have been difficult, but if I had resolved in the grace of God to move I should have moved, I should have been in a different place from what I am in today, today I am finding it less possible than ever to move, and, as things are brought to me, as Christ is brought to me, the truth is brought to me, and appeals are made in my presence, I find myself less inclined to respond! That is a terrible situation, the knowledge of Him meaning death unto death.

Oh! do shake yourself from the dust, if you should be in that position! If you have had Christ brought near in a living way for years, and you have not come into the living value of that, now is the time for you to get before God and say: This must stop; this death regime must end; this bondage must be brought to a conclusion; I must break and go on with God! Seek the grace to fight that thing through, lest all that was meant for you by the Lord coming near again and again should be eternally missed.

There is no getting away from the fact that Christ is effective. If He is not effective unto life, He is effective nonetheless. It is impossible for the Holy Spirit to bring Christ near without a result. There is no such thing as God's Word returning to Him void. It will accomplish a purpose, and the purpose of Christ is not to leave people where they were, but, if possible, to lead them into life; and, if they will not, to intensify their state, so that in The Day they will have no ground whatever on which to stand. If God condemns He condemns thoroughly, and leaves no room for argument.

2. FROM LIFE UNTO LIFE.

The life may be in very simple forms. It may not be in a large measure. It may only require openness of heart, willingness of spirit, but that is toward life, life in its simplest form reaching out, incapable of doing very much, yet open and stretched forth. Ah, yes! the very heart open to the Lord, ready for the Lord. The coming near of the Lord means a ministration of more life. Increase of life requires that the life that is, should be active. Even though it be in its simplest and smallest forms, yet to be active. It is only a state of heart. Are you dead, or are you alive? Are you indifferent, or are you reaching out? The Lord draws near to minister more of Himself in life to every heart open to Him. It is wonderful and blessed to see what happens when the heart is open and the spirit is pure. There may not be a great deal of energy, a great deal of understanding, a great deal of instruction, a great deal of truth and teaching, but the most blessed results are not always in the realm where there is a great comprehending of truth, but more often in the realm where there is a simplicity, honesty, and openness of spirit. Some people are far too well informed to live. Some people's heads are the great obstruction to their spiritual enlargement. It is noticeable today that the Lord is not particularly active amongst the people who know such a lot, and He is not seeming to be working to lay hold of the clever people, the well informed people, the people who are recognized as the authorities. The Lord is moving in a wonderfully blessed way amongst people whose hearts are open, whose spirits are simple, and who have little to throw off in order to go after Him. Are we active to the Lord in heart? Are we really going on, or have we come to a standstill? Have we never started?

Here is Christ brought near, and there can be an increase of Christ, an increase of Divine life. It will depend upon whether you are open, whether you are not very concerned, not particularly interested, passive, perhaps antagonistic; or whether — not that you have a great deal of ability, or knowledge, or understanding of the meaning of it all — but whether your heart is open and reaching out to the Lord. Marvellous things can happen if you

are in that state. It is not that you should have a perfect understanding of everything, not that you should have confidence in yourself, that having moved you can keep going, but it is that your heart is livingly toward the Lord; then everything is possible. That is the way of life (and to be in the way of life may only mean at its beginnings, that you are reaching out for the Lord), that is the direction of life. That you are in that state is the way of life; that you are obeying whatever light the Lord has given you; that you are obedient to everything that He has made known to you as His will, that is the way of life, and the way of an increase of life.

The way of death may be, at its beginning, no intention whatever of being the Lord's; or, at some point further on, where the Lord has said in your heart: That is My way for you; that is My will for you! you have perhaps not said, "No, Lord" in as many words, but that is what your life is saying. That, No! has now been hanging over your life for perhaps five, ten years. perhaps longer. It is not that you have never said positively: I will never be obedient; I am not going that way! It may be that you are simply doing nothing. That is a negative! That is, No! It is not Yea! to the Lord. The issues are tremendous. When we think that there may never be a presentation of Christ without one of two results: we may either increase or decrease; we may be more positive or less so; we are either in a fuller way of death or a fuller way of life; it is a tremendous thing. It is impossible to get away from the alternatives.

The Apostle felt the solemnity of this, and surely we feel the solemnity of it! The Apostle was so deeply conscious of, and moved by, the solemnity of this position that he said: "Who is sufficient for these things?" Think of it, that wherever I go the effect of my life is more life or more death! It is serious to be bound up with anybody's life. So we would entreat, and would plead, lest it should be death unto death. Open the heart! Reach out to the Lord! Move in obedience to every bit of light which He has given, and it shall be a savour of life unto life.

THE STREET OF PURE GOLD

*"And he shewed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal,
proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,
in the midst of the street thereof" (Revelation 22:1-2)*

Passing from the general description of the holy city in Revelation 21 the apostle John then said that he was shown it as consisting of one single and central street, with a river flowing down the centre of that street of pure gold. The spiritual significance of the vision is the perfect oneness of Christ as revealed in a beautiful unity in which He has the central place. This is God's masterpiece, this unity of the fellowship of the Spirit which makes Christ and His members one. By means of this city God plans to minister to the whole range of His universe. The nations are to walk in its light and to find health from the leaves of its tree of life. God purposes to minister blessing to His universe from the central position of the Church in which Christ is the central Figure.

If this is so, then we must believe that this element of oneness is a vital principle, and that even now the Lord is working to produce and maintain it. Although the final objective of God is future, it must surely cast its rays upon the present. When the glorious city comes suddenly into view it may seem to come 'out of the blue', but in fact it will only represent the final emergence of that which has been spiritually coming all the time. There is a sense in which each one of us is sending up in advance those spiritual values in Christ which are being developed in us. When we follow the simile of the bride, we think of the garments being prepared now, as some excellency, some beauty, some virtue of Christ is woven like a thread into the fabric of the bridal garments. We will 'put on' Christ then because we are learning to put Him on now. It seems that in a similar way, the material of the heavenly city is being prepared now. It is true that every part of it represents some aspect of Christ, but once again it should be realized that these expressions of Christ are to be formed in us now. The consummation will be seen later, but the city is being spiritually formed now.

What will be true ultimately concerning the eternal vocation of the Church as the metropolis of God's new universe, throws some light on what should be true here and now. In eternity God's glory is to be ministered on a basis of absolute unity. First of all this means oneness with the Lord Himself. The Church can fulfill God's eternal purpose only by oneness with the thoughts of God as expressed in His Son. It is not enough to contemplate a feature of divine unity as illustrated by the one single street and the life-giving river flowing down the middle of it; we need to ask ourselves what this implies for us here on earth. Surely the implication is that among God's people there should be that basic unity of the Spirit which makes possible a free-flowing ministry of life. There is no need to insist on a uniformity of language or procedure. Even where this exists in outward matters there can still be deep tensions of spirit and dividedness of heart. And even where people differ in unimportant matters there can still be that all-important unity of fellowship in Christ. It is this unity which is essential to the flow of the

Spirit.

Satan himself lays emphasis on this point by his constant strategic movement against the power and value of any service for Christ by introducing divisions and seeking to perpetuate them. He does not mind talk about oneness; in some ways he does not so much object to doctrinal agreement of an external nature; but he is set positively and persistently against a deep-down inwrought oneness, for he knows the powerful impact of such a testimony. So the picture of the river flowing down the street is a challenge to us all. It is, of course, a challenge to the Church as a whole, since the unity of the Spirit is not sectional but all-embracing. It follows, though, that the practical impact of the challenge is felt at local levels and in the assemblies where we are found. Is the river flowing there? If not, is this lack due to basic disunity? Are there many streets, side avenues and private roads, instead of the King's highway?

The challenge finally confronts each individual, for the Lord Jesus promised that the result of a vital faith in Him would be the outflow of rivers of living water (John 7:38). So the initial unity must be that of our own personal relationship with Christ. Before we begin to consider our church, we need to examine our own lives and to ask if those around us are finding refreshment and life as the Spirit flows out from us to them. It is not enough to meditate on the beauty of the golden street with its crystal-clear river if we think of it only in terms of future prospects and not of present fulfillment. So while we gratefully enjoy John's prevision of eternal glory, we do well to ask what it should mean for us here and now.

John could say: "He showed me...". He was reporting what he had himself seen. But is it not relevant that each one of us, in reading and hearing the Word, should be able gratefully to affirm: "He showed *me*...". Just as John could hardly have conceived these heavenly wonders if the Lord had not first said to him: "Come, and I will show you...", so we cannot appreciate the spiritual significance of this matter until the Lord Himself has revealed it to us. We should be able to say in all humility, "He showed me...". But if this is true, if we really have received revelation, then what we have seen ought to have a tremendous practical effect upon our lives. How can I rightly claim to have seen this wonderful truth of spiritual fellowship if it does not find practical expression in my life? How can I talk about the holy city, the heavenly bride of the Lamb, without any outworking of the principles in me now? Surely the test of whether we have seen is to be found in what happens to us and in us. I do not believe that there can be an effective divine showing without there being some result. It is surely most perilous to accumulate teaching concerning holy truths, perhaps even to disseminate that teaching, while all the time there is a minimal outworking of them in our experience. The teaching can do more harm than good, for it can deceive people into imagining that they are in the good of things just because they are informed about them. We must always test our assumed knowledge by the practical effect which it can be shown to produce.

In the last chapter of the Bible, as in the first, the double emphasis is on the Spirit and on life. In Genesis we are told that the very first indication of divine activity was the brooding of the Spirit of God, and then followed ever new and ever more wonderful expressions of life. When we come to the last chapter of the Revelation we find the Spirit with the bride calling: "... he that is athirst let him come: he that will, let him take of the water of life freely". So again we have the Spirit and life. In a sense this is a key to the whole Bible. In the Old Testament the Spirit is symbolised in many ways, as water, fire, oil and so on, but always related in some way or other to the matter of life. In the New Testament this is much more clearly emphasised. The last book, the book of consummation, has the Spirit and life as its two most prominent features. It opens with John's statement that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and then seven times over in the letters to the churches, the call is for those who will listen to what the Spirit has to say in the churches. Running right alongside is the question of life. In the Spirit John saw and heard the Living One, the Lord Jesus, in terms of resurrection life. As the sevenfold fullness of the Spirit is referred to, we realize that His lamps of fire are directed to the churches in a quest for the one supreme experience which should be theirs, even the fullness of life. The real test of whether those believers were moving towards the Church's goal was, Are people meeting Christ through you? Is virtue flowing out to others, as it did from the garments of our Lord? Our very vocation here on earth is to be witnesses of His life and to minister that life to others around us. Individually and in our churches, we are meant to be life centres.

One of the churches was told: "... thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead..." (Revelation 3:1-3). Names are no use to the Lord. Whether the name sounds good, whether it is Scriptural, whether it has a long tradition; these are of no interest to the Lord and have no value in His sight unless His own life and love are flowing out through us. And there can be no doubt that this life expresses itself in oneness. If the Holy Spirit is really having His way among the Lord's people, they cannot be divided. In eternity there will be a golden street. Even now may His love so triumph in us, His people, that the river of life is freed to carry life to the thirsty souls around us!

THE TIME IS SHORTENED

“But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both those that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it...”

1 Corinthians 7:29–31.

It is necessary that we should not misunderstand Paul’s words, for he would never contradict himself. He who wrote: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church...” would never write anything that set aside or lessened the force of such a grand description of marriage relationship. Clearly he did not wish to minimise the importance of marriage; nor did he mean that weeping or rejoicing or other human activities should be obliterated; his remarks are set over against the existing situation in Corinth and they are introduced by the word ‘But’. “But this I say, brethren, the time is shortened” (RV).

In his letter the apostle had been forced to deal with many unhappy features of current experience in the Corinthian church. There were so many inconsistencies, even contradictions, and so much which denied the Lord, that it was as though he became utterly wearied of it all and felt obliged to cry out in protest against using so much time and energy on the quibblings and carnality of God’s people. He felt that he could not afford the time which he was having to give to the negative task of admonishing, correcting and remonstrating. He wanted to get busy with the positive matters of life in the Spirit, and groaned at the sheer waste of time produced by the internal conditions at Corinth.

For this man, who ever had his eyes on a wider horizon, there was still so much to be done. Paul was so aware of the tremendous forces at work against Christ and against His testimony that he felt that they were in an emergency situation. In his day there were signs of a great crisis in which Christian testimony might be curtailed; he sensed in the very atmosphere the tension which eventually brought him to martyrdom. Being conscious of the emergency state in which public witness, the work of the Lord, would be severely suppressed and the antagonistic forces would overflow the world in their attempt to destroy the testimony of Christ, he could not refrain from crying out about it to his brethren: “But... the time is short!”. He wanted them to get clear of their internal problems and difficulties so that they could buy up all possible opportunities for Christ. We need to be freed from self-preoccupation, so that we can redeem what time there is, for at best it is all too short.

I suggest to you that in this connection the Scripture is very meaningful for us now. There are so many problems, questions, differences of opinion, personal clashes, *but...*! ‘But’ brothers and sisters, ‘the time is short — too short to be wasted on things of secondary or third-rate importance.’ Even marriage, the sorrows and joys of life, possessions, fashions, earthly interests — it is not that they are wrong but they provide a subtle snare to distract us from the real business of our Christian living. Nothing, from the inner circle of our domestic relationship to the widest circle of world events, must ever be allowed to interfere with our testimony for Christ. Those blessed with wives must not allow them so to fill their lives that the happy domestic circle becomes a preoccupation which absorbs all their time. There are some that weep, but they must not let their sorrow paralyse them with regard to the Lord’s interests. There are those who can rightly rejoice, but they must watch that their delight does not subvert them, so that they give it priority and find themselves turned aside from their main concern which should have been for the glory of Christ. There is much in the world which can rightly interest. The Corinthians had already been told that “All things are yours; whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world...” (1 Corinthians 3:22). But Paul also told them that they must not abuse this gift, not use it to the full, not let it be their prime concern. Brethren, the time is short, and we must not allow anything in any department of our lives to encroach upon the interests of the Lord.

This is the cry of a man looking back and knowing that for him time would not last much longer. Paul was always feeling the cold hand of the past reaching out to remind him of those wasted years which he so deeply regretted. He had spent such a valuable part of his early life in travelling along the wrong road, fighting against the Son of God; and he deplored those barren years. How much energy — and religious energy at that — had been utterly wasted! His soul was filled with sorrow about the failures, the lost opportunities of the past, and he was stirred to make sure that this should never happen again. He cried out in protest against the possibility of further shortening. Life is not as long as all this, that one can afford to have more failures, more lost time, more misspent energy. Life here on this earth is all too short. The man who looked back and grieved over those periods of his experience when his energies were bent on a course which brought no glory to his Lord, had to cry out in dismay at the prospect of still more waste.

It is also the cry of a man who was looking around, being made conscious of the overwhelming need which everywhere abounded. Paul was deeply distressed over the crying spiritual need of Christians who seemed so muddled and powerless, as well as over the appalling condition of men without Christ, multitudes who had no vital experience of the transforming power of the gospel. And time was passing so rapidly. The demands on every

hand were so great that it seemed most culpable to give them anything less than full and undivided attention. So it is today. Only the gravely insensitive can fail to register the seriousness of the circumstances which surround us. The needs are so great and the important thing to remember is that our remaining time is very short, and so are our opportunities for doing the Lord's work. It seems that the Corinthians were so taken up with their own affairs that they failed to realize how spiritual opportunities and values were slipping from their grasp. Paul was aghast that this should be so. He was no passive spectator himself, no self-interested neutral, but a man who realized the supreme importance of working the works of God while it was still day. He cried out against the paralyzing work of Satan among Christians and the great power of darkness in the world. "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving", he affirmed (2 Corinthians 4:4), and this darkening, blinding work of the devil forced him to warn his brothers that the time was drawing to an end.

His words were also the appeal of a man looking on into the future with eager expectation but who yet appreciated how much still remained to be done in these shortening days. His own course would soon be finished, and he felt that if he spent all the moments of all his days in utter devotion to Christ, it would still be woefully inadequate and he an unprofitable servant. The time was so short that he knew that at the end he would feel regretfully that if he could have his life all over again he would use it to so much better advantage. This might be a general and very natural emotion, but for Paul the important thing was to minimise it and be saved from unnecessary regrets at the end of his brief career. So it was that he urged his brothers at Corinth to join with him in making everything subservient to the one great consideration of the work of Christ.

Some of them were doubtless still young in years and therefore not so conscious of the swift approach of the end of earthly life, but the call to them was just as valid, for at best life passes all too quickly and the Spirit of God would surely impart to them something of His own urgency to buy up every opportunity for glorifying Christ. The Christians of those days lived in constant expectation of the return of the Lord Jesus in glory. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" they were told, the trumpet would sound for the termination of the gospel age (1 Corinthians 15:52). The Second Coming has not yet taken place, but to many of us it appears quite imminent, so that more than ever we need to take note of the fact that the time is shortened. It may well be that as we move rapidly towards that great day we shall find that there will be a closing in upon Christian testimony, with all kinds of new limitations being imposed on the servants of the Lord, and then Paul's 'But' will be even more relevant. It stands over against all the petty and unworthy preoccupations of Christians like those Corinthians who were inclined to fritter away the precious moments still remaining to them in unprofitable disputations and childish self-indulgence. Most of the matters raised in this letter would never have arisen if the believers had kept their priorities right and not forgotten how rapidly time is diminishing and eternity drawing near. The same applies — and even more so — to our own day and age. Brothers, there is no time to spare for the many unimportant and time-wasting differences and disputes which beset the Church of Christ and dissipate its energies. There is something far more important on hand. The Lord's interests demand that we have done with all that has no eternal value and get on with the real business of life, which is the bringing in of the kingdom and of the King.

From "Toward the Mark" May–June, 1974

THE VOICE OF THE SON OF GOD

Reading: John 5:25, 28; 11:43; 6:63, 65; 8:43; 10:4,5; 10:16.

It is well known that with John 11 a transition has taken place. Up to chapter 10 a series of spiritual truths and principles has been very largely enunciated and made practical in relation to a number of individuals. With chapter 10 those truths are taken up in a collective way, and from there onward the Lord Jesus is found more particularly occupied with a special company. Chapter 11 stands exactly halfway, with ten chapters on either side. In this position it gathers up all that has gone before, and represents what will be the ultimate issue. Lazarus is central in both position and meaning, so far as Christ's glory is concerned. The company which is found together at the table, occasioned by the raising of Lazarus, sets forth two things (and we must always bear in mind the double aspect of things in the Scriptures, the earthly and the heavenly, the temporal and the spiritual). Those two things here are Israel and the Church. Israel's history will be exactly that of Lazarus. A sickness in which Christ will not intervene. He will deliberately remain away from Israel (as such) — although greatly loved — until no hope remains along any line but a miraculous intervention. Israel will "stink" in the nostrils of the world, and, rather than a remedying, only by a resurrection as from the dead, by the voice of *the Son of God* — *Jesus Christ*, will they have a Divine future.

The other thing here is that the Church comes right into view typically and in principle with the resurrection of Lazarus and the company as gathered. The Church is the company of those who have their very being only and solely by reason of the resurrection miracle. This is quite clearly and finally stated in the most “Church” part of the Bible, the letter to the Ephesians. “And you did he quicken, when *ye were dead* through your trespasses and sins... and made us to sit with him in the heavenlies” (2:1, 6). (“Lazarus was one of them that sat at meat with him” John 12:2). But, when we have said that, we have not touched the deepest note in the matter. The very heart of this position is found in the words in John 5:25, “The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God”.

Firstly, it is obvious that something more than a physical faculty of hearing is in mind. The dead have no such faculty, there must be a hearing which is not natural, which is deeper and more inward than the natural. Nor is it just that by God speaking some actual result occurs. There is a *hearing* which has that result. Briefly then, a living relationship with Christ and its corporate expression in what is called His “Body” — “the Church” — is the result of a hearing of His voice which, while it may come through spoken and audible words, is more than they. It is possible to hear the verbal statement of truth, and that many times and over many years, but not to have heard His *voice*. It is possible, after having heard the truths often and long, suddenly to hear the voice, and the result to be as though we had never before heard at all, all is so new and wonderful. Living relationship with Christ is not an emotional or intellectual or volitional reaction to a presentation of Gospel truths; it is not by an influenced and persuaded signing of a card or “deciding for Christ”; it is not the effect of hot air evangelistic effort in which the soul is played upon, and all sorts of superficial and theatrical elements are brought into play. All this may have an apparent success on a large scale, but — always allowing for the sovereignty of God to reach some hearts through His Word — much of this may only be adding to the great tragedy with which the Church is confronted as one of its most difficult problems, namely a cheap regard for the Christian life, a mass of people who “have tried it and found it disappointing”, and a great number of “Christians” who have no real living and growing knowledge of the Lord. The fact that there is so much indifference to Christianity today and so little taking of it seriously is largely due to its having been vitiated and cheapened. No, the basis of everything in the New Testament is that, beyond anything audible, vocal, natural, temporal, earthly, the voice of the Son of God was heard deep down in the human spirit. This may or it may not be a voice of actual words, but when it happens the one concerned is truly able to say “The Lord has spoken to me”, or “I know that the Lord has made me aware of His will”. It is a voice — a power — *through* words, or without them, but not just words alone.

I said that everything depends upon this. “They that hear shall live”. Our very life — in the Divine sense — depends upon it. Our salvation issues from it. But what is true initially is true in principle continuously. For all the major decisions in life (*obvious and unmistakable duties excepted*) it must be on this wise. Paul based his whole ministry, and its specific aspects, upon this principle. When God speaks in this way, something is done, not only said. We know that something has happened to us or in us. Such a knowledge or work in us is absolutely essential to stability. We know of those who have radically and thoroughly changed their strongest positions more than once in the course of a few years. After taking up truth and affirming that it was the greatest thing that God had shown them, they subsequently repudiated it, and changed their attitude to it. When this happens there is only one thing to be said, apart from willful and deliberate disobedience, and that is that they never received it in the first place from heaven, but from men. It came by mental and emotional acceptance, either by hearing or reading and study. So strong was the impact, so seeming to answer a need or provide a way of self-realization, that it was taken up in the soul with zest. And those concerned were not really broken in soul and emptied to the dust. Thus, not being a hearing in the spirit, beyond nature, of the voice of the Son of God, it could not last, and the life has become characterised by lack of permanence. Of course this is quite a different matter from the changes which mark true development and growth. Very big changes may take place here, but not in our basic revelation. It is most important that, as to the basic knowledge of the will of God and revelation of Himself to us, we are at the end where we were at the beginning, although enlarged and perhaps with a change of merely outward features.

Further, in the moment when God speaks thus to us in Christ, eternity has broken through time; the super-temporal has been registered upon us. All that belongs merely to time and earth has been suspended, and in that moment that which was in God’s mind “before the world was”, and that which is His thought unto the ages of the ages yet to be is brought to our lives. Our very existence is bound up with it. I do not mean that our continuity is involved and that there is the peril of annihilation; but the very fact of our existence, of our having a being at all, is now to have its meaning for us, or has drawn near. Yes, it is, for all Divine intention, an eternal moment; “Upon this moment hangs eternity”.

Then again, and closely related to what we have just said, it is most solemnly important to recognize that this hearing of the voice of the Son of God is a sovereign act of God. That is, it is when and as He alone chooses. Unless God speaks, all men’s speaking is dead. Neither those who are in view nor those who are concerned for them

can choose the time. That sovereign decision is most clearly seen in Christ's attitude over Lazarus. There were many human factors at work, and He was involved in misunderstanding by His behaviour, but, nevertheless, He would not move until the time of God had come. The point for the moment is this: when that voice is heard it is God's time, and we can never say if or when that time will be again. In the passages at the head of this message, we have included that strange one, "Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word" (John 8:43). God had spoken, and they had not responded. and now they *cannot* hear, even when He speaks. On the Damascus road only Saul heard the voice. Those that travelled with him only heard the sound (Acts 9:7. marg., 26:14). There is a recorded instance of the same thing in the life of Christ (John 12:28,29).

Then, a question arises. What is the first and immediate effect of God speaking to us? It will not necessarily be exhilaration. Mere exhilaration may mean something false. Usually there will be no *natural* gratification resulting. Our natural interests and likes will have little or no place. Exhilaration is not necessarily *life*. If it is only exhilaration we should pause and examine ourselves. There is a great difference between rest, peace, and quiet joy, and mere exhilaration. It may more likely be a solemn awe and fearfulness, but with quiet reassurance.

The first effect of hearing the voice of the Son of God is the gift of faith. What could not before be contemplated now becomes possible. What was hopeless — and we knew it — is now a living prospect. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (I Peter 1:3). It is a resurrection hope. How hopeless and impossible the situation was with Lazarus until he heard the voice of the Son of God! Now, Paul says, "by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). He also says, "Faith cometh by hearing" (Romans 10:17). But it is the kind of hearing of which we have spoken. The strain goes out of life when faith in God enters, and the impossible mountains are no longer impossible.

We are nearing the end, but two things remain to be mentioned. If the dead are to hear the voice of the Son of God and live, it will only be the dead who do so. We have seen that the Lord Jesus was very deliberate in His determination that Lazarus should really be dead before He came on the scene. He first used figurative language. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth", but His disciples did not know His meaning, wherefore He said emphatically, "Lazarus is dead". The sisters knew what the state would be ordinarily after four days in an Easter clime and tomb. Was Lazarus dead? Indeed he was! This was essential to the Divine principle. We are too much alive, in our own efforts, interests, struggles, ambitions, activities, works, etc. to stand a chance of hearing this voice of the Son of God. Therefore our works are so much "dead works". There is the life of nature, but not the life of God. So many voices fill our ears, religious as well as worldly, and a mixture of both. If the greatest thing that can happen to mortals is to happen to us, we, like Paul, will have to be smitten to the ground and hear a voice (Acts 9:4). How often, under the hand of God has it been that the end has been the beginning. We have been brought to a place of despair and utter helplessness, so that like Paul we have "despaired of life", not only or necessarily physically, but spiritually. But afterward we have found that this was sovereignty at work in relation to an entirely new thing. There really is no hope until we are dead.

"I lay in dust life's glory dead, And from the ground there blossoms red Life that shall endless be".

Finally. What is the nature of your relationship with Christ? You may believe in the Christian doctrine of the Deity of Christ, and believe in it very intensely. But if it is only doctrine, a tenet of the Creed, an objective fact concerning Christ, it will not carry you through the terrific experiences which lie in the path of true Christians. John said that the object of his writing his Gospel was that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in His name. But he took pains to show that those who did so believe, had an experimental basis for their faith. How and why do you believe? Can you say truly — "because something has happened in me for which there is no accounting apart from God Himself. Emotions, reasonings, persuasions, cannot account for it. Human personalities, psychology, or any human or natural factor cannot account for it. It required God Almighty, and I found Him in Jesus Christ. It was the voice of the *Son of God*, and I lived, and live".

THE WELL WITHIN

*"The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up into eternal life."
(John 4:14)*

"And Isaac digged again the well of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them up..." (Genesis 26:18)

The Word makes it clear that from the Lord's side the life of the Holy Spirit, with all its up-welling and out-

flowing, should be a spontaneous thing. On God's side there are no difficulties. So far as He is concerned there is nothing more to be done to make possible the reality of the well within. The very fact that when the Lord Jesus ascended to glory in the power of a completed and perfected work, the Holy Spirit spontaneously came down from heaven, is proof that from God's side there was nothing remaining to be done to effect that release. The Lord had made full provision. On the other hand, though, such a spontaneity of up-welling and outflowing of the waters of the Spirit is not as general among Christians as it should be. It is our intention to seek some explanation of this limitation.

The well is there; the spring is provided. If we have believed into Christ and truly belong to Him, then His Spirit is present as the well within. There can be no doubt about this if we are true believers. But we may have seen a swampy patch, with all the evidences of water but no freshness or flow, and have discovered that although a spring existed, its water was interrupted by some stone or obstacle which hindered its flow. This can happen in human life. The spring of the Spirit may be present, but with various obstructions lying heavily upon it, preventing the outflow in a definite course.

Abraham was noted for the wells which he dug. He was a man of faith, and faith always digs wells. The Philistines, however, blocked them up with rubbish after he died, so that his son, Isaac, had to unstop them. Isaac speaks of the power of a risen life in union with heaven, and this gives a good indication of the meaning of the opened wells. The Old Testament type finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus, the greater Isaac who, in the power of His resurrection, ascension and heavenly life, has opened up anew those fountains of the Spirit which had been blocked and choked by many things which were contrary to the will of God. The wells are opened in His resurrection. The Spirit is now freely given. But we have to see that no obstacles are allowed to hinder the flow. Perhaps it will help us to do so, if we consider a few of the hindrances which need to be removed if the well within is to be unstopped and the water allowed to flow freely.

□ HINDRANCES IN THE REALM OF THE MIND

Firstly, there are hindrances in the realm of the mind. We have been told that man is quite unable to cope mentally with the spiritual and heavenly things of God. For this reason God has provided the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth, of revelation and of spiritual knowledge. So there will obviously be hindrances to the free flow of the Spirit if we try to reason things out for ourselves instead of heeding the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. If we try to think things through ourselves, we become involved in all sorts of problems and questions. We are specifically told that: "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (1 Corinthians 2:14), a fact which needs to be accepted and remembered by Christians for themselves, as well as for the world around. There will always arise moments of crisis or experiences full of perplexity and seeming contradiction, for which the only answer is that we must trust God. If we resolve that we will reason the matter out, or if we turn to other men for their explanations, we will never understand the ways of God. His Word is our only source of light. It will, at times, be hard to understand. It will, perhaps, be difficult or even impossible to explain. But if we heed its message we will be delivered from man's foolish reasoning, and we will have lifted off a load of rubbish which was blocking up the well within.

There are bound to be matters which defy analysis or argument, for the ways of God are past finding out. The real test is whether we will trust God when we cannot fathom His ways; whether we will deliberately and positively take up a position of faith reliance on His faithfulness. Even that may not provide us with an answer which satisfies our minds and solves all our intellectual problems, but it will bring us that blessed peace which is promised to those whose minds are stayed on the Lord. This is just the opposite of the mind of the man who is stayed on himself and his difficulty. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3). It does not say that his heart will be at peace because he knows the answers to all the questions. No! The basic thing is a faith attitude towards God's faithfulness. To act in this way is to remove a big stone, and I venture to say that it will clear the way for a new joy, and new peace and a new strength. The Holy Spirit has been pent up, blocked, hindered, arrested, by incessant reasonings of the natural mind. He is released by the simple exercise of a faith which feeds on God's Word and relies on His faithfulness.

□ HINDRANCES IN THE REALM OF THE HEART

There is another possible realm of hindrances to the up-welling of the Spirit, and this is the realm of the heart. The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of love. If there is coldness towards the Lord, a lack of true devotion to Him, then this is like a heavy stone which makes the life more like a quagmire than a fresh spring. Any reserve which we have, not in the knowing of God's will but in the willingness to do it, will inevitably stem the flow of the Spirit's power. It is always the work of God's enemy to clog up our lives by introducing love of self or love of the world, and it needs ruthless determination to remove the accumulated rubbish and re-dig the well in purity of devotion

to Christ.

It may well be, though, that the hindrances arise from lack of love to our fellow believers. We must remember that the Holy Spirit can never have free course in us and through us if we harbour unloving thoughts concerning other of God's children, let alone put those thoughts into actions. He is the Spirit of fellowship, so that if we fail in that realm then we fail in the matter of love. It is so easy to allow unworthy considerations to quench brotherly love, to be clogged up with resentment or to be wrongly influenced by our susceptibilities or hurt feelings. What is more, we find it the easiest thing in the world to say or hear unkind things about others, things which put them in a bad light and somehow make us feel self-righteous. We must not dismiss such matters as unimportant, for although they may seem small in themselves, they become the deposits which unite to clog up the well of the Spirit.

This matter of personal relationships is one in which we have to set ourselves definitely to digging out the earthiness which stops up the wells of the Spirit. We must refuse to speak and refuse to listen to those critical accounts of other believers which would grieve them if they heard and do grieve the Spirit who is always present and who always hears. More than that, we have to be active in positive cultivation of fellowship. To some it is quite natural to be independent. For them deference to others represents a major difficulty. Sometimes they may deliberately ignore or despise others, but sometimes they just prefer to do it alone and never seriously think of inter-relatedness and interdependence.

The Word of God, however, is most explicit in ordering us to esteem one another, to submit to one another and to live and work together. The Holy Spirit demands that the people of God live according to a team order of things, that they should be governed by a family spirit. Anything which is of an isolated or detached nature, which fails to recognize and fully accept the family thought of God, is a check on Him. By failing to observe fellowship we quench the Spirit. It is not only a matter of avoiding giving offence but of active pursuit of fellowship. Some may be wondering why there is so little up-springing from the inner well, when they are sitting back in a wrong kind of modesty, failing to bring in their own personal contribution to fellowship life and ministry. Unkindness is not the only obstacle in this realm. Shyness and diffidence can equally rest like a stone on the flow of life. The only thing to do is to dig it up and move it away. Get in, get right in, and let yourself go! Do not always choose the back seat because you like to be left alone, but come forward in the Lord's name and give the Holy Spirit a free course in your lives. He is well able to check you if you become too self-assertive, but there is little He can do if your well is all stopped up with fears and inhibitions.

□ HINDRANCES IN THE REALM OF DAILY LIVING

There is one more area of life in which this hindering work may be found, and that is that the flow of the Spirit may be checked by inconsistencies in the daily life. The question which constantly faces us is whether or not we want to know the free flow from the well within. Do we want that springing up of living water, of which the Lord Jesus spoke? Do we want that, as He promised, rivers of living water shall flow out from our inner life? If we do, then we must always give serious consideration to anything which may serve as a blockage. Any disobedience, yes, any reservation in obedience, from our side will be sure to hinder the flow from God's side, acting as a deterrent to the Holy Spirit in our lives. We can never know the well springing up and the river flowing out if at any point where God has revealed His will, we fail in the matter of obedience.

This well is choked by disobedience to the known will of God. It is choked and blocked by inconsistency of walk. The Lord wants more than mental agreement with His Word; He expects to see it working out in practical terms. He is concerned with how we spend our time, how we manage our financial affairs, how we behave both alone and before others. He watches us in the home and at our work, as well as in our fellowship activities, always looking for a walk worthy of the gospel which we believe and preach. Not that He desires us to have a narrow life. Far from it! The Spirit has come to bring enrichment and fulfillment to us. God's command to us, though, is that we must not quench the Spirit nor must we grieve Him; in other words that we do not allow any rocks, stones or rubbish to accumulate as a hindrance to the springing-up well. We need to watch the practical expression of our daily life and so avoid a quagmire of suppression, whereas God provides for a well of water springing up into eternal life.

From "Toward the Mark" July–August 1976.

TRAINING IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

“When Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan.” (Genesis 14:14)

“His trained men, born in his house.” This raises some interesting questions. It must refer to a big encampment, for they were not living in an actual house but in tents. The reference is really to a household, and it is in this connection that the word is used in the New Testament with regard to God’s house. We have been born into a household (Hebrews 3:6), and this household is meant, above all other things, to be a place of spiritual training and education.

Whatever else Abram’s men were trained in, they were certainly trained for war. We also have to learn that the House of God is the place of training for spiritual conflict. The household of God is the relationship and fellowship of believers: it is not a place, but the relationship in the Holy Spirit into which we are born again. It is the sphere of our training, so that we do not live our lives in the realm of mere theories, but are subject to the disciplining work of the Holy Spirit.

There are many blessings in the House of God, many amenities which are for our good, our comfort and our protection. We thank God for these but must never forget that this also is the place for our spiritual education. Spiritual training is not academic. It consists of learning the lessons of life together in fellowship with other believers, and because of this we may at times feel that we would like to run away and escape from such testing.

“Trained men, born in his house.” What is the meaning of love if it is not a corporate thing? What is the meaning of patience, if it has not to do with other people? What is the meaning of so many things in the Christian life if they are not found in the context of related life? It is in this community life that we are tested. It is there that we find our real discipline and training.

“He led forth his trained men.” Notice why he had to do this. Lot, the compromiser, was in desperate need. There is so often the difficult person, constantly getting himself and his friends into trouble, the awkward man, the selfish man who has put his own interests first and suited his own pleasure without seeking the will of God. At this time Lot had been captured, with all his family and possessions, and carried off by enemies. Abram might have rubbed his hands and said, ‘Good riddance to bad rubbish! Thank God he has gone!’. But he did not do so. It was for this ‘weak brother’, this failing brother, this difficult brother who hardly seemed to deserve help, that Abram led forth his trained men, and he did not return until he could bring back this needy ‘brother’. It is a lesson for us and an indication of what it means to become a member of the Father’s household.

It hardly becomes any of us to judge or condemn Lot, for in fact we are all very awkward people. We all are the cause of trouble for the Lord. How wonderful to remember that “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the uttermost” (John 13:1). That is a household matter; learning to love like that in God’s House. Have you never felt that everything would be better if only some difficult brother or sister could be taken far away? This action of Abram’s reminds us that the household in which we are being trained demands willingness to fight for the weaker fellow believer.

Not that Abram would allow himself to be involved in Lot’s compromise. No, he would fight for his failing brother, seeking to win and save him, but he would have nothing to do with Sodom and its king. The king was grateful to him for seeming to support his cause, but Abram would have none of it. He refused Sodom’s gifts and their flattery. He kept himself unspotted from the world, but he devoted his trained household to giving aid to the man of compromise. He himself was in God’s House and had had to learn lessons of obedience and sanctification. Somehow we never think of Abraham as a fighting man, and yet the life of faith is one in which we have to learn to fight the good fight.

After Abram had left Ur and entered into the land of promise, he might well have presumed that he had arrived and that since he was now in his God-appointed place he could expect an experience of tranquillity. We, too, are apt to expect that once we have obeyed the Lord and stepped out in faith we ought to enjoy a smooth experience of serene contentment. Are we not in the place of God’s purpose, of His will and His covenant? We have to learn, as Abram did, that the opposite of this is true. To be committed to the totality of God’s will as a member of His household is to find that one difficulty overcome only means a greater one yet to be faced. The realm of the greatest spiritual values is the realm of the most difficult education, the sphere of the fiercest and most persistent conflict.

It seems that whatever else these three hundred odd men were being trained for, they were called to enter a war and pursue a foe. This is one of the great lessons that we who have been born into the House of God have to learn, the lesson of spiritual warfare. We need to be trained in this matter for there are enemies — spiritual enemies — who will contest the will of God and harass God’s people. It is not enough just to have experiences, however deep these may be. It is not enough only to have history. We have to learn the meaning of our experiences,

to be able to extract the Lord's intentions from our history. We have to learn in the House of God, which is the school of holiness.

According to Paul, one of the great purposes of the Scriptures is that we may know "how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15). Abraham was able to train others because he himself had to learn severe lessons. While he was in Chaldea it was different, but now he had moved on with God and what belonged in his new life was altogether different from what belonged to Chaldea. In Chaldea he could perhaps do things which he could not now do in the land. If we are to be trained to face and conquer the spiritual enemies of God's purposes, then we need that Bible truths should be wrought into our own personal experience so that we become embodiments of those truths. No teaching will ever be true teaching if it is not worked out in experience. And it is in the House of God, the related life together of believers, that such experience is obtained.

The temptation is to try to get away from such spiritual discipline, to break away from fellowship, to ignore the implications and great values of being born into God's house and trained there. Rather than succumb to such temptations by dividing up and separating, we should recognize that for our training in heavenly things we need to maintain the unity of the Spirit. The moment will arise, as it did in Abram's household, when there is a great challenge from God's enemies which will call us forth to make a stand, to prove the power of God to give us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, and so much will depend upon our having submitted to the discipline of being trained by the Holy Spirit and prepared for the spiritual conflict by the tests which will come to us in our fellowship life.

The very fact that we are considering God's great servant, Abraham, stresses the need for obedient and persevering faith. There must have been many times for him when it seemed that, far from enjoying the fulfillment of that hope which was based upon the strength of the Lord's word, everything was becoming less likely and more impossible. But he kept on believing. No doubt this was the kind of training which the rest of the household shared with him. And in the case we have been considering, there was a total victory and complete recovery of what seemed to have been lost. They "pursued as far as Dan". They did more than that. They returned in great triumph and demonstrated for us the New Testament assurance that "faith is the victory that overcomes the world".

We are "in a great house" (2 Timothy 2:20-21). Let us so respond to the Spirit's training and sanctifying work that we may be vessels unto honour, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work.

From "Toward the Mark" November-December 1981.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

What is the Church? It is Christ in living union with His own. That is the Church.

You do not build a special building and call it "the Church". You do not have a special organization — a religious institution — which you call "the Church". Believers in living union with the risen Lord constitute Church. This is the reality, not the figure.

Now, in union with Christ risen, all human limitations are transcended. This is one of the wonders of Christ risen as a living reality. We are brought into a realm of capacities which are more than human capacities, where — because of Christ in us — we can do what we never could do naturally.

Our relationships are new relationships — they are with heaven. Our resources are new resources — they are in heaven. That is why Paul wrote to the Corinthians that God hath chosen weak things, the foolish things, the things which are not... that by them He might bring to naught the wise, the mighty, the things which are. Why did God appoint it so? Because it is not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit... and to show that there are powers, energies, and abilities for His own which transcend all the greatest powers and abilities of this world.

That is the history of God's people... and that is where so many people go wrong. Men of the world look upon Christians and, for the most part, do not think much of them. They measure them by the standards of the world and say: "Well, they are rather a poor lot; their caliber is not much!"

But that is God's way, and the world never can measure that. Nor can that be done by human wisdom, strength, or ability at its greatest. God has chosen weak things for that. Why? Simply because weak things, in their dependence, are the best instruments — the best means — of allowing God to show that such works are not of any human sufficiency at all... but all of Himself.

Please do not take comfort from the fact that God has chosen weak things and foolish things... and say: "Well, I am that — and therefore it is all right!" The point is: Are you, in God's hand, bringing to naught the mighty and the wise? Is it not a case of our resting back on our weakness and our foolishness and our nothingness... and our saying: "That applies to me; that is all right; that is all that matters!"

That is not all that matters. The thing that matters is that I — being weak — may know resurrection union with Christ in all His might and power; and, in that union with Him, mighty spiritual things should be done through me. That is the positive side.

We may know the Lord in a personal and inward way. We may draw upon the Lord's resources in a personal and inward way. All that the Lord has is available to us inwardly. Heaven is no longer closed when we are united with Christ on the ground of His atoning work.

July, 1936

WHEN THE BOOKS ARE OPENED

Reading: Romans 16.

An outstanding feature of this chapter is that people are appreciated as people. The Letter itself is a masterpiece of spiritual instruction, Paul's supreme exposition of the infinite range of redemption. The more striking, then, that place should be given for the names of these simple people. Doctrines can be considered and held in a detached way, but what value is there in abstract truths if they are not expressed in terms of individual people?

When a person is led to trust in Christ he does not become one more cipher for statistics, but a live being who matters to God. The phrase "in Christ" is repeated eight times here, for this is the significance of the names listed, not what the people were in themselves but what was their spiritual measure in Christ. The apostle had no thoughts of social niceties or merely of paying compliments; what mattered to him was the degree in which these friends of his were counting for Christ. This, of course, presents a personal challenge to me. I wonder what Paul would have written against my name if I had lived then. If he had needed to write a salutation to me, what could he have said about the quality of my life "in Christ"?

Why was Paul so lovingly drawn out to these people? Perhaps because he could observe the fulfillment in them of the revelation given to him of the power of the gospel of Christ. It must have been refreshing to pass from his exposition of the theory of redemption to the living outworking of his doctrines. So it is that I ask myself what fruit there is in my own life from the volumes of teaching which I have been giving in my preaching. Are God's people being helped, are they being made better servants of Christ by reason of my labours? If not, then in my case all that Paul wrote and all I teach goes for nothing.

In Rome there was one of the churches that Paul had not yet visited, but even at this juncture there were a number of people there whom he knew personally and even intimately. This is more than a mere item of interest. It seems to indicate something of how in those days the gospel spread abroad and the churches were established. For one reason or another, for business purposes or by political compulsion, people had to move about the world, even as they do today. This may have been inconvenient and at times most unjust, but behind that movement there was the sovereignty of God, using everything for the speeding up of the work of the gospel.

This gives us encouragement, to know that once our lives are wholly given over to the Lord, His sovereignty will govern and overrule all the ordinary affairs and circumstances of daily life and make them contribute to His purposes and glory. Because of the cruel decree of the Emperor Claudius, Aquila and Priscilla had to abandon their home and business and become displaced persons in Corinth, but the sequence of events and their commitment to Christ resulted in the honoured place which they have in this list which we are considering. Their case opens up to us a world within a world, a world of spiritual romance. No doubt as we pass from one of the

names to another in this list, we would discover that there had been marvellous providential working of God in each case.

What is more, when we look more deeply into the chapter we find that the people here referred to not only had their lives overruled by God but were themselves intent on the Lord's business and ready to take responsibility for His interests. They were not just passengers, just people who happened to come and go, individuals in the crowd; they each got involved to the utmost in the affairs of the kingdom of Christ. Paul's comments and allusions make it clear that the gospel was furthered and the churches established because these men and women put the Lord's interests before everything else, in their work and in their journeys. They had the urge of the divine imperative. Like their Lord before them, their lives were not at the mercy of chance but characterised by the word "must", just as His was.

In the final book of the Bible we are told of the book of life being opened, but we are also informed that there are other records which relate to our personal histories: "the books were opened" (Revelation 20:12). May it be that these books represent God's evaluation of the lives of His children? If so, what will be the eternal verdict concerning my life? What will the books have to say of my response to the divine imperatives of grace in my life? Thank God that all my sins are blotted out by the wonder-working power of the blood of Christ, so that there can be no accusations against me. Of that we can all be certain. But I have to realize that although there is no mention of my faults, there will also be no record of any personal features or virtues which seem to assume so much importance to me now. No, what will be recorded for eternity will surely be that which has been true of me "in Christ". It is what is being enacted daily in my life and walk with God which will be written there, and that alone is what matters. What will history — God's history — say about me? What will be His verdict?

In the case of these people, it was Paul's own life which had been enriched by them, as he readily acknowledged. Phoebe had "succoured" him; Priscilla and Aquila had "laid down their necks" for him; Rufus's mother had been like a mother to him and Tertius wrote for him. None of these were apostles, yet by helping Paul they had contributed something, however small, to an apostolic ministry. They could not do it all, and neither for that matter could he, but the whole divine purpose was realized because each played their part, labouring in Christ and for Christ.

So the reading of this heartening list of Paul's friends challenges us as to how much our lives are counting for God as the days go by. We are led to believe that the apostle could not always give such cheerful comments on those whom he knew and worked with. There were unhappy exceptions, those who, like Demas, seem to have shrugged aside divine imperatives and taken their own course. They are not mentioned here. Paul writes appreciatively of each of those who in simplicity remained devoted to the Lord Jesus.

It is people who matter! Nobody is a nonentity in Christ. There is a place for each one of us in the divine record. And when the stories written in the books are disclosed, we will exclaim, as Paul does at the end of this chapter and this Letter to the Romans: "To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ... be glory for ever." Amen.

From "Toward the Mark" May-June 1988.

SOME PRINCIPLES OF THE HOUSE OF GOD

Reading: Psalm 132

"Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, which he made ready in the place that David had appointed, in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite" 2 Chron 3:1

There is much related Scripture which we ought to read, but must only refer to as we proceed, because of our limited space.

It needs no arguing amongst us, I think, that the centre of God's presence among men, namely, the house of God, is a matter of first importance. I have said the centre of God's presence, for the house of God embraces and relates to every thing else which is of concern or interest to the Lord. The house of Lord is within a wider range of God's interests and concerns. Ultimately, there will be wide ranges to which it ministers, to which God manifests Himself through it. It is the centre of His presence.

From a consideration of its great type here in the Old Testament, the temple, we are able to learn something of the principles which constitute the foundation and basis of that central dwelling place of God.

□ THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

The passage which we have just read is a key to so much, both historically and spiritually. I begin by pointing out again that the first principle of the house of God, the dwelling place of the Lord, is the triumph of faith and obedience when all else has been brought down to the dust. All Abraham's hopes and expectations, and the promises of God and the covenant of God with him, centred in Isaac. Beyond and apart from Isaac, Abraham had nothing. And then God said, "*Take now thy son ... Isaac...and offer him...for a burnt offering*" (Gen 22:2). In the words from Job: "*Lay thou thy treasure in the dust*" (Job 22:24) And the writer to the Hebrews makes a point of that — that he in whom all the covenant and promises were centred was being offered up by Abraham (Heb 11:17, 18). Looked at from one side only, Abraham was severing the very arteries of life, parting with everything of hope, prospect, possibility; all was, from that stand point, brought to ashes. But for the intervention of God, Isaac would very soon have been reduced to ashes. In effect he was. So far as Abraham's heart attitude and obedience were concerned, Isaac was already in ashes. The wood was there for kindling, the altar and the knife were ready. But faith triumphed through obedience, and that very mount Moriah subsequently became the site of the temple, the house of God. The house of God is built on that sort of thing.

This foreshadows Calvary. From purely earthly standpoints Calvary was the end of all hope. It was a laying of treasure in the dust; it was ashes; it was an end. We know how it was for those around that Cross: it seemed the end of everything. But on the part of the one central figure of that great universal drama it was faith's obedience unto death, yea, the death of the Cross; and the house of God was and is built upon that. It is a principle. It is the great reality, the great doctrine of Christ. But it is of practical application, namely, that the house of God can only be grounded and founded and built as that sort of thing goes on.

□ THE LAYING DOWN OF LIFE

A related principle is the continuous laying down of its own soul by the Church, letting go of its own life in obedience and in faith, when all is dark, when all seems hopeless beyond. Some course of obedience is required, calling for us to do that which seems to be without prospect or hope, and which involves, therefore, the laying down of our lives, of our souls. It is the way of building. It has ever been like that.

When young men and women have given up all the prospects of this world and laid their treasures in the dust and gone forth at the command of the Lord, they have laid everything in ashes so far as this world's hopes and prospects are concerned. The Church has been built in that way. Even when it is not like that in great acts of life's vocation, it is a daily thing, a letting go of our own interests in obedience to the Lord, in faith in the Lord. It is thus the building goes on. I could work that down to very fine points and show how often the house of God is delayed and arrested in its progress by the withholding of something on which the Lord has laid his finger and said 'I want that'.

However there is the general principle, the triumph of faith through obedience when all is in the dust. Abraham believed God, and that great triumph provided God with the site for His temple, the great example and type of that spiritual house which is central to the fulfillment of all His purposes. God dwells in that sort of thing. But that central thing has to go through the depths. That which is the very heart of God's presence, to which He commits Himself, has to know stripping more than others. This involves a deep work where faith is brought to perfection through very deep testing.

□ FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN HIS SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Alongside of that (very deep testing) there is that factor of perfect fellowship with God in His sacrificial love. We have often made that point when speaking of Abraham's great step into the heart of the One who withheld not His Son, His Well-beloved, but freely gave Him up for us all. It was indeed a movement right into fellowship with the sacrificial nature, the giving unto cost, of the love of God. That is the only way in which the house of God is established. There has to be a giving unto cost because of love. It is quite evident that Abraham loved God more than he loved Isaac, dear and important though Isaac was. Abraham saw that to obey was of greater importance than even to keep this tremendous treasure; and that is love. That is what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord — that element of fear in love.

I am sure you know what that means. If there is someone of great account to you, and whose love you esteem very highly, you are always very sensitive about causing that one disappointment. That is the nature of the fear of the Lord. Abraham feared God. The house of God is built upon that kind of fear. It is of very practical and every day meaning — the love of God in our hearts leading to costliness in our sacrifice, our giving.

□ THE GLORY OF MAN ABASED

Then passing from Abraham to David; this threshing floor of Ornan, the site of the temple, represented and stood for the undercutting of Satan's man-glorifying work and the deep abasement of man himself. You remember that Satan incited David to number Israel — a thing which even a carnal man like Joab could see through, for he said, "*The Lord make His people a hundred times as many as they are: but, my Lord the King, are they not all my Lord's servants? why doth my Lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of guilt unto Israel?*" (1 Chron. 21:3). 'The Lord has done very much, and will do more, but do not begin to count heads, to take account of how big your resources are and to glory in the greatness of your kingdom'.

Joab was a carnal man, but it seems that some carnal men sometimes see more than Christians do as to principles. But David set aside Divine wisdom and good human wisdom, and insisted on the numbering of Israel. You know the result. All came from Satan's prompting of David to do something which would glorify man and make much of his resources and achievements. The Lord came out and smote it hip and thigh, and that Satanic work of glorifying man was undercut and man was deeply abased. David was a sorry picture when he came to the threshing floor of Ornan. Oh, that man is now humbled to the dust!

This has to be done before there can be any building of God's house. Satan's work to make much of man has to be completely undercut. The glory of man, and man's desire for any kind of glory for himself, have to be abased. This is a house for the name of the Lord and for no other name in heaven, in earth, or in hell. "*My glory*", says the Lord, "*will I not give to another*" (Isa. 42:8).

The Lord does that all the time. Oh, the horrible display of human flesh in the realm of Divine things! Oh, the reputations made in the realm of what is of God! Oh, the delight to have a place in the Church! Oh, how often this flesh is active for its own pleasure and gratification! The Lord is hitting it hard all the time, driving hard blows — to ensure that His house is on the right foundation, not on any thing that is of ourselves. It does come home to us.

"*Lord remember for David all his humiliations*" (Ps. 132:1). That last word is more accurate than the one used in our translation. "Afflictions" is the word in the text, but that does not convey the true meaning unless you add other words and say, 'The afflictions with which he afflicted himself'. He is saying, 'How I humiliated myself! I would not allow my eyes to have sleep, I would not allow my bed to entice me, I would not enjoy my own house; I humiliated myself, deprived myself, in order to find a place for the Lord'. And the Lord does require that humiliation. He brings about this breaking down of man in order that the house should be rightly based. That explains His dealings with us. He will not let us be anything.

If we are really to be the dwelling place of God, then we are to be nothing in ourselves. Do not look for reputation, do not try to make an impression, do not stand on your own dignity, do not do any of those things in any way whatever which will give you prominence with people and make them think something of you. It will not pass with the Lord.

So let us get rid of it, every bit of it, and recognize what we are in God's sight. He is going to bring that about; so if we try to make people think we are other than we are in order to get an advantage, we are contradicting the principle of the house of God. All self-importance must go, and all desire for recognition. All that sort of thing has to be wiped out. The house of God is not founded on that. God will not have it. Man is abased, and all the other is the devil's work. It comes from him in whose heart pride was found.

□ THE MEETING OF MERCY AND JUDGMENT

Then let me remind you that the threshing floor of Ornan, the site of the temple was the place where judgment and mercy met. We sing

*With mercy and with judgment
My web of time He wove.*

There must be judgment. It was so in the case of David. But judgment is only one side. Judgment and mercy met on that threshing floor that day and kissed each other, and the temple resulted. Judgment has to begin at the house of God, but, thank God, it is not judgment unto utter destruction. It is mercy mingled with judgment, and the end is the triumph of mercy over judgment. That is Calvary, that is the house of God. We shall find it like that all the time. There will be judgment; it has to be; we know it quite well.

The Lord does not let pass things that are contrary to the principles of His house. If we only knew it, as Paul tried to make the Corinthians know it, many are suffering today in numerous ways because they are not observ-

ing the principles of the house of God (*I Cor. 11:30*). There is that side; it goes on. But oh, God only does that in order to have mercy. It is mercy that is His end. So He founds and so He builds His house.

□ GOD UNDER NO DEBT TO MAN

No indebtedness to man is allowed to be represented by God's house. How insistent David was, how alive now to Divine principles! The refining fires wake us up to principles. It was so with David on another occasion. You remember how the ark was put on the cart. David had forgotten the Scripture. He went through a time of suffering until at last he came to see the Divine principle in the Word of God and put things right (*I Chron. 13 & 15*). Here he is alive to principles again. When Ornan wanted to give David the threshing floor, David said, 'No, I will pay you in full. No man shall ever say that the house of God is in debt to men; no other shall ever be able to say afterward, "Yes I gave God that; the site of that temple is my gift"'.

No Ornan is brought out of all holding. Man has no place as a creditor in the house of God; there is no debt to man, he is brought right out. You can apply that.

□ THE THRESHING OF THE CORN

This was a threshing-floor, the place where all is threshed out before the Lord. No chaff here; nothing that is not real, genuine, true, solid; nothing that will not contribute to building up. It must be the true corn. God is always seeking to do this. The house of God is a threshing-floor. All our chaff, our vanity, our emptiness, is being got rid of, all that really does not count. God is after that which builds His house, or, to change the metaphor, the Body. He is after the corn. The chaff must go. In our very relationship to the Lord amongst His people, as forming His house, we find He is winnowing, threshing, getting rid of our vanity, our unreality, our chaff. But in so doing He is getting reality. He is getting what is solid, what will stand, what will feed. This is the basis of His building.

All that we have said should work out in very practical ways. The figures employed are but types and symbols, but the realities are in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and He will unceasingly press for their fulfillment in the lives of God's people. Let us see to it that as He works in our case He has our full cooperation.

THE WILL OF GOD IN RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE (1)

□ OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD

These messages and this ministry are based upon a threefold supposition, or assumption:

1. That you have a very real concern to know the will of God.
2. That you are quite prepared to consider anything that may be a help to you in that direction.
3. That you are of a mind to obey any light that the Lord may give as to His will.

Given that foundation, I think the Lord will find a clear way of meeting us and speaking to us.

The business of any servant of the Lord is, perhaps in many ways, to bring His people to know what is His will concerning them, and it is on the heart of this servant of the Lord, if He will help, to give you a fuller understanding of what that good and perfect will of God is. We will come back to that more specifically as we go on.

The Bible, which is the charter of the Christian faith, is altogether occupied with that one thing. You can read through your Bible, and perhaps you will find some of it rather tedious, and other things you might not understand, but the whole Bible, altogether, is concerned with that one thing — the will of God. So it is as well to read the Bible everywhere in that relationship: What has this to do with the will of God?

□ GOD MOVING ACCORDING TO PURPOSE

In other words, the Bible is a revelation of God moving according to purpose. That is only another way of speaking about the will of God. God is seen, from the first words in the Bible to the last, moving according to purpose, moving *IN* and *WITH* purpose. He is a God who is motivated by one final and all-inclusive object, which we understand in New Testament language as God's eternal purpose.

The first section of the Bible, which consists of the first five Books, shows us, clearly, fully and meticulously, God moving according to purpose. It is a section of movement forward, and although in the fifth book, the Book of Deuteronomy, there is a retrospective aspect, a looking back with this word: "Thou shalt remember all the way

which the Lord thy God hath led thee" (8:2), even that retrospective aspect has a forward aspect connected with it, for the remembering is related to what is yet to be. As you know, it is the book of people between a past history and a new history of the future, and it is looking back to pick up the lessons of the past in order to carry them into the future. So we move into the Book of Joshua with all that the past history has taught as the foundation, and how meticulous the Lord is in that book of Deuteronomy! He is reiterating and reemphasizing, and laying a very sound and very particular foundation for the future. It is important to note that in the light of what we are going to say, for we are going to be occupied with the laws of God by which His will — which is His purpose — is realized, fulfilled and accomplished in His people. So all this first section has the future in view, with the will of God governing.

The last section of the Old Testament, the Prophets, is occupied with the tragedy of lost purpose. The cry of the Prophets is that God's will has not been realized and fulfilled. It is a tragic cry of failure and disappointment, and you must listen to it, for as you listen to these Prophets and hear their anguished cry over these people, you are hearing just this: 'What God meant has not been realized, and that is a terrible thing!' The Prophets have a voice of tragedy, pathos and anguish, because God has been disappointed over His purpose in these people, and they have missed what He intended for them.

So we have the first and last sections of the Old Testament. We are not here occupied with the whole of the Old Testament, but just notice these in connection with the will of God. Of course, I am talking about the big, comprehensive will of God, not about what we might call the little wills of God with which we are occupied every day when we say: 'What is the Lord's will for me in this, or that?' No, that is not what I am talking about but, mark you, all those expressions of the Divine will in the particular matters and situations are gathered into the big will, and until you get into that big will, you really do not have the ground for the little wills of God, the particular application of that will.

Turn over to the New Testament, and in the first section God is taking up His purpose again. Now He is taking it up in the Person of His Son, and in Him the purpose and will of God is embodied and personified. Now it is all gathered into a *PERSON*. It has been expressed, as the writer of the Hebrew Letter says, in many different ways and "by divers portions" at different times. Now the whole thing is summed up in the Person of Jesus Christ, who says: "I am come... to do thy will O God" (Hebrews 10:7). This whole will and purpose of God, therefore, is personified, or incarnated, in Jesus Christ, God's Son; and although you have heard that a thousand times and have listened to many, many messages about it, it may not have occurred to you that there is one statement by the Lord Jesus which comprehends all this: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). That is a comprehensive statement as to the whole will of God.

"I AM THE WAY"

What do you have a way for? To get somewhere! A way implies a goal, a moving toward an object. 'I am the way of this eternal purpose of God. I am the way of its realization. I am the way, the embodiment of the will of God.' "I am come to do thy will, O my God." The way is a Person.

"I AM THE TRUTH"

That simple clause, or definition, is so immense that it needs many hours! Men have been preaching on it for centuries. In effect the Lord Jesus is saying: 'I am set in a realm which has been deceived and led away from the will of God, from the Divine purpose. I am in a world that is now a lie in its constitution. I am the truth over against all that which is false in the human race, in the creation, in this universe.' If the will of God is all-comprehending, vast, and great, the lie of the devil is an immense thing, and it is something that has to be overcome in you, in me, and in the whole race. Truth has to be put into our constitution to destroy the lie that is there.

I dare not dwell upon that, but just indicate it in the connection with which we are concerned — the will of God. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). We talk about 'conversion', and, you know, a fundamental factor in conversion, in turning round in the opposite way, is turning from what is false to what is true, coming *INTO* the truth of God, as to why we have a being in His purpose, why He is dealing with us as He is according to His great will, and what it all means. Do you and I not need every day to know the good of that conversion, the real and true meaning of God in Christ for us?

"I AM THE LIFE"

We have far too small an idea of that! There is a marvellous statement in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians, where he speaks of the life which God foreordained unto His glory. Before ever the world was created and man upon it, God's thought was centred in this thing called 'life'. It was in His eternal counsels. That is the battle-

ground of the ages, and is the key to so much — what God means by life, the life of God's eternal purpose, the life of His all-captivating will, the life which the Lord Jesus is.

This is the day which is called 'Good Friday' and we were reading this morning of the Lord Jesus, having received the sentence of crucifixion, walking toward the Hill with Simon carrying His Cross, and the women of Jerusalem weeping and wailing for Him. I was impressed again with the way in which He turned to them and said: 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me. There is no need to weep for Me. You weep for yourselves and for your children, but not for Me!' What does that mean? That this Cross, toward which He was going, on which He was going so soon to be impaled, and all that was going to fall upon Him there, was not the end. The women may have thought so, but He knew that it was not. Even then tears for Him were not justified: "... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross..." (Hebrews 12:2). The way of the Cross was life, not death. This was how He was going to secure that for which He had come, and which God had intended for man all down the ages, and from before the world was.

"I AM the way, the truth, and the life." Dear friends, we cannot get outside of that! If we comprehended what those three terms mean, that would be all that we need. They compass everything.

The New Testament, then, introduces this eternal will and purpose of God in a Person; but what is the rest of the New Testament about after the Gospels? It is simply the working out of these three things. All the rest of the New Testament is gathered into the way that Christ is, the truth that is in Jesus, and the life that is by His death and resurrection.

Having said that, we can come to our particular message for this time.

□ THE DIVINE LAWS OF REALIZING THE DIVINE PURPOSE

We must read some Scriptures to get to this:

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (or, as the margin says, "deal wisely") — (Joshua 1:8).

"And now, O Israel, hearken unto the statutes and unto the judgement, which I teach you, for to do them; that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:1,2).

"These words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thy house, and upon thy gates" (Deuteronomy 6:6–9).

"He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

The Divine laws of realizing the Divine purpose of knowing, of doing the will of God, which is the ultimate thing in Christianity. Here it is perfectly clear that it is the law of the absolute government of the Word of God.

We have read from Joshua, and we have intimated already that the Book of Joshua is the resumption, after a nation's failure and perishing in the wilderness, of the Divine will and purpose, and moving forward now under that government. Right there at the beginning, the foundation of this new movement and all that is involved in it, all that it means against a repetition of the failure and tragedy that has been, is the meticulous observance of the Word of God. The Word and the will of God go together, and there is no progress in this great calling into which you and I are called in the mind, the purpose and the will of God except by the Word of God. There must be obedience to the Word, the cherishing of the Word, the binding of the Word upon our lives in all matters. I have said how meticulous the Lord was in that Book of Deuteronomy because, on the one side, there was the terrible tragedy which had taken place and, on the other side, the tremendous prospect. There, in chapter after chapter, He is saying: 'Remember what I said? Remember what I said! Call to remembrance all that I have said to you.' The law of prospect is the government of God's Word. The people had been forty years on probation in the wilderness, and the one thing that stood over that forty years was a testing of the heart as to the Word of God. Remember Deuteronomy 8:2: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble thee, to PROVE thee, to know what was in thine heart, *WHETHER THOU WOULDST KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS, OR NO.*" In other words: 'Whether thou wouldst obey His Word, and

what place His Word had in thy heart.’

The probation of life is always the testing of a wilderness experience. The trials of the journey and of the experiences are, in God’s mind, to see what is in our hearts, whether we really have a heart for the Lord and whether, after all our professions and protestations, the will of God is really *THE* thing which governs our whole life. The Lord is trying us out on that — “Whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no”. The testing is by the Word of God, and perhaps we know something of that daily?

So we come to Joshua, and a new phase begins on the other side of Jordan with a reaffirmation that the Word of God is to be kept always before the face, on their arms, on their foreheads, on the thresholds of their homes. The Word is always there to govern them. They were a called people, called by God out of Egypt, and called by His name, but the calling is not enough. We have all been called, but, after the call, comes the testing; then, when the testing has been proved, we are chosen.

□ THE RESULTS OF FAILURE TO OBEY GOD’S WORD

Everything in the Word of God turns upon this one thing: the government of God’s Word. Where the Word of God was not honoured there was disaster, and because of failure to do what God had made known as to His will there was calamity. Again and again in the Old Testament we find disaster as the result of a failure to keep the Word of God always before them. Even Moses, who had sacrificed and suffered so much for those people, was at the last forbidden by the Lord to ask any more that he might go into the land. Why? Because the Lord had said something and Moses had not meticulously observed what He had said. ‘Well,’ you say, ‘that is terrible! He is a hard God.’ Ah! but you must remember that it was not just Moses — Moses has attained and obtained now, for he was with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration — but it was the people for ever afterwards who had to learn this lesson: you cannot violate anything that the Lord has said without forfeiting and losing something.

Then we remember David bringing the ark up to Jerusalem and making a new cart on which to carry it. But there was a disaster on the way. The whole thing, about which they seemed to be having such a good time and feeling that they were being prospered and blessed of the Lord, turned into that threshing-floor calamity. Uzzah died before the Lord, and David was angry with Him that day. He turned the ark aside and went and sulked, nursing his grievance with the Lord. But he got over that, and we do get over these things! We have those bad times with the Lord, but when we get over them He is able to show us the meaning of what He has done. David went back to the Word of the Lord and found the Lord’s instructions about the carrying of the ark. He had not said: ‘Thou shalt make a new cart’. That was not in the Word at all, indeed, it was another heathen idea. Then David saw and said: ‘Oh, it is written that the Levites shall carry the ark.’ The tragedy of that day, with the all good intentions, was because the Word of God was overlooked and missed, but the Lord never overlooks His Word.

There may be many secret tragedies in our lives, many arrests in our spiritual progress, not because our motives were not good, but the best motives may just miss the particular thought of God, and He does not substitute a good motive for something that He has laid down as law.

This all sounds very terrible, but we must take it further, and this is where our hearts are really going to be touched. The answer to these failures was not just a sort of legal, mechanical way of observing some statement in the Bible. The issue was very much bigger than that! If you will look at every such instance in the Old Testament, the big and the small, you will see that it was always a matter of the Lord’s presence. Do you remember Ai? What had the Lord said about the principles of spiritual progress? You know what He had said! The people came to Ai, and you know what Achan did. He violated the Word of God, and the whole of Israel was arrested in their progress, brought to a standstill and there was a scene of tragedy. But what was the real tragedy? The manifest presence of the Lord had departed! Is not the manifest presence of the Lord everything? Oh, we do not want anything greater than that! Surely there is no heart here which is interested in anything in this life and all this world apart from the presence of the Lord! If only we know that the Lord is with us, what a lot of difference that makes! There may be a lot of victories, a lot of strength, yes, there may be conflicts, as there were with Joshua afterwards, there may be many problems and many difficulties in life, but if only we are assured that the Lord is with us, that is everything, is it not? I tell you that is my battleground all the way along. The devil is so cruel, using the very discipline of God meant to bring us into His greater fullness, using those trials as accusations against God, and making us feel that because of this situation and circumstance, this trial, this difficulty, this thing that is so hard, the Lord is not with us. Don’t you listen to that lie! You will be absolutely worsted, ruled out of all the conflict and the possession if you take on that lie of the devil.

The presence of the Lord is the battleground. What can we do without His presence? How can we get on without it? What would our meetings be but for His presence? If only we are able to say after our prayer-meetings: ‘The *LORD* was with us. He was there and we knew His presence.’ That is life, and that is strength.

Now all that in the Bible, as you see, hung upon this Word of God. He is with us according to His Word, on the basis of His Word and He is only with us as His Word is in our hearts. So the Apostle says: "Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16), and that is the Presence of the Lord. He stood back at Ai and in the incident in David's life because of the defaulting over His Word. And it is always like that.

□ THE TRUSTEE OF THE WORD

The Holy Spirit! You see, He is present as a jealous Trustee of the Word, will and purpose of God. I thank God for that! You are probably thinking: 'This is rather oppressive, rather heavy, exacting, demanding and rather hard!' Oh, yes, that is true and right, *BUT* the Holy Spirit...! For what has He come? Why is He here? Why is He in us? He is, as I have said, the jealous custodian of the Word of God. He is very watchful. He is referred to as the "seven Spirits of God" (Revelation 3:1), which means complete spiritual knowledge, discernment and perception. If I may put it in this way, the Holy Spirit is here in trust with the will of God, in trust with the purpose of God, and, therefore, in trust with the Word of God, for these things all go together. The known presence of the Holy Spirit, and the working of the energy of the Holy Spirit are all in this connection — to bring us, by way of the Word of God, to the end to which we have been called. The Word of God is the ground of the Holy Spirit's activity. You see that illustrated here in the Old Testament. The Spirit of God is in charge. He is the Captain of the hosts of the Lord. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit has come to dwell within in order to keep us on the line of the Word of God, and if we are sensitive to Him, without perhaps knowing the particular Scripture that applies, we shall know that something is not right. We are just out of adjustment with the Lord. There is something that does not say: 'That is right and good and proper.' There is a sort of pause in us. The Holy Spirit knows why that is, and if we will seek the Lord about it and turn to His Word, He will just put His finger on something; and we say: 'Why, that has been there all the time, but here my situation just contradicts it.' So we are tested by the Word as to the heart, and the Holy Spirit has come for that. It is the ground for His working.

Let me say to young Christians, out of a long experience, that, although you may not understand a great deal of the Bible, and you may not seem to enjoy it, *READ* it! Even if it is labour, read it, work at it, get down to it. You know, you have a tape recorder inside you! We have a lot of tapes in the office of messages spread over many years. Sometimes one is asked for and we look it out, and just occasionally I want to hear a bit of it. Then I say: 'Did I say that? Oh, yes, it is coming back to me now from somewhere far away. Yes, I did say it.' Have you tried to remember something, someone's name, some person or some particular thing, but it has gone? 'What *WAS* that person's name? When was it that *THAT* happened? Where was it? Oh, I give it up!' Do you? If you understand anything about psychology, you won't give it up. When it happens with me my folk say: 'He has gone away!' I cannot let go of that thing until I have remembered it! I am not looking anywhere for it, but I set my mind to recover it, and then the point comes where I feel utterly defeated. But I have learnt something, and I let go. Later on, the thing just comes floating into my mind. Where has it come from? My tape recorder, speaking back after perhaps many years. Have you had that experience?

The Word of God is like that. I am so glad that in my early Christian life I set myself to a systematic study of the Bible, book by book. I did not understand it all, indeed, there are many things today that I do not understand, but in those days I could often have closed the book because it did not seem to mean anything. But I worked at it; I analysed the books without spiritual understanding, but I worked — and am I not glad today! If I have any spiritual ministry today it is the Holy Spirit working upon what is there. The Word is there, and the Spirit works upon it. In times of need it becomes more than the Word — it becomes the life.

Young Christians, do not give up the Bible because it is difficult. Work at it, and the time will come when you will say: 'Thank God for that hard labour over the Bible!' One of the greatest, if not the greatest, Bible expositors of this last century said to me once: 'Sometimes it is such a weariness in my work with the Bible that I almost wish there was no Bible there!' Well, he laboured at it, but the fruit of his ministry is all over the world.

The Spirit works upon the Word. Give Him His ground. It is the ground of spiritual progress by the Holy Spirit. There may be an unconscious control of the Word in the sense that you may not know exactly what a Scripture is, but you know there is something that has got hold of you. That is the Spirit working. The thing is written inside you by the Spirit. The new covenant is written upon the heart.

That is the beginning; but what does this mean after all? It may still seem objective to you, just things said, but spiritual progress in the will of God unto the full purpose of God in our calling means that demands will not be made without a very meticulous observance of what is in the Bible.

Why this word today? Oh, it is born out of a tremendous amount of exercise over recent years! Why the weakness of Christianity today? Why the weakness of so many Christians? Why the slowness of their spiritual progress? Why the failure of so many? I put my finger upon a large number of things that are here in the Word of God, as

clearly to be seen as anything can be, and I look at those Christians and find that in their behaviour, in their appearance, in their conduct and way of going on, in their relationships there is just as clear and definite a contradiction of what is here in the Bible as anything could be. The Bible has something to say about anything that you can think of. If I mentioned some of the things that the Bible speaks of, you would be surprised: 'The Bible says something about *THAT*?' Yes, it does! What is the meaning of the tragedy of so many marriages? That is a practical point! Then you go behind and ask: 'Why did the marriage take place at all? On what ground? A fascination? An infatuation? An emotion? An impulse? A desire to be married anyhow?' It is a tragedy, because that marriage was not based upon a real spiritual relatedness. The first thing was not given its place, because there were other interests. The Word says precisely: "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Are you going to make spiritual progress if you violate that? No! There will certainly be tragedy sooner or later. I take that as an example, but I could mention many other things that I am seeing in Christianity today.

I am trying to be faithful with you young Christians, because I am deeply concerned for you that you do not miss God's best, God's fullest, and so I say that that depends upon your having the Word of God in you, so that the Holy Spirit can touch something and say: 'Now, what about this?' I want to be serious on this matter, because it is a pressing issue in Christianity today. The Christianity that is being produced now is a terrible caricature of Christ. Young Christians, having God's fullest and best depends upon your being serious about the Word of God.

There is the other side, of course, and what a blessed thing it is to feel that there is no impediment, no restraint with the Lord, that there is a clear way, and that the presence of the Lord is very real! Heaven is opened! I know of nothing more blessed in all life than those times when there is no cloud between the Lord and myself, and His presence is so real and so wonderful. I wish it were always like that! We sing the hymn:

*"These were but seasons, beautiful and rare;
Abide with me, and they shall ever be."*

Well, that is the wrong way of putting it! It should be:

"Let me abide with Thee, and they shall ever be."

Deviations bring a cloud, but there is nothing more precious in all human history than this joy of the Lord, this peace of God, this sense that the Lord is for you, not against you. You have days, hours, weeks of spiritual ecstasy, and so it is worth it to be obedient and let the Lord's Word rule in your heart, as the Scripture says.

When the Lord Jesus was dealing with the devil in the wilderness, He was dealing with an evil person, but He was dealing with very much more than that — He was dealing with the whole issue of life and death. The devil was trying to get Him, coerce Him, tempt Him, constrain Him, compel Him to take a way which was out of the will of God and would mean premature death, a death which would be death and not victory. The Lord Jesus was dealing with this whole issue of life and death, so underline and encircle the word: "It is *WRITTEN*, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Put that in the positive way, ruling out the negative clause: 'Man shall *LIVE* by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God' — and that is God's thought.

Suffer this personal word: I was very near to despair a little while ago, especially in the realm of ministry. I went to the Lord, and He turned me to a Scripture which hit me like a sledgehammer: "Preach the word, be instant in season (that is very easy!), out of season (when everything says: 'This is not the time'), but preach to reprove, rebuke, exhort" — and here we are!

If you have had too much reproof, too much rebuke, well, I exhort you: Give the word its place. The Holy Spirit will do the rest and you will go on the way with unimpeded progress.

THE WILL OF GOD IN RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE (2)

□ THE LAW OF RENUNCIATION

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5-11).

“Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:8–9).

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:24–26).

In this message we shall be occupied with the realization of the Lord’s full will, unto which He has called us. We have already considered that great law of realization and fulfillment, the law of the government of the Word of God. We were able only just to touch the very fringe of that matter, and I can only trust that it at least introduced you to a new consideration, and that, because of that emphasis, you will have a much closer and more devoted regard for the Word of God in every matter of your life. All those who have been of service to the Lord to others have been people of the Word, and not just of the letter of the Word, but of heart relationship with the Word of God. All who have in any way fulfilled the function of spiritual leadership, like Joshua, have, as we saw, been based so strongly and utterly upon the Word of God. It has been like that all the way through, but the greatest Servant of all, the Lord Jesus, was meticulously careful that in everything He moved according to the Word. The Scriptures had such a place in His whole life, conduct, teaching and work, that He became known as “the Word of God”. The Word is not only something written in a book. It has to become personal, personified in life, in character, and in every way if we are going to be of use to others, to be able to fulfil any responsibility at all like those men in the beginning of the Church in Jerusalem and in Antioch, who were men who waited on God for His Word. They did not organize the Church, nor did they decide upon programmes, plans and schemes. They never introduced anything until they had waited upon the Lord for His Word about it, asking: ‘Is this according to what is revealed?’ That is the only way of the growth of the Church and its building up.

Well, as you see, that opens a very large door, but we are not going any further with that matter. I just reemphasize that a binding law of spiritual progress in the individual life, in the church life, local and universal, is the absolute government of the Word of God, to the law and to the testimony. If it is not according thereto, then there will be a hidden peril in it.

So we go on now to another law of this progress in the will of God unto its ultimate realization. We must remember that we are called unto this. It is inherent in our calling, and not something extra to the Christian life, nor something optional in the Christian life. It is fundamental, intrinsic, in the Christian life. So is what we are going to say now about another law of the will and purpose of God in our calling, and it is what is presented to us in the Scriptures which we selected for this purpose out of many others and what I am going to call ‘the law of renunciation’.

□ THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

In Philippians 2 the Lord Jesus is presented to us in terms of the great renunciation. He was equal with God, but, as the margin says, He regarded that not as something to be grasped, or held on to, tenaciously gripped, but He “emptied himself”. He made the great renunciation in heaven.

The Apostle Paul has caught that mind, which he exhorts Christians to have. He has seen the point! It came to him in the great encounter with the Lord at the beginning of his Christian life. He saw, and then all the other things, however great they were — and they were many and they were great, as he tells us in that Letter to the Philippians — lost their grip on him, because something else had a grip on him, and he says that he made the great renunciation, perhaps not in the same dimension as the Lord Jesus, but for him it was everything, as it was for the Lord. Our everything may not be as great as was the Lord’s everything, but if it is everything, well, that is full and final. Paul says that he counted all these things, this catalogue of advantages which were his by birth, by upbringing, by training and by acquirement, as refuse. He renounced them all. And by the great renunciation of his Master and of himself the Church has benefited through all these generations — and that is the point we have to come to before long.

Then we read of Moses, though we could have mentioned many others in that chapter 11 of Hebrews. We picked out Moses, who renounced all that he had in Egypt, the learning of the Egyptians, the court of Pharaoh, and all the advantages that were there. He made the great renunciation. Why? Again, because of the people of God.

□ THE DISTORTION OF GOOD INTO EVIL

Now, that is the point, but before we come to its application, let me remind you that one of the clear marks and traces of the devil and his handiwork is the distortion of good into evil, of good things made into bad things. Satan *CREATES* nothing, for he is not a creator, but he attempts to turn what has been made for good into bad. Hence you have a whole list of paradoxes in the Bible, and it is fascinating to follow them through, but I am not going to do so. I will just give you a hint. There is a whole list of paradoxes, of seeming contradictions, and they are in this realm of good things in Divine intention turned into bad things.

Take the matter of ambition. Ambition indeed is the parent of many evils. Look at what ambition in the world leads to! There are so many ambitious men and women who, to realize their ambition, will tread upon all principles and will ride roughshod over all sensibilities. Ambition is a driving force to get, to be, to master, to dominate, to rule, and have we not in our lifetime seen something of that? My, these ambitious people whose names we could mention, who have thrown the world into the most distressing and awful state! Literally multitudes have been murdered for one man's ambition! We need not dwell upon it, but that is what ambition can be, and it has come into the Church of God. Men, as Peter calls it, "lording it" over God's heritage, wanting to be something in the Church, and to have power. They are just fulfilling some secret ambition, and perhaps do not mean it or realize it, but others do.

Well, here is something that is evil, *BUT* God created ambition! It is a Divine thing. Our translations do not help us too much in this, but Paul said: "We make it *OUR AMBITION*... to be well-pleasing unto Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9 — R.V. margin). Paul, you have redeemed a bad word! You have salvaged something that has gone astray, that the devil has captured and turned to his own use, for it was ambition in Satan before his fall that led to that fall, and he, like a serpent, has injected that poison into human nature. Surely we should keep that word 'ambition' out of the sacred language? No! It is something Divine.

We could go on with a whole lot of paradoxes and contradictions like that. Paul gave us a list in one place: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10). Those are paradoxes, are they not?

Here, in this very chapter, Philippians 2, and in this very consideration of the great renunciation, we are in the presence of one of these things which have been distorted. Satan has taken hold of something that God created and put into man and into His universe. What is it? The desire to acquire, to possess, to have. It is not wrong in itself to have, to acquire, to possess. Do you not have many battles over this very matter, whether you ought to have this, and whether it is right to possess that? In your very nature there are the traces of this Divine thing, this acquisitiveness. Yes, God put that in. The Bible is full of it. We were looking at Israel earlier, and what a lot the Lord said to them about 'having'! 'I will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey, and this is for you to *HAVE*. I mean you to have it, to be a wealthy people. It is all for you. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon I have given to you.'

Over against that there is the great renunciation. Is that a contradiction? Renunciation is a law of having — the Lord Jesus let go, and He was given. He renounced, and was endowed with all the fullness of heaven.

Satan, then, uses this Divine thing, twists something which is of God and is quite right in its own nature, and gives it this distortion to make it an evil thing, so that in this world now we have this terrible assertiveness, this wanting to get control, to possess, to have.

□ WHAT IS IT FOR?

The answer to that question is the answer to the paradox. What do you want it for? And, you see, it is just there that the enemy has done his work by introducing the selfhood power, this drawing to self, having for self, holding for self, prizing it for self. So when we read: "He emptied *HIMSELF*", there is the whole story of redemption in the emptying of self, and of the wonderful issue in this universe along the line of the redemption — what man is going to have by God's gift and what we may have now by His gift in a spiritual way. Every blessing of the spirit in the heavenlies in Christ and the fullness into which we are called in the will of God comes along the line of the conversion of self, this turning round from self to God.

Now please do not let that principle work wrongly! This is where Peter slipped up, because he was not converted at the time. I know I am going to be challenged on this, for I have been, but there is a real sense in which Peter was not converted until the Day of Pentecost. We will not argue that out, and you can say what you like about it, but when the Lord came with the basin of water and the towel to Peter in order to wash his feet, Peter said: "Thou shalt never wash my feet!" Then the Lord said: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (John

13:8). ‘Oh, well’, said Peter, ‘I want the part.’ Do you see the point? In a very few hours after that it was proved that it was really Peter who was in view, who wanted all that he could get, even of Divine things. And when I say that you will get a great fullness if only you will learn the lesson of renunciation, be careful as to your ambition for fullness! *WHO* is it for? *WHAT* is it for? Is it for self, or is it for the Lord?

□ GOD’S VINDICATION IN THE CREATION OF MAN

The principle lying behind Philippians 2 is just this: The Lord Jesus let go of all that He had of heavenly glory and equality with God, not for Himself, for it was His already and there was nothing whatever that He need do to enhance His own position and rights, but for the vindication of God in the creation of man. God created man and took a tremendous responsibility in doing so. Have you not often felt bad about this? Oh, some of your natures are better than mine, but sometimes I have been tempted to think: ‘Was God justified in creating man, collectively as he is today?’ I think of the history of man, and, really, it hardly bears thinking about! But God did it. He took the risk and the responsibility of making you and making me. I have to turn that back on the Lord sometimes and say: ‘Lord, You made me! You gave me a being! It was by Your law that I came into being! It was Your responsibility!’ Well, that is helpful sometimes, but we will leave it.

God had got to be vindicated in His creative responsibility, and, therefore, He had to save this man that He had made. Further, He had to be glorified in this man, and there is no salvation and no glorification while man is a selfish creature. Selfishness spoils everything and robs of all glory everywhere. Therefore that deep thing had to be touched and dealt with, not theoretically, not doctrinally, not theologically, but actually, and there is no way of dealing with anything *ACTUALLY* except by taking it and destroying it in your own person and work, and being the opposite yourself by a mighty, deep work of God. So the motive that led the Lord Jesus to the great renunciation, the letting go, was the vindication of God, the justification of creation and the making possible of man coming to that glory in fellowship with the Father in heaven for ever. It was outward, first for His Father’s vindication, and secondly for man’s redemption from that twist that the devil had brought in and by which so much mischief had been made. It was your salvation and mine from some *THING* that the devil had planted in the race which was a contradiction to what God meant. All that was outward, and not for the Lord Jesus Himself.

Now read His life again. All that is included in this description in Philippians 2: ‘He emptied Himself... He humbled Himself... He took the form of a bondservant... He was found in fashion as a man... He became obedient unto death’ — and the most shameful and ignominious form of death that the world has ever known! It has always been known that crucifixion is the worst form of death possible. But He went right down to that! That is letting go of self and all self-interest, is it not? That is renunciation! And all that was for the Father first, and was why He was always speaking on this earth of ‘My Father... My Father’. It was for the vindication of the Father, and for the redemption of man unto glory, the transformation and transfiguration of humanity.

□ OUR RENUNCIATION

Now, dear friends, you and I are in the way of this. Have you not noticed that the Lord’s dealings with us when He gets us in hand, when He really does get a purchase upon us, are along this line? Again and again in the course of our Christian experience we come up against a situation where it is: ‘Are we going to hold on or let go?’ Are we going to let go? Can we let go? Can we really renounce? We are stuck until that is settled! We just cannot get past it. It may be an incident in our life, or it may be what we might call a small thing in comparison with other things, but there it is. ‘Must I let go? Shall I keep hold? Shall I get this bone between my teeth and worry it to death, and not let it go?’ I must repeat: there is no way on until that thing is settled.

Have you not, on the other hand, experienced what it means when at last, having sought the grace of God, you let go and say to Him: ‘All right, Lord, my hands are off. I am not just resigning.’ Be careful about becoming resigned to your fate! That is not the will of God. There must not be a negative or passive attitude, but a positive one: ‘Lord, if this is what You want, You have it, and I believe You have a purpose in bringing me to this position of letting go, of renouncing.’ When we get there something breaks in, and all that we had been wanting we get! It is strange that it works like that, but what about Abraham and Isaac? Could Abraham not have held on? Could he not have argued with God? Could he not have supported his tenacity about Isaac by reminding the Lord of what He had said? Oh, yes, he could have built up a tremendous argument against offering Isaac, but he came to the point of the great renunciation. He let go to God, and what did he get? He not only got Isaac back, but he got a nation! “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). It was from inward to outward.

You see the range, the tremendous potential of renunciation? We have picked Moses out from all those mentioned in Hebrews 11, and he could have argued with the Lord on the ground of sovereignty: ‘Well, Lord, Your sovereignty ordered that when all the babes were being slaughtered I was spared, and that girl of Pharaoh’s came

along that day. It was in Your sovereignty that I was rescued and taken right *INTO* the palace and brought up in Pharaoh's house, educated according to the wisdom of the Egyptians. Your sovereignty was in this! But the point was — he left it all, and it was a big 'all'. He renounced it all. Why? Because he had become converted, not in the New Testament sense, perhaps, but converted. He turned round, inward, to people. His race, the people of God, were, as we know, on his heart: "Choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God" — and there you have his motive: the people of God. 'What *I* may lose does not matter so long as the people of God get the benefit and the blessing.'

Do you see the point? Christ was repeating Himself in these men's lives on the one principle of renunciation; and because He, the Son of God, made the great renunciation, "*wherefore*" — and what a 'wherefore'! — "God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on the earth" — and here is a peculiarity — "and things under the earth". You know, things like that are said quite often in the Bible, but the third dimension, "things under the earth", is left out on other occasions when the heavens and the earth are mentioned. I will leave that for you to think about! But in *THIS* case the underworld is also going to bow to Him! His renunciation means that the full dimensions of the universe are affected. What a range is affected by the ability to let go unto God!

I think I hardly need say more than that. To let go is one of the most difficult things that you and I have to learn! The Lord Jesus was "meek and lowly in heart", and meekness is just selflessness, the outward aspect of life. Not having things for ourselves, but thinking how much others can gain if we have to lose them, and if by *OUR* loss the Father can gain what He ought to have and the people whom He has created may be benefited.

□ THE LAW OF ENLARGEMENT

That is the law of enlargement. You noticed that I stopped short in the reading from Hebrews 11 about Moses at a certain point, because I am always afraid of this wretched self-interest of ours! It is always there, and ready to pounce upon anything. I did not read: "He looked unto the recompense of reward." The Lord has promised enlargement along the line of renunciation and loss, but we should not be motivated by reward, should we? No servant of the Lord should be motivated by what he is going to get out of his service. "When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants." Nevertheless, we can put a right and proper emphasis upon it because of where we started. Are you following the train of thought? It is God's will for you, for me, for mankind, to be enlarged with all His fullness, to have *ALL* that He can give, but not selfishly, not for our own use, but for His glory, His vindication, and if you and I get to glory and He is able to give us then of His fullness, endow us with heavenly riches, I am quite sure that we will have found in the discipline of renunciation the right ground upon which to be rewarded. You see, anyone who has really been through this, has been right in that deep and desperate reality of facing the loss of some *THING*, some possession, something which meant very much to them, indeed, it might be everything to them, might have made or marred their lives, for they have been faced with the question of willingness to let go unto the Lord. It has meant devastation to selfhood, to ambition, but when that devastation has taken place and we come out on the other side, it is all right. There is no battle now, for it is done, and then the Lord has His ground for rewarding, for giving. It is safe for Him to do it.

I wonder how many of you, especially you servants of the Lord, whoever you are, have sometimes said to the Lord: 'Lord, can You trust me with this? Can You trust me with that blessing? Can You really trust me to do this for You? I know my own heart. I know its pride, its acquisitiveness, its love of place, position, influence, and so on, and I'm afraid that if You do bless, I may, all subtly, take some gratification to myself. Can You trust me?'

The Lord is working to get us to the place, dear Friends, where He can trust us with eternal, heavenly responsibility, and He knows when that deep, evil thing in our nature has been dealt with by the discipline of renunciation. It is very true to spiritual life, is it not?

There are so many tensions! Are we not suffering in this life from nervous tensions and strains? Yes! but what is many a nervous breakdown and a lot of this wrong kind of intensity that does us so much harm, nervously and physically, due to? Not getting what we want! We are not having what we have set our heart upon! God is not giving it to us, or doing it for us, and so we get into this state of tension, strain, in life. Life becomes a strain, and even the Christian life becomes a terrible strain. If you do not know anything about that you are a very fortunate person, but it is true for us all. We meet people everywhere who are under strain. You can see it in their faces. And what is the matter? They have not learnt to let go to God. We know, by experiences that we have had, that when we have come to the place where we let go to the Lord (and I am very particular about saying 'letting go TO THE LORD!'), a wonderful calm comes, wonderful rest and wonderful peace. The battle is over and the strain has gone. That is very true.

The great renunciation made by the Lord Jesus was that He identified Himself with fallen man. Temptation

has no meaning at all if there is not something to work upon, and so when the devil came to Him in the wilderness and offered Him the kingdoms of the world, it was no temptation if He had no heart for the kingdoms of the world and could say: 'You can have them. I am not interested in them. The kingdoms of the world do not matter to me at all.' There would be no temptation, would there? But if the kingdoms of this world were the very object for which He had come, there is a temptation, and a subtle one, appealing to the soul life. The Son of Man became identified with man, knowing quite well the temptations of man and man's natural ambition. He was tempted in *ALL* points as we are, sin apart, but He conquered. How? Not by saying: 'I am not a bit interested in that. That is no temptation to Me!' But by saying: 'I am going to have the kingdoms of this world, but not at your hands, Satan! Not by your gift, and not along your line. I am going to the Cross, and there I will destroy you and get the kingdoms on a proper ground.' So He came in the likeness of man, knowing man's temptations, without the sinful nature, yet with a human soul which can have ambition for itself or for God. In that temptation, then, it was the Father and every word that the Father had spoken which came first. The battleground was: 'Not for Me, but for the Father and for others.'

I wonder if you have followed me? I think we are touching things that are very real in the spiritual life! This whole matter of the Lord's identification with us was in order to save us, and to save us from our selfhood, our self-towardness, by conversion turning God-ward. The life of a Christian, then, is simply the life which is for God. We are tested on that so often, and when we get through we come to rest, to peace, to quietness. The battle is over — until the next time! But that is the way we grow. The next time will be more severe, I am sorry to say, but when you go into it you have learnt something. You do not go into the more severe without the knowledge of what it means, and you are able to say: 'Oh, well, I had something like this before, and I have learned how to get through by the grace of God. This is a bit more difficult, but it is the same principle. I am not going to fight for my own way, nor for my own interests. I am not going to exercise this bulldog disposition of mine to get hold of this and not let go, but I am going to be ready to put it on the altar for God.' The solution comes that way. It is the law of renunciation in progress toward Divine fullness.

The Lord give us understanding and help from His Word!

THE WILL OF GOD IN RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE (3)

□ SEEING THE LORD JESUS

"Therefore... let us run... looking off unto Jesus the author (or captain, or file-leader) and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

I want to try to gather up and focus the ministry of these messages, taking you back to the beginning and reminding you that we pointed out that the whole Bible, in every part, is concerned with the will of God; which means that, as the Bible is the Word of God, the will of God is only to be found in the Word of God. Then we pointed out that the Bible introduces God to us as a 'going' God, a God moving *IN* and *WITH* purpose. He is in action from the first verse: "In the beginning God created" (Genesis 1:1), and all the way through the Bible He is seen to be pressing onward in purpose and revealing Himself, and that purpose, in His Word. So the Word of God has to govern everything if the purpose of God is to be fulfilled and completed.

We moved on to see that, in order to be in that full, comprehensive will of God with purpose, it is necessary for us to have no purpose of our own, and so we dwelt upon the great law of spiritual progress — the law of letting go; the law of renunciation of all unto God. We mentioned three factors for a true beginning:

- (1) That we are supremely concerned to know the will of God;
- (2) That we are quite prepared at least to listen to and consider anything that might help us to know the will of God, being openhearted and open-minded
- (3) That we are committed to do what the Lord shows us as to that will.

That is the point at which we have now arrived, and, as I have said, I want to gather all that up with one other great essential to going on with God.

□ CAUGHT UP IN THE GOINGS OF GOD

Let me say this. In the presence of such a great deal of misapprehension and inadequate understanding in the world as to what Christianity is, I would say that Christianity really is that persons are caught up in the goings of

God. The Apostle Paul used the word “apprehended”, and this is what he meant. He had been apprehended of Christ, and Christ was going on, moving forward — and how true that was at that time! In the early days of the Book of the Acts it is so evident that He was a forward-moving Christ. There was a great forward movement from heaven, and this man was caught up, and carried on in that going as one under arrest.

That is what Christianity is. It is not just a little thing. It contains many things, but what it really amounts to is that you and I have been caught up in something; we have been taken hold of. There is a very interesting word in the New Testament which is just this very thing. It comes in the betrayal of Jesus, when the band of people came out to arrest Him, and there is a clause which says: “And *they that had laid hold of Jesus* led him away” (Matthew 26:57). You can see what kind of men they were! They were pretty tough, and to be in their grasp and grip would certainly be something that was not easy to resist. Again, it is the same word as the Apostle Paul used when he said: “The love of Christ *CONSTRAINETH* us” (2 Corinthians 5:14) and the word just means that we are taken hold of and irresistibly carried on. There was the woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment for healing, and He said: “Who is it that touched me?” The disciples said: “Master, the multitudes *PRESS* thee” (Luke 8:45). That, again, is the same word. Have you ever been in a mob, a crowd, a multitude that is *GOING*? There is plenty of that sort of thing today! There is a rushing multitude, and when you get in what can you do but go? It is no use trying to resist. And Christianity is just being caught up in the eternal going of the eternal God, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, and being mastered and irresistibly carried on.

I am very careful that you should get the point, for this is a law of progress. That may seem very obvious, but we need to see the principle of it.

You know the content of this Letter to the Hebrews. What does it do right at the beginning? It gathers up everything of all the goings of God. It gathers up all the previous movements and goings of God — “God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners” — and focuses them in His Son, Jesus Christ — “hath at the end of these days spoken”, not by bits and pieces, not here and there, by divers portions and manners, but focused, concentrated, consummated, fully and finally, “*IN HIS SON*”. Then the writer goes on to tell us what Jesus Christ is, and Who He is. This wonderful Christ that is being presented is greater than all the angels, greater than the law, greater than Moses, and greater than everything. Then the writer uses the metaphor of a race, a going. We are caught up in something as in a race, and what is it that is governing this movement, this race, all this energy? “Looking unto *JESUS*” — it is this wonderful Jesus about whom he has been writing. He is the full and consummate embodiment of Divine purpose into which we are called and caught up.

What does this say to us? We have used a lot of words, but what does it all mean?

Dear friends, it is a law, amongst the others, of *GOING*. This Letter is full of phrases such as: ‘Let us go on’, ‘let us leave the beginning and go on’, ‘let us... let us... let us be caught up in something that makes us shed every impeding, arresting and hindering thing.’ What is it that carries us on? We have seen the Lord Jesus! We have had a vision, not objectively, perhaps, but something has happened in our hearts and Jesus Christ has become the all-mastering, all-controlling and all-absorbing object of our existence. We have *SEEN* Jesus, and that vision carries us on. What we have seen about Him, what God’s purpose is in Him, what we have seen in Jesus has become a dynamic in our life, and such a dynamic that nothing else matters. ‘Let us lay aside this’, for this does not matter. ‘Let us lay side that... and that... and *THAT*’, for they are not *THE* thing. *THIS* is it — what we have seen of God’s will, in its fullness, as comprehended in His Son for us. All that He is for us.

□ THE SIN THAT DOTHSO EASILY BESET US

You know, we have not yet really grasped the Lord Jesus. I say that meaningly and knowingly. Oh, how many of our worries would go if only we had seen the Lord Jesus! How many of those delaying, arresting things in our life would go if only we had seen the Lord Jesus! What is it that is holding us back? What is “the sin that doths so easily beset us”? What is it that is slowing us in the race, or even holding us up? ‘Oh, this terrible sinful thing that I am! This wretched man that I am! This poor thing, so weak, sinful and faulty. I think about this, I dwell upon that, and what happens? I stop running! All the “go” goes out of my being!’

You stop and think about yourself for five minutes, and see how fast you will run forward in the Lord! Oh, yes, we all do it. We are overwhelmingly obsessed with this terrible, poor, miserable thing that we are! We dwell upon it, and then we flop down — and the race is at an end for us while we are there. We have not seen the Lord Jesus!

In Him we have been dismissed. In His death we have been put out of sight. In Him risen we no longer appear before God, for He appears for us as us. He is us. *THAT* is seeing Jesus! If only we could get hold of that! If only we could get hold of Him! If only our eyes really did see what God has made Him to be for us — “Of him are ye in

Christ Jesus, who is made unto us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Not dwelling upon our own foolishness and folly, but "unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." What more do you want? That comprehends everything in redemption and unto glory! "Looking *OFF* unto Jesus."

Do you see what I am trying to say? The writer of this Letter to the Hebrews sees us as in a race and he says that if we are going on in this we have to see Jesus, and keep Him always in view; not by seeing ourselves and other people all the time, but keeping our eye on Him. Then we will keep going, but if we do not keep Him in view, then we will stop going.

That is very plain, very simple, but it is the Gospel concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ.

□ VISION ESSENTIAL TO PROGRESS

You and I, dear friends, individually, and if we belong to a company of the Lord's people, that company, will only make progress toward that full, ultimate end of God in Christ if we have a spiritual vision of Jesus Christ. Vision is essential to progress. Is it necessary for me to stay with the word 'vision'? I am not thinking about something objective that you see with your eyes of flesh. It is something that has happened inside of you, and your inner spiritual eyes have been opened. You can say: 'I have *SEEN*, and that has revolutionised my life. That has put me on my feet. That has set me on a course. That has become a dynamic in my life which, *IN SPITE OF MYSELF*, keeps me going.' Yes, thank God, it works like that. I know the aspect, the factor, of our responsibility, but God help you and me if it is all going to be left to our responsibility and what we do! I tell you — and this may have been your experience, or it may interpret your present experience — many, many times I would have given up the race. That is an awful confession! Indeed many times I have given it up in my heart. It became so difficult that I could go no further, so I gave up. It was not, therefore, my persistence that enabled me to go on, but what the Apostle calls "the power that worketh in us". What is that? The Holy Spirit has put a dynamic in us and we have seen. We cannot un-see! We cannot go back. The seeing may fade, and it may even be eclipsed by days of darkness and trouble. We may know what Paul meant when he said: "We were pressed out of measure, beyond our strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8). That was a terrible thing for the greatest of all apostles to say! What happened? Did Paul give up and say: 'Well, I cannot go on!?' No, not at all! "The power that worketh in us" got him on his feet again and again. Let Elijah seek out his juniper tree and say: 'Take away my life!', but the Lord does not agree. He has given Elijah a part in his great, eternal purpose, and so he will come up again.

Be encouraged! Are you down? Are you despondent? Are you despairing? Are you feeling you cannot go on? You still come up again, for something has taken place. I am calling it 'vision', but that may be misleading. What I mean is that something has come into our life which is a spiritual knowledge and has become a spiritual dynamic, giving us a sense of purpose, God's purpose. It is something that God has done, and that is going to be the secret of our survival, at least. But for that we will not survive. We will not get through on any resource of our own, but we will go on in the going as the eternal goings of God if there has been this initial seeing of God's purpose in Jesus Christ.

Oh, I do wish with all my heart that in the preaching of the Gospel to the unsaved the note of eternal purpose was more often struck! The Gospel is generally presented from the point of view of what *WE* are going to get. The appeal is to our souls, that we will have something that will make us happy. That is the whole setup: being happy! Oh, you will not get much of a Christian by that means, but you will if those who have come to the Lord have come because they have seen something of the greatness of Jesus Christ, and of their calling in Him; if they have had this vision which has produced a sense of vocation, a sense of mastering purpose. Without that we will not get very far in the race! It is that which the Apostle means, though he speaks in symbolic language. Do not just dwell upon the literal idea. The spiritual motivation is "looking off unto Jesus", who started it and will finish it. He is the author, the file-leader, and the perfecter. It did not begin with us, thank God! How many times we have been rescued by that word of the Lord Jesus: 'You did not choose Me. I chose you. *I* initiated this thing and I will complete it, if you will let Me, if you will fall into this going, if you will keep your eye on Me, and off the things that delay and arrest this vision' — or whatever word you may use for the idea, the principle, the law, this something that has taken hold of you, and you know it is that which is carrying you on.

Have you got that? Are you a Christian of that sort? I am not asking you if you had a Damascus Road experience, when the whole thing was visual, ocular and sensational, but whether something has happened so that, if you wanted to put it into words, you would say: 'Well, I have come to see Jesus Christ, and in Him my eternal destiny has been bound up.' Do you see what I mean, what I am trying to say? A mastering motivation has been brought into us, and upon us, by Jesus Christ at the beginning that will make us Christians that go on in this race with patience. Have you got a mighty, Divine imperative in your life?

I wish I could get this home! After all your troubles, trials, temptations and difficulties, are you prepared to give up, to abandon everything and say: 'I am not going on with this any longer!?' Well, sit down and try! I venture to say that you will not get very far with that! You may have two or three miserable days over it, but sooner or later you will say: 'It is no use; I have to go on!' That is what I mean by vision — this sense of a God of purpose having laid hold of us to carry us on.

This is exactly what is meant by inspiration. The Lord's people ought to be inspired people, which is only another way of saying 'inspired'. And, because of that, they ought to be an inspiration to others. Oh, if we are not an inspiration to others there is something seriously lacking in the very nature of our Christianity! If we cannot inspire others, if we cannot bring in inspiration in our ministry and our contacts, in our leadership, then that is a contradiction in terms, because the idea in the Bible of leadership is inspiration, inspiring people. If you are leading a meeting you ought to inspire people, in whatever kind of meeting it is.

And what should be true of the individual should also be true of every company. They should be a company of people who are being carried on by this mighty Divine dynamic of purpose, or vision. 'We *KNOW* where we stand. We *KNOW* where we are going, and what we are after.' Many of the Lord's people today do not seem to know where they are going, or where they are. No assembly ought to be like that! They ought to be a 'going' company and everybody ought to know that those people have seen something and are mastered by something that is carrying them on, something that is a real force in their being.

□ VISION ESSENTIAL FOR UNITY

Such a vision has many side-effects and values, one of which is the resolving of the whole question of unity. And what a question that is! I hardly know what to say and what not to say, for there is so much. Take up the first Letter to the Corinthians and what have you there? People with internal dissensions, divisions and quarrellings, and anything but unity and oneness. Paul knew it well before he went to them, and so he said: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). To him that was the one all-unifying thing — a focused vision of Jesus Christ and His Cross.

If you have this what I am calling 'vision', this dominating sense of purpose and meaning given by the Lord, it will resolve so much of this trouble manifested in divisions and lack of real fellowship. A vision of Jesus Christ is a unifying dynamic.

We go to the Old Testament for an illustration. Take the case of Nehemiah. Well, Nehemiah had a vision. He was a man of vision. He saw Jerusalem rebuilt, with the wall reconstructed and made complete. He had a vision of this new Jerusalem on the earth for that time, and he was a man who was tremendously mastered by his vision. Then all these poor people — and they were a bedraggled remnant! — came back, with all the possibilities of more disintegration, murmurings and quarrellings to hinder the realization of this thing that had mastered this man. But what? They shared his vision! They were gathered up into it. They met persecution, opposition, and everything that could deter them, but the verdict was: "The wall was finished... in fifty and two days" (Nehemiah 6:15). Why? Because the people had a mind to work. And what was that mind? Well, it was this vision of the purpose which had been put into the heart of this man and which unified the people. Let the devil come alone and do everything that he can to discourage and make difficulty! He even tried the subtle ruse of trying to get Nehemiah to come and have a conference in order to discuss things. 'No!' said Nehemiah, 'Not on your life! I am doing a great work and I will not come down there.' You see the power of a mighty objective, a vision, to unify, to energise, to keep going? Do we not need that? Does not Christianity need that? Do we not need it in our assemblies? We do indeed need something like that, so we must have this new apprehension of God's purpose and will as centred in His Son concerning us, a mighty, animating power in life that is (as I have said and want to say again) more powerful than all our capacity for giving up and being discouraged and resigning. It is more powerful than all the weaknesses of our own souls.

Oh, I do thank God for survival! That is a weak word, I know. It is not enough to say that we survive, for we are doing more than surviving, but in order to survive all this that is against us, there must be something more than ourselves. The Word says: "God is greater than our heart" (1 John 3:20), and we have proved that many times. Our hearts have fainted and well-nigh given up the struggle, but He is greater than our hearts.

□ VISION AN EMANCIPATING POWER

This thing, call it vision or what you will — you know what it means now! — is a mighty emancipating power. I use that word in this sense: it is a great power for lifting us out of our smallness, our narrowness, our littleness.

In illustrating this we will take up our good friend who supplies us with so much instruction in this matter in

his own history, the Apostle Paul. You know, dear friends, that the cause of the old Israel's calamity, first of all of being sent into Babylon and captivity for seventy years, and then eventually being dismissed by God, was because of exclusiveness. There is no other answer. 'We are *THE* people. The truth will die with us. No one else has any place at all. We are it, and only we are it. These nations, the Gentiles, are mere dogs. There is no place for them in the Divine economy! We are the chosen people, God's elect, and no one else.' This was in spite of all the prophecies of what they were meant by God to be to the Gentiles, to the nations. They were to be the seed in which all the nations were to be blessed, but in spite of that covenant with Abraham, they had closed in on themselves until they were the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. It was exclusiveness, and Paul the Apostle was a representative of that. He was born and brought up in that, trained in it, imbibing it from his childhood. He was an embodiment of that pharasaic exclusiveness. What are you going to do with a man like that? Try argument, and see how far you will get. He will out-argue you! Try persuasion. No, not a bit of it! He is not the kind to be persuaded. He is a bigot in this! Try persecutions. It makes no difference. You will not move that man! He is shut in to this exclusive position — but the thing is done. [Now] He is emancipated, and the old Israel is no longer his parish. The *WORLD* is his parish. How vast is the range of his vision now! You cannot cope with his language about this! He leaps over all language barriers because of what? *HE HAS SEEN JESUS CHRIST!* He had a vision, and not only has he seen Him in the incident of the vision of a Person, but he has seen the significance. He has seen what Jesus Christ means in God's universe, in God's economy, in God's goings from eternity to eternity. You cannot be exclusive if you have seen Jesus Christ! That would dissipate and ruin all exclusiveness. You cannot be mean, contemptible and small if you have seen Jesus Christ!

Do you not agree with me when I say that this presentation of Christ in His infinite greatness is the only way to emancipate people from their littleness in their spiritual life? Is that not needed today? Oh, indeed it is! It is unifying, because we have one central Object which draws us together and makes us say to about one-thousand-and-one things that would hinder: 'You get out of the way! We are set upon this purpose of God, and we are going on.' It is unifying, emancipating and enlarging. Oh, that the Lord would give us this emancipation again, and enlarge us! The Psalmist says: "I will run the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Psalm 119:32), and enlargement of heart will make you fleet of foot in the ways of the Lord.

□ VISION THE GREAT BATTLEGROUND

Vision is the great battleground of all time. Oh, if you have seen you will be a marked person. If your eyes have been opened you will know something of what that fellow knew when the Lord opened those eyes that had been blind from his birth. It is all so true to life! He had his eyes opened and said: "Whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). 'This one thing I know, and you cannot rob me of that!' But it was not long before he was excommunicated from the synagogue. He was cut off and made an object of the Pharisees' spite.

That is true to spiritual experience. If you have seen you are in the battle. You will not be troubled very much by the devil if you have not got this dynamic in you, because it is this dynamic which spells his final overthrow. You have to count for God, and you only do so by having seen; and when you have seen you are marked, and there is a battle on. Anything to destroy you, to get you out of the race and out of the battle will ensue!

How are we going to end? What are you praying? I will tell you what I am praying! After all these years I am praying with all my heart: 'Lord, reveal Thy Son in me more than ever. Give me yet a larger apprehension and comprehension of the meaning of Jesus Christ!' Will you go and pray that? Will you seek the Lord continually that He will enlarge and strengthen your apprehension of Jesus Christ so that, figurative language or not, this is what it is in actuality: 'Looking off unto Jesus, all that He means, all that He contains, all that He represents of God concerning us, the File-leader, the Perfecter, the Completer, the Beginning and the End.' Pray that Christ seen in the heart becomes this dominating power in our lives which saves us from all that would bring us into despair.

*"I have seen the face of Jesus,
Tell me not of aught beside!"*