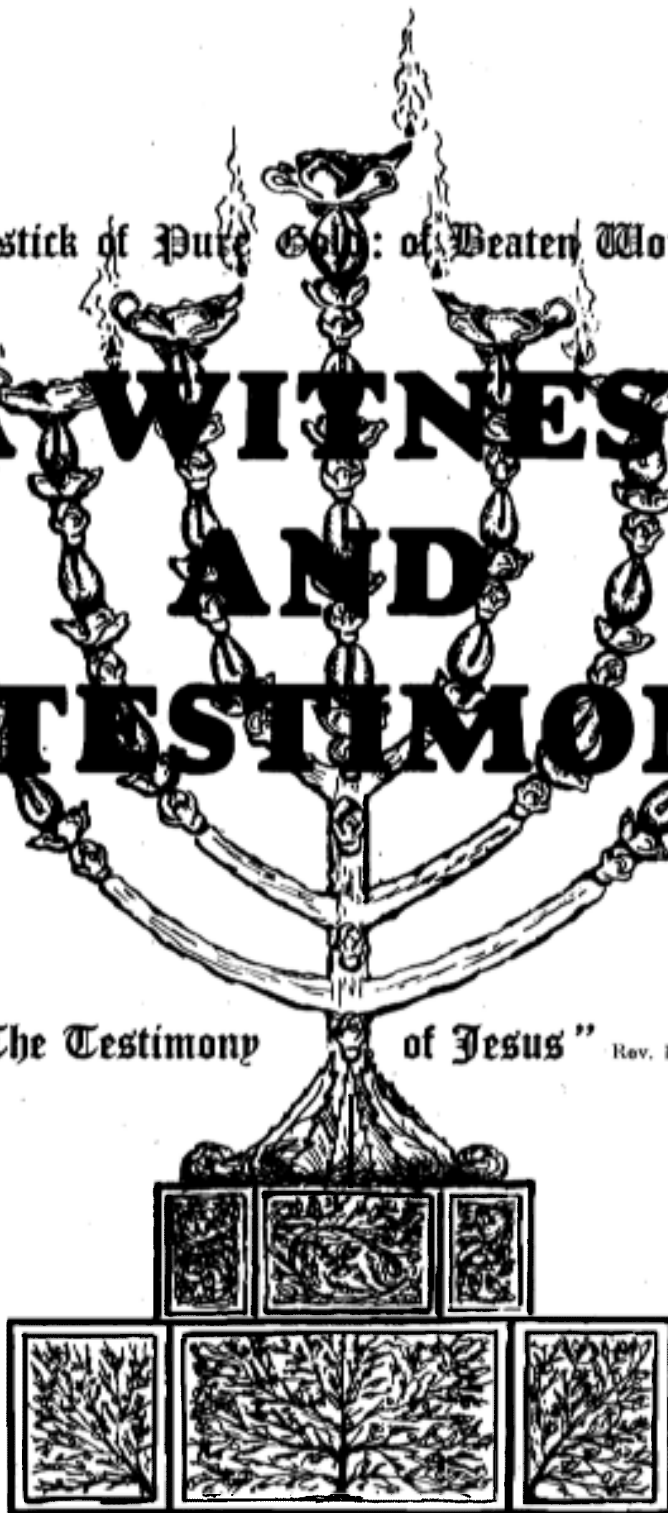


"A Candlestick of Pure Gold: of Beaten Work" Exodus 25. 31.

**A WITNESS  
AND  
A TESTIMONY**

"The Testimony of Jesus" Rev. 1. 9.



## THIS MINISTRY

**T**HE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13—" . . . till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . ."

It is not connected with any 'Movement', 'Organization', 'Mission' or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment', it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S. E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

'Personal' letters should be addressed to  
Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



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EDITORIAL

*As from*

13, Honor Oak Road,  
London, S.E. 23

Beloved friends,

I am writing this Editor's Letter in the Far East, and although its contents will be in the past when this reaches you, I think it good that you should know a little of this ministry—where I have been and what I have found.

The first phase was the All India Convocation at Hyderabad in October. Some seventeen hundred had gathered from many parts of India and were housed and fed on the compound. Some hundreds more came in from the locality. The larger proportion of these were the Lord's, and what a joyful multitude they were! From early morning, perhaps at 4 o'clock, when a procession of singers went forth, until late at night—often after midnight—there was unceasing occupation with the things of the Lord in one way or another. The meetings would sometimes go on for six or even seven hours, and they seemed never to tire. The Lord enabled me to take practically all the ministry of the Word over four days, and, although two interpreters had to be employed for two other languages (which meant every message in three languages), there was rarely a hitch—the oneness of spirit was so real that the word just flowed along.

This Convocation was a very great testimony to the wonderful thing that the Lord is doing all over India, mainly through the instrumentality of our brother Bakht Singh, and a body of fellow-workers. Companies of believers have been 'born' in many places. Thousands are being "added to the Lord". During my brief stay in Hyderabad there were over 90 baptisms, and every one was prayed with personally afterward. It would be impossible to describe all the details of such a Convocation: every dwelling (and there are very many) with its own name from the Bible; likewise every prayer place; every path to dwellings or meeting places; the main way from which all others branch; the walls with Scriptural banners all along; the perfect organization of food, water, sanitation, and general supervision; and the continuous prayer relays, day and night, all through. The send-off was a wonderful experience: singing crowds lining the way, and hands outstretched for a grasp. That there should be two or three *such* Convocations in different parts of India each year, besides all the work in localities, does speak of God doing something.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

From Hyderabad (Dr. Kinnear having joined me there, and Mrs. Sparks having gone on to Bangalore), we moved east, *via* Bombay, where we had another evening with the friends, and Calcutta, with other contacts and two meetings at the 'Bible College,' to Hong Kong. As we looked from our plane we saw a crowd of eager faces strained towards it, and on appearing at the door hands went up and there was a general stir. About 200 believers had come to the airport to greet us, and what a greeting it was! These radiant faces of the Chinese believers are a testimony to the grace of God. After formalities with the airport authorities, who gave us no trouble at all, we joined the procession of cars into the city, and the elders joined us at an evening meal.

Here again is a wonderful work of God. The central meeting-place is a beautiful hall, quite modern in every way, seating 1,100 people, and is usually full for the main meetings. There are a number of other halls and meetings of this work in different parts of Hong Kong. We had three meetings a day (with one exception) during our ten days there. Two in the mornings for workers, of whom there were about 300, from Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore, Saigon, etc. These were times of systematic teaching. The evenings were open to all, and were very large. To look on these happy faces, with the traces of suffering in so many, is an experience, and to hear these believers sing is something not to be forgotten.

On the first Saturday evening of our time there they had a Love Feast at which nearly a thousand sat down to a real Chinese meal. There was indeed a feast of love. At the close of this we were both asked to give a message. No one could possibly have had more love and kindness shown than we had in Hong Kong, and we thank our God on every remembrance of the believers and their leaders there. The send-off was like the reception—a large crowd at the airport waving and smiling until we were out of sight.

Then Formosa, and here it was the same but more so. What a crowd of eager faces, and bursting into singing as we emerged. The formalities were much less happy here owing to Nationalist China's reserve over Britain's relation with Peking. It was *not* pleasant! But the reception outside was a tremendous thing, and it took quite a long time to get through the greetings, photos, etc. At length the leaders and ourselves were crowded into the Gospel Bus, and we were taken to the house of Dr. and Mrs. West (now doing *locum* for Dr. Dale), where we had an evening of fellowship. Next morning we were taken round to see most of the other seven meeting-places in the city. This was an experience! On the Lord's Day morning about 2,800 gathered in the central meeting-place, and that meeting is difficult to describe. The life, joy, singing, and earnestness of that great company is very impressive. At 5 o'clock in the afternoon we had reports from the other places on the Island—a story of "the wonderful works of God". This lasted for two hours. Then a Love Feast, followed by the Lord's Table. It was late when we closed that long-to-be-remembered day.

From then onward, during the first week, there were four meetings a day: two in the mornings for workers (about 800); one in the afternoon taken by Dr. Kinnear; and then the great evening meeting with sometimes about 3,000 present. During the second week the afternoon meetings were dropped. For the third week we are visiting all the other centres on the Island, eight of them. As I write this has not been completed. From here we go to Manila, in the Philippine Islands, for another week of Conferences, and then back to India for a further Convocation—all "if the Lord wills."

This is an unusual kind of Editor's Letter, but I thought it would encourage you, and lead to praise.

It will be appreciated that all this ministry, travelling, etc., makes no small demands, but I have to testify to most gracious help from the Lord, and am deeply grateful to Him for allowing me to see something of His goings in the earth, to say nothing of being permitted to participate. "A great and effectual door is opened, and there are many adversaries". It is no small thing that, at the time when the opposition to this ministry has reached a point of intensity and openness unparalleled in our history, the Lord should lead us out into such a large and wealthy place and tell us so overwhelmingly that He has not done with this ministry yet. We have not sought this nor tried to bring it about. "It is the Lord's doing". We have positively nothing in view but the glory of His Son, our Lord Jesus, and we are sure that He will stand by that. The answer to all is with Him and we can safely trust Him to give it.

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May the Lord make this New Year one of great blessing to you all, and great enlargement of His Son in all of us.

Warm greetings to you, dear friends, and thanks for your so valued and needed prayer help.

Yours in His Grace,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS

## THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF SERVICE

### V. A SPECIAL VOCATION (concluded)

#### THE DIFFERENCE MADE BY (1) THE CROSS

WE shall perhaps be helped in this matter of the Levites if we go on to ask what it was that made the difference between the objective and the subjective, as we have called them—between that which was accepted, believed, appreciated, obeyed and followed as from without, and that in the other realm which came first-hand from the Divine throne and headquarters. What made the difference, and what makes the difference?

The answer is a large one, with quite a number of aspects. The first answer is the Cross, and I take you back again to Exodus xxxii, for that chapter is basic to the life and the realm and the ministry of the Levites. You remember what is in the chapter. Moses had been in the mount, had tarried long. The people had lost patience, and had called on Aaron to make them 'gods that should go before them'—'for as for this Moses which brought us out of Egypt, we know not what has become of him.' And so the calf was made, and they danced around it, and gave it the glory of God. Moses came down, having already been told by the Lord what was happening, came down and verified, saw and heard, challenged Aaron as to this great sin, and then took the calf, ground it to powder, strewed the powder upon the water, made them drink it—the bitterness of their own folly. We always have to do that when we depart from the Lord: we have to drink the consequences. That by the way. Then Moses went off to the gate, stood there and cried, 'Who is on Jehovah's side? Let him come to me!', and all the sons of Levi went over to him. And he said, 'Put every man his sword upon his thigh, and go in and out and slay every man his brother and every man his friend

and every man his neighbour', and they did it; and from that time the Lord took the tribe of Levi, and set it aside for the essential service of the tabernacle. That is the story in brief.

Let us come over to the New Testament, to the letter to the Hebrews, chapter iv, to the familiar words in verses 12 and 13: "*For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight*".

What do we find here as the context of those words? We have seen, in the case of Israel, a people in spiritual weakness and in spiritual immaturity, behaving like irresponsible children. Look at them down there around the calf—just like a lot of irresponsible children. And here, in the letter to the Hebrews, it is like that. Everything had been done for them, and they had come into the good of that which was provided in the High Priestly work of Christ, which is much spoken of here in the immediate context. They were Christians, that is, they were the Lord's people, but they were in terrible spiritual limitation and weakness and childishness, just as those people were when Moses came down from the mount. 'Gird every man his sword upon his thigh'. "The word of God is . . . sharper than any two-edged sword".

Let us go on, for what we have at the beginning of chapter vi of this letter to the Hebrews is all of a piece: "*Wherefore let us . . . press on unto full growth*". Now between that and chapter iv you have chapter v, verses 12 and 13: "*For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and*

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

*are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food. For every one that partaketh of milk is without experience of the word*”—“the word of God is . . . sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit”—“*without experience of the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But solid food is for fullgrown men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.*”

‘Let us go on to full growth’. On the one side immaturity, spiritual infancy, irresponsibility, and all the marks of childhood. On the other hand, full growth. What is the way out of spiritual childishness and immaturity and feebleness, and all that goes with it—out of that into full growth? We have it in chapter iv, verse 12: the sword of the word—the word of the Cross—dividing between soul and spirit. It is the word of the Cross that makes this cleavage. Spiritual infants live in their souls. And what is the soul? It is just the sum of our senses, our natural senses, our feelings, our natural seeing, our natural judgment; the way we approach, apprehend and react to things naturally, even as Christians.

Now, you see, the Israelites reacted. Moses is away there a long time. ‘We wot not what has become of him.’ ‘We have lost him to our senses, we cannot see him, we cannot hear him, we cannot handle him’; and children must do that. They must see, they must handle, they must have all the evidences and the proofs. That is the mark of a child. He had gone out of their natural realm, and they were living in that. Now, the Levites took the sword and cut and cleft between soul and spirit. Their very action was such an action. “Every man his brother”. Do not think for a moment that that meant the hated brother, the disliked brother, the brother to whom you would like to use the sword in any case. It is your brother, your own kith and kin, your blood relationship, your own family, the closest ties. Here is a test as to whether you are going to live in your soul or live in the spirit, whether you are going to move on the basis of your own feelings, sentiments, likes, reasonings, or whether you are going to move with God on principle. There are very, very big spiritual issues bound up with this.

As we said in an earlier message, it was a breaking in of Satan to draw worship away from God to himself, just at the time when the worship of God was being set up and constituted; as though he would say, ‘I am taking all that—the very gold of the sanctuary, which is meant for the tabernacle.’ Is not that a very, very big thing? Satan is always

doing that, seeking to steal God’s place and God’s rights, even amongst the people of God. Now, the Levites reacted against that. I am not saying that they understood all that was involved, but it is here in principle, and it was a costly thing to their own souls to slay their own brother and their own friend and their own neighbour. The neighbourly man, to do it, was taking the sword to his own soul, was he not? There is no doubt about that.

Yes, the sword divided between soul and spirit then, right enough, and the Cross, you see, is represented by that. The Lord Jesus connected and linked those two things—taking up the Cross, or His Cross, and denying oneself. “He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. x. 39). This is the work of the Cross. But it was just that that made all the difference between these people, the Levites, and the rest. The Cross brought the Levites into their special position. To-day, a deep application of the Cross would slay the self-life, the whole self-life; and God only knows how comprehensive that is, how many-sided and many-pointed that is. But a deep application of the Cross to the very centre of the self-life, the selfhood, for its depositing, that Christ may have that place, is the only way out of immaturity into maturity, out of the objective into the subjective; out of that realm where everything, though precious, is just presented to us and given to us, to the place where it is planted in us and becomes a part of us—and there is a very great difference between the two.

The Cross severs, the Cross divides. The Cross nullifies a whole realm. And spiritual knowledge—“for the priest’s lips should keep knowledge” (Mal. ii. 7), says the Word—waits on this work of the Cross. Whoso has not known this work of the Cross may regard himself or herself, or may be regarded by others, as an authority in the things of God, but that authority is not resting upon a proper foundation. Authority rests upon this—has it been wrought in you by a mighty, deep, self-destroying work of the Cross? Out of that, and that only, is authority. Take the case of all cases—the Lord Jesus. He spoke with authority. Why? Because, all the while He was speaking, and in all His life, He was utterly self-crucified—crucified to self.

Ministry, too, is consequent upon a work like this. Let me ask any of my readers who are in ministry: How did you take up ministry? If you like to put the article there, How did you take up ‘the ministry’? On what ground? Let me tell you something. It has not been an unknown thing for men who have been in what is called ‘the mini-

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stry', to come to an end of that whole thing, and quit it, because they have discovered that they were in it on a wrong basis. Yes, called ministers, wearing the garb of the minister, on the ministerial list, and all the rest: and yet eventually, by some eye-opening work of God, they have realised that theirs was a false position. They were in it, not on this ground that God had done some terrific thing in their being, shattering the natural life. And out of those ashes there sprang a knowledge of the Lord for His people which is the only qualification for the ministry. If that is not the ground, it is better to quit. Do not be in a false position, under a false interpretation of: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke ix. 62). With your hand on that plough, you may yet be in a wholly false position. You may have no right or proper basis for having your hand on that plough at all.

Forgive the seriousness and solemnity of this word, and the emphasis, but these are very vital things. Much more could be said. The first answer to the question—What makes the difference?—is the Cross.

#### THE DIFFERENCE MADE BY (2) THE BLOOD

The second part of the answer is the Blood. Many people confuse the Cross and the Blood. Do not confuse them. If you have done so in the past, let me now try to help you to discriminate between them. Of course, they go together—they are two parts of a whole; but there is a difference, and the Blood itself has two aspects.

First of all, there is the aspect of implication. You can never have the blood unless a slaying has taken place, unless the death of a body has taken place. The word 'body' in the Scriptures is often used representatively of the whole man. When Paul says, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice" (Rom. xii. 1), he means yourselves, your entirety, the whole being. He speaks of the whole "body of the flesh" (Col. ii. 11). There the body is just the 'embodiment', as it were, of the whole man. But note that nowhere in the Scripture is it said or implied that Christ's Blood in itself carried or bore our sin. Perhaps you ask, What about blood shed for the remission of sins (Heb. ix. 22)? Let me repeat: it is nowhere said or implied that Christ's Blood bore our sins. "He bare our sins in his" (not blood, but) "body upon the tree" (I Pet. ii. 24). It was His Body that bore our sins. The shedding of the Blood implied, carried with it, the

fact that the Body had been broken, had been slain, had been offered. It was not that which was shed which bore our sins. It was His Body which was broken that bore our sins. The implication is that there is an entire body or embodiment of things that is slain, and in His Body He was made sin for us, and the judgment, the sword of God, fell upon His Body, He was smitten and stricken of God in His Body. It was then that our sins were met and judged and dealt with.

But by that slaying His Blood was released: and, look where you will in the Bible, you will never find other than this concerning the Blood, that the Blood is always the *vivifying* factor—not the death factor, but the vivifying factor. "The life . . . is in the blood" (Lev. xvii. 11). "He that . . . drinketh my blood hath eternal life" (John vi. 54). The sprinkling of the blood upon the tabernacle and its vessels, and everything else, spoke of a vivifying, a making alive; and in the Blood of Christ an incorruptible life, which was never touched by our sin, was released for all future purposes, in principle to vivify everything. The Blood itself is the vivifying of everything subsequent to the slaying, to the dying, to the offering. The life has been taken from the body which has been made sin, or which has borne the sin, and released to become the life of another body. We are members of Christ, of His Body; and all that is represented by His life, His deathless life, the life that could not see death, could not touch death—if it could have been touched of sin, it could have been touched of death; that holy, perfect life that was in Him, signifying by His Blood that it was incorruptible, that it could not taste death—all that has been released by His slaying to be the life of His spiritual corporate Body.

The Levites came into the good of that. They came into the immediate value, on the one hand, of the slaying of a body, the setting aside, the cutting off, of the whole body of the flesh, the natural life, the self-life, as dominant; and, on the other, of all the vivifying power of the released and sprinkled blood, speaking of another life and another body. Again, I beseech you, do not draw artificial distinctions between the people of God, but see that these are spiritual principles. It is a tremendous thing to have entered into the meaning of the setting aside of the body of the flesh. All Christians have not done that. Many of us know in our own experience that at one time we laboured in the flesh with natural resources for God, and very earnestly so, and yet we knew we were not getting very far—it was a heartbreaking business. Yes, until the day came when the Lord brought it

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home to us that that whole body has been set aside. It is out of another life and in another relationship with the Lord Jesus that this ministry is to be fulfilled.

THE DIFFERENCE MADE BY  
(3) THE SPIRIT

The Cross, the Blood ; and thirdly, the Spirit, the anointing of the priests. The Cross is on the death side, but the Blood and the Spirit are on the vital side, the potency side, the resurrection side, so do not always dwell on the Cross aspect. The Blood and the Spirit are united, and this is an important point. It is the Spirit of life—"the law of the Spirit of life", as Paul calls it (Rom. viii. 2)—which means that this life that is released through the Cross is not just some abstract element, some force at work. This life which is given us in Christ in and by the Holy Spirit is conscious life and intelligent life. Let me say to young Christians, to any who are new on the way of the Lord: this is one of the most important things that you should know. The conscious, intelligent life of the Holy Spirit in you is going to make all the difference between a child and a grown Christian. It differentiates between those who just do what is expected of them, because they are told it is the thing that they ought to do, and those who know in their hearts what they should do, and need not to be told. How good it is not to need telling everything, when your life with the Lord is such that if anybody does bring some point to your notice, you are able to say, 'Yes, the Lord has spoken to me about that already: the Lord has been dealing with me on that matter.' Do you not think it would make a lot of difference if Christians on the whole were like that?—if they could say, 'The Lord has been speaking to me, the Lord has been showing me, the Lord has been putting me right; the Lord has been touching things in my life; He has been talking to me about my dress—or my no dress'?

Perhaps this sounds amusing; but there are many practical matters. One is distressed at the way in which some Christians can behave, even in this matter of dressing—or not dressing—when they come into the house of prayer. They have the Word of God before them. What is the matter? Either they are not reading the Word of God, or

the Spirit find some difficulty. I beseech you to give heed to this. Many, many matters which concern our spiritual growth, our *full* growth, depend upon this—that the Holy Spirit within is truly governing. The thing that has distressed and appalled me perhaps more than anything else for a large number of years is that dear children of God, men of God, servants of God, can accept and pass on things that are positive lies, and yet never seem to hear the Holy Spirit inside say anything about it. What is the matter? I tell you—if the Holy Spirit within us is really in government, and having His way, we shall never hear a lie without knowing that He does not agree with it. We shall have a check-up about it. We shall never be able to speak or pass on a falsehood without something inside 'going wrong', so that sooner or later we have to go back to the Lord and say, 'Well, Lord, I do not know how it is, but I feel that was wrong. I must get right over that.' Do you not think it would make a great difference to Christians and Christianity if it were all like that? What is the matter? I am afraid the Cross needs still to do something, and the Blood. I pass no judgment, but I have to draw conclusions from facts. The fact is that it is possible.

Yes, there is a great difference between childhood and maturity. The Levites were spiritual men who had to walk before God, and were checked up all along by the anointing, by the Spirit. It was not an objective fact, as it was with the whole mass of Israel, that the cloud and the pillar represented the presence of the Holy Spirit overshadowing, and, in a general kind of way, leading. With these men that thing became an inward positive reality. They had discernment as to the movement of the Spirit, and their discernment was for the rest of the people who had not got it.

Do take this to heart. These are the principles. It is very important that we should be clear on these things, because it is going to make a great difference to life, to service, to ministry, and to going through. I am glad to see that the Levites, although they were in the van when the people passed through Jordan overflowing all its banks, were not a separate, exclusive company of people, but were in the midst of God's people, as a spiritual company.

T. A-S.



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## THE SECRET OF CHURCH BUILDING

Reading: Matthew xvi. 13 - 25.

"I will build my church" (Matt. xvi. 18).

**T**HE Lord Jesus was never vague or uncertain about His plans for this present age. He ascended into Heaven not to rest, but to work, and He sent His Spirit in fulness to be the divine Agent of His working. If we ask what this great task is, the Lord Himself gives us the answer: "I will build my church". The further statement, that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it", shows that the Lord means this to be His supreme challenge to the kingdom of Satan. The powers of darkness have always taken this matter most seriously, and directed their bitterest attacks against this building work. Would to God that His people took it equally seriously! We are meant to do so, and are called to co-operate with the great Master Builder in His work.

### BUILT ON A NEW FOUNDATION

The statement was made at Caesarea Philippi. A glance at the map will show that this was the remotest possible place from Jerusalem. Away up beyond Judaea, north of Samaria, right to the extreme limit of Galilee, Caesarea Philippi lay as far away from the Jewish capital as it was possible to go without passing out of the land. It was there, of all places, that Jesus made this solemn statement of His programme for the dispensation. Why there? Surely to emphasize the extent to which this new move would break with past tradition. Christ will not build on somebody else's foundations. His new building was to be very different from the old. He did not mean to take up the Temple organization, or the official Jewish hierarchy, in order to incorporate them into the Church. It was to be *His* Church, and so must be built on the new and only foundation of His own blessed Person. His words arose out of Peter's confession that He was "the Son of the living God", and indicate that if it is to be His Church it must be born, "not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God". "... Upon this rock I will build my church". That which is constructed out of the traditions and craftsmanship of men, built according to earthly ideas or supported by human effort, fails to measure up to this fundamental condition. The Church must have its origin in Heaven, even as did its Founder.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CROSS

Caesarea Philippi was more than a geographical incident in the journeys of Christ; it had a spiritual meaning, for it marked the turning point of His earthly ministry. "From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed . . ." (vs. 21). How will the Lord build His Church? "... he must go . . . and suffer many things . . . and be killed". This, too, was foundational. Even the Lord could not proceed with the building until He had first laid down His life on the Cross. What a rebuke this should be to carnal activity! We are so often rash and impetuous, trying to make plans to build the Church or wanting to give advice or to preach on how it should be done. These are not the first things. The first thing is that we should be willing to go to the Cross. The work must begin with crucified lives.

Christ's sufferings were, of course, unique. We can never be crucified for the sake of others as He was. Nevertheless it is absolutely essential that we should share in His Cross before we try to share in His labours. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (vs. 24). The Church will be built when there are those who are prepared to suffer and die for it. Those of us who have realised how much this work of building matters to the Lord are ready to work for it, but are we ready to sacrifice? Not just seeking to know all about it; not just passing on to others what we know, setting to work to tell them where they are wrong, or trying to change and shape them in some new way; but taking up our Cross and following Christ. There is need enough for workers, but this is not the first need. The Lord laid the foundation of His Church by dying for it, and we can have little part in the building, if any, unless we too begin by laying down our lives, becoming truly crucified men. This is fundamental to the building of His Church.

### HIS ABSOLUTE LORDSHIP

The Lord did not say that He would build *a* church, or even *the* church; still less did He promise to build *our* church. He said: "I will build *MY* Church". He is gracious enough to share the building work with us, but He will share possess-

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

ion with no man. The Church is His, and only His. He is not going to build for any man or group of men, for any movement or for any nation. He will only build a Church for Himself.

So often we excuse our possessiveness by saying that we are taking charge of things for the Lord. It is easy to deceive ourselves into the idea that we are only taking possession in order to hold it for Him and ultimately to hand it over to Him. We really do intend to hand it over to Him. It is helpful, however, to note that, while it will be presented to Him one day "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle . . .", it will be the Lord Himself who does the presenting: ". . . that he might present the church to himself . . ." (Eph. v. 27). He owns it from the beginning; He will never depute the ownership, nor will He share it. The Church is not the property of any man or men. It is not the property of the leaders. Nor is it the property of those who are not leaders. No one can rise up and say, 'This is not your church; it is our church', for it is neither; it is the Lord's.

There is a very illuminating phrase in the great Church Letter to Timothy: ". . . but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. iii. 15). The advice is not as to how men ought to run the Church, nor how they should insist on others running it, but how they ought to behave themselves in it. It is only worthy of the name of Church if it is constituted and maintained as His property, if it is recognised as the abode of the living God, where all must learn to reverence Him. Christ is more than the Unseen Guest in His Church. He is the Unseen Host; and those who wish to have a part in it should be careful always to consider His wishes and obey His commands.

## CO-OPERATING OR HINDERING

"I will build my church". He is the only One who can build this spiritual Temple; no man can build it for Him. We may and should co-operate with Him, but the initiative and the ordering are in His hands. Men cannot set up churches where they wish. Not even Paul could do that. Is it not a striking fact that no mention is ever made of a church in Tarsus? Tarsus was Paul's own city, and he was clearly proud of it. It was a strategic centre, a hub of world movement, just as were Antioch and Corinth, and therefore a most suitable site. We know that the Apostle lived and witnessed there, for it was in Tarsus that Barnabas sought

him out to help at Antioch. Surely Paul's natural feelings and personal preferences would have led him to found a church there. Yet seemingly he never did. Other places possessed their churches which were largely or wholly founded by his testimony; other cities, of no particular interest to him, became the scenes of his labours. Paul was not permitted to choose. It seems likely that in some cases he could not even foresee what would eventuate. All that he could do was to take note of what the Lord was doing, where the Lord was building, and join in with hearty co-operation. To be found as a yokefellow with Christ, sharing in His activities and being the human agent by which He can build His Church—this is blessing indeed!

We must beware of hindering the Lord instead of co-operating with Him. The gates of Hades cannot prevail against Him, for He is well able to deal with all the opposition from without, and even to turn it to His own advantage. The book of the Acts shows so clearly that our Lord's challenge to the powers of darkness was no empty boast. Religious rulers and jealous priests, puppet kings and Roman Governors, mob violence or devilishly cunning plots; none of these could hinder the Lord. He swept them all aside and prospered in His work of Church building. Yet no sooner had our Lord declared His purpose than Peter stood across His path, to be a stumblingblock to Him. "Get thee behind me, Satan . . ." So quickly after his great revelation and confession, Peter all unintentionally became a menace to the Lord. It is a solemn thought that a well-intentioned and devoted disciple could become such a hindrance to the work which the Lord had undertaken to do. Let his example be a warning to us! The best of us can get in the Lord's way if our hearts are not disciplined by the Cross.

We can hinder the Lord by a selfish spirit. The Lord did not say, 'I will build you up'; He said, "I will build my church". Of course He is seeking to build us up, but He wants us to concentrate on the blessing of others, that we contribute something to their help and strengthening. We hinder Him if we permit personal interests to intrude, if we view things from a selfish standpoint, if we allow considerations of our own gain or loss to govern our words or actions. Doubtless there was something of this spirit in Peter when he became a stumblingblock to the Lord. It is so easy to make ourselves the centre of concern, or to judge matters by their effect on our own interests, even while we try to help in Church building. Such a spirit is a hindrance, though, instead of a help.

We can hinder by having a divisive spirit. How-

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ever utter and uncompromising may be our own obedience to the Lord—and we cannot be too utter or wholehearted—we must never for one moment become divided in spirit from other children of God. This is not easy. True love is never easy ; but then we are not looking for what is easy, but for what is possible by the grace of God. We must not sacrifice truth for the sake of apparent unity ; we dare not compromise about the will of God as we find it in His Word ; but still we must not allow our zeal for the truth to betray us into an unloving or un-Christ-like spirit. True love means that, even if others differ from us, even if they misunderstand us or hold us at a distance, we must never become superior or exclusive in spirit, but must keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This is love indeed ; but without such love the building cannot go on.

We can hinder the Lord by being too parochial. We should notice that the Lord Jesus did not say that He would build His churches, though of course the lesser are included in the greater. It would be wrong if we concentrated so much on our local church that we dissociated it from the universal building work which matters so much to our Lord. Smallness of heart, pettiness of spirit, undue pre-occupation with our own special sphere or local interests ; all this can become a hindrance in the true work of Church building. There is weakness about a position which is only concerned with the mystical truth of the Church and makes no attempt to translate it into practical living, but there is great limitation if we think only of our church or our assembly, as though it represented the beginning and end of the Lord's interests. We must learn to combine the widest possible concern for others with practical faithfulness in our own sphere.

### THE BUILDING MATERIAL

If we ask what are the materia's which Christ will use for the building of His Church, Peter himself seems to give us the answer to our question. "Thou art Peter . . . I will build my church".

Simon Bar-Jonah had been blessed with insight from Heaven concerning Christ. Such an insight was to work a mighty transformation in his own experience ; and then of him, and of men like him, the Lord would construct His Church. Who was Simon's father Jonah? Nobody seems to know. It had nothing to do with the work in hand. Simon was the son of a nobody, and it is of such men that the Lord makes use. Simon had clearly not been selected because he had natural qualities which would contribute to the building. In himself he

was nothing. Indeed he could easily become a menace to the Lord, as we have already seen. Christ did not take him up for qualities which he possessed naturally, either in his birth or in his upbringing, but only for what grace could make of him. He was not to remain Simon Bar-Jonah, but to become Peter, a new man in Christ. The Lord's reply to Peter's "Thou art the Christ" was: "And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter . . ." Really to know Christ is to become a transformed man ; it brings an entirely new element into what we are, when we by faith perceive and embrace what He is.

It is difficult fully to understand what the Lord meant by linking the new name Peter with the rock foundation of His Church. It has, of course, become a matter of fierce controversy and unjustified claims. We may be sure that Peter is not the Rock, for Christ is the Rock, as the rest of the Scriptures make very clear. Yet manifestly there is some association between the new man, Peter, and the Rock on which the Church is founded. There is, indeed, a very close association, not only for Peter but for all truly born-again men, with the Son of the Living God, which association is the basis for the Church. It is the association of fellowship with Christ by means of the Cross and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Truly to know Christ is to have eternal life: and that involves the whole issue of the new man—no longer Simon Bar-Jonah but Peter. So in His building of the Church Christ is seeking for those who no longer live on the basis of what they are in themselves, but on what He is, both for them and in them.

### (I) MADE SAFE

This change of name seems to mean in the first place that Simon had to be made safe. One outstanding feature of a rock is its stability, its settled, unchanging character, which makes it safe and reliable. The Lord could not build with the shifting sand of Simon Bar-Jonah—it would not be safe. There can be no question but that Simon badly needed some rock-like qualities put into him. He was so unreliable that he could turn in a moment from "the things of God" to "the things of men", from communion with Heaven to complicity with Hell. In this he was typical of the rest of the disciples—none of them were safe. The difficulty in those pre-Pentecost days was that they had no experience of the Cross or of the indwelling Spirit, for human nature, even at its best, is totally unreliable in the things of God unless the Cross has done its work and the Holy Spirit is in charge. The

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disciples could not be trusted. "Then charged he the disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ" (vs. 20). They were not safe even to talk about it. They could not be trusted to keep things pure for the Lord, and were all too likely, by self-seeking, to let the Devil in, and so play havoc with what the Lord was seeking to do.

"... Let him deny himself, and take up his cross"; only so will he be made safe. Peter did not take the name 'Peter' on his own initiative. The Lord gave it to him, and thereby signified that He was prepared to give him the new nature which he so badly needed. The Lord has made full provision for the dangerous unreliability: Simon can become Peter, not in name only, but in nature, and as soon as that happens the work of building the Church can go on apace. These are not theories; they are not just fanciful playing with words. In the Acts, that most practical of books, they are plain facts, clearly set forth for all to read. And they are there for us to learn the lesson. As then, so now, the material which Christ needs for building His Church is not natural men, be they never so wise or strong, but those who by the Cross have found deliverance from themselves and a new basis of life in Christ.

## (2) MADE STRONG

A rock also indicates strength: "... strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (Eph. iii. 16). Peter and the rest of us must be reinforced with Divine strength if the Church is to survive and triumph. There is no need to labour the matter of Simon Peter's weakness; it betrayed him at the time when he most wanted and intended to be firm and true to his Lord. This was not because he was an outstanding weakling or coward, but because he was brought face to face with powers which were altogether too much for him. When the battle was so fierce that even Christ was sorely pressed, we need not be surprised that His simple disciple was worsted and overcome. Yet afterwards Peter had to face those very same powers of evil, once they had rallied after Calvary, and together with the other members of the Church to become the focus of all their malicious hatred against his Lord. When the Lord Jesus associated "the gates of Hades" with His Church's experience, it was no mere figure of speech. He knew that as His people became His representatives in this

world and stood true to His testimony, all Hell would be roused against them. It happened almost immediately after the Church had been founded, but this time it was Satan who was worsted. Simon had truly become Peter by the power of the Holy Spirit. The fight is still on. Satan still concentrates all his force and fury against a true expression of the Church in the united life and ministry of believers. We shall need all the strength of the Rock Himself if we are to be true to Him and to one another in Him. The Lord make us strong!

## (3) MADE SPIRITUAL

The Rock is also a "spiritual Rock" (I Cor. x. 4); therefore transformation in Peter must change him from a carnal man into a spiritual. Peter became a stumblingblock to Christ when he passed from the realm of knowing things as Heaven knows them into the realm of minding "the things of men", that is, of reasoning and judging from an earthly standpoint. Now Christ's Church is essentially spiritual—"a spiritual house" (I Peter ii. 5)—which means that it is to be composed of spiritual men. This word 'spiritual' is very much misused and misunderstood. Some think that it means inhuman, ethereal; others that it means unpractical, visionary; and still others that it is equivalent to mystical, a mere matter of ideas or emotions. It means none of these things. The Lord Jesus was a spiritual Man, altogether filled with and possessed by the Holy Spirit, yet He was practical in both precept and example—He meant what He said and He practised what He preached. He insisted that the revealed will of God was a matter not merely for thoughts and words, but for honest obedience, without fear or question. It is not an imaginary Church that Christ is building, but a real one; not a vague conception, to which present experience bears but little resemblance, but a living community of men and women, worshipping and witnessing together in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This means that its individual members must be made spiritual, that they must share in the very Spirit and life of the glorious Head. So the work of building is essentially an inward matter. It is not a question of outward forms and procedure, but of men and women who are truly Christ-like, filled with His Spirit and being-daily transformed into His image.

H. F.

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## THE MAN GOD HAS ORDAINED

### IX. THE MAN CHILD

*Reading: Revelation xii 1-12.*

#### SONSHIP IN REPRESENTATIVE FULNESS

**H**ERE we have, I believe, the whole matter of sonship gathered into representative fulness. This son, this man child, is sonship in representative fulness: that in which all the principles and elements of Christ have been brought to utterness.

The conception of Christ takes place in the believer by the revelation of Christ in the heart. Paul said: "It was the good pleasure of God . . . to reveal his Son in me" (Gal. i, 15, 16). Again he said: "God . . . shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. iv. 6). The man child—sonship—is conceived by the revelation within of Jesus Christ. Something takes place in us, the beginning of something new and wonderful, when we are able to say, in these or other words, 'By an act of the Holy Spirit, a conceiving act of the Holy Spirit, God has revealed His Son in me: in my heart I have seen the Lord Jesus.' The principle of Christ is that He was 'conceived of the Holy Ghost' (Matt. i. 20), and that is true in the case of every believer. The conception of Christ in our hearts is by the Holy Ghost, and the method is the revelation of Christ. We have to date everything, all this wonderful new beginning and prospect, to the time when we could say, 'I have seen the Lord Jesus', which marked the conception of sonship.

#### SONSHIP NOT POSSIBLE TO THE FLESH

But again, the principle of conception is that which we find stressed throughout the Scriptures, Old and New: namely, that it is something which is not possible to the flesh, not even to the religious flesh. It is not possible to the Church. You know the Old Testament instances in which this very principle is revealed. Isaac is impossible to the flesh, even to the flesh of a separated and consecrated Abraham, a man who is walking with God. He cannot of himself, by the will of the flesh, produce sonship. This is of God, wholly, utterly of God. The Isaac man child, with all its tremendous significance, is something that the religious flesh

cannot produce. Samuel is another case. How impossible Samuel was without a Divine intervention, a real act of God. Again and again we find the situation under the sovereignty of God related to the bringing forth of something to serve God's purpose in a very particular and special way.

This is an abiding principle brought out spiritually in the New Testament. It is something which cannot be unless the Lord does it. Sonship is an impossible thing apart from God. This that is to come forth as the full expression of God's mind concerning His Son is beyond us. It is outside of any ability of our will or mind—it is of the Lord. Christ said: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John iii. 6). Here, in the "man child", this principle is brought to utterness: ". . . who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13). There is a good deal of mixture in Christians; there is much of being Christians by our decisions and willings and efforts and activities. Many people are in a false position as to the beginning of their Christian life. It is not a thing utterly of God. It is something they have done and decided upon. Many who are children of God are mixing things up, mixing their own strength and effort with what is of the Lord; and, in so far as it is like that, it is a contradiction of Divine principle and cannot come to this ultimate full expression.

The principles of Christ are brought to utterness in the man child. Let there be no mistake about what it is that we have in view. It is not just being Christians. It is the principles of Christ brought to utterness. That is what is here set before us.

#### THE FULL FORMATION OF CHRIST

Paul said to the Galatians, and through them to us: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you . . ." (Gal. iv. 19). The conception has taken place, there is something there, but there has to be a full formation of Christ within. Paul says, 'I am in distress, in agony, in great pain, till Christ be fully formed in you.' The "man child" is the full formation of Christ in the Church.

And the formation, as we know so well, is in the first place by means of a ministry—a ministry

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which God provides to that end. If God's thought is full conformity to the image of His Son, the full formation of Christ or the full expression of Christ. He will provide a ministry sovereignly for that purpose. So we have in the New Testament not just ministry for the salvation of souls and for the care of spiritual babes—it is there—but the importance of the New Testament bears down upon this other thing: the full formation of Christ. The real weight of the New Testament has to do with full formation, and God has marvellously provided ministry for that purpose.

The formation, too, is by means of discipline: and, again, by far the greater amount of the discipline (what the Word calls "chastening", literally 'child training') in the life of a true, earnest believer, has to do with this full formation. There are phases of discipline concerned with our wrongdoing, our sins, our errors, where the Lord has to correct and has to chasten; but let it be understood that by far the greater amount of the chastening or the discipline of the people of God has to do with the full formation of Christ.

## THE TRAVAIL

After the conception and the formation, we come to the travail. To begin with, the travail starts, not with ourselves, but with the Holy Spirit Himself. It is the Spirit of God who is in the first place travailing to this end for the full formation of Christ. You have only to read the letter to the Galatians to recognise that. See the place of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes up this matter of understand that this travail in the Apostle Paul is not Paul's working of himself up to a state of trouble and anguish, but something in him by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes up this matter of travail, and wherever He expresses Himself He will cause this sense of pain concerning spiritual life. When you and I have a bad time over our spiritual life, it is a mark of the Holy Spirit's work. It is indeed a sign of His working when we have a bad time over other people's spiritual life—provided we are having a bad time about our own as well! You understand what I mean. There is the possibility of always being troubled about other people's spiritual life, and not looking after our own; but, provided we know what it is to have the work of the Spirit in us, it is a mark of the Spirit's moving in us that we are deeply pained about spiritual conditions in the Lord's people. The travail begins with Him.

Women, in the Bible, are types of spiritual principles; and Hannah, being a woman in the Bible,

represents a spiritual principle. It was Hannah who, in the presence of God, in the House of the Lord, was found breaking her heart over this matter of the man child, in travail for a man child. Hannah, in type, indicates that a principle by which God is going to reach His end, His full expression, is the travail of our spirits brought about by the Holy Spirit.

## TRAVAIL AT THE END-TIME

Now, this picture of the woman in travail, in Revelation xii, belongs to the end time. There is no doubt about that, because Satan here is still in the heavenlies, where Paul showed him to be in his letter to the Ephesians. John has outlived Paul by thirty years, so that, sixty years after the ascension of Christ, Satan is still in the heavenlies, operating and making war. John is being shown the things that shall come to pass afterward: so that this travail belongs to the end-time. It is the Church in suffering in order to produce something.

Do not let us be led astray, do not let us be deceived and become mistaken, if the Lord should for a time do a work of what is called 'revival', and many saints are gathered in, and there seems to be some tremendous thing going on; do not let us be deceived. That is one aspect of end-time need, that there shall be an ingathering; but—let there be no mistake about it—the actual end-time is going to be marked by suffering on the part of the Church. How that will come about I do not propose to discuss now. The possibilities for the Church, with the irresistible spread of one great power over the earth, are pretty clear. It will not be put back, it will go on; it is anti-God, anti-Christ, and wherever it holds sway it will begin to limit the activities of the Lord's people, and presently it will break out. But whether that be it or not, there is coming, and it may be in our lifetime, a time of real suffering to Christianity, and out of that suffering there will come that which goes right out to the Lord. Many will fall away, many will give up, many will drop out of the race, paralysed by the situation; but there will be those who see that the only thing is utterness for the Lord—to go right on.

Is not that the question which confronts us, in a small way, a particular and personal way, in every bit of suffering? Something comes upon us—the Devil makes an onslaught—and there are alternatives for us. One is to sit down in hopelessness and give it up, say that you cannot go on, to turn with bitterness against the Lord, to become full of questions and almost cynical. The other

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alternative is to say: 'There is nothing for it but just to go on!' We are all brought to that situation in simple ways. 'Am I going to succumb, to yield to despair, to give up? Or am I going right on, and all the more because of this activity of the enemy?' The Spīrit of God would bring us to that. You notice that that is the thing upon which Paul put his finger in his word to the Galatians. Because of certain things, they had stopped in the race; they were Christians, but they had stopped, come to a standstill. "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you?" (iii. 1). "I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" (iv. 19). 'You have to go on. The only thing for you is to go on; not to stop, to give up, but to go on.'

### THE BIRTH OF THE MAN CHILD A CRISIS

And it is those who go on who reach that which is here represented by the man child—full sonship. But it is the product of suffering, the effect of suffering. It is going to be made corporate at the end, and—there is no doubt about it—the birth of the man child is the crisis. Thank God, it is going to be a definite crisis, an act: it is going to be a rapture. The word here is quite clear. It is not a word that has been coined to express some theory. "Caught up" to the throne is just the word 'raptured', and it is used in the New Testament in other connections. When we read that Philip the evangelist was "caught away" by the Spirit and found at Azotus (Acts viii. 39, 40) the same word is used; he was raptured, he was caught away. When Paul said: "I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up even to the third heaven" (II Cor. xii. 2), it is the same word—raptured.

And here this man child is caught up, raptured. It is an act. Philip was raptured in an act, not over a lifetime; it was something sudden, quick, precise. And so this man child is caught up to God and to His throne. It is the consummation of a work of the Holy Spirit of bringing children of God to a place of full and utter expression of spiritual principles, the principles of Christ. A principle is not an outward form, but an underlying law, and there are these underlying laws of Christ which are going to be made utter in us. Christ is heavenly: that is a law. It will have its utmost expression in the man child—born out from Heaven and at last caught up to God and to the throne. It is the principle made perfect.

### THE WRATH OF SATAN AGAINST THE MAN CHILD

"To rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (Rev. xii. 5). That word was spoken also in promise to the overcomers of the church at Thyatira (Rev. ii. 27). If this is God's thought and intention, what may we expect? Well, there is a great red dragon not far away, whose one concentrated interest is in this man child. The woman, with the rest of her seed, the whole of the Church, will come second: they will be a secondary, though by no means unimportant, interest and concern; but the primary concern of the great adversary—here called the "great red dragon", later called Satan, the Devil, "the deceiver of the whole inhabited earth", 'the accuser of the brethren' (xii. 9, 10)—the dominant object of his hatred is this expression of Christ in fulness, in utterness. He is against that; he is out to devour this 'child'. His hatred and malice are concentrated in a determination if possible to destroy those who are seeking to go right on with the Lord, and those who are seeking to fulfil any ministry in that connection: to destroy them, to swallow them up and put them out altogether, to make it impossible for them to come to their Divinely intended place and destiny.

Just look for a moment at this in the Bible—the wrath of Satan against the man child or against sonship in full expression. The book of Exodus is just this. Exodus is sonship and victory over the world. The very first verse strikes this note: "Now these are the names of the sons of Israel"—sons of a prince with God! Here is sonship right in the first verse of the book. When you come to verse 16 of that first chapter, you find Pharaoh issuing his order for the destruction of all male children, and the word is: "If it be a son, then ye shall kill him". How much of spiritual history lies behind that! We see Herod coming in, centuries later, and killing all the male children to get one particular Son (Matt. ii. 16). And again, in chapter iv of Exodus, we read: "Israel is my son, my firstborn: and I have said . . . Let my son go" (vv. 22, 23). It is sonship, and the exodus, the emergence of Israel, is sonship triumphing over the world and its principles. There is much more in the Old Testament concerning the wrath of the enemy against the man child—against sonship in fulness.

### SATAN CAST DOWN

So there will be a climax. God will get what He is after; it will be found in the throne—it will be established in its position for its glorious purpose

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and function. And it is quite obvious that when that man child, that full expression, is found in the throne, Satan is put out of his heavenly position. He and his angels were cast down to the earth (Rev. xii, 9). They have only been there until the right and proper instrument of the heavenlies has come to its place. There is no room in the heavenlies for the man child and for Satan together. One or the other has to go. When the Lord finds among His children those who satisfy Him in the matter of a full expression of these Divine principles of sonship, the ground of Satan's power in the heavenlies is undercut, and he is cast down. What a time that is, according to all that is said here! "Rejoice, O heavens . . ." (vs. 12). This is, indeed, the climax of the ages. It is an immense thing, and therefore it involves with us very great matters in spiritual experience.

I close with something that I want you to take particular note of. *We are not occupied with a special object called 'the man child'*, and we must not be. *We are occupied with Christ*. But we must recognise that there is a fulness of Christ to be

reached which carries with it very, very big issues indeed. There are tremendous issues bound up with this chapter that we have read—Divine interests, eternal issues, factors of supreme account. It is the matter of government in the heavenlies. It is no small thing to be caught up to God and His throne; no small thing for Satan and his angels to be deposed. That is bound up with a 'man child'—a company of which it will be said: "And *they* overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death" (vs. 11): their soul-life—a big thing. But do not go around talking about the 'man child'. This is only a representation of Christ in fulness. Talk about Christ. It is not the representation that we are after—it is Christ in fulness we are after: so let us keep our eyes on Him. Let us allow a message like this to move us, not toward some *thing*, under whatever designation, but toward Christ—toward a position of utterness in Christ.

T. A-S.

(Concluded)

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS OUT OF HER ELEMENT

**B**IDDY was a really first-class hen, and she knew it. The farmer knew it, too, and was never tired of singing her praises to anybody who would listen. The chickens all knew it, for some of them had been hatched and brought up by her, so that they could testify that she was a very good mother. Nobody was surprised, therefore, when she was chosen to sit on some special eggs which the farmer wanted hatched out. Large eggs they were, and there were eight of them. Bidy felt rather important as she took charge of the nest where the farmer had placed the eggs, and she settled down to keep them warm.

Now, if hens could count (which, of course, they cannot), Bidy would have known that these eggs were taking a week longer than usual to hatch. Perhaps the time seemed long to her—we do not know—but she stuck to her job and in the end she had her reward when the shells began to be broken open and fluffy yellow chicks stepped out. They were large chicks, and very clumsy ones too, but she clucked away, calling them to eat the food given by the farmer's wife, and generally watching over them and fussing them as hens always do.

The days passed, and the chicks were growing fast, when one day she decided to take them for a

walk round the farm. As it happened, they came near to the farm pond. Hens do not like water, so Bidy decided not to go any nearer, and when she saw one of her little family straying towards the pond she called to him to come back at once. But he would not listen! And, what was worse, the other seven decided to follow him. Bidy hurried down to the water's edge, shrieking with rage and fear, only to see the chicks falling into the water. They would be drowned, all of them, drowned in the pond, and then what would the farmer say?

She called and cackled so loudly that he came running out of the house to see what was the matter. What did he see? Eight happy little ducklings swimming safely in the water, while the poor frantic hen rushed to and fro, longing to follow them but knowing that she could not do so. Poor Bidy! She had hatched out duck's eggs; her chicks were not really chicks at all, but ducklings; and now, without meaning to be unkind, they were showing her that she could not share in the life which they were going to live. She could walk on dry ground. She could even fly a little way up into the air. The water, however, was different; it was no place for her. Water was not her element.

Ducks are born to swim. Their feet are made for



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it ; their feathers are specially oiled to keep out the water ; they can even keep their heads under water while they search for food. They belong to the water. It is their home. If Biddy had been born a duck she would have been able to understand, and would have been able to lead the ducklings in their swimming, but she had not been so born and never could be.

Biddy was much older than the ducklings. She was wiser and stronger than they. Yet she could not enter where they went, or live where they lived. She could not even understand such a life. She belonged to the kingdom of land and air, but not to the kingdom of water.

All men and women belong to the kingdom of earth, but none of us by nature belongs to the kingdom of Heaven. Only those who have received new life from the Lord Jesus can enter that kingdom. That is why so many people who are older than we, yes, and wiser and stronger too, cannot

understand what it means to be a Christian, " Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God " (John 3. 3). The hen could not enter the kingdom of water, for she had not been born a duck ; the ducklings, though, had been born into that kingdom, so there was no fear of their drowning, even though they were quite little, for they were in their element.

The great question for us, then, is whether we belong to the kingdom of God. It is not a matter of trying to make ourselves better or copying what other people say or do. It is a question of starting all over again by becoming children of God, and we do this by receiving the Lord Jesus into our hearts. When He comes in, then we are " born anew " and begin to belong to the new kingdom, the kingdom of Heaven. " But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name " (John 1. 12).

H. F.

## ATTAINING TO GOD'S FULL THOUGHT

*" Thus saith the Lord . . . that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure : even saying of Jerusalem, She shall be built ; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings ; to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut ; I will go before thee, and make the rugged places plain ; I will break in pieces the doors of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron ; and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I am the Lord, which call thee by thy name, even the God of Israel " (Is. xliv. 24, 28 ; xlv. 1 - 3).*

*" Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord, the God of heaven, given me ; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah " (Ezra i. 1, 2).*

**H**OLDING these Scriptures in reserve for the moment, I am going to put before you a case in the form of a supposition. Whether the supposition is more than that, and is actually the case itself,

remains to be seen by what may come to light.

### SOVEREIGNTY IN RELATION TO A REMNANT

Let us suppose that God had, and has, in His heart and mind a certain fulness of purpose which He has determined should find expression by means of a people on this earth ; and that, when it comes to the test, that people as a whole and in general fail Him. He has known all along of that coming failure, and yet He has never for an instant contemplated giving up one iota of His main purpose. He therefore resolves that, in view of the failure of the people as a whole, He will proceed to secure to Himself from among them another company, smaller in number, who will respond to Him in His fuller desire. As He foreknew the whole and called them, so He foreknew these. In His eternal counsels He has His eye upon them and they are to Him, not an elect of the elect, but the first ripe fruit of His husbandry, a kind of first expression of His thoughts concerning all the rest. If such a supposition were true, what do you think would be some of the things that He would do in regard to such a company?

#### (a) HEART HUNGER FOR GOD'S FULL THOUGHT

In the first place, would He sovereignly do something inside them? Would He induce within them

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

a sense of need, a right kind of dissatisfaction and disappointment with the existing general condition, producing an inward longing for something, a sense that there should be something more, that this existing state is not what the Lord really means for His full satisfaction? Would He thus reproduce inside these people His own discontent and dissatisfaction, His own desire for something more in spiritual measure? Do you not think that that is one thing He would do?

## (b) PROVISION TO SATISFY HUNGER

Then do you think that, possessing perfect foreknowledge, He would work sovereignly to provide for that inwrought sense of dissatisfaction and need to be met; to have the provision in existence, so that there should be no contradiction or inconsistency in His way; so that He should not seem to be one who causes a desire and sense of need but makes no provision for it? Those two things surely would go together. Does it seem likely that that is what He would do, in the second place?

## (c) LIFE SOVEREIGNLY DIRECTED AND CONTROLLED

Thirdly, do you think He would act sovereignly, apart from those people, so to arrange and govern their experiences, their lives, that they were really headed up to His fuller thought; that in some way—to begin with perhaps without their knowing why and what it meant—He would bring them within the compass of that intention and provision of His, and would shut all other doors to them, so that they were unable to become absorbed in something else, something more general?

I do not mean by the latter something wrong or bad, but something that just does not meet God in that measure in which He must be satisfied. For these people He is acting sovereignly, and they find that, while they may be able to give a partial explanation for it, the fact is they have not been allowed to be absorbed by the general Christian life and outlook and activity. It is not that they are separatists themselves, that they are not concerned in all that is of God and for God in a general way—very often they would fain move out into that realm and become a part of it and take up its activities—but somehow or other God has not allowed, and does not allow, them to do so. There are conditions which put up barriers, things which do not permit such a course. The people concerned are somehow shut up despite themselves—shut up to something more. Their prevailing consciousness is, 'Well, here we are! The Lord has not allowed

us to get into this or to go into that. For some reason we are shut up.' Do you think that is what God would do? Would it be necessary for Him to frustrate other things and other ways of a more general character, cutting across them at every turn? That sounds hard and difficult, but do you suppose that is the sort of thing the Lord would do? What would happen if He did not? Everything would become general; those people would go out and be absorbed in the whole general line of things.

Then, let us suppose that you are an object of this sovereignty of God, though unconscious of the fact. In the course of your life you are brought into touch with something fuller of God—brought there, firstly, by an inward sense of need which cannot be satisfied in a general way, and, secondly, by the seemingly accidental happenings in your life which result in your arrival at a particular condition and set of circumstances. You find the course of your life by no means easy—and it will indeed not be so, for in such a realm things are very exacting. The Lord is not going to accept a general kind of Christian life in the case of such people; there is going to be some really deep work done in them.

The difficulties will not always appear to arise from purely spiritual causes. They will seem to come from awkward and difficult people, from strife about mere earthly things, and so on. Under the pressure of such trials you may abandon your ground and go off for a time; but presently a consciousness of having got out of your place overtakes you and you feel you must get back on to your former ground. You begin to weigh things up and to see what is needed of humbling, confession, and so on; and you realise that after all it is God Himself with whom you have to do—not merely people and things. Under the urge of the need, and despite the cost, you come back, humbled, to your former position; and only then do you feel you are at home, where you ought to be. You can know no true rest anywhere else.

Do you think that sort of experience might be an expression of the sovereignty of God in relation to His special purpose? Is it not likely that that is just what would happen? Outwardly, matters appear to be the outcome of purely human affairs and everyday happenings, and yet when you come to look squarely at them you are forced to the conclusion that they cannot be accounted for merely along a natural line. If you believe that God is really on the throne and that your life is under His control, you are forced to the conclusion that your affairs, strange and difficult though they be, are the expression of His sovereignty.

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## GOD'S PEOPLE IN BABYLON

## (a) A HEART-HUNGRY REMNANT

Now that is a hypothetical position. You have, however, exactly that kind of thing present in the Word of God to a detail. Here in Isaiah that whole ground is covered. The Lord has taken a people, Israel, for the expression of Himself in Divine fullness, and the nation as a whole is going to fail Him; and He, knowing beforehand that they are going to fail Him, takes action before they fail. This word concerning Cyrus is a prophetic utterance many years before Cyrus has a being. "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus . . ." Where is Cyrus in the day that that was uttered? He was not even born. Here you find the Lord speaking about a returning remnant before the nation went into captivity, and about the instrument which should send them back; and of the re-building of the temple before the temple was destroyed. It is all spoken of before anything happens.

And when you come to the captivity, what do you find? Well, most of the people are quite content with their condition and position. The majority have settled down in Babylon with no thought of anything else at all. But within that company there is a smaller company who are saying, 'This is not what God meant; we cannot inwardly settle down and be content with this. And yet, how can it be otherwise? How are we going to get out?' There are those who say, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps. cxxxvii. 4). That speaks of the inward work.

## (b) DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AT WORK

Now look at the outward provision for meeting that need, already secured by God. What are Daniel and certain others doing in Babylon? They are maintaining God's full thought in the midst of His people. As the result of Daniel's travail and soul exercise, the remnant returns. God has His prophetic ministry operating right on the spot on behalf of this remnant. There is His sovereign provision of one kind.

Then see His sovereign apprehension of Cyrus. "That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus": "I will gird thee, though thou has not known me" (Is. xlv. 5). That is sovereignty: a man who does not know the Lord, girded by the Lord to do His work; unreligious solicitude for God: sovereignty at work to secure God's end.

Then you have two men, Ezra and Nehemiah. If you have any doubt as to what I have said, you have only to read this book of Ezra. "Then rose up the heads of fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, even all whose spirit God had stirred to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem" (i. 5). That is the inner work. Then in the first verse of the next chapter you read: "Now these are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away into Babylon . . ."; and you get a list of people, showing that there God had been working in the spirit of a company. They are not the whole of Judah, but within Judah a number in whose spirit God had been working in this direction. What you have embodied in Ezra is the sovereignty of God in relation to this fuller expression of Himself in a company. The book of Ezra is just full of Divine sovereignty from beginning to end. The very first words show the sovereignty of God—"the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus"—and then follow the sovereign orderings of God to see that this thing is brought about. Ezra himself is one of those involved, and he represents the sovereignty of God.

## (c) HUMAN FAITHFULNESS IN RESPONSE

Nehemiah represents the complement of that sovereignty. Do not forget, there is always this other side. It is the side of the faithfulness of man to the things of God. It is one thing to recognise the sovereignty of God, but it is very important to recognise that that has to have its counterpart in the faithfulness of man. Nehemiah is the embodiment of the faithfulness of man as to God's thoughts. One is God taking responsibility, the other is man taking responsibility. Those two things must go together, even when God is going to do a thing so sovereignly—even when there is so much that is of God. Many of us know something of the experience of the inward urge which will not let us rest content with that which is less than God's full thought. We know that that urge is not of ourselves. And we know, too, the remarkable way in which our lives seem to have been hedged in. We would have gone off in many directions, but somehow or other we have found we could not move. The door was shut against us, despite our own intention and desire. What do these things mean? They are the proofs of the operation of Divine sovereignty in relation to us, holding us to that which is wholly of God.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

But what response does this find in us? God's sovereignty makes a demand for man's faithfulness. To reconcile the two things is not easy, but they are there. Look at Nehemiah. He was faithful. Read again the book which goes by his name. You must highly esteem that man. He is a man who has seen what God wants, and he is committed to it up to the hilt. See him using every kind of resource and wisdom. His first move on coming to Jerusalem is to go out quietly by night round the city, with its broken-down walls and burnt gates, to survey the whole thing, but to say nothing as yet: he is keeping the matter in his heart. Sometimes it is the greatest wisdom to say nothing; because there are plenty of treacherous people about and plenty of enemies who only want to discover your intentions, so that they can start to frustrate you before you get a chance to begin. Nehemiah acts with the greatest wisdom and care, and all the way through you see his faithfulness to the purpose to which he is committed. Oh, to recognise what God is after, to see the meaning of His dealings with us, and then to give ourselves utterly to the realisation of His end!

### A CHALLENGE TO BE FACED

If we are committed to the Lord, life is not just hap and accident; but a major issue is raised for us all. I think the major issue I have had to face again and again, in the midst of the problems, perplexities and sufferings and all the apparent contradictions to which Satan gives his own explanations, is that of the faithfulness of God. If we have committed ourselves thoroughly to God, really meaning that we want His full will and not our own, and that by His grace we will go the way that He leads and shows, whatever it costs; if we have done that, and then situations arise which look terribly complicated and seem to contradict the faithfulness of God, what are we to conclude? We have to conclude one of two things: either that God cares nothing for all our devotion and consecration, and just lets us go altogether astray, or else that this is all under His eye and is being governed by Him.

We have either to believe God or not to believe Him. If we believe Him, then all these things are not incidents, they are not just haps: somewhere behind them there is a sovereignty at work. It may all seem frustrating, it is true; shutting doors, holding up, bringing into difficult ways and deep perplexities; yes, but there is a sovereignty at work in relation to some purpose. It must be so, if God is God. You have all this here

in the Word, and it all bears down upon this—that people who, because of Divine foreknowledge, are related to Divine sovereign action, do come into such situations; but in the end God's sovereignty is shown to relate to something that is unusually precious to Him: "they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, even mine own possession, in the day that I make" (Malachi iii, 17).

The Lord is after something more than the ordinary, and He needs a people for it; but such a people will have unusual experiences, inside and out. Theirs will not be the ordinary, normal course, where everything goes well and straightforwardly. They will go through ways that are tortuous and exceedingly difficult, but there is all the time a sovereignty at work. And from such a people God looks for a response which expresses itself in utter faithfulness to what He shows them, and an utter trust in His own faithfulness. This is the challenge which our own hearts must face.

### GOD'S SOVEREIGN PROVISION FOR TIMES OF DECLENSION

I find it helpful, after reading a portion of the Word of God, to stand back and ask myself: What is the implication of what I have read? What does it all signify? I get a great deal along that line. Here is an example. I read certain letters that were written by Paul at the end of his life and at a time when Christianity, as to its primal beauty and glory and purity, was breaking up. I see that the first early conditions as we have them in the opening chapters of 'Acts' have changed. Things seem to be going wrong; the purity of things, the heavenliness, is being lost; the Church is becoming an earthly thing. I know from church history that, before the apostolic age is past, before John himself dies, they will have begun to make what they call 'bishops' (not in the New Testament sense of that word, but ecclesiastical bishops), and it will not be long before they make a pope, and this whole thing will be brought down to earth. The process started before Paul was dead. At the end of his life, with those conditions coming about, Paul writes some letters, and no one can pretend that those letters are a compromise, accommodating to the situation which is developing. They are the most drastic and utter contradiction of it. They are a wonderfully full revelation of the heavenly thought and mind and position.

What is the significance of this? Is it not that in those letters God has sovereignly made His provision for all times of declension? That is His sovereign reaction in which He says, in effect, 'When-

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ever declension sets in and things begin to lose their purity, here is your provision, I have laid it up for you: everything is provided to meet the situation.' We are not left without guidance, we are not left without light in a dark day. We can take hold of these later letters and say, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come" (Is. lx. 1). Darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the peoples, but here is our light. The sovereign act of God has made provision for what He saw coming, and in every age here it is right to hand. God does not accommodate Himself to the situation and say, 'We must make the best of a bad job, we must be content with a little.' He has taken sovereign precautions against that by giving us letters like 'Ephesians', 'Philippians', 'Colossians' and 'Timothy'. That is the implication and significance lying behind these letters. It is a case of the sovereignty of God again in relation to His full thought.

#### THE IMPLICATION— GOD'S FULL THOUGHT IS ATTAINABLE

What about the faithfulness of man? We shall be unfaithful, thoroughly unfaithful, if we take the attitude, 'Well, everything has gone wrong, there is nothing to-day which represents the original; we had better accommodate ourselves to the situation as it is.' If you say that, you will have to cut out those epistles and put them in the fire. You cannot possibly take that attitude and leave the New Testament intact as it is. What a bad time you would have every time you read 'Ephesians' if you were to take that attitude of compromise!

For a long time those letters were lost as to their real value in the Church. It is only within recent times that the value of Paul's later letters has come home to Christians. They have appeared too deep, abstract, heavenly. The Gospels were practically the Bible of the Church for a long time, and then Luther saw the true meaning of 'Romans', and that made a break. Then another movement of God, and the Church saw the spiritual implications of 'Ephesians', and that made another break. We have to recognise the significance of these epistles of Paul's, and see that the position which they set forth is one which is to be regarded as attainable and maintainable by the grace of God, and that we are required to hold fast in faithfulness in a day of declension. The whole issue is wrapped up in those two things—the sovereignty of God and the faithfulness of man.

May the Lord make us faithful. It is going to be costly, a lonely way, but the sovereignty of God is to be counted on. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (II Chron. xvi. 9). There is sovereignty active toward those who will not compromise.

If there is one thing more than another that I trust will result from our meditation, it is that our faith will revive, and that we shall be stronger in determination, and shall recover from the weaknesses and the bruising and the paralyisings which the sufferings of the way may have brought. The Lord help us.  
T. A-S.

#### LIKE-MINDEDNESS AMONGST GOD'S CHILDREN

*"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus" (Romans xv. 5).*

IN these words the Apostle recognizes that like-mindedness amongst God's children is the result of Divine power and grace rather than of human effort, however sincere and well-intentioned. His language also implies that the attainment of this like-mindedness will not always be an easy matter; but rather the reverse. God Himself is exercising much patience in order to bring men into a state of like-mindedness with Himself, and it is this same God of patience who alone can work in us and so secure a similar condition, not only as between Himself and His children, but as amongst them in their mutual relationships. Some difficulties in the way of realizing this end may here be referred to.

Much is due to the natural depravity of our

hearts, which tends to engender in us a perverse and obstinate spirit in holding on to our own point of view and makes us unwilling to admit mistake. Not the least dangerous feature of this tendency is its subtlety. It may frequently operate in our minds and bias our view of things quite unknown to ourselves. A habit may thus be formed of instinctively holding on to our own righteousness and adhering to our own ways and opinions in a spirit that will effectually blind us to anything that may be urged on the other side of the case. We are repeatedly warned in the Holy Scripture against this form of self-deception, and are also taught that it is the poor in spirit and the meek who will be truly taught of God and led into a right and true view of the matters concerning which there may be difference of opinion amongst brethren. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God".

D. E. HOSTE (quoted in his Biography).

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## A FORETASTE OF THE INHERITANCE

*Reading: Genesis xxvi. 1-6, 11-14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 32, 34, 35; Romans ix. 7, 8; Galatians iii. 16, 29; Ephesians i. 3; II Corinthians i. 19, 20; Romans viii. 1.*

CHAPTER xxvi of the book of Genesis is set in the midst of a section that is concerned with the inheritance. At the end of the previous chapter, we find the wrong choice of Esau: Esau preferred his present gratification to that which represented eternal glory and Divine intention. When we turn over to chapter xxvii, we find again Jacob and Esau; and here Esau, having earlier despised the birthright, now loses the inheritance. Jacob, unsatisfactory as he is, is determined to have this inheritance, and by subterfuge he secures it.

Now, though those chapters, xxv and xxvii, are concerned with a vital matter, with the fact that there is an inheritance, that there is a great intention of God which is worth everything else; though there is that concern, the atmosphere of this section is one of battle and difficulty. But in chapter xxvi the atmosphere is quite different. Here is a chapter full of blessing before the end is realised, and I believe that we might call this 'a foretaste of the inheritance'. You see, the person in view here is Isaac. In the Old Testament, and very particularly in the book of Genesis, we can truly say that persons represent principles. Abraham, for example, represents a great principle—the principle of faith; and Isaac also represents quite a number of spiritual principles.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES REPRESENTED  
BY ISAAC

We remember, to begin with, that he represents that which is the fruit of an utter faith in God. Only by a way of faith did Isaac come into existence. Only through a trial of faith, a mighty testing of faith, did his existence come about at all.

Secondly, he represents the principle of utter dedication, the giving of all. "Because thou . . . hast not withheld thy son, thine only son . . . in blessing I will bless thee" (Gen. xxii. 16, 17). Reserves, holdings back from the Lord, prevent everything else. But as faith has been established, an absolute dependence on God; as the faith principle is embodied in this man: so also is the utter committal of a life to God without reserve

embodied in this man who has been on the altar. There has been no holding back of that which was absolutely dearest. If Isaac speaks of anything, he speaks of an utter abandonment to the will of God.

Thirdly, Isaac speaks of the power of resurrection. He was given back, in figure, from the dead (Heb. xi. 19). He ought not to have been there—but here he was.

And so, with that threefold basis, Isaac comes into view again, and there is repeated to him the promise given to Abraham, the promise of the inheritance, the promise of the full purpose of God.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN CHRIST  
THE KEY TO EVERYTHING

We have to pause here for a moment, because the matter of the purpose of God, in Christ, concerning us, His children, is the key to all else. It is a tremendous issue that God has in view by redeeming us. No mere security, no mere deliverance from judgment is purposed: the whole intention of our being redeemed is the *inheritance*. It is that we should come into the vastness of what it means to be one with Christ, what it means to be eternally one with Him who is the Heir of all things. We touch here on a matter which is so great that human language fails us. There is no greater theme, in some ways. At the end of the book of the Revelation we hear the voice from Heaven saying: "He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev. xxi. 7). "Shall inherit these things". And the Apostle says: "we are . . . heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him" (Rom. viii. 17). With Christ—"whom he appointed heir of all things" (Heb. i. 2). The inheritance is brought into view.

The whole of this section of Genesis—Isaac and Jacob—is full of warning concerning missing that for which we have been redeemed, missing the inheritance. There is the possibility of choosing an easier way—one not reaching God's end. May the Lord quicken our hearts to an utter fleeing from everything that is less than His fullest. It is a matter of heart-attitude. It is not being good or clever or knowing a lot of truth. It is something to do with the heart. "The Lord looketh on the heart" (I Sam. xvi. 7). He knows whether we have divided interests, or whether it is Christ alone.

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## DWELLING IN THE LAND

And so here Isaac comes into view, and the Lord appears to him. He was then dwelling at Beer-lahai-roi (Gen. xxv. 11), which lay "between Kadesh and Bered" (xvi. 14), far down in the South country. The Lord said to him: "Go not down into Egypt". 'Don't get off your right ground—don't compromise with that realm which I have judged and with which I have finished'. This whole world is a judged realm, and we touch it at our peril. Put one foot on it, and you will find sinking sand—you will find you have lost your footing in God. It is a deadly realm. Here is God speaking, with whom everything has its eternal, spiritual significance. Egypt is not only a literal country; it signifies something. God says: "Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of". Isaac did not yet see all that the land meant; but God said: "Dwell in the land that I shall tell thee of"; implying 'There is something more coming.' "Sojourn in *this* land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all *these* lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father'.

"Sojourn in this land". Where is he? If you look at a map, you will see that he has moved up out of the South country, in a north-westerly direction, into the particular part of Canaan, along the sea-coast, occupied by the Philistines. He has moved to Gerar, near the sea-coast, about twenty-five miles from Beersheba, to which he afterwards returned (xxvi. 23). He has, in fact—though it seems almost unwittingly—moved into the Land of Promise. He is in the right position—and so are you and I! This land is Christ—Christ is the land. How unwittingly, how almost inconsequentially, oftentimes, we seem to find ourselves in Christ—because God has had so much more to do with it than we have. Is that not so? Salvation is a miracle. It is possible, alas, to be a Christian who is not enjoying the land, although we are really in it—although we are in Christ. Let us remember: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 1). We are in the land; we are in Him.

So this land was the land of the Philistines—for "Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar." But though he was in the land of the Philistines, the Lord said: "Sojourn in this land". I think that word 'sojourn' is a good word. We find it taken up again in the letter to the Hebrews: "Abraham . . . became a sojourner in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs

with him of the same promise" (Heb. xi. 8, 9). This is something temporary, since at present the land is enemy occupied. What a perfect counterpart of our own spiritual position! The Lord says: 'You are in the land.' You say: 'But I am in the land of the Philistine!' Yes, we are in Christ in the midst of an alien atmosphere, in an alien situation. But one day the whole thing is going to capitulate to Him. There is not going to be any alien thing left. The whole, not only of external things—they are incidental—but of the inward withstanding of Him, is going to break. In the end there is going to be a complete inner spiritual capitulation to the Lord. The Kingdom is going to come; the Kingdom is going to be a real establishment of His sovereign government. There shall be the absolute sway of the One "whose right it is" (Ezek. xxi. 27), and every other alien and resisting thing shall be banished eternally.

## DWELLING BY FAITH

But at present the Lord says to Isaac, to the heir of the promise, the one in whom all the fulfilment is intended: 'You are in the land now; now stay here. Do not go down to Egypt; stay in this land. Surrounded as you are by Philistines, by another kind of régime, you are to dwell in this land by faith—faith in the position and the promise that you have been given.' When Isaac recognises that this land is the very one which is the land of the inheritance, he surely sees it with different eyes. It is as though he says, 'I am going to stand here for the Lord ultimately to give me the whole inheritance.' Yes, the whole land of Christ is ours now to appropriate. "In Christ" we have "every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies" (Eph. i. 3). The Lord Jesus said to His disciples when speaking of this dispensation: 'In Me you have everything; abide in Me. Stay in the land, stay in your inheritance. If a man abide not . . . ' You see, there is Egypt; there is the possibility of taking on the Philistine atmosphere; but we are to be abiding in Him in the land, appropriating the fulness of the inheritance now by faith. That is the first explanation of a foretaste of the inheritance.

Why was this whole chapter full of blessing? Why was it that, wherever he went and dug, water came up? Why was it that he reaped a hundred-fold straight away, the first year? Even his failure the Lord somehow turned into blessing (vs. 11). It is as though God insisted upon blessing Isaac straight away; a secret of blessing has somehow been touched. Yes, and the first is this spiritual position. "Sojourn in the land". It says that

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

“Isaac dwelt in Gerar” (vs. 6). I believe he dwelt there by faith, believing that the Lord was going to fulfil the promise, as though he were already in the land.

Is that not the meaning of “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. iv. 4)? Hallelujah! we have a risen, living Lord. We are in the fulness of Christ now because of our union with Him. Let us glory in Him. Let us not say ‘Oh, but it is only Gerar, the land of the Philistines.’ We have got to live on higher ground. There may be all sorts of things going on all round, but that is not the point. We are dwelling in the land. “Dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed” (Ps. xxxvii. 3, A.R.V., mg.).

So Isaac dwelt in Gerar, and I think there is more in that than meets the eye. He dwelt there by faith. He said, ‘Lord, I am here in you and for you, trusting for the promises.’

THE ANSWER TO  
HEREDITARY FAILURE

And then there was a section of the chapter that we did not read (vv. 7-10). We might call this ‘the answer to hereditary failure’. Much of what we do and much of our failing is just what we are, is it not? It is not that we deliberately do something wicked. It may be something that other people can see, of which we may not be the least conscious. We are just that sort of person. You see, here is a failure which Abraham himself twice repeated. And then Isaac does the very same thing. Is that not remarkable? He says to his wife, ‘Say you are my sister, in case something goes wrong.’ This weakness seems to be hereditary, it seems to be temperamental; it keeps recurring. Have you or I got things in our lives that keep recurring? Maybe we have. It could be that there is much going on in our lives of which we would be ashamed if the light were turned on. And God’s Word always turns the light on—it never hides anything.

Now, there is no excuse for this, but there is both comfort and encouragement. The Lord is constantly overruling, is He not? There is no excuse for these ‘recurrences’. Once we are conscious of the wrongness of our particular weakness, it must cease, because we can now go to the Lord about it. We trust that Isaac learned something through this breakdown. But what we have got to get at is that, if we are on God’s ground, if we are wholly with Him for the inheritance, if we are really poor in heart, and really set upon Him, it is amazing how much He overrules all the time. He goes on blessing. Suppose we were only blessed when we did exactly the right thing, how

would we get on? Take the matter of guidance: suppose you should have stayed in this morning, instead of going out. You have really ‘done it’ now, haven’t you? The Lord is angry, and you have missed the blessing.

Well, if the Lord did not go on overruling, I do not know where we should be. It does not mean that all we need to do is just to muddle along and trust the Lord. Not at all. We have to learn to walk step by step with Him. But we are such, alas, that we have not learned to walk perfectly yet. I think this is put in as a warning and an encouragement, that we do well to come to the Lord about things that are our own temperament, and bring them to the Cross and be done with them, that they shall not be repeated. But, for the much of which we are unaware, there is constant mercy operating. This should not make us careless. The Lord wants us to have a balance. We are not living by a rigid legality; there is much mercy over everything. But once the heart is set, and once the position is: ‘Christ for me’, the Lord seems to go on blessing on the right hand and on the left.

## THE DIGGING OF THE WELLS

And that brings us to the third thing, the digging of the wells. Occupying this position by faith, in the inheritance, means that life comes out of the very ground. Life comes out wherever we put our hand to a thing. That does not mean, of course, that our experience is literally of constant, conscious blessing. But we cannot ‘abide in Him’ without fruit (John xv. 5); we cannot ‘believe in Him’ without “rivers of living water” (John vii. 38). We have got deliberately to take the ground that the Lord has set us on, and then He will be with us. That is why it seems as though every few minutes one of Isaac’s herdsmen or servants came running in and said, ‘We have dug another well, and there is water!’ A few minutes later some more came in: ‘We have dug again, and there is more water!’ Isaac might have said, ‘Well, of course there is water: there is water everywhere in the land!’

We are in the Land, where we are in the Lord’s will, and therefore everything is living; everything can live, because our hearts are with Him for the inheritance.

## THE REJECTION OF THE FLESH

The last little section of the chapter is a sad one. Esau suddenly appears, and Esau made these marriages with the forbidden tribes that surrounded



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them, and "they were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah." Esau speaks of the flesh, and this chapter of a spiritual position and of a foretaste of the inheritance closes by showing us that anything of the flesh is a grief. "Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23). You can feel Isaac and Rebekah saying, 'Oh dear, oh dear! Why did he have to touch that realm?' "There is . . . no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk *not after the flesh*, but after the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 1, A.V.). We have to keep the Cross between us and that Esau realm. "Jacob is the lot of his inheritance" (Deut. xxxii. 9). "Esau I hated" (Mal. i. 3). "He that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John xii. 25).

This is something of a complete rejection of a realm, is it not? We might have thought, 'Well, that rather spoils the chapter, having that bit at the end.' Ah, but it is very important to recognise that the spiritual position means a rejection of another realm all the time. The Lord wants us, while we wait for that eternal inheritance, to have a heart that is wholly set for Him and His inheritance in the saints.

Let us close by reminding ourselves of those three great principles of Isaac.

Firstly, faith; he was the fruit of faith. "I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God" (Gal. ii. 20); not living upon externals, not living upon convenience, but living by an utter dependence upon God.

Secondly, the giving of all. Are we going to hold back, are we going to have reserves in a day when things are speeding to an end? "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James v. 8, A.V.). Why not to-day be people who have finished with all compromise? Say, 'Lord, I give myself wholly to You for Your will, and I trust You to deal with all that is other.' Utter dedication.

Thirdly, the power of resurrection. "Faithful is the saying, For if we died with him, we shall also live with him" (II Tim. ii. 11). We can trust Him for the power of His resurrection day by day.

Let us then take our position of glorying in Christ, even in the land of the Philistines. He will overrule a great deal that we might deplore; He will teach us how to triumph, even where our temperaments are concerned; and He will give us an abhorrence of all that is of the flesh, of ourselves. Thus we shall experience here and now something of the reality of life released, and blessing tasted, that is going to be ours in the ages to come.

C.J.B.H.

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A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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**A WITNESS  
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## THIS MINISTRY

**T**HE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13—" . . . till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . . "

It is not connected with any 'Movement', 'Organization', 'Mission' or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment', it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S. E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

'Personal' letters should be addressed to  
Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



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A STATEMENT FROM THE EDITOR

With the expanding and strengthening of this ministry there is an increasing enquiry and request for some concise statement as to its spiritual history and nature. This need seems also to be accentuated by a growing misunderstanding and misrepresentation of it. Under considerable pressure, therefore, and with the desire to help all concerned, I am seeking, in as small a compass as possible, to make available this explanation.

"A Witness and a Testimony" is a small paper in which we seek to minister to the Lord's people every second month such spiritual food, light, and instruction as He gives. At the time of writing, the paper is nearing the end of its thirty-third year of issue. Very much ground has been covered in that extended period, and what we write here can be but a very brief intimation of the main features of the ministry.

Behind the written and printed ministry there is a body of people which has grown from a small company to a very considerable family. This is true locally and world-wide. Most of what has been published has first been given in spoken ministry, either to the local company or in the periodic conferences held usually five times each year. Some books, however, have been written direct.

It is necessary to say this, because we want it to be understood that everything is vitally related to the actual and growing need of the spiritual life of

a representative body of God's people. Indeed, it is the people who have made it necessary, given meaning to it, and drawn it out. This is surely God's way of giving! This, then, is not just booky, cloistered, or studied matter, but ever the call and answer of living conditions.

During the years there have been changes and developments in measure and form, in emphasis and presentation, as there should ever be where there is life and growth, provided that the essential foundation remains true and unchanging. Adjustableness in the presence of fuller light or better understanding is an essential to true and proper growth, and we have ever sought this grace, and shall seek it to the end. It is not for us to speak of the appreciation which has grown and been given such wide expression, but we may speak of the help which we have received from the Lord and by which we have been enabled to continue to this day. When we say that, we say very much, for, had it not been so, we could not possibly have survived the many-sided effort of Satan to end this ministry, and the so great antagonism of many who have thought that they were doing God service in opposing it and us.

Before proceeding to outline the message, may I make this further emphasis. It is not truth in any merely technical or doctrinal sense that we are wanting to propagate. We can truly say with Paul,

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although now only in a secondary sense (that is, through the Scriptures), "I received it not from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through revelation of Jesus Christ." It has been by being taken into deep and painful experiences that we have come to see God's Son in the greater fulnesses of His significance, and that we can truly say that every fresh ray of living light has been born out of dark and bitter travail. So we would have it ; for if there is one thing more than another from which we would be saved, it is from having our teaching not in vital relation to our experience. God forbid that we should ever decline into a mere 'teaching' ! We desire to know no more truth than is experimental. It is an axiom or fixed principle that spiritual and eternal values can only be ministered as they have proved to be living power in those who minister. We can only comfort others with the comfort wherewith *we ourselves* have been comforted of God. Others can only really be helped by what has been the power of life in the would-be helper. Information, by itself, however correct and orthodox, however strongly held in conviction and passed on in passion, will lack an essential and indispensable quality or value for spiritual constitution. Hence it has ever been God's way to raise up a vessel, personal or corporate, in which His message has been wrought by fiery ordeal. The messenger must not only have the message in him, but he must be in the message : not only in mind and feeling, but in experience and being.

This being the way of life, in setting forth the nature and content of this particular ministry I shall follow the course of our own spiritual history and growth, rather than work backward from the present position. As we have said, the various books which have come into being through the years have been but the expression of the progressive and many-sided emphasis in our hearts, and these embody the history of God's dealings with us in experience and illumination. Their value will only lie in their being able to touch the Lord's people at that point of experience and need which was the occasion of their being produced. Unless there is such felt need, they will be nothing more than words.

No one should imagine that we think of what follows here as a 'special revelation', or regard our experience as unique. *We positively repudiate the charge that we claim to have a special revelation.* Nothing that we may set forth is new in itself, but all of it can be found in the Word of God. It is only new as things are new when they come with all the impact of a revelation to those

concerned, although others may have seen them long before. It is not the things in themselves, but the power and life with which they break upon us *as if by revelation*, that constitutes a ministry. Therefore, no one will expect to find here a new 'revelation', but it may be that what is here will come to some—as it came to us—like a new revelation. (In using the plural, 'we' and 'us', in this statement, I refer to the company, here and scattered world-wide, of whom I know these things to be true.)

It was after years of Bible teaching, evangelical ministry, missionary enterprise, and varied Christian activities that the Lord brought us, in His own effective way, to see, as we had not seen before—

## THE FULLER MEANING OF THE CROSS

This was the first stage in an altogether new life under an open Heaven. As we came to see subsequently, the Cross (or its type—the Altar) was ever God's new starting-point in the realisation of His full thought. Starting-point, we say ; for Calvary is not an end in itself, but the beginning of everything. As to the objective meaning of the Cross, there was no need for any adjustment. The great values of the Lamb slain, as related to the first stage or phase of Christian experience, were there, thank God. Deliverance from the judgment resting upon the world ; deliverance from condemnation and death ; deliverance from the tyranny or the bondage of an evil conscience—all in virtue of the righteousness which is by faith in that Righteous One who offered Himself without spot to God for us : this was where we stood, by His grace. What Christ by His Cross was and is for us was our anchor-ground. The apprehension and appreciation of all that has never ceased to grow, and is deeper, fuller, stronger to-day than ever.

Moreover, we know quite well that this basic position is an object of Satan's unending assault and bitter antagonism. And it will be so to the last. He knows quite well that everything else is jeopardised and frustrated if he can shake a believer's position as to what Christ is for him or her. Who is of any use to God or men, in eternal values, who is not settled as to his or her acceptance in the Beloved? Who can count in any realm spiritually who has not a settled assurance that in Christ Jesus they are accounted righteous, whatever they may be in themselves? Every fiery dart of the evil one will get home if the breastplate of righteousness and the shield of this faith is not firmly apprehended and appropriated. Yes, the objective mean-

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ing of Calvary—Christ crucified—is of unspeakable importance in the matter of a believer's standing, and withstanding, and we can never cease to keep this in full view and hammer it home.

But, when we have taken account of this and have it well settled, it *may* only relate to deliverance from "Egypt". For it is clear that all that we have said and referred to so far is connected with 'translation (or transference) out of the power of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of God's love.' It was a mighty thing that happened in Egypt, in virtue of the slain Lamb and shed and sprinkled blood, and it had abiding elements and values. But there was much more needed. While an outward bondage was destroyed, that is, the bondage which meant being involved in the doom of the world, there still remained an inward bondage. Israel in the wilderness represents the dominion of the natural life, the self-life, the "flesh". God's people, yes! Redeemed, yes! In the Kingdom, yes! Heirs of promise, yes! But not getting very far; ineffective, unfruitful, up-and-down and round-about; and always at the mercy of the life of sense. They even, sometimes, imagined that they might have a better time back in Egypt. A strangely contradictory state for those who, in their better moments, were so sure that they had been redeemed by God! This wilderness life represented much expenditure of energy, much laborious effort, much longing and aspiration, much service and much religious devotion and activity, but it never got through, and it was one big circle, coming back, in effect, to where they were before.

Well, it was at some such point that the fuller meaning of the Cross was made to break upon our greater need. It is a part of the nature of things that we never learn in a vital way by information. We really only come into the good of things by being "pressed out of measure". So the Lord has to take much time to make spiritual history. When at length our eyes are open, we cry, O, why did I not see it before! But everything else had to prove insufficient before we could really be shown, and that takes time. Thus it was that we were turned in that dark hour to Romans, chapter six, and, almost as though He spoke in audible language, the Lord said: 'When I died, you died. When I went to the Cross I not only took your sins, but I took *you*. When I took you, I not only took you as the sinner that you might regard yourself to be, but I took you as being all that you are by nature; your good (?) as your bad; your abilities as well as your disabilities; yes, every resource of yours. I took you as a "worker", a "preacher", an

organizer! My Cross means that *not even for Me can you be or do anything out from yourself*, but if there is to be anything at all it must be out from Me, and that means a life of absolute dependence and faith.'

At this point, therefore, we awoke to the fundamental principle of our Lord's own life while here, and it became the law of everything for us from that time. That principle was: "nothing of (out from) himself", but "all things of (out from) God".

*"The Son can do nothing of (out from) himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner."* John v. 19.

*"I can of myself do nothing: as I hear I judge."* John v. 30.

*"My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me."* John vii. 16.

We saw that this explains so many strange and—naturally—perplexing things in His behaviour: acting and refusing to act; going and refusing to go; speaking and refusing to speak. Later, we came to see that this is the whole meaning of life in the Spirit, and that it is an altogether different life from the natural ways of men, even of Christian men (more on this later). At the time of this seeing, it was a matter of this law becoming basic, absolute, and ultimate, and it was something totally different from what had been in all our ideas and activities in Christian life and work.

Such a revelation, if it is to be a staggering and breaking thing, so that there is no strength left in us, requires a background of much vain effort. But then, it carries with it a great implication. While an end is written large in the Cross, and while that end is to be accepted as *our* end indeed, so that there *can* be no more of *anything* so far as *we* are concerned, JESUS LIVES! and that means boundless possibilities.

Thus we came to see that the Red Sea and the Jordan are but two sides to the one Cross. Both symbolize the spiritual death and resurrection of the believer, but the latter carries it into another realm. Jordan sees the deliverance from judgment, death, and doom, carried on to deliverance from self; it is the *practical* disconnection of what is dead from what is risen. In the first it is my sins; in the second it is my self. At the crossing of the Jordan a monument of twelve stones, a type of the Israelites themselves, was left buried in the bed of the river, as if to signify that the self-life of the wilderness was to be henceforth reckoned as judged and ended as absolutely as was the bond-



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age to Pharaoh. And then another memorial of twelve stones was taken *from* the bed of the river and placed on the Canaan shore, as a type of themselves, as risen not only to newness of life, but also to a perpetual and practical separation from their dead and buried selves. All this is as by union with Christ crucified and risen: for the priests stood in mid-stream with the Ark and its blood-stained Mercy-seat on their shoulders, type of Christ as in death, yet triumphing over death in virtue of His Blood: for the first set of stones were laid in the exact spot where the priests' feet had stood.

Israel after the flesh in the wilderness, and Israel after the Spirit in Canaan, while both having known the blessing of salvation from judgment, are like two different peoples. So it was with us. The difference is unspeakably great. Someone who had been prominently in Christian work for many years described the difference—when at length he knew it—as even greater than when he first knew salvation, and that was great. We will not attempt to set down all the differences, but there is one phrase that puts so much of it all into expression—'an open heaven'. How the life of nature blocks the way to the life of the Spirit! How doing, or attempting to do, work for God in our own natural energy closes the way to the energies of the Spirit! How our mental strivings and intellectual labours to apprehend spiritual truth lock the door to illumination by the Spirit! Yes, we know something of this, but, blessed be God, we know something of having that "natural man" put away, and Christ in greater risen and ascended fulness taking his place.

There is a double tragedy that may be associated with this subjective or experimental meaning of the Cross. On the one side, there is the tragedy of the ignorance of so many of the Lord's people, leading to or resulting in a wilderness history in life and service. A tremendous amount of energy, expenditure, effort, and strain, with *spiritual* results so incommensurate. The wilderness is ever a bounded place; limited by the horizons of sense; never characterized by the realisation of the limitless fullnesses of the heavenly emancipation from nature.

On the other hand, there is the tragedy that this meaning or application of the Cross is positively refused and rejected by so many of the Lord's people. There is a very large body of Christians who just will not have the Cross on its subjective or experimental side. This amazes us, but it explains very much. If the "natural" man (not the unregenerate man, necessarily) still exerts an in-

fluence in the realm of Divine things, there is bound to ensue a static system of teaching, a fixed horizon of vision, a legal bondage to tradition, a fear of man, a deadening domination of the "letter" as separated from the "spirit"; and many other unhappy situations of spiritual death, endless divisions, and spiritual pride. Paul's remedy for traditionalism and legalism in relation to *Christians*, was Christ Crucified, as see 'Romans' and 'Galatians'. The same remedy was resorted to for all the painful fruits of carnality amongst believers, as see 'Corinthians'.

Perhaps the repudiation of this application of the Cross is due to the fear of a too great subjectivity: that is, a turning of people in upon themselves. It is true that introspection is a sign of weakness and can lead to certain paralysis—indeed, it can breed very many evil things; but introspection is a *misapprehension* of the subjective side of the Cross. It would indeed be unsafe and disastrous for anyone to 'take up' such 'teaching', were they not already settled and established in that objective aspect, which settles once and for all the question of "all righteousness" and acceptance in Christ through faith in His perfections as for us. No; Israel in Canaan did not represent introspective self-occupation and morbid engagement with how much more they personally had to be crucified. They were free, and *free to do the Lord's business*. The 'Jordan' meaning of the Cross, carrying, as it does, the 'Red Sea' aspect into the realm of self-life, means freedom from self, and it is only a contradiction of the Cross to be still engrossed with self-crucifixion. But 'Jordan' is a big crisis, with an abiding application and progressive outworking.

The crisis is like the touch upon the sinew of Jacob's thigh. The strength of nature is definitely and permanently crippled, so that "Jacob" will carry that veto to his last day, when he will still be "leaning upon the top of his staff". The progressive outworking will be in the discovery of how much there is that we *cannot* do—are not allowed to do—*of ourselves*, because of that basic forbidding of the Cross. This may take us as far as it took Paul, who in one unparalleled experience said:

"We were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life" ("despaired" here means 'there seemed no way out for life'): "yea, we . . . had the sentence of death within ourselves, *that we should not trust in ourselves*, but in (upon) God which raiseth the dead" (II Cor. i. 8-9).

The working of the Cross here is a subjective-

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objective matter, and has nothing to do with our standing or acceptance, but rather with the *fulness* of Christ. Because the importance of this crisis and process has to be emphasized to Christians, many have allowed it to enter into the wrong realm and almost carry them back into 'Egyptian' bondage. If the Lord brings us to the despair of Kadesh-Barnea and then shows us Romans vi. or Galatians ii, 20, we must capitulate to our death position with Christ as to *ourselves*, just as we did as to our sins; and we must have a *faith* understanding with the Lord, firstly that the thing is so, whether we immediately realise it or not; and then that He is going to take us by the way that will reveal what the new position is and implies. We shall undoubtedly discover that there was far more included in the 'death' than we had any idea of; but the new position will mean enablement to acquiesce.

We have said that this 'Jordan' experience of the Cross is a crisis—and what a crisis it is! It is not only the end of one realm, it is the opening up of and entering upon a new one. So it proved to be with us, as with Israel. Through this experience we entered into a great expanse of spiritual life, light, and liberty. But then several major things began to come into view. Of course, the first of these was—

### LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

We do not mean that there was no knowledge or experience of the Spirit before this. As with Israel, the very deliverance from Egypt and government in the wilderness was by the Pillar of Cloud and Fire; so we had known that sovereignty and grace. But Jordan marked a development in this matter. Joshua stands for ever as a type of the *energies* of the Holy Spirit in relation to the *full* thought of God. These energies stood over against the poor fruitless energies of man's own soul.

For us this had a definite subjective meaning: it meant that the Spirit's sword or knife cut clean in "to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit". There came about the recognition of the fact that the soul is one thing and the spirit is another, and that it is the latter through which the Holy Spirit realises all the purposes of God. The soul is *ourselves* in intelligence, will, feeling and energy. It is not in our souls or ourselves that the Holy Spirit dwells, but in our spirits, and the renewed and indwelt spirit is the organ of Divine knowledge, purpose, and power. Life in the Spirit is only possible as this distinction is made. We have covered the

ground of this distinction in a book entitled "What is Man?" and our object now is only to indicate the steps of spiritual progress. This life in the Spirit, then, means a new realm of spiritual knowledge and understanding, which is closed, very largely, even to Christians, if they have not known the meaning of death and resurrection union with Christ in its relation to the natural man, man in his natural constitution. Such may have the information which is given by the Scriptures on all matters, and even teach these things—so did we; but there is all the difference of life and death between this and being in the living good of the truth. Life in the Spirit, then, means another life, another knowledge, another energy, another capacity.

Then, of these outstanding features of the new sphere, one that very quickly came into view was the inclusive fact that life was thenceforth "in the heavenlies", and this was nothing abstract and mythical. It was to involve us in the most practical issues.

Once again, Israel's history was in the course of being repeated spiritually. In their case there was a development, even with Joshua. True, he represented—and continued to represent—the energies of the Holy Spirit, but now another feature appeared as peculiarly associated with the new place. This is described thus:

*"And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." (Joshua v. 13-15).*

The new feature which is brought in at this point is that of Sovereign Headship in the heavenlies and in relation to spiritual warfare. The "Lord's host", the "Captain", and the "sword drawn" are very significant words. What is signified is that the Holy Spirit is not just abstract or unrelated power, neither is He present in His own name. He and His energies are related to, and are the servants of, a Sovereignty, a Throne. The Lord Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. He is said to have been given that place till His enemies shall have been made the footstool of His feet. All authority has

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been given unto Him in heaven and on earth. There is a mighty hierarchy of evil occupying the heavenlies and making war in countless ways against that heavenly Kingdom of God's Son. Paul's well-known description is:

"Principalities . . . powers . . . world-rulers of this darkness . . . spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies" (*Ephesians vi. 12*).

It is precisely in relation to the destruction and ultimate casting out of this system of evil powers and intelligences that the Holy Spirit is here. He and God's Son are one in Godhead, and therefore in Divine Person, and He is here *as* Christ in the captivity of the Lord's host. He is the mighty energy of that "all authority", that Throne. His it is to lead and energize the people of God against the spiritual opponents of God's purpose.

Thus, it was not long after our coming into the fuller meaning of the Cross, as to the self-life, that there broke upon us this great fact that life in the Spirit is life in the heavenlies, and life in the heavenlies is meant to be a life of reigning and dominion. Again, this is a life of warfare; but in *this* realm and in *this* work it is a case, not of appealing to the Throne, but of operating or functioning as from the Throne. It is bringing that Throne to bear upon the enemy in his hold and his devices.

Whenever the Lord has brought in livingly something of His heavenly order, either initially or by recovery, He has done so with such evident tokens of it being of Himself that you never forget. For us, when this broke upon us, there was a period in which the tokens were so clear and many as to keep us in a state of wonder. The impact of the Throne was brought—through prayer—to bear upon all kinds of situations in which the enemy was very definitely implicated, and those situations were released. We are concerned now with spiritual principles, not with examples. Through the years there has been much spiritual education, and the battle has been carried into deeper realms, more and more away from the surface to the great ultimate spiritual issues of life and death, but the truth and principle remain the same, and we remain there in the positive testimony to the absolute Lordship of Christ in the universe.

But we were to learn more yet of the Divine mind, and so, in keeping with the Scriptures, we found the Lord bringing a further matter to bear upon us. Each fresh step included what went before and carried it further. The next thing, into the spiritual value and significance of which we found ourselves being led, was—

THE HEAVENLY NATURE, VOCATION,  
AND DESTINY OF THE CHURCH  
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

That which the Lord had done in us through the deeper work of the Cross had, among other things, resulted in a strange detachment *in spirit* from the earthly aspect of things religious. We found ourselves lifted spiritually from the forms and systems, the titles, designations, divisions, and orders of Christianity as here known amongst men; and our concern was for "all saints" without discrimination. But the Lord very definitely took us in hand to show us in a positive way the meaning of what He had done. We saw later how much this was in keeping with His Word throughout. The Altar always leads to the House; pointing on to the fact that Calvary leads to the Church. There can be no Church until there has been an Altar, but the very *object* of the Altar—the Cross—is the Church. And so, with steadily increasing clearness and fulness, there opened to us the reality of the Church as the Body of Christ. Its aspects or meanings are various.

Firstly, there is the fact that Christ's exaltation and reign is not just a personal matter where He is concerned. When, at length, Satan and his hosts are dispossessed of the heavenlies and cast down, it will be done through and by the Church in union with Christ as its Sovereign Head, and it will be that Church—Head and Members—that will take the place of that deposed kingdom to fulfil the governmental purpose which they have usurped and evilly exercised in God's universe. The Lord Jesus will reign and govern *through His Church* in that age to come.

Then, as being all-of-a-piece with this inclusive purpose, several other things became clear to us.

It is the *Church* which is of primary concern to the Lord in this dispensation. Everything is related to that in His mind and activity. This means, among other things, that all unrelatedness and independence, all that is merely personal, sectional, exclusive or separate must certainly fail to reach God's full end or to have His seal upon it beyond a certain point. It must inevitably stop short and be spiritually limited. Every *Divine* provision is unto the securing and perfecting of the Body (*Eph. iv. 14*), and individuals can only reach fulness in a related way. If this is true then other things follow.

The Church must be on heavenly, not earthly ground. Earthly ground will provide contradictions of some sort. Anything which is, by its position, interest, relationship or *title*, on earthly

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ground, as distinguishing between the Lord's people, is a contradiction of the Church as the Body of Christ. None of this obtains in the heavenlies, and its existence here means spiritual weakness in face of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies. It was borne in upon us with increasing clearness and strength that consistency with this light demanded that we must forsake all partisan or sectarian ground—indeed, all ground other than that of Christ universal in all born-again children of God—and take the position, with all artificial barriers down, that all such are “one new man in Christ”. How could we honestly stand upon and for that affirmed fact and then expect people to ‘join’ some particular *historical* section of Christians, when *the Church is not historical but eternal*, issuing from the eternal counsels of God and continuing unto “the ages of the ages”?

The change of position involved us in immediate and growing misunderstandings, misconceptions, misrepresentations, ostracism, and “evil report”, being “everywhere spoken against”. The first thing said, and which cost us the loss of some valued friends, was that the way that we were taking put all those who did not take the same course in the wrong. This was, of course, rather a superficial and cheap way out of a difficulty, for the same could be said of anyone or anything that departed from tradition or common acceptance in any realm whatsoever, and not least of the Lord and His apostles.

For many years we adhered to an imposed silence and refusal to try to explain, lest such a course should seem like self-vindication or self-defence.

As time has gone on and the ministry has spread so extensively, making us so widely known, the misapprehensions have gained in measure and strength. Hence, largely in response to the appeal of friends and the necessity of the situation, we are seeking herewith at least to clarify the position, and, if possible, correct mistaken conclusions to which some have come, either by reason of their own inability to grasp the true situation, or, maybe, because of the way in which we ourselves have put some matters.

So we return to, or pursue, this matter of the Church. Taken out of the general or immediate context certain paragraphs in our books *could* be made to mean quite the contrary to our intention. To begin with, we have always made the comparative the basis of any statement. That is, we have always made the matter one of comparison and contrast with what God would really have if He had His full way. Few would contend that the

situation in Christianity is as God would have it. If He had His mind expressed, what so many Christian leaders call ‘our unhappy divisions’, and what the ‘World Council of Churches’ has described as ‘these man-made divisions’ and ‘man’s disorder’, would not exist.

We have pronounced this situation as wrong and not according to God’s mind, and have said—and do say—that these denominational divisions are a menace to spiritual fulness and a hindrance to the full purpose of God. They mean positive spiritual limitation. We believe that this situation would never have come about but for a low and weak level of spiritual life. When the tide is full the dividing ‘breakwaters’ disappear and lose their meaning. When it is low, they stand out stark. The difference between the natural and the spiritual is that in the one they are a necessity, in the other an exposure of tragedy. If, for some reason—an evangelistic campaign, or a spiritual-life convention—the tide rises, then we forget, *for the time being*, our divisions. When Christ becomes the all-dominating Object, then ‘things’ lose their importance. We have said that this is how it ought to be normally and not extraordinarily.

But when we have said this, and all that we could say of this kind, there remain some other points which call for explanation. They mostly come under and out of the matter of Church order.

We have intimated that behind this ministry, and largely as the occasion and *venue* of it, there is a company of the Lord’s people who regularly meet at Honor Oak, London. We believe that the ‘order’ of gathering, procedure, and ministry is as near to what the Apostles sought to have as our present light permits. We do not claim to have “yet attained”, neither do we account ourselves as “yet perfect”, but, being open to the Lord, we are adjustable to any further leadings of the Holy Spirit. But here again is a matter which to us is of great importance, although it denotes another difference.

We have never followed a pattern discovered on earth. Either we were in culpable ignorance, blissful blindness, or providential innocence, but we knew not of the same order obtaining already. So far as we were concerned it seemed as though the Lord was beginning *with us* at zero. Neither had we studied the New Testament *with the object of trying to formulate a New Testament church or its order*. We have since come to believe that the New Testament does not give a full and final pattern for reproduction and imitation.

Thus, having set aside all the former system of organized Christianity, we committed ourselves to

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the principle of the organic. No 'order' was 'set up', no officers or ministries were appointed. We left it with the Lord to make manifest by 'gift' and anointing who were chosen of Him for oversight and ministry. The one-man ministry has never emerged. The 'overseers' have never been chosen by vote or selection, and certainly not by the expressed desire of any leader. No committees or official bodies have ever existed in any part of the work. Things in the main have issued from prayer. We are very conscious that mistakes have been made, but the result of these has only served to re-emphasize the above principles.

Baptism of believers by immersion has clearly become the only way by which testimony to union with Christ in death and resurrection can truly and rightly be given. The Lord's Table is seen to be the combination of all the Christian testimonies, i.e., Christ's death *for us*; our death *in Him*; the oneness of all believers in and with Him as "one loaf" (I Cor. x. 17); and the "blessed hope" of his coming again.

We also feel that the Spirit's way of bearing testimony to the oneness of the Body of Christ is by a simple act of 'laying-on of hands' by representative members ('elders') of the Church, particularly in the case of the newly baptized. This is what we believe the Scriptures mean in this connection.

Reverting to the matter of 'Church' association or connection, let two things be said with strong emphasis. One: we sincerely recognise the sovereignty of God over all that we do not believe to be His first and full will. While the 'sects' and denominations, 'missions' and institutions are a departure from the Holy Spirit's original way and intention, God has undoubtedly blessed and used these in a very real way and has sovereignly done great work through faithful men and women. We thank God that it is so, and pray that every means possible of use may have His blessing upon it. This is not said in any patronising or superior spirit; God forbid. Any reserve is only because we feel that there has been much delay, limitation, and weakness due to the departure from the first and full position of the first years of the Church's life, and because of a heart-burden for a return thereto. We cannot accept the present 'disorder' as all that the Lord would or could have, and this may involve us in the charge of being 'reactionary'.

A second thing is that, believing so strongly, as we do, that everything must proceed from the Lord by the Spirit and not be of man, we could never advise or influence people to leave their

'church', 'mission', or connection. This we have never done, but have carefully avoided doing. Some have mistakenly felt that we meant that they should do so, and have done it. Others have acted under very definite exercise before the Lord. We feel very strongly that this matter *must* be one which involves the spiritual life, and that it should have no less an issue at stake than the walk with God. On the same principle we have never felt that it was our business to try to duplicate or reproduce this spiritual 'order' by bringing into being churches in other places. This could easily have been done, but we have held back. Churches, we believe, must be the spontaneous result of a work of the Spirit and must be 'born' just as the individual believer is born from above. We may yet have to have clearer light and further leading on this matter, but this is as far as we have seen at present.

One other practical point must receive a mention. It is true that we have always believed that *the main* purpose for which *this ministry* was raised up was the feeding, instructing, and helping of the Lord's people, so that they might do His work more effectively. This has proved to be true, and the Lord has wonderfully enabled and supplied unto this. But let it be clearly understood that, however true this may be, we recognise without question that a great and essential part of the Church's business is that of bringing Christ to the unsaved. If unsaved ones were not continually being brought 'into the Kingdom' among us and through this ministry, we should be most distressed, and should seek earnestly that the Lord would show us the reason why. Hence we do seek, by very definite ways and means, both at home and in other lands, to bring souls to the Saviour. Many have gone from us, during the years, into many parts of the world with this specific burden on their hearts. But, even so, evangelism is a related matter and not an end in itself. We repeat: It is the Church which is the primary and inclusive concern of the Lord in this dispensation.

As the years have passed we have found that, without premeditation, we have been increasingly occupied with God's one end—the fulness of Christ, and the ministry in all its aspects has had this as its focal centre. What an immense range and wealth there is in that clause: "to sum up all things in Christ"! Yes, it is Christ and His fulness! An adequate apprehension of Him will emancipate us from all smallness, earthboundness, and time-serving.

There are other aspects of this ministry which

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have given rise to misapprehension, but I trust that this much that has been written here will—at least—show that there is a meaning to it which is not that given by some, and a meaning of no small importance to all who seek the truth.

To sum up, we feel very strongly and positively that the Word of God throughout shows that God would have that at the end which corresponds with His thoughts at the beginning. There is ever and anon a call-back to “first love”, “first works” and ‘beginnings’. With Israel this is the clear burden of the Prophets. Before the Apostles had gone they were under obligation to re-emphasize first principles and to warn regarding departure. This, surely, is the burden of so much that they wrote. It is impossible to read John’s letters and the first chapters of the Revelation, and to miss this meaning. The Lord never finally abandons His first position and revealed full mind. He may, in sovereignty, use all that He can as fully as He can, but if what obtains is other or less than that which He has shown to be His mind, there will be severe limitations and weaknesses.

Such limitations should give deep exercise of heart and lead to serious enquiry, and we believe that there are in fact many indications of such

exercise and concern at this time. If the Bible is to be our guide, and if we are to take Church history seriously, then both of these make one thing clear. It is that, however long the Lord may bear with or sovereignly use the less, He at length forces the issue of the absolute by suffering and shaking and overthrowing, and by compelling to the essential, the spiritual, the intrinsic, and the full. This may be the great lesson that China should teach, and it will—at the end—be much more far-reaching. The *fulness* of Christ; the full and accurate thought of God; the true way of the Spirit—these are not ultimately optional. The vindication may await the time of the big testing and shaking, but it will as surely come, as did that of Jeremiah, Paul, and others; some even in our own generation.

What we have written above has been but our testimony. We do not give it as a Statement of doctrine, ‘Principles and Practice’, to which we expect anyone to conform, or as a basis of fellowship. The Spirit of God must bear witness to the truth in any unprejudiced and open heart, and we are quite content to have it so.

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.  
Editor.

## THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF SERVICE

### VI FEATURES OF SPIRITUALITY

WE have seen that, in the Old Testament dispensation, the tribe of Levi occupied a distinctive spiritual place. They were different; they were marked off by certain very important spiritual features and factors. In our last study we were seeking to show what those factors were. The first thing was in relation to the Cross—that, of course, is using the New Testament counterpart of the altar and the sacrifice of Levitical times—a deep work of the Cross within themselves. And then they became people in the power of another life, represented by the blood shed and sprinkled. Another distinguishing feature of those people was the oil of anointing—type of the Holy Spirit—constituting them spiritual people.

#### WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL PERSON?

It is always an exceedingly difficult thing to explain what a spiritual person is. The mental reactions to that very phrase are often strange and peculiar. The idea of a spiritual person is that your feet are off the earth, you are living somewhere up

in the clouds, and you are very unpractical as to the affairs of this world. You are too ‘spiritual’ really to be here at all—you ought to be in Heaven! Of course that is an entirely false apprehension of the meaning of being spiritual. Let us try a little further to explain what it really means that by the Holy Spirit we are constituted spiritual men and women.

But let me first draw a distinction, because not all Christians are very spiritual people. The New Testament has a very great deal to say about Christians who are carnal people, and that is a word which just means fleshly people, and if you want to know what that means—selfish people. You can be a Christian and be very self-centred, self-occupied, self-interested. Self—who can run to earth all the many aspects of what self means? When you think you have compassed the whole thing, it breaks out somewhere else in new forms. You just cannot finally lay your hand upon the multiplicity of the expressions of this deep root, with all its fibres, this self life.

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Now a spiritual person is one who is not dominated and governed and influenced by the self nature, but whose thoughts, interests, actions are directed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in charge of the life. It is not what *I* think—and how often Christians are talking like that: '*I* think', '*I* think', '*I* think'—that does not come into it with a spiritual person at all. There is no asserting of what *I* think; it is, 'What does the Lord think about this? What is the mind of the Lord about this?' Not, '*I* want', and '*I* will', but, 'What does the Lord want? Let us seek to know the Lord's mind, the Lord's will about this. Let us put our own mind and will and feelings out of the thing altogether, and let the Holy Spirit tell us. We will not move until we have a sense of what the mind of the Spirit is. At least we must know that our own minds are not governing.' The government of the Holy Spirit, the anointing, means that spiritual people are like that. And of course it means a great deal more. This complete, inward enthronement and government of the Holy Spirit touches things in all directions.

That again is discriminating. You see, we can be governed, as I said in an earlier meditation, by objective truth. It can be 'the truth'—orthodox, sound, Bible truth. We can be governed by that simply because it is taught; we do it objectively. But there is something more than that. There is such a thing as the Holy Spirit taking hold of the truth of God and making it something that lives in us. As I said previously, many Christians are just Christians: that is, after they are saved, after they are born again, their Christian life consists in doing as they are told by the minister or the Christian leader or the Bible class teacher, because it is presented to them as the thing they should do. It is what is in the Bible, and they do it so. But there is a very much higher level of life than that. The thing is right, but it is altogether transformed when the Holy Spirit brings it home to us in an inward way, and adjusts us to it. We no longer do it just because it has got to be done: we do it because the Lord has done something in us, and shown us that that is the thing He wants done.

Do you grasp that? We can illustrate it, of course. A little child may obey what mother says because mother says it—love, perhaps; perhaps a spirit of obedience; or perhaps there is just no choice in the matter—mother says it! But there is a lot of difference between that and anticipating what mother would like, doing it without mother having to lay down the law at all. It is a difference of realm: one is law and the other is grace. And

grace is only another word for love. Different kinds of Christians, you see; anticipating the will of God, being very sensitive. The same in practice: the Church teaches that certain things are rites of the Church, the ordinances of the Church, and therefore those who belong to the Church ought to do certain things, and so they go to Holy Communion, because the Church says that is what they ought to do, it is an ordinance of the Church, and other things which we might mention. They do it because that is the thing that is done. But oh, if the Lord has spoken in the heart and revealed the meaning of these things spiritually, how different the life is! It is no longer mechanical—it is vital.

THE GOVERNMENT  
OF THE WORD OF GOD

Let us return to the Levites, and consider some other features of spirituality—things that were true in the life of the Levites in a typical way, that is, they pointed on to the spiritual truth of our own time. A marked thing in the case of the priests, the Levites, the sons of Aaron, was that, as anointed men under the government of the Holy Spirit, they came in a very utter and immediate way under the government of the Word of God.

There was a symbol of that, as you know, in the court of the tabernacle. It is called the 'laver'. The laver, as we know, was made from the mirrors of the women. They had metal mirrors, shining, bronze mirrors, into which they looked, as women are wont to do, and saw what they were like; and when they saw that there was anything not right about them, they put it right in the face of the mirror, they adjusted to what they conceived to be the right kind of thing. They brought those mirrors, and there was made of them this great basin called the laver, and it was filled with water; and the priests, the Levites, could not perform or fulfil their ministry, could not enter upon the ministry of holy things, except as they came to the laver and washed hands and feet. They could never take a further step in the fulfilment of their service to God without coming to the laver to wash.

Now you can see quite clearly that that is a very simple and easily understood picture. This laver undoubtedly represents the Word of God: that is the thing into which we look now and see where we are wrong. If we look into the Word of God, we see where things are out of the straight: if we look into the Word of God, we see what God requires, what God's picture is for us, and what we are in contrast. We look in, and then, as we adjust to the Word of God, the Word of God has this mighty power of putting us right, cleansing us,

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and keeping on cleansing us, "by the washing (or laver) of water with the word" (Eph. v. 26).

That is brief, but it is very important. A spiritual person is first of all one who seeks to know the revealed will of God in His Word. You cannot be a spiritual person, after the kind of which we are speaking, and neglect or be careless about the Word of God. You will be one who is really diligent in reading and searching the Word of God, with one object—to know what God wants where you are concerned. If there were more of that, there would be a different kind of Christian, stronger, purer, and far more satisfying to the Lord.

#### NO VIOLATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

Moreover, a truly spiritual person will never violate the Word of God. Should they do so, they will know all about it inside of themselves. The Holy Spirit will make it clear to a spiritual person that they have gone contrary to the Word of God. Under the government of the Spirit we shall never be a contradiction to the Scriptures. It does not mean that all at once we shall be a perfect expression of all that is in the Word of God, but it does mean that the Holy Spirit will be dealing with us in the light of what is in the Scriptures. Have you not sometimes experienced an inward, unaccountable sense of grief? You may not have put it that way, but you had a strange sense of grief, of distress. The Holy Spirit has been grieved about something you have said or done, the way you have behaved. You cannot explain it or put it into words, but you just say to the Lord, 'Now, Lord, I am conscious that something is not right. I put it into Your hands, and trust You to show me, and make it clear.' Either sooner or later, you come on something in the Word of God, which exactly explains just where you failed, just where you defaulted. There it is, and you did not know that it was in the Word of God.

You know, it is possible to get a surprise over what is in the Word of God. I have been reading and studying the Bible for quite a good many years, but some eighteen months ago I came on a fragment in the Bible that I never knew was there—I had never seen it before! I expect there are plenty more. If you told me that that was in the Bible, I should not have known where to find it. But it just suited and fitted into a position in which I was at that moment. I needed something at that time for my deliverance—for my salvation, in a sense—and I came on that something. I opened my Bible, and there it was, right there. It amazed

me; it was so fitting to the whole situation. It described my situation in one single sentence.

The Holy Spirit knows the Bible, He knows what He has written; and if the Spirit is in us, and we are seeking to live in the Spirit, we shall live in the Word. The Word is a living thing when that is so. Spiritual people are people of the Word, and consciously or unconsciously they are checked up by it. And I do say to you, especially to young Christians (it may be necessary to many others as well): Be very careful about your life in the Word of God. Do not choose only the things that you feel you can understand. Do not just pick out the things that you like. How we like to take up our Bible, and find out something so nice and helpful—perhaps a lovely promise—and just to live on that sort of thing, the delicacies of the Word of God. It is just lovely! And all the time there are whole sections that we pass over. 'Those are parts that we do not understand—we do not read them.' Now, do not make any mistake like that. You will find that there are treasures which come to light in times of special need in the very parts that you would never read. You do not like all those long lists of names—that is all they are—difficult names at that. You cannot pronounce them, so you quickly turn the page. You will find some treasures there—hidden treasures!

But how much more necessary it is for us to read this Word first of all that it shall be there for the Holy Spirit to work upon. It is just there, that is all. We read: for the moment we do not realise what it means, or that it is a message to us; but we have read it, and it is there. Presently, the Holy Spirit begins to speak to us about that very thing, and it becomes most valuable, and by it we may be guided. I suggest to you that you read this Word always with a view, first of all—What has God to say to me here? It is going to touch everything.

And do not accept any human reasonings about the Word. Paul has a number of things to say, in his first letter to the Corinthians, for instance—things that people do not like, especially moderns—about dress and head coverings and all sorts of things. The modern mind says, 'Oh, well, Paul was old-fashioned, he was a woman hater', and so on. If you listen to that, you will get out of harmony with the Word of God. That Word is there to put you right and keep you right with God. Violate those things, and you will limit your own spiritual life. Conduct and behaviour are governed by the Word of God, and there is nothing in the whole range and realm of our human life that is not touched by it. I say that thoughtfully: it is



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true. The Word of God touches all our temperament; it touches our dress, our behaviour, our talk; it touches everything that you can think of. Somewhere in the Word of God there is something about it. A spiritual person gives a large place to the Word, and allows the Word to adjust them. They do not argue at all. If the Word of God says that, then that is all there is to it.

So the laver is a very important thing in the matter of our relationship with and service to God. A life in the Spirit will never violate the Word. A life in the Spirit will always mean adjustment to the Word, and that we shall not allow other influences to affect us if they are contrary to the Word of God. We can only be ministers—that is, spiritual men and women who have to minister to the Lord and to His people—in so far as we are governed by the Word of God.

## AN ANOINTED EAR

And that brings us to this matter of sensitiveness to the Holy Spirit. For the priests, the Levites, the blood and the oil were given a threefold application: to the ear, to the thumb, and to the great toe. The blood and the oil were applied first of all to the ear. As regards the blood, that meant that the ear was opened and made alive to God, vivified Godward, while the oil, as symbolic of the Holy Spirit, meant that the ear was wholly and completely under the government of the Holy Spirit. Now hearing is a very, very important thing. It typifies spiritual perception. When the Lord, in dealing with the seven churches in Asia, in the Revelation, is trying to check them up as to the faults, errors and failures that are among them, the appeal at the end of every message is: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches". The ear symbolizes spiritual perception, discernment, detecting, sensing. A spiritual person is one who is sensitive to the voice of the Lord.

That is the great contrast that is seen with Samuel. When Samuel began his Levitical, priestly ministry in the temple as a lad, it was just that. It was a day when even the high priest himself had no ear for God: he had lost his sensitiveness to God's voice, his ear was dull, and the people therefore were not hearing the voice of God—they were all dull of hearing. It was a bad state. And, in the sanctuary that night, young Samuel heard the call of the Lord, had an ear for the Lord; and it was through his sensitiveness to the voice of the Lord that things were so marvellously changed in Israel, and an entirely new régime came into being. The situation was saved by a sensitive ear,

and that is something of great value to the Lord's people.

Oh, for men and women who have this anointed ear, who have this sense of the Lord, who are not dull of hearing; whose senses are not preoccupied and jaded by a multitude of conflicting, clamant, distracting voices and interests, but who have the quiet ear, and reap the harvest of a quiet ear for God. Be careful about your ear. In the physical realm, the purity of our hearing—our sensing through this faculty—depends so much upon what we listen to. If you listen constantly to jazz, you will probably lose your appetite for the classics, if I may illustrate it in that way. You will always be in a jangle, and you will lose your fine sense of what is good, what is pure, what is high and what is elevating in music. If you and I listen to gossip, if we listen to what is not good, not profitable, the Holy Spirit will cease to have a place of speaking. If you want to be of real value to the Lord, watch your hearing, have an anointed ear alive unto God.

## AN ANOINTED THUMB

Then the blood and the oil were placed upon the thumb of the right hand of the priest, the Levite. Of course, the thumb of the right hand is symbolic again. The hand is very, very much at a discount if the thumb is not there. We require that for everything, for all the rest. Some people manage very wonderfully without thumbs, but the thumb is really a very important factor. It stands for the hand itself in fulness, and it applies to what we handle.

Be careful what you handle. Some people can handle all sorts of things and still be Christians. Be careful what you handle in your *reading*, young Christians. Be quite sure that what you read can be turned in some way to value for the Lord. Is that too hard? Well, I think you will come to the time, if you go on with the Lord in the life of the Spirit, when you pick up something, and you will say, 'Oh, there is nothing in that, that is no good, that does not lead anywhere'. You begin to discriminate like that. On the other hand, with *this*—'Ah, now we are finding something, there is a lesson in this'. Perhaps you are wondering about what I said in an earlier message about a certain book—the story of Lindbergh's crossing of the Atlantic. That was quite a secular kind of book. But I got tremendous lessons out of it, wonderful lessons, just as out of the Everest story. I could turn it to real account. And you have to test everything you handle by whether it can be turned to real account for God.

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Much depends, too, in the Christian life, upon what you hold on to and what you let go. You do that with your hands. There may be a lot of manipulating of things, 'pulling of strings' to our own advantage. Be careful: it is all just a matter of our interests. We put our hands to our own interests, our own occupation, and behind it all there is a purely selfish motive and concern.

### AN ANOINTED GREAT TOE

Finally, the same blood and oil were placed upon the great toe of the right foot—full of significance. The tread of a person very often betrays the character of the person. There is the heavy tread of the heavy-handed—to confuse the metaphors again. They come down, as we say, with a heavy hand. They are not sensitive, they are not careful, they are not sympathetic, they are not gentle; they are brusque. We know the heavy tread of the heavy, hard kind of nature, and the light tread of the sensitive, sympathetic and careful. We do not stop to think about this: it is just what we are—it happens. Our tread, our walk, betrays our character, without our thinking about it at all. And there is the uneven and unsteady step of the indefinite life. If you are indefinite in your life, it will come out in some way in your physical manner: an unsteady, uneven walk so often betrays a similar character. And there is the tread of the double soul—furtive, stealthy, lacking in transparency, ulterior in motive, betraying the character. And so we could go on.

But how necessary that all this should be brought under the government of the Holy Spirit, that our heaviness may be turned into sympathy and sensitiveness, our indefiniteness into steadiness, our self-interest and furtiveness into singleness and transparency. I think you see the point. A life in the Spirit means a certain kind of walk, it produces a certain kind of character and behaviour. How differently we walk when we become Spirit-governed men and women from the way we walked before! Where once we were so hard, so cruel, so insensitive, so heavy-handed, now we

have learned to be sympathetic and understanding and sensitive, and so on. It is the oil of the Spirit upon the great toe, bringing our goings, our course, our movement, our response to the Lord in obedience, all under the Spirit.

### THE INHERITANCE OF THE LEVITES

In closing, just a word about the privileges of the Levites. They were very real. You know that the Levites were eventually granted forty-eight cities of their own. They had no inheritance themselves on the earth: God was their portion and their inheritance. They were not allowed to have what other people could have. In the same way, some Christians can have many things that other Christians cannot have. Whether you can do what some Christians can do, and get away with it, depends very much upon how utter you are for God, upon how much value you are going to be to the Lord. Vocation is always governed by that.

But the Levites were given these forty-eight cities, and that came about when the wilderness journeys were over, and they had no longer to carry the different parts of the tabernacle through the wilderness. They came into the land, and were given these forty-eight cities, distributed amongst the Lord's people throughout the whole of their territory. That is a very, very rich realm of thought and truth, for cities are always figures or types of governmental centres. The Lord's ultimate thought is that He shall have those who govern spiritually all the rest and all the others, who are distributed amongst His people in a position of spiritual government. There is much in the New Testament about that. The Lord wants a heavenly people for a heavenly government, in the day when the wilderness journeys are finished and the kingdom is established, to be seated in the midst of the nations in order to govern and rule with Him. The word which, after all, so aptly applies to the Levites is: 'If we suffer with Him, we shall be glorified with Him' (Rom. viii. 17); "if we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (II Tim. ii. 12).

T. A-S.

### TRANSFORMING MINISTRY

*"Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit. Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not" (II Corinthians iii. 17 - iv. 1).*

**W**E are left in no doubt as to what the Scriptures regard as true ministry. It is the work of transformation. Not merely the announcement of certain truths, but the impartation of Him who is the living Truth. It is the ministry which transforms men, which produces likeness to Christ in their lives. There is no other ministry worthy of the

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name. This is a mercy which is not for spiritual specialists only, but is granted to us all. We all who have received mercy are not to faint, for we too have this privileged ministry.

### A MINISTER'S CREDENTIALS

This chapter opens with Paul's answer to those who were demanding his credentials, questioning the validity of his claim to be a servant of the Lord. They found that he had not the official standing among men which other apostles seemed to have. Although he had been better educated than all of them, he had not had the particular training which was given to the Twelve, nor did he seem to work under their auspices, though as a matter of fact he kept true and warm fellowship with them in the Spirit. They were stumbled because he earned his own living, which seemed somehow to deprive him of a status which other ministers possessed.

The Apostle's answer was simple enough, but tremendously searching to all of us who would claim to be engaged in spiritual ministry. 'My credentials', he affirmed, 'are the lives which are being transformed into the image of Christ.' The claim of the New Covenant was that by it men would have God's will written in their hearts, and so become, by the Spirit, living and walking expressions of the truth. That was actually happening wherever Paul worked. He could truly claim that his was a ministry of the New Covenant (II Cor. iii. 6); it was a ministration of the spirit (vs. 8) and a ministration of righteousness (vs. 9). If there is a certain glory in announcing the great truths of God and setting forth a revelation of His will, there is surely a far greater glory in a ministry whereby those truths are so imparted to the inner life of the hearers that they are enjoyed and lived out to the glory of God. It may be glorious to announce righteousness, but it is much more glorious to produce it in men's experience. It may be glorious to have a passing influence upon men, but it is far more so to produce in them a lasting transformation. These are some of the considerations which lead up to the challenging statement that this greater and more glorious ministry is committed to us. We do well to ask ourselves if we are exercising it. Is it true that men are being transformed into the image of Christ, "from glory to glory", by the effect which we have on them? If not, we must enquire the reason.

### THE UNPROMISING MATERIAL

Is it because of the difficult people among whom we live and work? Is the material which we handle

unsuitable for the purpose? At first this may seem to be the case, but if we pause to consider, we are faced with the fact that these words were written to the Corinthians. So far as the human material was concerned, it would perhaps be hard to have found anything more unpromising. We must notice that the test of this ministry was not the perfection of those who received it, but the fact that the work of transformation was going on. Judged even by the standard of some of the other churches, the Corinthians as described in the first letter were very faulty and disappointing. Yet even so, there had truly been a transformation in them. Paul was not forgetting this, and not forgetting to give thanks to the Lord for it. He could look back on what they were before he preached among them; there was certainly no glory in their lives at that time—indeed, there was much that was shameful in the extreme. "And such were some of you", he wrote; adding, however, that this was no longer the case—"but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. vi. 11).

This was the beginning, though only the beginning. Some of them, perhaps, wrongly imagined that the whole work of grace was finished in that one experience, and this very mistake may have been responsible for some of the very sad revelations and charges which the Apostle was forced to make in his letter. To his great joy, however, he found that the work of transformation had taken on a new impetus as the result of his ministry of exhortation and prayer. Changes were taking place in Corinth. This second letter shows clearly that more glory was coming in, as sin and self were going out. They were being liberated from themselves, so making it possible for the Spirit to proceed with the work of making them more like Christ. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Cor. iii. 17), or perhaps it would be better rendered, "there is liberation", since it is so easy to misunderstand this idea of liberty, as though it meant the lifting of restraint, the setting aside of all government. It does not mean that. There is no liberty for the flesh, if the Spirit is Lord. There is, however, a progressive emancipation from the tyranny of self, so that we are freed to be transformed into the image of Christ. This is how the transformation was working in the case of the Corinthians.

In the first letter we find them very complacent, self-assured and self-satisfied. This was a very real bondage, calculated to hinder the work of transformation as much as anything could. How can

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such a work go on when those concerned imagine that it is already perfected, and that there is no further need for a change in themselves? The second letter, however, records them in a very different mood. "... Ye were made sorry unto repentance: ye were made sorry after a godly sort . . . godly sorrow worketh repentance . . . behold this selfsame thing, that ye were made sorry after a godly sort, what earnest care it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what longing . . ." (II Cor. vii. 9-11). Such regret at their failings and careful concern to have them rectified showed them to have changed considerably from the conceited and complacent men that they had been. There is always a way for more of the Lord's glory to be seen when we are delivered from conceit about ourselves. In this case the very longing for a change was proof that a change was taking place, a proof that Paul's ministry was taking effect in them.

There are other features which can be traced to show the differences and the changes which had taken place in the interval between the two letters. These, then, were some of the signs of Paul's apostleship, and most convincing and enduring signs they were.

### THE SATANIC OPPOSITION

While there is undoubtedly much opposition from Satan to such a ministry—indeed, he concentrates his fiercest assaults on the very matter which we are considering—yet this is no excuse for failure in the ministry.

Consider Moses. His experience had as its setting the triumph of the evil one in the whole camp of Israel. From Aaron downwards, the whole people had succumbed to temptation: so that, at his first descent from the mountain, Moses, far from glowing with glory, was darkened with anger and dismay. The Devil had broken in among the people of God to destroy their faith and rob them of their testimony. "Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord" (Exodus xxxii. 30). Thus it was that he returned to the mount, not speeded by the people's faith but urged there by their sin and by the Devil's apparent triumph. There is no doubt that he did the right thing in getting back to God about the matter. That is the way to counter the wiles and answer the attacks of Satan. Preoccupation with Satan or sin will never produce radiance, but will have the opposite effect. We must face the true facts of the situation, for it is no use minimising or ignoring the havoc

that sin and Satan can make; but we must keep them in the light of the Throne of glory and of grace; we must get away with God, as Moses did. It was from such a tragedy, and with such a background, that he became the man of the shining face.

The same may be said of Paul. It was no use pretending that things were right at Corinth, or that Satan had not deceived and defeated the Lord's people there. The evil situation was urgent and tragic, so much so that Paul wrote to the Corinthians "... out of much affliction and anguish of heart . . . with many tears" (II Cor. ii. 4). Like Moses, though, he got to the Lord about it, and did so to such effect that the shame gave place to glory, and the transformation went on not in one man only, as in Israel's case, but in the whole church. What a victory over Satan! What a proof that, when he has done his worst, he cannot prevent the Spirit's mighty work of transformation! It is thus clear that, if our ministry is not producing such transformation, we cannot explain the lack by Satanic opposition. There must be some further reason.

### THE MINISTER'S SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

This, then, is the lesson of Moses—the lesson of being transformed while we serve, and of serving because we are being transformed. It is important to realise that the value of the ministry is bound up with the spiritual experience of the one ministering. The Apostle's declaration is that "we all . . . are transformed", the minister as well as those ministered to; indeed, we may safely say that he should be the first to be under the hand of God in this way. It is not enough for the ministry to be earnest and sincere, not enough for it to be Scriptural or able; it must come from one who is now, at present, being transformed by the Spirit into the image of Christ. He must be moving on "from glory to glory" if he is to communicate that likeness and that glory to others.

#### (a) THE CHALLENGE

The words are a challenge. They face us fairly and squarely with the question as to whether we truly are in the process of being transformed into greater likeness to Christ by constantly new experience of the Spirit. The Word makes it abundantly clear that such experience is the only basis for a ministry which effects transformation in others. We must argue from the Bible and not from appearances. It may seem to us that others

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are being used by the Lord even though they ignore their need of the Spirit's transforming work. We may be tempted to argue that we should concentrate on the work we are doing, rather than on our own spiritual experiences. We may even shelter behind the weaknesses of past or present servants of God, and so excuse ourselves from the need for being broken and emptied out by the Cross that we may be re-shaped by the Spirit. The Word is very clear. "This ministry" is the one in which "we all . . . are transformed".

It does not say that the ministers must be perfect—far from it. It is not so much a matter of our attainments or full conformity to Christ, but rather of our progressive movement towards the final goal. Even if we were perfect in ourselves, that would not make us ministers, for ministry consists in the Spirit's bringing into our lives something more of Christ that was not there before, and then making it shine out for the blessing and transformation of others. Moses was not perfect, though he was probably a greater and a better man than any other Old Testament servant of the Lord. The outshining, however, was not produced by Moses' own expression merely, but by that extra radiance which was surely the glory of God revealed in and through him. We ought to be changed like this constantly—"from glory to glory"—and so to become able ministers of Christ.

Everybody saw the glory shining out from Moses. Those who looked upon him, both friends and foes, knew that something had happened to him. He was not a perfect man, but he was a different man. Now, in our case the Spirit's work is essentially inward; yet we must not seek to excuse our shortcomings by imagining that it can be only inward. The inward transformation can and must produce something to be sensed by all. But it is the inward that is all-important. Outward glories soon pass away; the inward is that which abides. Nowadays there is a popular demand for the outward and more superficial wonders, but it is good for us to remember that the greatest proof of the power of God is not in the outward transformations of healing for the body, not in wonderful changing of circumstances, not in vast numbers and great excitement, but in the change of character which brings increased Christlikeness in the life. "Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day" (II Cor. iv. 16).

The challenge is not only to our spirituality but to the continually new experiences of the Lord which are essential to a vital ministry. Even a measure of spiritual understanding and past ex-

perience can be powerless if the life becomes static. In the end it may prove more healthy to have the Corinthians, in spite of their bad beginnings, provided that they are being steadily changed, than to have a Laodicean situation, in which things may seem fairly good, but where in fact everything is static, because the people of God have settled down into a condition where change is not possible because it is neither expected nor desired.

It is also a challenge lest, while speaking of Christ, we should be lacking in new experiences of Him. Satan's master-stroke against the truth is not to silence the ministry, though he often tries hard to do that. His greatest success comes by allowing the ministry to go out in word and then to be contradicted in the lives of the speakers. Silence is, after all, negative; it seeks to smother the truth, whereas contradiction brings the truth into prominence only to discredit and defeat it. This is one of the constant perils of ministry. The kind of state which Moses had to deal with, or the situation which faced Paul at Corinth, were calculated to bring out the worst in these servants of God. The Devil is always working like this with regard to our service for the Lord. He produces difficulties and disappointments, which all too often stir our flesh and provoke us to contradict the very message we have been seeking to bring.

## (b) THE PROMISE

Instead of falling into this trap, and so banishing the glory, these two servants not only kept steady but actually increased in their likeness to the Lord as a result of the provocation. Even as Paul sorrowed over the Corinthians, laboured for them and longed that they might be different, he himself was driven into fresh experiences of the grace of God. Therein lies the power of true ministry. "We all . . . are transformed". Which makes us realise that this statement is meant to be a promise as well as a challenge.

Above all else it becomes a matter of drawing in ever deeper measure on the grace of God. Moses found his glory by an amazing experience of the grace of God. It was not only grace to pardon sin, even sin which seemed to have gone beyond all hope of pardon; it was grace which also provided a new and perfect righteousness. Moses' face shone because he brought back from the mount a new expression of the Law, unbroken and unbreakable. From then on the ark of the covenant contained this evidence of the power of God's grace, speaking to us of the perfect righteousness which is in Christ. In Him God gives the answer to man's

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failure. Sin is not only blotted out, it is displaced by perfect righteousness; shame not only is forgotten but is displaced by Divine glory.

The need was too great for Moses. He could do nothing about it. He had to go back to the Lord in the mount to find the answer. It is an essential feature of true ministry that it is constantly making demands upon us which we are unable to meet. This drives us back to the Lord to seek fuller knowledge of His grace in Christ, and this in turn works the very transformation which is the basis and secret of the ministry.

### FACE TO FACE COMMUNION

Paul's reasoning about the veil is not easy to follow. In his interpretation of the Old Testament

story he seems to make a sudden transposition, when, after first speaking of a veil on the face of the minister, he immediately afterwards speaks of a veil on the heart of the people. But the meaning is quite simple. It is that this transforming work is the result of first-hand dealings with God. The ministry must find its origin, not in the study, but in the sanctuary. Those who receive it must not be confronted by the minister as a man, but by the Lord shining out from him. It is those who have the unveiled face who are all transformed.

Such a ministry will be costly in many ways. Yet it is God's call to all His people. And, as we said at the beginning, there is really no other ministry worthy of the name.

H. F.

## THE ANOINTING

*"Now he that stablisheth us with you into Christ, and anointed us, is God; who also sealed us, and gave us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (II Corinthians i. 21, 22, mg.).*

*"And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things. And as for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but . . . his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true . . ." (I John ii. 20, 27).*

*"Jesus of Nazareth . . . God anointed . . . with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts x. 38).*

**T**HE subject of the anointing may be especially appropriate to a time when many are reaching out in the interests of other lives and seeking, in one way or another, to influence them in relation to the Lord Jesus. But the matter of the anointing applies to *all* the Lord's people. I think it unnecessary to spend much time in pointing out or emphasizing the necessity of the anointing with the Holy Spirit. It should be fully and clearly understood that nothing of an eternal character is possible without the anointing of the Holy Spirit. No effort of ours, however sincere and earnest and well-meant, can ever accomplish anything in the interests of the eternal well-being of others, apart from the definite operation of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. In this world, in this dispensation, the Lord has shut up everything to the Holy Spirit. But, on the other side, that anointing makes great things possible.

### THE MEANING OF THE ANOINTING

So we will not spend time over the necessity. Let us take that as settled, and spend a few minutes on the meaning of the anointing. Here is something about which we all need to be quite clear. There is a difference between having the Holy Spirit within us, and knowing Him as the anointing. The anointing is the *active* aspect of the Spirit's presence with us and in us. Of course, they are not two different things. It is one Holy Spirit. But there are two aspects to this matter. Let us put it like this: The Holy Spirit has come and is here with definite, clear and positive purpose. He is the Spirit of purpose; purposefulness is the character of the Holy Spirit. He is always represented as being active, energetic, in the way of doing something. That is His nature, that is His character. The Holy Spirit has not come just to be here, and He has not come into us just to be in us. He has come with purpose, to fulfil purpose—not only in us, but through us. But it is possible for us to have the Holy Spirit dwelling within, and yet for Him to be latent. In many children of God the Holy Spirit, although present, is latent: that is, He is not active. In many Christians there are few, if any, marks of the Holy Spirit, signs of the energy of the Holy Spirit, or features of the working of the Holy Spirit, though they have received Him and are born again. It is strange, is it not, that such an one as the Holy Spirit can be present within, and yet be passive?

Now that is the aspect of just *having* the Spirit. But when you look through the Bible—and there is a very great deal about this in both Testaments—you will find that the word 'anointing' always

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relates to *activity*, to some phase or aspect of action—to ministry, to service, to warfare. Priests were anointed to serve, kings were anointed to rule, prophets were anointed to proclaim, and so on. Jesus was anointed to preach the Good Tidings (Luke iv. 18), and to go about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the Devil (Acts x. 38). God anointed Him. You see, when you touch the point of anointing, you touch the very active aspect of the Holy Spirit. This works in two ways. The Holy Spirit is there; He is of that disposition; and yet He does not become active and positive until *you* do. Until you get into line with the Holy Spirit in purpose, He does not express Himself as the anointing. It is very important to realise this. The Spirit would be active, would be energetic, would be doing, but He will not do so apart from us. It is when we begin to be active that we discover the energy of the Holy Spirit.

Some of us were really Christians, were truly the Lord's, for years, but, while the Spirit was within us through new birth. He was latent—until that day came when we began publicly to testify, and then we leapt at once into an altogether new experience of the Holy Spirit. We found that the Lord was with us, and we began to experience the Lord. It was not at that point that the Lord came into our hearts, it was not at that point that our Christian life started. But there had been this latent kind of Christian life, until—what ought to have been right at the beginning—we moved out with the Lord, and we discovered that the Holy Spirit meant much more than we had ever known Him to mean. He was there, but it was as though He could not spring into action until we did; confirming this, that the anointing relates to action. It is the active aspect of the Holy Spirit.

It may be that you are in this latent state. There is nothing happening. You are praying that the Holy Spirit will do this in you and through you, you are praying that you may be used, but you are waiting, you are just waiting for something to happen, waiting until the Holy Spirit moves you. And all the time He is waiting for you. He is there, waiting until you do something. When you move, you will find to your surprise that it is not you doing it after all. Somehow or other you become one with the Holy Spirit, and His energies move in and take charge. Beware of the loss, the prolonged loss, that may come by that inactive aspect.

I once knew a dear man in the Navy, who was an out-and-out Christian. He visited many ports around the world, and he once happened to be in a certain port through the Lord's Day. He hadn't very much time to find a place where he could

meet with the Lord's people, but eventually he found himself in a Quaker meeting. 'Now you know', he said, 'the Quakers always sit silent and wait for the Spirit to move; but, strangely enough, the Holy Spirit always moves me—and I couldn't keep quiet!' He was a live wire! But I think you see the point. The Holy Spirit is an active, energetic Spirit, but He waits for us. Nothing happens until we 'gird up the loins of our minds'—until we move and commit ourselves. This is simple and elementary, I know, but it is so possible to have this passive and unsatisfactory life when we might be knowing so much more of joy and satisfaction. If only we would launch out into the deep, commit ourselves, we should discover that the Holy Spirit has not to come. He is already there, just waiting.

## THE BASIS OF THE ANOINTING

What is the basis of the anointing? Do remember that the basis of the anointing is deep, inward separation. It is the inward separation from Satan's kingdom, with all that that means. Now Satan is referred to in the Scriptures, as to the position which he held before his fall, as "the anointed cherub that covereth" (Ezek. xxviii. 14). He was anointed, somewhere, in high and holy responsibility; he was in responsible heavenly ministry by the anointing. It is a very profound and altogether incomprehensible thing, this anointing before the world was; but the Spirit of God was active, as we know, before this world order came into being. But here is one who was anointed for ministry. He lost his anointing, he lost his position and he lost his ministry, through pride—pride working out in jealousy. He lost it all.

The basis of the anointing is deep inward separation from anything which in its nature belongs to Satan's kingdom, especially pride. "Jesus of Nazareth" (that is the name of humiliation), "God anointed Him". Here is the empty One, the self-emptied One, who says: "I am meek and lowly in heart". God anointed *Him*. That is how we must approach the service of the Lord, or any ministry: in deep self-emptiness, deep humility and meekness, in deeply conscious dependence upon the Lord, inwardly separated from any ground that Satan could hold, that is his own. That is the ground, the basis, of the anointing. Meekness is the greatest essential in the activity of the Holy Spirit.

"Quench not the Spirit" (I Thess. v. 19). That surely relates to the activity of the Spirit, not to the Spirit as passive. You don't have to quench a fire if it is latent; you only quench it when it is

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flaming, if you are going to quench it at all. The Holy Spirit is active. We need to be very watchful, at all times, against quenching the Spirit. I feel that this is a word that needs to be taken to heart. There are so many ways of quenching the Spirit ; I may indicate two. We can quench the active work of the Spirit by, on the one side, frivolity, talkativeness, lack of circumspection. How often the Spirit has been quenched and a great opportunity been lost because of excitableness, talkativeness, frivolity, unholy lightness in talk and behaviour, streams of empty words. The Spirit is so often grieved by that. "Quench not the Spirit". On the other side, it is equally possible to quench the Spirit by an artificial soberness, sombreness, heaviness. Some dear children of God seem to think that anything in the nature of joy is dangerous to the Spirit, to the spiritual life.

Now you see, between these two there has to be a balance: which means that the Spirit is the Spirit of self-control, or, if you like to use the word, the Spirit of balance. It is a matter of keeping the balance: joy and seriousness kept in equal measure. And that just means watchfulness, does it not?—that is, sensitiveness to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not going on with His work if there is something that is grieving Him. The way, there-

fore, for effective and fruitful service under the anointing is to be sensitive to the Spirit. We cannot be too sensitive to the Holy Spirit. There are so many things to take the keen edge off sensitiveness. And we shall need that, if we should at any time be seeking to help another, either to the Lord, or in their spiritual life. We shall need to be in an attitude of leaning hard on the Spirit ; not to our own understanding, but to the Spirit ; a silent but earnest prayer going on in our heart all the time as to the manner of our influence, the wisdom of our words ; being very sensitive to the Spirit.

We have only to recall the example of the Lord Jesus, the Anointed One Himself—how, while not sombre or heavy, or artificially serious, but very natural, very balanced, capable sometimes of a really humorous touch, He was all the time so sensitive to the Father and to the Spirit. How apt and how fitting, how wise, was all that He said and did! And our passage in II Corinthians i. 21 implies that the same Spirit as was upon Him is upon us. The same Spirit is with us to do the work, if He has workmen who are adjusted to Himself. May the Lord give us to know the anointing in a very real way, where it is all the Spirit's work, although operating through us.

T. A-S.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### PALM SUNDAY

*Reading : Matthew 21. 1 - 16.*

**W**HY was everybody so happy on Palm Sunday? In the Bible, palm trees are always used to speak of praise: not the dead praise which is only a matter of words, but the living praise which springs up freshly in the heart. The day of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was truly a day of praise. It was as though everybody (except the chief priests and scribes) had found the secret of true joy on that day. It was a day of joy because it was a day of glad giving.

1. The people gave their garments. The disciples first put their garments on the colt instead of a saddle, but later the crowd spread theirs all along the way. Not content with the palm leaves, which had cost them nothing, and feeling that Jesus was worthy of a royal welcome, they took their coats and cloaks, laying them on the ground so that our Lord could pass over. Were the clothes spoiled? I am afraid that they must have been. Not only were there the two donkeys and the twelve dis-

ciples, but with such a great excited crowd it is doubtful whether the owners ever got their garments back, and if they did it was to find them dirty and perhaps torn. But they did not mind. They had given to Him, and they had given willingly.

2. The owners of the ass and her colt had also given willingly to the Lord. Who they were, we do not know, but the Lord knew them, and most likely they had already promised Him that He could use the animals whenever He wished. They not only promised, but they kept their promise, which is more than many of us do. When the two disciples explained that the Lord had need of the beasts, that was quite enough. They asked no more questions ; they made no conditions. They had no royal charger to offer Jesus the King, but they had their humble ass. And, as a matter of fact, this was just what Jesus needed.

3. The ass gave her colt. She was not to have the honour of letting Jesus ride on her, for He needed



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an animal which had never been used as a mount before. Usually unbroken horses or donkeys need much training and discipline before they will accept a rider on their back, but this one seems to have been very willing and obedient. There was something of power in the very presence of the Lord Jesus which tamed all that was wild and lawless. So although the ass and her colt were only beasts, and could not understand what was happening, they were in harmony with all the rest on that day of gladness. They gave all that they had to Him. The ass gave her colt, and the colt gave himself.

4. By far the greatest Gift, however, was the One who was the centre of all this rejoicing. This was the Lord Jesus, who at that time had come to Jerusalem to give His own life upon the Cross, in order to be our Saviour. He knew what was to happen to Him at Jerusalem, and He knew that the time had now come for Him to make that great

sacrifice. It was no surprise to Him that Palm Sunday was to lead on to Good Friday, the day of His Cross and Passion. Yet He went gladly to suffer, because it was for the Father's glory and for our blessing. The palm trees were not only under His feet and round about His head; they were in His heart.

No wonder that even the children in the temple sang their 'Hosannas'! Of course they did not know the real truth about Christ's sacrifice, nor did the disciples, but they all felt that it was a joyful day, a day of praise because it was a day of willing giving to God.

For us every day should be a Palm Sunday. We have the great gift of life and love through the Lord Jesus, so there is every reason for us to be full of praise. We also have the great privilege of giving gladly to Him. It was the Lord Jesus Himself who once said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20. 35).

H. F.

## GOD'S SOVEREIGN ACTIVITIES

*"And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel" (Numbers x. 35, 36).*

THE book of Numbers is concerned with a militant movement on the part of God, in the midst of His ordered people, in relation to His testimony. The ark is called 'the ark of the testimony', and the place in which it was resident or deposited was the 'tabernacle of testimony'; and everything centred in, circled round and was governed by that testimony—the testimony of God concerning His Son, Jesus Christ. That has an abiding message for the Lord's people at all times and at all stages of spiritual progress.

I would point out that this is not some peculiar testimony belonging to any one particular company of God's people. It is *the* testimony of Jesus. We will not stay to explain what it is, but we do know that, in the book of consummations—the book of the Revelation—where everything is brought out to its final fulness and dealt with in finality, "the testimony of Jesus" is the dominant factor from beginning to end. In the first chapter the testimony of Jesus is presented by Himself in His own Person. Then everything—the churches and the Church comprehensively, the nations, and ultimately the kingdom of darkness—is all dealt

with and settled in the light of the testimony of Jesus; and finally that testimony of Jesus is brought out in glorious fulness in the symbol of the City, and everything about that City speaks of Him, and speaks of Him in glory in the saints.

That is just by the way, lest we should think, when we use the phrase 'a testimony', that we are talking about something other than the testimony of Jesus, in its fullest sense as in the Word of God. I do want to deliver minds from the idea that, shall I say, 'Honor Oak' has a 'testimony' of its own. 'This testimony'—how I hear that all over the world from people who are associated with the company and the Lord's work here in this place. Please strip your mind and your tongue of that phraseology. It is not some private testimony we are talking about. It is the testimony of Jesus in its fulness, and it is, as I have said, God's movements in connection with that that the whole of the Scriptures reveal.

## I. SOVEREIGN SELECTIVENESS

We start with Genesis. God's creative activity was there; we may deal with that more fully later. It brings us back to the whole outline of God's goings. But when things departed from the Divine intention, and that so early, God reacted in relation to His testimony, and we find that the whole book of Genesis is occupied with the *sovereign selectiveness of God* in this very connection. And here I

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am going to pass again to the key to the whole Word of God, His Divine principle. If you get the Divine principle, you will understand the Scriptures. If you have not, you will do what has been done and is being done, that is, you will make theories and interpretations without number and without end. Take, for instance, all that has been produced on the book of Revelation. It is perfectly hopeless. Of all the multitudes who have sought to interpret it, you find hardly two that agree. The only sure key to the Scriptures as a whole or in any part is a Divine principle. When you have that, the whole thing opens up.

I suggest that the Divine principle with which God reacted to the fall was this sovereign selectiveness. It begins with the seed of the woman, and then it moves on along a thin line of witnesses, reaching to Abraham, and then, through Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob; and then through them to the nation. There is a movement of God within the world of men, sovereignly laying hold of people in relation to that testimony which He in His eternal counsels had determined to realise. The testimony of Jesus began before this world began. It has been taken up along this line by the sovereign act of God, and it is there that we must find our strength. There are, of course, always the two sides to any Divine movement—the Divine initiative, and man's responsibility—but the Divine initiative always comes first, and that is our comfort, consolation and strength. "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you" (John xv. 16). "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. i. 4). That word 'chose' is a marvellous key to God's goings right down through the ages.

The goings of God are seen along this line of sovereign selectiveness—and how much we owe to that! The very holding on our way, our very being kept by the power of God to the end, is simply because in the first place God chose us; God, if I may use the word, selected us. God looked and saw us and laid His hand upon us, and that, we are told in this marvellous revelation of the eternal goings of God, happened before ever we had a being. We were foreknown. All sorts of difficulties are gathered into that, but let me say here that it is not so much the individual, as that elect company for a Divine purpose, which is the occasion of this sovereign selectiveness.

You can see God moving in this way right through the Word. You cannot explain it. We shall come on to the mystery of God's ways sooner or later, but there is no ground of explanation outside of God Himself. The Lord Jesus chose His twelve disciples. There is no ground of explana-

tion, none whatever, outside of Himself. "Did not I choose you the twelve?" (John vi. 70)—and that is all there is to it. 'I chose you'. He never explained why; none of us could explain why. But He has done it; and what we know, immediately we come under the government, the control, of the Holy Spirit, is that we have come into line with something which is not incidental in life, something which has a very long history; we have become a part of something that reaches beyond time, both backward and forward, something beyond the limits of this world and this life. We are conscious of being related to some immense purpose.

I say again, we are not always able to explain or define it; but a consciousness comes to us that after all, whatever we may have felt or thought about it before, our birth is not just an incident, we have not come on the scene by chance—there is something more in it than that. No one knows that until they become linked with the Lord Jesus and thus become a part of God's testimony concerning His Son, which is the ground of all God's movements from eternity to eternity. We have come into something that is very near to the heart of God; and the more utterly you come into line with that, the more God stands by you, the more God is going to vindicate Himself and His wisdom. It is a tremendous thing to be wholly and fully in the mid-thoroughfare of those eternal goings of God.

So Genesis sees the beginning of this principle, which continues all the way through the Old Testament and New Testament—the principle of sovereign selectiveness in relation to God's testimony concerning His Son, the testimony of Jesus.

## II. SOVEREIGN SEPARATION

We come to Exodus for the next phase in the goings of God, and here it is a matter of sovereign separation. There is the elect people, but the elect has got rather entangled in things, mixed up in things; the elect is in bondage, the elect is in the world; and God must move sovereignly again. And God retains that sovereignty in His own hands. Moses tried to assume the sovereignty of God in separating the people from Egypt, and it was a terrible disaster. God retains the sovereignty in relation to His purpose. When God's time came, when the hour came for God to move, He did it from Himself, on His own account, right out from Heaven. You find God saying all the time, in relation to that emancipation: "I . . .", "I . . .", "I . . ." "Now thou shalt see what I will do . . ."

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(Ex. vi. 1). "Come now therefore, and I will send thee . . ." (Ex. iii. 10). "Thus shalt thou say . . . I AM hath sent me unto you" (Ex. iii. 14). God in sovereignty, the great I, is taking charge of this matter.

The second principle, then, in the goings of God, is God acting to get His people separated unto Himself: and separated, in the first place, as the first stage, from the world. No one who is really vitally related to the Lord, who has a life with God, who is under the hand of God, will ever fail to recognise those activities of His in separating them from the world. They will never have a happy time in the world. The most miserable people on this earth are Christians who are still 'in with' the world. Far better be an out-and-out worldling—they are so much happier than the Christians who are in the world. Yes: for the Christian it is one thing or the other. The alternative is a miserable 'half-and-half' existence, which just is not worth while.

Look at Israel in Egypt, and see God at work with His own to make them inwardly know that they cannot be mixed up or entangled in this world. God's sovereignty will not allow it, and He makes that sovereignty known in the heart of His own people.

Then comes the next phase of separation. Once they are out of Egypt, there has to be an inward separation from *themselves*, which seems to be an even more complicated thing than getting them out of Egypt. That extrication had called for very great power on the part of God, and God was equal to it when it came to the matter of power: but in the wilderness it called for infinite patience. God Himself was, of course, again equal to it: but if God knows any comparatives in His activities—if one thing can be said to be easier or harder for Him than another, it seems that His task with Israel in the wilderness was much more difficult than His task in getting them out of the world. The inward work of God calls for infinite patience.

But here you see the goings of God. God is not just going to have a theoretical, doctrinal position; He is not just going to have positional truth; He is going to have an actual *condition* corresponding to the truth. In relation to the ultimate object toward which He is moving in all His goings—that Christ in all things shall have the pre-eminence—it is necessary that self shall have no pre-eminence, that the natural life shall not be lord in any sense or in any way. And so His goings must be through the wilderness, in which He is ever at work to divide inwardly as well as outwardly. Exodus sees those two phases of God's goings with His chosen

—outward separation, inward separation: the outward from the world and its overlord, the inward from the self, the flesh, the natural life and its dominion—so that eventually the Lord has a people who have no other lords, outwardly or inwardly, but in whom His lordship is absolutely established. It was only for a bright, glorious, but brief period in Israel's history that that was realised; by far the greater part of their history on both sides of that glorious period was of other lords having dominion. But what is in the Lord's view, toward which He is moving in all His goings, is to have a people unreservedly for His own. That is His testimony.

## III. SOVEREIGN SERVICE

We come next to Leviticus, and here it is a matter of sovereign service: it is priestly ministry. I cannot stay to take out even fragments by way of reminding you of the contents of that book. We can sum it all up in this way: Everything here is "holiness unto the Lord" (Ex. xxviii. 36, etc., A.V.). That is, ministering to Divine satisfaction, to Divine pleasure. All the feasts and the offerings speak of that which brings pleasure and satisfaction to God. It is all so highly symbolic of the perfections of His Son in Deity and in humanity. It is bringing Him for God's satisfaction; the priestly office and the priestly array all speaking of the glories of Christ in the presence of God.

There is another side to it, God ordains His service so sovereignly that there are many things connected with it which are exceedingly dangerous if they are not observed. If there is false incense, if there is man-made as distinct from Divinely-prescribed incense; if the requisite garments are not worn, the garments of glory and beauty; if there is a breach at any point in these laws of God concerning His Son, the consequences are fatal. So that He ordains this service, and He says, 'This is not optional, this is not a thing that you can take or leave; it is a thing upon which everything, so far as My ultimate purpose is concerned, depends.' It is a matter of life and death—holiness unto the Lord.

What is service to the Lord? It may take many forms, it may move along many lines, but the essence and true nature of the service of God is bringing to Him that which is for His pleasure and satisfaction, that in which He can have the glories of His Son, the perfections of His Son displayed.

That is His object with every convert. God's object in getting people saved is not *just* to get them saved. The proclamation of the Gospel is not merely a matter of 'rescuing the perishing' from

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Hell and getting them to Heaven *as though it were all centred in them*, as though they—or we—were the beginning and end of the Gospel. That is not it. Every newly born-again child of God, in the thought of God, is a vessel in which those perfections and glories of His Son are to be manifested, and each one is then to be related to all the others, to make the one glorious vessel which will eventually be seen “coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God”. The object of winning souls is the ultimate satisfaction and pleasure of God. It is not only for the sake of the convert and the convert’s eternal well-being; we have concentrated far too much on that.

If only we can see and grasp the fuller thought of God, what a motive it is! God can then commit Himself. Surely that is the main point, after all—that God should be able to come alongside and say: ‘Yes, I am in this: this has something more in view than personal gratification; this has My glory in view, this has My Son in view.’ That is sovereign service.

#### IV. SOVEREIGN WARFARE

When you come to Numbers, you find the Lord’s people in a position or condition of being constituted a warring instrument concerning the Testimony. This is something tremendous—for, so far as the ages down here are concerned, the testimony of Jesus is an outstanding thing, the most outstanding thing in God’s universe. All the conflict, all the trial, all the suffering of the Church and the saints, is related to that testimony. If you will have nothing to do with the testimony of Jesus you will escape nine-tenths of your troubles, difficulties and sufferings. Touch that, come into relation to that, and your troubles begin. Indeed, we know that, on one side, your troubles begin as soon as you become a Christian! Praise God, that is not the whole story; but it is one side, and the Lord Jesus did not hide that. He made it perfectly clear that that would be the immediate consequence of relationship to Himself.

There is a great kingdom of antagonism to this testimony of Jesus—fierce and violent antagonism. It is a mighty spite against God. We have suggestions as to how and why it arose. There was one who aspired to the kingdom, to the inheritance, to a certain place next to God, to be equal with God. But that place was reserved for God’s Son, and so the Son has for ever, in Heaven and on earth, been the object of that one’s fiercest jealousy and hatred; and so because God is working all things in the interests of His Son, the one thing to which the Devil has committed himself, throughout all

the ages, is to spoil everything that is of God—just to spoil it. Anything that God does, the Devil will immediately try to spoil, because it is related to God’s Son. So we find ourselves precipitated into a realm of animosity. It is in the very atmosphere—you cannot avoid it. It is there all the time.

This conflict is a part of the testimony. The book of Numbers brings us there: we find the testimony in the centre and the people ordered for battle in relation to the testimony. But, blessed be God, the testimony is seen as completely victorious. “Rise up, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered”.

#### PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

These few thoughts are just hints and pointers, rather than anything else, but if you take them up you will see their operation, not only in the Old Testament, but in the New, and also in our own lives. Firstly, God laid His hand upon us sovereignly: He made us know that it had to be Himself. We may have longed for Him, we may have craved for Him, we may have yearned for Him, but the Lord chose His own moment for clinching the matter. He did not allow any activities of ours to bring it about—

‘It is not thy tears of repentance, or prayers . . .’

There is a side, of course, where we have to show that we mean business with God; but God chooses His own moment for doing this thing, so that we have to say, ‘It was the Lord! I could not have got through of myself; I could not have brought this about myself. The Lord kept it in His own hands—I know He did it.’

That is so in every matter, not only in our conversion. We see the sovereignty of God dealing with us, His sovereign activities for our separation, outwardly and inwardly. God is working in that way. And until we let go of the world and of personal interests in this life as objectives, let go the government of any life of our own, let go any claim to direct and order our own paths, and come into the goings of God, we are not in rest, the testimony does not rest. “Return unto thy rest” (Ps. cxvi. 7). As you are in the activities of God ‘going’, you come into the rest of God resting.

And then it is a matter of everything for God’s pleasure. That is the meaning of holiness. Holiness sums it all up: everything to God’s pleasure and satisfaction, everything concerning the Lord Jesus. He in all things having pre-eminence.

Finally, God’s dealings with us do bring us into the realm of conflict: but it is conflict with tremendous issues and glorious assurances—the certainty of victory.

T. A-S.

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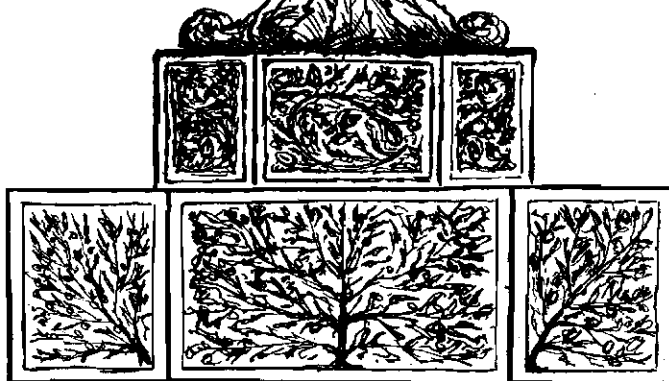
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"The Testimony of Jesus" Rev. 1. 9.



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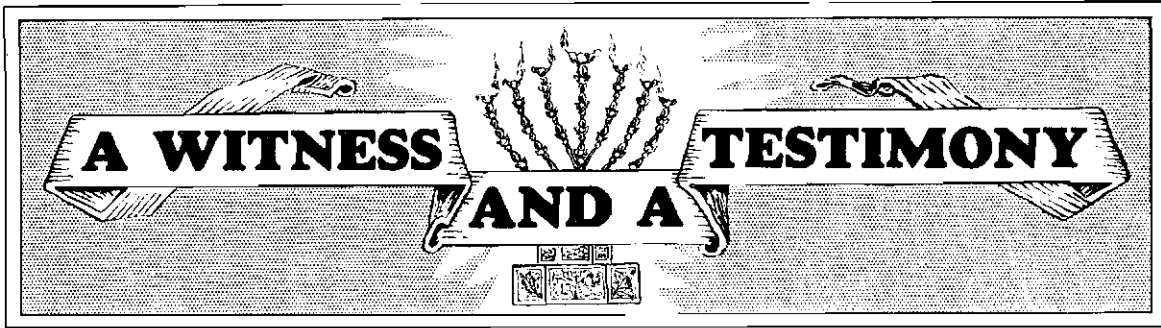
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UNDERSTANDING OF THE TIMES

SOME OBSERVATIONS AND AN APPEAL BY THE EDITOR

IN his "Holy War" John Bunyan's spiritual acumen is rarely more impressive than in that point in the enemy's strategy to capture Mansoul where he orders that Mr. Understanding—the Town Clerk—must be put in a dark dungeon where he cannot see what is going on. The Apostle Paul has given us no small emphasis upon the importance and value of spiritual understanding, and the New Testament contains a great deal of evidence as to that importance. Would to God that we—His people—were more awake to the nature and meaning of currents, trends, and happenings in our own time! David's kingdom was strengthened in the day of its establishment after the death of Saul by the men of Issachar "that had understanding of the times". Our Lord's kingdom surely needs people so endowed. The spheres in which this gift or quality is needed are both those of the Lord's movements, and those of the enemy's, and such perception would be a great strengthening to the Church and the people of God. While we do not claim to be greatly endowed in this way, there are some vital and big matters concerning which no great illumination is necessary, and we venture to point these out. For the moment we confine ourselves to only two, but two which are very far-

reaching and inclusive of many more. The first has to do with—

THE CHURCH

There is an almost astounding movement in our time in this connection, and it has two major aspects. The New Testament can be said to be—in a large proportion of its contents—a document containing God's conception, election, calling, and constitution of the Church for its eternal vocation, and it can truly be said that God has bound Himself to the Church in a very full and utter way. He has made it clear that *His* means and method of fulfilling His eternal counsels concerning His Son is 'Churchwise': that the normal channel of His approach to and meeting of men is His Church. Of course, this means the Church as constituted, indwelt, and governed by His Son as "head over all things" to it. This Divinely revealed and introduced Church all too soon lost its original character and effectiveness, toward the end of the apostolic age, and, for the most part, it has been other than at the beginning ever since, with few worthy representations, except here and there. But God has never abandoned His original

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

conception and appointment. Sooner or later it would be brought home to Christendom that His way and means are indispensable to its very survival. That time has now come! Never was there a time when so many books were being published, and so many conferences being held, on the subject of the Church as at this present time. The matter is—perhaps—not even second to evangelism, for evangelism resolves itself invariably into the Church question, and is so largely determined as to its abiding value by it.

What we are going to mention is not a verdict either way upon the World Council of Churches (here we pass no judgment for or against, that is not our object at the moment), but it is of no small significance that a body representing almost every denomination of Christendom should make the pronouncements that it has made.

In the great gatherings of this body in Amsterdam the subject chosen was 'The Order of God and the Disorder of Man'. This was afterward altered to 'Man's Disorder and God's Design'. This was a reconsideration of the New Testament revelation of the Church, and was a tacit condemnation of the departure therefrom. Later this great body was found using freely a phrase which has almost become a slogan: 'These man-made divisions must go!' For centuries these 'divisions' have been upheld and championed as part of the sovereign ways of God to recover or preserve certain specific features of Divine truth. It has been said again and again that the denominations were raised up by God for this purpose (no matter how they contradicted one another). Now it is 'these man-made divisions'. What lies behind this change and new face? Nothing less and other than the realisation that for its very survival and effective testimony the Church must reassert its unity. While we do not for a moment think that the kind of unity—or union—being aimed at or worked for is what is in the New Testament, or will have any more intrinsic value than a League of Nations or United (?) Nations, we repeat that it is of no small significance that, as the age closes in, God is compelling a recognition of His own established way. While this may be the imposing of His decree upon the recognition of men, there may be a hidden and deep-down working of His sovereignty to have the genuine thing.

There is another aspect of this matter. It is in the realm of—

## 'WORLD MISSIONS'

No one with any eyes to see can fail to recognise that we have turned a very big corner in the

matter of what have been called 'World Missions'. This turn is truly stated by one very competent to judge. Here are his words (we quote them with certain reservations which we will later mention):

"The missionary movement stands at the beginning of a new age." "Among enlightened individuals, for example, it is now common to hear the term 'world mission of the Church' used instead of the time-honoured phrase 'foreign missions'." "The age of foreign missions has passed." "The challenge of our day lies rather in a world-wide heathenism running horizontally through all the religions, cultures, and nations of the world, including our own." "Nothing is foreign that concerns our mission to take Christ to our disordered world." "Then, also, we speak less of 'missions' to-day and more often of the 'world-mission'." "The transition from the plural to the singular is important." ". . . the word 'missions' in the plural suggests many scattered enterprises, supported by churches and individuals because of their concern for a particular missionary or a specific type of work . . . in promoting these enterprises we find ourselves exalting the incidental and the subsidiary rather than the basic and the permanent. The missionary faith at home cannot be nurtured on success stories, for in some countries, at least, dark days lie ahead—how dark we dare not even surmise . . ." "To go a step further, this 'world-mission' is a world-mission of the *church*. Missionary emphasis to-day is upon the church. We are concerned with the mission of the church . . . The modern 'rediscovery of the church', of which we read and hear so much, was, in fact, largely a missionary achievement . . . It is with the church as fellowship, rather than organisation, that the missionary movement is concerned . . . Incorporation into the fellowship is the end of conversion. A solitary believer is an impossibility . . . Experience on the mission field has demonstrated that the gospel is commended to unbelievers by the corporate witness of the new life as lived within the fellowship as a 'colony of heaven'. The church as fellowship is not only the end of evangelism; it is the agent in that process."

The above is no isolated judgment and appraisal. Our point in this statement is that—whether it be the Church of Divine revelation, or of man's conception—it is the fact of the Church that is finding an altogether new and primary place in the realm

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of Christian concern. This, we repeat, is *very* significant, and ought to be considered seriously in the light of Divine sovereignty, as displacing both individualism and institutionalism. There is a particular aspect of this to which our evangelical leaders in particular will do well to take heed. We quote here from another work for the sake of getting to the point quickly.

“All through the Christian age a minority of believers has endeavoured to carry out in *corporate life* the Scriptural principles (i.e. of *Church* life and work). The bitterest and most implacable opposition has come to them, not from the world, but from organised Christendom, that is, the system men call the Church. By this powerful organisation they have been in turn oppressed, misrepresented, persecuted, reviled, ridiculed, and ignored, but their persistence from century to century has supplied proof of the practicability of the principles they professed.”

The present writer has recently spent some time in the East and the Far East and has seen the glory and the tragedy of the above.

On the one hand a mighty work of God—not on a ‘mission’ or institutional basis at all, but on the true and pure basis of the Church—is expressing itself and reproducing itself as shown in the book of the ‘Acts’, reaching far and wide until churches have been born in many hundreds of places (literally true), with large numbers of full-time workers, and an order beautiful to behold, a joy that bows one to worship. One thanks God for ever having been allowed the honour of seeing just a part of this work, from the inside, and of being able to look deeply into its constitution. This is something actually in existence and still going on to-day. But on the other hand, this is the work that has had more opposition in misunderstanding, misrepresentation, criticism, and avoidance on the part of organized Christianity, than any other Christian activity. ‘Christians’ have even gone so far as to boycott in business those who have been associated with this work. It is happening to-day, but the most evident seal of God is on this testimony.

This leads us to our second main word in this editorial. It has to do with this increasing and blighting—

#### SUSPICION AMONG CHRISTIANS

Error, false teaching, and heresy have always been a major means by which the Devil has sought

to destroy “the testimony of Jesus”, but when he brought in the weapon of what is known as ‘Modernism’, or ‘Higher Criticism’, he used a double-barrelled gun. One barrel he aimed directly at the great fundamental truths of the Person of Christ, the work of Christ, and the authority of the Bible. He has thus wrought great havoc, but one wonders whether even that is comparable to the mischief of his second and closely related barrel. By it he has poured out volumes and clouds of suspicion, fear, mistrust, apprehension, and all the grievous effects of these among true Christians. There is not a single person to-day who is quite safe in this ‘Christian’ world and atmosphere. Some of the most outstanding and erstwhile evangelical stalwarts have at length fallen under its awful miasma, and died of a broken heart because of it—and all so untrue! The enemy stops short at no point short of dividing the last two Christians, and if he cannot find true ground for doing it by spreading suspicion and mistrust—“evil report”—he will make it by giving a twist to anything that is capable of being twisted. It is like an evil disease, a blight, a cancer, working in the very system of Christianity, and because of it the Church can never be true to the glorious definition:—

“Fair as the moon,  
Clear as the sun,  
Terrible as an army with banners.”

God only knows what He is losing by this, and what capital Satan is making out of it! God forbid that there should ever be compromise with false teaching and error, but is not the predisposition to suspicion, the capitulation to a spirit of mistrust, and a mentality which is all on the alert for something doubtful, being carried too far, to the destruction of the Church’s authority and unity?

We beg to appeal to all those to whose eyes this message may come, that they will ask the Lord, if need be, to completely convert their mentality in this matter. Would it not be more according to the spirit of the Master, who said “Let him that is without sin cast the first stone”, and “He that is not against us is for us”, if, as our instant reaction to every ‘report’, ‘rumour’, criticism, judgment, insinuation, innuendo, or whisper, we instantly asked the question, Is it true? Did the speaker—or writer—really mean that? Is there not another meaning to be given to it? Is it not—perhaps—an unfortunate way of putting it, but not necessarily pernicious? Should we not, before accepting it, find out whether our interpretation is the right one, or whether *we* may be mistaken?

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Whatever value there may have been, or may be, in the meticulous custodianship of 'soundness' which some have assumed—and we do owe much to those who have been eyes to the Church when there has *really* been something to see that threatened The Faith—the Lord has suffered, and His people have suffered, far more from the ultra-critical and suspicious and fearful than from many other more open assaults upon the truth. The enemy is engaged more than ever upon a campaign of sabotage within the Church for its internal disintegration, and it is for us to resist him by seeking all the *positive* ground of fellowship possible, not looking for all the negative ground, either really or imaginatively existent.

There are various ways of approaching the matter of Christian unity. We have before approached it in this paper along the line of Scripture, dealing with its spiritual basis. Many books

have been published and articles written by various authors. Nothing seems to have had much effect, but we venture to believe that such a change of disposition as is here appealed for would go a very long way toward rescuing the Church from its present weakness due to its internecine strife and its civil war.

To return to our starting point. Is it not a matter for real spiritual perception and discernment that—at a time like this, at the end of the age—the Church should be so largely crippled by an intensive campaign of the evil forces to spread suspicion and doubt through all its ranks, and by lies, half-truths, and misapprehensions to get the Lord's people all looking at one another with questions and uncertainties, so that they are totally unable to face a common foe, and a great vocation, as one man in Christ?

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS  
EDITOR

## THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF SERVICE

## VII. PRINCELY SERVICE

*Reading: Numbers vii, 1 - 84.*

THE first thing that becomes apparent from the record in this chapter is that the Lord's people, as represented by their princes—the princes of all the fathers' houses, you notice—are looked upon as a princely people. God's conception of His people is that, and He desires His people so to conceive of themselves. They are a princely people, a royal priesthood.

PRINCELINESS:  
THE CHARACTER OF THE LORD JESUS

What is princeliness in its real nature, when it is a true princeliness? Ultimately, fundamentally, it is that which takes its character from the Lord Jesus. We are very ready to extol the Lord Jesus, to acclaim Him and proclaim Him as King of kings and Lord of lords, to put Him in the highest place. We glory in the fact that "God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name" (Phil. ii. 9). I trust that it can truly be said of every one of us, that that is our estimate of the Lord Jesus. If that is true, and He is to us Prince as well as Saviour, then surely we who bear His Name, and are of His family, over

which He is Prince, should take our character from Him. It is God's thought, and God's will, that there should be about us something of the princeliness of the Lord Jesus.

## (a) SPIRITUAL DIGNITY

Princeliness is a very different thing in the spiritual realm from what it is in the temporal and the natural. We have already seen through this series of studies the great difference that there is in priestliness, in Levitical service, between what is temporal and what is spiritual: it is a different realm, a different kind of thing altogether. When it comes to the Lord Jesus and His princeliness, again we say that it is not just official, it is not just by appointment, it is not ecclesiastical or formal. It is spiritual and it is moral—for princeliness is pre-eminently a moral and a spiritual thing. If we take our character from the Lord Jesus, we shall not be mean, contemptible, petty, or 'little' people, or anything at all like that. That is not princeliness. No, to take character from Christ means something noble, something fine, something big, great, honourable, dignified. You expect that of a prince, do you not? Even in the natural realm, you expect dignity in conduct, behaviour, presence. You lose all respect for a prince who is mean or contemptible.

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## (b) SPIRITUAL STATURE

Princeliness seems to speak, too, of stature. I expect these princes in Israel were men of physical stature, dignity of presence—men whose presence impressed. That is, everybody could look up to them—perhaps literally, as well as in other ways. Princeliness is stature, and stature in the Bible is always spiritually and morally a matter of the measure of Christ—just how much there is of Christ.

## (c) SPIRITUAL WEALTH

It seems an anomaly for a prince to be poor. Here you find the princes were men of substance, men of wealth. They were people who had a competence, who had plenty, who had whereof to dispose. Not only were their own needs met and satisfied, but they had plenty to give away.

Now, this is not a mere artistic presentation of things, or exaggeration in words. This is exactly what the Lord wants His people, His spiritual Israel, to be. He wants big people, in the spiritual sense, people of stature, people of dignity. And I think, as I have already said in earlier messages, that that may well come down to very practical matters of our personal presence and appearance. We can so easily let the Lord down by our appearance, by our carelessness, by our behaviour, by the way we talk, and so on. 'Letting the Lord down' is only another way of saying—taking from the grandeur of Christ, instead of showing forth the excellencies of Him.

That covers much ground and includes many things. But what I am trying first of all to impress upon you is the Divine conception and idea of His people: that that is to be true of them, not only when they are together in meetings, but at home, at business, wherever they are. There should be something about them that is fine, something about them that is grand—not petty, not small; something about Christians which will lead people to look up to and speak highly of them; something about them that is honouring the Lord. We should be people, too, of stature and people of substance—not going round, as we say, cap in hand, having to try to get something for our subsistence. No, we have plenty. I verily believe that, if we really come into what God wills for us, we shall be people of plenty. There will always be a margin; we shall never be at the end of things. Plenty! Plenty! Twelve basketfuls over all the time! It is the Lord's thought for His people that they should be spiritually wealthy. That should be true individually as well as collectively. This is what is

represented here by the princes of the fathers' houses of Israel.

## A GREAT APPRECIATION OF THE CROSS

But what was it that particularly brought into view their princeliness? How is it that we are made to take note of them? What was it that gave them a place in the Bible? What was it that caused them to occupy all this long chapter of eighty-nine verses? In a word, what was it that showed their princeliness?

The answer is very simple, but very, very striking and searching. It was their appreciation of the altar, their estimate of the value of the altar: in New Testament terms, their appreciation of the Cross. If you think about it, you will see how true that was. Was the Apostle Paul a prince in Israel? Was he a man of stature? Was he a man of substance? Was he a man of dignity? Why? "Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. vi. 14). It was his glorying in the Cross, his estimate of the value, the importance, the meaning, of the Cross. It is our apprehension of the Cross which reveals our spiritual measure. Measure always comes along the line of a very deep regard for the Cross of our Lord Jesus. It is the way of our enlargement; it is the way that makes a lot of room; it is the way of spiritual wealth. Despise the Cross, hold the Cross lightly, think little of the Cross, and you will become a very small person spiritually. These princes had a tremendous conception of the significance and value and importance of this altar which was being dedicated. I leave that with you to think about. The more you enter into the meaning of the Cross, as you really do in heart give an adequate estimate to the sufferings of God's Son, the greater will your spiritual life be, the more will you emerge a person of account, the more wealth will God lavish upon you.

'Oh, the sweet wonders of that Cross

Where Christ my Saviour loved and died!'

It is a tremendously enlarging thing to grasp, rightly and sufficiently, the meaning of the Cross.

A SPONTANEOUS, VOLUNTARY,  
HEART EXPRESSION

Now these princes had such a large appreciation of the altar that it required *wagons* to convey their appreciation. A wagon is a very large vehicle. It is not an ordinary little thing that you can carry in your hand. They did not want just a little bit of a truck! Here are wagons, and here are these many

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wagon-loads expressing the large appreciation of the altar.

But note two other things about the wagon. All this was something for which, so far as we know, no prescription had been made, and, from the account, it almost looks as though Moses did not know what to do with it. He had nothing in the 'Blue Book' about this! God had said nothing about this sort of thing; there were no laws and regulations about what was to be done should a thing like this happen. Evidently Moses looked to the Lord about it, and the Lord said, 'Take it, receive it, turn it over to the ministry of the sanctuary'.

Here is something that is not by legal demand. This is a voluntary, spontaneous expression from the heart, something altogether outside of the book. This is princeliness, this is greatness; not just to do what we are expected to do and what is required of us and what is commanded to be done; not, 'Lord must I do this?'—but, 'Can I do it? Is there anything that I can do—in the book or out of the book?' That is the spirit of it. It was the spirit that prompted this offering that made it so princely, so grand, so noble.

A princely life is one that is not just doing because it must, or giving because it is expected to conform to the regulations, but a spontaneous life that 'goes the second mile'. It does not stop just at the set time, but looks for how much more can be done. There are some Christians—watch this, young Christians!—who talk like this: 'Must I give this up if I am going to be a Christian? Is this not allowed? May we not . . . this, that or something else—do this, go there? What is wrong with it?' That is so negative. Princeliness, if it is taken from the character of the Lord Jesus, never talks or argues like that. It says: 'What more can I do? Is there anything more that I can do for my Lord, who did everything for me?' You are not surprised that the Lord takes note of that sort of thing, and those people become the expression of His thought.

That is princeliness—the voluntary giving without any consideration whatever of whether it must be done. Can we give like that? How grand it will be when we are all people whose worship is so lavish, so free, so spontaneous, that we so to speak do not know what to do with it all! Our worship is so little, so poor, instead of being a lavish pouring out of the heart. And in many other ways it is like that. May the Lord make us His princely people like this—large of heart, magnanimous of spirit: not for its own sake, but because we have come to see something of the greatness of what our Lord

has done for us in His Cross. The Cross, rightly apprehended, is a wonderful delivering power from all littleness—from our poor, miserable, contemptible little selves.

## A COVERED WAGON

They were covered wagons. I do not know altogether what that may have implied from their standpoint, but I think I can see something at any rate in the spirit of it. Princeliness, real princeliness, makes no display. It does the large thing and never calls attention to it, never lets it be known or seen. Real princeliness is that kind of meekness and humility accompanying an uttermost outpouring for the Lord, without looking for admiration, or any return. An uncovered wagon with all this might have drawn attention, so that people might have said, 'Look what So-and-so is giving!' It is like a Harvest Festival: that used to be a great occasion for people to bring along the biggest cabbage, or the biggest bunch of grapes, to draw attention, 'Who brought that?' 'Oh, So-and-so!' The lesson of the covered wagon is: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matt. vi. 3)—a real spirit of meekness; going, perhaps, further than many others, but covering it.

In this series of meditations, which we now conclude, we have heard much about the service of the Lord, what is service to the Lord, and the spiritual character of the servants of the Lord, but it all gathers up into this. The Lord is seeking a great people, in every spiritual and moral sense; not perhaps in the eyes of the world, but in the eyes of God. Sometimes the smallest and most insignificant person, naturally, can be somebody very princely, very precious, full of values to the Lord. We do not judge and estimate naturally, but always and only according to the measure of Christ. You may be a very small person naturally, either physically in stature, which sometimes produces a serious inferiority complex, or you may be small of gifts, small of resources; but you know the Lord Jesus attributed far greater stature to the widow who cast in her two mites than to those wonderful fellows who were displaying before everybody what they were giving. Stature is different in the sight of God from what it is in the sight of man.

No, you may not be of much account in any way naturally, but you can be something in the eyes of the Lord if the Cross has become a great thing in your life and in your heart, and its deep, full, rich meanings have come to be practical realisations in

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your life. I have no hesitation in saying these things, dear friends ; they are true. Enlargement of life comes by the application of the Cross, the apprehension of the Cross. The more there is of the Cross, the larger your life. It sometimes seems like reduction, but—make no mistake—it is increase.

The Lord make us a princely people—in *this sense*, that we have so greatly seen, grasped, sensed, the wonder of His Cross that our hearts go out, leaping over all the regulations, to be able to bring to the Lord all that is possible through life and through service, the fulness of our hearts turning to the service of the sanctuary.

T. A-S.

(concluded)

## THY KINGDOM COME

### I. THE KINGDOM AND REVELATION

Reading : Daniel ii.

*"And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High : his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Here is the end of the matter"* (Daniel vii. 27, 28).

*"And I heard, but I understood not : then said I, O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?"* (Daniel xii. 8).

WE may get help as to the meaning of the phrase which we often pray, "Thy kingdom come", if we seek it in the book of Daniel, for the book is full of kings and kingdoms, as may soon be seen by underlining the related words wherever they appear. We open our consideration with Daniel's last question. The Authorised Version renders it : "What shall be the *end* of these things?" ; but that is not really what Daniel asked. The question had already been put : "How long shall it be to the end . . . ?" (xii. 6), but Daniel wanted to know what lay beyond that. What is the issue beyond the immediate end, was what he wanted to know. Here was he, involved in great movements and battles, in testings of faith and great triumphs, too, in messages from Heaven and uprisings from Hell, in prayers prayed, yes, and prayers answered : everything seeming to lead up to one great climax. What was it all about? What was the point of it all? "What shall be the issue of these things?"

There is surely a sease with us, in these days, that we, too, are heading up to a climax. The end of this age, so we believe, cannot be very far distant. It is a reasonable and a right question to ask : What lies beyond? We, also, are in the midst of conflicts and testings. What does it all mean? As a matter of fact the book of Daniel answers his

own question. He could not understand, but as we open his book in the light of the rest of the Word of God we have the answer. And if we keep the book as a whole before us we shall surely avoid the perils which may be associated with studying the future. It is dangerous to be a dabbler in prophecy, being interested only in events that are going to happen. Daniel, however, is an excellent example of a man who had vision and "understanding of the times", and yet who was most practical in living for God in his day ; a man who was most enlightened as to the purposes of God, and yet was constantly in touch with present realities and not just dreaming of the future.

Daniel lived for God in his day, in the way in which he did, just because of his insight into the issues involved. His vision made him a big man. How prone we all are to pettiness! How limited our horizons can become, and how localised, personal and often unworthy can be the realms in which we live and are occupied! We have been called to a vocation which is vast and noble, to have a part in the greatest interest of God for all the ages : a right understanding of this will surely do for us what it did for Daniel—make us bigger people. One of the great needs of the Church today is not just for more gifted or more active men, but for bigger men—bigger in heart, bigger in vision, bigger in spiritual responsibility.

#### 1. THE ISSUE FOR THE WORLD

May we seek to define the issues beyond the immediate end, and begin with the issues for this world and its kingdom. They are : Intervention, Dissolution, and Transformation.

##### (a) INTERVENTION

God must be getting very tired of the apparently endless cycle of hopes and disappointments, new

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beginnings and sad frustrations, which characterize His world. The "course of this age" has been going on for a long time, and it would go on for ever, only getting worse, if He did not break in and bring it to a close. He is *going* to break in—that is the message of the "stone cut without hands". The world system is not to be won over for God—that is impossible; it is to be brought to a sudden end by Divine intervention from Heaven. The thing that is being built up here on earth is not God's kingdom, and never will be. The Lord is not asking His people to enter into alliance with this world's kingdom to win it over for Christ on the earthly level. There is no future that way. No, He is preparing a kingdom composed of men and women in vital association with His Christ, that it may break in from Heaven to terminate and overthrow the present order of things.

## (b) DISSOLUTION

According to Nebuchadnezzar's dream the broken pieces of the image "became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them" (Dan. ii. 35). This refers not only to the visible rulers but to that invisible kingdom which governs men's ways to-day. The visible things of this world exercise a tremendous power for evil; men and women can make so much misery for others; but they only faintly express the whole host of wicked spirits, hidden from our view but tremendously real, who occupy every hour of the twenty-four of every day in resisting the will of God, robbing men of His blessing and seeking to turn them away from Him. That whole kingdom is going to be displaced, swept away, and chained in the abyss for a thousand years. What an issue this is for mankind, to have no more temptation from without, no more deception, no more influence for evil! A world without a tempter! What a world! Surely that is worth working for, worth praying for, worth suffering for!

## (c) TRANSFORMATION

While the ultimate aim of God is a new earth, it seems clear that for at least a thousand years there is to be a true expression of the kind of kingdom He desires here on this very earth which has rejected His Son. We so often feel that we want to get out of the earth, to get far away from it because it is hopeless. Well, in its present form it is; but God is not a defeatist, if we are. Our reaction from something hard or unpleasant is to want to flee from it to somewhere easier; we think that it is impossible for God to work here, so we must

move away elsewhere. But we cannot tell the Lord that a situation is impossible, unless it be to provoke Him to prove that it is not so to Him. The Lord was faced with a world which would not have His rule. Did He despair? Did He capitulate? No, He waited for centuries; He planned in patience; He sent His Son to die; and now He is gathering a people into resurrection union with that Son, shaping them, taking them through the fires and the lions' den if necessary, that when His moment comes this very world may be possessed as part of His own eternal kingdom. This is the kind of vision which will make us bigger men. Instead of praying or scheming to get out of our difficult situations, we gather faith to stand in them for the Lord. Satan affirms that Christ cannot rule in fulness on this earth. Too often we accept this as true. But God has said that He is going to, the kingdom will come and the will of God be done on earth as it is in Heaven. How we need to be lifted out of our defeatism into the assurance of His triumph!

Then, after a brief and sad interlude, we are given to expect the 'new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness'. Whatever follies men may commit with nuclear fission, they will never destroy God's earth. The 'elements will melt with fervent heat', but it will be when God's time comes, and when He is ready with His new heavens and new earth—then and not before.

## 2. THE ISSUE FOR CHRIST

This brings us, of course, to what is yet in store for God's Son. What is the issue so far as He is concerned? Briefly, it may be described as Vindication and Administration.

## (a) VINDICATION

When God has purged this earth of all that seeks its own glory or serves His enemies, it will then be peopled by those who give all the honour to His dear Son. Some of them may do so because they are afraid to do anything else; there may be, indeed there will be, a measure of imperfection before the eternal ages come in, but Christ will be publicly vindicated in this very earth. This is one of the issues, and one which should be very dear to all our hearts. For when we talk of the coming of the kingdom, we think not merely of some régime or way of living, however glorious; we think of a Person, the King. That He should be universally vindicated, appreciated as He ought to be and honoured as He deserves—this is the true goal of all our spiritual conflict.



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## (b) ADMINISTRATION

He is coming to be King. Of course He is exalted above all now: He rules and overrules; He either restrains His enemies or else permits them to work and then turns their efforts to His own advantage. Daniel proved this and testified to it. Like him, we must maintain the testimony to the absolute sovereignty of the Lord; that is what we are here for. But, like him, we are also here to bring in another kingdom. His overruling is marvellous, but it is exercised in the midst of a kingdom that is far from satisfactory, and it involves much that is painful for His own. We look for the day when the Lord Jesus will have absolute and effective rule in all things everywhere.

This brings us to consider what it means for Christ to reign. His kingdom is not merely a matter of His imposing His own will and forcing everyone to obey Him just because they have to. The letter to the Hebrews makes it very clear that Christ is Priest as well as King. Now the Priest-King does not merely tell you from a Throne what you ought to do, but comes alongside in love and helps you to do it. He not only sends forth edicts and making proclamations, but in a gracious and understanding way He devotes Himself to helping us through our difficulties, constantly imparting fresh grace to us for every new demand. In a sense He serves while He rules, He helps even while He governs. This is God's idea of kingship: it produces an administration which is not imposed from above but is, as it were, ministered from alongside.

Christ's kingdom is to be administered in association with His people: they are to function together as a harmonious unity under His headship. This is the interpretation and meaning of the 'stone cut out without hands'. To Nebuchadnezzar it seemed very vague and indeed he did not concern himself with it. He was interested in himself and his own kingdom, no doubt fascinated by it as many have been since; but he paid scant heed to the other kingdom. He could not understand it and does not seem to have been greatly interested. Yet this is the true purpose of the vision—to reveal the end to which God is working. How much time has been spent in study, how many books have been written, to concentrate attention on identifying the image in its various parts! That was Nebuchadnezzar's part of the revelation. But the part which belonged to Daniel and to the people of God was surely to prepare them for the kingdom from Heaven: to show them that the stone cut out of the mountain without hands foretells the coming of

Christ and His saints—the great Head with His Body formed of a people gathered to Him, functioning in vital harmony as a kingdom of priests to reign on the earth.

We may have felt that it seems presumptuous to talk about reigning with Christ—wondered whether it is right to talk about sitting with Christ in His throne. Is there not a danger in this idea of sharing in His kingdom? will it not make us superior or conceited? This is because we have not understood the nature of the kingship as God sees it. Christ is not harsh and domineering; He is "meek and lowly in heart". As we have said, He is "a priest upon his throne" (Zech. vi, 13); He has learned to rule by learning to sympathize in the school of suffering and trial. We who know Christ as our King can gladly testify that His rule is not overbearing, but marked by loving patience and gracious helpfulness as He seeks to lead us closer to God, drawing us away from false paths into the ways of life and peace. This is the calling of the redeemed saints, to be a kingdom of priests; not to lord it over people, but to help them to come closer to the Lord.

## 3. THE ISSUE FOR THE CHURCH

And so we come to the issue for the Church. It is glorification and eternal vocation. When Daniel asked what was to be the issue of it all, he was probably thinking of himself. For many years his heart and mind had been concentrated on the coming of the kingdom. Of course, in his case it was the earthly kingdom centred at Jerusalem, and rightly so. While, in the midst of Babylon, he witnessed to the present expression of God's kingdom in His sovereign overruling, his real objective was the kingdom which was to come. His windows were open to Jerusalem; his life in the Word and in prayer filled him with expectation of coming glory. He was an old man now, but he had lived for one thing, the restoration of God's holy city. He had suffered for it, he had survived all the attacks upon him, and now the time had come for his vision to be realised. He must have reasoned with himself like this: 'I have not gone through all this for nothing. There is an issue to it all; God must have been preparing me for something. All the grinding discipline, all the tests of faith, all the conflicts and triumphs of prayer, all the humbling under the hand of God—this must of necessity have been making me fit to have a part in the coming kingdom. When the people return, I shall surely go with them and take my place in

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the possession of the kingdom. Is that not to be the issue of these things?"

The answer was very illuminating, and has a meaning for all of us who will be true to the Lord in our day as Daniel was in his. "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days" (xii. 13). 'You are right, Daniel: God has been preparing you for an honoured place in His kingdom, but not now and not in something local and earthly. Your vocation is to have a part in the heavenly and eternal kingdom.' That was the issue for Daniel, and that is the issue for us.

## THE REVEALER OF SECRETS

There are various implications of this fact that God is preparing a people to share with His Son in the administration of the kingdom, and perhaps the first of them is the need for understanding, for perception, for revelation. If Daniel is a book of kings and kingdoms it is also a book of visions. We often talk about the need for vision. We do not mean the kind of manifestations and dreams that Daniel had. We shall not have these visions; we do not need them, for they are written down for us by Daniel himself. But there is a deeper sense in which he is an example of a man with spiritual insight; a man to whom God made known what could not be discovered from earthly sources or by human reasoning. He saw. God wanted him to see, for is He not the "revealer of secrets" (ii. 47)? God wants us to penetrate beneath the surface, to be illuminated and taught by the 'Spirit of wisdom and revelation'. Far from making Daniel conceited or presumptuous, it was due to his humble walk with God and deep dependence that he became a man of vision. "From the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to humble thyself before thy God", the heavenly visitor told him, "thy words were heard: and I am come for thy words' sake" (x. 12). Daniel asked to see, and his prayer was answered. Would it then be presumption for him to claim: "I Daniel . . . saw"; "When I, even I Daniel, had seen . . ."? Rather would it have been false humility and unbelief to ignore or to suppress what God had showed him.

After all, when we set aside the particular prophetic element of Daniel, which none of us can have, what remains as a lesson for us? There were three means by which spiritual sight came to Daniel. He saw by the Spirit of God: even an earthly man like Nebuchadnezzar knew that (iv. 8). He saw by the Scriptures, the books (ix. 2). And he

saw in answer to earnest prayer (ii. 18, 19). All these three means are available to us. Daniel had the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Place of Prayer; he had them—and, what is more, he used them. We have them too. Let us be sure that we use them.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCRIMINATION

Revelation brought various values to Daniel, but the first which we shall consider is the power to discriminate. Paul prayed for the Philippians that their 'love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment', so that they might "prove the things that differ" (Phil. i. 9, 10, R.V. marg.). Revelation brings discrimination, ability to detect the true nature of things behind the mere appearances. By this first vision Daniel was made to realise that the imposing and popular kingdom is not necessarily the lasting one. He saw that, however much the Lord may permit what is of the earth and seem to prosper it, we must not be led astray and imagine that it can truly serve Him. It is not what He wants, and it is doomed from the start. More than that, as vision succeeded vision Daniel came to realise that the final development of this kingdom must result ultimately in Antichrist. There are many kings and princes described here: there is no need for us to try to identify them, but let us observe that in their final issue they all produce a personage who is directly opposed to Christ. "He shall speak words against the Most High" (vii. 25), "he shall also stand up against the prince of princes" (viii. 25) and "shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods" (xi. 36). It is an enlightening but most sobering fact that the kingdom which has its origin in the natural heart of man, however good it may seem in its beginnings, and however much it may seem to be permitted and even supported by God, will be found in the end not only to be not of Christ but to be His rival for the throne. Let our own hearts witness how true this is.

This first vision is basic. It revealed that after all there are only two kingdoms: one of man and earth, and so really of Satan; the other of Heaven—the kingdom of God. How we need to discriminate, if we are to find our way through to God's goal, as Daniel did, without defilement and without compromise. Not that the discrimination must be only negative. While Nebuchadnezzar was being identified as the head of gold, Daniel and the others were able to identify themselves; they saw the other kingdom to which they belonged. The difference is spiritual, not legalistic. We must not

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draw any rash conclusions from Daniel's purpose of heart and request as to the king's meat and drink (i. 8), "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17). He did receive his food from Babylon (even the pulse and water), and later on he received its honours and administered its civil affairs. Yet there was a difference, for Daniel never compromised in matters of spiritual affinity and heart attachment.

One thing is very important. In spite of his clear discrimination, Daniel never permitted himself to be critical of his brethren. They failed, they compromised, yet we may look in vain in his prayer in chapter ix for any trace of superiority, of critical condemnation or of a separate spirit. He did not denounce them; he loved them, he prayed for them; in a right way he identified himself with them. This is a lesson which we must take much to heart, for discrimination without love can be very hard and unhelpful. At the same time Daniel never allowed his love for his brethren to deflect him from absolute obedience to the Lord. That would be false love. We shall not help our brethren by compromising; we must be true to the Divine vision, absolutely firm and unwavering, as befits those who know that they belong to the heavenly kingdom, even though they have to live and work in Babylon.

### CO-OPERATION

Furthermore, the proper effect of revelation from God is inspiration and action, or perhaps we can describe it as spiritual co-operation. True revelation means that we know what God intends to do and are convinced that He will do it—so convinced, indeed, that His objective becomes the great aim and end of our own lives. The simple illustration of this was in the windows which Daniel kept open towards Jerusalem. To him the immediate expression of the kingdom of heaven was "the city which is called by thy name" (ix. 18). God had decreed that this city was to be re-built. Nothing seemed less likely at that time, for even those who were true to the Lord were doing nothing about it; but Daniel had 'seen', and therefore felt constrained to make this the one great purpose of his life. And because he was so

true to the light he had, the Lord gave him more and more light, until he came to understand that the real end in view was not earthly at all or local, but the bringing in of the eternal kingdom of Christ to possess all things for God. The "stone . . . cut out of the mountain without hands" (ii. 45) is no vague or shapeless weapon which the Lord seizes impulsively to do a job for Him; it is a city, a community of redeemed saints, vitally related to Christ the King, suitably shaped and prepared for its great vocation.

Daniel's vision governed his whole life. His prayer was centred on one objective, but it was more than a prayer, for his whole life was behind it. And he persevered and saw the matter through, even though he had to go into the lions' den because of it. What that amounts to is this. If God shows us something, He means us to shoulder the responsibility of it, to take it up and see it through in humble dependence on Him. It makes nothing of us personally, for it is the coming of the kingdom which matters, not our place in it. There was a sense in which Daniel and his friends had no care or concern as to what happened to them. They said, 'It does not matter if we go into the fiery furnace; it is the kingdom which matters. It does not matter if I go into the lions' den, so long as the prayer watch for Jerusalem goes on.' Being thus happily delivered from all self-interest, they became men of one purpose—God's purpose. That is what vision does for you. The time will come when the kingdom will come, when the saints of the Most High will possess it. They will have it given to them, for it is all of grace. And yet they will have it because they have seen it afar off, laid hold of it by faith, kept true to it, and suffered for it. The New Testament tells us that we are to "inherit" the kingdom (I Cor. vi. 9), to be "receiving" it (Heb. xii. 15) and to "suffer for" it (II Thess. i. 5).

We shall see, as we go on, that revelation leads to warfare, spiritual conflict. Daniel was no mere visionary; he entered into close co-operation with his Lord for the realisation of what had been revealed to him. Because he suffered for the kingdom of God, he was counted worthy of it. May the Lord make us strong to fight His battles and to possess the kingdom for His Son.

H. F.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

## I. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GOD'S BEGINNINGS

"... After that he [Jesus] had given commandment through the Holy Ghost unto the apostles . . . ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost . . . ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you . . . it was needful that the scripture should be fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost spake before by the mouth of David . . ." (Acts i, 2, 5, 8, 16).

IN the first chapter of Acts, the Holy Spirit is mentioned four times. To get the right value of that, we must remember when it was that Luke wrote this book. He wrote it when the Apostle Paul was coming to the end of his life and was in prison in Rome. At that time Christianity was already beginning to change its character, for many things were creeping into it that did not really belong to it. There were changes both in doctrine and in practice. You see this clearly when you read Paul's letters to Timothy, written from the prison, for they were written to try to put things right again.

## THE CHANGE IN CHRISTIANITY

It was, therefore, when Christianity was changing its character that Luke wrote this book called the 'Acts of the Apostles'. I do not know who gave it this name, but I am sure Luke did not. If he had given a title to this book, he might have called it 'the Acts of the Holy Ghost'. He—the Holy Spirit—is mentioned four times in the first chapter alone; and, if you look right through the book, you will see how very many references are made to Him. It is the book of the Holy Spirit, and Luke wrote it to point out that, at the very beginning of the Church's history, everything was of the Spirit. But when he wrote it, men were already beginning to bring in their own teachings and practices and were changing the original things which had been of the Spirit into the things of man. God wanted no change; He wanted all to be of His Spirit, both then and now.

In Europe and in the Western world Christianity has very much changed its character from what it was at the beginning. It has had a long tradition, and it has become all very mixed. There are all sorts of teachings, which are said to be Christian

teachings, and there are a great many things which contradict one another and yet are called 'Christian'. One section of Christianity says *this* is what you should teach, and another contradicts it and says something quite different. One section says that this is how you should do things, and another says that that is quite wrong and there is another way. There are hundreds of different kinds of 'Christianity'. Do you think the Holy Spirit is like that? Do you think that He has many different minds about things? No, He has not even *two* minds about things, let alone a hundred different minds.

The important thing for us is to know what it was like at the beginning. So we are going to try to see something of what it was like then, for it is always necessary to have a proper foundation. If that is not laid, sooner or later the building will change its shape or collapse.

## GOD'S BEGINNINGS AND THE SPIRIT

## (a) IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

At the beginning, then, everything was of the Holy Spirit. And, when you think about it, all God's beginnings have been of His Spirit. That is where you begin in the Bible. It says: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. i, 1, 2). Why did the Spirit brood? Because God was going to make a new beginning; He was going to bring a new world into existence, and the Holy Spirit was His instrument for doing this. That is the first beginning that we have in the Bible.

We move on a little way in the Word, and we find that God has decided to make another new beginning. We find a people in Egypt, whom God has decided to bring out, in order to form a people for Himself. How does He bring them out? You remember the pillar of cloud and fire—the one before to lead them out, and the other behind to protect their rear. That pillar is a type of the Holy Spirit. It is by Him that we are led out to become the Lord's people, and it is by Him that we are separated from the world. And then the same Holy

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Spirit, in the pillar, led them through the Red Sea. The Apostle Paul says: "Our fathers . . . were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (I Cor. x. 2). And then he says: "In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body" (I Cor. xii. 13). So we see that the Holy Spirit made this new nation, and in doing so was the Executive of another new beginning of God.

Then the day came when the Lord gave Moses the pattern of the Tabernacle, and Moses came down with it from the Mount; and we read that, in order to make everything for it, certain men were filled with the Holy Spirit. Bezalel and Oholiab were filled with the Spirit to make all manner of work. This Tabernacle was a fresh movement of God.

The building of the Temple was yet another new movement of God; and of David it was said at the time: "the pattern . . . that he had by the spirit" (I Chron. xxviii. 12). So here the Holy Spirit initiated things again. In the Old Testament God did everything by the Holy Spirit, although these new beginnings were only types and figures of what was yet to come.

#### (b) IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Then we pass over into the New Testament, and here we leave types and come to realities, and the greatest reality of all is the Lord Jesus Himself. His very coming into the world was by the Holy Spirit. The angel said to Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee . . ." (Luke i. 35). Jesus was born through the Holy Ghost. Then, 30 years after He had come into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit, He came to the river Jordan. Now He was going to take up the great work for which He had come and which He would accomplish during the next three-and-a-half years. It was there at Jordan, when He was baptized, that the Holy Spirit came upon Him. And in this book of Acts, from which we are reading, we have these words: "Jesus of Nazareth . . . God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (x. 38). So the Lord Jesus not only was born of the Holy Spirit but did His work by the Spirit. Then He went to the Cross, and we are told that He "through the eternal Spirit offered himself . . . unto God" (Heb. ix. 14). So it was also by the Spirit that Jesus gave Himself on the Cross. Lastly, we read in Romans viii. 11 of "the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead", implying

that it is by the Holy Spirit that resurrection takes place. That is the history of Jesus.

Then we come to the second chapter of the Acts, where the Church is brought into being, and we find that this great vessel of God, purposed through all eternity, was born of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the Church was brought into being by the Holy Spirit, and what had been true of its Head, now became true of the Body. And it was not only born, but was also anointed of the Holy Ghost for its work, and the whole book tells us of the Holy Spirit doing God's work through the Church.

We have one more thing to say. We come to the end of the Bible, the book of the Revelation, and here the Lord is doing yet the next thing. Things had gone wrong with the Church and with the new churches, and the Lord is calling them back to their first love. Seven times over He says: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches . . ." (chs. ii and iii). You see it is the Holy Spirit trying to bring the Lord's people back to things as they were at the beginning. I am trying to impress you from the whole Word of God with the truth that at the beginning everything is by the Spirit. Nothing originates with man. And we see from the book of the Revelation that God wants the final state of things to be just as it was at the commencement.

#### POWER THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now, if you are a true Christian, according to God's original intention, you are a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And when I say that, I am saying one of the most important things that it is possible to say to anyone. It is a tremendous thing for the Spirit of God to be in us, for the Holy Spirit is none other than the Lord Himself. What immense things are possible if the Lord Himself is inside!

Now let us look at the book of the Acts again. What was the first thing that it was said would happen to the disciples when the Holy Spirit came upon them? "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth" (i. 8). When you think of it, that was a very wonderful thing. Look back just a little way. Jesus was standing in the judgment hall, and most of his disciples had run away and left Him. Peter, perhaps thinking that he would not be recognised, slipped down into the courtyard below. I don't know whether it really was a cold night, but, for

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one reason or another, Peter was cold ; indeed, I think he was shivering. There came a girl and said to him: ' I have seen you with that man, Jesus ', and then, turning to others who were standing by, she told them that she had seen him with the Lord Jesus as one of His disciples. But Peter emphatically denied this, insisting that he had not been a disciple. A little later someone else came and asked him if he had not been a follower of Jesus, and again, still shivering, he denied it. Later still, he was asked the same question a third time, and again he said that he had not known Jesus. You see, Peter was shivering for his very life. He was afraid that he also might be crucified, and so he denied his beloved Lord three times.

Now comes this word: " Ye shall receive power . . . and ye shall be my witnesses . . . " A tremendous change was to take place in Peter. Instead of being afraid to be known as one of Jesus' disciples, he was to go everywhere, beginning in *Jerusalem*, witnessing to the fact that he believed in Him. His testimony was to be that the One whom they had crucified had risen (Acts ii. 23, 24). Everywhere they went they were going to glory in the Lord Jesus. It would not matter to them now whether they were killed for it or not. They rejoiced " to suffer . . . for the Name " (Acts v. 41). That is what the Holy Spirit can do, and that is how it was at the beginning. Go through the book and see what the Holy Spirit did in those days.

## TEACHING THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

But there is another very important thing that we want to mention. John became the oldest of the apostles. When all the others had gone to the Lord, he wrote his Letters. James had been killed, Peter had been crucified (so tradition says), and the others had all passed on. But John lived on, and as an old man, about 90 years old, he wrote the Letters which are called ' The Epistles of John '. Do you see how he began the first of these? " That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life . . . " (i. 1). That was what John wanted to declare to them. John was wanting to bring things back to the same state as they were in the beginning. And then he says this :

" the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that anyone teach you ; but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him " (ii. 27).

Do you not think that this is a very wonderful thing? The apostle John says that the Holy Spirit who is in us can teach us everything. He did not mean that we could do without Christian teachers. But if you look at the context, you will see that what John meant was this. Christianity had got into such a confused state that the Christians did not seem to know what was right and what was wrong. One teacher said one thing and another something else, and no one seemed to know whom to follow. How were they to get over that? *The Holy Spirit was in them*, and He was able to tell them what was right.

It often troubles me that there are so many people, claiming to be born again, who can say wrong and unkind things about other Christians and never have a bad time about it. Can you? Do you ever have to go to the Lord and ask Him what you have done to grieve Him? If you can do or say unkind things and not have a bad time, I wonder whether the Holy Spirit is in you.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, and He will not suffer us to tell untruths without letting us know it. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Love, and He will not let us be unloving. And that is true of everything else about the Lord. We ought not to need someone else to say to us that a thing is wrong: the Spirit should be checking us within.

So Jesus said: " When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth . . . He shall take of mine and declare it unto you " (John xvi. 13, 14). What does this mean? The Holy Spirit will say to us: ' *That* is what the Lord Jesus is like. You let Me make you like that.' How important it is, then, to have the Holy Spirit. You make sure that He is within, and that you trust and obey Him and walk with Him.

Much more might be said, but that is enough for now. We have seen how it was at the beginning. Will you ask the Lord to make you a Christian like those at the beginning? The Lord wants the end to be as it was then. So He says: " Be not drunken with wine . . . but be filled with the Spirit " (Eph. v. 18).

T. A-S.

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## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

## A WARM WELCOME

MR. Johnson had not seen his great friends, Mr. and Mrs. Ready, for a long time, as their farm was far away and he had not been able to visit them. One day, however, his work took him in their direction, so he decided to call on them, and looked forward very much to the joy of coming suddenly to their home and giving them a happy surprise. He only hoped that Rover, their dog, would not give him away. Rover did not like Mr. Johnson. Not that he had any reason for his dislike. He just would not make friends, in spite of all that Mr. Johnson did to try. Still, it might be possible to get up to the farmhouse without meeting him. So Mr. Johnson went happily on his way, smiling to himself at the great surprise which he was about to give his good friends.

He was right about Rover, though. The dog was outside the farm gate, and although he had not seen Mr. Johnson for a long time, he greeted him as an old enemy and came growling towards him. 'Come, Rover', said Mr. Johnson, 'let's make friends.' The dog, however, only growled more angrily. 'Are you not going to give me a welcome?' asked the visitor, but Rover barked out his 'No! No! No!' He would have spoiled the surprise if he had kept on barking, but happily he saw a cat, whom he hated even more, so he dashed off after her and forgot the visitor.

This left Mr. Johnson free to walk quietly up to the farmhouse. He tip-toed to the open kitchen door and then called out, 'Anybody at home?' Yes, Mrs. Ready was at home, and came to the door, but how surprised she was to see her old friend. It quite took her breath away. 'Fancy seeing you!' she exclaimed; 'why, I thought that you were far away!' Mr. Johnson explained the reason for his journey. 'But why didn't you let us know that you were coming?' she asked him. He further explained that that had not been possible. Still Mrs. Ready did not seem satisfied. 'What a pity you did not come last week,' she complained. 'for this is the week when I do my preserves. Yes, I am glad to see you, but I am afraid that I am very busy.' Mr. Johnson began to wonder if he really was welcome, but he kept cheerful and

assured her that he did not want any fuss made. 'Why, of course we must make a fuss of you', the farmer's wife insisted; but then she went on, rather gloomily, 'Now, if you had waited till next week, it would have been quite different. We would have given you a big welcome, for we have planned to kill a pig then.'

Poor Mr. Johnson! He knew that really Mrs. Ready was very fond of him, but it did seem that his surprise visit was not the joyful one which he had hoped for. He asked her where her husband was, and was told that he was ploughing, down at the other end of the farm. So off he went to see how his other old friend would take this sudden and unexpected visit. When he reached the field he saw that the farmer was ploughing away in the distance, so he was able to hide in a copse of trees until the team had passed him and halted just ahead for a rest. It was then that, very quietly, Mr. Johnson stepped up behind Mr. Ready and, putting one hand on his shoulder, asked, 'Well, how are you?' The farmer turned slowly round, a warm smile on his face, and, without showing any shock or surprise, grasped Mr. Johnson's hand and simply said, 'Welcome, old friend; I was just thinking about you!'

The Bible tells that the Lord Jesus will one day come suddenly back again, without letting any of us know beforehand what will be the day or the hour. How will we meet Him? Some people, like Rover, will not want Him and will give Him no welcome at all. Others, like the farmer's wife, truly love Him, but perhaps they will feel that He has come at the wrong time, too soon or too late, and so there will be something lacking in the welcome which they will give Him.

I would like to be like Mr. Ready, to greet my Lord with a glad smile of welcome—to tell Him that I am not at all surprised to see Him, for I had just been thinking of Him. Would you not like to do the same? This is what the verse means which reads: "And now, my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2. 28).

H. F.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## THE CHRIST OF GOD AND THE THINGS OF GOD

*Reading : Colossians i. 15 - 19 ; ii. 6 - 9 ; Romans viii. 32 ; John vi. 35 ; viii. 12 ; xi. 25 ; xiv. 6 ; II Corinthians v. 21 ; I Corinthians i. 30 ; Philippians iii. 10.*

*" But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption " (I Cor. i. 30, A.V.).*

WHEN we read that Christ is the 'fulness' of God ; all the 'fulness' dwells in Him ; that word 'fulness' may be very simple in itself, and yet many times it can be very puzzling. 'The fulness of God', 'Christ the fulness of God'— what does it mean?

If we want to understand the meaning of the word 'fulness', we have to go back especially to the Old Testament, to find how it has been used. You will find that, in the Old Testament, God used that word in a very peculiar way, not exactly in the rather abstract way in which we use it. You remember in the Psalms and in other places there is a phrase that runs like this: 'the earth and the fulness thereof' (Ps. xxiv. 1 ; 1. 12 ; lxxxix. 11) ; 'the sea and the fulness thereof' (Ps. xc. 11, xcvi. 7). The earth and the fulness thereof means everything that is on the earth—the things of the earth. Just the same with the sea. The sea and the fulness thereof means the sea and all the things in the sea—the things of the sea. So Christ being 'the fulness of God' means Christ is the things of God—a very peculiar sentence! Do not be stumbled at the poor grammatical construction of this sentence. Later on we shall see the truth of it. It means that the things of God dwell in Christ in fulness, not just some of them. They are in Him in full complement, in full representation.

What does it mean to say that 'Christ is the things of God'? We understand Him to be a Person: so He is. But besides Him, apart from Him as a Person, we Christians have got in our minds that there are things that are known as 'the things of God'. Two things, a hundred things, a thousand things—all the things of God, and over against those you have the Son of God. But this is not so. The Lord Jesus is a Person, praise the Lord, but all the things of God are in that Person and that Person is 'the things of God'. There is nothing, not one thing of God, which is not Christ.

I will turn you to several passages of Scripture to prove that, Christ our Lord tells us this. "I am the bread of life" (John vi. 35, 48). He did not

say, 'I am the giver of life', but He said: "I am the bread of life". He is a thing—He is bread. "I am the light of the world" (John viii. 12, ix. 5). He is a thing—the light. He does not say, 'I shine', 'I give light to the world'. He says: "I am the light". Then you find those words in John xi. 25: "I am the resurrection". It is not, 'I am going to be raised', or 'I have the power to raise others now', but: "I am the resurrection, and the life". He *is* the things of God.

Our Lord Jesus is a living Person—and then over against Him we want to have some truth. We want to know the way of God ; we want to have more light. It seems as if truth is something, life is something, and the way is something ; but He said to us: 'I am the truth, I am the way, I am the life'. He not only presents Himself to us as a Person ; He presents Himself to us as the things of God. He not only presents Himself to us as the Son of God ; He presents Himself to us as the fulness of God. It is of great importance that we should see that all the things of God are in Christ, and all the things of God are just (if I may put it that way) bits of Christ. Christ as a Person is the very things of God. We have to prove that.

The Lord did not say those things in John's Gospel in an abstract way. Especially in Corinthians, you find that Paul tried to put the Lord Jesus in altogether another light. I mean he not only tried to lead us to see that the Lord Jesus is a Person. He tried to lead us to see something else. You remember, in the last verse of II Corinthians chapter v, Paul tells us that He was "made sin for us". Paul did not say, as in some other place, that He has borne our sins. Paul did not say He is our Saviour from sins, or He is a deliverer from sin. But Paul did say here that He was made sin for us. He had become a thing. He was made sin.

## CHRIST THE WISDOM OF GOD

I Corinthians i. 30 is a very precious verse, one of the most precious in the book. Christ is both "wisdom from God", and "the wisdom of God" (vs. 24). God has made Him to be our righteousness—He is made unto us righteousness ; He is made unto us sanctification ; He is made unto us redemption. That is a very peculiar verse. The Word of God does not say that He is our Justifier or the one who provides a ground for us to be justified, but that He is made unto us righteousness, He is the One who is my righteousness. The



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Word of God does not say He is the Sanctifier. I do not mean to say that He is not—He is. But the point is that in this passage the Lord Jesus is not spoken of as the One who sanctifies, but instead you find that the Lord Jesus is made unto us sanctification. He *is* my righteousness, my sanctification. And then the third is just as amazing and remarkable. The Word of God does not say He is my Redeemer. No, God has made Him to be our redemption: 'redemption' instead of 'Redeemer'. Instead of saying He is the Person—the justifier, the sanctifier, the redeemer—the Word of God tells us that He is our righteousness. Remember that word in the Old Testament: "The Lord our righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 6, xxxiii. 16). The Lord our sanctification. The Lord our redemption. *Things*. What does all this mean?

Let us come down to more practical things to find out the meaning of all this. Our conception is that God is a great giver, God is the fountain of everything. His chief gift to us is His Son, the greatest of all. Heaven could not make a better gift or a greater gift. That is the greatest gift that Heaven could ever make to us. But there are many things that we need. We need some things very badly. We need grace, we need peace, we need righteousness, we need patience, we need life, we need meekness, we need joy, we need humility, we need goodness, we need prayer, we need sanctification, we need holiness. Therefore we are as those desiring something from the Lord. We come to the Lord and ask the Lord to give us holiness, to give us patience, to give us meekness, to give us life, to give us prayerfulness—to give us this and to give us that. Our whole conception is that God is going to give us something. My need is never yours, it is quite different from yours, and your need is quite different from somebody else's. Everyone has his own specific need before God. So we come to God to ask Him to give us that something of which we have need.

But that is not the way God works. The reason why many prayers along this line are not answered is because we seek those things *as things*. If you seek righteousness, you will never have it. If you seek Christ, you will have it. If you seek sanctification, you will never get it, but if you seek Christ you will get sanctification. If you seek the Person, you will get the thing. If you receive the Person, you receive the experience. If you look for the experience, you miss the experience. If you seek for something, it will never happen. If you have a vital knowledge of the Lord, that something happens. Things as things have never been in the economy of God. The things are in His Son. When

we get into touch with the Person, we have the thing.

Dear brethren, this is a most important principle of our lives. You cannot have anything apart from Christ. All the fulness of God dwelleth in Him, so nothing is out of Him. All the things of God are in Christ. That is the reason why, in the New Testament, so much is said concerning things "in Christ". Redeemed in Christ, forgiven in Christ, sanctified in Christ. If you look through the New Testament you will find a whole list of things which are in connection with Himself. Even when Paul asked the Philippians to get together—"If there is . . . any comfort in Christ", any unity in Christ, "any fellowship of the Spirit"—they had to get that in Christ (Phil. ii. 1, 2). All the things are in Christ. You cannot have any *thing* as such. You have to get in touch with the Lord, then you will have the thing.

#### CHRIST OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

I should like to have said more along this line, but I believe the Lord does not want us to go on simply on a doctrinal ground and just receive it as a teaching. We want to get down to practical things, to things which are true in life, which can be worked out. So we would like to look in a fuller way at this verse which I have specified. You remember that verse in I Corinthians i. 30; it is a very precious one.

*"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."*

Personally, I prefer the Revised Version: "Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." 'Christ, made unto us the wisdom of God, namely our righteousness, namely (secondly) our sanctification, and (thirdly) our redemption.'

Christ has been made to be our righteousness. Now we must find out just what that means. *The Person becomes the thing*. That is the reason for everything in the Word of God. And everything in connection with our life is altogether spiritual—otherwise of course you could never have a person becoming a thing. We all know that, whenever we come before God, the question of righteousness arises. If you never go out to visit, you do not give much thought to your coat. Whenever you think of being the guest of somebody, attending a function, immediately the question of clothing comes up. When we are not coming near to God,

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not approaching Him, the question of righteousness does not come into our mind. It is only when we are thinking of approaching God, of praying to Him, of getting near to Him to have fellowship with Him, that the question arises, What have I got with which to come before Him? The presence of God produces a sense of a need of righteousness. If we have never been in the presence of God, we shall never feel our need of being righteous. That sense of a need to be righteous can only be produced by the presence of God.

Now when we come before God, the first thought is, What have I done and what have I not done? Whenever we come before God, especially at His Table when we remember Him in the breaking of bread, immediately our first thought, rightly or wrongly, is, What have I done this week? Have I been faithful, have I been faithful in my prayer life, have I lost my temper? With what do I come before God? The whole thought is the *thing*: what am I going to bring to God? It is a blessed thing to know that our righteousness is not, 'I have been patient this week'. Our righteousness is not, 'I have been very meek this week, I have not lost my temper this week'. Our righteousness is not, 'I have read the Word of God consecutively and faithfully this week—I did not miss a day, that means that I did not miss a meal'; or, 'The whole of the past week I have been faithful in witnessing, trying to point the way of life to some soul—I have not missed a chance'. That is not our righteousness. What is our righteousness? *Christ* our righteousness. Not the things we have done—Christ our righteousness.

Dear friends, it is a great thing to see that Christ is our righteousness. We must not think it is something shallow, something elementary, for the beginner. None of us can ever have true rest, can ever be put into the fight, the battle, if that is not settled. If the question of our righteousness is not settled, we can easily be put out of the fight by the enemy in a minute. If we do not see that our righteousness is not something that we can produce, something we can do, if we cannot see that our righteousness is a Person—Christ—then we shall have lots of ups and downs every day, every week, experiences of going up and coming down all the time. *He* is my righteousness, not the things that I have done.

I remember once meeting a sister who was very sad. I asked her why, and she said, 'This week I have not been able to rise above things to get into real touch with God'. I said, 'Why cannot you get into touch with God?' She answered, 'I feel I have not been all I ought to be'. I asked her if she

confessed her sins, and she said she did. 'Well', I said, 'what do you want to bring to God so that you can pray freely?' 'I wish I were more patient, not so irritable: then I could come before God with a clear conscience.'

I do not mean to say that we should continue in sin, but that will not alter the fact that our righteousness is not our patience. Our righteousness before God is Christ. My patience will vary, but not my righteousness. My humility may change, but not my righteousness. My righteousness is Christ. If He has not changed, if He will not change, then my righteousness will never change, because *He* is my righteousness.

But the trouble with us all, the reason why we keep looking within and being troubled and put out of action, is that we try to look for something, and we think that if we have that thing we have righteousness. No, it is Christ, not the thing. It is a wonderful deliverance for us to know Him as our righteousness, to be delivered from sins and to come to know Him as a Person, Christ, the Son of God, is 'the things of God'—not only one, but all the things of God. That is a very bad sentence, but I do not think you can get a more spiritual sentence. Spiritually, it is perfectly right. Christ is the things of God.

Now we have to have that as a foundation. As I have said, unless this question has been fundamentally settled, there can be no progress. There will be no rest. Satan will always try to bring you back to *things*, and you will find you have failed. But as to the Person—He is quite another thing. So, please remember: no matter how we have failed, our righteousness has not changed. I may fail, but my righteousness before God is still there.

On the other side, it is just the same. To whatever lofty heights I may have attained, however much I may have succeeded, my righteousness is still Christ; not the things to which I have attained, not the things I have got, but Christ. The whole thing is that Christ is my righteousness. In our attainments, there is always the danger that we shall look away from Him, and when we come before the Lord it seems as if to-day we can pray better than yesterday. Yesterday I lost my temper, but not to-day; so yesterday I had no right to pray in a loud voice, but to-day I have got somewhere. No: yesterday, in all my failure, the Person was the same. Christ is my righteousness: therefore I rise up to God with the same feeling. I do not mean to say I overlook sin; but the point is, *Christ* is my righteousness, not my attainment. To-day I may succeed: but the whole thing is just the same—Christ is my righteousness. All I have before

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God is Christ, not myself. So, whatever I may have done and may have got—' Lord, I do not come on that ground, I come on the ground of Thyself. You are my righteousness '.

### CHRIST OUR SANCTIFICATION

And—bless the Lord!—it does not stop there. If the Word of God said that the Lord Jesus was only made to us as righteousness, then we might just as well content ourselves with being those who profess a great deal and yet possess very little, simply taken up with what is objective and throwing away everything subjective. Praise the Lord, the Word of God goes on to say that Christ is made my sanctification.

Please remember that in the Word of God all righteousness primarily has to do with *God*. The question of righteousness is how we stand before Him, I do not mean to say that the question of righteousness does not arise in relation to one another, but that is not the *first* thought of the Word of God. The first thought is always something to do with God. So that is Christ—He is my righteousness.

But then, walking on the earth, we find the question of sanctification or holiness comes in. I have to be separate. I have to be like God—I have to be something other than I am by nature. How am I going to deal with it? How am I going to be humble, loving, meek, good, kind, joyful? How can I be patient, not easily irritated? How can I be true? The thing is this. We try to look into ourselves and find what we need, and we go to God for it. Many of us have prayed great prayers over our needs. Some are specially conscious that they need patience, others humility, meekness, others some other thing. It is not my need as before God now, but my need as on earth. I need something. That thing may be very good and important—a thing like patience, humility, meekness. We think that is the thing we need, so we pray for it. One thing is certain. You may pray a good deal for these things, but you never get them. Prayer can never give you those things. It is a remarkable fact, but true. Some of us have been praying for patience for years, and yet in the midst of our prayers we fail. Even in prayer we get irritated. You may pray to be humble and never be humble—for the simple reason that we think of our need as a *thing*. If that can be put into me, I am all right! All the other parts are quite all right, and all I need is a new part! We ask for a piece of something, so that we can be made perfect. We never think that what we need is not that one thing, but the Lord Jesus in His fulness.

Let me give an illustration. I remember once I met a couple with several children. They asked me to pray, and I asked them if there was anything special about which they wanted me to help in prayer. They said, ' We would like you to help in prayer that God would give us patience ' . ( I have to confess that losing temper is a common thing among Christians. I have been approached for prayer on that more than on any other thing. ' My temper is such and such. Will you pray that I will get over it and get patience ' . ) So when I was asked to pray for the couple I said, ' One thing I know—God is not going to hear the prayer ' . Then the wife looked up and said, ' Mr. Nee, do you mean to say that we have gone so far that God will not even hear our prayers that we should be patient? ' ' That is exactly what I mean. You have gone too far for God to give you patience in order to cure you. ' Then I added, ' As a matter of fact, you do not need patience ' . The couple fixed their amazed eyes upon me, and then the wife could not be patient any longer! She said, ' Mr. Nee, if we do not need patience, what do we need? We have been irritable the whole day, and every day we have been losing our temper. If we do not need patience, what do we need? '

Then smilingly I looked at them and said, ' There is only one thing you need. It is Christ—not patience. If you seek patience, you will never get it. If you seek Christ, you will be patient. The thing, as a separate thing in itself, for God has never existed: I mean that in God's sight it has never had any notice taken of it. What we need is Christ. If we have patience, that is something of *nature* ; whereas everything given by *grace* is in Christ. You cannot have anything from God without touching Christ. ' And I said to the brother, ' Do you know, God is not a retailer giving out packages of graces, parcels of things—even Divine things—for you. That has never been the way of God. It is not that someone needs patience and so he approaches God and God gives him a dose of patience! God does not just dispense things from a shelf. For every ill, God has only one remedy. For every difficulty, every weakness of character, everything that we cannot get over, God has only one single answer—His Son. If you are irritable, then, when the Son is in you in His fulness, *He* will be patience. '

Perhaps you will find that you have need of love, but when the Son is in you in fulness without limitation, you will find that you become loving. The Son makes you loving, but it is the love of the Son. God has only one remedy and that remedy is His Son. Nothing short of it will do. It is not some

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grace being given us to make up our lack. It is the Son of God in us. So it is not, 'God helping me, giving me strength, I will be holy', but that the Son of God, living in me and living through me, is my sanctification. It is a wonderful day when we discover that our life on earth has nothing to do with things, even Divine things. Our life on earth has only to do with the Son of God. When I have Him, I have all the things. It is with Him I have to do. Oh, it is a great day when I find out that the secret is—Christ reproducing Himself through me.

Take the question of temptation. It is not that I fight the temptation; it is Christ who fights the temptation. It is not that I try to resist—it is that I trust in Him. Whatever lack we have, let us remember to trust the Lord for that. He will be that in us. Whatever may be your lack, whatever may be your ill, God's remedy is His Son. We may think that all our needs are different, but the fullness of Christ answers them all.

## CHRIST OUR REDEMPTION

Let me now say just a few words concerning redemption. Redemption in the Scriptures has been taken and looked upon as something of the past, but the Scripture makes it quite clear that redemption is something of the future. In fact, the full effect will only be manifested in the future: that is, when our bodies are redeemed. We are still waiting for the redemption of the body (Rom. viii. 23), which may mean translation if we are living, resurrection if we are asleep. So here we have something which is most beautiful. Christ has been made unto me to be my redemption.

I do not just mean redemption as such—as a state, or as a 'finished work'—but redemption in its *effects*—the redemption of the body. If we ask ourselves, How can I be raised and how can I be taken up?—here we have the answer. *Christ* is my redemption. To make it more simple, it means that it is *Christ* who is going to be taken up; it is something that is of *Christ* that is going to be raised.

I will give you an illustration. I remember once I was at the funeral of a brother, and I was standing opposite the grave. He had quite a number of unbelieving relatives; I think over a hundred had gathered at the graveside. Just ten or twenty yards away from where we were burying him there was another grave, and another party doing the same

thing, and, after enquiry, I found they were not the Lord's. I took the chance to preach to the unbelieving relatives of our brother. I said, 'Do you know what we are doing with his body?' 'We are burying him.' 'Oh, no: *they* are burying someone over there. *We* are not burying a man at all'. 'What are you doing, then? what are we here for?' 'I am planting him', I said; 'I am not burying him.' And I took out my Bible and found I Corinthians xv. 'Do you know the difference between burying and planting? If you bury something you do not expect it to come up. If you plant something, you will be very disappointed if nothing comes up. I plant him because I know he is going to come up!'

What is there in me that is going to come up? Christ. Everything of us will not come up in the first resurrection. The whole world may live again before the Great White Throne, but that is not technically what we know to be resurrection. The coming out from death, the shaking off of all that is of death, is Christ. Nothing in me will survive death, even physically. What makes it possible that I should be raised up in personal resurrection? Christ. If you put a piece of paper in the ground, there is nothing in it which will come up; but a seed is a different thing—there is life. It is the Lord of Life in me, that could not be holden of death (Acts ii. 24), that is going to be raised. What is going to be taken up to glory? The Lord in me. He comes from Heaven, so He can go back to Heaven. Nothing that was not out of Heaven could ever get back there.

So then, what is my hope of redemption—of rapture, resurrection? It is only the Lord. I have nothing that will go through death. I have got everything to go into corruption; but whatever I have in Him, that is going to carry me through. He is our redemption.

May God open our eyes to see that we cannot go on just occupied with *things*. That is a worldly religion. It is something of human device, it is not of God. If something that we are going to be taken through redemption into Heaven, that something must be the Son of God. Oh, that we may know Him! That is the reason why Paul could say: "He that spared not his own Son . . . how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32). When the Son is given, all things are given, because all things are in Him. Since all things are in Him, anyone who has the Son has all things.

W. N.

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## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

*“Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation; named of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard of interpretation, seeing ye are become dull of hearing. For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food. For every one that partaketh of milk is without experience of the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But solid food is for fullgrown men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil” (Hebrews v. 7 - 14).*

*“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew xi. 29).*

*“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want” (Philippians iv. 11, 12).*

### THE QUALITY OF OBEDIENCE PERFECTED IN CHRIST AS MAN THROUGH SUFFERING

**I**N this passage in the epistle to the Hebrews, the matter in view is one of the greatest importance and seriousness for us all, for we read of Christ Himself, Son of God though He was, needing in the days of His flesh to ‘learn obedience’ by the things which He suffered. This leads to the fact that the Lord’s dealings with us have as their object this primary issue—that we should *learn*; for a lesson learnt means nothing less than a moral quality established in the life and character. Our whole spiritual increase, and therefore our resultant spiritual value and usefulness, depend upon what we have learnt in this sense—indeed, upon whether we have really learnt anything in this true and vital way. Here the matter of ‘learning’ leads us to that of ‘teaching’. “By reason of the time

ye ought to be teachers” issues from the question of how much has really been learnt in experience of the Lord and of the inner character-forming lessons which are His supreme object with us.

First of all we shall consider the Son of God as the One who is in view as our forerunner in every necessary experience. Then we shall hear Him say to us, “Learn of Me”; and finally we face the challenge of whether we too can say, as Paul could, “I have learnt”. With that challenge comes the comfort that it is *possible* for great lessons to be learnt, for there is great grace!

The fundamental lesson of all lessons is thus focussed in the Lord Jesus, who as Man, though being the Son of God, learned through the years of His earthly life the basic issue of obedience. He was sinless, blameless and perfect at every stage of His life. Yet He was being perfected in every moral quality by His deliberate choice of the will of God at every point, under testings of every kind that pressed upon Him at every stage, from childhood to full-grown manhood, even before the brief years and final testings of His public ministry. This is a mystery, that He “*learned*” obedience and, as we read in Hebrews ii. 8, “*became* obedient unto death” and was thereby “*made perfect*”; but there is no problem when we come to ourselves. We are by nature rebellious, self-centred, independent and proud, and it is the eliminating of the rebel element in us that constitutes our chief education. How are we to become obedient, meek and lowly? For that is the issue. Only as we learn this have we any ground for teaching others, otherwise the enemy still has ground in a rebellious heart and an unbroken will.

### SUFFERING, NOT ENJOYMENT, THE WAY OF LEARNING

What mistaken ideas we have of learning! There can be a false learning, a knowledge of the theory of Divine things which is not a reality in the life. Paul speaks of such as “ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (II Tim. iii. 7). There is also a false idea about ‘teaching’, as though it were a matter of talking to others about spiritual things and our ‘knowledge’ of truth. Paul speaks of some as “desiring to be teachers . . . though they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm” (I Tim. i. 7). No, real learning is the learning of deep spiritual lessons, so that spiritual

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qualities have been truly established in the very life and character, till they are just *facts* in the life. The reaction is spontaneous when a thing is really 'learnt': like Peter and John at the gate of the Temple, we can say, "What I *have*, that give I thee" (Acts iii. 6), for we have in ourselves, through Christ, the answer to the need around.

But true learning is not academic; its way is here spoken of as suffering, and so it is. It is the suffering of letting go our own preferences and personal interests; of accepting the circumstances and ordering of our life, whether at the hands of men or through trials of many kinds, without resentment, argument or criticism. Do things or people rouse in us a reaction of that kind? The fact is that every test rouses the rebellious, disobedient element in our nature. We *learn* obedience by taking sides with the Lord against ourselves, by accepting His will and ordering, and gladly trusting Him with the issues and the way through. This is the secret the Lord learnt, as man, and we too are called this way, so that we may increasingly be able to say, in all humility, "I *have* learnt"! In Psalm cxix. 67 we read: "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe (or 'have kept') thy word." Again, in v. 71: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might *learn* thy statutes." So the first great lesson, and the most important quality in our character, is that of 'obedience'—a spirit no longer self-willed, resentful or complaining, but subdued in all things to the perfect ordering and permitting of the Lord.

Paul tells us, in the passage that we quoted at the beginning, of other, but related, lessons he has learnt, which are also for us to know. He knew how to be content in whatsoever state he found himself. He knew how to be humiliated or to be in need of necessities, and yet perfectly at rest. He knew—an even more difficult thing—how to have all he needed and abundant blessings, and still to take it quietly from the Lord, and not be unduly elated or taken up with the good things. All this he learnt through suffering, but the point is that he *learned*. So often we suffer and survive, but have learnt nothing. We have not gained the value and the lesson intended by the suffering. This is a tragic thing, for great values are lost and infinite possibilities wasted. There is no need for any experience to be wasted if our hearts are set on learning. Moreover, let us remember that obedience or submission is not a weak thing but something strong. It is not a moral collapse but a moral choice. I could resist, but I *choose* to yield and to accept. This is true obedience and is a constant inward challenge and opportunity.

It is well to remember at this point that the deepest and truest spiritual qualities are not learnt or established in us by our happy or enjoyable times, but in the difficult ones! There is nothing wrong in times of great joy and spiritual blessing; in fact we long for more of them, and look back perhaps to some days of much blessing in ourselves or in the work of the Lord; but in the securing of Christ in greater measure in our lives, we find that it is by the things which we suffer that we learn most. So let us give thanks for the joyful days, and learn all that the Lord intends by the days of waiting and difficulty.

USEFULNESS THE FRUIT OF LESSONS  
LEARNED

But not only ought we to have learnt our lessons, but this leads to the challenging and yet encouraging fact that we *ought* to be teachers! We ought *all* to be those who, out of real *experience* of the Lord, and of His Word, have something vital to give to others; no longer being 'spoon-fed' or needing milk ourselves, but being real living witnesses and helpers of others. Has something gone wrong? It evidently had with those addressed in the passage we read, for their very spiritual faculties had become dulled. They were so accustomed to hearing about spiritual things, and yet they now *really* heard little or nothing, for, as we see further on, they had never entered into the *experience* through *obedience* of things already heard. They used to hear, years ago, but now they have become familiarised with it all and nothing really goes home or registers in their hearts. They have no true spiritual usefulness; they cannot help others and teach them the way of the Lord, for they have never *learned* the lessons themselves. This is a solemn challenge, and we need to heed it—every one of us—for it is a message to every child of God.

What, then, is the remedy if we have lost ground, lost sensitiveness to the Lord, lost or never had the capacity to help others? Here it is, and here is the way of recovery, if there has been failure, and the way of increase if already we are on the way.

## THE FIRST SECRET—TAKING HIS YOKE

Before we shall be true learners, having the spiritual lessons truly established in our lives and our characters, there must be an initial coming to the Lord for a fundamental committal to Him—not now for salvation, for that, surely, is in the previous verse—but to yield utterly to His control

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by a deliberate choice. To take, or 'take up' (lit.), His yoke is to *decide*, and to tell Him that now it is His will and way we want, not our own. We realise what a lot of self-will and opinion and strength there is in our nature, but we now *choose* to know and learn His will, and His nature.

That is all, if we really mean it! *After* that choice is settled with Him, He says: "and *learn* of Me". Our education in His hands will follow, and it will be learning Christ, His meekness and lowliness of heart, through the varying experiences of the way.

THE NECESSITY OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

This leads to our part and responsibility in the outworking of this life of learning or discipleship. The word here (Heb. v. 14) is used of the strict training of an athlete in preparation for a contest or a race, and it implies that we too must give ourselves wholly to the exercising of our spiritual faculties. There is no place for carelessness or unwatchfulness, but for deep concern to see the Lord

more fully, to hear His voice and be sensitive to His will, to discern (or scent) what is of Him and what is not; and so, with every other capacity, to be wholly given to our privilege of knowing and obeying Him.

If then, for a thousand possible reasons and excuses, we have become 'dull', and perhaps almost given up hoping for anything vital in lives, now is the time to get again into the full way of sensitiveness to Him. Then soon we shall be true teachers and helpers of others, in the very things which we have learnt in experience and which He has established in our own lives.

In closing let us ask ourselves: 'What have I really learnt of the Lord; what lessons of obedience, patience, contentment, humility?' Perhaps we feel—Very little! But He says to us afresh today, "Learn of Me", and as we respond, our testimony will surely be one of praise and thanksgiving, and we shall say, "Who teacheth like Him?" May the Lord grant this, and make us His true learners, and in our measure increasingly helpers of others in this day of great need and opportunity.

C. J. B. H.



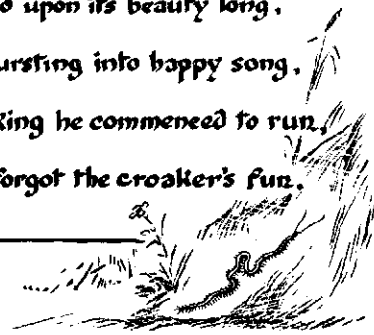
The Centipede, the Toad, and the Sun.

— Subjective —

— Objective —

A Centipede was happy quite,  
 Until a Toad in fun,  
 Said, "Pray, which leg comes  
 after which?  
 This brought his mind to such  
 a pitch,  
 He lay distracted in the ditch  
 Considering how to run.

While lying in this sorry plight  
 A ray of sunshine caught his sight,  
 He gazed upon its beauty long,  
 Then bursting into happy song,  
 Unthinking he commenced to run,  
 And quite forgot the croaker's fun.



A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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THE NEXT

SPECIAL GATHERINGS

at HONOR OAK

will be held, the Lord willing, on

SATURDAY, May 19, at 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

LORD'S DAY, May 20, at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

MONDAY, May 21, at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.



THE CONFERENCE CENTRE  
GUEST HOUSE

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**T**HE GUEST HOUSE exists for the accommodation of those of the Lord's people who desire to come for *the value of the spiritual ministry* of the Centre.

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The limited amount of accommodation makes prolonged visits very difficult and such need to have special consideration.

Those who are interested at any time should make application to Mr. or Mrs. A. G. TAYLOR, 13, Honor Oak Road, London, S.E.23. Telephone : FORest Hill 4609.

"A Candlestick of Pure Gold: of Beaten Work" Exodus 25, 31

**A WITNESS  
AND  
A TESTIMONY**

"The Testimony of Jesus" Rev. 19



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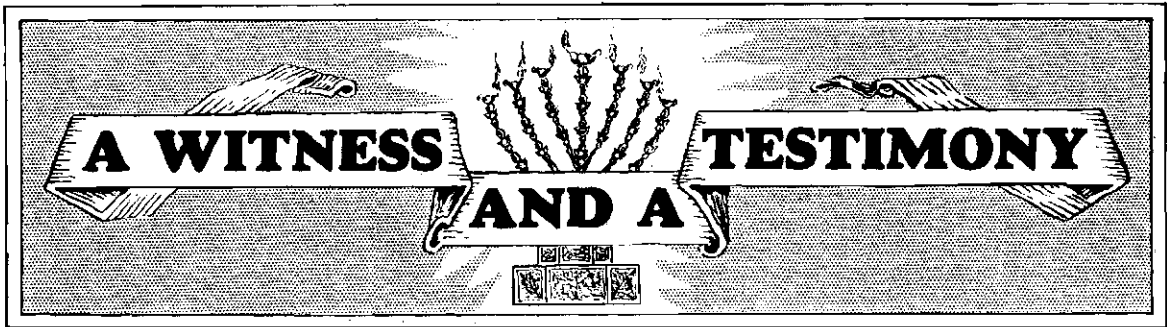
## THIS MINISTRY

**T**HE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13—" . . . till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . . "

It is not connected with any 'Movement', 'Organization', 'Mission' or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment', it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S. E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

'Personal' letters should be addressed to Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



JULY - AUGUST, 1956

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EDITORIAL

*"These things saith the Amen" (Rev. iii. 14).*

THE last message to the Church is from the One who selects for Himself from His many titles and designations the one that embodies everything that is affirmative, positive, and definite.

"Amen" is not only an ejaculation or form of assent, it is a Divine title, and in the title there is—as always—a character, a definition. In Isaiah lxx. 16, "the God of truth" is literally "the God of Amen". When Jesus so often said, "Verily, verily", He used this very word, "Amen, Amen", thus conveying the meaning that what He was and said was of the character of absolute certainty, perfect assurance, and unmistakable positiveness.

Eventually He gathered all into the personal title—"the Amen". This, alongside of its definition, "the faithful and true witness", gives a forceful significance to the message of the context, and becomes the message itself. It stands in vivid contrast to the conditions existing.

Although not universally, yet quite widely, the interpretation of the messages to the seven churches is thought to be historical and future: that is, that they not only relate to the first Christian century, but cover the whole Church dispensation and represent phases and stages of the spiritual life of the Church at certain given times. Thus, such an interpretation gives to "Laodicea" an end-time application and describes the condition which will obtain at that time. It is not necessary to accept that interpretation, for whether it be right or not so, the message holds a test and a challenge for all time. It is important to get the whole significance of this challenge, for undoubtedly it indicates an ever-present tendency.

I. THE LORD'S REACTION TO A REACTIONARY MOVEMENT

To fully grasp the meaning of the message to "Laodicea", we have to go back some years. There are two factors to bring forward.

(a) It is generally recognised and known that the two great letters of Paul called "to the Ephesians" and "to the Colossians" did not have such designations attached to them, but that they were

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

circular letters for the Churches in Asia (see, e.g., Col. iv. 16). If this was the case, as we believe it to have been, then these were the greatest documents ever penned; and the greatest revelation ever given by God, as contained in those two letters, was given to these seven churches in Asia. That, at least, signified spiritual capacity and aliveness on their part, for the Lord does not give His fullest and best where there is little capacity, life or spirituality. They must have been tuned to this great heavenly key.

(b) The second thing is that terrible statement of Paul at the end of his life concerning these churches: "All that are in Asia turned away from me" (II Tim. i. 15). This is generally held to mean a doctrinal turning away; an adverse reaction to Paul and his teaching; and it is surely borne out by the things said to at least five of the seven churches, and by Paul's letters to Timothy, who had responsibility in Ephesus.

If this was true, then the messages, and the message to Laodicea in particular, represent the Lord's reaction to that reactionary movement. It is as though the Lord said (and here is the message for *all* time): 'I have given you a full revelation of My mind concerning Myself and the Church; you have that immense deposit, but you have turned from it. You may turn from the messenger, but you cannot get away either from the message or from the One who sent it. 'These things saith (not Paul—but) "the Amen, the faithful and true witness"—the unalterable, unchanging, invincible One.'

The Church is responsible for what the Lord has given it, and will be judged accordingly.

## II. THE INCLUSIVE CHARGE

*"Neither hot nor cold"*

How necessary it is for us rightly to appraise what this means. Surely the things of which Laodicea boasted did not come to them without some zeal or energetic activity on their part! These things do not just tumble into the lap without thought and concern. May there not have been many things there that to-day would be regarded as the marks of a vigorous, energetic, active and 'living' church?—indeed, a very prosperous church?

It depends upon the viewpoint and the standard that governs—whether the world's or the heavenly Lord's!

Here is a state which, from one standpoint, is defined as "rich, and in need of nothing". From the Lord's viewpoint it is judged to be spiritual mediocrity, and the very boast contains the constituents of that spiritual mediocrity. *Spiritual* contentment and complacency, the absence of a deep and strong sense of need and desire for what has never yet been attained, are such constituents, and the symptoms of spiritual invalidism.

The Lord said: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst . . ." (Matthew v. 6).

Paul said: 'I have not yet attained, but this one thing I do—I press on . . .' (Phil. iii. 12 - 14).

Is it not possible to be very active, energetic, and zealous in good works, and yet be terribly deficient in spirituality?

Just look again at those two great letters of Paul. What wealth, what fulness, what power, what life, what light! This is the Lord's standard. Is the Church—or any church—living in the good of this? We must return to that presently.

But that is not all, nor the worst about "Laodicea".

*"Thou knowest not . . ."*

*"Wretched"—"Miserable"—"Poor"—"Blind"—"Naked"*

Can all these be true at one time and of one object, and yet—and yet—'know it not'? It could hardly be true in the natural, but here is something worse than natural.

What is *this* constituent of spiritual mediocrity? It is *spiritual insensitiveness*.

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One of the truest marks of a Holy-Spirit-governed life is spiritual sensitiveness. Such a life is finely strung to the gentle movements of the Spirit, and suffers much when the Spirit is grieved. But here is a state of which the Lord says it is all out of tune, and yet there is no sense of discord.

Look again at the letters mentioned. What riches, what sight, what clothing, what beauty, what glory! All this the Lord has provided, has given; but what a pathetic absence of a sense of loss—of poverty, nakedness, blindness—there is in the Church.

### III. THE CHALLENGE

*"I counsel thee to buy . . ." "Be zealous . . . repent . . ."*

Here it is not the buying of salvation—that is "without money and without price"—but it is the 'zeal' that repudiates mediocrity, complacency, and lukewarmness in a burning quest for that unto which we are saved. A false apprehension of even so great a thing as salvation can lead to untold loss. To make initial salvation an end in itself and to rest upon it as if it were all that mattered represents such a false apprehension.

The best exposition of this challenge and admonition is found in Paul's own words in Philippians, in which he shows how he would "buy . . . gold . . . and white raiment . . . and eyesalve". They are the words of a truly saved man, and one who had full assurance of salvation.

*"What things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ . . . Not that I have already obtained, or am already complete; but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 7, 8, 12).* That is what the Lord would designate an 'Overcomer'.

We are led, then, to—

### IV. THE FINAL ISSUE

The risen Lord having shown that, with a very great deal of what men may think important and successful *within the church*, it is terribly possible for Himself to be outside, He then discloses the "on high calling"; the "prize"; the object of the 'apprehending'.

*"With me in my Throne"*

A governmental union with Christ in the ages to come! Not only a heavenly citizen; certainly not one of those of whom Paul wrote to the Corinthians, as being "saved; yet so as by fire"—all else lost; but called to the highest place that Heaven affords believers—"in my throne". Unto this there may of necessity be "rebuke" and "chastening". It will be a disciplined, chastened people who will "attain" unto this completeness.

So we see the great contrast possible in Christian people, and hear our Lord say: 'Do not be satisfied with anything short of all that to which I have called you, and which I have made possible. Be a people of the "Amen"—very positive, utter, and abandoned.'

The alternatives are vivid: "Spew out", or "Sit . . . on my throne".

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith . . ."

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS

*Editor*

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## "JEHOVAH - SHAMMAH"

## "THE LORD IS THERE"

"The name of the city from that day shall be, JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH" (Ezekiel xlviii, 35).

SO, the end sees the eternal object attained: that which prompted creation; that which motivated Providence; that which has always been the dynamic of Sovereignty; and that which carried through Redemption.

The supreme and all-inclusive object has been God's presence in pleasure and satisfaction in the midst of men.

The City of Ezekiel's prophecy has its realisation in the "holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. xxi. 2). "And God himself shall be with them" (verse 3).

This has ever been God's quest. From one of many standpoints, the Bible can be said to be from beginning to end a record of God's quest for a place and for conditions suitable for His presence. In many symbols, types, and representations, this is the spiritual principle which governs and explains.

In a comprehensive way the Incarnation gathers up everything in this one connection: "Immanuel—God with us". The Cross is set in this one relationship—to clear the ground for God's dwelling. The Advent of the Holy Spirit must be seen supremely in the light of this eternal purpose. The Church is explained and justified in this one design. The individual believer is apprehended with this pre-eminent Divine thought. In all God is working toward this one issue and verdict—

## "THE LORD IS THERE"

If this is true, and surely it is obvious in the Scriptures, then certain very practical conclusions and issues follow.

## I. THIS IS THE EXPLANATION OF THE COSMIC CONFLICT

That there is such a conflict is surely more apparent now than at any previous time in history. The new attitude toward this matter is one of the many signs of the times. We have passed through a phase in which Satan's cleverest ruse has been widely successful. He has persuaded men not to believe in him, and has resolved the whole matter of evil into 'complexes', 'neuroses', 'good in the

making', etc. Theology has bowed out the Devil, and he has grinned behind the mask of deception, as he sees his dupes so 'clever'. But there is a come-back, and it is largely due to an altogether new appraisal of the New Testament and of Paul in particular. Paul has come into a place that he has never before held, and this postulates a principle, that a return movement is always stronger than the first position because it has in it all the strength of bitter lessons learned through experience.

A modern writer of no mean authority, a professor in one of the premier universities of Scotland, drawing attention to this return movement on the part of other outstanding intellectuals, says:

"It is the cosmic range and the sheer malignity of the evil they have seen in our world which have led them to re-espouse the Pauline view [of demonology]. And when we see, as we have seen in our time . . . insensate madness taking complete possession of a great and cultured nation and issuing in unspeakable horrors and cruelties—can we wonder that thoughtful men draw the Pauline conclusion?"

"There is no metaphysical reason why the cosmos should not contain spirits higher than man who have made evil their good, who are ill-disposed to the human race, and whose activities are co-ordinated by a master-strategist."

This writer goes on to illustrate.

"There are times when the police lay their hands on a criminal, and yet are not satisfied. Behind this petty thief is some other person, dimly guessed at, some master-hand moving the pawn. The police can recognise that other's strategy, for the man in their hands could never have thought it all out by himself. The marks of Satan-like strategy in our world have moved many to Paul's view that more than human agents are pitted against us in the battle, that 'the Power of darkness' is more than an outworn figure of speech, and that, though Luther said, 'his doom is writ', he still contrives to bedevil the affairs of men and nations."

What is the inclusive objective of this kingdom of evil? It is nothing less or other than to oust God and usurp His throne; "setting himself [Satan] forth as God" (II Thess. ii. 4).

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So we find ourselves in a time when the battle is joined, on a scale beyond anything known before, between a *true, spiritual, heavenly* expression of 'God's House', and the anti-God forces. No, not between the evil powers and formal and lifeless Christianity, but between them and any *vital* representation in corporate form of God in Christ as here by the Holy Spirit. The more vital, the more intense the conflict! Truly spiritual and devoted people of God, who are more concerned for Christ than for 'Christian' things, are feeling the pressure from that dark and vicious realm in a way that sometimes nears the overwhelming point. God is present *in* them and in the midst of them, and from Satan's point of view they are a menace and must be 'liquidated'. This intensive pressure points to a nearing advent of Christ, when His presence will bring the other presence to a climax. "The devil is gone down . . . having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time" (Rev. xii. 12).

## II. THIS IS THE ULTIMATE CRITERION OF CHRISTIANITY

There is a 'judgment beginning at the house of God' to which the Bible brings us in the first part of its final book. The climax of the sevenfold interrogation, examination and judgment of chapters i - iii finds Christ outside of the door of a Christian church (iii. 20). The verdict passed and the admonition given shows that the ultimate criterion is whether God is found within.

To put that in other words: It is not our orthodoxy, 'soundness' of doctrine, correctness of procedure, many 'good works', zeal, 'success', reputation, etc., that is the final criterion and justification (so say all of these messages), but whether the Lord is met with in us and in our midst. The Lord never commits Himself to that which is not according to His mind. If He is truly present and can be sensed by open-hearted and pure-spirited seekers after Him, then that is the argument for things being, at least in measure, not contrary to but according to His heart. The Lord Himself is the 'First and the Last', the test of everything. The final question is: 'Do I meet the Lord in that man or woman, in that company and place?'

Many other things are made the basis of judgment by so many, but this is God's test—

"Jehovah-Shammah"—"The Lord is there". This does not mean that there is never any room for a larger measure of His presence. The measure will always be determined by suitability to that presence. 'To fill all things' is the determined end made known as God's purpose.

This leads us to—

## III. THE MEANING OF THE LIFE OF BELIEVERS, INDIVIDUAL AND CORPORATE

It is sometimes a good thing to stand back from all that comes into our lives as believers, both personally and collectively, and ask some fundamental questions. 'Why, really, are we here? Why am I a Christian? What did God mean when He brought Christ into my life? Above and beyond all the details of life and work—the trials, sufferings, perplexities; the hopes, blessings, and activities—is there one thing that, in God's thought, governs all?'

Yes, there is! It is that there may be written on the life initially, to become progressively clearer and more luminous: "Jehovah-Shammah"—"The Lord is there". This is a statement of fact supported by the whole Bible. This is a test of everything and the standard of all values and judgment. This is the explanation of all discipline and suffering.

The same is true of the collective aspect. The 'meetings', 'congregations', 'services', 'churches', etc., are to God's pleasure and satisfaction just—and only—in the measure in which it is positively true that the Lord is there, and is met there. Not artificial and formal ways and means of making an impression of solemnity and reverence; not mysticism and artistry; not soulful emotions, either sober or ecstatic; but the sin-challenging, life- and light-giving, heart-satisfying and soul-saving presence of God. The verdict must be—not this or that about any feature, but—'We have been in the presence of the Lord: the Lord was there; we have met the Lord!'

May the Lord keep us alive in all things to this ultimate criterion. May we ever be exercised that when people meet us they shall meet the Lord, and that when they gather with us the predominant and abiding impression may be—

"THE LORD IS THERE"

T. A-S.



## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## THY KINGDOM COME

## II. THE KINGDOM AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

*"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel . . . and the thing was true, even a great warfare" (Daniel x. 1).*

**SPIRITUAL** warfare is one of the most important factors in the great issue of bringing in the kingdom. Those who are fighters by nature, however, must beware—for this is no natural conflict, but a spiritual. Could we have seen the young Daniel arriving in Babylon as one of a weary band of defeated captives; could we later on have heard him mildly 'requesting' that he might be excused from eating the king's dainties, and still later prefacing his sensational revelation of the king's dream by the modest denial of any natural wisdom on his part; could we have heard him earnestly pleading with his nation's most hated enemy to humble himself so that there might be a lengthening of his tranquillity, or seen him being cast into the lions' den without expostulation or argument, though he was a great political figure as well as servant of the Most High God; still more if we could have seen him at prayer, pouring out his heart in penitence and confession, or, later, down on his face before the Divine glory, with neither strength nor self-esteem—we should never have described Daniel as a fighter. Yet he was a great warrior for God, perhaps the greatest of Old Testament times. As we have said, this is not a natural fight, and it demands qualities which are very different from the aggressive or pugnacious temperaments which belong to those who are born fighters.

## NOT CARNAL BUT SPIRITUAL

A simple story, and a true one at that, may serve to illustrate this point. A young soldier, who had been a ringleader in evil, was brought to Christ in the Soldiers' Home at Woolwich. His open confession of Christ brought him much ridicule from his former companions. Previously they had been rather afraid of him, but now he became a harmless butt for their scoffing and contempt until, relying on a Christian meekness which they expected to be limitless, one of them went too far and roused his hot anger. He rose up from the meal table, told the offender that he would deal with him outside, and withdrew to remove his tunic and roll up his sleeves ready for the fight. The others did not come out at once, so while he waited he took up his pocket Bible to seek some text of en-

couragement for this conflict for the truth, rather expecting something about 'fighting the good fight of faith'. To his surprise, however, his eye lighted on Ephesians iv. 32, and he found himself challenged to "be . . . kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God for Christ's sake forgave you". Just then his persecutor emerged, white of face and fully expecting a thrashing. To his amazement, it was not a fist which greeted him, but an outstretched hand and an apology for angry words. The fight was over, and won, but how differently from what had been expected. Moreover the other young soldier was soon won for Christ, which made the victory still greater.

Yes, this is essentially a spiritual conflict, and for that very reason is no place for 'natural fighters'. There are not a few Christians who are to-day bruised and battered just because they have tried to fight the Lord's battles with natural strength. Take the case of Moses. He had a true vision, but he tried to fight it out in the heat and energy of his natural life. He lost the fight. It broke him. Forty years afterwards, when, humanly speaking, he had no more fight in him, God brought him back to Egypt to lead the people of God in the first great campaign for the kingdom. He was a different kind of warrior now. Nevertheless the fight was very real. When they moved out from Egypt, Moses sang of the Lord as "a man of war" (Exodus xv. 3), and, when his leadership had brought the people to the very verge of the land, the Lord said to him: "Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people" (Numbers xxxi. 2). It had been a fight all the way, right to the very last; yet it had been a spiritual fight, fought with spiritual weapons by the man who was "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers xii. 3). The final conflict and victory for the kingdom is to be celebrated in "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Revelation xv. 3). Moses the natural fighter, Moses the Egyptian warrior, Moses the zealot, Moses the reformer, was an abject failure. But Moses in fellowship with the Lamb triumphed gloriously.

## THE ISSUE OF THE KINGDOM

The spiritual battle has gone on all through the centuries. When Moses handed over to Joshua, it

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was for the people to fight for their possessions in the land. No one ever drifts into the possession of the kingdom. Joshua did not, nor shall we. When Christ came to bring in the kingdom He began in the wilderness as a Warrior, fighting a great spiritual battle. Satan knew what the issue was, too, for the climax of the temptations was concerned with the manner in which Christ should obtain the kingdoms of this world. We know how our blessed Lord won that great victory, but we must never let the simplicity of the narrative deceive us into imagining that it was easy. At the end, His need was so great that angels were sent to minister to Him, and they were not sent like that again until the further bitter conflict of the garden of Gethsemane. Thank God that Christ triumphed in these great spiritual battles, and triumphed supremely in His Cross. That was the great clash between the two kingdoms. All the hosts of darkness mustered to do battle against God's King, but we are told that "He spoiled principalities and powers" and "made a show of them openly, triumphing over them" in His Cross (Colossians ii. 15). When it met the One who hung there upon the tree in uttermost weakness and yet in pure dependence upon the Father, Satan's kingdom exhausted itself and suffered overwhelming defeat.

With the Lord risen from the dead, and the issue finally settled, it might be thought that the disciples would be spared the need for conflict; yet we hardly open the book of the Acts before we find the young Church locked in deadly conflict with the Satanic kingdom. How quickly they discovered that the Church is to be a Warrior Church, and by means of Psalm ii were able to interpret the nature of the struggle. Later on, when Paul and Barnabas revisited another infant church which had been born into the battle, they 'confirmed their souls', "exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv. 22). Heavy fare for young believers! Is it safe to talk to young Christians about the spiritual conflict and their eternal vocation in Christ? Paul evidently thought it was, for to the Corinthians and Thessalonians, as well as to the churches of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, he got straight to the point, instructing these new believers as to the issue of their faith and making no secret of the fact that it could only be realised by fighting, that spiritual hardship is to be endured if the kingdom is to come. When the time came for the Apostles to hand on to the next generation, and so to every subsequent generation right up to our own, they did so with such exhortations as "war the good warfare", "fight the good

fight of faith". There is no question as to whether we are in the spiritual conflict. We are born into it. The question is whether we are triumphing through Christ or being defeated.

#### WHAT THE WARFARE IS NOT

Before proceeding any further we ought to consider what this warfare is not. It is not a carnal battle. If Satan can get us down to earth, dealing with things and people as they are down here, he has us defeated. How well he knows this! The earthly level is his realm. He is master here. For that very reason he tries to get us preoccupied with flesh and blood, to get us using carnal weapons, fighting as natural men fight. There is no victory for Christ in that realm.

It is not a civil war. The beginning of the downfall of the kingdom of Israel was when it began to be divided by civil strife. Satan does not change his tactics much—he does not need to. Divisiveness of spirit is a betrayal of the kingdom. The kingdom destined to be revealed from Heaven is described as one stone—only one. Those who possess the kingdom are called "the people of the saints of the Most High"—*the* people. If this is true, then to contradict that oneness by hostility, even of spirit, is to hinder the coming of Christ's kingdom and to allow Satan to postpone his own downfall. There is no war so bitter, and so futile, as civil war.

Nor is it a personal war. We are not fighting for our own position. Daniel and his friends were willing to lose their own lives—though incidentally that is how they saved them. But they were not out for advancement, nor even for survival, as such; they lost sight of all personal interests in their overwhelming concern for the interests of the kingdom, and so became living examples of what Christ meant when He taught: "Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew vi. 33).

#### FOUR GREAT BATTLES IN BABYLON

Having said this, we may now turn to the four great battles which are described as actually happening in the personal experience of Daniel and his companions in Babylon. The other battles of the book do not concern us at the moment. There are kings and princes and rams and he-goats and horns, but their histories do not help much for our present purpose. In any case, they were fighting among themselves, so we can leave them to it. We want to fight for the Lord and to bear our testimony to His kingdom.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

### I. A BATTLE OVER THE LORD'S SUFFICIENCY

The first episode is described in chapter i, and circles around the matter of the Lord's sufficiency. In some senses it was a simple issue; but it was also fundamental—it affected and governed the whole of Daniel's life. If he had failed then, there would have been nothing more to write. True, the fiery furnace might have been avoided, and the lions' den; life might have seemed easier, with no costly visions and no sacrificial prayers. Satan sought to make a quick end to this whole conflict by introducing defilement. There seems to be a real connection between this first test of Daniel and the first temptation of Christ in the wilderness.

If this were just a message to young Christians, it would be right to point out how important it is to avoid the contaminating influence of this world even in small and apparently harmless things. But for our purpose this must be included in the larger issue represented by the Babylonian king's table. Babylon fed on pride. Self-sufficiency and self-glory, these were the meat of the king of Babylon and these the wine which he drank. Daniel would have none of it. He was not being wrongly independent: the pulse and water were not of his own providing, but received gratefully from Babylon. Yet what a difference there was between being nourished by that which spoke of pride and human glory, and feeding on the humble, despised pulse and water.

Even Daniel's spirit reveals how truly humble he was; for, while "he purposed in his heart that he would not . . .", we are told that "therefore he requested . . . that he might not . . ." (i. 8). His request must have seemed foolish and even weak. It brought no cause for boasting, but only a real experience of humbling. Nevertheless the humbling kept him pure with God. There is nothing so defiling as pride in spiritual things, and no battle so fiercely fought as the battle for humility. Indeed, humility is a fundamental necessity in the spiritual conflict. This chapter really sets the tone for the whole book. At the end of it we are told that "Daniel continued even unto the first year of Cyrus", and this is clear from the rest of the book; indeed he lived longer than that. Perhaps the reason for mentioning it at this point is to emphasize that he continued because he maintained this pure and humble spirit. No doubt there is also the hint that this same conflict continued with him all through the years. It was his first battle, and may well have been his last. It certainly is with us, and temptations to pride grow fiercer as we press on with the Lord.

His action revealed great faith as well as humility. He not only made a request; he issued a challenge: "Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days . . ." For the steward it was an experiment, and rather a dangerous one at that, whereas to Daniel it was a foregone conclusion. Faith cannot afford to have questions about the Lord's sufficiency. Daniel was not in a position to make a private test to see if it worked. No, he had to commit himself, to utter the challenge of faith, to invite others to prove how right was his complete confidence in the Lord. What a battleground faith is! We are here in this world not to apologize for our abstentions but to manifest the superiority and sufficiency of Christ to meet every need. 'Prove it', Daniel urged; and when they did so, it was made very clear that faith's way is better—ten times better—than the world's way. Even those who never tried it themselves could see that.

It seems that Daniel was more than the spokesman for the other three—he was the pioneer and leader. But for him, they might have been nonentities or failures like so many more of their fellow-countrymen in Babylon. Daniel seems to have given the lead, and then they gladly followed, which only goes to show how much our triumphs of faith may help and inspire others. Our victories are not to be kept to ourselves but to be shared with others.

### 2. A BATTLE FOR REVELATION

The next battle was even grimmer; it was truly a battle of life and death. So often the Lord gives His people light in this way, not as a matter of study or interest but as the only answer to the onslaught of spiritual death. For it was the Lord who brought them into this situation. He not only permitted it—He provoked it, for it was He who first gave the dream to Nebuchadnezzar and then withdrew it from him. How Daniel and his friends must have wished that the Lord had acted otherwise, either withholding the vision altogether or else helping Nebuchadnezzar in his attempts to remember it. If only the Lord would make things easier for us! If only He would not allow us to be cornered and involved in perils as He does! That is a very faithless wish, though common enough to most of us. It was God who hedged His servants in, faced them with disaster and forced them to their knees. We are not told in chapter i that they prayed. Probably they did, but the fact is not mentioned as the issue was fairly simple and straightforward. But now the spiritual battle had taken them beyond any past experience, quite out of

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their depth. Once again Daniel's faith triumphed. Once again he committed himself before he had any evidence, assuring the king that he would get the interpretation if only he were given time ; but still the battle had to be fought through on their knees.

There are so many lessons to be learned from this experience. There is the reminder that there must be prevailing in the secret place if the Lord's message is to be first received and then given out. There is the illustration of true corporate functioning as the three shared the prayer burden with Daniel. There is also a helpful insight into the Lord's ways with His people. He did not only want to reveal a secret—He wanted to get Daniel and his companions into a position of authority in Babylon. This is how He did it. He lifted them up by first bringing them down. Very low they came, even to despairing of life, low in crying for mercy to the God of Heaven ; but this was followed by an amazing exaltation, which could hardly have happened in any other way, for Daniel became chief governor, "in the gate of the king", and had the others promoted with him.

It should be a great comfort to us to know that, presiding over the whole outworking of this age-long conflict with its many engagements and battle-fields, we have the Master Strategist, who is steadily planning and working towards the final victory. He is not waiting for the great image to topple over, but is preparing and shaping a spiritual instrument for its overthrow. And He has some strange ways of pursuing His great campaign, and especially of placing His key men. It was He who put Daniel in Babylon, and later on it was He who put Esther and then Nehemiah in their strategic positions in the palace at Shushan. It may have seemed the wrong place at times, and the costly experiences for those concerned seemed most unfortunate ; yet they were all a part of the Lord's wonderfully wise means for reaching His end.

Daniel, like Paul, was "a prisoner of the Lord", and so should we all be. We must avoid fixed ideas as to how the Lord will use us, we must be careful not to arrange and order our own lives, and indeed we must even beware of praying to the Lord to do things in the way which *we* think is the right one. Daniel might have prayed that Nebuchadnezzar would revoke his edict ; perhaps he did, but he had no response from the Lord. He might have prayed that he and his friends might have special protection—that they would be miraculously spared although the others were slain. God had something more positive than that in view. So they prayed through to His will in the matter : they were not

only spared, they were advanced in the kingdom ; and the light which they received was not only of immediate importance, it was a revelation for the whole age. Once again, then, faith was the victory.

### 3. A BATTLE FOR THE LORD'S HONOUR

In passing from chapter ii to chapter iii, we pass from one battle to another. It is like that. Each spiritual victory does not absolve us from further service but only leads into new conflict. If Nebuchadnezzar had not heard about the head of gold he might not have made his golden image. If the three men had not been promoted to a place of prominence their non-conformity might never have been noticed. It is interesting that Daniel was not accused. Probably the accusers were afraid of their capricious king and did not dare criticize his favourite. It is also noteworthy that no other Jews were involved. Possibly they were ignored as being unworthy of notice. It was the prominence of these three which exposed them. So often spiritual triumph and advancement in the Lord has this effect of exposing God's servants to jealous criticism and malicious accusation. He permits it, for He means to achieve even greater triumphs in them.

Satan's attack was a psychological one, as may be noticed by a complete reading of the chapter. Not only was the image imposing and the king's command urgent, but look at the repetition of the long list of important personages on the other side and notice the repeated description, in detail, of the musical instruments. The Bible does not waste words, so we must believe that there is a meaning behind these repetitions. Surely the meaning is to show the cumulative pressure brought to bear upon these three. Who were they, that they should dare to dissent from that which was so universally popular and so convincingly presented? Satan knows how to concentrate his assaults upon our souls. How can we meet them? Certainly not by reason. Only strength in the spirit can give us victory over our own souls, and so over the great enemy.

These men had a spiritual relationship with the Lord, a relationship that was stronger than all the emotions and reasonings of their souls, so that, in a sense, the issue for them was simple. It was not easy—indeed it was very costly ; but it was clear and straightforward. Either their Lord's Name suffered or they suffered. Put like that, they had no difficulty in deciding, for the honour of the Lord's Name seemed far more important to them than their own lives. So they chose not to flee or surrender but to stand and fight, as every true spiritual warrior must do. All that they had to do was to

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

stand: yet their stand, though in great personal weakness, overthrew the power of Satan and maintained the rights of the Lord in the whole empire. It was indeed a battle. The fate of those who were burned by the intense heat shows that this was no imaginary fire, just as the destruction of Daniel's accusers in the lions' den proved that the lions were both fierce and hungry. For us, too, there is a real price to be paid if we are to stand firmly in the Lord's Name and not just be swept along with the crowd.

They not only fought for the Lord's honour, they also fought for the rest of His people. We have already pointed out that these three were exposed to attack because of their prominent position. They were the first, but they would not have been the last. If they had yielded (or indeed if they had perished in the flames), no doubt many of the lesser saints would have been hunted down and threatened in the same way. They delivered the rest by their faith. They stood, they survived, they rejoiced and reigned, even in the midst of the fires. This was true ascendancy. They "yielded their bodies", but they also "changed the king's word" (Daniel ii. 28). And after all, what is the good of our talking glibly of a coming kingdom in which the saints shall reign, if we are not proving the Lord now, and reigning spiritually even where we are? It is those who have truly prayed: "Hallowed be thy name", who alone have the right to pray: "Thy kingdom come".

It is impossible to think of these things without remembering brothers and sisters in the Far East who are at this very time face to face with the same issue, and, even as we remember, lifting up our hearts for them in prayer, that they may so triumph by faith that they, too, may walk with the Son of God, even in the fires, and have an honoured place with Him in His kingdom.

## 4. A BATTLE FOR THE LORD'S PURPOSE

As we turn to Daniel's conflict as described in chapter vi, we should note that, chronologically, this chapter follows the prayer of chapter ix. The two chapters seem to set forth two aspects of the same great battle, the battle for the realisation of the purposes of God. This battle differs from the other three in that it was not forced on Daniel, or at least only partially so. If he had not prayed through to assurance about Jerusalem's recovery he would have had no need to have his windows open toward Jerusalem. And if he had been content to walk quietly with the Lord, praying in secret, watching his own personal spiritual interests, and

abandoning—at least for the time—this concentration on Divine purposes, he need never have been thrown to the lions. The kind of prayer Daniel prayed in chapter ix is the kind that roused Hell—it always does; but the kind of vision which came to him from that prayer inspired him to go on without wavering.

The remarkable thing is not the fact that he prayed, but the nature of his prayer. He was so mastered by the vision that he forgot himself, even in prayer. Though he knew of the danger, not only did he still leave the windows open but "prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime". Satan could not even divert his prayers, so that he should pray for his own safety. Ignoring all the decrees and threats of men and devils, he kept pressing the great issue of the kingdom in his prayers and praises. "The righteous shall hold on his way." It is most cheering to find that the Lord was not deprived of a single one of the 'open-window' prayers. Daniel made a habit of so praying three times a day. After the accusation the king "laboured till the going down of the sun to rescue him". So Daniel was cast into the den after sundown. The king had such a bad night that he "arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions", and immediately had Daniel released. We may be sure that Daniel went straight back to his prayer chamber, and as the new day dawned was able to take up his prayer ministry just where he left it off. He was not so fresh as usual—for, after all, he had spent the night in the lions' den!—but the prayer had not been hindered, and there must have been a new note in the giving of thanks. What a battle! And what a victory!

We should take special note of the difference between Daniel and the majority of the Jews in Babylon. It was not that they had no faith or did not pray. Not that at all. But they were accepting things as they found them, accommodating themselves to the unhappy present order. In a vague sort of way they may have been hoping for a better day, but there was nothing practical about their hope. The Lord's testimony among His people was not as it ought to be, not as it used to be, but they felt that they had to do their best to hold things together in their present poor state, accepting all the contradictions and limitations because they could do nothing about it. That is surely not an unfair statement of the position held by many Christians today. Is there any other position? In all humility we say that there is. And Daniel seems to illustrate it for us.

He could not do anything about recovery or restoration, any more than others. Only God could

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do it. But he could believe for it, he could stand for it, he could testify about it. While it is true that he had a special vision, it is also true that he based his expectations on the Word of God. He prayed for it because he found it written in "the books". Daniel fought the battle of the recovery of a full testimony among God's people, because he had become convinced that this represented the purpose of God. There was nothing superior or exclusive about him, far from it. He loved the people of God, he travailed in the secret place for them, he went into the lions' den for them, but he

never settled down to their limited position, nor did he apologize for his expectations of a new and better day.

There is still a battle to be fought for God's purpose in His people. There is still a need for those who will be uncompromising in declaring what God has shown them in His Word, still a need for the open windows and a willingness to go into the lions' den, still a need for those who will go on praying and giving thanks until the kingdom really comes.

H. F.

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## RESURRECTION

THE supreme and pre-eminent factor in the testimony of Jesus is resurrection life.

This, in turn, is the most important and essential element in the Church's life and experience.

While true and sound doctrine is indispensable, it has been no uncommon thing in the history of the Church that, while orthodox and conservative in belief and practice, she has been without vitality and impact. The Lord has repeatedly to confront the Church, not with absence of "works", "labour", "patience", consistency in belief, etc., but with 'a name to live, but—dead'. Every new or fresh movement of God in the history of the Church is a resurrection-movement. Something has died. It is possible to have the truth in large measure and then to 'box the compass', or close the lid, as though all were possessed—'we know it all', 'we have it all', 'no one can teach us more than we know'. It sounds terrible when put into words, but the spirit and suggestion of it can be all too patent.

God's new movements have been in two or three connections.

1. They have been to recover lost truth in vital form.
2. They have been to recover Scriptural principles and procedure in a living way.
3. They have been to force into greater ful-

nesses when an untimely or too early stopping-short has taken place.

Spiritual death is *the* great enemy of all that is of God. Therefore God must be known predominantly by resurrection. The key to the Bible is spiritual principle, and the greatest of all principles is "the power of his resurrection".

This applies to the beginning, continuance, and consummation of the Christian life. What is true of the individual believer is true collectively or corporately, i.e. of the Church. Paul's life is a wonderful example of this principle: at his conversion; in his continuance; and in his hope. He surely was a representation of the revelation which was, in so much greater fulness, entrusted to him—that of the Church.

The above is a test and a testimony; the statement of a demand, and the declaration of an assurance.

God is the God of resurrection, and, amongst other things, this means that there is no end with Him, but ever new beginnings.

John Robinson, three hundred years ago, caught this light when, addressing the Pilgrim Fathers at Delft Haven, he said:

*"I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word."*

We might add: The Lord has yet more life to impart by acts of resurrection in sinner and believer.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## THE SPECIFIC MINISTRIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

(A Message given at Honor Oak by our brother W. N. when on a visit from China.)

*Reading: Matthew xvi. 16-19; John xxi. 18-22; Matthew iv. 18-22; Acts ix. 5-17; x. 11, 12; xviii. 3; II Timothy iv. 16, 17; II Peter iii. 15, 16; John i. 1; I John i. 1; Revelation ii. 7, 17, 26; iii. 5, 12, 21; xii. 5, 7-12; xxi. 1, 2.*

BY a 'specific' ministry, I mean a specific trust from God to bring to His people some particular part of the Divine plan or some special aspect of Christ. Certain parts will be emphasized by some servant being brought through some specific training and suffering. A specific ministry is simply this, that God, as the Lord of all operations, gives to certain of His servants something a little different from the general, something which is not common, but something to be specially emphasized because specially experienced, and brought to the notice of His people.

Every Spirit-taught reader of the New Testament will see that in it there are three different specific lines of ministry. They have much in common, but there is much that differs, and yet the things that differ are not really different. The difference is a question of something specific coming through each, supplementary and complementary to what all the others have got. You have the Peter line, you have the Paul line, and you have the John line of ministry. These are the three chief lines of ministry in the New Testament. There are others, but they can be classified under these. The Petrine, the Pauline and the Johannine are the three main lines of ministry given by God to His people. So it would be good for us to see clearly what God is emphasizing through each of His servants.

## PETER

To begin with, we have the Petrine, or Peter's line of ministry. It is agreed by most that Mark, in his Gospel, was following Peter in giving out what he knew about the Lord. Then you have Peter's epistles, and the records in the different Gospels and in the book of Acts concerning his ministry. What is his ministry? The Lord made it quite clear when He called him, 'I will make you a fisher of men.' That is his ministry. The ministry of Peter is to bring in men, to bring in as many as possible. Later on, the Lord confirmed Peter's ministry when, at Cæsarea Philippi, he confessed that He was the Christ of God. The Lord said He was go-

ing to build His Church, and as to Peter, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven".

A key marks a beginning. A key is for opening. You come in by opening, you come in by the door. Peter's ministry always marks a beginning of things. It is the beginning for the church in Jerusalem, it is the beginning for the church in Cæsarea. His ministry was at first to bring in the Jews, when he stood up with the eleven. And then he was the first man to bring in Gentiles, when he went to Cornelius at Cæsarea. Although later on you find that Paul was a man ordained by God to have a wider ministry amongst the Gentiles, yet Paul was not the first man to minister to the Gentiles. Peter was the first man chosen by God to minister to the Gentiles. He held the key, he was the fisherman. He was a man ordained by God to begin something.

The burden of Peter's message was always salvation in relation to the Kingdom, but whenever he stressed the Kingdom his emphasis was not upon the Kingdom in its other aspects. What Peter emphasized was always the keys to the Kingdom—the beginning, the introduction to the Kingdom. And that is in keeping with the circumstances when he was called. You remember that Peter was called quite differently from John or Paul. Peter was called when he was casting a net into the sea, and that characterized his ministry throughout his life. He is always the one who is starting something, drawing in something. By casting the net, you get fish—all sorts of fish. That is the ministry of Peter, and he stops there.

You must not think there is some little conflict between Peter and Paul. It is very easy for us to misunderstand; to think, 'Oh, there must be something going on between Paul and Peter—they are not one.' You must remember that the specific ministries given to these men are different. The specific ministry given to Peter is to be the one to start something, to begin something; to be the one who holds the key to open something, the one who is the first to go into something. That is the 'Peter' line of ministry.

## PAUL

Then Paul comes in. He is a servant of the Lord, but he is a different one. That does not mean that Paul did not preach the Gospel; it does not mean

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that Paul threw away ground covered by Peter ; but the point is: Paul went further. What God entrusted to Paul was to build the Church: to bring Christ to His people, and to bring His people to comprehend what the Lord has for them, what is His mind concerning them. He was shown, he had seen, that heavenly reality, and he was a man trying to build the gathered-in people according to that.

Let me illustrate. You remember the vision that was granted to Peter before he started out to go to the Gentiles in Cæsarea. He saw a sheet coming down from Heaven with all manner of beasts and animals. That is Peter. Peter's ministry is a ministry with a sheet—or a net—putting something of everything into it. It is God-ordained ; something coming out of Heaven. His ministry was to bring as many as possible to the Lord.

But our brother Paul is different. He is not a man holding a sheet. He is a tent-maker. A sheet in Peter's hand becomes a tent in Paul's hand. A sheet is something not formed into anything, not built into anything. But here you have Paul coming along, a tent-maker, a builder of the House of God. I do not mean to say he could do it in his own strength. Under the sovereignty and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Paul is the builder of the House of God. Something takes definite form. It is not a question merely of so many souls saved. Paul never experienced anything like three thousand. That is Peter. The ministry of Paul is to build them together according to that heavenly vision which God has given him. God does not want His people merely to become converts, 'going to church', sitting and hearing good sermons, and saying, 'I am a good Christian'. He is not even greatly interested in special experiences, such as 'second blessing', 'sanctification', 'deliverance', or whatever name you may use. There is something else in the mind of God, and that is a New Man from Heaven: Christ as the Head, the Church as His Body—Christ and the Church to make up *the* Christ.

It is good to look through the Scriptures to find *the* Christ. How blessed it is that in the mind of God it is not only the question of Jesus Christ. Many times it is Jesus the Christ, and not only Jesus the Christ—many times it is simply *the* Christ. You will find that it is not only the question of a personal Son of God, but that God is bringing in many sons, not merely as individual sons, but many sons as one together in the Son. He is gathering a people, forming the whole people of God, making one unit before God ; all the people of God forming into one Man, and that Man ex-

pressing the heavenliness and the life and the glory of the Son of God.

That is what God is after, and Paul is the man used by God to be the steward of that ministry, to bring that in to His people. We do not in any way discredit Peter. But what we want to see is this. Paul is the complement, or the supplement, of Peter. Paul goes beyond Peter, but not to the destruction or discredit of Peter. Even brother Peter recognised that Paul had gone beyond him. It is very good to read the last passage of his last epistle referring to the writings of Paul and classing them with the other Scriptures. It needs grace to do that. He had to come to a place where he saw that the teaching of Paul was complementary and supplementary to his.

Paul went further. He was a builder. He himself said he was a "masterbuilder" (I Cor. iii. 10). He laid the foundation—the foundation of Jesus Christ—and then he built on that. 'If you build on any other foundation', he said, 'you are counted out. You must build on the foundation of Jesus Christ. But it all depends *how* you build, and the question of how you build is *with what* you build.' Paul tried to show us what the Lord is after. Through his ministry, he showed how the people of God should be built and knit together to reveal the Son of God, to reveal the Christ of God.

But then difficulties came in. In his letter to the Philippians, as the apostolic age was drawing to its close, he tells us why. "All seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ" (Phil. ii. 21). Writing to Timothy, he says that all they of Asia have turned away from him. Who are these people of Asia? They are the churches, seven churches, and the Lord took them as representative churches of all the ages (Rev. i. 11)—so all the churches on earth had departed. Then he said that during his defence no one was standing with him, he was all alone ; and yet he could look up and say, "The Lord stood by me". There was a great departure at the end of the apostolic age.

#### JOHN

After Paul had gone, the Lord brought in another vessel. He brought in John. Now, the ministry of John is quite different from the ministry of Peter. John was never given the ministry of starting something. The Lord did not use him that way. John was not given the stewardship of the mystery of the Church. That is not what he was trying to bring to the people of God. John has nothing beyond Paul. In Paul's ministry, the things of God reach a climax, an absolute, and you cannot im-



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prove on that. If something is complete you can never improve on it. The ministry of Paul is the full thought of God in regard to His own counsels formed before the foundation of the world. In the eternity past, God had a counsel, a plan, something in His mind to bring about. Bit by bit, age after age, He sought to bring in something, and in this special age He disclosed His thought—that which was in His mind in eternity past as to what He purposed to do. That was the special ministry of Paul. Paul was given something from the eternities, from the very heart of God. To improve on that ministry of Paul, then, you have to improve on God, and that is not possible. That is absolute.

Then why bring in a John after a Paul? What was the need for the ministry of John? Because at the end of the apostolic age the enemy came in, and the people of God departed from the ways of God and failed. Even with the Ephesian vision, the people failed. The church in Ephesus is the greatest failure. If you compare the first epistle to the Ephesians with the second epistle to the Ephesians (Rev. ii. 1 - 7), you will see what a difference there is. Those two epistles show you where they are. Something has happened. Now John came in—for what? Not to lead further, but to restore. You will find that, throughout the New Testament, the ministry of John is always restorative. He does not say anything new, he does not bring up anything further, but he always tries to bring back to something lost.

That is exactly what John was doing when he was called. Peter was called when he was casting a net into the sea; Paul was called when he was a tent-maker; but John was called quite differently. He was a fisherman, just like Peter, but was not called when casting a net into the sea. He was called when he was on the shore and mending his net. When you mend, you try to bring something back to the original. Something has happened, something has been spoilt, and you try to restore it to its original condition. And that is the special ministry of John. He is always trying to bring us back to the original.

## JOHN'S WRITINGS

You know, John's Gospel is the last of the four Gospels. His Epistles are the last of the Epistles, and his Revelation is the last book in the whole Book of God. All his writings are the last. So in John's Gospel you find everything is different. He touches almost nothing as to the work of the Lord, as in Mark's Gospel. He touches nothing as to the commandments of the Lord, as in the sermon on

the mount in Matthew. He is not interested in what you should do if people take away your coat; he is not interested in whether you should go one or two miles. That is not the point. His burden is the life of the eternities: 'If you go back to that', he says, 'everything will be all right.' He is quite different from Luke. He does not mind as to outward things; he is not concerned with genealogies. His whole burden is this. 'Everything here now is broken—get back to that life. If you get back to that, Peter will be preserved and Paul will be preserved.' He has nothing new to offer. He does not take us further, for the farthest point has already been touched by God. His revelation is to bring people back.

If you read through the Gospel of John, you cannot but be impressed with the fact that the first chapter is the key to all the chapters following. You find in the first chapter you have grace and truth, the two lines coming from Christ. "The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (i. 17). Throughout the Gospel you find the question of truth on the one hand, and the question of grace on the other hand. Truth will always make demands, and grace will always be there to supply. In the incident recorded in chapter viii, concerning the woman, you find truth was there. The Lord did not say, 'You have not sinned'. The Lord did not tell the Jews it was all right,—that He did not mind. No, the Lord said: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (viii. 7). The truth was there. 'She has sinned and she ought to be judged, but let him who has not sinned cast the first stone.' The truth was there, but grace was also there. When all had gone out, the Lord said: "Neither do I condemn thee". Throughout the Gospel of John, you will find truth and grace meeting every time.

When you come to the epistles of John, you find something different. You never hear anything about grace, about truth as truth. No, it is written at a later date. A further recovery is necessary. You find everything refers back. "God is light" (I John i. 5). "God is love" (I John iv. 8). What has been *truth* in the Gospel becomes *light* in the epistle. What has been *grace* in the Gospel becomes *love* in the epistle. Why? That which is light in God, when translated to men becomes truth. That which is love in God, when it comes out to men becomes grace. Love goes back to God, but grace stays here. Everything that is in God is light and love, but coming out to men it becomes truth and grace: so even grace can be misused, truth can be mishandled. But God is light and God is love, and

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you cannot get up there and touch that—that is beyond touch. John takes you right back there, back to the Throne. He has nothing new, but he brings us back to the original, so that what has been given us by Peter and by Paul can be preserved, and we can enjoy the good of it.

Then we come to the last book, in some ways the most important book, in the whole Book of God—the Revelation. I think none of us could ever read that book without realising that it represents the supreme restoration. It is exactly the opposite of Genesis. Everything that came in at the beginning is now turned back. But more than that—what is now brought in through John at the end is more than what we lost at the beginning—far more. God began in a garden and He finished in a city. What God is going to do, God will do, and in His own mind He has already done it. Nothing can shake that. What has been the Church in Paul becomes the Holy City in John. He has shown nothing new, but he has shown that that thing will be carried into effect. He has brought us back to the original.

### THREE MINISTRIES

So we have the three ministries before us. We have Peter, with the ingathering of souls; then we have Paul, the great builder, building according to the heavenly vision; and then, when that fails, we have John coming in to point out that there is still something before God that has never been touched.

In speaking to Christians—including leaders—in various countries, I find that they all say one thing. 'Do you mean to say it is possible to have something according to God here? It may perhaps be possible in your time—but how about the next generation? It will be just like all other things—it will go to pieces.' Yes, if you look at Paul. But, praise the Lord, there is still the question of John coming in. You cannot touch that. What God has been doing is something eternal—not just something for ten years, fifteen years, first generation, second generation. It is 'from generation unto generation'. What God has in view will never end. He will never change. John brings in something to supplement Paul, as Paul brings in something to complement Peter. John shows us that that something can never be touched. In the Heavenly City, we find the Body principle more fully worked out. When the life of the eternities has a free course in us, we shall find that everything of the Lord, everything that is according to His thought, will be manifested on earth by us.

We do not want to be doctrinal. It is always a snare, and any mental grasp of things will not take us very far. Before I go on to the practical side, let me just touch on one passage. When Peter was speaking to our Lord about John, what did the Lord say? "If . . . he tarry till I come . . ." (John xxi. 22). The ministry of John in perpetuating the ministry of Paul is going to go on—nothing can stop it. The purpose of God is going to get through: no one on earth can ever stop that. He is going to bring it through and we are going to see it. No one can touch that "till I come". That is settled.

### PRACTICAL ISSUES

Now the practical side. What does it mean? It simply means that it takes three ministries to make the Church perfect. It takes the ministry of Peter to start with; it takes the ministry of Paul to build things up; and it takes the ministry of John to bring things back, if there is need of it.

Some of us are serving the Lord in mission fields. I praise the Lord for calling us into His service, but I would like to ask this question. Is your ministry purely Petrine, or something more? That is the point. Do you mean to say that, with the full thought of God revealed through Paul, you will be satisfied with only bringing in souls for the Lord, as Peter? Or may we go a step further for the Lord to realise His full thought? Dear brethren, this is a great challenge. I know that, with many, the whole thought is that, if they are evangelical, that is good enough. If they can win souls for the Lord, it is good enough. Now, we do not look down on that—far from it! That is not the point. We bless God for the Petrine line of ministry. Without the Petrine ministry, we might have nothing to build. I would we might double and re-double our efforts for bringing in souls. We have got to go out for souls for the Lord; we want converts. But do you stop there? If they be converted, that is good: so many units—three thousand or five thousand units—all Christians, yes; maybe all going on spiritually, yes; but have they ever seen that "one new man" that God is building?

### ONE NEW MAN

That vision is very costly. It costs all that is natural in man. All that has to go out. In that one new man nothing natural can have a place. A great 'minus' work has to go on. Something has to be 'minused' if you are to have that Body. The Cross has to dredge and to cut deep channels

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to rule out all that is natural. It is costly.

Then another question comes in. If we stand on the ground of the Body and we hold fast the Head, we find that we can only have one Head—we cannot have two. You will find that every human head has to be chopped off in order to give Headship to that One, the Christ of God. You will find that you cannot go on always trying to choose between obeying God or obeying man. If you go on to see the heavenly Man, that means that you have to hold on to the Head. You cannot have any other Head than that One. That will bring you into difficulties. You will find it conflicts in many ways with man—with system, organization, tradition, human ideas and notions. Other heads have to go; then you can hold fast to the Head. It is costly.

God is not after myriads of Christians as units; He is after one new Man. One day I was preaching the Gospel in a Chinese village. A Chinese scholar came up and said to me, 'Mr Nee, you preach your religion to bring us poor sinners to Heaven. I do not think I will get in because it will be so crowded!' I said, 'That is a great mistake. Heaven will never be crowded. Throughout Heaven there will only be one Man, not two! There is only one Man in Heaven.' Praise the Lord! The simple reason I shall be there is because I was in that Man. The thought of God is one Man: Christ as the Head, and we the members. You will find that this will cut into and break the present system of things if you are faithful to God.

So do you mean to say that you will be satisfied with only soul-winning? Please do not misunderstand. In no way do I look down on soul-winning. The Petrine line of ministry is important—in fact it is the first ministry in the New Testament to bring in—but you must not stop there. If you want to go on with God, you must follow on with the Pauline ministry to that heavenly Man, and build your converts into that.

## THE WORK OF GOD

Outward Christianity to-day is almost in ruins. I feel greatly distressed about it personally. The conscience of the people of God has not been exercised about it—they take things as a matter of fact, and many even take it as if it ought to be so. But the point is that God has something from eternity, and He has made that known. If you have caught a glimpse of the heavenly Man that God is after, how can you ever be satisfied with anything less? It is impossible. Is it good enough if my work and God's work do not coincide, if my plan and God's plan differ, if my aim and God's aim are not one? Am I here to do the Will of God

or to do my own? Not my work, not the work of my society, not the work of my institution, but the work of God.

The Lord knows that the whole failure of organized Christianity is such that it seems as if darkness reigns. There is only one prayer in my heart: that God will bring us back to see something that is in Him. There is no need to try to act on Body principles. You have to see it. I do not mean, see the reason of it or the reasonableness of it; I mean to *see it*. Once you have seen the thing, you will never be satisfied with anything less. If you only see the reason, you have to remind yourself many times, otherwise you forget it. If it is a doctrine, a teaching, it often seems as if we have to hold on to it, but when we have *seen* something, it is quite a different matter. Revelation never enlightens you to teach you something about the reasonableness of the teaching or the doctrinal side of the teaching. Revelation always reveals something that is of God: a heavenly reality is opened to you: you have a glimpse of that which is before God—that reality, that something, back of all things. When that is seen, we shall re-value our works, our purposes. May God give us grace that our interests may be so identified with His that we can say, 'All that He has is mine, and all that He has not I gladly lose.' It is so very easy to be bound up by opportunities, so-called, by position, by influences, so-called, and miss the best of God. May God show us what *He* is doing and how we may come into it.

## 'OVERCOMERS'

We praise God for bringing in the ministry of John. God meant that we should have a Petrine ministry, but please remember, He will never be satisfied with that. He wants us to go on along Pauline lines. But people will not believe that the Pauline is possible, so we have to go on to Johannine ground. What do we mean by coming on to Johannine ground, or coming into line with John's ministry? I would like to point out just a little concerning the difference between the teaching of Paul and the teaching of John about the churches.

What the Lord has spoken through Paul concerns the local expression of the Body of Christ, local churches expressing that one Body. If nothing has come in to break that, you will find local companies of the people of God in this locality or that locality to express that Body—only one Body being expressed in different localities, not different bodies. But we know how things happened. God came in, the Lord intervened from Heaven, touched a new note concerning the Body and concerning the churches. That is the reason why the second and

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third chapters of Revelation are so very precious. You find in those chapters that the Lord used John to bring in something more concerning the churches. What is it? Those seven promises to the overcomers. That is John's ministry. John's emphasis, at the time of general departure, of general ruin, is this: God is looking out for a company of His people as overcomers in the churches.

Now, what is the meaning of an overcomer? Firstly, we must not misunderstand and think that overcomers are Christians who are abnormally good, and therefore are overcomers. Please remember: overcomers are simply *normal* Christians. All the others have become sub-normal. Overcomers are simply normal Christians—they have no special credit. God had a definite thought. Overcomers are those who come up to that thought of God, who see what God is after and come up to that.

You must not think that, because there is a general departure, therefore God is asking me to take a different line from that revealed through Paul. It does not mean that, because the Pauline line of ministry has been rejected and forsaken by so many, therefore that is how things are, what can we do about it? 'We must just try to keep ourselves straight on certain lines, and allow certain things which are hopeless—we cannot do anything about them.' The overcomers are not certain imaginary people who have gone further than Paul. They are simply the people who have come back to the original thought of God. God, after all, has not departed from His full thought. The thought of God is still to have a heavenly Man, and overcomers are just those who come back to that.

Overcomers are those who stand into the ground of the Church and hold to that ground. This is something which the Church, *as* the Church, ought to have done, but which it has left undone. Overcomers are those who are raised up by God to stand in the gap and *be* the Church—although they are

only part of the Church—in representation.

Overcoming does not mean strictly in John's writing the question of personal overcoming. It is not overcoming along the line of personal holiness or deliverance, or the so-called 'victorious life'. That is not the overcoming spoken of by John. The overcoming spoken of by John is the overcoming in the situation, in holding a situation for God. It is not the question of overcoming sin—that is deliverance. It is something else. It is a question of holding a situation for God in dislodging Satan from his present position. That is the overcoming spoken of in the Word. To-day, with the general departure, God has not changed His mind. He is not a man, so He will not change. That is the position to which we have to return.

I have to confess that I would like to persuade and to entreat that we would go on to the full thought of God. But persuasion is useless if we do not see it. We shall simply say, 'In my situation it is difficult—impossible. I cannot do this.' There will be many hypothetical conditions which we do not know how to manage. But the point is, friends: Do not be satisfied with a Petrine ministry. You must not think it is not glorious. Praise the Lord, our salvation depends on that. We come in that way. But go on with Paul—go on with the *full* thought of God. As to the outworking of the whole thing, how things should be adjusted, what steps should be taken, it is not for me to say. God will say it, if you care to hear, as He has already said to many of us. He will show what is in keeping with the position of the Body and with the vision of the Body.

May the Lord open our eyes to see what He is after! May He give each one of us grace, according to our calling, to minister in, and to receive, at whatever cost, these *three* ministries of the New Testament. May we not fall short of the thought of God!

W. N.

"WE know from his [Paul's] own writings that the great truths concerning Redemption and the Church of God were specially revealed to him, as a vessel chosen to make them known amongst men, and it is quite clear from his writings that his apprehension of these Divine mysteries permeated his whole being. How intensely then must he have felt the coldness and apathy with which his teaching was met in some quarters, to say nothing of the suspicion and even opposition shown by certain sections of the Christian community. It is easy to imagine that the temptation sometimes must have come to him with no little strength, to cease from the endeavour to maintain fellowship with the Churches in Judea, amongst whom his doctrines seem to have made little, if any progress. So far from yielding to this temptation, we find Paul habitually seeking, as opportunity offered, to strengthen the ties between himself and his brethren at Jerusalem".

D. E. HOSTE. (Quoted from his biography)

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS  
SHINING IN THE DARK

**‘WHY** should Christians be like cats’ eyes?’ This was the question with which Jack greeted his mother when he came home from school for his holidays. His mother did not know the answer, but she knew Jack well enough to be sure that he could not keep his secret for very long and that she would soon hear the whole story if she asked no questions but just waited.

His father had gone to fetch him home by car, and for business reasons could only return late, which meant that they had to drive much of the long journey after dark. Jack had never done this before, so was thrilled when they left the street lights behind and drove out into the darkness of the arterial road. He was still more thrilled when his father switched on the car headlights to show rows of bright double lights, shining along the road surface as far as one could see. His father told him that these were ‘cats’ eyes’, and they certainly looked rather like the green, gleaming eyes of the school cat.

Really they were reflectors, set along the dividing line of the road to keep the drivers in their proper lanes, and so to make it easier and safer to drive at nights. They looked like rows of twin lights, set in the road, but really they had no light of their own, but simply shone back the strong light which was played upon them. Though he was quite young, Jack knew this. What he did not know, however, was what would happen if they were crushed. He knew how easy it is to break a light, for he had dropped his own torch a few days ago, and now it would not work at all. So when he saw a heavy van pass right over the shining row of little lights, he naturally expected them to be crushed to bits. Imagine his surprise, then, to find that, when the van had gone past, the cats’ eyes were twinkling as brightly as ever! ‘How did that happen?’ he asked his father. ‘Was it that the wheels of the van just missed the reflectors? If so, it must have been a very near miss!’ ‘No’, answered his father, ‘it was simpler and even more wonderful. No amount of kicking or crushing could ever put out those lights.’

This was no credit to them, he explained, but was due to a very clever arrangement by which they were set in the ground. As the heavy cars passed over their heads, they just sank in their beds and waited for them to go on. Then they came up again, unhurt and ready to keep on with their

good work of showing people the way. This seemed hard to believe, and made Jack wish that he could get out of the car and tread on a pair of these lights for himself. It was dark, though, and his father wanted to get him home, so he had to be content with watching the effect of passing cars. There was no doubt about it! However often the reflectors were pressed down, and however great the weight which passed over them, they always came straight up again and shone as brightly as ever. ‘Like Christians’, said his father.

After a few moments he asked Jack this question: ‘Why should Christians be like cats’ eyes?’ Jack was good at answering questions like that, and was able to give his father three reasons. Firstly, because they have no light of their own, but reflect the light of Christ. Secondly, because the reason for their shining is to show people the way. Thirdly, because hard blows and knocks do not stop them from shining.

His father told him that this was very good, but that there was a fourth reason. Jack waited to hear it, but his father, instead of telling him, asked him another question. ‘Who do you think keeps those cats’ eyes clean?’ Who, indeed? For there was one task which Jack did not like, and that was brushing his shoes. They so soon got dirty again! One little walk out in the dust or mud, and all the shine was off them. These reflectors spent all their time in the dust and slush. He wondered who on earth had the thankless job of cleaning and polishing them. It was then that his father explained how a clever man had thought of a simple plan to keep them always clean by having them mounted in such a way that the glass eyes brush against rubber pads every time they move up and down. The rubber pads in the ground are like two fixed eyelids, rubbing off from the reflectors all the dirt which has been thrown on them. This means that their being pressed down or run over helps to keep them clear and bright.

‘There’, said his father, ‘you have your fourth reason—the more they are trodden down, the more they shine’. The Lord who made us to shine for Him has made it possible for us to keep on shining through all the hard knocks of life, but, better still, He has made it possible for those very knocks to make us shine the brighter. The apostles were like that. When they were beaten for Christ’s sake, they went home “rejoicing that they were counted wor-

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thy to suffer dishonour for the Name" (Acts 5. 41). Stephen was like that, too, for his persecutors "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts 6. 15). In those early days the Christians were wonderful light-bearers, showing the way of life to all around them. Trouble often came to them, but by the grace of God it only made them shine all the brighter.

When Jack told his mother about the lessons he had learned from the cats' eyes, they looked for a text which would suit the subject. The best one which they could find was Romans 8. 37: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." I wonder if you can find a better?

H. F.

**I**T is essential to the right consideration of this subject (that is, the Church) that the magnificence of the New Testament concept of the Church be apprehended. In the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians the view of the Church which is Christ's Body is set forth. It is there seen as the ideal, invisible, indivisible, inviolable company of the redeemed of the present age. None but the truly regenerate have part therein; none, save the elect, partake of its blessedness. Failure and defection are unknown to it. Into it the pretender and the hypocrite cannot come. Breach or division it cannot know. Its unity is unbreakable; its calling and glory heavenly; its relationship to Christ holy and intimate; and its destiny bound up in Him in splendour inconceivable. Through the centuries of our era, each marching generation but brings a contribution to it. While historically its members are being called, one by one, and incorporated into it, in its completeness and glory it is ever before the eye of God. Indeed, it has been in His heart from before all times. From their heavenly vantage points the angelic orders observe it, and are impressed and enlightened concerning the manifold wisdom of its Divine architect. Through the swift ebbing years of this age Christ Himself is its builder, adding stone to stone to this temple ex-

ceeding magnificent, Himself the while abiding that day when at last, complete, sanctified, beautiful, spotless and radiant with heavenly glory, it shall be presented to Himself and taken into the full enjoyment of an eternal association of blessedness, the features of which are at present undisclosed.

SELECTED

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All through the Christian age a minority of believers has endeavoured to carry out in corporate life these scriptural principles [i.e. of the Body of Christ]. The bitterest and most implacable opposition has come to them, not from the world, but from organized Christendom, that is, the system that men call the Church. By this powerful organization they have been in turn oppressed, misrepresented, persecuted, reviled, ridiculed, and ignored. But their persistence from century to century has supplied the proof of the practicability of these principles and of such a Church being in the will of God.

SELECTED

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## FAITH UNTO ENLARGEMENT THROUGH ADVERSITY

## I. INTRODUCTORY

*Reading : Psalm cxviii.*

**T**HE real title of this Psalm is the 'Passover Hosanna Psalm', and its theme is faith unto enlargement through adversity. Martin Luther called this Psalm *his* Psalm, and I think his life is a very good commentary upon it. We know why he made it his Psalm. He might well have been the originator of it, so true was his life to all that is here. It is just an explanation and a summing-up of all his experience. 'This is *my* Psalm', he said.

This Psalm was really born out of experience, and it is that that makes it live. There lies behind it very deep history, especially in two particular connections.

## THE BACKGROUND OF THE PSALM

In the first place, this Psalm, whose composer no one seems to know, was at least adapted to, if not composed for, the Passover after the dedication of the second Temple. You are probably acquainted with the history of the second Temple. You have to turn, of course, to the book of Ezra, and alongside of it to the book of Nehemiah, and then to the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah; and when you have read those four books, you have the setting of Psalm cxviii. Read again verses 5 to 16 of the psalm in the light of that, and you will see what light is thrown upon these verses. Or take a fragment—verse 10: "All nations compassed me about: in the name of the Lord I will cut them off. They compassed me about . . ." And turn to the book of Ezra, chapter iv, verses 9 and 10. Here you have a whole host of nations all gathered against Ezra and the building of the second Temple. They compassed him about—all these nations compassed him about—they compassed him about like stinging bees. Thus this description of adversity, of opposition, gives this Psalm a very real, practical application: for the remnant which had escaped from captivity had returned to the land with the building and dedication of the Temple in view, and if this Psalm is a description of things as they were then, it is indeed the story of life out of death.

## LIFE OUT OF DEATH

We must remember that the 'I' and the 'me' repeated in this Psalm represent the personifica-

tion of the remnant or of the nation. It is as though the nation were speaking as an individual; it is a collective 'I'. The nation is here saying: "The Lord hath chastened me sore"—how true that was for the seventy years in captivity—"but he hath not given me over unto death" (v. 18); "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord" (v. 17): so that the remnant speaking in these words does really embody this great truth of life out of death and life triumphant over death.

The Lord had promised His people, when they were in that far-off exile and captivity, that He would 'open their graves' and bring them out (Ezekiel xxxvii, 12-14), and here it is. They are out—out of that grave of captivity; and a grave it was. There is no singing in the grave. "The dead praise not the Lord" (Psalm cxv, 17) is a phrase of Scripture, and how true it was away there. "Upon the willows . . . we hanged up our harps . . . How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Psalm cxxxvii, 2-4). 'The dead praise Thee not.' But listen! "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; for his lovingkindness endureth for ever"—four times repeated at the very beginning of the Psalm, and then added as the crown at the end. It is a new Psalm on resurrection ground. So the Psalm, to begin with, is one of life out of death.

## RELEASE FROM BONDAGE

And then quite clearly it is one of release from bondage. These people are so rejoicing in this aspect of their position by the lovingkindness of the Lord, that they are reminded of their earliest great deliverance, and you will see here in the Psalm a reference to the great deliverance from Egypt, and a quotation from the book of Exodus. They bring the two together—deliverance from Egypt and deliverance from Babylon—and the deliverance from Egypt is always, in the Scripture, termed deliverance "out of the house of bondage". The Psalm, then, is the Psalm of release from bondage.

Now, bringing that into the rebuilding of the second Temple, you can see how the remnant were straitened, were pressed, by the nations represented by these people who had been brought into Samaria. What a time Nehemiah had from these people in building the wall! He was pressed on every side. What a time Ezra had! How those prophets

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suffered! The work was held up for more than a decade by reason of this opposition and adversity all around. But the point is that the Temple was built and finished and dedicated, and this Psalm was sung at the Passover which followed the dedication. It says: 'Let men do their worst, let them oppress from every side; let them oppose as they will. The thing is done: the Lord has done it in spite of everything, and we are out.'

#### FROM LIMITATION TO ENLARGEMENT

So "the Lord answered me and set me in a large place" (v. 5). From death to life, from bondage to liberty, from limitation to enlargement—into a "large place"—and this represented a very great thing on the Lord's part. Consider all that the Lord had to cope with—though of course it is putting it in a wrong way to say the Lord ever has to 'cope with' anything, for He is so supremely superior to every situation. Yet what was against His people was no small thing. To bring them out into this enlargement meant the overcoming of tremendous difficulties. "The Lord answered me and set me in a large place." We are reminded of another word, so familiar to us: "Thou broughtest us into the net . . . Thou didst cause men to ride over our heads. We went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place" (Ps. lxxvi, 11, 12). It is a Psalm of triumph over limitation, bringing into enlargement.

#### GOD'S FAITHFULNESS OVER HIS PEOPLE'S UNFAITHFULNESS

The version from which I have quoted uses the word 'lovingkindness'. The version which is perhaps more familiar has the word 'mercy'—"His mercy endureth for ever". I think there is a note about 'lovingkindness'—God's lovingkindness—that touches the heart, when you think of the failure and the unfaithfulness of His own people. What a story it is all the way along, right through the lives of the major and the minor prophets. It would seem that if ever the mercy of God, the lovingkindness of God, could have been exhausted, it would have been so with these people, so terrible were their reactions to the mercy of God. How far they went against the Lord! But here in the end—and with Nehemiah we are in the last book of the Old Testament in historical order, we are at the end of a dispensation—the great note is: "His lovingkindness endureth for ever". When they used that language, these people knew what they were talking about. It was not just poetry or sentiment.

It is, therefore, a Psalm of tremendous consolation. We know our weakness, we know our unfaithfulness, we know how we have failed and do fail. The end of the story is—"His lovingkindness endureth for ever". You see, this is the experience—and, out of the experience, the testimony—of a people who have proved the Lord to be faithful over against their own failure and unfaithfulness, and over against all that men could do against them. It is a Psalm worth having. No wonder Luther said, 'That is my Psalm!'

#### SUNG BY THE LORD BEFORE GETHSEMANE

But there is something even more than that. The second thing about this Psalm is that it is believed to have been the Psalm sung by the Lord Himself and by His disciples on the Passover night. Before I knew this, I used to say, 'I wish I knew what it was they sang when it says that after the supper, "when they had sung a hymn, they went out" (Matt. xxvi, 30). I have discovered that, on very good grounds, it is strongly believed that this was the Psalm that they sang. The Lord Jesus actually sang this Psalm! And His disciples sang it with Him—I wonder if they really knew what they were singing? Let us look at it.

There is no doubt that this Psalm is very largely, if not altogether, related to the Lord Jesus, because it is quoted in immediate connection with Him in several places in the New Testament. For instance: "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord" (v. 26). But the title of the Psalm, the 'Passover Hosanna Psalm', is not based upon that incident of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem, when they cut down palm branches and went before Him singing out of this Psalm: "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord", but upon other grounds. And then you know that on several occasions in the New Testament the words are quoted: "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner" (v. 22). The Lord Jesus used them concerning Himself (Matt. xxi, 42), and Peter used them concerning Christ (I Pet. ii, 7). So this is in a large sense what is called a 'Messianic' Psalm. It is related to the Lord Jesus.

#### THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH

Now, if the Lord did sing this Psalm on that dark night of the Passover and betrayal, what a triumph of faith it was! "I shall not die, but live,



## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

and declare the works of the Lord" (v. 17). Going straightway to Gethsemane, the trial and the Cross—"I shall not die, but live". In faith He has leapt the garden, He has leapt the trial, He has leapt the Cross, right over into the resurrection, "I shall not die, but live." What a triumph of faith through adversity; through suffering! But oh, what a meaning this gives to Gethsemane. Look at the Passover. "This is my body, which is for you" (I Cor. xi. 24). "This is my blood . . . which is shed for many unto remission of sins" (Matt. xxvi. 28). And they sang a hymn; and after the hymn, the next thing—Gethsemane. Look—"Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar" (v. 27). What was Gethsemane? They bound Him and led Him away from the garden, but His interpretation of that binding was of "a sacrifice . . . even unto the horns of the altar"; not tied to the horns of the altar, but bound with a view to being led toward the altar. That is the meaning here: "Bind and lead to the altar."

This puts a new light upon Gethsemane, upon the bonds, the captivity, does it not? This is not man's prevailing, this is not man overcoming, this is not man's triumph. This is the Lamb of God allowing Himself to be led to the altar. For that is the next thing after the singing. He has sung: "Bind the sacrifice . . . even unto the horns of the altar"; and forthwith He goes. He goes to Gethsemane, then to the betrayal, then to the judgment hall, and then to the Cross. There is the Divine side of all that, but here you see faith taking hold of this human side, as men regard and interpret it, and turning it into the redemption of the world.

## THE LORD'S ENLARGEMENT THROUGH THE CROSS

In verse 5 again—"Out of my distress I called upon the Lord: the Lord answered me and set me in a large place." Are these words of the Lord Jesus? Yes: out of His distress He cried: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me". "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly . . ." "Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matt. xxvi. 39, 42; Luke xxii. 44). "Out of my distress I cried . . ."; and, although it does not seem that the Lord answered and delivered, an Apostle says that He was heard (Heb. v. 7). And how was He heard? Have we the proof that He was heard and answered? "The Lord answered me and set me in a large place." A large place? Yes, a very large place He is in. How enlarged was our Lord through His Cross! "How am I

straitened", He said—"how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke xii. 50). This was enlargement through suffering: His passion meant enlargement, release from limitation. But it is the voice of faith. As He goes to the Cross, faith goes beyond the Cross and claims the answer of life, not death; enlargement, not limitation. We could dwell quite a long time upon the enlargement that has come to the Lord Jesus through suffering by faith, and this we hope to do in later messages.

## LIFE, LIBERTY AND ENLARGEMENT FOR US IN CHRIST

But what a testimony this is to the mercy of God. This is the point, I said a little earlier that this 'I' of the Psalm is an inclusive and collective 'I'. In the first place, it is the nation speaking in this personal way, using this personal pronoun 'I'. Now it is taken up in relation to the Lord Jesus—"I shall not die". But, you see, it is not just personal. We know that the Lord Jesus had no need to go to the Cross for Himself. It has often been pointed out that those words used much later by an Apostle—"who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. xii. 2)—should be translated: "who, instead of the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despised shame, and sat down . . .", and it takes you to the mount of transfiguration.

The mount of transfiguration was the seal to the perfection of His moral character. There is no transfiguration or glorification apart from moral perfection, and so God gave Him the great witness that He was perfect, that He saw no fault in Him, that He had passed the scrutiny of the eyes of Divine holiness, and there was not a flaw or a blemish in Him: He was perfect. Therefore He had a right to go from the mount of transfiguration right through to the glory for aye. The glory was His: it was declared His, it was shown to be His, it was His. But instead of the joy that was set in front of Him, He turned round and came down and endured the Cross, and if you will look at the context of these words in Hebrews, you will find that it was all because of ourselves—that He was not going to glory without us. Bringing many sons to glory necessitated His coming down, foregoing for the time being His right, His immediate right, to the glory, and enduring the Cross. You remember how, in that same letter to the Hebrews, it is put into the mouth of the Lord Himself: "I and the children whom God hath given me" (Heb. ii. 13). "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (ii. 11).

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So this glorious Psalm, with its wonderful background in the life of the Lord Jesus and by the Cross of the Lord Jesus, gathers us in. *We* are in this collective 'I'. We come into the good of this. "I shall not die, but live." "The Lord answered me and set me in a large place." It is true, is it not? It is true. We have that life triumphant over death. He has given that life to us; it is ours. It is not only ours in that general way—"the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. vi. 23)—but it is a testimony for all our life, something for now. It is a life which has come out of His death, and has overcome death in Him. It is *for us*. Do not let us lose the force of that by familiarity. It is to be a testimony *every day*. What we have in Christ is to be experienced and manifested every day, and it can be.

But then—and upon this we shall dwell very much more fully—what enlargement we have in Christ from our limitation! How infinitely great is the place into which we have been brought, how immeasurable are the resources, how vast are the ranges, how potent are the forces into which we have come in Christ through His death!

I close by reminding you of this—that while it is all concluded in Him, that where He is concerned there is nothing more to be done in this matter: it is full and it is final, and He has entered into His

rest, has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens; nothing through which we go can add to that, nothing which we experience can take from it; nevertheless, in a sense—not vicariously, not atoningly, not in the sense of His great redemptive work—but in a sense of fellowship with Him while He is still rejected in this world, and of humiliation in fellowship with Him, the principle still remains: that is, that life and enlargement come through adversity and faith's triumph therein. It is the law of life. Faith's triumph in adversity issues in life and enlargement.

We shall see more fully how true that is. The Bible is just full of it. Given a real test of faith, much adversity and opposition, everything hemming in, circling round—"all nations compassed me about, they compassed me about, they compassed me about"—you see, it is reiterated, it is very real—nevertheless, nevertheless, that only constitutes the challenge to faith. Faith looks upon that as its opportunity, and when faith comes out in its declaration over against all that, and says, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord", that is the highway to a new experience of life and a new range of fulness—to enlargement by way of faith's challenge and faith's victory.

T.A-S.

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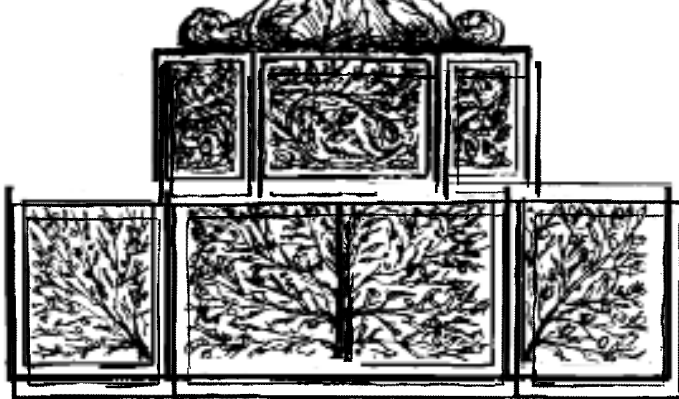
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# A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

"The Testimony of Jesus" Rev 1: 9



## THIS MINISTRY

**T**HE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13—" . . . till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . . "

It is not connected with any 'Movement', 'Organization', 'Mission' or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment', it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S. E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

'Personal' letters should be addressed to  
Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



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EDITORIAL

“WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?”

EVERYONE who has read history, and especially Church history, knows how true it is that people have very often thought of their own time as being the most significant or even critical of all times. The language of crisis has characterized many periods and phases of human life and the course of the world. Many such times while they lasted were regarded as the *most* epochal of all times. Some have certainly been outstandingly revolutionary. We may, or we may not, be right in regarding this present part of the twentieth century as more outstanding and significant than other times, but we should be blind indeed did we not recognise the tremendous changes that are so rapidly taking place.

This is true in the realm of all the sciences, in politics, industry, and not least in Christianity (we use the word in its broadest sense at the moment). The features will be easily recognisable by those who have eyes and are willing to use them honestly, neither closing them nor putting on blinkers. But it is not only these changes in themselves but their significance that God's Watchmen ought to recognise. A great responsibility rests upon Watchmen, as we know from Ezekiel xxxiii. Note, we say *Watchmen*, not watch-dogs. It is easy and cheap to take on the rôle of the watch-dog and yap or bark at any 'suspect', or even bite indis-

criminate. It is different to be really able to discern the portents or implications of developments.

We venture to suggest the following as being significant of a time of very great portent. It may be that it is no other or less than the end-time of this dispensation.

I. GOD'S BIG-SCALE NET OF EVANGELISM

Whatever may be the criticisms, the questions, the reservations as to the incidents and accompaniments, the results and fruits, of big evangelistic efforts and movements, what we have to take note of is that, on a scale unparalleled in history, the call to give Christ His place as Saviour is sounding over the world. When we think of the campaigns and the vast radio broadcasting of the Gospel we are not exaggerating when we say that no previous age in the history of Christianity has known anything nearly so immense. But the impressive feature is that which we may call the Sovereign factor in it. God just seems to have decided that, by the simplest possible declaration of salvation in Christ, millions shall daily be placed in a position of being without excuse when the day of judgment comes.

That is the simplest fact. Criticisms of and

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questions about the instrumentalities and means employed quite apart, it would seem that in His Sovereignty God is determined that men shall know the bare foundation of their salvation. The writer was being given the various criticisms and adverse judgments of a well-known evangelistic campaign in one of America's greatest and worst cities. When the critics had unloaded, he just asked the simple question—"Well, imperfections, weaknesses, and all that apart, is it better for such a city to be made aware of the fact of God than otherwise?" Whereupon the critics just said, "Well, of course, if you just bring it down to that alone, the whole thing would be justified." This is certainly not all that God would have, and it is no argument for the justification of some features, excesses or deficiencies, but, we repeat, may it not be one sign of the end that—on such an immense scale—Christ is being heralded as men's true and only Saviour?

This phase must be viewed in this setting and possible meaning, and not as something in itself. To view it in the former is to give it a meaning beyond itself. To view it as something in itself is to court disappointment, and to take up something that will not bear the weight of God's full purpose.

### II. INTENSIFYING AND EXPANDING DISSATISFACTION WITH TRADITION

This is no view from a cloister window, but the result of world-wide travel and contacts. The positive way of speaking of this discontent is to say that there is a deep and strong reaction toward reality and realism. People of "the old school" are conscious that their traditions are not standing up to new demands and changing conditions. The younger generation is not willing to take these traditions and institutions for granted and as a matter-of-course. Many are standing back and asking questions, not altogether due to lawlessness and a new age, but because of disappointment and a shrewd perception that things are not vital and dynamic in many of the historic and traditional realms.

There was a time when young people recognised, accepted, and were subject to their elders, and took everything from them, just because they were their elders. That time has completely passed—especially in the West—and now everything has got to prove itself before it is accepted. So the hoary institutions, the established order, the "as-it-was-in-the-beginning-is-now-and-ever-shall-be" ecclesiastical mentality is just not respected or accepted. Whether this is all a part of, and in keep-

ing with, the general world-movement toward "self-determination", and the revolt against the controls of many centuries—the swing of the pendulum toward a new "liberty"—or whether it lies deeper in the stirrings of spiritual forces toward the ultimate climax, does not alter the fact that it is here and has to be recognised. The inner fact within the general is that there is a new hunger for bread that satisfies. In a time which has so many appearances of superficiality, cheapness, flimsiness, and frivolity, there is an undercurrent of discontent, and an inarticulate cry for the more substantial. This may be limited to a comparative few, but it is real and by no means insignificant. The booksellers tell us that there is a growing demand for the old spiritual classics, the solid stuff of fifty and more years ago, even for the Puritan writers, and the discerning are reproducing such works.

There is a sense of spiritual loss in those directions where, formerly, there was such a wealth of spiritual measure. We have read the reports of two conferences of leaders of the one body from which more spiritual food has been given to the Church of God than any other in the last century. In these reports there is not only the evidence of tragic loss of measure, but the open confession that it is so. Perhaps we should draw what comfort we can from the fact that there is a consciousness of this loss, but even that is made the more pathetic by the evident absence of any sense of how rightly to recover it. There appears to be no searching for the cause or causes of decline.

However, there undoubtedly are reactions, and it is evident that, where solid food is known to be available, many hungry ones are to be found resorting thither. If that end-time sign of "a famine of the hearing of the word" (in spiritual life, power and fulness) is clearly discernible, it is also clear that not a few are aware of the famine and are distressed. This will be a governing factor in God's having a representative company which answers to His fuller thought at the end.

### III. THE GROWING CONCERN ABOUT THE CHURCH AS SUCH

In these pages we have recently referred at greater length to this matter, but we are increasingly impressed with the growing and strengthening occupation with it in all directions. It is not only in those quarters from which we expect such reactions, the "evangelical", "conservative", or "fundamentalist", but as a part of a tremendous theological swing-round in "liberal" circles there



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is an almost astonishing "new look" in this direction. As typical of this, here are some quotations from foremost theologians of our time.

"How stands the Church, regarded as a spiritual organism, as the Body of Christ, in relation to the institutions we call 'churches' to-day? Which ought the Church to be, primarily? Fellowship or institution? Can there be any doubt where the Pauline stress falls? For him, the Church is pre-eminently a fellowship, not an institution. It is a pure communion of persons united to Christ, its living Head, and to one another through the Holy Spirit: not a highly organised, legally administered institution."

"... if we look at our own 'churches' to-day, are we never smitten with an awful sense of their unlikeness to the Body of Christ as Paul conceived it?"

"Consider, next, the perennial problem of our Church disunion, 'There is one Body', says Paul. For him, the oneness of the Church is as axiomatic as the uniqueness of the Church's Lord. It is with sheer horror that he hears of 'parties' in Corinth. 'Is Christ divided?' And we cannot doubt that if he were here to-day, he would condemn our ecclesiastical divisions as roundly as he condemned the cliques in Corinth." "We comfort ourselves by saying that, in spite of all our denominations, we have a spiritual union with Christians in other 'churches', and we sing (God forgive us)

*We are not divided,  
All one Body we."*

"It is in the mission field that the scandal of our divisions presses most heavily. Converts not unnaturally ask, 'Why force your divisions on us?' ... There is no real answer to this question ... " "When we look at our denominations and divisions to-day, in which one man says, 'I am of Calvin', and another, 'I am of Luther'—can we not hear Paul, across the centuries, indignantly demanding, 'Is Christ in fragments? Were we baptized into the name of John Calvin? Did we profess our faith in John Wesley? Do we pray to Martin Luther?"

"Surely it is a task laid upon the minds and hearts of all who call themselves Christians, of all who believe the great High Priestly Prayer (John xvii) to be a true mirror of the mind of Christ, to work and pray for the healing of the Broken Body of our Lord."

"Or take the question, What is the true mission of the Church in the world? No worthier answer has been given than Paul gave in Ephesians, perhaps the most contemporary book in the New Testament.

"In the forefront he sets the Body of Christ, 'the fulness of him who is being wholly filled'. Christ and His Church, Head and Body, form a corporate Personality, and Christ is 'filled' as the Body grows up into its full spiritual stature. The mission of the Church is to 'gather into one all things' in Christ the cosmic Redeemer."

"Such is Paul's vision, and he speaks with pointed directness to the men of our day, hungry for true fellowship, yet living a 'barbed-wire' existence ..."

The above are but selected extracts; they could be extended to many pages.

A part of their significance, we repeat, is that they come from the top ranking theologians of our time, and not from the general level of evangelical leaders. The main import is that they are just fragments of volumes being written in our time and indicating the new and great concern in this direction.

As we have said elsewhere, it is a tremendous thing to live in a time when there can be so clearly discerned an enforced recognition of God's original and unalterable position that the Church is His means, method, object, and answer. That He is compelling to such a recognition is a matter of momentous account, and, at least, indicates that—even if only in a "Remnant"—God will end where He began.

#### IV. FIERY ORDEAL AND TRIAL

If we add one further sign of the times, for the moment, it would be that movement over the earth in which Christians are being tested by fiery ordeal and trial. A large part of the world is already undergoing this "baptism", and the waters are moving steadily on over widening areas. They are moving from the Far East toward the Nearer and Middle East and the Near East.

While Christians in parts of the West can still meet in conference and debate the question: "Will the Church go through the tribulation?", many believers are asking—"Can the tribulation be any worse than that through which we are now passing?" For one it is all objective, future, and doctrinal. For the other, real, actual, and ghastly. It would be more healthy and valuable were we to

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face the matter from another angle and ask—“Have we reason to believe that the Scriptures point to an end-time in which all artificial supports, ‘foreign’ aids, external forms, and all that which keeps Christians going from the outside, will be stripped off, and they will stand or fall in so far as they really know the Lord and He is more real than all the accompaniments and *things* of Christianity?” This will be the ultimate criterion, whether

in the increasing spiritual pressure upon believers more generally, or by the force of adversity such as that which is now spreading over the world.

God will have reality. For Him His Son is the only reality. He, as such, is the End, the Amen, and God works all His works toward Him, “that in all things he may have the pre-eminence”.

EDITOR

## FAITH UNTO ENLARGEMENT THROUGH ADVERSITY

## II. THE KEY OF FAITH

*Reading: Genesis xv. 1-6; xvii. 1-8; Romans iv. 16-25; Hebrews xi. 8.*

**I**N these passages, we find five things. One, enlargement; two, establishment; three, life; four, faith; five, consummation. All this is to be brought into fulness at the end of the dispensation. The Word of God gives us to understand that at the end God will have a state of Divine fulness corresponding to the word ‘enlargement’: at the end, God will have things established, fixed: at the end, God will have things wholly characterized by life: and all this will be through tried and proved faith. You will recall how this end is brought into view in the symbolism of the city—the holy city, new Jerusalem, seen as coming down from God out of heaven in the last chapters of the Bible. Here is Divine fulness: everything brought to a state of finality, establishment, and all characterized by life—illustrated by the tree of life, the river of water of life, and other symbols. But leading up to this, all the way along, is the matter of tried and proved faith.

As we look at the Christian world in our time, we realise that these are the great things which are supremely necessary. There is need for spiritual, Divine, enlargement—things are so small spiritually; for spiritual establishment—things are so weak and uncertain, so variable and inconsistent, without assurance, without certainty; for Divine life—how great is the need for more life, heavenly life, a greater fulness of life amongst the Lord’s people! But, while we recognise these things to be the crying needs, we should probably all be prepared to admit that the only way to

these things is for the Lord’s people to be really tested, really tried. We do not like the idea, but we realise that everything needs to be put to the test, to be proved, in order to be established. And we are in fact already very conscious of a new movement of God amongst His people really to test their faith, to try their faith, to bring faith to maturity.

Now this would seem to have been God’s pathway for His people all down the ages: by tried, tested, proved and established faith to bring to enlargement, establishment and life more abundant. These are laws of the ways of God, principles of His dealings with His people. Let us, then, in the first place, take a comprehensive view of this matter, before coming to the practical applications. The Bible has many angles. If you take it, and look at it from one standpoint, you may think that that is all that the Bible is about. You seem to be able to gather up the whole of the Bible into that one thing. It might be sin, judgment, death—it is an aspect, an angle. Or it might be righteousness and life—it is another angle. Give the Bible another turn, and the same thing seems to be true again. It has many such angles, and every one of them seems to be comprehensive. If the Bible is like that, you can see the whole of it by just turning it a little from one angle to another.

## FAITH THE KEY TO LIFE AND ENLARGEMENT

Now, you will see how true this is in the very clear instance that we have before us—the matter of enlargement by life through faith. It would be very easy to gather all the Bible into that, and to

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say that that is what the whole Bible is about. Of course, it is not, but it is one very comprehensive angle. You will at once see how that theme runs right through. But suppose we change the metaphor, and say that there is a whole bunch of keys to the Bible—quite a large bunch of keys—every one of which seems to be a master key to open the whole of the Bible; and on this large bunch of keys there seem to be three that are linked together, so to speak, on their own separate ring. Those three keys are—faith, life, enlargement.

Faith opens the first door. That door leads to the next, which is life, and through life to the next, which is enlargement. Those three things always go together through the Word of God. Of course, this is clearly seen by the opposite. Unbelief is always shown in the Scripture to result in limitation. Where there is unbelief, you just do not get any further—you stop short and stop dead: there is no enlargement, and therefore there is no life, no greater, fuller life, beyond. You cannot separate these things; they always hang together—faith, life, enlargement.

All the great crises in the history of God's people, as recorded in the Scriptures, had these three features. Beginning right at the beginning, with Adam, in the first chapters of Genesis, it is perfectly plain there that the whole question of establishment, of enlargement and of life hung upon faith, and that when he refused, or ceased, to believe God, that was a dead stop, a full stop. There was no more. At that point death entered in. The possibility of fellowship with God, and of all that God can mean in the life, hung entirely upon his faith—or upon his refusal to believe. If only he had believed God, the way would have been wide open to enlargement, establishment and life, continuous and unceasing.

Moving on in the book of Genesis to chapters xv and xvii, some passages from which we have placed at the head of this meditation, we come to Abraham. The Lord comes in with Abraham on this line of enlargement, of establishment and of life. Those are the three great things that sum up Abraham's life with God. And everything hung upon faith. All that God said about this multiplying, this tremendous increase and enlargement; about the finality of things—establishing him in the covenant for ever; and about this wonderful principle of life—so apparent in the case of Abraham, when death would argue that there was no prospect at all in himself or in Sarah or any situation, yet life is in view in spite of it all—all those things just hung upon faith. He believed God. If he had not, there would have been nothing.

In the book of Exodus, we find the great crisis in the national life of Israel—the deliverance from Egypt. Chapter xii of Exodus just rests upon this: 'The whole question here is that of your release with a view to your enlargement; it is a question of your being established and brought to finality, to fulness; and it is a question of your life.' The central thought of that chapter is perhaps life, is it not? The slaying of Egypt's firstborn, on the one side, and the deliverance of Israel into life through death, on the other. But it all hung upon this matter of faith—faith in action: whether they would take the lamb, whether they would sprinkle the blood, whether they would gird their loins and take their staff in their hand. Everything depended upon an attitude and spirit of believing God.

Passing through Numbers into the book of Joshua, we find that here it is the land that is in view—the land of promise, with all that it meant to them historically and all that it means typically and spiritually. What a matter of enlargement that was! From the wilderness, with all its emptiness and 'pent-up-ness', into the largeness, fulness and liberty of being established in the land. There was never, in God's mind, any thought or purpose of permanence in the wilderness at all. That was only a phase of things to be got through as quickly as the spiritual condition of His people would allow. His thought for them was—into the land and established for ever. The promise to Abraham was that the land was covenanted for ever: finality. And then through Jordan, ruming there between Numbers and Joshua, between the wilderness and the land, and overflowing all its banks, speaking of death to be overcome in its fulness, in its depths; and into the land: here is life triumphant over death. But again, everything hung upon their faith. Would they move in faith? One generation could not do that, and perished in the wilderness. It was left to the next generation to enter the land. These three things rested upon faith.

Passing over the terrible four hundred years covered by the book of Judges—the most terrible book in the Bible, I think—into the books of Samuel, we find a transition toward a new state of enlargement. This phase will end with David and Solomon, with the enlargement of the kingdom beyond anything that had ever been before, with establishment and life. Again, it is all on the basis of faith. It was faith in Samuel's mother, for instance, that brought in Samuel. But we cannot stay with all the detail. At last, as we know, faith was lost, and unbelief prevailed. Once again we see a return to limitation, to bondage, to uncertainty, to spiritual death. It all hangs upon faith.

## A. WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

As we take up the New Testament, we find that the issue is still that of enlargement, of establishment, and of fulness of life, and the question now is—Believe it!—a question of faith. These are the things, for instance, governing the first chapters of the book of the Revelation, where the churches are dealt with. It is a matter here of spiritual enlargement or spiritual limitation: either of being established, or of having the lampstand moved out of its place, with nothing established, nothing final. It is a matter of life, through the Living One who became dead and is alive for evermore. The challenge is on whether it is to be life or death, and it is focused in the one question of faith. Finally, as we reach the last chapters of the Revelation, we find these things brought to fulness, in the great City as a symbolic representation of the Church. How great it is, how full, how enlarged, how solid! It is established. How living it is, too! Abundant life is its most central feature. And it is the very embodiment of tried, tested and proved faith.

Here, then, is the whole Bible gathered into this, and our Christian lives are based upon the Bible, the whole Bible. What does that mean? It means this, that our lives are concerned with spiritual fulness, as we shall see as we go on; with our being established to eternity, and not carried away with time; and with the great matter of Divine life brought into complete triumph over the last enemy, death. And the thing that governs and comprehends the Christian life in these three aspects is the whole matter of faith: tried faith, proved faith, established faith, perfected faith.

## GOD'S REACTION AGAINST EMPTINESS

Let us now look for a few minutes at these words, these terms, that we have been employing. We will take for the present just this matter of enlargement. We can use the alternative word 'fulness'—and we shall do so, quite extensively—but I have here a special thought in my mind in preferring this word 'enlargement'. This whole matter of enlargement, whether the Lord is going to enlarge us, whether we are going to be enlarged, is a very living question and issue, for enlargement is a governing thought of God. All the way through the Bible, as we have seen, God's thought is enlargement. God is always thinking in terms of enlargement, of increase, of final fulness. God never finds any pleasure at all in emptiness and in smallness. God dislikes emptiness, and always reacts against it.

As we open our Bibles at the first page of Gene-

sis, what is almost the first thing that we read? After: "In the beginning God . . .", and then a few words more, we read: "And the earth was without form and void"—that is, 'waste and empty'—"and the Spirit of God . . ." The earth was empty, and the Spirit of God—did what?—reacted against that state of emptiness. It was as though God said, 'This is not My mind at all; this is altogether contrary to My thought. I am against this, and I am going to do something about it.' God would have everything in Divine fulness—that is, in abundance. That is His thought for the earth, and for His people. And so the Spirit of God, brooding over this void, this emptiness, begins to work, and every stage and phase of the Divine activity is to fill. He fills the earth with the vast range of the vegetable kingdom—seeds in abundance and life within the seeds capable of endless production and reproduction. He fills the earth with the immense variety of the animal kingdom. He fills the sea, and says: "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures" (Gen. i. 20). And then, creating man, He says: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (vs. 28). 'I am against this emptiness, this void.' And on He moves on that principle, governed by that thought. Reaching Abraham, He says: "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore" (Gen. xxii. 17). Comprehend that, if you can! That is Divine thought. Beyond all comprehension, God thinks in terms of enlargement.

How much can be gathered up in the Bible on this matter! The Lord Jesus, for instance, came to express the thoughts of God in practical terms, and, amongst many others things, He spoke of a great feast which was made. The guests were bidden, but they did not come—they made excuses. And so the man who gave the feast said to his servant: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke xiv. 15-24). Here we see Christ bringing God's thoughts into this world—'That my house may be filled'. But perhaps in the New Testament the day of Pentecost is the greatest example and expression of this Divine thought. When the Spirit came, a mighty, rushing wind "filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts ii. 2). And then it is applied to each believer: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. v. 18).

## THE DANGER OF PASSIVITY

It is thus clear that enlargement is a governing thought with God. But the Lord Jesus has not only

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pointed out that this is what God would have, but He has said on the other hand that it is exceedingly dangerous to be empty. He spoke of a certain 'house', which was a man, possessed of a demon, an unclean spirit; and He visualised the casting out of the unclean spirit: but, although the house is 'swept and garnished', it is left empty; and, because no other occupant takes possession, the unclean spirit comes back to his old home, taking seven others more evil than himself, and fills the empty house (Matt. xii. 43-45). It is a dangerous thing to be empty, to leave a void. If God does not fill, the Devil will. Beware of negative conditions, of not being positive and not being definite. Beware of vacuums in your heart, in your mind, in your life. David was one day on the house-top in a state of 'vacuum', at a time when kings go out to war (II Sam. xi. 1, 2)—and he was a king, and a warring king. But instead of being occupied in a positive way, he was in a passive state, and we know the disaster that overtook him, from which he never recovered all his life. It is a dangerous thing to be empty. The Devil will see to the filling up of any space that he can occupy. The Lord wants to fill to the exclusion of all else.

### THE FULNESS OF GOD

The ultimate word in this matter in the Bible is: "that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (Eph. iii. 19). Think of that! This is said to believers together in their corporate, related life—to the Church, which is "the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 23). Think of it: the fulness of God!—that is, God coming in in such a way that there is no room for anything else. It was like that at the dedication of Solomon's temple, in the Old Testament. When the priests moved out of the sanctuary, the glory of the Lord moved in and filled the house, and the priests could no longer stand to minister (I Kings viii. 10, 11; II Chron. v. 11-14). When the Lord fills, there is no room for anything or anyone else. That is the fulness of God.

### EMPTINESS THE RESULT OF JUDGMENT

Returning to that word 'void' or 'empty' that we find at the beginning of the book of Genesis, it seems to me that this represents the result of a judgment. That, of course, has already been surmised on other grounds. But the following considerations are perhaps confirmatory. When the Lord sent His people Israel into Babylonian captivity for seventy years, the land became waste.

The land fell into a state that could well be described in the terms used to describe the state of the earth at the beginning—void, waste and empty. Now, the Babylonian captivity of Israel was a judgment upon their unbelief and their idolatry, and the waste state into which the land fell was surely a part of that judgment; and it would therefore seem that "in the beginning", also, the desolation was the result of a judgment upon a former creation.

But what is the point of this? The issue must have been this—as it has always been—that God was not allowed to fill all things. God's place was either shared with other things, or God was driven out. The end of this present world, as is shown to us in the New Testament, is going to be like that. There will be a point at which God will be finally rejected by this world, and will have no place. We are moving fast toward that time. What will be the result? It will be the burning up of this world—judgment, destruction—and a longer or shorter period of desolation before there is a new heaven and a new earth, and all things are created anew. Judgment is always upon this one thing—as to whether God is all and in all, or not. Therefore enlargement—the fulness which is God's thought—rests upon this matter of God having full place; and that is the basis of all testing of faith. God presses this point closer and closer as we go on; whether we will believe God sufficiently to let Him have His place in an impossible situation.

### THE FULNESS OF GOD AS LIGHT

Now, what do we mean by the fulness of God? It is nothing less than the nature of God filling all things. "God is light", the Scripture says (I John i. 5): then where God is there is no darkness, there is no room for darkness; and when God comes in in fulness there is "no darkness at all." It is all "light in the Lord" (Eph. v. 8). And the Lord is moving on this line with you and with me. He is seeking to get us completely out of our darkness into His light; to bring us into the light as He is in the light. And how great a factor is faith in this matter of coming into the light of the Lord, coming to know the Lord, coming into understanding, or whatever expression you may use for light. It is seeing, it is knowing, it is understanding.

But you and I never come into one additional ray of *real* light—I do not mean information, I mean *spiritual light*—except along the line of tests of faith, faith really tested. A sister in the Lord, who felt that she was far too short-tempered, too quickly provoked, said to a dear servant of God,

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'Oh, I do need more patience—do pray for me that I may have more patience!' The servant of God said, 'All right, let us get down and pray now', and so they knelt down and he prayed, 'Lord, do please send more tribulation into this dear sister's life.' And she stopped him and said, 'No, I did not say I wanted tribulation—I want patience.' 'Ah, but', he replied, 'the Word says: "tribulation worketh patience"!' (Rom. v. 3).

Yes: we want more of the Lord, but we are not always so ready to go the way that He would take us in order to have more of Himself. But it is that way—the way of tribulation; and what is tribulation if it is not the testing of faith? We are put into situations where only faith in God will enable us to live and to go on. Yet it is possible—it is so possible. Early last year, during my visit to California, a brother there proposed that we should go to see some dear friends, living about sixty miles away, who had begged that we should visit them. These dear children of God were living in perhaps one of the most worldly, unpropitious, impossible situations imaginable—the week-end resort of all the Hollywood stars. I cannot describe the utter abandonment to the flesh. Our two friends were living in a large trailer, or caravan, right at the centre of a great trailer park, surrounded by all these worldly people in their luxurious trailer homes, in an atmosphere of the utmost sensuality, fleshliness, indulgence. We went in, and had a most blessed afternoon with them on the things of the Lord—a most precious time, with a real touch of heaven—and when we had spent the whole afternoon with them, a brother said: 'Perhaps you will not believe it, but there are sixteen out-and-out Christians in this trailer park. I am going to fetch some of them'. He went across to another trailer, and brought back two dear children of God, elderly, saintly people; and, without any going round matters at all or talking on generalities, we were right on the things of the Lord instantly, and we could have gone on all night. The brother told us, 'We all meet here in this trailer, sixteen of us, and have most blessed times of fellowship.'

Why am I telling you about this? In the most unlikely place on earth—yes, the most impossible place for anything of a spiritual character, for anything really of the Lord—there, right in that terrible place, are saints walking in white raiment, in

living fellowship with the Lord. Do not say, 'Oh, the place I have to live and work in is impossible for any spiritual life or spiritual growth—everything is against me.' Remember that the Lord can enlarge you anywhere if He calls you to be there. Never use the argument of the impossible. Just think of Abraham and the impossible. He came into enlargement, but not because everything was propitious, not because everything made it so easy and was so helpful. No, there can be light in the darkest place if the Lord is there. When I first heard of that situation, I had expressed the wish that those dear friends could have been got out of it, but when I left them I changed my view entirely. I do not know that they would really be the better for getting out of this. This is the thing that is enlarging them spiritually: it is throwing them on the Lord, it is making them prove the Lord. There is nothing here for them but the Lord; everything else is against Him.

The fulness of God is in terms of light, even in darkness; of love—for God is love—in a realm of hatred; of life in a realm of death; and of holiness in a realm of unholiness. "That ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God."

There is much more about this matter of enlargement. It was the governing thing in the sovereign gifts of the ascended Lord. "When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men . . . And he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; . . . and some, pastors and teachers"—for what?—"for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv 8, 11 - 13). Every Divine gift in ministry has fulness as its object and its governing motive.

Let me close with this for the moment, that the test as to whether a thing is of God is always spiritual measure. It is not the measure of our doctrinal knowledge, nor even the measure of our Bible knowledge as such. It is not the accuracy or correctness of our technique in form and procedure. It is the measure of God. We can have all those other things, without there being really any measure of God. That is what counts.

T. A-S.

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## GOD'S PURPOSE AND GOD'S REST

(Extracts from 'A Glorious Church')

### (1) GOD'S PURPOSE

#### (a) IN CREATION

**WHAT** was the purpose of God in the creation of man? God has told us in Genesis i. There we see that man was a distinctive creation. Before man's creation, God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (vs. 26). This was God's design. God then proceeded to create man according to His design: "And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (vv. 27, 28).

God wanted a man: God wanted a man to have dominion: God wanted man to have dominion on this earth.

And God wanted man to be like Himself. This clearly shows that man has a unique place in the creation. Of all created things, man alone was made in the image of God. The man of God's desire was to be totally different from every other created thing.

God sought to meet His own need through man. His creation required that someone should exercise control, and God chose man to be that one. He wanted man to govern, and He wanted him to govern in a specific realm—"upon the earth." "The earth" was to be the sphere of man's dominion. "And God said . . . let them have dominion . . . over all the earth . . . And God said unto them . . . replenish the earth, and subdue it".

But man sinned, and came under the dominion of Satan. It seemed then as though all was at an end. Apparently Satan had triumphed and God had been defeated.

#### (b) AFTER THE FALL

Psalm viii shows that the purpose of God is unchanging. After the Fall, God's will for man and

His requirements of man remained as they had been before the Fall. Though man had fallen, the Psalmist could still sing his song of praise, because he had not lost sight of Genesis i. And God had not forgotten Genesis i! Let us look at the content of this psalm.

"O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (v. 1). Despite the fact that some men were blaspheming the Name of the Lord, and others rejecting His Name, the Psalmist cries aloud: "How excellent is thy name in all the earth!" He does not say, 'Thy Name is excellent', as though he could express its worth: he says, in effect, 'Though I am a poet, I cannot utter its worth—I can only say, "How excellent!"' And it is not only inexpressibly excellent, it is so "in all the earth." That corresponds to Genesis i! If we saw the purpose of God, our hearts would be stirred every time we read the word "man" and every time we read the word "earth".

Verse 2 reads:—"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou established strength, because of thine adversaries, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." The Lord Jesus quotes the verse thus: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise" (Matt. xxi. 16). Even if the enemy should do his worst, God need not deal with him: a praising people can "still the enemy".

Verses 3-6 read:—"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him but little lower than the angels, and crownest him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the work of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." If we had been writing the psalm we should probably have added a parenthesis: '(Alas! man fell: he sinned, and had to be driven out of the garden of Eden, and so failed to reach the goal.)' But, thank God, there was no such thought in the heart of the psalmist, and so he tells the old story, completely ignoring the interlude of Genesis iii. That is the distinctive feature of Psalm viii.

The psalmist concludes his psalm as though he had not so much as noted the fall of man. "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" Adam could sin and Eve could sin;

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but neither Adam's sin nor Eve's sin could reverse the will of God. God's purpose for man was as it had ever been. Oh, God is eternally the same! There is no deviation in His ways: they go straight forward.

## (c) IN REDEMPTION

Genesis i speaks of God's will at the time of creation; Psalm viii speaks of God's will after the fall of man; Hebrews ii speaks of God's will in redemption. Let us now look at Hebrews ii.

"For not unto angels did he subject the world to come, whereof we speak. But one hath somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet" (vv. 5-8a). That was as God originally intended. "But now we see not yet all things subjected to him. But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour" (vv. 8c-9b). In Psalm viii it says that God made man but little lower than the angels; whereas here the writer interprets the term "man" as applying to Jesus. It is at this point that redemption comes in. Hebrews ii. 9 continues: "that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man." God's original intention was that man should have dominion. The Lord Jesus is that Man. Hallelujah! That Man has already overthrown the power of Satan. In that Man God's desire is realised. And that Man is related to us.

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (v. 10). Thank God! His purpose has not altered. As it was at the time of creation, so it was still after man's fall, and so it remains in the day of redemption. God still intends to secure a company of men after the likeness of His Son. As He is, so they too will be; and as He has entered into the glory, so also will they.

But how can such a thing be? "For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one" (v. 11a). Who is "he that sanctifieth"? The Lord Jesus. And who are "they that are (being) sanctified"? We ourselves. We might read the sentence thus: 'The Lord Jesus who sanctifies, and we who are being sanctified, are all of one.'

The Lord Jesus and we have proceeded from the one Source: we are partakers of the one Life; we are indwelt by the one Spirit; and one God is His Father and our Father, "for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (v. 11b).

## (2) GOD'S REST

Rest comes after work. And rest in the fullest sense is only possible when the work is accomplished, and when it is accomplished to a point of satisfaction. If a piece of work is not completely finished, or does not meet with approval, there is no possibility of true rest.

Let us not think it was a trifling matter that God rested after those six days of creation. For Him to be able to rest, something must have been secured. It must have been some very great cause or reason that led God—this God of purpose, this God of abounding Life—to come to rest. How could He? Genesis i gives the reason: "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (v. 31).

God rested on the seventh day. Before the seventh day He worked. But before He worked He had an objective. Ephesians i speaks of "the mystery of his will", of His "good pleasure", of what He "foreordained". God is not only a God of action, He is a God of purpose. He does things because He wants to do them. His outward acts are the result of inward desire. God came to rest because He had done things to His satisfaction. If we want to understand God's heart desire, His plan, His good pleasure, we only need to see what it was that could cause Him to rest. If we see God coming into rest in relation to anything, then we know that that thing was what He was after originally. No man can rest in relation to that which does not satisfy him. This matter of rest is of great significance. Throughout the six days God could not rest. Rest came only on the seventh day. He could rest then because He had accomplished something that rejoiced His heart. God's rest proclaimed His approval: it proclaimed the attainment of His goal: it proclaimed that His good pleasure was realised to a point beyond which there could be no fuller realisation. God is a God who must be satisfied. And God is a God who can secure His satisfaction. He has secured what He wanted, therefore He has entered into rest.

What was it, then, that caused God to find rest? What was it that provided His satisfaction? Let us read again Genesis i. 27, 28:—"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the



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sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Then follows these words:—"And God saw every

thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (v. 31). "And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it: because that in it he rested from all his work which God had created and made" (ii. 3).

God's purpose was to have a man: to have a man who could exercise dominion: to have a man who could exercise dominion on this earth. On the sixth day of the creation God's purpose was attained; therefore on the seventh day He "rested from all His work".

W. N.

## THY KINGDOM COME

### III. THE KINGDOM AND THE NAME

*"Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come."*  
(Matthew vi. 9, 10).

WE have already seen that the book of Daniel has many references to kingdoms, to visions and to warfare. We now turn to find in it various names given to God. There are a surprising number for such a small book, and each doubtless has its own special significance. Our concern is not only Bible study, but a quest for spiritual light on the connection of the kingdom with the Name.

#### THE LIVING GOD

There is one which should serve as a preface to all the rest—"the living God" (vi. 26). There is nothing formal or unreal about Him. Everything associated with Him, including every title, name or description, is *vital*. The Lord has a great number of designations, but He fills them all with vital reality. Not a single one describes what cannot be found in actual living expression. His kingdom is "not in word, but in power" (I Cor. iv. 20); He is the Living God. It is a pity that His people are not always like this. Think of the titles given to Christians: 'believers', 'saints', 'a kingdom of priests'. If only we lived up to them! But when we come to consider the Lord's names we need fear no disappointment. He fills every one of His titles to the full, and proves Himself worthy of them all.

#### REVEALER OF SECRETS

Of course the Lord knows all the secrets. He knows the end from the beginning (Is. xlv. 10); "the darkness and the light are both alike" to Him (Ps. cxxxix. 12). He is the Holder of Secrets.

But He is also the "revealer of secrets" (Dan. ii. 47). He wants to reveal His mind to men; He longs to find those who can share His confidences. It is His good pleasure to make known to His people that which they could never find out for themselves. For this reason He has given us His Word. Those who wrote the Scriptures needed revelation, but we who read them also need the Spirit's enlightenment, if we are to understand them to profit. Not only the apostle who wrote but the saints who read must have the "spirit of wisdom and revelation" if they are to know God's secret—His "mystery", as the New Testament calls it. It is a waste of time to open your Bible if you do not, at least in intention, pray the psalmist's prayer: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. cxix. 18). The Lord wants us to pray this prayer, because He really wants to answer it. Above all, He wants His people to know "the mystery of God, even Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Col. ii. 2, 3). He is the Revealer of Secrets, and we may know Him as such if we wait before Him in the same humility and faith that characterized Daniel.

The only way in which we can understand Divine secrets is by the Lord revealing them to us. None of the wise men of Babylon could discover what God was saying. Daniel and his friends had apparently completed three years' training, and so had acquired much of this world's wisdom in addition to that which was natural to them. None of this helped them. Neither natural ability nor acquired education can teach us the simplest matters of spiritual truth. We learn them only by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Let us believe that God *wants* to give us this revelation; that He really

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longs for us to have the eyes of our heart enlightened. This was one of the differences between Daniel and the magicians. Daniel really believed that God was able and willing to make known His mind—that He was not mocking them by capriciously hiding the secret, but was provoking them to humility and prayer that they might receive light from Heaven. A really teachable spirit is essential to such an understanding.

Such insight may save us from spiritual defeat. The three were not so frightened and overwhelmed as the rest by Nebuchadnezzar's great image, because they knew its end. It "became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors: and the wind carried them away . . ." (ii. 35). Revelation saves you, for it shows you God's viewpoint and delivers you from satanic deception. This principle worked all through Daniel's life: it was his understanding of God's secrets which made him the man he was, and made his service to God so effective. The great criterion of distinction between a mental grasp of ideas about the truth and a heart enlightenment from God is the difference that it makes in life and practice. God reveals His secrets, not to satisfy our curiosity, but to make us spiritually effective in His kingdom.

## THE GOD OF HEAVEN

"And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom . . ." (ii. 44; see also vs. 18, 19). In other places He is called also "the King of heaven" (iv. 37) and "the Lord of heaven" (v. 23). What do these titles imply?

Our general mentality makes us regard Heaven as a location, and, moreover, as a location very, very far away. The three men found that, as a matter of fact, far from being remote, Heaven was very near—it was actually with them in the fire. Or again, when Belshazzar made mockery of the things of God at his drunken feast, the hand wrote on the wall to show him that Heaven was by no means so far away as he would have liked it to be—that it was, indeed, uncomfortably near. This title, therefore, is meant not so much to emphasize where God dwells as to stress what He is like; it speaks of nature rather than location. The "God of heaven" is not just the God who lives in Heaven, but the *heavenly God*. And His kingdom is essentially the heavenly kingdom—or the kingdom of Heaven, as Matthew calls it.

This is the kingdom which we, His saints, are called to share, and to that end we, too, must be characterized by His heavenly nature. When Nebuchadnezzar saw it, he saw only "a stone . . . cut

out of the mountain without hands". It was quite vague and indistinct to him naturally, for apart from the Spirit no man can truly 'see' that kingdom; but in reality there is nothing hazy or ill-defined about the kingdom which is destined to possess all things for God. To the king of Babylon it may have seemed like some hastily seized and ill-prepared missile hurled down from heaven, but we know that it represents a people on whom the Lord has expended infinite time and pains, in fashioning them together in union with His Son. Daniel himself, even to take his place among Nebuchadnezzar's wise men, had to undergo three years' preparation and training. How much more time and trouble must be spent to make him fit for his place in the everlasting kingdom! This apparently shapeless stone is really a refined, highly integrated and spiritually powerful kingdom; its power lies in its heavenliness, which to us is interpreted in terms of humility, purity, faith and love. The New Testament, from the Sermon on the Mount onwards, makes it clear to us what it means to have a share in the kingdom of Heaven. "Without hands" means, not that it is shapeless, but that it is not shaped by human agency. For the Lord is at work all the time—planning, refining, shaping, fitting together—all with a view to our eternal vocation of reigning with Christ. He is working on us, working with us, to make us into a heavenly people.

Daniel's story makes it very clear that this shaping is done mainly in the daily test of ordinary life. He was no cloistered visionary—though he jealously set aside time for the secret place—but he was a man who had to earn his living among men of the world: a business man, and a conscientious and efficient business man at that. How often to-day one hears of Christians who have been so sickened by Christian employers that they prefer to work for unbelievers. How often, too, do Christian employers have to say that they really do not think that they can have a Christian working for them again; the ones they have had have been so unsatisfactory that they would rather not. This is most distressing, but it is all too common. Think of Daniel! Sooner or later every one of the various emperors of his day said, in effect, 'I must have Daniel; he is the man for me!' Chapter vi marks the climax of his long career, and in it we read: "This Daniel was distinguished above the presidents and the satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm" (vi. 3). It is true that this made the others jealous, but with all their anxiety to find some fault in him and the opportunities given by

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the exposed position he occupied, we are told that "as touching the kingdom . . . they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him" (vi. 4). Yet what was there spiritual about his job? It was entirely secular. Earning his living in work which must have been uncongenial to him, surrounded by jealous, malicious colleagues, working for the most capricious of employers, Daniel lived the kingdom of Heaven even in Babylon. There was nothing spiritual in his work except what he put into it, and it was thus that he had fellowship with the God of Heaven.

The kingdom of Heaven is not a matter of offices or titles, but of character. When our blessed Lord was stripped even of his earthly garments, when He had no royal throne, no reputation, no friends, even on the Cross He was King of kings. And when Daniel was stripped of all his earthly dignity and official position, when he was a lonely outcast in a foul den of lions, he only gained in spiritual stature. They could take away his earthly authority but they could not prevent him from reigning, even in the lions' den. He took Heaven with him into that pit: not only the blessedness and peace of Heaven, but Heaven's power, Heaven's authority. Daniel did not describe it like that, for he was a truly humble man. He said that his God had sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths. But the fact was, and is, that those who are in living fellowship with the God of Heaven have ascendancy over all the power of evil. They reign in life even now, and they are being prepared to reign in glory in the eternal kingdom.

### THE MOST HIGH GOD

Few titles seem to us so apt and timely as this one of "the Most High God" (iii. 26). If you have to live in Babylon you need the Most High as your God. Babylon was high in its pride and power: the image was high; the opposition was high: but the four men knew One who was higher than all—the Most High.

They testified to the Lord's superiority over all the riches of this world. Daniel's prophecies open with this simple but powerful assertion that he could find in the Lord something better than could be provided by all the wealth of Babylon. He challenged those concerned to put it to the test, and showed in his own person that there is a sufficiency in the Lord which can be found nowhere else. We must prove and demonstrate that He is the Most High God in such personal experiences,

or it is futile, and worse, for us to be talking about possessing the kingdom.

It was Abram who first discovered the wonders of fellowship with the Most High God, when he received the blessings ministered by Melchizedek. The story, given to us in Genesis xiv, is most instructive. It shows how Abram, flushed with his victory over the four kings, was in danger of entering into some kind of compact with the king of Sodom, or at least of being under an obligation to him. At the critical moment, Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, drew him aside, offered him bread and wine and gave him Heaven's blessing. It was then that Abram found deliverance from temptation and announced: "I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, God Most High . . . that I will not take a thread nor a shoelatchet nor aught that is thine . . ." (Gen. xiv. 22, 23). He did not want this world's riches; in the Lord he had found something better. When you have really tasted of heavenly blessings you do not hanker after earthly dainties. This is the testimony of the kingdom: not the negative niceties of legalism, but the enjoyment of the positive fulness of Divine life and fellowship.

Daniel and the others also testified to the superiority of the Lord's power. Through faith they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire . . ." (Heb. xi. 33, 34). They were nothing in themselves. Few in numbers, friendless in the hour of need, cast upon God in their utter helplessness, they proved again and again that spiritual power is altogether superior to any other kind of influence or authority. In their very persons, they gave the Lord the opportunity which He was seeking, to show that, even here and now, He is the Most High who *rules* in the kingdom of men (Dan. iv. 17, 25, 32). Not least was this testimony seen in Daniel's survival. In the course of this book kings rose and fell, empires changed hands, but this Daniel continued (i. 21). He continued in life, in vision and in ascendancy—all because of his relationship with the Most High God.

They testified to the Lord's superior wisdom. It may sound glorious to be a witness of the kingdom of Heaven, but there is no glory for the flesh. God's wisdom sees to that. He is not going to fight this world's pride by His people's pride, nor is He going to be governed by our ideas. This is a strange experience, this reaching the throne by way of the Cross. We are told that the "little horn" on the head of the beast "made war with the saints, and prevailed against them" (vii. 21),

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and that this is a king who "shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High" (vii. 25), and yet that these very saints are the ones who possess the kingdom (vs. 18, 22, 27). The kingdom of pride is defeated by the meek and lowly in heart. This is God's way, and there is no other.

## THE LORD—JEHOVAH

We can only distinguish this name in our Bibles by the fact that it is rendered LORD and printed in capital letters. In the book of Daniel, the Name of the Great "I AM" only appears in chapter ix, but there it can be found seven times; that is, in perfect fulness (vs. 2, 4, 10, 13, 14a, 14b, 20). This Name is never spoken to the men of Babylon, for it is a precious Name for the covenant people; it is only spoken by Daniel in the holy atmosphere of the place of prayer. What does it mean?

It is the Name of unchanging faithfulness. Daniel was careful in his prayer ministry to keep close to the Lord's promises and declared purpose. He did not pray for what he thought might be good, nor did he suit his requests to the general ideas current in his day. He went back to the Word of God, and concentrated on God's revealed purposes for His people. True, they had forfeited every right to the promises by their sinful unbelief, but he felt sure that the faithfulness of God had an answer even to sin. And he was right. 'Jehovah' is the name of the Redeemer, the One who will "make reconciliation for iniquity", and "bring in everlasting righteousness", in order to "seal up vision and prophecy", or, as this phrase means, 'to make the visions and prophecies come true' (Dan. ix. 24). Those who know such a faithful God can afford to go even into the fiery furnace or the lions' den for the sake of their vision.

It is also the Name of unquenchable life. Moses learnt this Name in the desert, where he saw the flame which burnt on without consuming the bush. It was there that he first heard the great title, "I AM THAT I AM". It is not life which has to avoid death, but life which can go right through it and emerge triumphantly on resurrection ground. None but Jehovah could bring a new Jerusalem out of the ruined city of Daniel's fathers; but He could, and so Daniel prayed on

and continued to hope. No other could ever bring a triumphant and glorious Church out of the confusion and weakness of things as they are to-day; but HE CAN, and so we too must pray on and not lose hope. It may mean the fiery furnace heated seven times for us, but we need have no fears. He will not let us avoid it; He will do better—He will bring us unscathed and triumphant through. He is the God of Resurrection.

## THE GOD OF DANIEL

"I make a decree, that in all the dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed . . ." (vi. 26). In chapter iii a similar thing is said about the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (iii. 28, 29). "The God of Daniel". It is as though Daniel's experiences had added something to the honour of that Name, and had also interpreted that Name to those who could not otherwise understand it. Surely this is the essential function of the kingdom, to make men know what God is like. Those who reign with Christ do not lord it over the rest, but proclaim and communicate His blessedness to the world around.

Daniel achieved this ministry by something more than a word-study of the titles of God. He learned them in experience; he proved them by faith in times of deep trial and need; they became a part of his own inner history. It was only thus that he could give such a testimony to the "God of Daniel". The Lord is seeking to do the same thing in us. He lets us be captives, as Daniel was. He faces us with difficult choices, as He did him. He tests us in our homes, at our business, in our fellowship and in the secret place, in the same way in which Daniel was tested. He leads us into the battle; He may even allow us to be cast into the lions' den; but it is all for this one purpose—to produce in us a powerful testimony to the greatness and glory of His Name. We shall never be anything in ourselves, but if men can see what God does for us and in us—yes, and even through us—they may learn by means of us something of what He is like. All this is involved in 'possessing' the kingdom. All this must happen in our case if we are to pray: "Hallowed be thy name".

H. F.

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## THE CONTROVERSY OF ZION

*"For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense in the controversy of Zion" (Isaiah xxxiv. 8).*

*"For thus saith the Lord unto me, As the lion and the young lion growling over his prey, if a multitude of shepherds be called forth against him, will not be dismayed at their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so will the Lord of hosts come down to fight upon mount Zion, and upon the hill thereof" (Isaiah xxxi. 4, A.R.V.).*

*"A noise shall come even to the end of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations; he will enter into judgment with all flesh: as for the wicked, he will give them to the sword, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah xxv. 31, A.R.V.).*

*"Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh: the Lord will have them in derision. Then will he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure: Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will tell of the decree: The Lord said unto me, Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Psalm ii. 1-9, A.R.V.).*

I want us to consider the meaning of that little phrase "the controversy of Zion". We know that, in the Word, Zion and Jerusalem are often synonymous terms. If there is a difference, it is that Zion denotes the intrinsic values of all that Jerusalem is supposed to represent and contain. We recognise that difference and must keep it in mind. When we come to Zion, we are coming to the high peak, the ultimate significance of all that Jerusalem stands for.

### JERUSALEM THE STORM CENTRE OF THE NATIONS

Speaking of Jerusalem, we know from history, from the Scripture, that Jerusalem has always been, and still remains, the storm centre of the ages. There is a little phrase in the Old Testament

used of Jerusalem that she would be "a cup of reeling unto all peoples" (Zech. xii. 2), and behind the phrase is a picture. It really sets forth a threshold, and on that threshold a cup full, and those who come to that threshold and drink of that cup stagger and reel, are thrown into confusion, and Jerusalem is said, in that picturesque way, to be like that to the nations. The nations coming against Jerusalem would find that on the very threshold they met something that threw them into confusion, completely upset all their calculations. She would be to the nations a cup of reeling. To the nations, yes, that is what Jerusalem truly has been and still is. They do not find that they can just play with Jerusalem, do as they like with Jerusalem. They meet something that is more than Jerusalem, something they cannot cope with.

### JERUSALEM A SIGN TO ISRAEL HERSELF

And not only to the nations. Jerusalem has always been a decisive point to Israel herself, a kind of sign, a barometer, a tell-tale, representing the spiritual condition of Israel. If Jerusalem was in the ascendant, it was because the spiritual life of the people was in the ascendant. If Jerusalem was other than in the ascendant, that represented the spiritual life of Israel, its condition. Jerusalem was always indicating spiritual life, and Jerusalem's security and peace was always bound up with the spiritual condition of God's people. The condition of Jerusalem was always a spiritually controversial matter, whether to the nations or to Israel.

### A GREATER CONTROVERSY OVER THE SPIRITUAL JERUSALEM

If these things are true—and they lie right on the face of history—if they are true in relation to the earthly and temporal Jerusalem and people of God, they are even more true in relation to that of which the earthly is but a figure after all, what Paul calls "the Jerusalem that is above" (Gal. iv. 26), and what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, whoever he was, speaks of when he says "ye are come unto mount Zion" (Heb. xii. 22). It is that controversy over this superior and supreme Zion that is to hold our attention at this time. For there is undoubtedly an even greater controversy over what is meant by the spiritual and

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heavenly Zion than has raged over the earthly. This is the very thing to which Paul himself refers in his letter to the Ephesians, when he speaks about 'our wrestling being with principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness, and hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies' (Eph. vi. 12). That follows straight on from his presentation of the Church, the Body of Christ, and this is only another way of saying that there is a tremendous controversy in heaven over this thing. This is the occasion of cosmic upheavals and uprisings and disturbances, something of a furious character going on in the unseen, directly and immediately related to this, the Church, the Jerusalem which is above, the Zion of God.

It is to this same thing that Peter referred when he said, quoting from Isaiah, "It is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: . . . A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence" (I Pet. ii. 6, 8); something that immediately raises a controversy, throws things into the realm of conflict and dispute.

Again, it is to this very thing that John refers in the Revelation, when he sees that multitude who have "come out of the great tribulation, and . . . washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. vii. 14)—the victorious host over all the forces of evil; and then he says later: "And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion" (Rev. xiv. 1). This is a presentation of the tremendous conflict that circles round this that is called Zion.

### JERUSALEM A SIGN OF THE TIMES

Yes, and just as Jerusalem, or, if you will, Zion, is a sign of the times in the temporal and earthly and historical realm, so it is in the spiritual. I am not launching into prophecy, but the earthly Jerusalem has always been a sign of the times, and still is. It has come to be almost commonplace to say: 'Watch Jerusalem, and you will know the time of day; watch Jerusalem, and you will know where you are in the dispensation'. A sign of the times. Why? Because God is acting in this whole world in a related way. Watch, and you see the movement of nations, the movement of policies; you see things shaping, forming, moving in the whole world. God is moving and acting worldwide in a related way, and acting in the earthly history in relation to Jerusalem. It is very significant. A sign of the times so far as the world is concerned, a sign of the times so far as the nations are concerned; God moving.

This is something that we should lay hold of,

in days when everything seems to be in the melting pot, everything seems to be in tumult and disturbance. We should remember that God is not only the God of Christians, He is the Lord of all creation, of heaven and earth, and that all the nations are as a drop in a bucket with Him. They are in His hand, and He is manipulating the course of history and the movement of nations; all these things that are happening are not just wild, lawless, run-amok events in the world. They are all governed from heaven relatedly, every one of them. There is no political movement that is not under heaven's government just now, in a related way, concerning something, and all the nations are like that with the Lord. It is all indicative of God's object, God's interest. It is a sign of the times, it is a sign of spiritual conditions; for God is not only acting in that kind of chronological way, working coldly, mechanically, to a programme and timetable; He is moving upon a spiritual basis; it is all connected with spiritual conditions, and spiritual conditions are all related to it.

Now, having said that, we arrive at this, that it is made clear in the Word of God—and we will not spend time in dividing between the temporal and the spiritual—that 'Zion' will be the occasion of the supreme and final conflict in the history of this world, this present world order. Zion—if you like, Jerusalem—will be the scene and the occasion of the final consummate conflict of the ages of this world. It will be upon Zion that everything is focused.

### ZION A REPRESENTATION OF SPIRITUAL THINGS

Now, let us keep to our side of this matter. What does Zion symbolize? Let us say it again, as we have said it before: Zion, the earthly, the literal, the material, the temporal, is, after all, at most a symbol, a representation, of spiritual things. Those spiritual things can be detected in the material, for God's material things always contain the elements of His spiritual, and Zion therefore symbolizes a full heavenly and spiritual testimony to Christ in the significance of His Person, and the value of His work, and finally to His God-determined destiny. Now that is a big statement. If you could break that up and grasp it, you could comprehend the whole history of the earthly Zion, Jerusalem, and understand what that is all about. It is true, in its realm, of the earthly: for there in Zion, when Zion was as God intended it to be, you had a full, heavenly, spiritual representation or embodiment of God's mind concerning His king and His reign,

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and the basis of it was always the altar and always the sanctuary. There are your elements. We are not going to follow those too closely, we have so much on hand.

But let us transfer that in its spiritual meaning to this Zion to which we are come. What is Zion, then, for us? The Zion to which we "are come", this "Jerusalem that is above", nay, this Jerusalem of which we are citizens, this Jerusalem which has no existence apart from the people of God themselves, who *are* the Jerusalem of God; what is it? It is this: a full, a heavenly, a spiritual representation, embodiment, expression of Christ in the significance of His Person in God's universe; the full, heavenly value of His work (that, of course, means the work of redemption by His Cross); and the full declaration of the place that God has eternally destined that He should occupy. That is the testimony of Zion. It is no small thing, because any one of those three things could occupy the Christian for a whole lifetime and more. The significance of the Person of Christ in God's universe—can you range that, can you fathom that, can you exhaust that? The value of His work by His Cross—have you ever plumbed that? The eternally predestined place that He shall occupy in God's universe—can we comprehend that? Put those three things together, and they constitute the testimony of Zion, and no wonder there is a controversy, and no wonder that the controversy is as great as it is. You are not surprised, are you? This is no little campaign, no little battle, no little fight. This is ultimate, this is all-inclusive. But let us go on.

This conflict and controversy has three aspects. One, as to the nations; two, as to the realm of Christian profession; three, as to the ministry of the testimony of Zion.

#### (I) THE CONTROVERSY WITH THE NATIONS

The controversy has to do, in the first place, with the nations. We have already stated that in general terms, but we will look at it more closely. I am keeping to the Scriptures; I am not outside of the Scriptures, although I am not quoting every chapter and verse. *The convulsions, the upheavals, the conflicts, the unrest, the frustrations in national and international affairs, are all related to this testimony of Zion.* That is saying a tremendous thing. It means, in other words, that they are all related to the inheritance of God's Christ. The nations are related. We read in Psalm ii: "Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for

thy possession". That follows upon: "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion". So that all that is happening in the nations, between them and amongst them, is connected with this whole matter of Zion's testimony as to the inheritance of God's Christ, and of course the inheritance of the saints with Him.

We have some very striking and forceful illustrations of this kind of thing in the Bible. We are all so very familiar with the controversy with Egypt and with Pharaoh and with the gods of the Egyptians. What a terrific conflict that was! How long-drawn-out, how thorough, moving with steadily growing momentum and force, working itself down ever deeper, exhausting all the opposition—but what a conflict! The whole cosmic realm was involved, natural phenomena, the sun, heaven, blackness, darkness; all nature was in convulsion. Everything was gathered into this controversy with Egypt, with Pharaoh. What was it all about? Something that God had in the nation; that is all. Something that belonged to God, something that in the sovereignty of God was chosen to be the vessel of His testimony in the earth. And so the nation, this mighty kingdom of Egypt, is thrown into convulsions, and all nature is thrown into convulsions, over this one thing at the heart of the nation.

Then consider Babylon. True, the people have failed the Lord and have been sent away into Babylon, but the Lord has not forsaken, and the Lord has not given up, and the Lord has not abandoned His testimony. So—what do we read? Well, let us look at it in Isaiah xliii. 14, 15: "Thus saith the Lord, *your Redeemer*, the Holy One of Israel: *For your sake* I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring down all of them as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships of their rejoicing. I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King". "I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring down all of them"—the margin says "all their nobles"—"I will bring down all of them as fugitives", "for your sake". Do you know what happened in Babylon? It is a wonderful story. It just looks like the pageantry of world empires, one following another. But no; God says, 'I have brought all this about'. We cannot take time now to go over the story of the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire—the onward march of Cyrus, the approach to the doors; when they were all inside, off their guard, in revelry, that night Belshazzar was slain. The doors were found unfastened and unguarded, and in came the next empire. The Lord's word about this is: "For your sake I have sent to Babylon". All this, the overthrow of

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empires—and the Babylonian Empire was one of the greatest in the history of this world—what is it for? Because of a people right in the midst. All this is focused upon some deposit of God in the nations. The controversy is with the nations over some object, and that object is this Zion.

And if that was true of the historical and earthly, it is even more true of the spiritual and heavenly. God has a deposit in the nations, and we are told that He has visited to take out of the nations a people for His Name (Acts xv. 14). He has got in the nations a people for His Name, and the things that are happening in the nations, though we may not be able to detect and follow and define, are happening in a related way. Just as the nations will vomit out the Jews and be glad to get rid of them, as did Egypt, so a true people of God in the earth will make this world sick, so that the world will want to get rid of them, and the sovereignty of God will make the very attitude of antagonism and hatred and expulsion His own way of securing His people. He is working in the nations. It is a tremendous thing to recognise this. "For your sake". Our point is that, just as the nations are being dealt with, or have been dealt with, in relation to Israel of old, so the world is being dealt with in relation to this Church that is in the "field" (Matt. xiii. 44).

In Matthew xxiv we have some of those signs of the end of the age given to us—wars, rumours of wars. Now you may say, as some do, 'Well, there always have been wars and always will be wars. What is the difference between those of Matthew xxiv and the others?' Well, to begin with, have you counted the number of wars in recent years? There have been more wars in recent years than in any previous time in the history of this world; we are never out of war, whether it be hot war or cold war. I am not going to dwell upon those signs, and the signs in the heavens. But what is the statement here? The Lord said: "But all these things are the beginning of travail" (birth-pangs) (Matt. xxiv. 8). Have you grasped that?—"the beginning of *birth-pangs*". We are far advanced beyond the beginnings, I think, in this matter. But be that as it may, birth-pangs. Then something has to be *born*. That is how the Lord viewed this whole situation, this upheaval, in the nations, this tumult, this unrest, this frustration—for you know that is the word that is really so *à propos* of the situation. When He said "distress of nations, in perplexity" (Luke xxi. 25), the Greek words employed by Luke suggest a picture of a trade, a business, which has no way out. It is a business that has become shut up.

But then the Lord says, 'When you see this state of things, the nations having no way out . . . ' Is that not true? 'No way out'. They are trying all the time to find a way out—a way round this situation, a way out of this dilemma, this predicament—and they cannot find it. All their expedients and policies and diplomacies are failing; they are having to make compromises all the way round, and none of their compromises gives them a way out. Then the Lord says: "When these things begin to come to pass . . . lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke xxi. 28). 'Your way out cometh'. We know the way out. That, however, is only said in order to emphasize this, that this is the beginning of travail, of birth-pangs; something is emerging, is going to have a way out. That which has been locked up in the nations is going up. The Church is the only Body that has a way out.

But that is so much in keeping with what Paul says in his letter to the Romans, chapter viii, verses 19 to 22. "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now", as it "waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God". Yes, there is travail and groaning in the creation. We can hear it with our spiritual ears.

Let us proceed. There has to be a testimony in the nations upon which God can work, which justifies His judgment of the nations, which gives significance to His government of the nations and of the world. There must be a testimony in the nations, and such a testimony as will provoke God to jealousy. We have so often quoted in this connection the words of the prophet: "I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath" (Zech. viii. 2); and that is connected in the prophecies with this. The Lord has a controversy with the nations; He is jealous over something; something is there that is very precious to Him, and very important. He must have a testimony like that; and when He has got it, His sovereignty comes into operation in all sorts of ways in relation to it. He may work on the long, patient line, but 'His mills', while 'grinding slowly', are 'grinding very small':

"Though with patience He stands waiting,  
With exactness grinds He all".

It is all related to that which is in the earth. There is something in this earth, in this world, which is a disturbing factor. It has set up inflammation. That is true wherever the true Christian goes. You get an adequate testimony, and you see the inflammation, the conflict, that is set up. There is something there. You do not have to try to make trouble, you have nothing whatever to do to pre-



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cipitate it. It is spontaneous, it happens. You may be the meekest, and the mildest, and the quietest person on God's earth ; but if Christ is vital in you, or in a company of such, you will find that your very presence provokes something, and that provocation has the direction of—'We must get rid of this ; it is foreign to us, it does not belong to us, it is something that is not of our constitution ; we must get it out of our connection.' That is the

*(to be continued)*

world's attitude. That is the attitude of the Devil and his kingdom. There is something provocative in this earth, something disturbing.

That is all we can say about the relationship of Zion to the nations. I trust you see more than I have said, as to the significance of God having an adequate testimony in this world, and what a tremendous thing it is.

T. A-S.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### TASTE AND SEE

WITH many jerks and much creaking and clanging, the train drew slowly to a halt. The passengers who were going on leaned idly from the windows, looking out at the trays of hot rolls which the village boys were offering for sale. They looked at them—but alas! they did not buy. In vain the boys shouted at the top of their voices 'Pan de bono!', trying their hardest to persuade the passengers to buy ; the people were either too tired or too hot to do so, and sales were slow and few. This 'Pan de bono' was a speciality, made only in that part of Colombia ; it was considered very tasty, for it had a lot of cheese mixed in it. The slow South American train was the only one of the day, and so the rolls were prepared daily at just the right hour to be taken down piping hot to meet it.

Mr. Johnson sat back in the long, open railway carriage, thinking much of his work for Christ in that difficult land, and rather disheartened that there had been so little response to his faithful preaching of the Gospel. He saw the boys passing up and down at the side of the train, holding up their trays of rolls and urging the travellers to buy them ; he noted how very few did so ; and then, as the train bell clanged and the train got ready to lurch on to the next station, he settled down again in his seat. But then, just as the train was starting and the boys drew back, he saw one of them dart forward, jump quickly on to the footboard and enter the carriage.

The boy did not cry out 'Pan de bono' any more, for that would not have been allowed on the train, but just looked around as though choosing his seat with great care. He then sat down with the tray of hot rolls on his knees. The man sitting next to him did not look up from his paper. He had been one of those who had looked out of the window, but had seemed to show little or no interest in the 'Pan de bono'. The boy did not speak to

him, but simply took one of his own rolls from the tray, broke it in half, and began eating it. Still the man paid no attention to the boy. As the hot bread was broken, though, its full flavour filled the air, so that very soon the man began to notice the appetising smell of hot cheese. In spite of himself he could not help breathing it in, and presently his mouth began to water. Before very long his hand was in his pocket, searching for a coin to pay for a roll. He found it, bought the roll and began to eat too. In a moment or two a woman with her back to them began to stir uneasily in her seat, and then to look around for the source of the tasty smell. She had almost bought some of the rolls when the train was halted, but had decided not to do so. Now, however, the attraction was too great for her to resist, so she motioned the boy to bring his tray round so that she could buy some.

The smell spread, and so did the customers. Several people sitting near decided that these rolls were too good to be missed, and found that their mouths were watering too. One by one they called the boy, made their purchases and sat back to enjoy eating them. When there was a lull, the still silent boy sought out a seat higher up the carriage, where the same thing happened all over again, as first one and then another had to give way to the strong attraction of the fragrant rolls.

First Mr. Johnson had been vaguely amused, then really interested, and finally he became serious and thoughtful. When the train stopped at the next station and the boy jumped off with an empty tray and a full purse, it seemed that he had left a message behind him. When others had shouted loud and long without making any sales, he had found a different and better method of urging the people to buy. He had just sat near them, enjoying his hot bread and letting it speak for itself. By this means men and women had been awakened, and had been drawn to ask for the rolls, to

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taste for themselves and to hunger for more.

By this simple means the Lord had spoken to Mr. Johnson. He had shown him how to make men hungry to taste and see how good the Lord is. The successful boy had found something better than persuasive words to arouse hunger and attract buyers. He did not call to them; they called to him. They wanted what he had got, and felt that they must taste for themselves. This is how a Christian life should be, so fragrant with Christ as to attract others and cause them to desire to taste His love too.

It was a great help to him to know that even if his preaching was not attracting men to Christ, his life might do so. There, in that train, he prayed that his life might be a message which would say to all: "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him" (Psalm 34. 8). God answered that prayer, for, although Mr. Johnson is no longer on the earth, there are numbers of people in that part of Colombia who were drawn to the Lord by seeing the grace and goodness of Christ in his life. He made people taste and see.

H. F.

## THE RENDING OF THE FLESH AND THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT

SOONER or later every servant of God will make this discovery—that the hindrance to his service comes, not from others, but from himself. And he will find this also, that his outer life and his inner life are at variance: the inclination of the inner is in one direction, the inclination of the outer in another.

Sooner or later, too, he will discover this, that his outer man cannot come under the control of his spirit and cannot act in accordance with the law of God. His supreme difficulty in ministry will be that his outer man obstructs the exercise of his spirit. Actually it is in the spirit that every servant of God communes with God. It is in his spirit that he comes to know the Word of God, and from his spirit that the Word of God finds outward expression. But interference from his outer man hinders the exercise of his spirit. The work of many of God's servants cannot be fundamental because they themselves have never been fundamentally dealt with. Wherever this radical experience is lacking, a radical work is impossible, and no amount of earnest effort or importunate prayer can make good the lack.

## THE INNER AND THE OUTER MAN

In Romans there is a word which reads: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (vii. 22). In Ephesians Paul speaks of our being "strengthened with power through his spirit in the inward man" (iii. 16). Elsewhere he states that, "though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day" (II Cor. iv. 16).

The Scriptures differentiate between our inner and our outer man. The outer man houses the self-life; in the inner man is deposited the life of God. If anyone is to work for God there must be a re-

lease of the inner life, and it is this that constitutes our basic problem. Our inner life is imprisoned, and the effectiveness of our work depends on whether or not the Lord has broken down the outer life in order to make a way for the release of the life within.

## DEATH AND FRUITFULNESS

In John xii. 24 our Lord declares: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." Inside the wheat there is life, but outside there is a husk; and not until that husk is burst open can the wheat begin to grow. The question is not merely: Is there life in the inside? but: Has the husk on the outside been broken down? The Scripture immediately following our quotation states: "He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep in unto life eternal." Our Lord shows us here that the outer husk is our own life, while the inner life is the eternal life which He has given us, and if that inner life is to find an outlet the outer life must go.

Among the mass of human beings in this world there is a class of beings who have within them the life of God. Those who possess this life are again divided into two categories: those in whom that life is imprisoned, and those in whom the Lord has so wrought that the life has found a way out. Our problem to-day is not how to receive life, but how to release the life already received.

The life of the Lord could fill the earth, but we have locked it up. The Lord could bless the Church, but we have imprisoned His life within ourselves so that it can find no outlet. Unless our outer man is shattered we cannot be a means of

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blessing to the Church, and we shall hope in vain for the grace of God to reach the world through us.

### THE CRUSE MUST BE BROKEN

The Scripture speaks of "ointment of spikenard, very costly" (John xii. 3). But apart from the breaking of the alabaster cruse the very costly ointment is sealed up. It is amazing, but many people prize the alabaster cruse more than the ointment. This is the trouble in the Church. This one sets store by his wisdom; that one sets store by his emotions: others again fancy themselves better than their fellows—able to do things more expeditiously, able to form more accurate judgments, and so on. But it is not alabaster cruses we are after. What we want is the fragrant ointment. And that involves the breaking of the cruse!

The Holy Spirit is ceaselessly at work in lives, seeking by circumstantial dealings to break down the outer life so that the inner life may be released. But let us meet with a little difficulty, and immediately we are discontented: let things go slightly awry, and we begin to complain. God is seeking to make us usable, but no sooner does His hand come upon us than we have a controversy with Him and become passive. From the time of our salvation, right up to the present day, God has been at work in our lives seeking to break us down, because there is treasure within the earthen vessels. What the Church needs is not earthen vessels, but treasure; what the world needs is not earthen vessels, but treasure: and God longs to cleave a way of blessing through His own out to the world. But the way of blessing is by way of wounding. If we have consecrated ourselves to Him for His service we cannot preserve our lives.

It is a lamentable fact that numbers of people have no idea what God is doing, or what He is

aiming at in their lives. Oh, that we might each one discover what He is really seeking with us! When He opens our eyes, we shall realise that every experience through which we have passed during the entire course of our life has been purposeful. Not one thing has the Lord done in vain. All the events of the past have been for our highest good. We could have hoped for nothing better, for the Lord has given us His very best. And all His appointments have had this in view—the breaking down of the outer man that the spirit might be released.

### THE TIME FACTOR

God's dealings with this outer man are of two kinds—continuous and sudden. In some cases He breaks abruptly into a life and follows that sudden dealing with a gradual breaking-down process: in other cases He deals gradually with a life, then suddenly breaks in with a drastic dealing. In any case it takes the Lord years to accomplish this work. We cannot shorten the time, but we can prolong it. In some cases, the work is still unaccomplished after a period of 10 or even 20 years. This is a solemn thing. There is nothing more tragic than to waste God's time. It is often we who stand in God's way when He would bless the Church, and so the time factor is drawn out and great loss results.

If in the past we have never utterly consecrated ourselves to the Lord, may we do so now! Shall we say: 'Lord, for the future of the Church, for the future of the Gospel, for Your sake and for my own life's sake, I hand myself over to You unconditionally. I gladly place myself in Your hands, that through my life You may cleave a way for Yourself to bring blessing to the Church and to the world.'

W. N.

### GOD'S STANDARD OF VALUES

*"For who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah iv. 10).*

*"Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing? Yet . . ." (Haggai ii. 3, 4).*

*"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 make; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Malachi iii. 16, 17).*

**J**UST as a ship, after a long voyage, spends some time in having its compass adjusted, because of interferences and variations, so it is with us on our way. It becomes necessary from time to time to stop and think again, to get our minds corrected, and to be freed from those influences that upset our balance and poise and our right appreciation. This matter of greatness and smallness is an im-

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portant matter, and it is therefore very necessary for us to have it made clear in our hearts and in our minds, to have our mentality adjusted concerning it. There is a good deal of confusion on this subject, and that confusion can result in our missing the way entirely, or being found in an altogether false position. We need to know what we mean by 'greatness', and what we mean by 'smallness'.

It is quite evident, from the Scriptures which we have read, that a certain kind of appraisal, a certain kind of observation, resulted in a false judgment which brought the people perilously near to calamity. The Lord, reading their heart, used this word as to their attitude and their reaction—"despise"—"Who hath despised the day of small things?" And if you look carefully into these prophecies, you will see that from God's standpoint things were not as small as they thought. God had an altogether different point of view about the matter. You see, we have a way of confusing *bigness* with greatness, and they are two entirely different things. Bigness may be in outward dimensions and bulk, and in the impression that a thing makes upon your senses. Greatness may have none of those characteristics at all. You may not even be able to take its measure or see any measure in it at all from the human standpoint, and yet in God's sight it may be very great. There is a lot of difference between bigness and greatness from God's standpoint—just as there is a great deal of difference between littleness and smallness. I know that that may give trouble to some of our friends who are not familiar with the English language! But things *can* be quite small outwardly and yet of tremendous value. You would sooner have an ounce of gold than pounds of iron in intrinsic value.

You may have read the life story of Madame Curie, the discoverer of radium. If you have, you will remember how tons and tons and tons of by-product from the gas-works were unloaded in her backyard, and how she worked upon this mountain of stuff and recovered from it the smallest particle of radium. There is your comparison between big and great: that almost imperceptible speck of radium, with its immense qualities, values, and potentialities, all extracted from this huge mass of stuff. There is the difference between bigness and greatness. That is why it is so necessary for us to get adjusted in our mentality about things, lest we go astray.

We may judge something merely in an outward way and say, 'Oh, it is so small!', and despise it. And yet this day of small things may be a day of

tremendous potential. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32). There is something little that is immensely potential: you have only to run your eye through the Bible to see again and again what God made of apparently little things that would have been despised and set aside, overlooked, scorned, by those who always had this mentality of bigness.

## THAT WHICH IS PRECIOUS TO GOD

Now you will see from these passages that we have quoted that there was something that was very precious to God, although the people in their natural judgment were calling it so small. The last passage which we read, from the end of the Old Testament, marking a dispensational end-time, finds God saying (in another translation): "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, a peculiar treasure". "They that feared the Lord"—just that little company who feared the Lord—"spake one with another", "thought upon His Name", were occupied with Him. There is something here so precious that our translation does not convey how valuable it was to the Lord. You notice two words: "the Lord hearkened, and heard". That is not just a repetition of two words, or the same word in two different forms. The first word signifies that the Lord bent down, inclined. The Lord says, 'Here is something to take note of; here is something to which to listen; here is something to hold Our attention.' The Lord inclined, listened, heard. And then the picture is of the Lord saying, 'Get the book, the great book, The Book of Remembrance, and put this down; put the names of these people in it'. A book was kept, the Book of Remembrance of "them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." 'They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, even mine own possession, in the day that I make, even a peculiar treasure'.

## WHAT THE LORD LOOKS FOR

What was it that made for this greatness, over against that which people were despising as so little? What does the Lord look for? Well, it is quite clear. This comparatively little company was a disciplined and chastened company. They had come out of the fires of Babylon. They had been through all the discipline of those years in exile. They were of those who had hung their harps upon the willows because their captors demanded of them, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." "How

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shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" See where their hearts were. And then the day came when the proclamation was made—"You can go back, you can all go back to Zion." The vast majority decided that their present position was a very much more comfortable one than it would be back there in Zion, and decided to stay. This little company, with all the hardships, the difficulties, the sufferings, the toil, and much more involved in going back, went back because their hearts were in Zion, and Zion was in their hearts. There was a heart relationship to the Lord and to that which was dearest to His heart. And so they were always thinking upon His Name, talking about His interests.

They were a little company, comparatively—a despised people. I expect all those who stayed behind in Babylon thought they were fools. Well, be it so. What did the Lord think? That was the point. And we know what the Lord thought. Here was a chastened and disciplined people whose hearts were for the Lord. Small? If you like. Read the

prophecies of Jeremiah. What a book that is! What a time it takes, and what patience it takes, to work your way through Jeremiah's prophecies! What a big book—and what little books these of Malachi and Haggai are. We call them 'Minor Prophets'—but what have you got for the Lord in the people as recorded in Jeremiah? A 'Major Prophet', if you like, but there is nothing in the people there for the Lord. But in these little 'Minor Prophets', there is something very precious to the Lord. The discipline has taken place, the chastening has been carried out, the heart has been searched; the Lord has got something very great. That is what is precious to the Lord, that is what He is looking for; that is what He calls great. Although, looking at it with natural eyes and the eyes of man, judging by outward size and appearance, some may despise, there is much intrinsic value there; and with the Lord everything is a matter of intrinsic value, not of bulk.

T. A-S.

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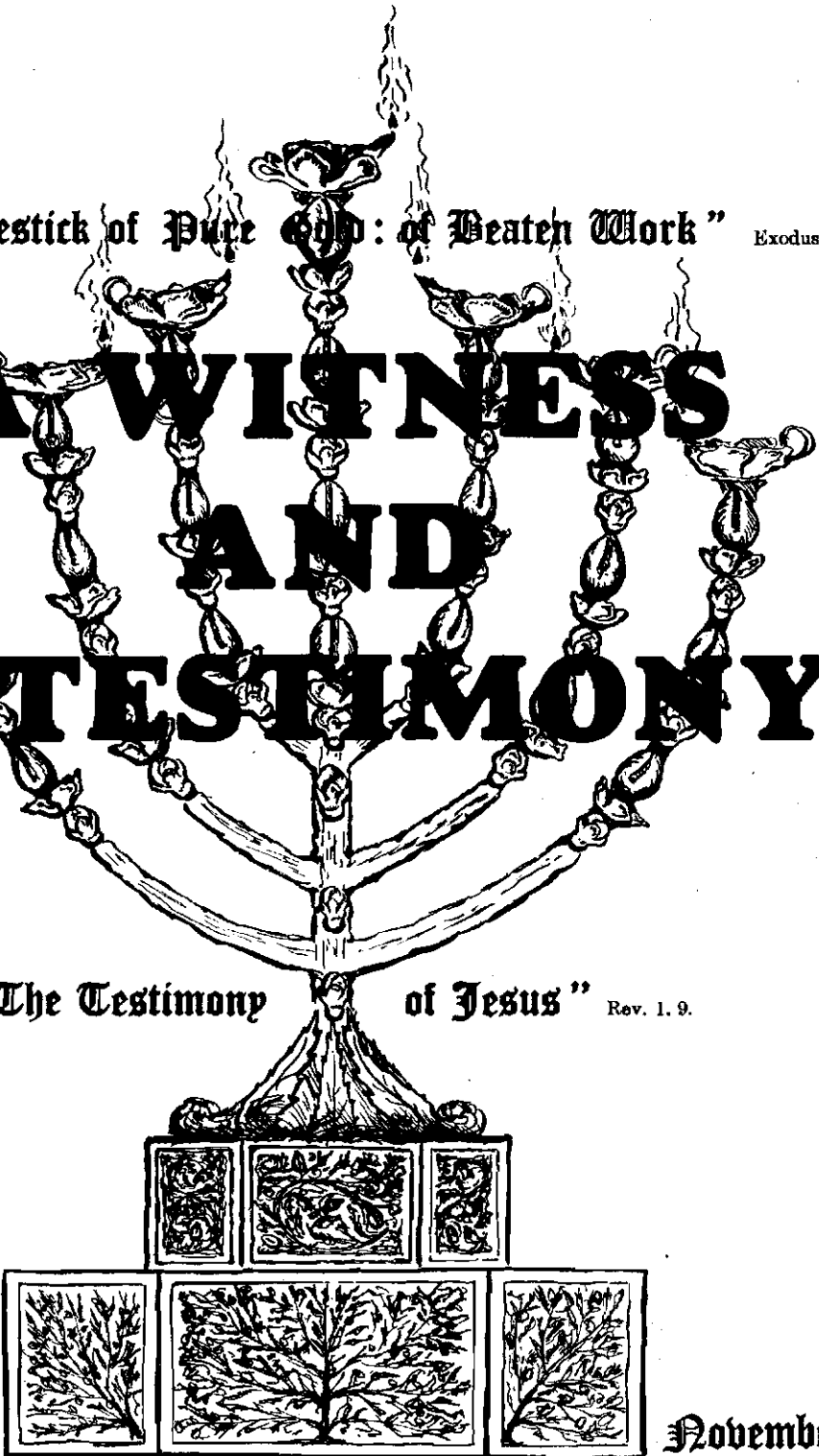
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**A WITNESS  
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A TESTIMONY**

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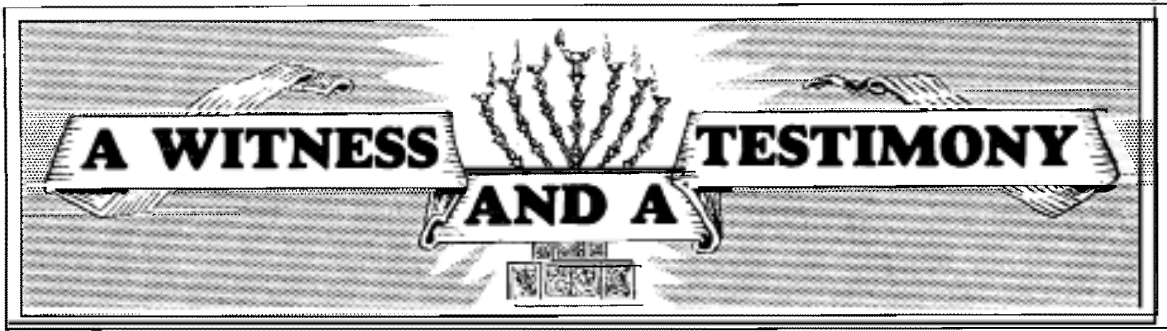
## THIS MINISTRY

**T**HE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13—"... till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children..."

It is not connected with any 'Movement', 'Organization', 'Mission' or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment', it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S. E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

'Personal' letters should be addressed to  
Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1956.

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EDITORIAL

**I**N our Editorials we have referred much to the tragedy of spiritual conditions, particularly to the divided state of Christians. It is a matter which no one really concerned for God's glory can easily set aside, or fail to have as a constant burden. Reflection upon this whole matter leads to the prayerful desire to be able to do something toward what the Bible calls 'healing the hurt of My people'. This can be carried little or no further than an appeal, but in so far as this small instrumentality can affect the Lord's people, we venture to make such an appeal. As we see it, there are only two grounds of hope in this direction, but if they were taken we are certain that a wholly new and fruitful situation would arise.

The first part of the appeal, therefore, is that the people of God, and particularly those in responsibility among them, shall—

TAKE HEAVENLY GROUND

The best illustration of what this means is presented to us in considerable fulness in the New Testament, and particularly in Paul's letters. We can narrow these down to two—'Corinthians' and 'Ephesians'. One is the earthly; the other is the heavenly.

What is meant by the earthly is clear in I Corinthians, especially—for our present point—in the early part. Implying that it is wrong for supposedly spiritual people to be or to act so, the Apostle uses the words: "Are ye not men?" (iii. 4). This clearly means, as the context shows, that spiritual and heavenly people are not allowed to proceed as the rest of men do. The immediate connection (although it applies to all the other things) is that of "divisions", and circles, bearing particular names and taking the character of natural preferences. This might be temperamental, doctrinal, emotional, intellectual, or 'spiritual' (?). Whatever the causes or occasions, Paul says this behaviour is "natural" and "carnal"—it is acting as "men". In a word, it is earthly. At best, he says, it is

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

childish, or 'babyish'; it does not signify any spiritual stature. Looking at Christianity to-day by this standard, we cannot fail to be painfully impressed with how little the Church has grown up.

But that is the negative side. When we turn to 'Ephesians', we find ourselves in the presence, not only of the oft-repeated words, "the heavenlies", but of the realities and characteristics of that realm. Here is the "one body". Here is the "unity of the Spirit". Here is heavenly wealth, walk, warfare. Here is relatedness and inter-relatedness. The Apostle—nay, the Holy Spirit—has no restraint in giving out of the fulness, that it may lead again to the fulness of Christ. Here are the measureless dimensions of eternal thoughts, counsels, purpose, and love. Here is ascendancy over disappointment, frustration, discouragement, and earthly limitations. Here is grace transcendent and triumphant. Yes, truly we are on heavenly ground here, while all those things are bitterly true down below. To be "seated together with him (Christ) in the heavenlies" is no mere ideal, phantasy, illusion, beautiful concept, or sublime teaching; it is real because of the literal counter-realities to which it is set in contrast.

This is as much the work of grace, to be apprehended by faith, as is our initial justification.

Would that the Church—believers, and their leaders—could first see it, in the way in which the prayers in this letter show that it should be seen: could then, by faith, take it: and henceforth positively and resolutely refuse to come down on to the earthly ground of Corinthian divisions, strife, pettiness, and *nature!*

But what is the way thither? How can it be?

This leads to the second part of our appeal: it is to—

## TAKE THE GROUND OF THE CROSS

The Corinthians knew about the Cross. They were "in Christ", and there is no way into Christ but that of the Cross. Yes, but even so, the Apostle said that in visiting them it was his considered, resolute, and premeditated determination that he would 'know nothing among them, save Christ, and him crucified' (ii. 2). There was a knowledge of the Cross which either they did not possess, or else they were violating. In 'Ephesians', the death and resurrection 'togetherness' with Christ is foundational to all that fulness of heavenly position. In Corinth, the value of the Cross was in what it meant *for* them, rather than what it meant *in* them. There is undoubtedly a difference in these aspects, both as to position and as to results. The fuller aspect may have a deeper application to the natural life—but, again, both in one are presented to us for our apprehending by faith.

The Cross not only deals with our sins and our condemnation: it deals with all our earthliness, our natural ground, which is so fruitful in those works which bring dishonour to our Lord. We are especially thinking of this spirit which produces or ferments jealousies, rivalries, contentions, criticisms, and all that is not love.

If we would take heavenly ground and the ground of the Cross, the Holy Spirit would be able to cause the things which really do not matter to fade from their importance, and to give the Lord's people a loving concern for all who are His, just because they *are* His, and not 'ours' in any earthly way.

EDITOR

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## FAITH UNTO ENLARGEMENT THROUGH ADVERSITY

### III. THE KEY OF FAITH

(concluded)

*Reading: Genesis xv. 5, xvii. 1-8; Romans iv. 17-24; Hebrews xi. 8-10; Revelation xxi. 9-18, xxii. 1, 2.*

WE were speaking about God's governing thought of enlargement, bringing to remembrance His words to Abraham concerning the immense increase which He purposed for His servant; and then we saw how every bit of that increase came along the line of a testing of faith.

This is not just teaching. These things are very pertinent and appropriate to our need at the present time. The whole work of the enemy is by every means and agency to limit what is of God, to reduce it, to make it as small as possible and keep it so. God's thoughts, of course, are entirely to the contrary; but God's thoughts do not just operate and come to realisation automatically. He is dealing with living people, not with a mechanical world. It is in a people that His thoughts are to have their fulfilment, individually and collectively. For the realisation of His thoughts, therefore, all the work of the enemy has to be overcome.

#### THE BATTLE OF UNBELIEF

Now the work of the enemy is not only from the outside—it is from the inside. The enemy has got a very strong and deep foothold in man by nature, in you and in me, and it is no small thing to enlarge us unto the enlargement of God. There is very much in us that ever seeks to frustrate and limit God. That foothold of the enemy in us by nature is something that ever stands in the way of God's thoughts, as a positive force to resist God. The essential nature of the foothold is *unbelief*, and there is not one of us, no matter how advanced may be the point of our spiritual progress, who has no battle remaining with the unbelief of his own heart.

"The sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. xii. 1), which impedes, retards, and arrests us in the spiritual race, is unbelief. You know that this letter to the Hebrews is all concerned with going on—going on to fulness; and here, in this metaphor of the race—"running with patience the race that is set before us"—we find the exhortation to

lay aside this impeding thing that so easily besets us. It is unbelief. In the original text, the passage follows immediately, without any chapter division, upon the eleventh chapter of the letter, which is the chapter of faith. Thus, in that quite general way, it is very appropriate to our present need to speak about this matter of 'faith unto enlargement', for as it was with Abraham, so it is with us all.

But of course it has particular and specific applications. In the work of the Lord, in a ministry, in a testimony, in an instrumentality for Divine purpose, there are times when the direction and course of everything seems to be to close it down, to thwart, frustrate, and bring it to an end; and because of that, a very great test of faith arises. Those concerned are thrown into the vortex of a great conflict as to whether God, after all, wants this, means this, is after this—or whether, in view of the accumulation of frustrating, crippling, limiting efforts and activities, some mistake has not been made, and the whole thing needs to be reviewed and revised. At such times, the enemy does press very hard with questions. It is a time of severe testing of faith. And what is true collectively becomes so true in individual lives from time to time.

#### ABRAHAM'S TESTS OF FAITH

Now, the point and the argument of all that we see in the Bible is this: that the very testing of faith is God's way of enlargement. Fresh enlargements will come by fresh testings. That is the order of things. It ever has been so. You see, here is Abraham. With an oath and a covenant, God has announced to him His thoughts about this great enlargement. "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth" (Gen. xiii. 16). "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore" (xxii. 17). God has not left Abraham in any doubt as to His thoughts about enlargement.

But look at the testings into which Abraham was immediately brought. He had, speaking naturally, every ground and reason for saying, 'I have made a mistake in thinking that God meant that. I have misunderstood what the Lord meant;

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

I have been caught in some illusion.' It would have been very easy for Abraham, under the pressure and the trial, to have so reacted. But the point is this, that the Lord has done, where Abraham is concerned, far more than Abraham ever thought. For you see, all that great multitude presented to us in the last book of the Bible—'a great multitude which no man can number' (Rev. vii. 9), 'ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands' (Rev. v. 11)—Paul says they are the seed of Abraham (Gal. iii. 29): not Jews, but believers, the children of faith (iii. 7). Every one who has reposed faith in God is the seed of Abraham—a countless seed. It has come to pass. But see how Abraham's faith was progressively tested on this matter of enlargement. It was not one battle fought once and for all, and settled; but over a long life, till he was a hundred years old, in different forms, at different stages and with accentuated poignancy, again and again the test of enlargement was raised.

But every test passed meant some further enlargement. We have said that that is a way and a law of the Lord. It is something to hide in our hearts. The Psalmist said: "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. cxix. 11). The sin of all sins, where God is concerned, is unbelief, and here is a word that we must hide in our hearts against the day of trial—the day when we feel our faith is being so tested and tried and pressed by the situations in which we find ourselves, that it must mean limitation—it must work out to curtailment, if not to an utter end. The Bible all the way through argues the other way: that such tests of faith are ever alongside of God's expressed and revealed mind, that these tests are the way for the realisation of His purpose, and that the thought of God is, in the first place, enlargement.

## ESTABLISHMENT

But if spiritual enlargement is a need, and if the work of God, the testimony of Jesus, needs releasing and enlarging, is this not equally true in the matter of establishment—the establishing of the Lord's people? If God is after enlargement, He is certainly revealed to be equally desirous of, and working toward, that which is solid, that which is substantial, that which is characterized by

stability, endurance, steadfastness, trustworthiness, faithfulness, responsibility, depth. These words touch the situation very, very closely.

We may recall that the New Testament was written almost entirely for the establishment of believers. Typical phrases are: "I long to see you . . . to the end ye may be established" (Rom. i. 11); and: "Now he that stablisheth us with you in Christ . . . is God" (II Cor. i. 21).

God works for that which will endure. A characteristic of God is the "for ever" feature. "Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever" (Eccles. iii. 14). The chief factor in establishment is faith. Firstly it is the establishment of faith—the objective ground. This is the message and meaning of the letter to the Romans. There can be no subjective work until this objective position is secured. Indeed, it would be very dangerous to proceed with the subjective otherwise. All further and fuller work *in us* necessitates a strong and settled faith in what has been done *for us*, and in what our standing is by grace.

Then comes the establishment *in* faith. This means the removal of all false ground—any ground of confidence or trust which is other than God Himself. In this category of false ground come our feelings, theories, traditions, and all external supports. All these will prove false and incapable of bearing the strain of true faith's testing. In order to keep to reality and true life God shatters all false positions, shakes all false ground, and strips of all vain confidence.

This applies to our lives and our work. It is very impressive to note that, when Paul was a prisoner and when many old friends forsook him, when churches which were his life-work turned from him, he then wrote such tremendously assured and confident letters as those called "To the Ephesians", "To the Colossians", and "To the Philippians". This does not look as though he believed that the real work was breaking down. "Unto the ages of the ages" is characteristic of these messages.

Paul knew what he meant when, in writing to the Thessalonians, he used the phrase: "Your work of faith" (I Thess. i. 3). His was that, and it paid large dividends, although both the faith and the work underwent severe testings.

T. A-S.

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## THY KINGDOM COME

### IV. THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

Reading: Daniel v.

*"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew xxiv. 14).*

THE Gospel of the kingdom in its universal proclamation leads up to the great consummation. If, then, we hear this Gospel aright it will have a profound effect upon our lives. We notice that the Lord Jesus followed His announcement about the worldwide testimony with a reference to Daniel who, as we have already seen, was the prophet of the coming kingdom.

*"When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains: let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloke" (Matthew xxiv. 15-18).*

The inference is that, if you understand what Daniel is saying, it will move you to action, and to very swift and decided action. We cannot be passive or indifferent in the face of the challenge which Daniel's revelation gives us concerning the kingdom which man has lost, and the recovery through Christ of the kingdom of heaven.

#### MAN'S LOSS OF THE KINGDOM

In the historical part of the book we are told of three occasions when the kingdom was overthrown. The first was concerned with Nebuchadnezzar: "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: the kingdom is departed from thee" (Dan. iv. 31); the second refers to Belshazzar: "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and brought it to an end" (Dan. v. 26); and the last is dealt with in chapter ix, which tells of Daniel's broken-hearted prayer over the tragically ruined kingdom of Judah. A kingdom lost! Nebuchadnezzar lost his kingdom for seven years; the Jews lost theirs for seventy years; but Belshazzar lost his for ever. And, in a way, they were all lost for the same reason.

In each case the kingdom was lost through

pride. If we had used a more general term, we should have said that it was through sin, but there seems to be a specific sin which relates to this matter of the lost kingdom, and that is the sin of pride. God's kingdom is the kingdom in which there must be no pride. God is high and holy, but God is not proud. God's King is the Lord Jesus Christ, highly exalted and yet truly claiming to be "meek and lowly in heart". Even on the throne of the universe He is still known as the Lamb. It was when this other spirit of pride came into the race that man lost his kingdom, and it is because we all have that spirit of pride within us that we are men of a lost kingdom.

#### PRIDE'S INDEPENDENCE

The three cases under consideration reveal three different forms of pride. Nebuchadnezzar's sin was the pride of independence. He himself confessed that he had walked in pride (iv. 37). It might be thought that he had reason for boasting, since Babylon with its hanging gardens was one of the wonders of the world; yet he could have done nothing without God's help. This was soon demonstrated when that help was withdrawn, for his reason left him and he became lower than the meanest of his subjects. However successful or prosperous we may be, the spirit which is seemly in our relationship with God is one of deep and humble gratitude. To act or think as though we were self-sufficient is a sin against the love of God.

Conceit brings blindness. It lays us open to deception. That is why Nebuchadnezzar made the mistakes which he did.

He mistook goodness for weakness, as many have done since, who have drawn wrong conclusions from the favours which God has granted them. Nebuchadnezzar received many blessings from God; he was helped and prospered by Him in many ways. But instead of fearing God and submitting to Him in humble gratitude, he only despised Him and swaggered along on his own proud path of independence, as though he could manage his own affairs and achieve glory without God. It was a big mistake.

He also mistook a warning for a wonder. In addition to all His other mercies, the Lord sent him a warning in the form of a dream. At first he was startled by the dream, and he must have

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

been taken aback when Daniel gave him its interpretation, especially as the prophet earnestly entreated him to pay heed and repent while there was still time. It seems, though, that Daniel's words only fascinated his mind—they did not reach his conscience. He was thrilled to listen to the words of enlightenment and warning. No doubt Daniel was worth listening to; he was interesting, even enthralling; but what a pity to enjoy the words and miss the message. Alas! it is often so to-day. People listen to the Word of God; they are interested and perhaps moved in their emotions; but they fail to obey the Word.

Furthermore, he mistook delay for forgetfulness. The Lord was very longsuffering, giving Nebuchadnezzar a whole twelve months before the judgment actually fell. No doubt as the days went by Nebuchadnezzar grew careless again, as we so easily do; indeed his pride grew worse, for when we harden our hearts to the Lord's warnings we almost inevitably grow bolder in our unbelief. So, presuming on the Lord's goodness and forbearance, he began to talk boastfully of the might of his power and the glory of his majesty; and, while the word was in his mouth, "there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: the kingdom is departed from thee" (iv. 31).

Need we say more? God is not weak, nor is He forgetful. His methods with Nebuchadnezzar may seem harsh, but really they were in love, as the king later discovered, for happily this story is not concerned with eternal judgment. There was time for repentance. He learned his lesson. He realised how completely he depended on the mercy of God, and he publicly confessed his absolute submission to the King of heaven, "for all his works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (iv. 37).

## PRIDE'S PRESUMPTION

We now pass to Belshazzar, his successor, or really the son of his successor, finding in him a far less striking character, a man who seems to have been weak and dissolute. Nevertheless a man can be weak and proud, just as well as strong and proud, for pride is found in all classes of men. In Belshazzar's case the pride expressed itself in careless presumption. He did something which his great predecessor would never have dared to do, by ordering that the golden vessels taken from the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem should be made use of at his unholy feast. Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten God or ignored Him, which is a serious sin;

but Belshazzar trifled with Him, mocked Him, defied Him, and so was suddenly cut off without remedy. In his folly he failed to profit by Nebuchadnezzar's experience, though the latter's story was familiar enough to him. "Though thou knewest all this", Daniel said, "thou . . . hast not humbled thine heart" (v. 22).

So Belshazzar's sin was essentially pride: he was proud and merry, proud and careless, proud and presumptuous. It is very dangerous to trifle with holy things. In our day, mere *things* are not holy in the sense that those vessels were, though the Lord's Day is still a holy day and His Word a holy book. The real issue of holiness is now concerned with God's Son. The temple vessels were types of Christ. God wants to know what men are doing about Him. If they are trifling with Christ, treating Him lightly and frivolously or even only patronising Him, their pride will surely bring the writing on the wall.

For God watches. The first intimation of what was going to happen in Nebuchadnezzar's case came from "a watcher and an holy one" (iv. 13). Even if Nebuchadnezzar had not spoken his words aloud (and in any case we are not told whether anyone else was listening), God knew the thoughts that were in his heart. No feigned humility will satisfy Him. He watches and He sees it all.

God also weighs. "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (v. 27). With Him there can be no mistakes. He does not judge by appearances, but, like a careful assayer, He puts everything into the balances to discover values as they really are. What levity, what hollow sham, what spiritual poverty lay behind that presumptuous pride of Belshazzar. We, too, are weighed in God's balances, and under that test are found to be pitifully wanting.

And God warns. He does everything possible to avert the calamity, even with a man like Belshazzar. God's warnings are not empty threats, but spring from earnest desire that men may take heed and save themselves from His judgments. In this case it was clearly useless for Him to wait any longer, for the king was incorrigible. Even after the writing on the wall, he stifled the warning by forcing his favours on Daniel, while the whole atmosphere was still one of heedless merrymaking. Well, it did him no good to promote and honour Daniel, though doubtless that promotion was very important in the purposes of God, and as a part of the continuation of the spiritual ministry of the prophet. God cannot be bribed into suspending His judgments. There was no humbling, so there was no remedy. The kingdom

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was numbered and brought to an end. "In that night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain" (v. 30).

### PRIDE'S REBELLION

The third case of a lost kingdom is referred to in chapter ix, where we read of Daniel's prayerful grieving over the destruction of Jerusalem. This tragedy was the saddest of the three. The people of God had sinned in the face of such great privileges. After all, Nebuchadnezzar was a heathen, who could have had but little knowledge of the true God. Belshazzar, it is true, had the one example for good, but he had much influence for evil all around him. Israel, however, were in a different position altogether. They had enjoyed every privilege, had been carefully instructed from their beginnings, had been preserved from evil influences and blessed with inspiring examples. Yet in them, too, pride had found expression—the pride of rebellion. "We have sinned, and have dealt perversely, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled" (ix. 5); "for we have rebelled against him" (ix. 9).

God's judgments did not come to Israel without many warnings. They had not one prophetic vision of warning, but very many such visions. In their case it was not just one hand which wrote their condemnation, but many, many messages which were written by the prophets; messages of tender love and grace as well as of solemn appeal. But it was all in vain. Pride is deaf as well as blind. The Lord Himself could take no other course with His people than to let them reap the bitter harvest of their rebellion against His will, and so the judgment fell. When Daniel was praying, the full seventy years of desolation were nearly completed.

The tide seems to have turned when Daniel prayed on behalf of all the people, humbling himself in such confession as left no room at all for pride. The answer from Heaven was immediate. It always is, Daniel did not bring excuses; he did not make promises of amendment for the future. Like the prodigal son, he poured out his confession and asked for mercy. The prodigal's father did not let him finish his confession. He smothered it with the kisses of pardon. Daniel did finish his prayer, but as a matter of fact the heavenly messenger did not wait for him to get to the end: "At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment went forth, and I am come . . ." (ix. 23). We have said that God watches, that He weighs and that He warns: He also recovers with an everlasting redemption.

### THE NEW KINGDOM IN CHRIST

Man has lost his kingdom through pride. There is no need to labour that point any more. Daniel tells of the frantic efforts of rulers and kings to reverse that decision, and even indicates the apparent success for a time of some who seek to possess the kingdom in opposition to God's chosen King. But all such attempts are doomed to failure. The new kingdom from heaven is reserved for Him who is "meek and lowly in heart", the only One in whom pride was never found at all. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (vii. 14).

Daniel's frank confession and earnest plea for undeserved mercy received an immediate answer. The Lord is always eager to answer a prayer of that kind. The answer was the promise of the Saviour. God's way of deliverance and the secret of His new kingdom is found in the coming of "the anointed one, the prince" (ix. 25), who is, of course, Christ the Lord. He is our hope. The Gospel shows the way out of man's failure into the blessings of the kingdom of heaven: "who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. i. 13). What a glorious kingdom this must be! We are told that by means of His anointed King God undertakes "to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy" (ix. 24). These are tremendous undertakings.

### AN END OF SINS

The first is "to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins". It would be useless for the Lord to provide a sinless realm if He allowed uncleansed sinners to enter in. No, the old kingdom went wrong not because of environment but because of man's heart. For this reason the new kingdom demands a new heart. Time does not remove transgression. The sins which Daniel was praying about had been committed years and years before. He was still remembering them. Past guilt is not only still recorded in heaven, it has an uncomfortable way of rising up anew in our own consciences and memory. How can the past be blotted out? How can sins be so dealt with that even God remembers them no more for ever? The revelation which came to Daniel showed him how: it was by the advent of this "anointed one" and above all by



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His atoning death. "The anointed one shall be cut off, but not for himself" (ix. 36, A.V.).

Those who make a study of these things assure us that the time prediction was absolutely accurate, and that in truth the Lord Jesus was "cut off" at the end of the sixty-nine weeks. Our immediate concern, however, is not with dates, but with the glorious fact that Christ's death on the Cross has done what nothing else can ever do—it has put away all sin, however dark it may be and however long-standing. This perfect cleansing is foundational for those who would have a part in the new kingdom.

### RECONCILIATION MADE

"To make reconciliation for iniquity". This is the language not of the law-courts but of the home and family. Sin has weighted the balances against man and brought him into condemnation, but it has also caused a sad estrangement: it has broken a love relationship which ought to exist between God and man. The captive Jews in Babylon were separated from their native city by hundreds of miles of desert, but that is only a faint picture of the sinner's separation from the Lord. The captives could not return. Not only was the journey too great and costly, but there was another kingdom—"the power of darkness"—which held them in bondage. It needed the Lord to release them as well as to take them back. In the first place it was for this earthly release and restoration that Daniel prayed, but he was led on to speak of the greater spiritual deliverance, and the more difficult journey back to God. This is the "translation" which we are offered—back to the heart and home of God; this is the reconciliation which has been made through the blood of the Cross. There is no need for distance, no need for estrangement, no need for vain regrets or empty longings, since grace provides a warm welcome into the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

### EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS

"To bring in everlasting righteousness". The weakness of those Old Testament recoveries was that they did not last. No doubt Nebuchadnezzar made many good resolutions after his restoration to the kingdom, but, like us all, he certainly failed to keep them. The Jews were no better than he in this respect. It was indeed a marvellous recovery for the remnant to return and rebuild the desolated city of Jerusalem, but alas! their righteousness did not last and a further and a worse destruction came upon it. No human righteousness lasts, and

that is why no man can have a part in the eternal kingdom apart from Christ. It is by the Gospel that there is offered to man a new kind of righteousness, perfect and enduring—the righteousness of God which is provided on the basis of simple faith in Christ.

### MAKING THE PROMISES COME TRUE

"To seal up vision and prophecy". There is another rendering which reads: "to make the visions and the prophecies come true". This is certainly what Christ does. This kingdom of Christ is the realm where all the promises of God have their Yea and their Amen (II Cor. i. 20). Before we enter His kingdom it may seem to us that the promised blessings of the Gospel are just visionary fancies, but those who are in that kingdom know the joy of proving God's power to implement His promises.

Since Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were godly Jews, they were doubtless familiar with the promise: "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Is. xliii, 2); but they could hardly have realised how wonderfully this would be fulfilled in their case. We are not able to appreciate the promises until we are desperately in need of them. They proved that the Lord could make the promises come true. They were not burned; the flame did not kindle upon them. More than this, the promise included an assurance of the presence of the Lord in the midst of the trial: He had said that in the floods and the fires "I will be with thee". Even the ungodly could perceive that this promise was being fulfilled. It was obvious that the Lord was walking with them in the midst of the fiery furnace. This is just one example of a personal experience, but in every realm it is true that the Lord is prepared and eager to fulfil His Word to those who trust Him.

### THE HOLY OF HOLIES

Then consummation of all the rest is the promise "to anoint the most holy". In the first instance this referred to the restored temple, but in the full spiritual sense it goes beyond earthly places and buildings to the spiritual temple of the Lord, the place of His indwelling by the Spirit. We are apt to be appalled by what *man* lost when he lost the kingdom: whereas the greatest tragedy was the loss to God. In the same way, we usually emphasize the blessings which the new, eternal kingdom of Christ brings to redeemed men. We need to remember that the greatest feature is the

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recovery for God of His place of honour and glory in His universe. The "end" which will come, when the Gospel has been preached in all the world for a testimony, is not just the termination of the day of grace, nor only the completion of the number of forgiven sinners. It includes these, but

above all else it means the satisfaction of God's heart-desire to dwell among men in holiness and glory.

This is the true objective of the prayer: "Thy kingdom come".

H. F.

(concluded)

## A GOD WHO HIDES HIMSELF

(An address, slightly condensed, given in Hongkong, 19th August, 1956).

*Reading: Luke xxiv. 13-37; John xx. 11-29; I Peter i. 8; Isaiah xlv. 15.*

"NO MAN HATH SEEN GOD  
AT ANY TIME"

HAVE you ever noticed this statement in the Bible—"a God that hidest thyself"? I have tested numbers of brothers and sisters with this question, and have made the discovery that scarcely any of God's children have realised that His Word contains such an expression; nor do they really know God as a God who hides Himself. They know Him as the Almighty One, as the Righteous One, as One full of grace and compassion; but as the One who hides Himself He is unknown to them.

Note how Isaiah expresses this thought: "Verily thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel". This statement of his is most emphatic. He is not talking empty words, the fruit of his own imagination; his utterance is based on an accumulation of facts. He has looked at those facts, he has studied those facts, and then he has come to his conclusion: "Thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God". What he has seen of God's doings; what he has observed happen to Israel under the hand of God; what he has beheld of the experiences of God's people—all these observations have forced the prophet to acknowledge that God is a God who hides Himself. Why did Isaiah come to this conclusion? If you read his book through you will discover. It was because God did countless things in the midst of the children of Israel, and countless things in their personal lives, and yet He concealed Himself. He was ceaselessly working, yet He was always hidden. Very much was being done by Him, yet the Israelites were utterly ignorant as to who the doer was. Then one day Isaiah exclaimed: "Verily thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God".

If you look into the history of the universe; if you look into the history of the Old Testament and into the history of the New; and if you carefully examine the whole history of mankind, you will arrive at the same conclusion: God is a God who hides Himself. This universe was created by Him; the heavens and the earth are the works of His hand; yet for six millennia men have beheld all these things and not one man has ever seen God. The Scripture says of the Old Testament times that no man ever saw Him; but of the New Testament times it says: "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John i. 18).

And yet, when this Only Begotten Son came for the very purpose of showing forth the Father, He hid Him in a human life—a human life with a "visage marred," a human life that had "no form nor comeliness" (Is. lii. 14; liii. 2). And He came from Galilee, an insignificant province, and from the town of Nazareth, a small town of which it was said by the Jews that no prophet or person of repute ever came from there (John i. 46, vii. 52). So, when He appeared, people not only found it hard to believe that God was present in Him—they found it hard even to believe that He was a prophet of God. Yet God was hidden within Jesus of Nazareth.

## A MATTER OF TEMPERAMENT

One day, as I was pondering this, it occurred to me as an amazing thing that God, who obviously desired to manifest Himself, should have hidden Himself from men for ~~4000 years~~—from the crea-

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

tion to the end of the O.T. period. And when, in the N.T. period, He came from heaven to earth for the special purpose of revealing Himself to men, He hid Himself once more—hid Himself in man. He appears, and then hides; and He hides Himself so effectively that no one can possibly recognise Him. It seems as though He likes to act that way. I believe He knows I do not mean it irreverently if I say: That is His temperament!

Let me illustrate. There are some brothers and sisters who, whatever they do, do most unobtrusively. If they bring you a drink of water, they watch for an opportunity when you are looking out of the window, then steal in quietly, put down the water, and steal out again. When you turn round you see a glass of water, but have no idea who put it there. I have met many brothers and sisters who do things like that. When they do anything for you, they do it so silently and secretly, you don't know who has done it. And we say—That's their temperament! But there are brothers and sisters of a totally different disposition. They always make a great display. If they bring you a glass of water, they bang the glass so that the noise reaches you before the water does; then in they walk with a great flourish and say, 'A glass of water, Brother So-and-So!'

Once I visited a certain church where one of the sisters had been appointed to act as hostess. Oh! that sister simply filled the place. She was so big she obscured the whole church; I could not catch sight of the elders, or the deacons, or the brothers, or the sisters, for the sight of her. Wherever I looked, there she was. If she brought you anything, she always did it ostentatiously. Let me tell you, Brothers and Sisters—that was her temperament!

## GOD HIDDEN IN A MAN

And let me tell you, our God is not like that. He never makes any display: He is too great. But the marvel is that He remains so hidden. We know He is great, exceedingly great, unutterably great; yet He could make Himself small enough to take up His abode in a Man, Jesus of Nazareth. And this Man belonged to a poor home and grew up to be a carpenter—a very ordinary carpenter, working in a very small way, till He was thirty. Who ever would have thought He was indwelt by God, the infinite God? True, after He entered upon His public ministry, He did at times work signs and wonders, and He did at times say extraordinary things; but then He would withdraw and hide Himself again.

If you study the Scriptures carefully, you will see that God has the kind of temperament that dislikes ostentation. He likes to work secretly rather than openly. He created the universe, and then hid Himself in it, until we do not know where to find Him. He took up His abode in a Man, but that Man was almost unknowable. On first meeting Him, men just saw a man called Jesus, of Nazareth. On meeting Him a second time they recognised in Him a man of more than average intellect; and on the third time of meeting, they thought He must be a prophet. When they met Him still later, they felt: 'Oh, this man is surely more than a prophet!' But to discover exactly who He was, was no easy matter. Even His disciples, during their three-and-a-half years in His company, did not arrive at a true knowledge of Him. All this tells us that He was continually hiding Himself. He would manifest Himself for a moment, and then would conceal Himself again.

Once, on the Mount of Transfiguration, He revealed Himself clearly; but He hid again, and even told the three who were with Him not to tell others what they had seen. And though they had been witnesses of the Transfiguration, later on they themselves were tossed between faith and doubt. What was the cause of their bewilderment? Just this—that no sooner had He revealed Himself than He would hide Himself once more.

## "WHOM NOT HAVING SEEN YE LOVE"

Though Christianity has spread all over the world, not a soul can say that his eyes have actually beheld Jesus. It is a startling fact that, though Christianity has such a place on the earth, Jesus is concealed from the earth. Brothers and Sisters, does the wonder of it not strike you? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus? You say, 'Yes.' Do you love the Lord Jesus? You say, 'I do.' The heathen may ask you, 'Where did you meet Him?' And not only will they raise questions, you yourself will raise questions. I remember over twenty years ago I used to wonder if I had been deceived. I loved Jesus intensely, I believed in Him heartily; but I had never seen Him. Had I perhaps come under the influence of men? How could I love someone I had never seen? How could I believe in someone my eyes had never beheld? I began to doubt.

But the astonishing thing was this—that, just as I was questioning, I fell on my knees and prayed: 'O, Lord Jesus, You're too good; You're too loveable: You're too trustworthy.' And even while I was kneeling in prayer this mind of mine

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was still saying: 'Perhaps I've been deceived. Where is Jesus? Have you ever seen Him?' But, all the while my mind was questioning, my heart was saying: 'O, Lord Jesus, how I thank You! You died for me on the Cross, and now You are in heaven as my Mediator, and Your Holy Spirit is within me.' Just see those two streams of life—the outer man doubting, the inner man praying! Is it not surprising that often both of those experiences are simultaneous?

Now, why have I spent so much time elaborating this one point? So that God's children may see that in all His intercourse with us, in all His activity in our lives, His ways are in keeping with His disposition. Just as we, in our intercourse with our friends, inevitably act in accordance with *our* dispositions, so God, in all His relations with us, is true to *His* disposition. And what is His disposition? It is a disposition that hides itself. He is very active and yet very hidden; He is truly present and yet so concealed that you can be totally unconscious of His presence. If at any time you become aware of Him, He will change His activity and that awareness will go.

### " I GO AWAY "

Our Lord Jesus had close intercourse with His disciples for three-and-a-half years. Little by little He made Himself known to them, till they began to realise that He was a Man indwelt by God. How they appreciated Him then! They looked at Him, they touched Him, and one of them even reclined on His breast. And just as they really thought they possessed Him, He broke in with these startling words: "I go away"! They were all deeply distressed. Formerly they did not know Him; now they know Him, now they appreciate Him, now they prize Him; and now—just as they think they have really got Him for ever—He talks of leaving them. How can He? But listen to what He says: "It is expedient for you that I go away." His disciples are more perplexed than ever. "Expedient for you that I go away"? Yes, "expedient . . . for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." Who is He? "He" is still "I". "I go away, and I come unto you." "I will not leave you orphans: I come unto you." (John xiv. 18, 28; xvi. 5-16.)

Did He go away and come again? Yes. But here is the remarkable point. When He left them, they knew it; when He came again they were ignorant of it. Is not that astounding? You remember, when He rose from the dead and appeared to men, Mary stood there weeping, and

she "beholdeth Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus." As soon as He called, "Mary," she recognised the Lord and wanted to touch Him. But He said, "Touch me not"—and presently He was gone! (John xx. 14-17). Do you see? When you are not clear, He comes to you; as soon as you are clear He goes. That is His disposition! He comes all unseen; as soon as you have seen Him, He has gone.

I love to read Luke xxiv. I think, What nonsense those two disciples talked on the way to Emmaus! (But I sometimes discover myself to be one of the two!) Just as those sad-faced disciples were walking along the road, mournfully communing with one another about the death of their Lord, suddenly Someone joined them and asked what they were talking about. 'What,' they said, 'do you mean to say you've been staying in Jerusalem and don't know what has happened?' How great our Lord is! He simply asked: 'What has happened?' And as they walked along, slowly pouring out their long tale of woe, He patiently accompanied them, and patiently listened. When they had concluded their tale, He said: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe after all that the prophets have spoken!" Up to this point the two were still unenlightened; but they must have been impressed by the Stranger, for, when they reached the village and Jesus "made as though he would go further," "they constrained him" to stay with them. And when they invited Him to eat, He quite unceremoniously assumed the place of host, "took the bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them." At that point "their eyes were opened, and they knew him". And here is the amazing thing. When they could not see, He could listen; when they talked nonsense, He could go out of His way and accompany them for a long time; but as soon as ever their eyes were opened "he vanished out of their sight." That's His disposition!

Let me assure you, when you cannot see the Lord, He is listening to all your foolish talk and is going out of His way to accompany you. I have found myself talking to a brother after this fashion: 'These days the Lord is not with us. The meetings are so heavy; those who should open their lips keep them closed. It seems as though the Lord has forsaken us.' When I discover myself talking like that, I daren't go on, for I am afraid He will hear me talking nonsense. Brothers and Sisters, I long that we might all realise that, since the resurrection of our Lord, the chief discipline for His followers has come along the line of knowing Him as a God who hides Himself. He is in the midst of men, yet does not show Himself to men:

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

He dwells within, yet withholds the consciousness of His indwelling. He is truly in you, and is truly working in you, and working wonderful things, tremendous things; but His disposition is not the disposition of the one we spoke of who loved to make a display. He is a God who hides Himself.

## FAITH AND LOVE IN AN UNSEEN ONE

Let me cite another illustration. One evening, when the doors were shut where some of His disciples were gathered, the Lord appeared. Later Thomas came along and declared: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." The Lord felt for him in his weakness, and one day he allowed him to see and to feel. Then Thomas bowed his head and worshipped, saying: "My Lord and my God." But Jesus said to him: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John xx. 24 - 29). 'Your disposition is one that loves to see, but I love a disposition that believes where it cannot see, for I like to hide Myself.'

Peter had some experience by the time he wrote his first epistle, and he could say: "Whom not having seen ye love." That is a marvellous thing. Where would you find a man who could love a fellow-man he had never seen? But Peter says that, though you have never seen the Lord, you love Him; and he goes on to say: "On whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice." (I Pet. i. 8). Faith and love are in an Unseen One.

May the Lord show us how different He is from our conception of Him. If there is great exhilaration in our meetings we say: 'Oh, the Lord is truly in the midst!' But such a condition is no evidence of reality. On the other hand, when the atmosphere is heavy and you find yourself thinking thoughts like these:—'Alas! I don't love the Lord as I ought! How reluctant I've been to pay the price! How I've failed to honour Him in my life!'—then the God who hides Himself is positively at work in your life. Sometimes when you

are out on the street, or in your room, thoughts such as these come to you—'What is the purpose of my life? What is the Lord getting out of it?'—and it does not dawn upon you that that is the Lord at work within you. Let me tell you: those faint registrations in the depths of your being, those slight suggestions you thought were wholly your own because they were so natural—those were the Lord's doing. The God who hides Himself is at work within your life, but He has hidden Himself so effectively that you have been quite unconscious of His activity. And He is working outwardly as well as inwardly—in your home, in your business, in all your circumstances. He is creating many situations and is active in many directions, though He lets you sense nothing of it, until you imagine these things have just come about naturally; but both the inner and outer conditions of your life are under His control.

The very fact that the Church has continued on this earth for well-nigh two thousand years is the result of the working of Him who is a God that hides Himself. It is often true that the greater the display accompanying any work, the less the Divine content; and the more silent the work and the less our awareness of it, the greater the Divine content. Since all the work we do is done unto Him who hides Himself, it must be based on faith, not on sight.

I trust these words will help some of us to realise that when we are most conscious of impotence, God is often most powerfully present. Don't look for greater things. Don't look for things other than they are. Don't set your expectation on some great vision, or on some great experience. And don't expect anything outward: for the God who hides Himself is at work within your life, and He is working mightily. Your responsibility is to co-operate with Him by responding to His voice within—that "still small voice", that voice that seems so much a part of your own feelings that you scarcely recognise it as a voice at all. To that voice, registered in the deepest depths of your being, you must say, "Amen"; for there, secretly and ceaselessly, the God who hides Himself is working.

W. L.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

## THE VOICE OF THE MASTER

'JEREMY! Go home at once!' Matron's voice was very firm, and it sounded as if she was used to being obeyed when she spoke. Still Jeremy did

not move. He had no wish to be rude. Truth to tell, he was just a little afraid of Matron, and did not wish to cross her. 'Go home!' she had said,

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and she clearly meant it. But though her voice was stern, it was not the voice of his Master, so he did not obey. For Jeremy was a dog—a rather unhappy dog at the moment, as he stood on the doorstep of the Cottage Hospital refusing to go home when he was told.

Jeremy's Master was the local doctor, and the dog greatly loved him. When he was a puppy he had often had to be corrected, for it had taken much time and patience on the doctor's part to make the dog obedient and well-behaved. Although his Master had sometimes seemed hard, he had never been unkind, so that now Jeremy had become devoted to him, following him everywhere and always doing as he was told.

Almost every evening it was the doctor's custom to visit his patients in the Hospital, and when he went on foot he was often accompanied by the dog. Master went in at the front door, Jeremy sat down on the step to wait, and then when the visit was over the doctor came out again and the two walked back home together.

Sometimes the doctor was kept in the hospital for a long time, and Jeremy grew tired of waiting; but he always came out at last, and the wait was forgotten in the joys of the run home. But to-night it was different. Jeremy had waited and waited. No Master appeared. It began to grow dark. Still the door did not open. It was then, quite late, that a nurse found him waiting on the doorstep and tried to get him to go home. When he refused she called Matron, who spoke sternly to him, as we have already told. Nevertheless, he thought his Master was still in the hospital, so nothing would make him go away.

As a matter of fact he was mistaken. His Master was not there. It had so happened that, after seeing his patients, the doctor went out into the garden to give Matron some advice about alterations there. They talked for a while, and then, as they were near the garden gate which led out in the direction of his house, the doctor said 'Good-night' to Matron and went home that way, forgetting that Jeremy would still be sitting at the front door.

Matron could not explain this to Jeremy. She did her best, telling him that Master was gone, that he was already at home, and that Jeremy was to go off at once. He could not understand. He had not seen the doctor come out yet, so he made up his mind to wait. He gave a few respectful barks

to Matron to this effect, but she could no more understand him than he could her, so what was she to do? At last she decided to telephone to the doctor to ask him to come and fetch his dog away.

Doctor was just going to bed, and the Cottage Hospital was some distance from his home, so he did not want to walk all the way back at that late hour. He asked Matron if she could not order Jeremy home. Yes, she said, she could, but he would not obey. The doctor asked her to try again, and so she did, but it was still all in vain. Jeremy would not move from the doorstep. Then the doctor had an idea. He asked Matron if she would please bring the dog into the Hall and put the telephone receiver to his ear. When this was done the doctor just quietly spoke through the telephone, saying, 'Jeremy! Come home!'

It was his Master's voice at last. With not so much as a look at the Matron, Jeremy rushed out of the front door, down the steps, out through the gate and away to his home. He could not understand what had happened. He did not stay to try. It was enough that he had heard the voice of his Master, and that the voice had told him what to do.

When he finally reached home, panting and excited, he found his beloved Master waiting for him. What a good thing that he had obeyed! He was given his supper, which he badly needed by then, and was soon able to curl round to sleep in his own comfortable basket; but, best of all, he had been patted on the head by his Master, who had called him a good dog. Life was very sweet. And this was all because he had learned to know and obey the one voice that mattered—the voice of his own Master.

This is a true story. The lesson for all of us is very clear. The Lord Jesus said that it was a mark of those who belong to Him that they hear His voice and follow Him. We begin to be Christians by hearing and answering the call of Jesus the Saviour. We ought to go on all through our Christian lives by this same rule, learning to know His voice and always to obey. Like the dog, we may sometimes not understand, but like him we shall find that it is always the right and best thing to do what He says. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish..." (John 10, 27, 28).

H. F.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## THE CONTROVERSY OF ZION

## (II) THE CONTROVERSY IN THE REALM OF CHRISTIAN PROFESSION

## (a) PERSONAL INTERESTS

NEXT we must consider Zion, and the testimony of Zion, in relation to the realm of Christian profession and tradition—that realm in which, with the name of Christian or of Christ, the natural soul has its kingdom. It is a terrible thing to say, but it is true, that right there, with the Christian title, there is that which is after all only the kingdom of the soul of man, the natural life. You find—we say it with grief—that there is correspondence, in principle, even there in the realm of Christian profession, to all that you have in the world. All the same elements are active, commercially and socially. Whence come jealousies, rivalries, ambitions, personal interests? You find them all rife and in riot in a certain realm called Christian. They do not come from God, they do not come from the Spirit of God, they do not come from heaven.

Yes, there are rivalries in Christianity, in Christian work, in Christian interests; jealousies for Christian things; personal interests to bring men into position, into reputation, into influence. You touch them, and you meet something—a kick-back. Christianity is a sphere of many selfish, natural, personal ambitions. Men sport themselves in the realm of Christianity, to get advancement, to gratify their own natural desires. One grieves to say that, but it is a fact. We know it so well. That is one aspect of the realm of Christian profession. The 'eyes as a flame of fire' see through it; they know all about it.

## (b) ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

Another aspect is that it is a realm of 'zeal without knowledge', and that is a terrible realm, a terrible kind of thing. "Zeal . . . but not according to knowledge" (Rom. x. 2): a kind of shadow land where men are seen "as trees walking"—that is, there is something indistinct in spiritual apprehension, there is no power or capacity or faculty for discriminating between what is spiritual Christianity and what is 'soulical' Christianity; things are all mixed up and confused. In so much that is going on, you cannot draw even a thin line between man's soul and its ambitions and its activities and its heats, and what is really purely of the Spirit of God. It is all so mixed up; there

seems to be no ability to discriminate or discern between the two. Therefore many innocent people are carried away by the semblance of things, thinking that it is something quite good and quite right. But everything is indistinct, confused, with very limited revelation.

This was the kind of thing with which Paul had to do in Judaism: a confusion of the old covenant with the new, an attempt to mix them up and make a Jewish Christianity, making one thing of Judaism and Christianity; Judaizing Christianity and Christianizing Judaism, leaving no gap between and no difference. Paul was up against that. No, these two things belong to two different realms and kingdoms altogether. One belongs to the realm of the soul, and the other belongs to the realm of the Spirit, and there is a cleavage to be made between these, a discrimination, a cutting through.

Much is being fought for that is believed to be the truth—and yet after all it is only a legalistic interpretation of the truth. There is so much failure and so much inability to grasp the meaning of the truth. Need I point out that there is a vast difference between the statement of a truth in Scripture, and God's meaning in that statement? If you are not able to discriminate between these two things, you will be in constant confusion.

That is just what we find. Here is the letter, but what did God mean by that? If you cannot discriminate, you can take that letter to support a thousand different opposing things; you can take any bit of Scripture and use it to support something that is entirely in conflict with another thing based upon the same Scripture. It needs the Holy Spirit's enlightenment, interpretation, witness and government, to bring us to the truth of the Word.

Now, God has a controversy with that sort of thing. For His true testimony, He will have a controversy with what is called Christianity as surely as He had with Judaism. He will indeed, and very likely it will rage in greater intensity in that realm than in any other. I cannot follow that further, but this is a matter about which the Lord has very real concern. Zion represents, amongst all the other things which it represents, the transparent light of heaven. Zion's light—"thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Is. lx. 1)—is absolute transparency, clear seeing of issues, clear discrimination. That is what Paul meant when he spoke about discerning the things that differ (Phil. i. 10). As you know, he was speaking about, not the wrong and the right, but the

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good and the best, Zion represents the best ; God will not be satisfied with anything less than His full and ultimate testimony.

### (III) THE CONTROVERSY AS TO THE MINISTRY OF ZION

Now we come to the third application or realm of the controversy—that as to the ministry of Zion. Of course, this includes the two that we have already considered—the conflict with the nations, and the conflict with tradition and formal Christianity—but when it comes to the ministry of Zion it becomes very much more inward. This controversy rests upon some things that we may seek to understand. The ministry of Zion is a greatly disputed thing. The ministry of Zion is something around which the battle circles more hotly, perhaps, than it does around any other issue. This whole matter of ministry in relation to God's full purpose—what a battle! Paul knew something about this. How he besought believers that they would pray earnestly that he might be given utterance to open his mouth to speak the mystery (Eph. vi. 19), that a door might be opened to him to speak the mystery (Col. iv. 3). This is not something about which you can get up an address, and go out willy-nilly and begin to give it out. If it is rightly constituted, it is fraught with the most terrific conflict. This ministry, if it is the true ministry of Zion, first of all rests upon, and is constituted by, the sovereign apprehending of a vessel for it.

#### (a) SOVEREIGN APPREHENSION

Of course, that is so true of the historical Zion, God's sovereign choosing of Zion. It is there in the Scripture declared and made clear very positively. It was a sovereign act of God that chose Zion. But Zion is a vessel, a symbolic vessel ; and a vessel for this specific ministry—the fulness of the significance of Christ and His work and His place in God's universe—is something sovereignly apprehended by God, raised up by God. When I say 'sovereignly', I mean that there is no explanation for it other than that this is of God. You cannot account for it in any way whatever but by the Lord. Touch it, you meet the Lord. Be amongst it, you meet the Lord. Somehow or other, the Lord is responsible for this. Whether it be collective or individual, it is something sovereignly raised up by God.

You have no choice in this matter of ministry. You cannot do this by choice, you cannot aspire to it, you cannot walk into it, you cannot put your hand upon it. You cannot just 'take up' this mini-

stry. Oh, it is such a sifting and discriminating thing. Many people like it ; they like the ideas, and they think they are going to propagate those ideas, to take up this thing and make it theirs ; but it just does not do. Either they get into confusion or other people do. Something happens that it does not work out. You have a caricature, you have a contradiction, you have the absence of the vital thing. It is something that you cannot, just like that, take up at your own will. If God Himself has not apprehended you for that purpose—He may have apprehended you for something else—then it is no use ; keep out of it. It is something out of the sovereignty of God.

How many things that touches! It amounts to this, that the question of such a testimony is a matter of life and death with us ; nothing less of an issue than that. It is not something we can take up and drop. It is not something that we can come into, and then not like it, and be offended and draw out. It is a matter of life and death : I am there because my very life is found in my being there, and it would be committing spiritual suicide for me to drop out. That is very utter, I am not saying that God's sovereignty operates only in this ministry or that ministry of utter fulness of Christ. It operates in other ways. But I am saying, as to the testimony of Zion: first of all, it is something right out of the sovereignty of God, and man has no place in it other than that of faith and obedience. Man has no proprietary interest in this, no possessive place, no controlling place in this. It is the Lord, wholly, utterly the Lord, and if it should cease to be that, everything goes. Man just cannot carry that on. He can carry on the framework, but he cannot carry that ministry on. He can still have the tabernacle in Shiloh, but the glory has departed. It is the Lord. That is a very solemn, very searching word.

This ministry of Zion is constituted, then, by a sovereign apprehending of God.

#### (b) GOD'S SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENT BEHIND THE VESSEL'S HISTORY

Then, in the second place, there is a sovereign government of God behind the history of the vessel. Of course, that needs explaining. It can be illustrated. When the Apostle Paul said, 'It pleased God, who separated me from my birth, to reveal his Son in me' (Gal. i. 15, 16), he touched this very point. 'From my birth'. 'My birth was into a Jewish family, my birth was utterly, one hundred per cent, Jewish ; but right there, while I was like that, in a most complete and utter Jewish setting—birth, blood, training, education ; while all that heat of



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antagonism to Christ was still in my blood, although it had not come out until it was provoked; while my hatred of the Gentiles, whom I called the 'dogs', was in my constitution—God had already separated me to be the messenger of Christ to those very Gentiles, to have all that heat in my blood against His Son quenched—or rather, to have a new fire kindled in love for that Son'.

The point is this, that right behind that man's earthly history was the sovereignty of God, foreseeing him, foreknowing him, forechoosing him, and arranging everything in line with his ultimate calling and the purpose of his life. It is difficult to believe that it is like that, and yet when God has a vessel for a purpose in view, it is no afterthought. It does not just arise, at some point in time, God has foreseen it, known all about it, and worked in relation to it, and its very birth and environment are under His sovereignty to some good purpose in relation to ultimate meaning. We may have to live a long time before we discover what that is.

Let me put it this way. We have to get right into line with God's purpose and God's thought, before we are able to see that our very birth and constitution and environment have had a definite relationship to the thing to which we are called. If you cannot understand and grasp that, do not worry about it; but it is a fact. It is the sovereignty of God, lying behind our earthly experience and history, in relation to purpose, that constitutes this vessel.

## (c) A DEEP WORK IN THE VESSEL

And then, in the third place, this ministry of Zion is constituted by a deep and drastic work in the vessel. This is not something that we can take up apart from something that has been done in us—that God is doing in us: the undoing of us, the taking of us to pieces, the stripping of us, the emptying of us, the bringing of us to zero and starting from there all over again with us. That is the sort of thing that is connected with Zion and Zion's ministry.

Do not make any mistake about it. This ministry, the ministry of which we are speaking, the ministry of Zion, is something utterly different in its nature and its realm from all other ministries. It is possible to look on and admire. It is possible to walk in and out, or sit down inside, and to appreciate the truths and agree with the ideas, and to recognise something of the values, and to desire the benefits, and to seek to participate. It is possible that all that may be so—and then that there should be a great dividing 'but'. With all the

agreement and admiration and recognition and desire, there may yet be lacking the constitution of Zion. The constitution of Zion is—what? That God has broken clean through all natural faculties and abilities for understanding, and, by revelation, has planted right deep down in the centre of the being a knowledge of a spiritual kind which is different from natural knowledge. It is not taking up the phraseology and the ideas, and all that sort of thing, and appreciating and valuing and agreeing, and then going and repeating. It is something that has been done inside, and the thing has come by revelation of the Holy Ghost.

That is the ministry of Zion; and I say—that discriminates, that divides. And it is because things are like that that you have so much conflict. You find the conflict in the very realm of that ministry. It arises there. It arises in the realm where people, while they agree, they accept and they repeat and they look and they want, and so on, yet they are not constituted. Violent conflict arises in that realm. If you only take the matter of ministry itself—I mean public ministry—you find it is the most controversial point in all Christianity. More trouble has arisen over platform ministry than over anything else. But in Zion no one has a right to minister, no one has a qualification for ministry, who cannot quite easily sit back and do no ministry at all if the Lord wants it. It ought to be just as easy for a minister of Zion to take a back seat, and wait for the Lord and watch for the Lord, as it is for the natural soul to want to be on that platform.

What I am saying may have application to a very limited company, but I focus upon this matter of ministry, the ministry of Zion. It is of a quality, of a kind, of a constitution that is not studied, that is not the result of going to books and extracting the truths, of observing and hearing, and then reproducing. It is something *inwrought*. But oh, how the devil rages over a ministry of that kind—because it is going to do something, it is going to touch God's ultimate purpose, and if he can he will destroy it and destroy the vessels of it. He will stop at nothing to bring an end to that kind of ministry. It is true. Here the "controversy of Zion" rages. It rages over the ministry of Zion.

You see, the whole point of the controversy and the conflict is its reality, its essence, its essential value; the very life of it, the very power of it, the very distinctiveness of it: for if Satan focuses upon one aspect of such a testimony more than another, it is to destroy its distinctiveness, in some way to get it drawn out into a generalisation, conform it to a recognised system, take away that dis-

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tinguishing definiteness ; and it is a terrific battle all the way along to keep the testimony clear, distinct, unmixed. You may not know all that I am saying, but it is quite true. It is something in a different realm from mere mental apprehension. You can have the same truths by study, but there is a difference between that and having them by revelation of the Holy Ghost.

#### (d) SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

I close upon what I regard as one of the most important factors in the testimony of Zion, and that is spiritual discernment. This is the greatest gift that God gives to His Church. It is impossible to overrate the value of people of spiritual discernment, who see the differences, the fine differences ; who 'register' ; who read right through the semblance to the reality ; who sense, perhaps—' Yes,

that is all according to the book, but there is something lacking' ; or, on the other hand—' Ah, they have not got that by reading, by studying ; they have come to that through something the Lord has done in them.' That capacity for discernment is of the greatest value to such a testimony. Oh, for more men and women of that discernment, able to discriminate—not to criticize by their discrimination, not using their discernment in order to denounce, but able to guide and help because they know the Lord has done something. They have not built up a standard from which they judge, but God has done something in them, so that they recognise where God has done something in others, and at the same time register a sense of hurt and grief where they only meet with an imitation.

The Lord give us such understanding!

T. A-S.

(concluded)

### WHEN GOD IS WITH US

*"The Lord is with thee" (Judges vi. 12).*

IT is useless to attempt even the smallest work for the Lord if we cannot be sure that we have His backing and support. Gideon's task was not a small one—far from it ; and therefore it was essential for him to know that God stood behind him. For this reason the heavenly message was sent : "The Lord is with thee".

#### A PERSONAL ASSURANCE

Gideon's immediate reaction was to question the reality of God's presence. "Oh my lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his wondrous works . . . ?" This message was meant to be very personal ; it was not meant to describe the whole people. The angel had not said, 'The Lord is with *you*', for indeed, as Gideon observed, there were no signs of His power in the general situation. He was a man whom the Lord singled out, so he must not be governed by what was true all around him, but must believe that the Lord was prepared to commit Himself wholly, if only Gideon would move forward in faith. We shall be paralysed if we do not have heaven's witness that the Lord is with us—and this not merely with regard to salvation, for no truly born-again Christian need ever have any doubts as to that. The Word of God will answer all questions as to whether or not we are the Lord's. The question is as to whether, being

the Lord's, the course which you are taking and the end which you are pursuing is such as can have the Lord's whole-hearted support and the corroboration of His presence. "The Lord is *with thee*". Is He? The matter will be contested, but we cannot afford to have any questions about it if we are to serve Him and His people.

One of Satan's greatest weapons is the weapon of discouragement. As the story unfolds, we find that Gideon had constantly to overcome it. To us the story is glorious, because we know the end of it. By His grace the end of the story will be glorious. But the way to that end was marked by a constant assault on his faith, not in a general way but as to this personal issue of whether God was backing him up, as to whether he could really count on the Lord being "with" him.

He had to learn the uselessness of letting himself be governed by the general state of affairs. Whatever the condition of the people of God in general, he had to know that the Lord was with *him*, and indeed it was only by such a personal assurance and commission that they could be delivered. "And the Lord looked upon *him*, and said, Go in this thy might, and save Israel . . ." (vs. 14). It is useless to bemoan the sad state of things all around. It is vain to wait for widespread blessing all around, in the hopes that amidst such outpoured blessing it will be easy to follow the Lord, or that strength and fruitfulness will come as we are swept along on a tide of general spiritual fulness. In the language of Gideon's signs, that

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would be to ask that the fleece might be wet because the ground all around was wet. This was the one sign he did not ask for ; it would have been no sign at all. Yet so often that is the request that we bring to the Lord. If only the Church as a whole were at a high level of spiritual life, how we would prove that the Lord was with *us*. If only our local church or assembly were different, how much easier it would be for us! God's man is the one who can know in the midst of prevailing weakness and failure that the Lord is with *him*.

## HIS BASIS IS OUR WEAKNESS

There was no conceit or self-confidence in the response which Gideon gave to the message, which had only made him more aware of his utter inadequacy. He marvelled that God could be so committed to such as he. His second question was not concerning things around him but about himself. "... I save Israel?" he asked, "... my family is the poorest ... and I am the least ..." This is where the Lord's servant must begin. There is no true basis for God's backing until we have been brought very low in sincere realisation that we in ourselves can supply nothing at all to help God. Our only contribution is the faith that enables His strength to be known in our weakness.

This basis must be maintained. Gideon began by being nothing, but the Lord saw to it that he continued to be nothing in himself. His was the story, not of growing strength, but of weakness made still more weak. For the Lord to continue to be with him, he must not be permitted to gain strength in his own eyes or in the eyes of others. That is the explanation of the great reduction in his army, till it reached the pitifully inadequate three hundred. God had been working toward this very end. "By the three hundred ... will I save you", He told Gideon: not because they were marvellous men, but just because they represented this very element of human weakness counting only on Divine strength.

The actual method of deliverance—the torches and the broken pitchers—only pressed home this essential principle, proving anew that so long as it was maintained the Lord continued to be "with" them. Furthermore, when the battle seemed to be won and Gideon was following up the enemy, there was no change ; for we are told that he "came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing" (Judges viii. 4). They are in the victory, yet in themselves they are without strength, "... faint, yet pursuing". What temptations in that

faintness to wonder whether the Lord was really with them now! What temptations to give up the pursuit because of their own exhaustion! Even at that advanced point of the story, Gideon was still on the same basis with the Lord of personal weakness and inadequacy.

Was the Lord "with" him? Clearly the men of Succoth very much doubted it, and so did those of Penuel. One would have thought that by this time they would have recognised the hand of the Lord upon His servant ; but no, they despised him still, or at best they doubted him. They would give him no bread, nor commit themselves in any way to him, for all the evidence seemed to be against the success of this pursuit of his. "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?" they asked (viii. 6). There was no denying the great victory already achieved, and which the rest of Israel were busy enjoying and celebrating: but Gideon and his few, as they pressed on to consummate the victory, still had to contend with those who had the greatest questions as to whether the Lord would still be with them ; they still had to press on, regardless both of their own conscious weakness and of the taunts of those who might have helped them.

## GIDEON'S TWO SIGNS

It is clear, then, that this matter of the Lord's backing demands a constant exercise of faith. This is the explanation of the two signs which Gideon sought of and was given by the Lord. They were encouragements to active faith, not evidences to make faith unnecessary.

## (a) DEW ON THE FLEECE

In the first instance, Gideon asked that there should be dew on the fleece only, and that it should be dry upon all the ground. And so it was : for the next morning when he wrung out the fleece he gathered a bowlful of water (Judges vi. 37, 38). This, then, is the experience of the man who has God with him. He is not affected by the deadness and dryness which surround him ; he does not have to wait for general blessing and for helpful circumstances: alone in the midst of inertia and even opposition he can keep alive and fresh by direct dealings with Heaven. He does not have to depend on atmospheres, for by his communion with the Lord he brings his own spiritual atmosphere. He does not languish and complain because of surrounding deadness, but himself abounds in fresh life by the Spirit.

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Quite rightly, Gideon made vital experience the test of Divine commission. Human qualifications, popular approval, official recognition—all this meant nothing to him. The one essential was that of abundant spiritual life direct from its source in God. It did not matter whether the people were with him, but it mattered supremely that he should be sure that God was with him. The answer through this first sign was an abundant one. The fleece was not only moist—it was wringing wet, saturated with dew in an area where no dew had fallen.

## (b) DEW ON THE GROUND

In a sense, the second sign which Gideon asked for required a greater miracle than the first. "Let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew" (vs. 39). If our reading of the first sign was correct, this request was a very remarkable one. Gideon invited the Lord to withhold: to prove the reality of His presence by allowing His servant to be dry when there was freshness and moisture all around.

This sign means, just as the first one did, that God's servant does not draw his resources from those around him. When they are dry, he need not be dry; but when they are watered that is not to say that he too will be watered. The obvious meaning is that still he is entirely dependent upon heaven. But it means much more. It means that there can be confirmation of a spiritual position by withholding as well as by supplying. There are times when any true servant of the Lord pauses to enquire whether, after all, the flow of his ministry is not coming from nature's source. It is possible to get so used to praying that prayer becomes glib and easy. The words may come so freely that, if we are not careful, they will have no meaning. It is possible to grow so accustomed to preaching, or to testifying, that ideas, phrases, messages pour out without the need for deep spiritual exercise.

Under such circumstances, it may be that the Lord can best reassure as to His power by keeping His servant dry, though all around may seem to be active with life. In a sense this is a sign to the spiritual. It can be very painful. It can, alas, be ignored, as the Lord's servant forces his way on in activities without anointing. Yet it can be a most blessed confirmation of a spiritual relationship of deep dependence, of the kind described by the Lord Jesus when He insisted: "I can of myself do nothing" (John vi:30). Happy the man who through the Lord's withholdings can still hear Him saying: "The Lord is with thee!"

"And God did so that night . . ." This seems to have been enough for Gideon. The verse marks, not only the end of a chapter of the Bible, but an end to all doubts and questions as to whether the Lord was willing to stand behind him. After this a new chapter opens, with God's servant rising up early to prepare for the battle. It was worth waiting for. The double sign was of supreme importance. We dare not become involved in an enterprise which entails spiritual conflict unless we have solid reasons for believing that the Lord has called us to it and will see us through.

## THE LORD WITH US FOR A PURPOSE

The original assurance to Gideon was given in the light of a definite call to a specific task. The Holy Spirit's presence and power is always associated with such definiteness. Gideon was not given a general assurance that, whatever he liked to undertake in the interests of the kingdom, he would find the Lord backing him up. It was not like that at all. His course was to be a clearly defined one. His calling was quite specific. It was with this in view, and on the assumption that he would devote himself to this calling, that the angel assured him: "The Lord is with thee".

Gideon is a type of the Church, or, perhaps better, of a spiritual remnant in the Church. It is called for a purpose, and if it will only ascertain what that purpose is and devote itself to the Lord for it, there will be no lack of Divine support. "Lo, I am with you . . .", the Lord Jesus said, and surely He meant "with" you in the sense that the Lord was "with" Gideon. The full power of all His heavenly resources by the Spirit is freely available, so long as the people of God are true to their calling. Like Gideon, they will begin in great weakness, and like him they will find that the Lord takes steps to keep them so, and even to weaken them further. Faith will be tested, enemies will multiply; those who should give help may doubt and deride: but what do these matter if only they can be assured of the Lord's backing?

This truth also applies to the individual believer. How can a man know that the Lord will be "with" him after this fashion? Only by humbly fulfilling his own calling. The baptism of the Spirit is not in order to free individuals to embark on any spiritual enterprise they choose, with the easy assumption that the Lord is now "with" them: it is the bringing together of all the members in life union with one another in the Lord (I Corinthians xii. 13). Thus, as members together of this complex whole, set in the Body so that each may fulfil its

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own function, acting in true relatedness to one another in the Spirit, we may be assured of adequate resources and fulness of support from the Lord Himself. In this way we shall find that He is "with" us. But when the best and the most spiritual get out of their place, undertake what should be given to others, overreach the limits of the present will of God for them, violate the harmony of the functioning of all the members, then there is a real sense in which the Lord will not be "with" them in that matter.

On the other hand we are to be greatly encouraged. There is a purpose for each life, a function for each member. Let us concentrate on that, give ourselves to that, forsake all else to be available to the Lord for that, and we can then appropriate the promise: "The Lord is with thee". Impossibilities do not matter to God; all that matters is faith's obedience.

## DEPARTURE FROM FAITH

The end of Gideon's story is a sad one. Although, man of God that he was, he was not carried away by the great popularity which came to him—for, when the people asked him to become their king, his answer was: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord

shall rule over you" (Judges viii, 23)—yet he did one thing which became a snare to him. He took the gold and purple, the visible fruits of his great victory, and had them made into an ephod, which became a kind of memorial of his victory. When he looked on that costly ephod he regarded it as the proof that the Lord had been with him. The man who was prepared to trust the Lord's presence without outward proofs; who ignored difficulties and criticisms; who joined the battle though in great weakness, and pursued to the full end in spite of faintness—this same man so declined spiritually that he eventually found satisfaction in earthly greatness—in an empty trophy of past glory.

This is a warning to us. It may also be an explanation of why the Lord so seldom allows us to have ease and prosperity. It would be a bad day for us if we measured the Lord's favour by human popularity and were content to be rich in our own eyes without the same need for making sure that the Lord was "with" us. To avoid this the Lord keeps us in the battle. He still allows us to feel faint, even as we are pursuing. He allows the men of Succoth and Penuel to sneer at us. He holds us to the double sign of the fleece. But none of these things really matter when God is with us.

H. F.

## THE DIVINELY APPOINTED PLACE OF CHRIST

"The unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians iii. 8).

"O the depth of the riches . . . ! how unsearchable . . . !" (Romans xi. 33).

"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (I Corinthians ii. 9, 10).

"Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job xi. 7). (You will notice that there is a marginal rendering which puts it this way: "Canst thou find out the deep things of God?"—"The Spirit searcheth . . . the deep things of God.")

WE ought also to read from John's Gospel chapter xvi, where the Lord is saying to His disciples that when the Spirit was come He would take the things that are His, and show them (vv. 13, 14).

## THREE KEY WORDS

Let us look at two or three outstanding words in the passage that we have quoted of the first Corinthian letter. You notice the three words—"prepared", "searcheth", "deep things" (lit. "deeps").

"Things God prepared for them that love him"—things which God made ready for them that love Him. The question of course immediately arises: When did God prepare, or make ready, those things? The word is used in different connections, and they throw light upon this question. You remember that, when the Lord was here on earth, there was a request made of Him by a mother concerning her two sons, that, when He came into His Kingdom, they might sit one on His right hand and one on His left hand; and His answer was that that was for those for whom it was prepared (Matt. xx. 23). He could not grant that privilege—it was kept for those for whom it was prepared, made ready, by God. Again, the blessing of the Lord upon certain ones takes this form: "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation

of the world" (Matt. xxv. 34). And the Apostle Paul writes of: "good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. ii. 10).

We shall presently touch more definitely upon when that took place, but it is quite clear, I think, from these passages, that there was a long anticipation of something, going right back to the foundation of the world—more literally the 'laying down' of the world, the mapping out of the world. It was then that things were prepared by God for them that love Him.

Then this word 'searcheth': "the Spirit *searcheth* all things". The word does not mean to find out, to discover. It means to range: 'the Spirit ranges the deep things of God.' The Spirit's movement is deep, far and wide, ranging and exploring the whole realm of the things of God.

And then '*deep things*'. This very same word, in the singular, was the word which the Lord used to His disciples: "Put out into the deep" (Luke v. 4); and Paul used it of some of his own experiences when he said: "A night and day have I been in the deep" (II Cor. xi. 25). That will give anybody who knows anything about the sea some idea of the meaning of this word as it is employed here, in the plural, for "the deep things of God."

When we come into the realm of the things of the Spirit, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are led into a very great realm, and we are going to ask this question—What are these deep things of the Spirit? We can only hope to think of some of them—perhaps only one—at this present time. What are these deep things, which have been revealed, though never explained? ~~We must not~~ confuse those two things. It is possible to reveal or uncover something, bring a thing into view, without explaining it, and we are not given the explanation to the deepest things of God. We are still left with very, very great questions about them, as we shall clearly see as we go on; nevertheless they have been uncovered, they have been brought to light as immense realities, and moreover brought to light for our good.

#### CHRIST GOD'S APPOINTED HEIR OF ALL THINGS

One of the deep things of the Spirit which have been brought to light, and I think the first of them, is the place of Christ in the Divine scheme of things. Here is a very, very deep thing indeed, far beyond our fathoming, but nevertheless it is clearly before us in the Word, going right back again into past eternity. The writer to the Hebrews, speaking of the Son, says: "whom he appointed heir of all

things" (Heb. i. 2). That is His place in the Divine scheme—"heir of all things". He was appointed—when? Well, before all things were created; because immediately it goes on to say: "through whom he made the ages". He was "appointed heir of all things".

You remember His parable in which He quite clearly intimated this—the parable of the wicked husbandmen who, having stoned the servants, espied the coming of the Son and said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance" (Matt. xxi. 38). This incidentally touches upon the deep things of Satan. It is an uncovering of Satan's deep work to rob Christ of His inheritance, and explains the Cross from the side of the enemy—the murder of the Heir with the securing of His inheritance in view. So Jesus, the Son of God, is revealed by the Spirit to be God's appointed Heir.

In the second Psalm, undoubtedly Messianic and prophetic, we read: "Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Ps. ii. 8). So His inheritance is the nations and the uttermost parts of the earth, Divinely appointed and ordained, and it cannot be set aside. And Heaven too—for He said on His resurrection: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18). He is the Heir possessing all authority in every realm. And He is Heir to the Church—for Paul prays that, through the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of revelation, believers might be able to see "the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph. i. 18)—that is, Christ's inheritance in the saints. Here are some of the all things—the nations, the uttermost parts of the earth, the heavens and the earth, and within the Church. That is a statement of fact. It is a deep thing revealed by the Spirit.

But the point arises here: 'God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit'. These things, then, must have a very real meaning for believers. This will take us away from a superficial Christianity. If we can really grasp the meaning of this first thing for ourselves, as believers, it is going to exercise upon us a very salutary effect.

#### THE BELIEVER'S CALLING

The calling of believers is said to be in accordance with His eternal purpose. What is that? The eternal purpose is Christ inheriting all things: so that our being called, our hearing the call, is a first work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Christ coming into His inheritance, according to something laid down with the foundation of the world.

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That makes conversion something very much bigger than just being saved, does it not? It is not just a matter of becoming a Christian. There is this immense background to our being called. The Holy Spirit has, so to speak, 'got to work' in relation to the appointed Heir of all things: you and I are coming under the hand of the Holy Spirit as a part of that inheritance. Our very calling in grace is according to that purpose, and our calling therefore is something tremendous. It is not only our calling. The beginning of our Christian life is not something merely incidental. It is fundamental to the whole scheme of things in relation to the Lord Jesus.

### THE BELIEVER'S CONSCIOUSNESS

I think it is true to the experience of most, if not all, of those who respond to the Spirit's influence and call, that, following that response, there comes into being, there settles down within, a sense of belonging, of being owned, possessed. We feel: 'I know now where I belong—this is really where I belong. I felt that I did not belong to anything or anybody before, but now I know I belong, and to Whom I belong.' It is a sense of being taken into possession. It is a matter of ownership.

That is why there springs immediately from the lips of those who have responded to the Spirit the word 'Father'. Paul says to the Galatians that the Spirit of God has been put into our hearts, and thereby we cry 'Abba, Father': and what does 'Father' mean if it does not mean belonging? And again, 'Lord': the first ejaculation of Paul after his apprehending was 'Lord'. We love that word, but we did not always love the idea of being 'lorded'. It is foreign to human nature to be lorded over. There is a revolt in the whole human race against being lorded over by anything or anybody, but it is the Christian's delight to use that word 'Lord'—*Dominus*—and to be 'dominated' by Him, 'Master'—that word is music to the Christian, as applied to the Lord Jesus; but how the natural man hates the idea of 'master'!

This is the consciousness that comes in. We are not compelled or forced; it is spontaneous. The Spirit has brought us home, brought us into our rightful ownership. This is how it ought to be. For that was all arranged long, long before we had a being. We belong to Somebody, we are Somebody's inheritance; that is where we belong.

### THE BELIEVER'S CONFIDENCE

This leads surely to the believer's confidence. There is a tremendous value for us in the place of Christ in God's scheme of things. If really, in the

'before-times-eternal', we were made a heritage, included in the inheritance of the Son, and the Spirit calls, do you think there is going to be any difficulty in our acceptance? It is altogether out of keeping with this whole scheme of things to have any question at all as to whether we shall be accepted. If you had an inheritance, and that inheritance was brought within your reach, do you think there would be any argument as to whether it could be accepted? None at all. And so this very great, deep, blessed truth of Christ's inheritance in the saints gives us a ground of confidence as to our acceptance. There is no question about it, we belong to Him—why have any question as to whether we shall be accepted?

Of course, He has done everything to make our acceptance a blessed reality and to dispose of anything in the way. What a ground of assurance! This whole question of assurance amongst believers is so often challenged by the Devil and every demon that he has, with the object of shaking confidence, shaking assurance, bringing in doubt. Why?—there is no ground for it at all. It is not contingent upon our worthiness, or anything about us—except that we believe it. Long before this terribly complicated make-up of ours had any acceptance, the whole thing was planned. We were given to the Lord Jesus, and we belong to Him. What a ground of assurance, then! It stands rooted in eternity; it stands rooted in the Divine counsels. If you have heard the Spirit's call, that is not just something belonging to this moment or to this life. That is something which ranges all the ages and goes right back to the beginning. I say again: What a ground of assurance!

And He will keep surely that which belongs to Him. "I am persuaded that he is able to keep" (II Tim, i. 12). Is the Lord Jesus able to keep what is put into His hands and what really belongs to Him from eternity past? Is He able to keep it? What a ground of assurance for keeping! We need have no worry about to-morrow, about the future. He is able to keep. Oh, those mighty words of the Apostle—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. viii. 35)—followed by a catalogue of everything conceivable that might be thought to have the power of separating—only to be swallowed up by: 'I am persuaded, none of these things'—"we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Why? Simply because we belong to Him.

### THE CHURCH'S MESSAGE

We have seen something of the believer's life, as to what lies behind the call, as to what accom-

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panies the call, for assurance, for confidence for the future. What about the Church's message? You see, the Church's message is called a proclamation. The word most characteristic of the function of the messenger of Christ is that he is a herald. It is a herald's business to make a proclamation, an announcement, a declaration. What is the message? It is an announcement, it is a declaration, it is a proclamation—and, mark you, this means far more than may appear on the surface—that *all things belong to the Lord Jesus.*

Every unsaved man and woman belongs, by right, to the Lord Jesus. This world, in every spot, by right belongs to the Lord Jesus. Put your foot down just where you are and say, 'This place belongs to Christ by right!' The Holy Ghost takes account of that, stands on that. Oh, yes: although He has not got them, they belong to Him. But, you see, it raises tremendous issues. If you declare the fact that men and women belong to the Lord Jesus by every right of creation and redemption, as His inheritance: if you declare it, if you make it known, then if they refuse they are held as guilty of rebellion against the rightful owner. It precipitates a very positive, clear-cut issue. If there should be reading these lines an unsaved person—any person who does not recognise the absolute ownership of the Lord Jesus—and you are not, in the presence of this declaration, ceding Him His rights, you are positively guilty of rebellion against God's appointed Heir. It raises a tremendous issue. And it goes beyond that. If you belong to the Lord Jesus, by right of God's giving and appointing, and you do not give Him yourself, you are robbing Jesus Christ of His rights. It is a very positive issue. You are in the category of a robber of God, and that is very serious.

So this is the proclamation. There is the good side, the Gospel side, of this. It is a grand thing, on

the grounds which we have set forth, to know that I really belong to the Lord Jesus. Recognising and acknowledging that, there is no question as to whether He will accept what belongs to Him; there is no question as to whether He will keep what belongs to Him; there is no question as to the destiny of what belongs to Him. All I have to do is to believe and to cede to Him His rights.

This is the work of the messenger, the herald, the proclaimer. The Holy Spirit is said to be committed to this. If we make the right proclamation or take the right position in relation to Christ's place in God's scheme of things, the Holy Spirit comes in on that. It may be that very often the Holy Spirit cannot come in and precipitate issues because we are not clear-cut enough as to what this whole thing is about. It is about nothing less than Christ's Heirship of all things. Bring that in, and the Holy Spirit will come with tremendous conviction. We make the issue so much less—usually what the individual is going to get as the benefit of coming to the Lord Jesus—instead of primarily the rights of the Lord Jesus Himself. If we proclaim Him as Lord, the Holy Spirit will set His seal to that. In the unsaved or in the saved, when we cede anything to Him as Lord, let Him take His place as Lord on any point, the Holy Spirit bears witness. That is always His ground.

So the Spirit is committed to calling according to purpose, to sealing those who respond, to conforming them to the image of God's Son, and to guiding them into all the truth related to God's purpose.

That is Christ's place. It is a deep thing of God, it is a big thing, it is an immense thing, but this has been revealed, amongst many other things, to us by the Spirit. May the Lord strengthen us by His Word.

T. A-S.

THE NEXT

## SPECIAL GATHERINGS

at HONOR OAK

will be held, the Lord willing, on

SATURDAY, January 5, at 3. 30 &amp; 6. 30 p.m.

LORD'S DAY, January 6, at 11 a.m., 3. 30 &amp; 6. 30 p.m.



A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge with gratitude the following gifts received during August and September, 1956.

Aspley Guise 10s., 2s. 6d.; Auckland, New Zealand £1; Baitalpur, India 10s.; Berlin, Germany £1; Bietigheim, Germany 5s.; Birmingham £1; Bradford 5s.; Brechin £2; Brighton 5s.; Broadview, Canada 12s.; Brynmawr £2; Buckingham £1 10s.; Burnley 2s. 6d.; Chirk 6s.; Christchurch, New Zealand 10s.; Congleton £5; Cuiaba, Brazil £5 5s.; Dalmally 10s.; Dowlais 10s.; Drumna-drochit 10s.; Dublin 3s. 6d., 15s.; Edinburgh £1 5s.; Evesham 15s.; Exeter 5s.; Foxhole £5; Galashiels 10s.; Glasgow 10s., £1; Gondar, Ethiopia £2 18s.; Gravesend £1; Grimsby 5s.; Hannover, Germany £1; Haslemere 10s.; Hastings £3; Hornchurch £1; Horsham 10s.; Ipswich 4s. 6d.; Ipswich, Australia 16s.; Joppa £2; Kilcreggan £2; Llandudno £1 2s. 6d.; Llantwit Major £1; London E.11—3s. 3d.; S.E.6—10s.; S.E.9—10s.; S.E.14—£1; S.E.15—8s.; S.E.18—2s. 6d.; S.E.22—£1; S.E.23—10s., £2, £3; S.W.4—£2 W.11—5s.; W.13—17s. 10d.; W.C.I—£1; Los Angeles, California £3 10s. 5d.; Maidstone 4s.; Mansfield 10s.; Melbourne, Australia £1 4s.; Nairobi, Kenya £5; Newcastle-on-Tyne £1; Nîmes, France £1; North Coburg, Australia 16s.; Orillia, Canada £1 9s.; Paris, France £2; Reading £1; Reconvilier, Switzerland £1; St. Austell 5s.;

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