

# A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Use - pp 16 a peculiar vessel  
pp 21 A tragic answer to prayer

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Excerpts from letter



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### EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear fellow-travellers,

With this issue of this little paper we have entered upon one more year of its ministry—the forty-second.

Let us immediately express our very sincere wish that this year will be one of great blessing to every one of our readers. May it be a year in which our beloved Lord has a great increase in the possession of His inheritance, and one in which His people come into a great enlargement of theirs, in Him.

We shall count upon the continuous prayer-fellowship of each one of you that we shall be enabled to help in both of these directions by the medium of these pages.

Need is undoubted: Christ is all-sufficient; but our capacity is so small. In a new way, or with a new emphasis, we have been burdened with the need of so many scattered and hungry sheep. We do need to know that mighty resurrection-life which can make the small handful of 'loaves and fishes' expand to the multitude for whom the Great Shepherd has compassion.

I personally take this opportunity of once again sharing with you, and asking you to share with me, this very practical concern. Does the Lord really want me to spend this year in 'journies oft'? The calls are many; some quite pressing, and these would lead me practically right round the world. But the physical conditions of increased years make it necessary to be very sure of the Lord's will and to know His enablement in a fuller way than ever.



My own inclination would be toward centres or a centre to which the Lord's people might come and return to their location to fulfil the ministry. I am especially concerned for the Lord's servants, that their ministry may be enriched and the vision of the Lord and His essential purpose may be fuller and clearer. You will, I am sure, join me in prayer over this matter.

At the time of writing I am having to face a very urgent and pressing 'Macedonian cry' from the Far East again, *immediately*. It may be that a note will be added in this connection before this issue is mailed.

Forgive the very personal note in this letter, but our readers having given such a personal expression of their appreciation of this ministry, I feel sure that no idea of personal importance will be attached by them to this approach.

The sense of urgency and shortening time is making us press on with more literature. Some twelve books and booklets (including reprints of those not available for some time) are now with the printers, and three new books are ready to go to press. One of the books most called for—*What is Man?*—is now at the binders. We only regret that books take so long to print in these times. Announcement will be made as the books are on hand. This is a ministry which can go on when we have gone to the Lord, and it can go where we are unable to go personally.

When you think of the Editor and pray for him remember also his three helpers; our faithful brother, CLIFFORD OGDEN, who has printed *A Witness and a Testimony* single-handed for a long time, and who printed many of the books. Also my two devoted secretaries—Miss GUY and Miss READ. We four carry the full weight of all that is entailed in getting this ministry out over the world.

There are many fierce battles related to it all, but 'He who hath delivered, doth deliver, and we trust will still deliver.'

What a glorious thing it would be if this should be the year of His appearing! Let us walk with our faces toward the light and our hearts inspired by "that blessed hope" to pour ourselves out for Him, "till the day breaks, and the shadows flee away."

Love, and warmest greetings,

Yours in His grace,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

P.S. to the Editor's Letter.

Further to the note in the above letter, it is now possible to say that provisional arrangements have been made to leave for the Far East toward the end of this month, January. We, my wife and I, will, the Lord willing, fly direct to Manila. Any other calls will be considered while we are there. May we ask friends to note particularly that only personal letters of a non-business character should be addressed to me by name at the Witness and Testimony office. All business letters in relation to the magazine, literature, etc., should be addressed to The EDITOR. This will avoid long delays by business letters being sent far afield.

EDITOR

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## “ AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING ”

(continued)

### THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

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

Concerning the world, it is said:—

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let us look more closely at this term ‘ World ’ in the light of the Bible.

#### 1. THE “ WORLD ” IS A NATURE

If, as we have noted, the world is hostile to God, and God to it; if it is something to be “ overcome ”, and from which the Christian must be separated; if friendship with it constitutes those con-



cerned "enemies of God", then there *must* be something *very* evil about it: and what is more evil than Satan himself? The Bible represents Satan as having become "the *prince* of this *world*" and its "god" by the *consent* and conquest of man, to whom the created earth was committed as a trust.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2. THE "WORLD" IS A PRISON

The keeper of that prison is Satan himself.

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

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

## 3. THE "WORLD" IS A LIE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## LEADERSHIP

### CHAPTER EIGHT

#### THE APOSTLE PAUL

"Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Corinthians xi. 1).

**W**HEN a man says such a thing as this he assumes a very heavy responsibility. He involves

Christ in his conduct, and for anyone to take his advice and then go wrong, would mean that Christ would be implicated in the error. The would-be leader will be committed to a very full and exact understanding of Christ and His ways.



History has given ample evidence that Paul was well aware of the responsibility which he took upon himself, and moreover, to the fact that Paul was a very safe leader in every Christly respect. So that, when we come to a consideration of leadership as in the case of Paul, we are also seeing leadership in the case of Christ in many essential respects. The comparison can be made by the reader without our indicating it in detail.

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

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

## I. VISION

By 'vision' we mean dominating objective and purpose. Paul was a man of immense energy, and his energies covered a vast number of details and items. But Paul was not just tremendously active with a view to getting *things* done. That is, his was not a life of diffused activities, not even *good* works. Everything sprang from and was harnessed to one clear positive objective. Paul had seen something. He called it "the heavenly vision", and for *that* he said that he had been "apprehended by Christ Jesus". He was a man who knew very clearly where he was going; what his many-sided activities were unto; and what the end of all had got to be. He has placed on record precisely and concisely what that vision and objective was. That is not the subject of this message, it is elsewhere in our ministry. Our present point is that, if there is to be that to which history will bear witness as really having been permanent—although temporarily undervalued and, perhaps, discredited—it must proceed from, and be governed by, a God-given vision of Divine purpose. There must be a seeing clearly of how things would be if God had a true expression and realisation of

There will be disappointments, discouragements, heartbreaks, and near despair at times, but there can be no alternative or turning to some substitutes. The vision, if given by God, will be so much a part of the leader as to be nothing less than

life or death to him. This is evident in all the Seers of old, and as much as in any in the case of Paul the Apostle.

## II. EXPERIENCE

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

We have only to look at the Apostle Paul's particular ministry and note how God dealt with him, not only from his new birth, but even from his natural birth to see how all fitted in to that ministry. Difficult—yes, impossible—as it may be to believe it, there is a secret history of God in the life chosen by Him for leadership, even before a living knowledge of the Lord, and from the time of new birth there is a history *with* God related to purpose. In most cases it is a *deep* history; a cramming and crushing into a comparatively short time of that which makes for reality and makes mere theories almost abhorrent.

## III. ORIGINALITY

Going hand in hand with experience, and, indeed, just a slant thereof, is originality. This, as its very nature, rules out effort or 'trying to be original'. Indeed, it is not aiming at being different; getting off 'the beaten track', or anything of that kind. Originality is not a deliberate discarding of old or existing orders with a view to starting something new. It is not the effort to think of something that no one has thought of before. It is

not being 'smart' or clever. Neither is originality imitation; that goes without saying. The word itself just means 'beginning'. This is not something caught from another or others. This is not something stored away in our unconscious minds and now coming out, even without our recognition that it is not our own. It is in the very nature of a thing *that God does in us* that it is so real, wonderful, and personal that we cannot believe that *anyone* has ever known *this* before. One may preach a certain matter for years and then one day the Lord brings that life into a living experience of the very thing and he—or she—will come and preach to you about it as though you were the most ignorant on the matter. But, see the life, the strength, the joy in the original! How often it would be pertinent to repeat to many preachers and would-be leaders the question of Christ to Pilate—"Sayest thou this of thyself, or did another tell thee it of me?" In other words—"Where did you get that?"

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

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

#### IV. COURAGE

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

In Pilate's judgment hall—or adjoining it—during Christ's trial, the man who had faced and weathered many a violent storm at sea; and the man who believed that he could face *any* moral test, was a pitiable sight; reduced to abject cowardice. In Jerusalem—before the same authorities

—less than two months later, the one thing noticed and recorded about him was his 'courage'. That is what we mean by 'spiritual courage'. It is *not* based on temperament, but is *above* temperament! Temperament or training may act and behave at the dictates of policy and diplomacy. Temperament may hate the way of unpopularity; may fear to lose friends, standing, advantage. Therefore in self-protection and self-preservation, compromise will be the resort or back-door way out of a dilemma. It could be worse, but this is the weakest way. True courage is a stand—at *any cost*—on principle, and no compromise if compromise means, in the first place, sacrificing some spiritual value, and, in the last place, merely postponing the crucial day.

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

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

#### V. BALANCE

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

Few men have combined strong opposite features in balance more beautifully and effectively than this example. That Paul was a man of very powerful forces is unmistakable. Whatever he did, he did it in strength. His own description of himself is very true. "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air . . ." (I Cor. ix. 26) There was no air-beating about Paul. If he struck, he struck hard and reached his mark. The forces stored up in that little body and mind were very powerful, and balance with him was not weakness of character or feebleness of presence. Balance in the case of this leader is clearly seen in the combination of austerity and kindness. He could make the same people feel what he called 'a rod', and melt into tears in his sympathy and tenderness. He could—like his Master—leave those who did injury to *others*, or to God's interests, just devastated and



shamed, and—so to speak—‘without a leg to stand on’. And yet, he could win a grim battle—as in Corinth—by sheer love and meekness.

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

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

## VI. DEPENDENCE UPON GOD

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

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

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

Obviously, the first is that, whatever value the sovereignty of God may have in such natural fea-

tures, *by themselves* they are no guarantee of *spiritual* leadership. Should ever a man called to spiritual leadership tend to ‘lean to his own understanding’ he will find himself confounded. The Anointing is an Extra to the fullest and best, and—note this—is of another order of qualification.

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

## VII. LOYALTY

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

With all that we know of wrong, weakness, meanness and disloyalty in churches and people, it is more than impressive to note how the Apostle Paul refused to speak or write of it to *other* churches and persons. We are much disgusted with a lot at Corinth that was deplorably unjust, unfair, unkind, and grossly selfish. But we never find Paul ‘letting them down’ to other churches. Rather does he make the best of them. His loyalty finds rich expression in his lists of people. Paul would never stoop to try and strengthen himself by

demeaning someone else. He was a man who would—if such could be found—find some extenuating explanation for a seeming—or actual—delinquency when it was a matter of talking to others. To the delinquent he would be absolutely faithful and frank. You could rely on him to stand up for you, even if he knew well your failures.

Whatever might be said against him, it would require the most contemptible of persons to lay a charge of being a 'little' man against him. He was too big a man to be jealous or disparaging. He never thought or acted lightly in the matter of

friendship. Friendship was a sacred thing with him, never to be cheaply thrown away. How very much there is to say about this great virtue and factor of loyalty, but with so little said, it is not difficult to see what an important and vital part it plays in leadership. It was so largely this that justified Paul in holding the position of spiritual leader which he had.

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

"Follow me, as I follow Christ".

## "BEARING ABOUT IN THE BODY THE DYING OF THE LORD JESUS"

*"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (II Cor. iv. 10, 11).*

THIS fourth chapter of II Corinthians is the Apostle Paul's statement of power for ministry. He shows us in these stirring verses that God is not looking for brilliant men, is not depending upon eloquent men, is not shut up to the use of talented men in sending His gospel out in the world. God is looking for broken men who have judged themselves in the light of the cross of Christ. When He wants anything done, He takes up men who have come to an end of themselves, and whose trust and confidence is not in themselves but in God.

There were those who were calling in question the apostleship of Paul himself, for he did not seem to them to be what an apostle, according to their estimation of the office, ought to be. There was not the pomp nor the dignity they would expect, he did not come to them with great swelling words, there was no making anything of what he was after the flesh, no drawing attention to his natural ability or education; and in this the method of the Apostle Paul was in very vivid contrast to the method pursued by many to-day who pose as servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. This man went through the world a broken man, a lowly man, a man seeking only the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and the blessing of souls, a man who might have occupied a very high place among the great and distinguished of the earth. But he was a man who for Jesus' sake had turned his back upon all that, and

could say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. vi. 14). That cross spoke of the deepest shame and ignominy, and Paul gloried in it because through the work that took place upon it his soul had been saved, and he had learned that the preaching of the cross, while it is "to them that perish foolishness", is "unto us which are saved the power of God" (I Cor. i. 18). And so he went forth content to be broken in order that the light of the grace of God might shine out.

You will notice in verse 6 that "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of us". It is easy to see what he has in mind. He is thinking undoubtedly of that very striking incident which we read in Judges, when Gideon and his three hundred men took their lives in their hands, were delivered unto death, as it were, and went forth against the vast armies of the Midianites. Surely no other army was accoutred as this one. They carried in one hand a trumpet, and in the other a pitcher, and in this pitcher was a lamp. The light of the lamp was not seen though it was already lit. It was not seen as long as it was in the earthen jar. They surrounded the army of the Midianites in the middle of the night, and suddenly at the command of their leader the jars were crashed to earth, and the light shone out, and the Midianites sprang up startled. They heard the crash and saw the light, and thought that they were surrounded by a tremendous army, and they



turned their swords upon one another. It was God through Gideon that led the army to victory. A broken pitcher in order that light might shine out! The apostle says, as it were, "That is it! If you want to be a light for God in a world like this, be content to be broken, to have your hopes, your ambitions, all dashed to pieces, and then God can take you up and use you in order to carry the light of Christ to darkened hearts."

How are we broken? By affliction, by trouble, by the discipline of the Lord, sometimes by sickness, by pain and anguish. All these are the divine methods for breaking God's pitchers in order that the light may shine out to His praise and glory. Men may misjudge us, misrepresent us, persecute us bitterly; we may not have enough food to eat or water to drink; we may be cast down; we may suffer all kinds of sorrows; but it is all right if it breaks us in order that God may be able the better to use us. And so he says, "We are troubled on every side, but not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;" for in all these experiences we are simply "bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our body." He "came from Godhead's fullest glory down to Calvary's depth of woe."

We sometimes sing a little hymn that always stirs the heart. I remember hearing Dr. Torrey say that he believed of all the hymns that were used in his great meetings around the world, it was the one that seemed to be most blessed of God to the people. It is:

"I surrender all,  
I surrender all,  
All to Thee, my blessed Saviour,  
I surrender all."

But that hymn never had the appeal it ought to have for my own heart until one day I found myself changing that chorus. I was thinking of Him who though He was "in the form of God, thought equality with God not a thing to be grasped; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 6-8). And as my heart was occupied with Him, I found myself singing these words:

"He surrendered all,  
He surrendered all,  
All for me, my blessed Saviour,  
He surrendered all."

And then my heart said, "O Lord, it will be easy to sing it the other way now, for what have I to give up, to surrender, in comparison with what Thou didst give up in order to redeem my guilty soul from going down to the pit?" It is as you and I realise from day to day what it all meant to Him that we can bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Dying day by day to our own hopes and ambitions, dying to the good opinion of people, dying to human praise and adulation, to everything that the natural heart grasps, dying in the death of Jesus to it all, because He died for us in order that "the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our body."

You will notice that verses 10 and 11 are very much alike, and yet the great difference is this: verse 10 suggests something that we do deliberately, consciously, whereas verse 11 is something that God does for us. What is it we are called upon to do? "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus"—reminding ourselves every day that Jesus died for us, and because He died for us we are gladly to put ourselves in the place of death for Him.

Looking back to the cross the apostle Paul could say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20). But this has to be put into practice daily by putting my tastes and ambitions in the place of death. That is my part. But here is God's part: "We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." You tell God that you are willing to take the place of death with Christ, and He will see that it is made good; you tell God you are going to trust Him, and He will test your faith and show you what it means to trust Him; you tell Him that you are ready to surrender everything to Him, and He will put you in the place where you will begin to find out what full surrender really means. I do not know of anything that it seems should have such an appeal to the Christian heart along this line as the frequent remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ in His death, and I think it is because He realised that it is so easy for us to forget, that He said to His disciples when He gave them this memorial feast, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke xxii. 19). And the Holy Ghost said, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come" (I Cor. xi. 26). Every time we are called upon thus to remem-

ber the Lord it is a new challenge to ask ourselves, "Am I simply remembering Him in a cold, formal, intellectual way because it is customary, or am I truly in heart remembering the One who went down beneath the dark waters of death for me, and am I truly ready now to always bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus?"

What a poor thing it is to come together in assemblies to participate in the communion of the Lord's Supper and then go out from the building and forget what it all really means, forget that our Saviour died, that we are linked up with the One who died, and that He has left us an example that we should follow His steps—that is, we should always bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. This seems to me to be linked very intimately with several Old Testament references to which our attention is drawn in Hebrews xi. We read, "But Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones" (Heb. xi. 22). Did you ever stop and ask why the Holy Ghost selected that particular incident to dwell upon? He has instanced something that you and I would probably have passed over altogether. What did Joseph do? "Gave commandment concerning his bones". In Genesis i. 25 we read where Joseph, talking to the children of Israel, says, "God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt". That is the close of the book of Genesis. What an odd way to close the book! But God wants us to think about the bones of Joseph. They are there in a coffin in Egypt, but they are to be carried to Canaan. In Exodus xiii we find that the children of Israel who have been sheltered by the blood of the passover lamb are now starting out for Canaan, and we read, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away with you" (Exod. xiii. 19). Who was Joseph? He was the saviour of Israel. If it had not been for him they had all been destroyed in the

famine, but he was their saviour, and now he says, "When you leave Egypt to go to Canaan, you carry my bones with you." When they left, they were very careful to do as they were told, and all the way across the sands of the desert wherever that great caravan went, they were always bearing about in the body the dying of Joseph.

I think I see that great procession winding its way up over the hills; and the Amalekites and the Midianites looking at them in wonder say, "What is that strange dark casket?" Presently they call an Israelite and ask him, and he says, "We were once in greatest distress; if God had not had mercy upon us we would have been left to die, but He raised up a saviour for us, one of our own; his name was Joseph and he delivered us; Joseph saved us. But *our saviour died*, and we are marching on to the land that our God has given us, and until we get there, we carry with us the memorial of death, the bones of Joseph. We can never forget him; he died, but we have the memorials still." And by and by when they reached the land, when they got to the place that God Himself had selected for them, we are told that after everything else was properly attended to, "The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph" (Joshua xxiv. 32). There was no need to carry the bones of Joseph through the wilderness any more, for they were home now. And, beloved, you and I are passing on through the wilderness of this world, we will soon be at Home, but until we reach there we are called upon to bear about in the body the dying of Jesus, and as we remember Him in the breaking of bread and the drinking of the cup, we should challenge our own hearts: Are we simply looking objectively toward that cross and saying, "There our Saviour died", or are we seeking day by day to practically make it manifest that His death means more to us than all that this world glories in?

H. A. I. (SELECTED)



## THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE MYSTERY

### CHAPTER NINE

#### THE "MYSTERY" OR DIVINE SECRET IN THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

THERE are, surely, very few people for whom this Letter does not have a very warm place. Its general nature of warm love, pure joy, and transparent purity endears it to all hearts, while some of its particular parts have fastened it to heart and mind. It is only necessary to say 'Philippians ii. 10' or 'iv. 9', for instance, and everybody knows!

It is, however, to add to the value of this Letter, rather than to take from it, to see it in relation to the whole 'stewardship' of its writer. It is a point of immense value and importance to see all parts of the Bible in their greater setting rather than just in the occasion of their immediate object. Being God's Word—God who is eternal, universal and infinite breathes that super-temporal character into all that emanates from Him—no smallest portion can ever be exhausted as to its content; preach on it howsoever many times you may; it is still beyond you.

Although the word 'mystery' does not occur in the Letter to the Philippians, it is as implicitly there as anywhere. Although each of the three letters written in prison was given a particular complexion relative to its destination, it is clear that beneath and behind them all the Apostle's mind was working on the same major line or theme, and that was what he called the 'mystery'. This is quite apparent when we compare Philippians ii. 9 with Ephesians i. 21, Philippians ii. 10 and Ephesians i. 10 and Colossians i. 16 - 20.

With this evidence of the deeper and vaster mental background we are brought to the immense implication of that classic section of the Letter to the Philippians marked in the arrangement chapter ii verses 5 to 11. While this is a matchless unveiling of the cycle of redemption, from the glory which Christ had with the Father before times eternal down stage by stage to the deepest depths of shame and ignominy, then up, up, up to the 'highest place that Heaven affords'; there is a clear implication in the clause—"counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on equality with God"—that the letting go, the 'emptying', the 'humbling', etc., was—in the light of the context—to offset and undo terrible havoc wrought through an unlawful 'grasping' at that position somewhere, at some

time, by someone. There is plenty in the Scriptures—borne out by human history, with immense emphasis in these later times—to show that there is in this universe a power which has ever striven to be—at least—"equal with the Most High"; indeed, to usurp His place.

At some time a rift took place in this universe, first outside of this world, and then pressed into it with the object of establishing independence of God and robbing Him of His rights. The evidence of this is massive, and it is the central and focal ground of all spiritual conflict which rages in the whole creation, and in man in particular. Seeing that it was—and is—a moral issue of rights and righteousness, it had to be dealt with and answered on that ground. And seeing that man is the object and vehicle involved in this issue, the whole thing had to be taken up and fought through in man-form. So, the "mystery" in Philippians is "the mystery of iniquity"; the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God; the mystery of the Cross; and the mystery of the ineffable Name. The iniquity of an *unrightful* grasping at equality with God had to be answered by a relinquishing of the rightful equality, and descent to the lowest depths where that iniquity reached.

'He plunged in His imperial strength  
To gulfs of darkness down:  
He brought His trophy up at length;  
The foiled usurper's crown.'

Humility must answer pride. Emptiness must counter false fulness. Weakness must be the way of *true* power. The Cross of shame must be the pathway to the eternal glory.

God must be vindicated and His rights *in creation* be established. Righteousness—which just means 'God vindicated'—must be "fulfilled". The baptism of the passion is the only way. You agree—this is all a 'mystery'. Yes, and Paul says that this was the 'stewardship' entrusted to him.

Read the whole of the Letter to the Phillipians in the light of the above, and it lives with infinite meaning.

It is very impressive that the Apostle should take up this immense revelation and presentation of Christ in the grand cycle from glory to glory in relation to a local situation. There is his heartfelt appeal in chapter ii, verses 1 to 4; then there is his appeal to Euodia and Syntyche in iv. 2, as well as other hints, showing that things were not all well at Philippi. There was division; a lack of 'like-mindedness'; a strain in relationships. If the implication of the great appeal of Christ's condescension means anything, surely it is that the cause of the division was a 'grasping', a holding, a not letting go; in a word—pride! Somewhere there

was an inability or unwillingness to use the most difficult words in any human language—"I have been wrong"!

In effect, the Apostle says: 'It was anything but easy for the Son of God to trail that long and painful journey which led to being "obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross"; but He did it for us. "Let *this* mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"! This is the only way to heal the divisions and come to be of "the same mind". Not discussions, arguments, or sentiment; but "a broken and contrite spirit", an "obedience even unto death."

## THE PREPARATION FOR GOD'S SERVICE

*"And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord wherewith he had sent him, and all the signs wherewith he had charged him. And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel: and Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had seen their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped" (Exodus iv. 28 - 31).*

IT is important for us to realise that behind what is seen of man's service there is the hidden, secret life, and there are unseen experiences. So we look to the beginning of this chapter to find these signs now being displayed to others and discover that they were first of all Moses' own experience, personally, and alone with God. Each one of the three signs seems to me to have tremendous significance, but may I again say that it is our personal, secret life and history with the Lord that will determine what power those outward activities of our life fulfil. If a man has thus met God alone, and proved Him for himself, then, and only then, can he be a real help to others.

At the beginning of this chapter we read: "And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail (and he put forth his hand, and laid hold of it, and it became a rod in his hand); that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the

God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob hath appeared unto thee" (Exodus iv. 2 - 5).

This first sign is a personal proving of the complete and absolute power of God over all the power of the enemy, and until you have proved that in your own private life no one else will believe it, even though you talk about it. But, if you have proved it, what a message for the world!

When Moses casts his rod—this trusty rod that he had known for so many years—on the ground in obedience to God's command, it suddenly, unexpectedly, becomes an expression of the evil power of the wicked one. You do not need that I should stress what the Scriptures say, from the first right to the last, about the serpent, but it is disconcerting when you find the serpent as near you as that! And to find it emerging from what would seem to be something quite ordinary in your daily life!

Yet how true this is to experience! Suddenly, unexpectedly, inexplicably, something Satanic emerges when you least expect it. What do you do? What did Moses do? "Moses fled from before it". Ah, Moses, if you do that no one will ever believe you when you go and try to deliver them! You have to learn in your own private experience not to flee away when something devilish springs up, but to remember—and this is the supreme thing!—that God is over all. It was *God* who turned the rod into a serpent, and that is a reminder that there is no serpent, no uprising of evil, no attack from the wicked one, but that, behind it and above it, is the absolute sovereignty of God. If you believe that, you can begin your ministry, but until you have proved it you will have no power with men. It is no use running away. The Lord had to



## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

stop Moses, who evidently had not run very far. 'Turn round, Moses, and take hold of it in My name.' That is faith expressing our confidence that the Lord is Lord of all: not talking or singing about it, but acting.

How often something arises for us, just in our secret, private life, and the Lord knows whether we run away from it or whether we face it.

This is the first sign, the beginning, and it is elementary, but we have to learn to prove the power of the Lord, and by faith to exercise our confidence in the Lord. "And it [the serpent] became a rod in his hand". That is something, dear friends, with which you can go out. That rod meant *everything* to Moses through all the years of his ministry. He knew that away there in the wilderness, alone, he had proved the power of God over all the power of the enemy. He had proved that faith *is* the victory and that it had become so in his own circumstances.

This sign was not only done later to the children of Israel. We read in Exodus vii that it was done also in front of Pharaoh. And so we learn that what you prove in private you have to prove with others, and this was not a very encouraging company in which to be found—Pharaoh and his servants. But if it works in private it will work there—and it does!

However, in verse eleven of that chapter it says: "Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers: and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents". Now what do you do? There is nothing you can do except wait and let God deal with the situation.

You notice that this time Moses did not go round and take hold of the tails of all the serpents. He did something much better—he waited for God. There is a time to take hold and a time to wait. He waited to see how God would answer this challenge to His sovereignty. And here, in verse twelve, we have another of the great 'buts' of the Bible—"But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods", and we never hear that the magicians got them back again. So the rod that Moses carried around was not only the one in which he had proved personally, alone, the power of God over the Devil. All those other rods were inside it, and no one could get them out. What a testimony! What an encouragement to his own heart! What power it gave! The more you read about this rod as they passed through the wilderness the more impressed you are with its tremendous expression of Divine

sovereignty. There was *no* enemy that could not be defeated, *no* need that could not be met when that rod was extended. Inside it was this proving of God's ability to deal with all His enemies.

That is the first sign—and what a sign! What a blessed thing to have proved in the privacy of your own life, and then in the small circle of your difficulties and experiences, that God is supreme over all the power and spite and guile of the wicked one!

For the second sign we turn back to the fourth chapter of Exodus and in verse six we read: "And the Lord said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, as white as snow."

Now this is the same hand as the one that cast down the rod and picked it up. How quickly, how easily, when we have had some spiritual victory, some triumph of faith, we begin to have self-confidence and self-righteousness! 'Now', God says, 'put your hand in your bosom, and when you bring it out it will bring out what is there.' And what does it bring out? It was probably the biggest shock that Moses ever had to discover that leprosy was in *his* bosom! That was what he was really like.

The Lord only showed him that as the beginning of the sign. The real sign was not what was in Moses' heart—that was no sign, but a discovery and a humiliating one! The sign was that when he put his hand in again and then removed it, we are told: "And when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh". The power of God to cleanse from all defilement is something you have to learn in secret before you can ever have a message to anyone else. It means a discovery of the leprosy of your own heart, but it also means a proving of the power of the Lord to cleanse and to make perfectly whole.

What was this leprosy in the heart of Moses? Later on, in the person of his sister—as we read in Numbers xii—he had an illustration of what leprosy was. Miriam was self-assertive and jealous, and this is not so difficult to understand for, after all, she was Moses' older sister. Everything he had, humanly speaking, he owed to her. She did not like his present position. It was very difficult for her—and it always is when younger ones are coming along, those whom you have helped; and you have to realise that maybe the Lord has given them something that He has not given to you! That is what happened in Miriam's case, and she did not like it—the flesh does not like it. And



there, in the secrecy of the family, it came out and she got Aaron involved in her speaking.

The Lord told them to go and meet with Him. Moses very wisely left the Lord to deal with this matter. If only we had the same wisdom under similar circumstances! The Lord did deal with it. We are told in Numbers xii, 10: "And the cloud removed from over the Tent; and, behold, *Miriam* was leprous, as white as snow".

When Moses brought his hand out of his bosom he was only bringing out what was inside. When *Miriam* was covered with leprosy it was only an outward manifestation of what was inside. As I have said, her state was quite natural, quite understandable, but it was not acceptable to God. She became "leprous, as white as snow", and God said: "That is the kind of thing that is in the human heart". Moses saw now that it was in *Miriam's* heart, but earlier he had realised that it was in his own heart also. And, friends, unless the Lord deals with it, that is in your heart and in mine.

Well, the Lord, in His great mercy, did deal with it in *Miriam's* case, and the leprosy was cleansed.

There are two other cases of leprosy which I think it would be right for us to look at.

The first, which occurs in II Kings v, is the case of *Gehazi*. You will remember that *Naaman*, when he had been cleansed, offered a gift to the prophet *Elisha*, who refused it. But *Gehazi*, *Elisha's* servant, moved this time not with self-assertiveness but with self-interest, said: "I will go and get something out of this for myself". So he went after *Naaman* and asked for a gift. Do you notice that in verse 20 he said: "As the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him"? So *Gehazi* deceived *Elisha*, told lies to *Naaman*, came back with his gift and carefully hid it before going in to *Elisha*. *Elisha* said to him: "Where have you been?" *Gehazi* said: "Nowhere". What a tissue, a web of deceitfulness! And yet, do you notice the language he used? "As the Lord liveth". It is incredible that he could bring the name of the Lord into the greediness and self-interest of his own heart, but he was not the first, and he was certainly not the last, to do that! And you see what happened! *Elisha* said: "The leprosy therefore of *Naaman* shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow."

That was what was on the inside. On the outside there was all that fair show, his use of the Lord's name, his deceiving of his master, but in-

side there was the leprosy of self-interest.

Well, you say this happened centuries after the time of Moses. That is true, but it was all expressed in that leprous hand of Moses, for that is what was in his heart, and in every other heart by nature—self-interest.

The other case is in some ways the most tragic of them all. You read about it in II Chronicles xxvi: the story of the great King *Uzziah*. You will remember that *Isaiah*, describing his great experience of the Lord, said: "In the year that king *Uzziah* died I saw the Lord" (*Isaiah* vi. 1).

Here is a man who is supremely a man of faith, a man of God, greatly beloved and greatly used. It says of him: "And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped" (II Chron. xxxvi. 15). But when he was "marvellously helped", instead of being more humbled—as we always ought to be when God blesses us—he was strong and "his heart was lifted up so that he did corruptly". And as he stood, in a place that did not belong to him, "the leprosy brake forth in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord."

So the first case was in the wilderness, the second was in Israel, but the third was in the very house of the Lord. These are things about which to ponder, for they are in the Word of God and are written for our instruction. "Put now thine hand into thy bosom"—and see if there does not emerge the same tendency to self-righteousness, to self-interest and self-assertiveness. How can such a man or woman serve the Lord? Only by having what Moses had—a personal dealing with the Lord whereby all that is cleansed and put away.

So Moses went to the people having had his own true nature uncovered, but also, thank God! having proved the power of the Lord to cleanse and deliver from himself. So the Lord says: "And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign" (Ex. iv. 8). There is no power like the power of a holy life. Even more than the sign brought about by your own personal victory over the Devil is the power of the impact of a man or woman who has had secret dealings with God, and found the mighty cleansing of the Blood of Christ, the deliverance of the Cross of Christ, and can go out to the people of God, to the enemies of God, to the world and to the ministry with this as their own private knowledge: that God has exposed all that they are, but has dealt with it and delivered them from it.

There is no time to speak of the third sign—the

sign of judgment—though it is equally important, but I pass on to what is furthermore in the chapter.

Here is a man who in his own private life has proved the Lord. Now the Lord says: 'Go'—and still he felt he could not go. Rightly or wrongly, he argued; he remonstrated and showed his reluctance. So the Lord made a provision for him. He, the Lord, went back miles and miles, and over forty years of history, to Moses' brother, Aaron—"And the Lord said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mountain of God, and kissed him" (Ex. iv. 27).

The signs of the serpent, the leprosy and the blood were sensational miracles. Here is a sign and experience which in a sense is no miracle, but is actually the greatest miracle of God. The Lord gives Moses a brother! And together they go with the message, with the signs and with the ministry. Dear friends, that was God's goodness to Moses.

Do you notice where they met? It was not that Moses went to Egypt and looked for Aaron. God brought Aaron to him and those two men met in *the mountain of God*, brought together by Divine providence. Was it not a miracle that they knew where to find one another? Was it not a miracle that Aaron could be brought out of Egypt like that? And it was just the miracle that Moses needed. With all his personal proving of the Lord he needed a brother to stand with him, and with whom he could stand.

Friends, these things are surely meant to encourage us and to enlighten us. We must have our own personal experiences with the Lord. We are no use to Him until we do. And then we need a brother, a sister, a fellowship brought about by Divine sovereignty and by a meeting in the mountain of God. When Moses had that he felt he could go forward, for they could go forward together. They did, and so may we, for His glory!

H. F.

## A PECULIAR VESSEL

"FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS"

*I Samuel i.*

THE state of things to-day is very similar to that which existed at the beginning of the first book of Samuel. Three things in particular seem to stand out there as features of those days.

The first was a formality in the things of God through being pursued in the energy of the flesh; resulting in mixture and spiritual adultery, and spiritual weakness and ineffectiveness.

Another feature was the absence of spiritual revelation and perception—"There was no open vision". The "Spirit of wisdom and revelation" was inoperative amongst priests and people. Spiritual intelligence and apprehension was a minus quantity.

The third thing was the constant menace of the Philistines, which eventually issued in the departure of the glory from Israel and the absence of the testimony of the Sovereignty from the midst of the people of God. When we remember that the Philistines always represent the intrusion of the natural man ('uncircumcised', Col. ii. 11, 12) into the things of the Spirit, it is a very significant feature.

We leave it with those who have eyes to see to judge whether there is any similarity between then and now. What we have on our hearts is to note the

method by which the Lord reacts to this situation.

The two things, then, which immediately come out are, firstly, that the Lord is not satisfied to have it so, yet He does not abandon the situation. Rather does He begin in a secret way to secure the instrument for recovery. The second thing is that there has to be a very deep and peculiar travail in the bringing forth of that instrument. Samuel represents such an instrument, and Hannah represents the travail which produces it.

What is clear in this first chapter is that this will not come about in the natural course of things. The *usual* way will not produce it. Indeed, it is declared that there was a deliberate act of God against that course (verse 6). Hannah's state was the Lord's doing. In other realms and for less important purposes—or shall we say, for more general purposes—the usual method may be followed. Samuel was not an after-thought. He was fore-known and foreordained and yet humanly he was an impossibility. Why had the Lord so acted in this matter? How do you relate and reconcile the two things, that Samuel was determined and yet made humanly impossible by the act of God? The first part of the answer is that the bringing of this instrument into being was to be by a fellowship in

the Divine travail in relation to the testimony.

Hannah went through unusual and uncommon soul-agony in the matter. She is here represented as "in bitterness of soul" and she "wept sore" (verse 10). It was not just simply a personal interest or a selfish end in view. When at length Samuel was given she placed him at the disposal of the Lord as soon as she possibly could. Concerning Isaac it says that "when the child was weaned", but in the case of Samuel it says of Hannah that "she weaned him", as though she was not letting things go on, but bringing about a separation unto the Lord as soon as possible. She was concerned for the Lord's interests in a specially eager way. This is impressive when we take into consideration the cost of this child, and therefore the peculiar endearment to herself.

Let us get the full force of the truth here. *A thing which is to serve the Lord in a specially vital way is not born easily, and is not brought into being without some unusual suffering and travail. There is much bitterness of soul to be gone through, and many tears.*

For a time, a drawn-out time, it appears that there will be nothing. The heartache and sorrow seem to remain long in the place of barrenness. And yet there can be no philosophical acceptance or fatalistic capitulation. The Lord is a factor and there is a "hoping against hope", a wistful looking toward "the God who raiseth the dead, and calleth the things that are not as though they were."

Not one of the least painful aspects of the suffering is the taunting of Peninnah (verse 6). Now Peninnah was of the same household and a co-wife with Hannah. She was not a stranger or a foreigner. It was as such that she "provoked sorely to make her fret". Peninnah had plenty of children, there was none of this (divinely appointed) human impossibility. Things were more or less simple and easy with her.

So it is, when the Lord determines to secure for Himself that vessel of peculiar purpose, and cuts off all the many activities, works, and occupations which, while being in the same household of faith and in some relation to Himself, are largely by the energies of nature and the facility of man. When and where there are not those usual accompaniments and outworkings, those issues and results, the evidences and proofs; then there is criticism, taunting, the pointing of the finger, and grievous imputations. The very acts of Divine sovereignty are given a twist to mean just the opposite of God's thought. So one system of things taunts the other. Well, so be it! It ever was. It ever will be. But wait! Samuel did come, and one Samuel meant more to God than all the children of Peninnah put together. And yet it is not a matter of comparative values. Samuel was for an hour of peculiar need. The suffering in connection with his coming into life was so deep as to solemnize beyond the suspicion of pride or comparison. All questions of self-realisation, vindication, or satisfaction had been tested in the fire, and the refined issue was the glory of God.

Samuel came, and, in the purpose that he served, the suffering and sorrow were made well worth while, and the wisdom of God's mysteriousness was established. God was justified and the channel used was satisfied. We can leave it there.

When the Lord wants something for an hour of peculiar need, the methods have to be out of the ordinary. To those concerned He has to say, 'Others can, you cannot'.

More and more deeply, we are entering into such an hour at this time. The general thing is not meeting the situation. The Lord must bring through something which will "come to the kingdom for such a time as *this*".

Who will pay the price?

## CAPTIVITY IN THE LORD

*Ephesians iii. 1 ; iv. 1 ; II Timothy ii. 9 ; i. 8.*

**T**HERE is a very real sense in which the Apostle Paul in his own person and experience was an embodiment of the history of the Church in this age. Indeed it would seem to be a principle in the Divine economy that those to whom a revelation has been entrusted should themselves have it so wrought into their very being and history that they

are able to say, 'I am your sign'. To take the one fragment which is now before us, the end of Paul's life saw a process of narrowing down and limitation working itself through by "a great falling away" on the one hand, and a closing up from the general to the specific in the case of that which (him who) represented the testimony on the other. This is precisely what is foretold as to the conditions at "the end", and it is not a little signifi-



cant that this is specially referred to in prophetic utterances to Timothy—the *end* letter. So that this phrase “the prisoner in the Lord”, occurring as it does in the last writings, is prophetic in its meaning and wonderfully explanatory of the end-way of the sovereignty of the Lord.

What we have here, then, is

#### 1. THE INSTRUMENT OF THE LORD'S TESTIMONY IN A PLACE OF LIMITING BY THE WILL OF GOD:

As we read the record of the incidents which led up to Paul's going to Rome as a prisoner, and especially when we read the words of Agrippa: “This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar”, we are not far from feeling that there were mistakes and accidents, but for which there might have been a much more propitious issue, and the Apostle's ministry at large might have been extended. There may have been times of stress when Paul himself was tempted to wonder if he had not been impulsive in that appeal to the Emperor. But as he went forward and when the Lord spoke to him from time to time giving light, it became clear that however the thing might have been construed humanly, there was the sovereign government of God in it all, and that he was in prison not as the Emperor's prisoner, but as the prisoner in the Lord.

Perhaps Paul did not accept this all at once. Possibly he did not realise just how it would work out. A more-or-less quick trial and release may have been in his mind. Some hope of further ministry amongst beloved saints seems not to be absent from his correspondence. At length, however, he fully accepted what was becoming increasingly clear as the Lord's way, and it grew upon him that this way was in the greatest interest of the Body of Christ. Thus we see that when the time comes for the Lord's people to be brought face to face with the ultimate and supreme things of the revelation of Jesus Christ; things beyond personal salvation; things which relate to the mind of God from “before times eternal”, as far above being saved; then there has to be a narrowing down, a closing up, a limiting. Much activity that has been (and all quite right for bringing things to a certain position and state), now ceases to carry them further, and something more intensive is needed.

That which represents the testimony in its fullest and closest approximation to the ultimate purpose of God has, then, to be shorn of much that has been good, necessary, and of God in a preparatory way, and must be shut up to what is ultimate. The

captivity is not to a conceived truth or a superimposed doctrinal acceptance. It is wrought into the very fibre of the being by experience following revelation interpreting experience. It is not the championing of some espoused interpretation; it is that it is the very life of the instrument and the instrument is *that* in its very being. It is not a matter of ‘want’ or ‘not want’, but of ‘cannot be other’, a prisoner, the sovereignty of God has done it.

#### 2. THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF SEEING AND ACCEPTING THINGS IN GOD'S LIGHT

This applied both to Paul and to those who were brought into touch with him. For the Apostle the settling in to the sovereign ordering of God in his imprisonment issued in increasing illumination leading to spiritual emancipation.

No one can fail to recognize the tremendous enrichment of ministry as contained in what are called ‘the prison epistles’. If he had been restive, piqued, rebellious, or bitter, there would have been no open Heaven, and a spirit of controversy with the Lord would have closed and bolted the door to the fuller Divine unveilings and clarifyings.

When all was accepted according to the mind of the Lord, then “the heavenly places” became the eternal expanses of his walking about, and earthly bondage gave place to heavenly freedom. So it must be with every instrument set apart in relation to the higher interests of the Lord's testimony. The reading of certain passages in his letters and the record of his imprisonment shows how this applied to others. Take the following:—

“Be not ashamed, therefore, of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner” (II Tim. i. 8).

“And he abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went unto him . . . teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus” (Acts xxviii. 30).

“The Lord grant mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus: for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but when he was in Rome, he sought me diligently, and found me” (II Tim. i. 16).

Clearly the effect of these passages is that there had to be a divinely given apprehension and not a merely human appraisal of Paul's position. Human levels of mentality would have produced an atmosphere of doubt, suspicion, question, and have let in elements of false imputation. Regarded on merely natural lines, association with the pris-

oner would have involved such associates in the suspicion and prejudice. Doubt of the Lord's servant was very widespread, and even many of the Lord's people were not sure of him. But the Lord was shutting up a very vital revelation to this channel; and for such as were really in spiritual need, and such as were to stand in a living relation to a fulness of testimony through identification with Christ in death and resurrection, on to throne-union with Him in power over "principalities, and powers", and so on, and on to the ministry "in the ages to come", there had to be a putting aside of all human, personal, and diplomatic considerations and a standing right in there with the instrument where God had put it in honourable imprisonment. For the possession of that which is to come through the vessel there has to be a coming where the vessel is, without consideration for reputation, influence, or popularity.

In this way the Lord sifts His people and finds out who really is wholly for Himself and His testimony, and who is actuated in any measure by other considerations and interests. The instrument in this position of popular rejection is thus the Lord's means of searching out the truly needy and pure spirited. They will search it out, and it will thus meet their need.

The other truth that remains here, then, is that

3. SHAME, REPROACH AND LIMITATION ARE OFTEN GOD'S WAYS OF ENRICHING THE WHOLE BODY OF CHRIST.

This has always been so. The measure of approximation to the fulness of the revelation has always been accompanied by a relative cost. Every instrument of the testimony has been laid under suspicion and reproach in a measure commensurate with the degree of value to the Lord; it has meant a commensurate human limitation. Many have withdrawn, fallen away, held aloof, doubted, feared, and questioned. But as Paul could say "my tribulations for you, which are your glory" (Eph.

iii. 13), or, "the prisoner of the Lord *in behalf of you Gentiles*" (Eph. iii. 1). So the measure of limitation *in the Lord* is the measure of enrichment in His people. The fuller the revelation the fewer those who apprehend, or the greater the number of those who stand aloof. Revelation only comes through suffering and limitation, and to have it experimentally means sharing the cost in some way. But this is God's way of securing for Himself a spiritual seed-plot.

A seed-plot is an intensive thing. There things are narrowed down to very limited dimensions. It is not a great extensive show that is immediately in view, but things are all considered firstly in the light of seed. The real meaning of things is not always recognized *there*, but you can travel the world over and find a great many gardens which are the expression of that intensive and restricted seed-plot. If ever there was such a seed-plot it was Paul's prison in Rome.

All this may apply to individual lives in relation to the Lord's testimony. There may often be a chafing against limitation or confinement, and a restless hankering after what we would call something wider or less restricted. If the Lord has willed us to the place where we are, our acceptance of it in faith may prove that it becomes a far bigger thing than any human reckoning can judge. I wonder if Paul had any idea that his prison meant his continuous expansion of value to the Lord Jesus through nineteen hundred years!

What applies to individuals also applies to corporate bodies, assemblies, or companies of the Lord's people scattered in the earth but one in their fellowship in relation to the Lord's full testimony.

May the Lord be graciously pleased to cause the merely human aspect of prison walls to fall away, and give the realisation that, far from being limited by men and circumstances, it is imprisonment *in the Lord*, and this means that all ages and all realms are entered through that prison.

**FOR BOYS AND GIRLS**

**LIFE MORE ABUNDANT**

**A-M-A-R-Y-L-L-I-S.** Arthur spelled the word out letter by letter, and then asked, 'Amaryllis, what is that?' 'What a silly question', replied his sister, June, 'You can see from the outside of the box what it is'. Sure enough, as the family stood around looking at Uncle's present, they could see from the brightly-coloured picture that the bulb

inside the cardboard box could be expected to produce a head of large red, trumpet-like flowers.

Not only had the box a picture on it, but it also had instructions for planting. These were detailed, and were in five different languages. It was evidently an important and an expensive bulb. Mother could read the German, and June could understand



the French. Arthur could only just manage the English, but as they all said the same things that was quite enough. Their uncle in Holland had sent this as a Christmas present to Mother. It all seemed very exciting. However, Arthur and June also had exciting presents, and they soon got busy opening them.

In the New Year there were other exciting matters too. Arthur was to go to a new school, June was to start work for the first time, and—more exciting than anything—they were going to move to another town.

So Mother put the box aside and decided that it would have to wait until they were settled into their new home before she could plant the bulb. At last the great day of the move came. They liked their new home, June liked her work. And Arthur felt sure that his was the best school in the whole world, especially for sport.

So the months went by. Happy months they were, and very busy ones too. July came, and in a letter from Holland, Uncle wrote asking Mother if the Amaryllis had been a success. Amaryllis! Her heart sank. What HAD happened to it? She, and indeed the children also, had forgotten all about it. It had been packed up and moved to the new house. Once or twice she had looked at the box and thought vaguely of planting the bulb, but as the instructions seemed to suggest that the process was rather a complicated one, she decided that it would have to wait until she had more time. Somehow she never seemed to have that 'more time'. And where was it now?

Actually the box was lying up on a shelf in the kitchen, unremembered and unplanted. It was quite a relief to her to find it. At least it was Arthur who first spied it up on that topshelf and called the other two. 'I must plant it at once', Mother said, as June fetched the steps to retrieve the forgotten box, but when she had climbed up and got hold of it she gave a squeal of surprise. 'It's flowering, Mother', she said, 'the flower is bursting open the top of the box.'

The others could hardly wait until she had climbed down again from the steps and shown them this marvel. The bulb had sprouted all by itself, the bud had begun to force up the box-lid, and the red flowers were beginning to open.

Arthur, as he looked at the sides of the box which were covered with the instructions in the different languages, was full of questions as to how this could have happened. They had NOT trimmed the roots, they had NOT kept it in a warm place, they had NOT watered it daily—in fact they had

not given it a single drop of water, yet it had grown and flowered all the same. 'How . . .' 'Never mind "how"', interrupted June, 'the fact is that it has done it, and now we can tell Uncle that it is O.K.'. Mother did not waste time talking or arguing, she got a flower-pot with some mould, planted the bulb and gave it some much-needed water, and placed it in a warm spot.

When it was all finished, Arthur was still persisting with his questions as to 'How?', so Mother pointed out what a wonderful thing life is. It was the life in that bulb which had triumphed over all adversity. It had no air, no water, no warmth; it was shut up, forgotten and untended. Yet it had flowered. This is a proof of the power of natural life. It is also a picture of the power of spiritual life. There are many things which a born-again Christian should have—teaching, fellowship, helps of many kinds—but the fact is that if the mighty life of Christ is in him, he will flourish even though he has none of them. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

This year the family has what Arthur called 'A "pukka" Amaryllis'. Mother had another bulb and this time she read the instructions carefully and did everything which she was told to do. The bulb had its roots attended to, it was planted in the right surroundings, it was kept warm and it was constantly watered.

How different it was from the first one! This time it had four fine leaves, whereas before the leaves had had no chance to grow. This time, instead of being short, it had a long stem which actually measured more than four feet. 'FEET, not inches', Arthur told all his friends. And the stem, built up and maintained by the large amount of water it had taken in, held a beautiful head of flowers.

June somehow seemed to like the first one best, for, as she said, it had grown in spite of having everything against it and nothing to help. Mother, however, pointed out that although life is a wonderful thing, still more wonderful is 'life more abundant'. And it is this more abundant life which the Lord Jesus Christ came to give us (See John 10. 10.).

Every Christian who is indwelt by the Spirit of Christ has life, but to know more abundant life one must follow the instructions. These instructions, are, of course, the Word of God, not written in five languages only, but in many, many hundreds. English, however, was good enough for Arthur, and is good enough for us. If we let our lives be governed by the Word of God, and if we are



always freshly watered by that Word and keep ourselves in the love of God, then we, too, can be

strong and straight and beautiful in our daily lives.  
 H. F.

## A TRAGIC ANSWER TO PRAYER OR THE TRAGEDY OF GOD'S SECOND-BEST

*"He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls" (Psalm cvi. 15).*

**W**HAT a sad 'but' that is! It represents God's frustration and disappointment. It means that God has so left the decision and choice with man that He will not force or coerce. It points to the fact that God has a great intention where His people are concerned, but they may miss it.

But when all that has been said, the reason for the tragedy was—and can be—persistent insistence on having what the people who pray want rather than what the Lord had so evidently shown to be His will.

It is therefore possible for God to yield to us, to answer our prayer, and for the result to be an everlasting regret and reproach.

What are the alternatives? The context of the verse in Psalm cvi, and the reference to Numbers vi, shows that it all hinged upon the food question.

The Manna was too mysterious, too inscrutable, too delicate, too heavenly, too miraculous, too 'spiritual'. It contrasted with the tangible, certain(?), understandable, and *naturally* gratifying food of Egypt. The fact is that their spiritual life had dropped to such a low level as to make them forget the tyranny, labour, heartbreak, and groanings in Egypt, and to be in an illusionary mentality about that terrible history. Get spiritually low and the world holds out false attraction. Granted that the life of faith and a supernatural basis of life has trials and difficulties for the flesh and the natural man, but it has a daily miracle of sustenance at its heart. The point of departure with them was

whether their own souls were to be gratified or whether they were to be a testimony to the Lord.

The phrase "leanness into their souls" indicates that, firstly, thinness, scantiness, smallness, starvation, tenuity, weakness, and contraction in spiritual stature and measure are quite contrary to a God who is so full, abundant, and beneficent. Such contraction and limitation could never be a testimony to Him.

In the next place, the words indicate that the heavenly, the supernatural, the spiritual, and the way of faith is really the way of spiritual robustness and substance.

How lean-souled many of the Lord's people are! How little many of them and many churches have to give! How rare it is to find those—individually or collectively—who have much more than they need themselves and plenty for others! Starvation conditions are all too common among the Lord's people. There are many reasons for this, but our verse says that it is the preference for the earthly to the heavenly, and an unwillingness to forego the natural for the spiritual. This whole matter is threshed out in the First Letter to the Corinthians, a church characterized by spiritual leanness, weakness, and smallness.

Spiritual leanness can be a judgment. "He sent leanness into their souls", while he gave them their request for natural fatness.

At any cost let us set the highest value and importance upon spiritual fulness, the fulness of Christ, and never by any means limit Him, or be instrumental in limiting Him in others!

## CHRIST OUR LIFE

ONE of the main objects of the Holy Spirit with the children of God is to get them spiritually and experimentally into Christ as risen and exalted, and into the risen and exalted life of Christ.

The present phase of things is particularly marked by a cutting off from things, men, and movements, with a view to utter attachment to the Lord Jesus Himself. Antichrist will soon be made manifest, and will probably come along the line of a great united world-movement of human improvement and moral and social uplift under the name of 'Christianity', but without regeneration; a great thrust of 'humanism'; a full development of the principal sin—*independence of, and superiority to, God—the true God.*

Multitudes will be drawn away after him, and to refuse to be included in *such* a movement will bring a stigma and ostracism upon those who so refuse. The Lord is preparing for Antichrist by seeking to make the Lord Jesus more completely the life of His own than has been their experience.

Work, enterprises, activities, movements, churches, societies, teachings, people, etc., have been and are the life of many. They must have the stimulus of a programme, a scheme, a place to occupy.

Teaching—as such—may bring to confusion and provide no living way through. Work may lead to exhaustion and disappointment. Movements may become marked by merely human features and be spheres of dissension.

Things—all of them—will disappoint sooner or later, but the Lord abideth and never fails. The measure of attachment to the Lord can often be the measure of attachment to some interest, either

a person, or persons, or place, or movement, or piece of work, and when these break down faith in the Lord is shaken, and a dark period of eclipse of faith is passed through.

What we *must* learn supremely is to attach everything to the Lord Himself, and to come to a full appreciation of Him. The Lord must be life for the spirit to make it strong; not interests and merely objective concerns. Otherwise we shall only stand up strongly when there is the appeal of some outward occasion, crisis or emergency.

The Lord must be life for our minds so that truth is not for us either abstract or merely true things, but life and power.

The Lord must be the life of our bodies. Natural weakness or strength is not the criterion. Healing as a 'truth' or as something in itself can become legal bondage and a 'bugbear'. It is the Lord Himself our life, whether to remain cumbered about with infirmities or to be set free—whichever will serve most His glory. It is not so much the natural condition as the transcendence and accomplishment of the Lord.

In the days of terrific pressure which are now upon the Lord's people everywhere; days when the enemy takes less 'off-time' than ever; days when it is more perilous for believers to take 'off-time', there is only one thing adequate—it is that the Lord should be known in absoluteness as our life—our very life.

The exhortation of Barnabas to the converts at Antioch may be a very timely and salutary word for us at this time: "He exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts xi. 23).

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" AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING "

CHURCHES AND WORKERS

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

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

There is a clamant need for a deep revision of our mentality regarding what we call New Testament procedure. The starting-point will have to be at the parting of the ways between causes and

effects ; that is, *how and why* things began, and the things themselves. We begin at the wrong end ; at the place where things are in existence, and we take the things as a pattern, a blue-print, a text-book, and proceed to imitate, to copy, to reproduce. Thus we resolve the New Testament into a hand-book of organization. In so doing we overlook the fundamental, elemental, and vital fact that what we have in the New Testament never came that way. Whatever there is in the New Testament which is called an 'order' was the normal, natural, spontaneous issue of a kind of life which had been miraculously imparted by direct act of the same Spirit as brought about the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary: "Begotten, not created". It was the growth and formation of an organism: "*Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*" (John i. 13). This was as true of the whole as it was of the individual parts.

Let us take:

### THE CASE OF THE CHURCHES

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

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

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

Carry on the form if you will, but a 'church', as such, is no more sacred in the eyes of the Lord than was the Tabernacle in Shiloh, or the Temple in Jerusalem, once the glory had departed ; that is—the presence of the Lord.

### THE WORKERS

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



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

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

Before the Apostles had finished their course, things began to change in Church order. Signs of incipient ecclesiasticism, as we know it to-day, were showing themselves. It is overlooked that when Paul wrote his last letters—to Timothy—and said that he wrote that “men might know how they ought to behave themselves in the house of God”, he was writing correctively of misbehaviour. That ‘misbehaviour’ related, in the main, to those in responsibility—the Elders. Paul’s corrective was the recognition that Elders are not just officials, but they are essentially *spiritual* men; men of *spiritual* measure, and no novices. They *are* Elders in character, *spiritual* qualifications and gift before they have the title of Elder. The title never makes a man an Elder. If he is not that already, no title will ever make him that! As in the churches, so in their responsible men, it is the presence and measure of Christ which determines everything.

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

### THREE FAITHFUL WOUNDS

*The following message by Dr. Tozer is reproduced here by the kind permission of the editor of THE ALLIANCE WITNESS. Reprints will be available in pamphlet form.*

**F**AITHFUL are the wounds of a friend, says the Holy Spirit in Proverbs xxvii. 6. And lest we imagine that the preacher is the one who does the wounding, I want to read Job v. 17 and 18: “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty. For he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole.” You see, the one who does the wounding here is not the servant, but the Master Himself. So with that in our minds I want to talk to you about three faithful wounds of a friend.

In order to get launched into my message let me introduce a little lady who has been dead for about six hundred years. She once lived and loved and prayed and sang in the city of Norwich, England. This little woman hadn’t much light, and she

hadn’t any way to get much light, but the beautiful thing about her was that with what little Biblical light she had, she walked with God so wonderfully close that she became as fragrant as a flower. And long before Reformation times she was in spirit an evangelical. She lived and died and has now been with her Lord nearly six hundred years, but she has left behind her a fragrance of Christ.

England was a better place because this little lady lived. She wrote only one book, a very tiny book that you could slip into your side pocket or your purse, but it’s so flavourful, so divine, so heavenly, that it has made a distinct contribution to the great spiritual literature of the world. The lady to whom I refer is the one called the Lady Julian.

Before she blossomed out into this radiant, glorious life which made her famous as a great Christian over her part of the world, she prayed a prayer and God answered. It is this prayer with which I am concerned to-night. The essence of her prayer was this: “O God, please give me three wounds; the wound of contrition and the wound of com-

passion and the wound of longing after God." Then she added this little postscript which I think is one of the most beautiful things I have ever read: "This I ask without condition." She wasn't dickered with God. She wanted three things and they were all for God's glory: "I ask this without condition, Father; do what I ask and then send me the bill. Anything that it costs will be all right with me."

All great Christians have been wounded souls. It is strange what a wound will do to a man. Here's a soldier who goes out to the battlefield. He is full of jokes and strength and self-assurance; then one day a piece of shrapnel tears through him and he falls, a whimpering, beaten, defeated man. Suddenly his whole world collapses around him and this man, instead of being the great, strong, broad-chested fellow that he thought he was, suddenly becomes a whimpering boy again. And such have even been known, I am told, to cry for their mothers when they lie bleeding and suffering on the field of battle. There is nothing like a wound to take the self-assurance out of us, reduce us to childhood again and make us small and helpless in our own sight.

Many of the Old Testament characters were wounded men, stricken of God and afflicted indeed as their Lord was after them. Take Jacob, for instance. Twice God afflicted him; twice he met God and each time it came as a wound, and one time it came actually as a physical wound and he limped on his thigh for the rest of his life. And the man Elijah—was he not more than a theologian, more than a doctrinarian? He was a man who had been stricken; he had been struck with the sword of God and was no longer simply one of Adam's race standing up in his own self-assurance; he was a man who had had an encounter with God, who had been confronted by God and had been defeated and broken down before Him. And when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, you know what it did to him. Or take the man Ezekiel, how he went down before his God and became a little child again. And there were many others.

Now the wounded man is a defeated man, I say, and the strong, robust and self-confident Adam-man ceases to fight back any longer; he lays down his sword and surrenders and the wound finishes him. Let's talk about these three wounds in their order.

The first is the wound of contrition. Now I've heard for the last thirty years that repentance is a change of mind, and I believe it, of course, as far

as it goes. But that's just what's the matter with us. We have reduced repentance to a change of mind. It is a mental act, indeed, but I point out that repentance is not likely to do us much good until it ceases to be a wound within our spirit. No man has truly repented until his sin has wounded him near to death, until the wound has broken him and defeated him and taken all the fight and self-assurance out of him and he sees himself as the one who nailed his Saviour on the tree.

I don't know about you, but the only way I can keep right with God is to keep contrite, to keep a sense of contrition upon my spirit. Now there's a lot of cheap and easy getting rid of sin and getting your repentance disposed of. But the great Christians, in and out of the Bible, have been those who were wounded with a sense of contrition so that they never quite got over the thought and the feeling that they personally had crucified Jesus. The great Bishop Ussher each week used to go down by the riverbank and there all Saturday afternoon kneel by a log and bewail his sins before his God. Perhaps that was the secret of his greatness.

Let us beware of vain and overhasty repentance, and particularly let us beware of no repentance at all. We are a sinful race, ladies and gentlemen, a sinful people, and until the knowledge has hit hard, until it has wounded us, until it has got through and past the little department of our theology, it has done us no good. A man can believe in total depravity and never have any sense of it for himself at all. Lots of us believe in total depravity who have never been wounded with the knowledge that we've sinned. Repentance is a wound I pray we may all feel.

And then there's the wound of compassion. Now compassion is an emotional identification, and Christ had that in full perfection. The man who has this wound of compassion is a man who suffers along with other people. Jesus Christ our Lord can never suffer to save us any more. This He did, once for all, when He gave Himself without spot through the Holy Ghost to the Father on Calvary's cross. He cannot suffer to save us but He still must suffer to win us. He does not call His people to redemptive suffering. That's impossible; it could not be. Redemption is a finished work.

But He does call His people to feel along with Him and to feel along with those that rejoice and those that suffer. He calls His people to be to Him the kind of an earthly body in which He can weep again and suffer again and love again. For our Lord has two bodies. One is the body He took to the tree on Calvary; that was the body in which He



suffered to redeem us. But He has a body on earth now, composed of those who have been baptized into it by the Holy Ghost at conversion. In that body He would now suffer to win men. Paul said that he was glad that he could suffer for the Colossians and fill up the measure of the afflictions of Christ in his body for the church's sake.

Now, my brethren, I don't know whether I can make it clear or not. I know that things like this have to be felt rather than understood, but the wounded man is never a seeker after happiness. There is an ignoble pursuit of irresponsible happiness among us. Over the last years, as I have observed the human scene and have watched God's professed people live and die, I have seen that most of us would rather be happy than to feel the wounds of other people's sorrows. I do not believe that it's the will of God that we should seek to be happy, but rather that we should seek to be holy and useful. The holy man will be the useful man and he's likely to be a happy man too; but if he seeks happiness and forgets holiness and usefulness, he's a carnal man. I, for one, want no part in carnal religious joy. There are times when it's sinful to be happy. When Jesus our Lord was sweating it out there in the garden or hanging on the tree, He could not be happy. He was the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

And the great saints of the past, who conquered and captured parts of the world for Jesus, when they were in travail were not happy. The woman, said Jesus, who is giving birth is not happy at the time of her travail, but as soon as the child is delivered she becomes happy because a man is born into the world. You and I are, in a sense, to be mothers in Israel, those through whom the Lord can suffer and grieve and love and pity again to bring children to birth.

Thirdly, there's the wound of longing after God. This little woman wanted to long after God with a longing that became a pain in her heart. She wanted to be lovesick. She prayed in effect, "O God, that I might want Thee so badly that it becomes a wound in my heart that I can't get over." To-day, accepting Christ becomes terminal. That is the end. And all evangelism leads toward one thing—getting increased numbers of people to accept Christ, and there we put a period. My criticism of most of our Bible conferences is that we spend our time counting again the treasures that we have in Christ but we never arrive at the place where any of that which is in Christ gets into us. He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ, but you can no more

buy food with the money still in the bank than you can live on the treasures that are in Christ unless they're also experimentally in you.

So many of us say, "All right, I'll attend another Bible conference", or "I'll take a course", or, "I'll buy a book". My friends, what we need is not more instruction; we've been instructed to death. Where in the world is there more fundamental Bible teaching than here in Chicago? This is the Mecca of Fundamentalism. This is the Vatican of Evangelism. We've got notebooks at home stacked high that go back twenty-five years. They tell us of some new sidelight on some text or some new illustration somebody gave to point up a doctrine. But, oh, what weak creatures we are! What joyless people we are!

Note the paradoxes: To be happily forgiven and yet to be wounded and to remember the grief; to enjoy the peace of the finished work of Christ and yet suffer to win others; to find God and yet be always pursuing Him. When Moses saw the glory of God he begged that he might see more. When God revealed to him that he had found grace, he wanted more grace. Remember this: the man that has the most of God is the man who is seeking the most ardently for more of God.

There was a man who talked about "a restless thirst, a sacred, infinite desire", and that is what I want for my own heart. Among the plastic saints of our times Jesus has to do all the dying and all we want is to hear another sermon about His dying; Jesus does all the sorrowing and we want to be happy. But, my brethren, if we were what we ought to be, we would seek to know in experience the meaning of the words, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

I have been greatly and deeply concerned that you and I do something more than listen, that we dare to go to God like the Lady Julian and dare to ask Him to give us a faithful, fatherly wound—maybe three of them, if you please: to wound us with a sense of our own sinful unworthiness that we'll never quite get over; to wound us with the sufferings of the world and the sorrows of the church, and then to wound us with the longing after God, a thirst, a sacred thirst and longing that will carry us on toward perfection.

The lack of desire is the ill of all ills;

Many thousands through it the dark pathway  
have trod;

The balsam, the wine of predestinate wills

Is a jubilant pining and longing for God.



Write that sentence down, "A jubilant pining and longing for God."

Almost every day of my life I am praying that "a jubilant pining and longing for God" might come back on the evangelical churches. We don't need to have our doctrine straightened out; we are as orthodox as the Pharisees of old. But this longing for God that brings spiritual torrents and whirlwinds of seeking and self-denial—this is almost gone from our midst.

God loves to be longed for, He loves to be sought,

For He sought us Himself with such longing and love;

He died for desire of us, marvellous thought!

And He longs for us now to be with Him above.

I believe that God wants us to long for Him with the longing that will become lovesickness, that

will become a wound to our spirits, to keep us always finding and always seeking, always having and always desiring. So the earth becomes less valuable and heaven gets closer as we move into God and up into Christ.

Dare we bow our hearts now and say, "Father, I've been an irresponsible, childish kind of Christian—more concerned with being happy than with being holy. O God, give me three wounds. Wound me with a sense of my own sinfulness. Wound me with compassion for the world and wound me with love of Thee that will keep me always pursuing and always exploring and always seeking and always finding."

If you dare to pray that prayer sincerely and mean it before God, it could mean a turning point in your life. It could mean a door of victory opened to you. May God grant that it be so.

A. W. T.

## "LET THE HOUSE BE BUILDED"

### I. THE ETERNAL CONCEPTION AND DECISION

*Reading: Ezra vi.*

CHRISTIANITY has many aspects, and Christian people are occupied with those various aspects; such as evangelism, the teaching and building up of believers, or contending for the faith. There are movements entirely devoted to the study of prophetic matters related to the coming again of Christ, and so on. All these are right. But they can, and often do, become things in themselves and, while being so good and right, have the effect of dividing Christians into sections, circling round some interpretation, or some teaching, or some specific object. The inclusive and supreme object of God, in and through and over all, is thereby very often lost sight of.

It is the purpose of these pages to seek to bring that object more definitely into view. Our concern is with God's all-inclusive object and purpose. I am sure you will agree that the value of any one aspect or side of teaching or work will be governed, very largely, by its relationship to the whole purpose of God. The value will be more immediate if that whole purpose is seen, and kept all the time in view. God does not commit Himself wholly or exclusively to any one part of His purpose; He only commits Himself wholly to the *all* of His intention. If we desire to find God committing Himself, it becomes very necessary for us

to know what are the conditions and ground for His committal.

The inclusive object to which we refer is inherent in the few simple words which we have taken for our general title, from the sixth chapter of the book of Ezra: "Let the house be builded" (Ezra vi. 3). That is God's all-inclusive object. You notice that Ezra traced this decree back through and beyond the instrument, the ruler, who made it. He traced it back to God. He recognized that this decree, while made by an earthly ruler, originated with God (v. 22). He said: "God put it into the heart of the king (vii. 27). This came from God. And, having shown that it originated with God, in the rest of the story he shows how God, in sovereign ways, committed Himself to it. God instigated this; God supported this; and, in spite of numerous and great difficulties, God consummated this.

If that was true then, we want to discover how it can be true in our time. I believe that all the people of God, all true Christians, are deeply desirous of knowing, in our time, what it is that *God* has instigated, what it is that *God* takes upon Himself to support and see through, what it is that, in spite of everything—a great, vast everything—God will finish. We want to discover how God will commit Himself.

## THE ETERNITY OF GOD

That brings us to a vital and fundamental principle of Biblical interpretation. It is a thing that everybody who handles the Word of God ought to recognize, and when we take up our Bibles it ought always to be present. It is simply the *eternity* of God. That bare statement perhaps does not convey very much to you at first. But the great fact is that there is no time with God. All 'time', as it is with us, is 'present' with God; with Him there is no past, present, future. He is the eternal God—'From eternity to eternity, Thou art God' (Ps. xc. 2). God may accommodate Himself to the time-periods of men and this earth, but He Himself dwells in eternity: His thoughts are eternal thoughts; His purpose is an eternal purpose. The architect has the whole plan before him; the builder only has the day-to-day part or parts. Those who only see the parts may be confused; they may not understand; they may even begin to take the part for the whole. A writer of one of the New Testament documents introduced his thesis in these words: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets . . . in divers manners . . ." (Heb. i. 1). God did speak in time, at different times, in different manners, and different portions; but, with God, the whole, from eternity, was present, and every part that came from Him had the whole in it.

We must ever remember that when we are handling the Bible; otherwise we shall wrongly divide the Word of Truth. The full design of God governs every part, as far as He is concerned. God's mind does not grow. There is no progress with God; He is full and complete and final at all times. God has brought His thoughts into time by means of models and figures, but they are only models and figures of spiritual and eternal realities. And the principle is this, that whatever comes from God, at any *time* from our standpoint, from this world's standpoint—whatever comes from God, however partial it may seem to be, has in it the eternal and complete thought of God. It contains within itself the whole of the spiritual mind of God. We have to look *through* the immediate form of presentation, to discover the spiritual and eternal thought that lies there.

This house—"Let the *house* be builded"—is only an earthly, temporary, limited representation of the vast eternal, spiritual thought of God. It is but a poor representation, and it will pass; but God's thought will never pass. What lies behind it will have no end: it has come out of eternity;

it will go on to eternity. And the whole Bible is just a manifold expression of this principle. From beginning to end, in its numerous forms of presentation and representation, in its types, symbols, and figures, the whole Bible is one comprehensive and many-sided expression of this one idea, that lies here inherent in this word 'House'.

## GOD COMING OUT FROM ETERNITY

Let us get behind the figures, behind the representation, to the great spiritual truth and reality. Here it is. Out from eternity, out from unknowableness, out from incomprehensibility, out from inaccessibility, God resolved to presence Himself in a special, unique creation, a spiritual organism, of His own devising; in something which, amongst many other titles and designations, is called in the Scriptures a *house*. God determined to come out, from all that vast unknowable, inaccessible, eternal realm, and presence Himself, make Himself known, make Himself accessible, in a 'house' or dwelling-place. That is the truth that is running all the way through the Bible, from beginning to end; that is the thing that is governing everything, which we shall see as we proceed.

But as we take hold of that great truth, and move with it through the Bible, we begin to make a discovery about it. We begin to find that, while it is certainly a wonderful idea, an amazing thought, it is also something much more than just a thought and an idea. We find, in fact, that it involves the very heart of God—not only His mind, but His heart; it is something greatly cherished by God; something with which God's greatest interests are bound up. Far from being something objective to God, it turns out (if I may put it like that) to be a very part of Himself—of His thought, of His will, of His very heart.

One of the most staggering statements in the Bible is surely this: ". . . the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts xx. 28). God purchased this that is called 'the Church' with His own Blood. That will defeat and defy every attempt at fathoming and comprehension. Blood is the very vitality of any organism. This 'thing' (forgive the term for the moment) has the very life of God bound up with it. God has given His life for it. That is something more than a matter of objective interest. The very heart of God is in this—His own life—Himself.

## GOD PRESENT WITH MAN

What is this thought, then, this thing so near to the heart of God, with which all His interests are

bound up? It is *God present amongst men*: God related to an organism, as the Inhabitant, the Occupier, the Indweller of that organism. The simple, plain meaning of a 'house' is, surely, something to be dwelt in, to be lived in; it has no meaning unless it is inhabited. God's thought is to be *there*, present, indwelling, with the object of making Himself known and understood, and with the object of having blessed fellowship with that which comprises the 'house'.

I have said that the Bible contains the history of that thought, that eternal and Divine concept through the ages. It begins with a very simple, primal expression of the thought: the man and the woman in the garden, and God present, walking in the garden, talking, communing, making His thoughts and intentions known. It is a picture of happy fellowship between God and man, man and God. Man is shown in relationship with God, in terms of friendship (if I may use that word), and on a basis of commission to be God's regent here for the development and fulfilment of His purposes. Everything speaks of peace and order and beauty, and all that the human heart longs for: God has created for Himself a 'house', and is in it, and is walking in it, and talking in it. It is there in this simple first representation.

From that point, the Divine intention has a long and chequered history. Remember that all the actions of God are related to that one 'thing', and all the reactions in history, recorded in the Bible, are against that thing—to drive God out, to exclude God, to bring about conditions in which God cannot be present, to which He cannot commit Himself. It focuses upon this one eternal desire of the heart of God.

#### GOD'S INTENTION REALISED IN CHRIST PERSONAL AND CHRIST CORPORATE

But where does it end? Yes, it is a long and chequered history, but, in the end, the intention is realised. And it is realised in two ways: firstly, it is realised in God Himself, as incarnate in His Son. We have not recognized the supreme significance of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, until we have recognized that in Him this eternal conception finds its realisation; He is 'Emmanuel'—"God with us"! God has reached His object. He Himself has made for Himself an abode. "God was *in* Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. v. 19). In that first and fundamental way God reaches His end; and so we discover that the House of God is not an 'it'—it is a 'Him'; it is a Person. And then He proceeds from the One to

the many, from the individual to the corporate; and an elect body is brought into view, in terms of a dwelling-place for God. The end of the Bible is again in symbolism as much as the beginning was—a City and a Garden—and we hear the music of these words: "The tabernacle of God is with men; and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be . . . their God" (Rev. xxi. 3). That is where the Bible ends. History is consummated.

I have said that this Divine intention explains the Bible from every angle; that all the action and all the reaction are centred in this one thing, that God may have a place for Himself where He may dwell, in these terms of fellowship and peace. There is, in fact, nothing in the Bible that is not related to this all-governing purpose and thought of God. Here is the object of God's concern, and of God's jealousy. If God was jealous over a temple in Jerusalem, or over Jerusalem or Zion, as the prophets so strongly said, do you think that His jealousy was exhausted in such an earthly, temporary representation? Nay, it was because of *the something represented* that God was jealous.

#### WHAT IS THE HOUSE OF GOD?

What, then, is the House of God? The question is raised by God Himself, through His servant Isaiah: "Thus saith Jehovah: The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool, what manner of house will ye build unto me? and what place shall be my rest? For all these things hath mine hand made . . ." (Isa. lxvi. 1, 2). You remember how Stephen, in that magnificent message which cost him his life—so significant in this very connection—quoted these words from Isaiah. It was almost the culmination of that great discourse; it all worked up, headed up to this. He says: "Solomon built himself a house . . . *But . . . but . . .* what manner of house will ye build me, saith the Lord?" (Acts vii. 47-49). "The heaven of heavens cannot contain him" (II Chron. ii. 6).

#### 1. THE INFINITE GREATNESS OF THE HOUSE

What manner of house? There are some things there to take note of. Firstly, it is an intimation of the infinite, infinite greatness of God requiring something infinitely great. No magnificent temple, whether of Solomon or of any other builder, can answer to this demand. It requires something infinitely great to show forth the greatness of God. The Apostle Paul, more than anyone else in the



Bible, saw the meaning of this House; and, in spite of the wonderful richness, comprehensiveness and flexibility of the Greek tongue, he exhausted all the language at his command in trying to speak about it. With all his knowledge of words and language, Paul was hard put to it to find words in which to express the reality of this House—the breadth and the length and the height and the depth, and so on. He wrestles with human language, but it all fails to express how great this is.

But note—and here is the wonderful thing, where we are getting very near to it, or it is getting very near to us—there are some things that the Apostle Paul does make clear as defining the nature and purpose of this House.

## 2. THE PLACE OF THE “KNOWLEDGE-SURPASSING LOVE”

Firstly, that it is that in which the “knowledge-surpassing *love*” of God is manifested (Eph. iii. 19). God conceived this objective order, in order to demonstrate in it something of the knowledge-surpassing love of His heart. And then Paul speaks of *grace*—the “riches of his grace” (i. 7; ii. 7); the “glory of his grace” (i. 6); and he brings that all into relationship with this House, that “in the ages to come” (ii. 7), in that House, Body (call it what you will), there should be displayed to a wondering universe the infinite grace of God. But Paul does not stop there: he passes to *wisdom* (iii. 10). The infinite wisdom of God is to be shown to ‘principalities and powers’—in this House! It requires a big House to comprehend the greatness of His love, and the greatness of His grace, and the greatness of His wisdom—God present in such terms of Self-manifestation!

### MAN'S MISAPPREHENSION

But there is another thing implied here. It is the implied misapprehension of man. When it is a matter of ‘big ideas’, wonderful conceptions, man has a way, as we know, of ‘catching on’ and taking hold of them. Man has got hold of this idea of a ‘house for God’, a ‘dwelling for God’, and has given it a twist, and brought into it a false interpretation. Man has tried to capture God and put Him into a house of man’s own making. By so doing, he has tried to limit God, confine God, possess God, make God exclusive to some particular ‘house’ made by man—a building or an institution on earth. This inveterate propensity of man to make God his property, and the property of his

particular kind of house, leads to the uprise of a terrible exclusivism: saying, in effect, that, if you do not belong here, go this way, then you are outside the pale. It is the effect of an idea taken hold of, but misapplied—a false interpretation.

That was Israel’s tragic blunder, against which the prophets raged and stormed. It was that into which Jesus came. Like new wine in old wine skins, His coming burst the whole thing; but it cost Him His life. They had made God’s house an exclusive thing, their own—they ‘possessed’ God. That was their blunder. And, as Jesus was walking away into the eternal, spiritual reality, He said: “Your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. xxiii. 38)—*your house, your house!* That is an awful indictment—*your house!*

## CHRIST THE CORRECTIVE

### 1. PERSONALLY

We must take this all very seriously, because, from one point of view, it was this misapprehension, this false interpretation, this caricature, that Jesus came to correct. He did so in two ways. As we have pointed out, He corrected it, firstly, in His own Person. Do you want to see the House of God, what it is?—look at Him! Secondly, He did it in His teaching. The Gospel by John, if we did but recognize it, stands, in the whole Biblical purpose, to show how Jesus supplants and transcends all earthly and material representation. It makes perfectly clear that He supplants and takes the place of the temple in Jerusalem. He supplanted and took the place of the priesthood, Himself became the High Priest, and offered Himself a sacrifice acceptable to God, thus not only fulfilling all types, but showing that until Christ offered Himself God had never been satisfied. He supplanted and transcended all the Jewish feasts: you notice how in John’s Gospel the feasts of the Jews are constantly referred to, and Jesus figures in them, over against them, in contrast.

Jesus takes the place of the manna in the wilderness: He is the ‘bread of God come down from heaven’ (John vi. 33). Jesus takes the place of the water from the smitten rock, and says: “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst” (John iv. 14). “He that believeth on me . . . out of him shall flow rivers of living water” (John vii. 38). He takes the place of the lights in the temple, and says: “I am the light of the world” (John viii. 12). He takes the place of all the old shepherds of Israel, and says: “I am

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the good shepherd" (John x. 11, 14). He takes the place of Israel, and builds a new flock out of His own blood: "I lay down my life for the sheep" (verse 15). Jesus is the answer to God's eternal quest.

## 2. CORPORATELY

But Jesus, as the New Testament goes on to show, does not stand alone. Jesus in corporate, organic expression, is the House of God. Where, and what, is the House of God? It is where there is spiritual, organic, vital union with Christ; no more, no less. Says Paul: "In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body" (I Cor. xii. 13). Jesus fulfils all the functions, and expresses all the features of God's presence—God's presence in the midst of men.

This is a statement, but it is a challenge. How great is His House—but how spiritually definite is His House! It is built upon *the love of God*. That is testing enough. The very object and purpose of this House is for the expression of the love of God. And if that love of God is not present, or is contradicted, the House ceases to be what God intended it to be. It is the explanation of why Israel, who were once called 'God's House' as a nation, were set aside. Here is the infinite love of God, the infinite grace of God, brought into the world in the Person of His Son: and what does He meet? Infinite hate! Love cast out! Very well, then—"Your house is left unto you desolate".

All this doctrine and theology—even about justification, not by works but by faith, and so on—can be so cold, after all; *it* can become hard, legalistic, 'righteous'. But remember that that is all there in the Word of God in order to magnify the *grace* of God! "Not of works . . ." but the grace of God. The House of God exists on the basis that men and women have discovered that their deepest and most terrible need is for the grace of God, and they have come into the knowledge of that grace. The one word uppermost in their vocabulary is the word 'grace'—it is the most wonderful word in the language of earth and Heaven. Grace, grace, grace! It is that which constitutes the House of God. If you and I are living in the meaning of that wonderful word 'grace', we shall know God very near to us. God 'beholdeth the proud afar off', because the proud have no sense of their need of grace. Pride is an abomination to God, simply because it is such a contradiction of the grace of God. "To *this* man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite

spirit, and that trembleth at my word" (Isa. lxvi. 2). That is the atmosphere of the House of God.

And so, you see, God's House is not a 'thing', it is not a 'place'—it is not anything that man makes; it is something spiritual. On what ground does it rest? It rests on the ground of the Cross. God's House in the wilderness—the Tabernacle—came after the Altar, and stood as the background to the Altar. In the new dispensation, the Church is the background to the Cross of Christ, for it only comes by the Cross. What does the Cross do? It sets man aside, and makes room for God; it puts man out, that God may be all and in all. God's intention in the Cross is to make possible the realisation of His eternal thought to be present, to be *there*. Where the Cross is most deeply wrought into the life of a people, *there*, most fully, you will meet the Lord. You will not meet Him in uncrucified men and women; in the presence of the flesh, God stands back.

## THE NEED FOR CHRIST-CONSCIOUSNESS

In closing, we will ask one more question. What is the dominant necessity? The answer is twofold. The dominant necessity for the realisation of God's desire—the bringing in of this House, in its beauty, in its love, in its grace, in its fellowship, in its peace, in its order, in its Divine manifestation—is a Christ-consciousness. Perhaps that does not convey much as it is stated. But what you and I need perhaps more than anything else, is more of this Christ-consciousness. Are we not ever and always rebuked when we hear Paul say, "the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died . . . that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him . . . Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh . . ." (II Cor. v. 14 - 16)? Are we not always rebuked by that? Do we not know one another so much after the flesh? Instead of laying hold on whatever there may be, even remotely, of Christ, in one another, and making the most of that, we do the other thing: we make the most of one another's faults and weaknesses and un-Christlikeness—and there is plenty of it, God knows!

But, oh, for this Christ-consciousness—that we might give ourselves more to this laying hold of what there is of Christ, however small, and making the most of that. The House would be built, God would find His House and commit Himself, if we would do that. God help us! And Christ-consciousness means House-consciousness, fellow-



ship-consciousness, relatedness-consciousness, that we are members one of another, so that the hand cannot say to the foot, I don't need you, I can do without you! It is this corporate consciousness that is so needed to-day, to destroy all that is disintegrating and divisive.

God grant that something of the impact of this may come upon our hearts, and lift us out of our

all-too-small conceptions of the House of God. May it govern our attitudes in relation to all—all who rest upon the love of God, *all* who rest upon the grace of God, *all* who have come to see and to acknowledge that it is only by the wisdom of God, in solving all the human problems, their own and others, that God will at last find what He is seeking—a place in which to dwell.

## A PLACE IN THE HOUSE

*Reading : Psalm lxxviii.*

"God setteth the solitary in a house." (Ps. lxxviii. 6)

". . . how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God . . ." (I Tim. iii. 15)

LONELINESS is a great tragedy. More than once God declares (as in verse 5) that He will have a special care for the fatherless and for widows. In spiritual matters, however, He has planned to avoid this sad condition. "God setteth the solitary in families."

He does this by His providential dealings with us, by bringing us, at the time of our conversion or subsequently, into touch with other Christians, so that we can know the real family nature of the eternal life which we have received from Christ. In the New Testament there are many hints of such sovereign activities of God. We find that He used business or personal affairs, government action and persecution, as well as direct guidance, to bring together those who would otherwise always have lived apart. It is still so to-day. Interrogate any live group of believers and you will find that they, too, have been brought together by events over which they had little or no control; by experiences which were sometimes strange or even romantic. Such assemblies are not man-made, nor are they accidental; they are the result of God's planning and over-ruling to bring men and women together that they might share their spiritual history. "God setteth the solitary in families."

### GATHERED TOGETHER IN CHRIST

There is, however, more to it than this. The actual words of the psalmist are that "God maketh the solitary to dwell in a house" (R.V.M.). It was from this same psalm (lxxviii. 18) that Paul extracted the words which are quoted in Ephesians

iv. 8. He clearly regarded them as referring to the great and glorious outcome of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, which is the provision of a place for all believers in the house of God. From this letter to the Ephesians and from the rest of the New Testament it is evident what is meant by the term 'house of God'. It refers to the inter-related and interdependent life of all God's people as He makes His home among them. It is into this sphere of fellowship-life that God has set the solitary believer.

He has done it by the Cross of His Son, for through that Cross all human divisions and distinctions are brought to an end. He has done it by the Resurrection of His Son, a resurrection in which all who are born again are lifted on to a new plane of living. He has done it by the Spirit of His Son, for the ascended Christ poured out at Pentecost the Holy Spirit who has baptized all believers into one body (I Cor. xii. 13). Once and for all God has set each separate and solitary child of His into a house—His house—and He now asks them to allow their lives to be adjusted to this action of His.

He does not ask us to form ourselves into a house. This is His work, and He alone can do it. What He asks of us is that we should recognize what He has done and act accordingly. It is not enough to grasp the idea and marvel at its beauty. Too many people protest that they 'see' the house and then contradict their statement by their procedure. The Word of God was written in order that we might know ". . . how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God . . ." (I Tim. iii. 15).

### LIVING TOGETHER IN CHRIST

"How men ought to behave themselves . . ." How do they? The psalmist gives us a clear indication in this verse, "God maketh the solitary to dwell in a house; He bringeth out the prisoners



into prosperity: but the rebellious dwell in a parched land". They either accept what He has done and become glad prisoners to His will in this matter, or they are rebellious, being unable to bear the discipline of a corporate life.

This reaction is no small matter. It determines a great deal of our spiritual experience. It is not just *a* house or *the* house, it is *His* house, and whether we realise it or not we are reacting in relation to His will in all our dealings with fellowship-life. He takes notice of this. When we renounce our own individual liberties to become His prisoners for this interdependent life, then He leads such prisoners out into spiritual prosperity. If, however, we are rebellious to His will in this connection, then we face the prospect of living "in a parched land". The Lord does not lead us there. He does not have to. To rebel against being set in His house is to be left without the peculiar blessings of that house, and for the spiritually sensitive to be without those blessings and benefits is a dry and barren experience. They "dwell in a parched land". The Lord leaves them to do so. He can hardly do otherwise, when they persist in rejecting the submission to fellowship which He has so wonderfully provided.

### THE ALTERNATIVES

Here, then, are the alternatives for those who come under the hand of God in this matter. They can co-operate in 'the house', or they can evade its responsibilities. To do the latter is to court spiritual barrenness. It is perhaps one of the major reasons for spiritual dryness and lack of power that so many Christians find themselves unable to "continue in the fellowship", to persist in submitting themselves to the demands of corporate life in God's house.

'Rebellion' is an ugly word. Most of us would indignantly deny that there is any rebellious spirit in us. But who of us can claim never to have resisted or even rejected the discipline of having to live and work with other Christians?

Let it be said at once that there are two legitimate reasons for withholding fellowship, namely, false doctrine and immoral living. These two, but no others!

The Word of God teaches that "whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ" cannot be afforded fellowship. "If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house and give him no greeting" (II John 10). This is plain, and the

only matter for care is to be sure that it is the essential "doctrine of Christ" which is at issue and not some interpretation of our own.

The second matter is summed up in Paul's words: "but now I write unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner: with such a one no, not to eat" (I Cor. v. 11). This is also quite plain, and refers not to some personal criticism which we may make of a brother's conduct but to the kind of immorality which even the world can recognize.

To follow these Scriptural injunctions is to be obedient, not rebellious.

We shall, of course, be tempted to limit our fellowship to the like-minded, or to exclude from our fellowship those who may seem to be a danger to the spiritual standards of God's house. We have no warrant for this and must resist the temptation.

We shall also be tempted to withhold our fellowship or at least to remain somewhat detached and aloof, if we disapprove of the group in which God has set us. In doing this we may well have good reasons to justify our aloofness. It has even been known that people should justify their apartness by deciding that this group is not "the house of God". There is no end to the arguments and reasonings which can surround such coldness and non-cooperation. The simple truth, however, is surely that if we are found in related life with other Christians and yet persist in keeping ourselves apart from them, either in action or in spirit, we are in danger of frustrating the purpose of God who set us there. In this case we must not be surprised if we "dwell in a parched land".

All this leaves room for the sovereignty of God in changing our location. It is He who is setting us in His house, and He has perfect liberty to move us around.

### BROUGHT OUT INTO PROSPERITY

The rest of the psalm seems to describe the happy prosperity of those whose spirit is one of glad submission. It tells us the kind of blessings which come to those who are "the prisoners of the Lord" in His house. Four of the aspects of this prosperity are indicated here.

#### 1. THE PRESENCE OF GOD (vv. 7 - 18)

God is described as going out before His people; of sending them plentiful and refreshing

rain; of scattering their enemies, and lavishing gifts on them. The main point, however, of this rich experience is that they have the very presence of God with them (vv. 8, 16, 17 and 18). This is man's supreme bliss, to have God making His home with His people.

The Lord Jesus confirmed this promise, by saying that wherever His people (even two or three of them) are really 'together' in His Name, He is there in their midst. His presence in fulness is for those who humbly take their place in the house of God, and become whole-hearted 'prisoners' to the will of God in that fellowship.

"The presence of God." Yes, people will say, that is what we so much need. When Christ ascended on high, leading captivity captive, it was for this very purpose, "that the Lord God might dwell there" (verse 18 margin). If we refer to the passage in Ephesians where this is quoted, we shall verify that the conditions for this longed-for presence are that we should be found "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians iv. 3).

## 2. THE LIFTING OF BURDENS (verse 19)

Here is a sister who in spite of faithfulness to the Lord now finds herself burdened with care almost beyond what she can bear. She has no financial security, she is growing weaker physically, she is full of forebodings concerning the future. Still, it is Prayer Meeting night, and she senses the Spirit's urge to take her part with others in the work of intercession, so in spite of her burden she takes her place in the Lord's house among His praying people. Later on she returns to her lonely home with an extraordinary lightness of heart. None of her problems has been solved, but the burden has been lifted. Without a doubt those problems will be solved and all her needs met, but the miracle is that without waiting for things to happen she is a Christian without a care. "Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden."

Here is a brother who has no particular troubles of his own but who is burdened about the spiritual conditions around him. He remembers past days, when things were so much more thriving and promising; he harps on the faults and failures of his fellow Christians; he becomes so gloomy about everything that he almost decides to stay at home instead of joining in Sunday worship with the rest. His burden has weighed him down almost to the point of despair. However, the Spirit within him (as well as the Word of God) urges him not to for-

sake the assembling of himself with the others, so off he goes to join with them in praise and prayer. Irrespective of whether the meeting is specially good or not, he returns to his home radiantly happy in the Lord. The burden has gone! Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he has discovered that Christ's burden is light. He has not lessened his spiritual concern but he has identified himself with God's people in God's house, and found the blessing of the lifted burden.

It may be argued that to persevere in fellowship often involves taking up other people's burdens. True enough! This also is a way by which the Lord lifts our load, by getting us occupied with the needs of others. The gloomy Christian must be suspected of living in a parched land. Let him capitulate to the Lord over the matter of 'the house' and he will have a daily testimony of praise.

## 3. TRIUMPHANT LIFE (vv. 20 - 27)

"Unto JEHOVAH the Lord belong the issues from death." There is no doubt about the enemies of which this section speaks. Nor is there any suggestion that we can be spared the pain of encountering them. There must be new trials that there may be new deliverances. Every vital assembly of Christians can testify to the fact that although they have had times when the end seemed to have come, the Lord has brought them again from the depths (v. 22). 'The house' is the place in which God is able to display His superior power over all the powers of evil and death.

We have the same troubles and difficulties which all men have to endure. But we have—or should have—a different spirit in which to face them, and an inward buoyancy which lifts us above them. It is in a man's own soul that he is either defeated or victorious. Christ's life is victorious life, a fact which God demonstrates by letting His people be involved in need and then giving them the issue out of it.

We also have special tests which the world knows nothing of, for Satan's aim is always the opposite of God's. If God sets the solitary in families, then Satan breaks up the families into solitary fragments. If God puts us together in 'the house', then the Devil does his utmost to pull apart and away from 'the house'. God's goings are always "into the sanctuary" (v. 24). His programme is that there should be constant praise (v. 25). He gives a princely dignity to His people (v. 27). We shall find that everything conspires to

pull us in the opposite direction, away from the sanctuary, away from praise and away from humble dignity. From this death only the Lord can deliver us, but he needs our faith co-operation if He is to do it.

#### 4. DIVINE STRENGTH (vv. 28 - 35)

It is a trite saying that 'Unity is strength'. The strength which we need is something more, much more than our combined efforts. We need power from another world. "His strength is in the skies"

(v. 34). It is this power from on high which the Church has been promised, "The God of Israel, he giveth strength and power unto his people" (v. 35). "Thy God hath commanded thy strength" (v. 28).

This is the birthright of the Church. The book of the Acts is the book of Divine power. We must notice, though, that it is also the book of fellowship, and this is no coincidence. For us, too, that gift of power may well depend on our whole-hearted acceptance of being set by Him in 'the house'.

## THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE MYSTERY

### CHAPTER TEN

#### THE "MYSTERY", OR DIVINE SECRET IN THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

In this Letter the term occurs four times (i. 26, 27; ii. 2; iv. 3). To read carefully each of these occurrences is to be made aware of the tremendous thing that this "Mystery" was.

To realise the occasion of the Letter is to add to its vital importance. Without taking time to explain that context and to go into all its technicalities, let us simply say that those to whom the letter was written were becoming involved in a colossal system of mystical ideas. These had to do with ranks and grades of spiritual or angelic intelligences, from the lowest order of such, up and up to the pre-eminent angelic intelligence. Even the highest and greatest was but an angel. This philosophy (wisdom of man) was prepared to give Jesus Christ a very high ranking in this mystical system, perhaps the highest, but only as an angel, short of very God.

Right straight, flat, direct, and devastating was the Apostle as he levelled this Letter against this limitation and distortion of Christ. Hence the well-nigh matchless paragraphs which declare Him to be "the Son of God's love"; "the image of the invisible God"; "the firstborn of all creation"; in whom "were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all

things, and in him all things consist [hold together]. And he is the head of the body, the church . . . that in all things he might have the preeminence", and so on. He ranges back to eternity past and on to eternity to be. He ranges all realms and comprehends all things. What potentialities are His! What glory is vested by the Father in Him! What a 'spoiling' this 'philosophy and vain deceit' of men carries with it! What a robbing of the Son of that 'indwelling of the fulness of the Godhead'! (ii. 8-10). This is just mysticism, it is not the Divine "Mystery".

Now, the infinite wonder and amazing blessing of all this concerning this Son is focused down to "this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (i. 27). "And you . . ." (ii. 13).

The whole Letter has to be read in the light of this transcendence of Christ brought into the vessel of His Body—the Church, and the Church's "hope of glory" thereby and therefore. As this is not an exposition of the Letter, we only mean to keep to the great 'Stewardship' which the Apostle Paul conceived as his trust, and how that stewardship is embodied in the true spiritual Church which is His Body. All the Church's hope of glory is centred in and bound up with this absolute transcendence of "the Son of his love".



## THE BATTLE FOR THE SPIRITUAL AGAINST THE LEGAL

*The following is taken from Dean Farrar's Letter to the Galatians. The title is ours and also the italics.*

EDITOR

“**I**N the history of mankind ages of torpor and oppression are often ended by a sudden crisis of deliverance, due to the . . . burning courage of one man. The man whom God appoints to this task has, in most instances, to face the fury of a world suddenly awaked from the deep slumber of decided opinions; and by that fury is often persecuted, and sometimes slain. We are sometimes driven to think that men in general will endure anything rather than the honest pain of facing great questions for themselves . . . Is not Israel in this respect a type of all mankind? Released from the serfdom of Egypt, and led—a free people—into the eager air of the wilderness, did they not murmur, and rebel, for their lost flesh-pots, and leeks and onions?

The Bible, rightly used, is eminently the book of freedom. All the noblest and most inspiring parts of its history tell of the struggles of a people against colossal tyrannies. All the most glorious pages of its prophets are like the blasts of trumpets to awaken men from acquiescence and apathetic sloth. Its spiritual law is a perfect law of liberty. The very spirit of its gospel is, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”. And yet so innate and perverse is the propensity of mankind to prefer their familiar fetters to the perils and pains—the ennobling perils, the glorious pains—of freedom, that they have managed to degrade the very Scriptures into an instrument of oppression.

I have said that it was the Epistle to the Galatians that thus became to Luther a weapon for emancipation for mankind. He said himself, in his own rough way. “I have betrothed myself to it. It is my wife”. Its very characteristic is that it is the Epistle of Freedom. In writing it, Paul stood, as it were, alone upon a mountain-top, and shouted “Liberty”. Eleven times in these short chapters, and in this connection more often than in all the other Epistles put together, the thought occurs, “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free”, and, “Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty”. “Jerusalem, which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” These words are the summary and the key-note of the Epistle. “Free from what?” you will ask. Free, I answer,

from all things that enslave the body and the soul; free from morbid scrupulosities . . . free from morbid anxieties of service; free from the manifold rules of “Touch not, taste not, handle not”; free from strife of contending sects, which make religion consist of shibboleths; free from timorous ritualisms and small ceremonial punctualities; free from anything and everything but the law of faith, the law of grace, the royal law of liberty, the law of those who are not slaves, but sons; the law that is fulfilled in one word, even this, “Thou shalt love . . .” But this freedom is “In Christ”. Forty-three times in this Epistle does the name Christ occur; Christ the Saviour, the Man Christ Jesus.

What St. Paul was principally thinking of—the freedom in which to him all other freedom was involved—was freedom from Judaism; freedom from the petty and intolerable yoke of circumcision, washings, fastings, sacrifices, new moons, sabbaths, incessant assemblies, and all the wearing and fretting externalism. Perhaps you may think that it was indeed necessary to deliver Christianity from this yoke, but that now the work is done; so that this Epistle has no longer any concern for us. It is indeed the principal letter against Judaism; but Judaism, you will say, is dead. It was a splendid service to cut Christianity free from the decaying corpse of obsolete traditions; but it was a service which has for us only an historic interest. Alas, such a notion is greatly mistaken. *Judaism was something more than a dead system; it is a living tendency. There is a Judaism in the secret heart of every one of us; of which we must be aware; and the more you study this Epistle the more you will recognize the significance of its teaching as being as great for the nineteenth century as for the first.* Christ, in accordance with the divine economy had not, in so many words, abrogated the Mosaic law; but He had taught spiritual truths which involved the necessity of its abrogation. The law was, as Peter said, a yoke which neither the Jews nor their fathers were able to bear; but the law alone was as nothing to the mass of infinitesimal minutiae, which Scribes, Rabbis and Pharisees had built upon it. By arguments and inferences, and inferences from those arguments, and arguments from those inferences, they, by the spirit which has been the besetting sin of theologians and commentators in all ages, had darkened God's whole heavens with the smoke of an

attenuated exegesis. *The centre, and head, and heart of Christianity is Christ, and there is nothing narrow, nothing scholastic, nothing jealously exclusive, in Christ. But in the craft and subtlety of devil and man religion has ever tended to wither away into Judaism, into Rabbinism, into scholasticism, into ecclesiasticism, . . . into sectarianism, into dead schemes of dogmatic belief, into dead routine of ceremonial, into dead exclusiveness of party narrowness, . . . into dead formulæ of church parties, into dead performance of dead works .*

Now it is just this fatal tendency . . . against which Paul had to contend. Judaic Christians—apparently one man in particular—had come from Jerusalem . . . with hard ready-made Biblical dogma. *They wanted to substitute external badges for Christian freedom; observances of practices for holiness of heart. In their hands Christianity would have been debased into exclusiveness, self-congratulation, contempt of others, insistence on the outward, indifferent to the essential.*

St. Paul saw that it was time to speak out, and speak out he did. The matter at issue was one of vital importance. *The essence of the Gospel . . . was at stake. The fate of the battle, the battle of spirituality against historic tradition, hung apparently upon his single arm. To him alone had been given to see the full bearings of this question.* The new faith must not be choked at its birth by past prejudices. The hour had come when concession was no longer

possible. Accordingly he flung all reticence and all compromise to the winds. Hot with righteous anger he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians. Against all slavery to the outward—all reliance on the mechanical—he used words which were battles. If he had given grounds for the charge of “inconsistency” by his indifference to trifles, and his willingness to sacrifice details to principles, there should at least be no further doubt as to what he meant and taught. He would leap ashore among his enemies and burn his boats behind him. It requires much thought and study to feel the force and beauty of a letter of which almost every sentence is a thunderbolt, and of which every word, when one understands it, is alive . . .

He . . . then turns from personal self-defence to the defence of the truth that he had preached. He shows them that the new ceremonialism, so far from being an advance, was a mere retrogression. It was a retrogression from the spirit to the flesh, from faith to works, from the Gospel to law, from the eternal to the transient.

His enemies charged him with hunting for popularity by suppressing his real convictions. “Am I now seeking to please men?” he asks (i. 10).

*He showed that if a man wanted to be a Christian, he must give up all reliance on exclusiveness and on externalism. The very inmost spirit of Christianity is . . . not exclusive; spiritual not external; . . . tolerant, not partisan.”*

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### IS YOUR NAME THERE?

EDITH came dancing into the dining-room shouting excitedly, “My name’s in the Bible! My name’s in the Bible!” The rest of the family turned round to look at her. Her sister, Jane, looked scornful, and bluntly said that it was ‘Nonsense’. Her father looked puzzled and tried in vain to remember if he had ever seen that name in the long lists which can be found in the Old Testament and also in the New. Her mother, as always, looked interested and sympathetic, but clearly she was not convinced. Tea, however, was just ready, so in her most practical and matter-of-fact voice she simply answered, “Well, go and wash your hands, dear, and come to the table. Then you can tell us all about it.”

It was Sunday afternoon. Father had been helping in the local Crusader Class and was going out to the Service, so he had little time to spare and

tea must be started without delay. Edith had recently started going to Sunday School. She was only four, and found everything interesting and exciting, so that it was nothing new for her to come back to Sunday tea with some unusual comments or questions. This time, however, she seemed hopelessly wrong. “My name’s in the Bible” indeed!

Jane, who was feeling the indignation, was some years older. She went to Girl Crusaders, and like many older girls was inclined to laugh at her little sister’s strange ideas. However she was kind at heart and normally let Edith talk away without making fun of her. This time, though, she felt that it was a bit much to try to convince the family of what could not possibly be true. Jane always read her daily portion, and she had already won a prize for Scripture knowledge, but she had never seen the name “Edith” in the Bible, so that this was



something which she did not intend to let pass.

Not that anyone else wanted it to pass, Edith was clearly bubbling over with a desire to say more, and even Father seemed to show some interest. First, though, they must give thanks, help one another to bread and butter and receive their cups of tea poured out by Mother. When she had finished doing this she turned to the excited Edith and asked her, "Now what is this that someone has been telling you?"

Edith then explained as best she could that it was not what anybody had been telling her, it was what had been read out of the Bible. Instead of dividing up into classes they had had Open School with a special speaker, and he had read to them about Jesus and Edith. This was getting quite involved. Jane put down her cup and looked as if she was going to explode. Father took another bite and wondered whether he ought to try to change the subject. Mother, who was never at a loss, began to ask Edith what else the speaker had said.

Wrinkling her forehead so that she could think better, Edith began to explain that it was a story about a sheep—or really about a hundred sheep. The speaker had read it from the Bible, and there was a verse about Jesus wanting sinners, and her name was in it.

"Of course, dear," said Mother as she passed the jam, "we are all sinners. You are a sinner and Jesus wants you to come to Him". This did not satisfy Jane, who felt it to be an easy way out. It did not satisfy her young sister either, for she persisted that the name Edith was in the verse.

It was then that Father cleared his throat, and with a kindly smile asked her, "Is this the verse? The one that says, 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them'?" "Yes, that's it", cried out the delighted Edith, and turned to her sister saying, "There you are, Jane; I told you so". Jane's only reply was to burst out laughing. "Eat-

eth", she hooted, "Eateth! with a 'T'. Don't you know the difference between a 'T' and a 'D'?"

Well in fact Edith did know her letters, but not much more, and she was certainly not used to hearing the word "eateth". Her face dropped, and she was not far from tears when she realised that her name was not in the Bible after all. She was silent for the rest of the meal, and was rather glad when the time came for Jane and Father to go off to church.

Came bedtime, and a rather sad little girl got ready to say her prayers with Mother. Before she knelt down, her mother asked her if she minded very much that the verse had said "eateth" and not "Edith". When she replied that she did, her mother asked her if it made her feel less welcome to the Lord Jesus, as if He did not care so much for her. Yes, answered Edith, that was just what it did make her feel.

So Mother read another verse to her, this time from the N.E.B. Version of John 3. 16: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life." "Everyone who has faith in him", repeated Mother, "does that not mean you?" When Edith said that it did, her mother put it to her that this was really better than having her own name there. "There are so many little girls called Edith.", she pointed out, "so that even if it were there, it might mean Edith White or Edith Black, or some other Edith, and not you at all".

Gradually the girl began to agree that "Everyone who has faith" was a much more certain way of knowing that God loved her. Her name was there after all. And so is yours. That is to say, if you truly have faith in the Lord Jesus and have entrusted your life to Him. If you have never done this, then you can put down what you are reading and do it now. Then your name will be there.

H. F.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Addis Ababa £8 3s.; Aldershot £1; Ashstead £2 10s.; Belfast 13s. 10d., £1; Benbecula £1; Bideford £1 5s.; Bintulu, Sarawak £1; Birmingham 6s., 10s., £1; Bognor Regis £20; Bournemouth 10s.; Brighton £1; Bristol £1; Bromley £1; Bury St. Edmunds £1; Calgary, Canada £2; Canterbury 10s.; Chesterfield £1 10s. 6d.; Congleton £10; Copenhagen £1; Cullompton 10s., 10s.; Deal 10s., £1, £1, £1, £1, £5; Dublin 10s., 10s., £2; Dunning £1; Eastbourne 15s.; Edinburgh £1 10s.; Fareham 12s.; Farnham 5s. 9d.; Findon 10s.; Frankford, Canada £1; Glasgow 10s., 10s., £1, £2 2s.; Gobowen 10s.; Grindsted, Denmark £2; Hastings £5; Hatch End £10; Heathfield £1; Henley-in-Arden £1; High Wycombe 10s.; Hirwaun £2; Hounslow £2; Hunter's Quay £2; Ightham 5s.; Indianapolis, Ind. 14s. 3d.; Ipswich 2s. 6d.; Johannesburg, S. Africa £5; Keighley £2; Kensington Park, Australia £8; Kleinburg, Canada £3 5s. 7d.; Kings Lynn £2; Leatherhead 18s. 6d.; Leicester £10; Leigh-on-Sea £1; London, N.14—£1 1s.; N.W.3—£5 0s. 6d., £5; S.E.5—10s., £1; S.E.15—6s.; S.E.18—4s. 3d.; S.E.22 10s., 10s.; S.E.23—5s, 5s., £1, £2, £2, £5, £5; S.E.25—10s.; S.W.4—10s., £2; S.W.11—£1; S.W.18—£4 15s. 9d.; W.1.—11s., £4 9s., £5; Louth £2 3s. 9d.; Minden, Germany £2; Northleach £1; Oldham £3 10s.; Oshawa, Canada £1 13s. 4d.; Par 17s. 6d.; Perranporth 5s.; Perth £5; Poole 10s.; Regina, Canada £1, £15; Rhyns-

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SPECIAL MEETINGS IN SWITZERLAND

As indicated in the January issue, we are expecting—the Lord willing—to have a further time of conference at Aeschi in the Bernese Oberland. The dates are:—

SATURDAY EVENING, 5th SEPTEMBER

to

MONDAY MORNING, 14th SEPTEMBER

The ministry of the Word will be in English with interpretation, as necessary, into German and French. In view of the increasing numbers wishing to come to these conferences each year, and of the fact that the accommodation is limited, an early application is advisable to avoid disappointment. As last year, accommodation in the Hotel where the conference is held will be reserved for those who are able to be with us throughout the period. Applications and requests for further details should be sent to:—

THE CONFERENCE SECRETARY,  
30, Dunoon Road, London, S.E. 23, England.

# SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

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Please add postage to the above prices in accordance with the rates indicated inside the back cover of  
this magazine.

Please write to:—

The Editor, WITNESS AND TESTIMONY PUBLISHERS,  
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“ AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING ”  
CHRIST, AND HIS CHURCH INCOGNITO

“ . . . *the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not* ” (I John iii. 1).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Is it not impressive to see how, whenever that which had a strong, deep, rich, and effective beginning has been 'accepted' by the world, especially the religious world, marks of *spiritual* loss show themselves? Of how many God-initiated ministries and instrumentalities this is true. From something of Heaven containing a deep and costly spiritual history and possessing the dynamic and impact of the Divine presence, with its later development as an 'institution', standing well with men, with all its bigness and natural impressiveness, it has become a mere shadow of its origin, so far as depth and spiritual strength are concerned. There is now little or no 'mystery' about it. It has nothing inscrutable and inexplicable in it. It can be mainly attributed to human ability.

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

The challenge to many hearts is as to whether they are prepared to be misunderstood, unacknowledged, unsung and unapplauded in this world, and live only for *eternal* values. It has been said of



the Apostle Paul that 'he lived with eternal values only in view'. Was he right?

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

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

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

## THE DISCIPLE . . . WHEN FULLY TAUGHT SHALL BE AS HIS TEACHER

*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).

*"But ye did not so learn Christ; if so be that ye heard him, and were taught in him, even as truth is in Jesus: that ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth"* (Ephesians iv. 20 - 24).

*"The disciple is not above his teacher: but every one when he is perfected shall be as his teacher"* (Luke vi. 40, margin)—or as the Revised Standard Version says: ". . . but every one when he is fully taught, shall be as his teacher."

**T**HAT is the ultimate end of all leading and instruction—that the pupils shall become like their teachers. "*Every one, when he is fully taught, shall be as his teacher.*"

This was a warning in the first place. It follows the little parable about the blind guiding the blind, and is a warning that whether the teaching is bad and the lead given is wrong, or whether the teaching is good and right, the end will be the same—we lead people where we ourselves are going, if they absorb fully the influence of our life and ministry and become like us. That is a sobering thought to anyone who has any influence over other lives, whether we be preachers, teachers or parents. The end of all instruction, if it is fully absorbed, will be that the person instructed becomes like the teacher. That should drive us, in deep humility, constantly to the Lord for His help and His mercy.

But we may take it—as the Lord undoubtedly

meant it also to be—as a word of enlightenment as to what it means to be a disciple, for He had just called His disciples to Him. Are we disciples? Is the Lord Jesus really our teacher? Well, the end in view is that we should become like Him, and if we are not yet like Him, we have still more to learn.

It is, then, a demand from the Lord that, whoever we are, we maintain a teachable spirit, we are ready to be taught, eager to be taught, until the full outworking of that teaching is realised, and that will not be until we are wholly like our Teacher.

These words were spoken not only to the disciples in general, but to the twelve Apostles in particular, for we are told earlier in the chapter that this was the day on which the Lord Jesus called His disciples and chose from them twelve "*whom also he named apostles*" (Luke vi. 13). They were Apostles, but they were still disciples. They had work entrusted to them; nevertheless they had to remember this—that it was not a question of learning a lesson and then regarding themselves as fully instructed and able to instruct others. They had been called into a life of learning, Apostles though they were. They could never regard themselves as fully instructed as their Teacher meant them to be, until they were actually like Him. That is a reminder to every one of us that the lessons are still on. The Teacher is not yet satisfied with us, nor will He be, and nor should we be, until 'every one, being fully taught, shall be as his Teacher'.

## PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

Now you will notice that the twelve disciples are listed here by name. They were, each and all,



to be made like the Lord Jesus, and yet there is no thought at all of anything stereotyped, no suggestion that they would ever be like one another. And that is a miracle! How different men can be, so that of each one it is said: 'He is not like any of the others, and yet he is like Christ. And the others are not like him, but they are like Christ.' If it were something without that personal element of individuality involved, there would have been no need to write all these names. It might just have been said: 'Twelve'. After all, what does it matter what their names are? There are twelve who are going to be like Jesus—but, in point of fact, the list is given four times. John is content with mentioning one or two—Nathanael, Philip, Peter—as they come along, but in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and then again in the Book of the Acts, we have the whole list, and surely one of the purposes of this is to stress that each one of them, with his own personal name, his own individual history, is entirely different from every other one, and has to learn, not to be like another one, but to be like Christ. And that is our business—not to be like any other man, but to be like Christ.

There was one disciple, of course, who was not willing to be taught and he dropped out—indeed, he never came in. However, concerning the true disciples, who, with all their faults and failings, in their hearts wanted to be taught, the promise is given: "*Every one when he is fully taught shall be as his teacher*".

### DISCIPLESHIP IN ASSOCIATION

I suppose also that the names are put like this to remind us that they were taught, not by personal tuition only, though there is something very personal about it, but as a group by virtue of their association together. The Lord, in His inscrutable wisdom, and after a night of prayer—which means, with *much* exercise—took one, and another and another (who will know why, except as Heaven itself exercised the choice?) from the crowd and brought them together, and, in effect, said: 'Now, as you live together, walk together, work together, with Christ in the midst, every one of you will be in this blessed school of conformity to Him.' It does not mean to say that they spent the rest of their lives in this association. Indeed, the time came when the same Lord who had drawn them together led one in one direction, and one in another, but until He led them out, they had been brought together to learn their lessons in that association, and I believe that that is the explanation,

not only of the Church universal, but of the church local. Sovereign choice, guidance, governs one, another and another, and they are drawn together. Then the Lord says: 'Now you are to be disciples', and the effect, the fruit and the end of that discipleship will be to make them like Christ.

It is a comfort to us all to know that the moment they began their work the lessons also were being learnt, and to know that they did not have to learn all the lessons in order thus to begin their work. They learned as they worked, and they worked as they learned. That is a further matter that we do well to remember. The Lord Jesus is never satisfied with mere works. These men may be great preachers, healers, workers, apostles, but what He wants to know is whether they are learning the important lesson—to be more like their Lord.

So this verse is followed by three parables. The first is of the beam and the mote, and then there are two others which speak, in a parabolic way, of this double necessity of learning and working; of character and action. As to character, we are told: "*There is no good tree that bringeth forth corrupt fruit; nor again a corrupt tree that bringeth forth good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth that which is evil: for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh*" (vv. 43 - 45).

The final judgment is not the labour but the man; not the works that he has done, but the character which has been produced in him. Many would like to do the works which Jesus did, and we are called upon to do them, but the supreme concern of the Father is that we should provide Him with the character that Jesus had.

### LEARNING CONFORMITY TO CHRIST

In Matthew xi. 29 the Lord Jesus says: "Learn of me; for *I am meek*". That is the first lesson, the great lesson: to learn to be like Him. As we have read in Ephesians, that means a constant activity of faith by which something of what we are is put off, and something of what He is put on. That is described by the Apostle Paul as "*learning Christ*". If you have been taught, as truth is in Jesus, the full end of your teaching, the graduation from your instruction will be a new man, righteous and holy, and like the Lord.

But this parable is followed by a further one: "*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Every one that cometh unto me, and heareth my words, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like*" (vv. 46 - 49).

Here, then, is the accompaniment of living in activity and in action, and the disciples are to do both. They are Apostles who have a work to do, but supremely they have a character to be produced—as we have, but we must not for a moment, any more than they, imagine that it will be produced without a life of active, constant obedience and service to the Lord. That is how I read these two parables. "*Every one that cometh unto me, and heareth my words, and doeth them*". The Lord will teach us as we *do* His will. He does not wait until we are perfect before He gives us that will to do, but He will work on us and pursue the work of perfecting us if we will work on in our active obedience to Him.

This is the beginning of the calling of the Apostles. They are told what the end is to be. They have begun to be disciples, and the end of their discipleship is that they shall be like their Teacher.

If we look at the whole setting we find that these words are spoken not only in regard to the Apostles, but in the middle of teaching which is for all the disciples, and in this chapter we have a shortened version of the Sermon on the Mount.

Now I do not know how you feel, but I think most true hearts, when they read the kind of teaching that is found in Matthew v and vi, or, for that matter, in I Corinthians xiii, feel that there is only One who measures up to that standard, and that is the Lord Jesus Himself. Thus, if we look at this chapter, we look not at a series of commandments, but at the Teacher Himself. This is our Teacher, and we are told that we, if we learn properly from Him and profit fully from all His teaching, finish up by being like Him.

There are three main points which I would point out to you in this short version of that sermon. You will notice, first of all, that both the titles of the Lord Jesus are either mentioned or implied. In verse 25 He is the "Son of man", and in verse 35 there is the mention of the "sons of the Most High". The Lord Jesus is the first of those sons.

### CHEERFULLY ACCEPTING THE COST

The first thing that we notice in this sermon is that we are called to learn cheerful acceptance of

the cost of discipleship: "*He lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed are ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy*" (verses 20 - 23). It is a costly thing to serve the Lord, but we are called on not only to pay the cost, but to pay it joyfully.

"*Blessed are ye poor*". This does not mean that there is necessarily any actual blessing in literal poverty, but if we look down at verse 24 we see that there can be a curse in riches. "*Blessed are ye that weep now*" does not mean that there is anything wrong in laughing, but we can quite believe that there is a great deal wrong in the mad pursuit of pleasure that goes on around us all day and every day. We are in pursuit, not of riches nor of pleasure, as such, but of Christ, and we shall find, as He found, that there is a costliness associated with true discipleship. There is a price to pay, and if we are to be as our Teacher, we must pay the price. The disciple is not above the Teacher. Sometimes we think we are. Our Teacher learned His lessons in a hard school and we would like to learn them in an easier one—but that would be to be above our Teacher. We have to learn them in the same school. But we must not look for pity. Indeed, no pity is permitted, for the command of the Lord is that in the midst of paying this price we are to rejoice, and "leap for joy".

That is the first lesson, and we find it difficult to go on to a further one, for we are so completely abashed and humbled. We wonder whether we have learnt the first lesson as He did—but we want to learn it. We want to be like Christ in a glad paying of all the cost that is involved in faithfulness to God.

### THE LESSON OF UNFAILING KINDNESS

Secondly—in the section from verse 27 to 35—there is the lesson of love, or, I think it may be better to say, the lesson of unfailing kindness.

"*But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you. To him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and from him that taketh away thy cloke withhold not thy coat also. Give to every one that asketh of thee; and of him that*

*taketh away thy goods ask them not again . . . But love your enemies, and do them good, and lend, never despairing; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the sons of the Most High; for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil*". That, then, is the second lesson, and how beautifully does our Teacher reveal to us His perfect mastery of this lesson! He challenges us and charges us that we also are to learn it: the lesson of unfailing kindness to all.

I am sorry that Luke left out the bit about the 'second mile', because that phrase seems to me to convey precisely what this whole section is pressing upon us. It brings up the whole picture to most of our minds, and until we are prepared to go the second mile, we have not learnt the lesson.

### THE LESSON OF ABOUNDING GENEROSITY

The third lesson is in verse 38: "*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again*". Abounding generosity! Now, I know that the immediate reference is to the fact that you will get it back again if you give, and that is true—the Lord Jesus proved that. How abundantly He gave, and, because of that, what abundance has been given to Him! However, it is not only for that, but for the way in which this giving shall be pursued, the standard of it, the character and nature of it, that I read the verse: "*Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over*". Is that the kind of measure that you and I give to every opportunity that we have, every demand placed upon us, every occasion where we are found with something that we could give if we would? I wonder!

Our Teacher shames us all by the way in which

He gave, and gave again. He gave Himself and that is something in which we all rejoice. But it is not only that God in Heaven in some gracious way, like the sun shining, pours forth His mercy to sinners, but God's representative, God's Man, God's Son, here on earth, in simple ways, in daily activities, in all directions, and at all times, was ready to give unstintingly, whole-heartedly—"*pressed down, shaken together, running over*". How different would be the Church of Christ if it were giving after that fashion!

This, then, is the Teacher, cheerfully paying all the price of obedience to the Will of God, showing constant, unfailing kindness in every matter, pouring Himself out in generous, abundant giving. That is our Teacher, and He says to us: 'If you are my pupil, My aim is to make you like that'. "*Every one when he is fully taught shall be as his teacher.*"

When Elisha had been with Elijah as his disciple over a period of time, the moment came for their separation, as Elijah was to go up to glory. Elijah asked Elisha what was in his heart as his uppermost and chief desire, what he wanted most at that time, and the request which Elisha made was, in effect: 'I want to be like you. A double portion of your spirit. If I can be like my master that will satisfy me.'

You and I have influence over other lives. As I have said, in spiritual and other responsibilities at work and at home we are, for some purposes at least, teachers. Supposing our pupils, our children, expressed this as their supreme desire: 'The one thing I want is to be like you.' What would we say? Most of us would say: 'God forbid! I want something better than that!' and in our confession we would be admitting that we have still a lot more to learn before we are fully taught.

The Lord help us to learn of Him!

H. F.

### THE OVERCOMER AT THE END-TIME

*Reading: Revelation xii.*

*"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."*

As to these words in the eleventh verse, with mind ourselves again that they are part of an utterance by a loud voice in heaven at a time when the heavenly hosts were watching a colossal con-

flict which was taking place in the lower heavens, a conflict between celestial and diabolical forces; Michael and his angels on one side, Satan and his angels on the other. The occasion of the conflict was an object, a corporate object here spoken of as a man-child, or a son; which son, or man-child, having been raptured to the throne, precipitates this terrific battle and its issue with Satan and his angels being cast out of the heavens—"no more place being found" for them there—down to the earth. Then a loud voice is heard in heaven (a



“great voice” the revised version has it) saying :  
*“Now is come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ : for the accuser of our brethren is cast down who accused them before our God day and night. And they [our brethren] 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. Therefore, rejoice O heavens and ye that dwell in them. Woe for the earth and for the sea because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.”* There is very much of detail in that with which we shall not stay for the moment; but note the occasion of that utterance as well as the substance of it, for that, and all that is connected therewith, is what is before us at this time.

Now it will be necessary for us to just look at the book itself for a moment or two and make a very hurried survey.

We note that chapter xi brings us to the time of the end. The seventh trumpet closes that period ; that is the completing of things, of that phase or part of the dispensation. Chapter xii deals with the end time, but it is very important for us to see that chapters xii to xiv are a parenthesis. That is, they are not in the direct line of the narrative ; they are—as the word parenthesis means—a section or clause inserted for explanation or confirmation of what has been said. The narrative is complete in itself but something is introduced in a parenthetical way to elucidate and explain certain things in it, and so chapters xii to xiv inclusive are a parenthesis, an explanation of what has already been said. Recognizing that, if we are able thus to see, chapter xii corresponds with chapters ii and iii, and the word which is the key, or the link, between chapter xii and chapters ii and iii, is the word “overcome”. We know how all those messages in chapters ii and iii come to the Overcomer, that is, they are concluded with “to him that overcometh”. The link between that section and chapter xii is just that word: “*And they overcame*”, the overcomer is the key and the link. In chapter xii the man-child, the son, is the group of overcomers at the time of the end. I suppose I ought to stay here to say that that may not be agreed to by some. I know quite well that it is so, and if I say it with emphasis please do not think that I want to impose upon you my own conviction or that I am trying to make you accept that interpretation. My emphasis is the strength of my own

conviction, that is all. You are still to go to the Lord about this thing and get from Him His witness. To me this is a matter of unparalleled importance, and I think we may see some of the importance of this thing as we go on. Now that also is by way of parenthesis. Let me repeat as to what I feel myself, that the man-child in chapter xii is the group of overcomers at the time of the end. I note two things ; that this man-child is referred to as “they”. Verse 5, “*she was delivered of a son, a man-child*”, verse 11, “*and they overcame him . . .*” That is not a single entity, that is a corporate body. It is true the word ‘son’ (v. 5, R.V.) is the Greek word *huios*, frequently used of Christ ; but the combination in this chapter of *teknon* (twice), not so used, and *huios* (once), only strengthens if it does not prove our point, i.e., the “Overcomer”—“Man-child”—is Christ and a company out of the church caught up to the Throne before the tribulation (Rev. iii. 10, 21). Some of you may not, of course, see the value or force of that ; others will, because of a large school of interpretation that thought this man-child was the Lord Jesus and that all this took place when He was born. But the context needs a good deal of wrestling with to conclude that that is so.\*

Now then, if our interpretation is correct, we are able to open out into a larger realm and see the great thing which is in view here. What is the thing that occupies the central and supreme place in this revelation? It is a company associated with Christ in His throne as having overcome the great dragon, the old serpent, the devil, Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, the accuser of the brethren. That is what is here—a company in that throne-position and -union with the Lord Jesus, the first and inclusive Overcomer. Now, beloved, that ranges the whole history of this earth or this world. It represents God’s primary and ultimate thought concerning man in union with His Son, Jesus Christ. It represents God’s original thought concerning His Son, and then His thought concerning those whom He chose in Christ before the world was ; and His thought concerning His Son and those whom He chose in Him from eternity was that they should reign and govern and administer this universe for and with God ; that they should be linked with the throne of God in universal administration and government. That thought, that truth runs all the way through the

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\* See appendix.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Word of God. On that He set His heart. Against that this other one, presented in these various titles representing the varied forms of his activities and character, set himself in one great age-long challenge and resistance. But God had had His thought, His intention, His purpose for us in Christ in relation to His throne, and the overcomers are that. This company embodies the original intention of God, and are God's sphere and instrument of His success. They declare the success of God concerning His original thought, therefore "*Rejoice O ye heavens and ye that dwell therein*", for God has succeeded in spite of everything. You might think that speaking like that represents some great difficulty for God—not at all. If God had dealt with this whole thing in naked infinity, it would have been like a snap of the fingers to wipe it all out. But it is by Man that He has done it: by Man for man, and that represents a terrific conflict. Now you see what is in view. The achievement of God, the success of God in Christ, in those who are in Christ and that represented by a company, a specific company called "Overcomers".

Over against that, then, everything else is set and to that everything else is related. All that is in the Book of the Revelation is connected with that. Chapter xii is the key to the whole book. Everything thus far moves up to chapter xii and everything else moves from chapter xii. Perhaps one ought to keep the connection between xii, xiii and xiv because they are so intimately bound up with one another, but this part of chapter xii is the pivotal point upon which everything revolves. As you go back and traverse this book you begin with Ephesus and see the first love left. "*I have this against thee, thou hast left thy first love.*" You seek for an explanation of leaving the first love and you find the explanation is not to be found simply in the waning of an enthusiasm, but in the attempted quenching by the deluges of spiritual antagonism, the object being to close down the fire of love for God in the heart. You know that true love for the Lord does not just wane of itself, you do not just give it up and let it go; you know it is by reason of great pressure, great adversity, conflict, discouragement, wearing-out tactics as well as by subtle insinuations and subterfuges and such like things; the snare of the world, deceitfulness of sin, and the awful opposition of the enemy—why? This is not merely a natural, temperamental thing. It is against that ultimate object of the Lord, the throne. You have Balaam's subterfuge leading to spiritual fornication; and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans; and that woman Jezebel, the false

prophetess, and the name to live, but yet dead; mere profession, the false claims of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan; then the lukewarmness of Laodicea.

All these things represent different ways and means by which the enemy has sought to get in to destroy the testimony. You see the lampstand is the testimony. At that time and in that place it was God's testimony in the earth, and all these things are working against the testimony to destroy it, to quench it, to blot it out, and God is appealing for a maintenance of His testimony, and all these things are against the issue of that testimony as maintained, which is in the throne. And so you find they overcame because of the blood of the Lamb and because of *the word of their testimony*. They have kept the testimony of Jesus, these Overcomers. Do you see the link between these things? And all else you find, whether it be in the nature of the persecutions through which the saints have passed, which are mentioned here; or the subterfuges, the snares, the deceptions of the serpent; or the many trials, adversities, sufferings of the Lord's children, so many that we could never catalogue them; all that we pass through as we seek to go on with the Lord and be faithful, it is all directed against this ultimate issue, the coming of this company of Overcomers to the throne.

It is the explanation of what we are passing through now; the explanation of all trial on the one side, from the adversary's side; sufferings, persecutions, pain, anguish, to quench the testimony with a view to thwarting that rapture to the throne. On the Divine side we are not protected against it because the Lord wants us to overcome, and you will never overcome unless there is something to overcome. There are the two sides, the Divine, sovereign side and the diabolical side to thwart this. All is related to that, beloved, all is leading up to this final fury of the erect dragon waiting to swallow up this corporate company who are to bring about the issue of the ages.

Does it not strike you as a thing of immense moment, that a company (we do not know how many, small or great but comparatively small we judge, a company nevertheless of the Lord's children) are going to be the Lord's occasion for the precipitating of the crisis of the ages; that is, bringing about that time and that condition when and where there is no more place for Satan and his angels in the heavens. I think it is a tremendous thing to say that: "*there was found no more place . . .*" as though the heavens said: 'There is no more room for you here any more.'



Now we do not want to get hilarious about it, it is too solemn—but that is the issue: “*no more place in the heavens*”; and that is arrived at by this company being raptured to the throne in the face of the fury of the dragon. They are God’s instruments for winding up the old régime which held for thousands of years contrary to God’s original thought. Supposing this is that time, supposing that we have entered into this last phase! Only to suppose it is to explain a great deal. But, beloved, the intention of the Lord in these days is to show us how to overcome. We have got to know how to overcome. We have got to come to see the means of overcoming, the ground of overcoming, and that is what is in view as we pursue this matter in these pages, that we shall be put in the way of understanding what overcoming is, and how to overcome.

So we see that with the rapture to the throne of this man-child company a great change takes place in the heavens as well as on the earth. With this rapture the first thing that is seen is war in heaven. The next, the issue of that war: “*no more place*” in heaven for these forces of evil. Therefore, they are cast down out of the heavens, and then a great voice in heaven is heard at the moment of that casting down, saying: “*Now is come . . .*” (it almost seems to say ‘*now at last, now at length, now*’, the great eternal now! This hierarchy which has encircled the earth as “*prince of the power of the air*”, “*the world-rulers of this darkness, the principalities and powers, the hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies*”, now at length they are cast down, and now is come) “*the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ.*”

I pause to note the distinguishing words—“*Now is come the salvation of our God*”. The salvation of our God is come *now*. Sit down with that in this connection for a little while and see where that will lead you. “*Now is come the kingdom of our God*”; the kingdom of our God is come *now*. “*Now is come the power of our God*”. The power of our God is come *now*. Here is Divine energy, Divine force, Divine might, here it is *Now*. But then note. “*And the authority of his Christ*”. The *exousia* of His Christ; the jurisdiction of the Lord Jesus has come *now*. How much hangs upon this ‘*now*’! You weigh these sentences one by one and you see that with this rapture of the man-child there synchronizes this arriving at the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the jurisdiction of His Christ. A great point to reach, that! To fathom all that, we need much more time than at present; we will leave it there

for the moment. There is a new phase of things on the earth as well as a new phase of things in the heavens. Before passing to that, note how this thing is put. There is a great voice in heaven, and that great voice says: “*Our God . . . our brethren*”. There is a company in heaven looking on, who call this overcomer group “*our brethren*” and speak of God here as “*our God*”. Some already there have been interested in this final overcomer conflict. There have been overcomers in every age and they have overcome and they are interested in this thing to its end, and they say “*our God*” and “*our brethren*”—“*who accuseth our brethren*”; and notice, when you go on, “*Satan is gone down*”, is *gone* down—that is someone speaking from above, not underneath, saying ‘*Satan is come down*’. Those there are saying: ‘*he has gone down*’, they are above.\* A new phase then begins on the earth, and then you go on to the other two chapters, xiii and xiv.

You have on the one side, antichrist, and on the other side linked with that, the tribulation of those who have not been raptured, or the tribulation on the earth into which those enter who have not been raptured, even the Lord’s people. The discrimination in the seven letters is between those who overcome and those who do not overcome. (I cannot accept that the seven letters addressed to the seven Churches were addressed to those who were not the Lord’s people, neither to just a few inside a merely professing Church). I believe the messages were addressed to those who were the Lord’s people in a state of spiritual apostacy or weakness, out of the way, in a state of declension, and there is a division between the Lord’s people who are in a state of declension and those who overcome. I think it is J. N. Darby who says concerning the Philadelphian saints: ‘*but then there were very blessed encouragements given to them. There was an hour of great temptation coming upon the whole world to try those who dwell thereon; some might be victorious in the trial, but those who kept the word of His patience would be kept from the trial. On the whole world it would come, but where were they? They had gone out of it.*’ That is the position here, and the great tribulation overtakes

\* *Katabaino* is not always used for ‘to go down’, but sometimes ‘to come down’ or simply ‘to descend’: but the best authorities translate it in the former sense here, i.e., ‘has gone down’, and that is more than justified by the context; the voice is speaking in heaven and is noting that the “*Accuser*” has been “*cast*” down (verse 9).



non-overcoming believers. There will be those who were kept *out* of the great tribulation, but there will be those who "*come up out of*", who were kept there and who came out of the tribulation in the midst of which they have washed their robes which had become spotted by the world.

We see what is in God's eye, in His mind. We see that the end-time is going to have this central thing, the securing of this overcomer group, this overcomer company. In the securing of that company through spiritual travail, and the rapture of that company, God is going to secure His original purpose, His pre-eminent thought. Changes in heaven and in earth will be related to that. That company will be raptured on a threefold basis. "*They overcame because of the blood of the Lamb.*" That is one of the things we have got to consider carefully, more fully; "*because of the blood of the Lamb*". That is foundational. "*And because of the word of their testimony.*" The blood of the Lamb was that which was provided for them, apart from them; the word of their testimony is *their* part. We have got to know, first of all, God's basis of victory, and then our side of the victory, what the word of testimony is by which we overcome. And then, as to the cost, the third factor: "*and they loved not their lives [their souls] unto the death.*"

That is the position as I believe we have it, perhaps only at its beginnings, just now. Maybe we are coming into it. Some of us feel sometimes we could not stand very much more, the spiritual conflict and pressure is so great. Beloved, do you see the tremendous issues bound up with this conflict, Do you see the need for us to know what the means of victory and the ground of victory are? Therefore it is necessary that we gather together in days like these. These are times when we need to be in solemn convocation. The ends of the ages are coming upon us and there is a very, very big explanation to the pressure and the suffering, the spiritual intensity through which we are passing now. Some of you are feeling that pressing in, that intense spiritual pressure; it is becoming almost unbearable. There is an explanation, a big explanation, the biggest explanation to anything that ever existed. God is about to accomplish His end and change the aspect of the universe. Oh, wonderful thing! all that, beloved, has its operation in saints. We are in that. That is taking place in us. Perhaps we might sometimes think it might be very much easier if we saw an erect dragon, if these figurative things were literal, we would know where we were and what we had got to do. But it is

this spiritual pressure, this thing that comes to us, not in the bare, naked, devilish antagonism of the enemy, but that which is coming in very often along what we call ordinary, everyday things, the domestic things, the business things; yes, all that, coming in that way, it is all the conflict, it is *there*. *But again, we see there is a marvellous explanation* to it, and we need grace, much grace, we need a mighty instrengthening of the Lord.

Oh, unto this, doctrine is not enough, teaching will not do, light merely as a matter of light, beloved, is not always power. No; power is the capacity for going through, and light does not take you through; light may help you to see your way, but you want energy as well as light, and we need in these days the mighty instrengthening of God to get through.

This message will be very pertinent to the situation in which many of God's people are found at this time. The spiritual pressure is growingly intense. The trial of faith is increasingly 'fiery'. The explanation of God's ways is beyond human ability. There is a cry and a sob in many a devoted heart—'Why, Oh, why,' The word is for such. Those who know little of this costly way to the Throne will not feel its appeal. Those who are only interested in theoretical prophetic interpretations will sabotage the point by rejoinders such as 'Selective'—(or 'Partial Rapture'), of course'.

We have no concern to systematize the truth into such theories or 'teachings'. What is patent to all honest and unprejudiced minds is—as many accredited and highly-respected Bible teachers have taught—that the New Testament *does* discriminate between Christians, and the force of its general and particular teaching is that there is a 'crown' which can be missed, and a 'calling' which can be forfeited.

There are many letting go the greater for the lesser. The Lord does not bring judgment on them now, but it will be a terrible thing to realise in "*the day*" that they let go "*the on-high calling*".

## APPENDIX

### THE "MAN-CHILD" OF REVELATION XII

Inasmuch as many have sought to interpret this Scripture as historical in the past, that is, as having been fulfilled before John wrote at Patmos, and as applying to the birth of Christ, Israel being the woman, it will be well if certain very clear points are afresh taken into consideration and honestly faced.

1. The pangs of travail (verse 2).

Where were the birth-pains in Israel when Christ was born?

Israel has never yet travailed unto the birth of Christ.

Isaiah lxvi. 8-24 shows Christ's birth out of the nation *without* travail. That Scripture does not refer to Revelation xii.

2. "*Clothed with the sun*" (verse 1).

The Lord Jesus is *Himself* the sun, "light of the world"; and it is the Church which has been invested with that Light; the revelation of Jesus Christ, the whole Truth of God. The Jewish nation has never stood so robed.

3. "*The moon under her feet*" (verse 1).

The moon is an object which has no light of its own, but borrows its light from the sun.

This is exactly what the whole Jewish system of Law and Types did. The Law, the Prophets, the Types, all reflected the Christ, and shone with borrowed light. These are all fulfilled in Christ and realised in the Church, and all are under the feet of—in a subject relation to—the Church. This *cannot* apply to the Jewish nation.

4. "*On her head a crown of twelve stars*" (verse 1).

Stars are heavenly living bodies in a ruling capacity. Twelve is the number of governmental power or order.

The twelve Apostles may be seen to fulfil this part of the symbolism. They come in several times in the "Revelation" as in a place of special honour. What is here, we believe, is that, in the mind of God, the Church is seen in the position of heavenly authority, according to Luke x. 19; Ephesians, etc. But, while this is God's thought concerning the whole Church as in "Ephesians", only a company *out of her actually and experimentally* come to know the throne-union in the first instance. Undoubtedly, this is the position to-day, as it has always been, and this is the occasion for the great amount of exhortation and admonition in the New Testament. And this also is the place and condition which gives rise to the many provisional "Ifs" of the New Testament.

5. "*As soon as it was born*", or "*When she was delivered*" (verse 4; R.V.).

There is no gap here. Christ was not caught up to the throne when He was born, there was a considerable interval.

6. "*A great red dragon*"

"*Ten horns*" (not crowned).

"*Seven heads*" (crowned) (verse 3).

No such power existed when Christ was born. John was writing nearly a hundred years later than the birth of Christ, and in the seventeenth chapter of this book he shows that only five of these powers had been overthrown, and one was in existence; the seventh was yet to be (xvii. 10). The ten horns as ten kings obtain power at the same time as the Beast (xvii. 12; cf. Daniel vii. 20).

*All these come into view when the Gentile Dominion is at its close.*

The Beast and the False Prophet (Political and Religious) are the two aspects of the Dragon which persecute the true Church at the end, and the very removal of the "man-child" is a main cause for this assault and of the commencement of the tribulation.

7. "*War in heaven*", "*The dragon-cast down*" ("*The old serpent, the devil, Satan, the deceiver*"), "*No more place in heaven*".

This did not take place either at the birth or the ascension of Christ:

"Ephesians" still sees conflict in the heavenlies (vi. 12).

Satan is still "the prince of the power of the air".

True, Christ is far above all principality and power, etc., and we are seated in Him there, but the clearing of the lower heavens with the result that the Church administers and governs the world *therefrom* is something yet to be, and the "man-child" is the fulfilment of Revelation iii. 21, 22, unto this end.

We have not incorporated these notes into the body of the message because it is our aim not to allow the messages to be of a controversial character, but always straightforward spiritual teaching. The notes are added that it might be seen that we are not saying things without very good ground in the Word, and careful meditation and study therein.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### OUR DECEITFUL HEARTS

SUSAN was seven. And she loved flowers: She had seen some tulips in a garden which she passed on her way to school, and longed to have

some: or one—just one!

Most of her friends stayed to lunch at school, so when she went back up the hill where the gar-

den was, it so happened that she was alone. The tulips looked lovelier than ever. There was no sign of movement in the house, so she guessed that the lady was out shopping, or perhaps in the kitchen at the back. Susan just longed to have a lovely red tulip. She looked this way and that, and found that there was nobody about, so quickly she reached up and picked the flower. It was all done in a moment.

Now the tulip was hers. But what would Mother say about it when she got home? This was a problem which Susan had already thought of and knew how to deal with. She walked over to the side of the pavement, and with one more look each way to make sure that she was not being watched, she placed the flower carefully on the pavement. Then she stood up for a moment. Now it did not matter if people were watching or not, so she stooped down, picked up the tulip as though she had just found it, and went skipping off home. She was happy to have got what she wanted, and when her mother asked her where she had got the tulip she said that she had picked it up, for the moment, satisfied that she was speaking the truth.

Susan's father had to go off early in the mornings, so she did not see him until teatime, and it was only then that the whole family could be together for daily prayers. It was the custom, therefore, that after tea they all sat round the table and read a Scripture portion, taking it in turns to read round before Father prayed for them all.

To tell the truth Susan would rather have avoided the prayers that night, for all through the afternoon she had been feeling uncomfortable about what she had done. When she got home from school she even closed her eyes as she went into her room, hoping that when she opened them the flower would not be there. When she did open them, though, the tulip was there as red and beautiful as ever, standing in a vase which her mother had given her for the purpose. This made her feel even more miserable.

The time came for their evening reading, and she knew that she would have to take her turn with the others. The passage chosen was Exodus 2, the story of the baby Moses. Susan always loved this story and the first time round, her verse was verse 4, which she read easily. The next time round the one which she had to read was verse 8, and this, too, she was able to manage. The next time round brought her to verse 12, "*And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and*

*hid him in the sand*". Poor Susan tried again and again, but she could not finish the verse. Her father thought that the word 'Egyptian' was too big for her and tried to help, but Mother knew very well that there must be something else.

Mother knew; but she said nothing, hoping that at bedtime the true story would come out. Susan began to cry and told her mother just what she had done. She said that she had tried to hide it, but when she read that bit about Moses looking this way and that way, it made her realise that if nobody else was looking, God must have seen it.

Of course Father wanted to know what it was all about, and when Susan was tucked away in bed he heard the story. His only comment was, 'Fancy that! Who taught Susan to deceive in that way?' 'Who taught Moses?' Mother asked him, 'Isn't it strange that our little Susan should do the same as the great Moses?' When they talked together, however, they agreed that it was not strange, for we all have hearts which do not need teaching how to hide our wrongs. "*The heart is deceitful above all things . . . who can know it?*" (Jeremiah 17. 9).

Moses, Susan, you and I, we all have deceitful hearts. That is why the Lord Jesus died to be our Saviour, so that when we confess our sins He can forgive them and cleanse them away.

It was hard having to confess her deceit to the Lord but still harder when her parents told her that she must confess it to the lady who owned the tulips. However Susan was anxious to be right before God, so she did this. To her surprise the lady told her that she had been seen after all. A neighbour across the road had watched the whole action from behind her net curtains. 'Just like Moses', was Father's comment, 'he was seen too.'

However it was not quite like Moses, for Susan and the lady are now good friends and sometimes Susan is allowed to pick some flowers for herself and take them home for her room.

H. F.

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## A REMINDER

The dates of the conference at Aeschi, Switzerland are Sept. 5 (evening) to 14 (morning). As the accommodation available is rapidly filling up, any further applications should be sent as soon as possible to: The Conference Secretary, 30 Dunoon Road, London, S.E.23., England.



## “ LET THE HOUSE BE BUILDED ”

### II. THE CONTINUOUS CONTROVERSY AND CONFLICT

IT is a matter of very simple evidence and observation that the first three chapters of the Bible have not been passed before all the elements of conflict and controversy are met with. And from then onward, right through the Bible, those elements of conflict and controversy are rarely absent. The Book is just full of them, until we reach the last two chapters; and then the conflict ceases, the controversy is settled, and that, for ever. But, as we pointed out in our first chapter, the centre of the consummation, the final issue, the end which has been the occasion of this tremendous conflict from the beginning, is this: “ *The tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be . . . their God* ” (Rev. xxi. 3).

When we look closer into this matter, it is most impressive to find that it is invariably related to and focused upon one thing: namely, God’s place in this world, and particularly upon a people for His habitation. It is *that* which is, as we say, the bone of contention, the focal point of all the trouble. That is the issue there in the garden at the beginning, with the first pair. It is far too beautiful and happy a scene—for one exalted being—to behold God walking and talking with men, having blessed fellowship with men, in a scene of peace and rest and order—that is far too beautiful a thing to allow to go unassailed. Somehow, a situation must be set up, which will break in upon that fellowship, if possible end, or at least suspend it, and drive God out. That was the issue then—God present here in conditions of fellowship with men. Many things may circle round that, but that is the point of the trouble in the first family. A family in holy and sacred fellowship with God is something that will not go unassailed. And so we find the family thrown into this state of conflict, and one brother murders the other.

It is the whole point in the life and history of the chosen nation, in all its varied phases and stages. It was the point when that chosen nation was in Egypt. What was it that God intended? It is found in His challenge to Pharaoh, king of Egypt: “ *Let my people go, that they may serve me* ” (Ex. vii. 16, etc.). We know from later history what that meant—God in the midst of a people. And the great controversy and conflict in Egypt was born of the realisation, on the part of sinister powers,

that, if that happens, God will have what He has ever set His heart upon having, and that must be frustrated at all costs. God gets the children of Israel out into the wilderness, to be His people, for His dwelling-place; but, as they are in the wilderness, congregated at the foot of the mountain, and Moses goes up into the mountain, what happens? Note, Moses is going to receive the pattern of the Tabernacle, in which God will take up residence in the midst of His people, and for that Tabernacle there will be the need of some gold in the great symbolism of the Divine nature; and that gold has been brought out of Egypt. While Moses tarries in the mount, what happens? Once again, there enters in this challenge to the Divine purpose, and the gold is stolen from God and made into a calf, to be worshipped in the very place of God!

It is all a part of the one long story. And it goes on in their history, when they are through the wilderness and in the land. Solomon builds the Temple, and God takes up His residence. But just before that Temple was going to be brought in and built, another terrible thing happened. It is said: “ *And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel* ” (I Chron. xxi. 1). We know the story. The numbering, of course, was just a bit of vanity—the vanity of the human heart; ‘counting heads’; being able to say, ‘What a great people I have, and what a great king I am!’ Even a man of the world, who had very little, if any, spiritual perception—Joab—saw through it, and urged the king not to do it. But he insisted, and then he had to reckon with God. The result—the devastation of the nation; till at last, as the plague swept over the people, mowing them down, the Angel of the Lord met David at the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite—and that became the site of the Temple.

What a contesting, what a controversy all the time over this ‘habitation of God’! The Temple is built, and then, when the nation has come to the very summit, in the realisation of a habitation for God, the builder of the Temple himself defaults, and makes an alliance with that which is another god, outside of Israel. And so it is not long before the nation is split in two. The downward movement rapidly gathers momentum, and the Lord leaves the Temple. The end of that movement is

away into Babylon: the Temple, Jerusalem, forsaken of God; a people in captivity. After seventy years, a remnant returns and commences to rebuild a temple. The story is told in those twin books of Ezra and Nehemiah—and what books of conflict they are! Here it is again; it is as though something or someone has said: “No, never, if we can stop it! And indeed they were partly successful, for at one point we read: “*Then ceased the work of the house of God . . .*” (Ezra iv. 24).

In this atmosphere of conflict and controversy the Old Testament closes. As the New Testament opens, as we saw in our first chapter, God comes to His consummate realisation along two lines: Firstly, He becomes incarnate in His Son, as ‘Immanuel’—‘God with us’. But His very presence raises the bitterest controversy, on this very point of the Temple. It all centres in and circles round this Temple. You remember *the* charge which brought Him to His death; it was: “He spoke about the destruction of the temple!” He said: “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*” (John ii. 19). In their blindness to His true spiritual meaning, they interpreted it as meaning that the great Temple in Jerusalem was to be destroyed. Of course it was! But those words of His brought Him to His death. A few years later, Stephen took up this matter, and, in words that are almost an echo of Solomon’s, declared: “*The Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands*” (Acts vii. 48); and those words unloosed upon him a storm of rage and fury. That was the focal point of it all, and it is most significant. And finally, when the personal Christ, having been sown like a grain of wheat in the ground, and having died, has risen in the corporate form of the nucleus of His Church, to form the ‘habitation of God’ in reality, what a storm breaks upon it! It is the signal for new outbreaks of this same terrible antagonism.

### THE TRAGIC HISTORY OF DIVISIONS

That is at the root of all the sad, tragic history through the centuries, of divisions and schisms, conflicts, contentions and controversies, amongst Christians. The one determination is—God is not going to have this dwelling, if it can be prevented by any means whatsoever; this must be stopped! For there is no greater menace to the kingdom of darkness than a people after this kind: a people to which God commits Himself, because they provide Him with a ground for being there—just being there in blessed fellowship. We believe that we are

living in the ‘end times’; and, as the end draws near, in spite of all the talk and efforts for unions and affiliations, and so on, the spirit of suspicion and fear and misunderstanding only intensifies. The atmosphere of Christianity is impregnated with it, until it seems that the last little thing will suffer division if possible. The differences are multiplying all the time.

Why are there so many differences and controversies in the realm of interpretations and of Christian relationships? It is this one thing. You may say it is because of this or that or the other thing; you may put it down to one of the many hundreds of things that make for division, but let us get right to the heart and root of the matter. Every one of these things which may be the pretext is related to this one true reason, which is all-inclusive and all-governing: namely a spiritual relatedness of the people of God, to provide Him with that which has been in His heart from all eternity—a habitation, a presencing of Himself with men. That is the heart of it. All this sad and terrible story is related to this corporate idea—in the beginning, the man and his wife; then two brothers; next the race, twelve brothers, who became twelve tribes; the pattern of the Tabernacle; and so on. There has always been an inexorable determination, either to prevent it, or to wreck it; if it has any semblance of being present. Ever and always the point of attack has been the people of God in heavenly fellowship, with God in their midst.

It is thus perfectly evident that there exists in this universe a force and system that is bitterly antagonistic to the realisation of this Divine purpose. This phenomenon is not a ‘natural’ thing. True, there often seem to be good human and natural reasons for it. But get behind all that, and you find that it is all issuing from this realm, or hierarchy, which is antagonistic to this one thing.

And it is this one thing. We speak about the ‘Church militant’: what do we mean by the Church *militant*? Well, our ideas are usually objective when we speak like that. We think of the Church making assault upon heathenism, upon paganism, upon worldliness, upon vice, upon bad social conditions, upon suffering and its causes. This is perhaps what we mean by the Church ‘militant’, but however true and right that may be, the fact is that the Church ‘militant’ finds its campaign sabotaged from the inside—it is defeated before it starts to fight. It cannot fight as a corporate whole, because it is already crippled from within by the lack of expression of this one, related, cor-



porate life. Yes, the enemy has subtly got inside things, and has weakened and paralysed the Church 'militant'.

You are perhaps familiar with the story in the life of Spurgeon. The students of his college were preaching their 'trial' sermon before him, and one young man chose Ephesians vi for his subject. In a great attempt at eloquence and impressiveness, he pictured the warrior, and the armour, and himself as taking it up; and at last, fully clad, in great boldness he stepped forward and cried: 'Now, where is the enemy?' Mr. Spurgeon, sitting in the audience, cupped his hands and called out: 'Inside the armour!'

That story is very much to the point. The Church is not moving 'like a mighty army'—it is not true that—

'Like a mighty army moves the church of God'!

It is not true that it is "*terrible as an army with banners*" (S. of S. vi. 4, 10). Satan has seen to that; he has given the lie to that. What is the point? We have got to take account of something more than the human factors and the natural elements. I am not wanting to open the door to any morbid occupation with demonism, but perhaps in our fears we have swung too much the other way. We must either accept the Bible or reject it; and if we accept the Bible as it stands, we have to accept the fact of a great, evil, spiritual system that is unrelenting, ceaseless in vigilance and activity, watching for any and every opportunity and ground that it can use against this one thing—the absolute oneness of God's people, to provide Him with a habitation suitable to Himself. We have got to recognize that great system, and definitely take it into account.

### NUMBNESS TO THE REAL CAUSE

There seems to be some strange dullness, numbness, over the Church in this matter—a fact which may itself be significant. What Christian, for instance, does not know Ephesians chapter vi? Probably most of us could quote it: "*For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Eph. vi. 12). Who does not know that, as to the words, the language? But who has really been *stung* into the realisation of what it means for the Church—into the recognition of the fact that that word is the summing up of the greatest revelation of that

Church which has ever been given to mankind? It is up to *that* that the Apostle moves, with his great unveiling of the Church, in its past, eternal election, in its heavenly vocation, in its walk here with God, and in its coming eternity of purpose. Through all that, he moves up to this, and says: Yes—but, while that is true, while that is God's masterpiece, the greatest thing ever conceived, it is at the same time the one object of the inimical, antagonistic interest and attention of countless hosts of evil spirits. The 'principalities and powers', the 'world-rulers of this darkness', the 'hosts of wicked spirits', all have one thing that they are after, namely, the destruction of that Church, the dividing of that Church. We, I say, are strangely numb in the face of such a revelation: we are not stung alive to the recognition of what it means.

If all this is true—and you will have great difficulty in arguing your way out of this, if you are so disposed, for, as I say, the Bible, from the first chapters to the last, is full of this controversy and conflict, over the matter of God having a habitation for Himself; in a people—if this is true, we need to adjust ourselves, take a new attitude, and face the fact that these evil forces are not merely concerned with the grand sum-total of the Church, to split it into so many sections, but that they will not stop at the last two individual Christians! They began with the first two, and they will pursue their evil purpose to get in between and separate the last two believers.

That being so, we have got to adjust ourselves to the further fact that any division, any breaking up of fellowship, is not to be put down finally to some human or natural factors. They may be the immediate pretext or the occasion, but, behind, there is something very much more. We are involved in a terrible warfare over this matter of relatedness—far, far beyond our power of overcoming or coping with it. And there is where the words in this great letter come to our rescue, as the Apostle prays that the Father would "*grant you . . . that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man*": "*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever*" (Eph. iii. 16, 20, 21). Yes, we must take account of these forces, and adjust ourselves to the matter in a new way. We need to realise what it is that is happening, not putting everything down to secondary causes, but getting behind them to the primary cause in that other, evil, realm.



God is holy: the place of His dwelling must be holy. If this dividing is the work of Satan, then it is unholy. The touch of evil means that God cannot commit Himself to that which divides Him. Cried the Apostle, to the Corinthians: "*Is Christ divided?*" (I Cor. i. 13). And I think there was a tone of shock in his interrogation—it is unthinkable! Christ is not divided! Therefore He cannot, as one God, commit Himself to division. The Holy Spirit is one Spirit: "*there is*", says the Apostle, "*one Spirit*" (Eph. iv. 4). There are not as many Christs, as many Holy Spirits, as there are believers. We do not have a personal or private Jesus, or Holy Spirit. We only have Him and Them in common, and there is no other way of having the Lord.

### THE KEY TO ONENESS

Now we have got to find the key to this oneness, this unity. And in this very passage, the Apostle speaks of it as "*the unity of the Spirit*" (Eph. iv. 3). The unity of the *Spirit*—therein lies the key. Our oneness, our unity, is not first an intellectual thing. It is not that, after threshing out truth and matters of procedure, and a great deal of discussion and argument, we have arrived at some measure of agreement, and know we are one! It does not begin there; that is not the basis of our oneness at all. Even in evangelical truth, we do not arrive at oneness by argument, intellectually. We do not arrive at it by sharing in some enterprise, a common undertaking or piece of work—seeing something that needs to be done, and resolving to unite to do it. The history of Christian work is surely the history of how that kind of thing breaks down, does not go through, when it meets the forces of evil. No, we are not one in that way. We are not one by sentiment—by (may I use the word) 'smarminess', nice talk, closing our eyes to wrong that *is* wrong; that is not a basis of oneness. It is not a oneness of ideals, and certainly not a oneness of pretence. What is it? It is, as the Word here says, the unity of the Spirit; that is, of the Holy Spirit. As I have just said, there are not as many Holy Spirits as there are believers. "In *one Spirit* were we all baptized into *one body*" (I Cor. xii. 13), says the Apostle.

This oneness is first of all basic, and then it is progressive. It is basic by our sharing of a common life. Oh, that we made more of that fundamental reality. We know it is true. Were we to be scattered over the world, meeting perhaps one Christian in a hundred thousand, we should find the thing becoming very, very real. What a grand

thing it is—generally—to meet a Christian! You do not immediately raise ecclesiastical questions, doctrinal questions, and so on; you just find you have something in common. And if we only keep on that ground, what a long way we can go. We know a believer, a true believer, anywhere in the world, without introduction. The introduction is inside! It is something fundamental: we share one life; we have one Holy Spirit dwelling in all. That is the basic reality of oneness; if only we would make more of it.

And then the oneness is progressive: that is, it grows, it develops, it proceeds and progresses: by our *living in the Spirit*. It is ministered to by life in the Spirit, by a life governed by the Holy Spirit within us. Though this has been said many times, it is a point for very great emphasis: if only you and I, personally, really lived lives that were under the government of the Holy Spirit inside, what a big difference it would make! For He is the Spirit of *truth*; and if we as born-again children of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, knew Him governing our spirit and our inner consciousness, supposing we had a false notion about some other child of God, it would not be long before we knew, in our own hearts, that the Holy Spirit did not agree with that notion. We hear something about somebody—a false report, a false rumour—and take it on. But reports that are apparently true, and that come from the most 'authentic' and most 'trustworthy' source, may yet be false; and we can know that in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And the governing of the Spirit will be a safeguard against some division, some strain, some broken fellowship, which ought never to be, because it is founded upon a lie—it may be even a beautiful lie! We could spend much time with that.

Oneness—fellowship—is then progressive on the basis of a life in the Spirit. And you and I, as God's people, are called to live in the Spirit, to walk by the Spirit, to know the voice of the Spirit, the inner instruction and teaching of the Spirit. It takes us a long time to learn it in any great measure, but it is a great reality which ought to begin with our new birth—the consciousness of a new standard of values, of things that differ, of right and wrong, of what we ought to do and what we ought not to do, of how we ought to speak and how we ought not to speak—all this ought to be born with us at our new birth. And it ought to grow, and grow, and grow. Only so will this other evil kingdom be destroyed; only so will its works be countered; only so will the Church be "*terrible as an army with banners*". Only so will God find the place

which He is seeking, where He can commit Himself, and abide, and make Himself known.

There is a great battle on, and that battle is not just the battle of different conceptions and interpretations and presentations of Christianity. Behind

all is the battle between a great intention of God, and the counter-intention of a great foe. May God help us to have our eyes open to this, and to be very clear-cut as to where we stand in this fight.

## THE LINE OF CHRIST

### I. GOD'S OBJECT IN CHRIST

*Reading : Ruth i. 1 - 5 ; iv. 11 - 17.  
Matthew i. 6 - 16.*

HERE we are in the presence of a, if not *the*, all-governing, all-comprehending, all-encompassing truth, which is that God from the beginning has worked, and does ever work, on the line of His Son. His Son is God's starting-point and ending-point in all His works. Christ is the beginning, and Christ is the end of the work of God. Christ casts His shadow forward and backward over all the ages. If at any time we ask: 'What is it that explains the government and the ways of God?' whether they be in the nations, or in the people of God as a whole or in individual lives, there is always one answer—from God's standpoint that answer is Christ.

#### GOD'S ANSWER IN ALL THINGS IS CHRIST

What lies behind all God's government and all His ways? What has God always and only in His eye and mind in His activities, wherever they are, whatever they are? The answer is the same—Christ. What is behind His dealings with us individually or together? There is only one answer, and that answer is His Son. His Son is going to be the answer and the explanation of every activity of God. God has confined Himself to His Son, has bound Himself up with Christ, will not do anything apart from Him, but will do all things in relation to Him. If God is ever found to be against us, or the world, or any particular course, decision, situation; or refusing to countenance something, judging it; it is because He sees that in some way the interests of His Son are involved in an injury. On the other hand, if we would find God committing Himself to us, free to go with us, we must ourselves be wholly committed to His Son. There must be on our part the same singleness of committal, devotion, interest, zeal and jealousy for the Son of God as there is with God Himself. That is where we shall meet. We shall meet God in Christ and God meets us in Christ. Just in so far as Christ has His place, and is really our concern, not in mind, in

thought and in word only, but in action and in spirit, so shall we find the Lord.

That is a great general truth which sums up and comprehends the whole Bible as a book of the history of the ages of this world.

This little book of Ruth is a classic illustration of that truth. We start with Bethlehem and we end with Bethlehem. We start with God disapproving, in judgment, not in evidence at all, not committed, and we end with God there in fulness of blessing. Where is the end? It is Christ. Bethlehem—Obed—Jesse—David—then a leap—and it is Christ. All that is in this book, which is a beautiful little gem, is really an illustration, almost a matchless illustration, of this truth: Get on the line of Christ and everything will be all right in the end. There may be tragedy, failure, and lots of other things, but get on the line of Christ and the end is all right. It comes out like a romance in the end, for all is well.

But not only is it an illustration of this general truth which we have just enunciated. It is an illustration of the meaning of Christ as God's way to that happy end.

#### THE REACTION OF GOD IN A DARK DAY

The first thing we see here is that because of Christ God reacts to a state of spiritual declension, weakness, breakdown, failure and tragedy. This book contains a reaction of God in a dark day. It opens with a dark day. We know what it was like when the Judges ruled, and all about that period of four hundred years. It was indeed a dark day, a day of declension, weakness, failure and spiritual tragedy in Israel, and the opening of this book just shows how it was working out in famine and death. But God does not leave it there. He reacts, and He has done so again and again against those conditions in history because He has His Son in view. It is a good thing that God never gives up His Son and never gives up His purpose concerning His Son. Here we see the turning of the tide. When we open the book it is as though the tide had gone far, far out. Everything is stark, bare, naked and unpleasant to look upon. The tide has gone out, and then there is that oscillation that we know

when the tide is about to turn—something is going to happen, and in this book the tide is turning. We go from here into Samuel, the book of transition and recovery. Here in this book the tide is turning—on what ground? What is it that governs the turn of the tide when things have gone out just about as far as they can go and everything seems to be lost? God has His Son in view. The tide is always made to turn by the heavenly government in relation to Christ. It has to be *more* of Christ and not less. ‘This won’t do for God. Get into line with God’s end, His Son. Things may go far out and far down, and it may look as though everything is lost; but, no, if you are on that line, the tide is going to turn. God is going to bring it back, and perhaps it is going to be a higher tide than ever before.’

God is governed by His Son. We shall only lose everything if we get off God’s line on to the line of, well, our ambitions, things, or whatever of the many substitutes or alternatives there may be for Christ Himself; we will lose out. Get right into line with Him and the lowest tide will turn and come rolling up again, perhaps to cover more ground than ever before.

### THE INCREASE OF RESURRECTION

That is the story of Ruth: the turning of the tide because at the end there is One in view with God. Note: Christ as God’s way always does come back with greater increase than ever before, for the end is not less than the beginning, or at any time since; it is the fulness of Christ. But Christ as God’s way always comes back with this increase on the principle of resurrection. God holds very truly to His law of resurrection. With Him resurrection is resurrection, not resuscitation. It is God’s own act, which none other can perform.

Now this book is first a story of death. We read the first five verses and see that there is death in the land, death threatening everyone. This family, afraid of death, thought to find life somewhere else, and only found death; the husband and two sons died. Notice the words at the end—“*a restorer of life*”. That is the key. This end of God is by His own mighty work of resurrection, and with Him that is the way of Christ. You are so familiar with that truth that I wonder if you really do sense what it means. Listen to it again: God *is* the God of resurrection, Christ *is* the very embodiment of that unique work of God, resurrection. Get on to the line of Christ and you are on the line of resurrection. It just must be so. He is the resurrection and the life. Get on to the line of Christ and you are on

the line of God in this unique way, that is peculiarly His own way of life and power.

### IN CHRIST EVERY EMBARGO REMOVED

Then, again, here is such comfort for us. Christ as God’s way means the removal of every embargo, and the very curse itself is dismissed when you get on the line of Christ. Ruth, the Moabitess—and you know the embargo put upon the Moabites: “. . . a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord . . . for ever” (Deuteronomy xxiii. 3). Remember, Balaam was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse Israel, and when Balaam was unable to curse directly, he taught Israel to commit fornication. How? by marrying Moabitish women. And here is a man, a leading man in Israel, marrying a Moabitess under God’s blessing, bringing her into the sanctuary of God, over against the embargo! Is it not strange? How can you account for it? Only in the words spoken to Peter from Heaven: “*What God hath cleansed, make not thou common*” (Acts x. 15). The Cross has done something. In Christ every embargo is removed, every curse is destroyed, and there is a way into the sanctuary of God for those who would otherwise have no way, but would meet the judgment of God and be under the curse. Get on the way of Christ and there is no embargo, no curse, no forbidding, no saying ‘No, never!’ The way is open. There is a lot of comfort in that, but I hasten to the last thing which I think also has a real word of comfort.

### HUMAN FAILURE TURNED TO DIVINE GLORY

Christ as God’s way means the turning of human failure into divine glory. Yes, Elimelech made a tragic mistake. He went to the land of Moab, and Moab was a hereditary enemy of Israel, a thorn in Israel’s side. Elimelech went down there and you see what resulted, what he involved his wife and his sons in. What a tragic mistake! What human failure! We could say a lot about it. He knew better—or he ought to have done. But there you are! under the stress of life—and how many people do the wrong thing when spiritual conditions are at low ebb! they go and do something because of the state of things in which they find themselves. Well, we will not be too hard, but, nevertheless, here is human frailty, human mistakes, human weakness involving much trouble on the natural side. Is there any one of



us who can say: 'We have not made mistakes'? I do not know. I did once hear a dear servant of God say: 'In thirty-eight years I have never been allowed by God to make a single mistake.' Well, I envy anyone who could truly say that! The Lord's servants have made mistakes, and they do. Paul made mistakes. I am not one of those who believe that Paul did not make a mistake when he went up to Jerusalem against all advice, counsel and pleading, and became involved in a compromise, and all the rest. Ah, but the point is this: If our hearts are really on the line of Christ, not on our own line for our own ends or interests, then God over-rules our mistakes for His glory.

You see, we cut into a Scripture with which we are so familiar. We divide it and do not finish it — "To them that love God all things work together for good", and there we stop. But the rest

is: "... even to them that are called according to his purpose" (Romans viii. 28). What is His purpose? It is centred in His Son. Get on the line of the purpose of God concerning His Son and weakness, failure, mistakes (and this is no brief for going and making mistakes and doing wrong that good may come) are over-ruled by God for good. There is glory at the end.

And so this story begins with failure, breakdown, mistake, and tragic consequences in human life, but it ends in that same family with glory, with joy. "The restorer of life". It is on the line of Christ, you see. Get on to that line, and with all our faults, our failures, our mistakes and our tragedies, it will be all right in the end because God is concerned for the glory of His Son. If we are too, that is where we shall find Him.

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## EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Fellow-members of Christ,

While the paper as a whole contains what we believe to be the Lords desire for His people—at least in part—from time to time a personal letter, such as this, can bring it all into focus. That is, the particular aspect of the concern can be underlined.

While there is no organized movement or institution behind this ministry, we have for many years—up\*to date—been in touch, directly and indirectly, with the Lord's people and work in many parts of the world, from Far East to Far West. We are therefore able to judge fairly well what conditions and needs are.

Of course, many things could be said in this connection; much that is good, and occasion for thankfulness; but also much that makes for sadness.

One thing stands out so impressively and oppressively. It is the limitation in the matter of real, solid, building-up *spiritual* food. What is so largely being given is such light and unsubstantial fare. What *pleases*, in a superficial way, seems to be characteristic. There seems to be—perhaps unintentionally—a fear of anything too solid. It may be that the supply is dictated by the kind of demand, but this is very shortsighted. We fear that a generation is being brought up on such light or unsubstantial diet which will mean a lack of stamina in the day of testing.

The Lord put strong emphasis upon 'endurance'. "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will wax cold" "The love of a great body of people will grow cold, because of the multiplied lawlessness and iniquity" (A.N.T) "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. xxiv. 12, 13).



It is a matter of very great importance that we should not live just for the moment, the immediate present. 'Quick returns' may be a policy in worldly trade, but the firms which have lasted and built up a reputation for reliability have often sacrificed this superficial consideration for the day when business will be severely tested. 'Quick returns' is the policy of so much Christian activity, but too often that is just policy, not principle, and the long-run proves its weakness.

Again, it is a disastrous thing to think more of the work, and how much can be done, without watching closely its depth. I was talking with the man at the head of one of the largest organizations of Christian work, and we were deploring the loss through the years of the original and former spiritual depth of that ministry. At length he asked: What can be done to recover that lost strength? I suggested that perhaps one step might lead to that recovery, that is, to bring all the leaders and most responsible workers together in areas for a period of prayer and waiting upon God in deep exercise over the situation. I suggested at least ten days. He said—"That is right, and the only way, but it is impossible, it cannot be done; our men are too busy." "*Too busy!*"

The tragedy of the work! Yes, there *is* urgency. There is necessity to heed the word—"Son, go work in my vineyard". The call is imperative; there is so much to be done; but remember, the Lord does not hesitate to lay aside in long indisposition some of His most valuable workers, showing that it is quality more than quantity which is His concern.

In this connection, food is a very important factor. On another page of this issue we have dealt with this question more fully; by which it will be seen that the Lord is laying the matter increasingly upon our heart.

This burden has led us to build up considerably the supplies of written ministry. We have definitely responded to what we believe is a leading of the Spirit, so that, as need increases—so far as *our* responsibility is concerned—there may be "meat in my house".

We would be careful to say that we are concerned with *spiritual* food. There is very much being provided for the intellect; much that is undoubtedly good, but we do distinguish between theological and philosophical wisdom; between the academic and the intellectual—as such—and that which ministers to the heart, and builds up *spiritually*.

We receive a great many letters in relation to the ministry of this little paper. Some express pleasure because—they say—it gives a new idea; it is a fresh aspect of various matters; etc. The letters which give us the greatest pleasure are those which tell of the change in *the life* of the reader, and of how much more the Lord has become to them through the ministry.

That is the real test of food. A person's body and demeanour, complexion and health is so often the result of the diet. That is why the doctor goes so quickly to that matter when he has to do with debility and disorder. It is character that matters! The ultimate test is stamina and effectiveness. What does it issue in that we have been here on this earth? What are the *eternal*, time-outlasting values?

We know that such an issue will sift and reduce because the great majority, even of Christians, want a 'good time', the pleasing and the exciting; and those who really are desiring the greatest possible measure of Christ, at any cost, are comparatively few. But the end will determine lasting values.

We would resolve this letter into an appeal to our readers to pray to the Lord that whatever there is available here in this printed ministry; as well as personal ministry, that would minister to the Lord's need in His people, may be released.

In a new way we are burdened regarding the 'gathering of my people unto me; those that have made a covenant by sacrifice', and the feeding of the flock. Please do pray with us about this; both as to *how* it can be done, and the release of what is available.

Yours in the quest for a greater fulness of Christ,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

## “ AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING ”

(continued)

### THE MEANING AND REALITY OF THINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Utterness for the Lord *anywhere* will produce spiritual conditions which will test, challenge, and make for reality, and bring out the real and deep meaning of everything. Utterness means willingness to let the Lord dictate every aspect of life, and, when He faces with a question or test, to go through with it, whatever the cost. It means being committed to knowing the deepest and fullest meaning of every bit of our Christianity.

What does the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures mean by New Birth, Baptism, The Lord’s Table, Fellowship, The Church, Ministry and Service, etc.? Indeed, what does it mean to *have* the Holy Spirit? There is such a great amount of assuming and taking for granted, which *may* work out in presumption—*presumption*.

Most Christians accept the doctrines, the traditions, and the ordinances, but, in the beginning, it was the implications, the significance, and the meaning which gave reality to everything. This

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

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

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

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

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

## " LET THE HOUSE BE BUILDED "

### III. THE ULTIMATE CRITERION

WHEN, as we read at the beginning of the Bible, conditions were such as to make it possible for God to pass the verdict, 'It is very good', then God was found present in communion and fellowship with man. We are not told very much about how He was present: we are told that He walked in the garden in the cool of the day; that He talked with man, and made known to him His thoughts. So far as the story goes, we know little more about it than that. It may well have been much like the forty days after the resurrection, when the Lord Jesus came, showed Himself, spoke, and went, came again, and went. There may have been a coming and a going, showing and speaking, making it clear that the desire and thought of His heart was to be present, and, in personal presence, to be able to commune and communicate.

But so soon He had to withdraw. Conditions changed; they no longer corresponded to His mind, no longer made it possible for Him to say, 'It is very good'. The change made it necessary for Him to withdraw. In a sense, morally, He was driven out—expelled. But, again and again, through history, we are told of God's effort to recover a condition suitable and well-pleasing to Himself, so that He might return.

He gave to Moses the pattern of a heavenly habitation (Ex. xxv. 9); and, when all things were

made according to the pattern, it was as if God said again, 'It is very good'—and He returned and filled the Tabernacle. But again, it cannot be abiding. It is a habitation in figure and in type, and in a measure; but things are not fully and finally according to His mind in the people themselves. Later, He gave to David another pattern—the pattern of a Temple, a representation again of a heavenly habitation (I Chron. xxviii. 11, 12, 19); and when all things were made according to that revealed pattern, God came and filled the Temple, again showing that this is what He is ever seeking. But yet again things changed, and we have the sad story of the glory departing, removing, going away (Ezek. ix. 3; x. 18, 19; xi. 23), and that habitation remaining just a 'thing'—an empty shell, a cold, unreal formality.

The Old Testament closes on the note of failure in this great purpose of God; failure, and yet promise. "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 . . .* The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former . . ." (Haggai ii. 3, 4, 9). And then that great statement: "Yet once . . . and I will shake . . . the earth . . . and the desire of all nations shall come . . ." (vv. 6, 7). *He* is the desire of all nations. You will remember that those words are



taken up by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews (xii. 26), and applied to the shaking of everything here on this earth that is but a representation—a type, a figure, a symbol—in order that the spiritual reality may take its place.

### THREE EXPRESSIONS OF GOD'S THOUGHT

There are, in the Bible, three major expressions of this Divine thought for a dwelling-place among men. There are other minor ones, but three major ones stand out above the others.

Firstly, Israel. We have not understood Israel until we have recognized that that people was chosen among the peoples and nations of this earth for this one, sole, and only object—that God should find in a people a habitation suitable for Himself. He strove, He laboured, He longed, He suffered; He showed His infinite patience and mercy and longsuffering with that people, because His *heart* was bound up with the realisation of this eternal thought and object—that of having a habitation here in a people. I repeat: we do not understand the dismissal of Israel from the Divine programme, until we have recognized their utter and final failure to fulfil that vocation.

But God has not abandoned His purpose. We turn the page from the Old Testament to the New, and we find the next consummate movement of God in relation to this purpose. The second great expression—perhaps we may call it the inclusive expression—of His thought is in the Incarnation itself: “Immanuel, God with us”. Again, we have not understood the Incarnation, until we have related it to this eternal thought—God finding in man a habitation, making man the place of His dwelling. In the Person of His Son, He has found His Sanctuary, His Temple, His Tabernacle. “The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld his glory . . .)” (John i. 14).

The third major expression is in the advent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. We have not understood the deeper significance of these great events—the Holy Spirit coming to take up residence in the newly-born Church—until we have related that to this one thing, *God is here*. The Church is that place of His dwelling, and He has come to His Temple. We can see how gloriously that was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Verily ‘the messenger of the covenant has come to his temple’ (Malachi iii. 1); verily God was present on that day, and did not depart. He has come to stay. It is God incarnate who says: “I am with you all the days, even unto the consum-

mation of the age” (Matt. xxviii. 20). He has come to stay in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Now, it is quite clear that that was the Divine thought for the Church in general. But then we find that what was to be true of the church universal, was God's intention for the local churches. The one thing that was to characterize local companies of God's people—I repeat, *companies* of God's people—was that *God* should be found there. That was the ultimate criterion, and that is, as you see, our third message. Let us remind ourselves that ‘criterion’ just means the principle which determines the standard of judgment; that is, the ground on which any matter is decided; the standard of measure by which things are determined.

### THE CRITERION

The one criterion of the House of God, universal or local, is ultimately just this: that God is there, and may be found there. That is the dominant thing about it. It is not the methods and the manner, the performance and the rites, the formalities and the ceremonies, and all the other external ‘things’. It is that, either in them or through them, or without them, apart from them, God is there—you meet God; you cannot go in there without meeting God. That is the ultimate criterion as to whether the House of God is present as a reality; or not. It is not a place, but a people, in the midst of whom God, in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, is present, and known to be present. For is it possible for such a one as He to be present without His presence being known? (Yes, perhaps it can be if there is something wrong with us, but it ought not to be so. It ought to be that, where God is, we know it, because we meet Him.) The criterion is not any one, or any number, of the many things that men often regard as necessary to form a ‘house of God’, in the sense of a building or a place. The criterion is just this: *Do you meet God?* If not, it cannot bear that name, because it does not fulfil that function; we may as well dismiss the thing, cease to try to keep it going, if it is not like that.

### THE GROUND FOR GOD'S PRESENCE

This brings us to the question of the *ground* on which God is present. Let me say here, in parenthesis, that God may be present in greater or lesser degree. What we read of the churches in the New Testament makes it clear that that is so. It is

not at all difficult to discern that God was more fully present in one place than in another—that there was a greater measure of the Lord and His glory in this place than in that; for instance, in Phiippi as against Corinth. But surely, the thing that ought to concern us is—not that the Lord should be there, so to speak, ‘anyhow’, but that He should be able to be there without reserve or restraint, giving Himself wholly. It is something that ought to concern us, as individuals, that the Lord should be able to be with us individually, without reserve—just free to commit Himself. And surely *the* concern of every company of the Lord’s people, in every place, should be—not this or that, or some other thing relating to material existence, but—the maximum of the presence of the Lord.

I venture to say that if that were the governing and dominating concern, it would be the key to, and the solution of, many problems. All the difficulties would clear up if we were to say to ourselves—‘Now, the thing that matters more than anything else is that the Lord should have an absolutely clear way to fill this place with His glory. Whatever stands in the way of that must get out of the way.’ This must be a mighty motive in our lives. Our eyes must first be opened to see this eternal thought of God; then we must become so wedded to it, it must become so much a passion with us, that anything that may threaten it, obstruct it, limit it, cannot be tolerated. That is the challenge of this message.

But in order that it should be like this, God must have conditions which, on the one hand, will not involve Him in man’s disorder—for God will not allow Himself to be involved in man’s disorder, He will not commit Himself to that—and which, on the other hand, will be completely suitable to Himself. May this not explain much of the reserve of the Lord, that we, Christian people everywhere, are finding so difficult either to understand or to endure? All the cries and the appeals, the pleadings and the praying, day and night, for a visitation of God: and God seems so reserved and so slow. May it be that God cannot commit Himself to man’s order of things, without becoming involved in something that will dishonour Him? I put it in the form of a question; but it is clearly shown in the Bible that, as a principle, this is so. The cry of the prophets to the people was to put things into such an order or state that God could come. It is something to be taken account of, that in all our praying there may, after all, be something for *us* to do, in preparing the way of the Lord,

casting up a highway for our God, in gathering out the stones which would injure His feet should He come. There may be something!

### SATAN’S INTERFERENCE

Now, Satan, as we saw previously, in the continuous controversy over this one thing, and in his efforts to prevent God from having an abiding place, has sought, from the beginning, to put man in the way of God. Man was created for the very purpose of providing God with a habitation, for it was ever His intention that He should dwell with man. Therefore Satan’s great stroke and effort has been to turn the very man of God’s creating against the purpose of God, to turn man into a positive hindrance, a means of frustrating God. That is the long and terrible story of God being hindered by man, and by the conditions created by man. Jesus saw that: He saw quite clearly that the nature and effect of Satan’s interference with man was so to change man that God could not come and dwell in him. At the end of the second chapter of the Gospel by John, which ought never to be divided from the third chapter, we find this comment about the Lord Jesus, that He would not commit Himself to man, because He knew what was in man (ii. 24, 25). What a terrible thing, that man, who was intended to be God’s very temple, should now be in such a state, that God cannot and will not commit Himself to him!

I said that chapter ii of ‘John’ ought never to be separated from chapter iii; for, a few verses later (in what in the arrangement is chapter iii), we come on this: ‘You must be born again’. What is the point? This throws a new flash of light on new birth: it says that God must have a new kind of man to indwell. And you notice that it was said to an outstanding representative of the Jewish nation: for Nicodemus was a full-length portrait of Israel—the people who had claimed to be (what they were intended to be) God’s very habitation; who had appropriated God, who had sought to lock God up to themselves, to make Him their exclusive God. It is here in Jerusalem that Jesus, knowing what was in man, would not commit Himself to them; and then, speaking to a representative of such a nation, as to the nation itself, He said: ‘You must be born *from above*’.

Why this? In order that God, the Holy Spirit, should come right in and take up residence; and that is chapter iv. You see, it is all a wonderful sequence. It all centres in this one eternal thought—this thought unlocks the whole Bible, every-



where—the thought of God to be indwelling *in*-dwelling, in man, in the midst of man. That is why we find the matter of the new birth coming in at the point where Jesus would not commit Himself, because He knew all men, and knew what was *in* man.

### EZEKIEL'S VISIONS

So, the question immediately arises: To what will God commit Himself? Let us look at the prophecies of Ezekiel for a few minutes. Do you recall the last words of those prophecies? "The name of the city from that day shall be, Jehovah-shammah—The Lord is there." With that the book closes. The end is reached; the thought and purpose of God is attained: "The Lord is there"!

Now, leaving aside the controversy over Ezekiel's Temple and House, as to whether there is to be a literal rebuilding of the temple on this earth in Jerusalem, when all this Moslem world has been swept aside, and the Mosque of Omar has been obliterated from the Holy City—there is much to be done yet, but it is not impossible with God!—whether it is to be like that, or whether all that is realised in the Church spiritually, we leave such controversial matter aside, for it is irrelevant to our present purpose. The Book of Ezekiel in any case stands for to-day with much positive application and teaching. Its Divine principles, which are eternal, belonging to no particular age or place, are very clear. As regards the whole end of things—where it is to be, what it is to be—well, the end is summed up in this—The Lord is there!

The whole of these prophecies is a progressive movement towards that end. They begin with the prophet saying that he saw "visions of God"; and then the visions that follow are progressive towards that consummate end: they are the stages and the phases of that progress, showing the principles or the ground upon which that end will be reached—The Lord is there!

### THE MAN ON THE THRONE

The first vision, which in a sense is inclusive of all the rest, is the vision of the Throne: the Throne above the firmament, and upon the Throne above, the likeness as of a man. What does it signify? The first, the fundamental, the all-inclusive reality, by which this end of God shall be reached, is the absolute enthronement, exaltation and authority of that Man (with a capital M), the Son of Man, on the Throne, above the firmament. It was there that

Stephen saw Him; it was from there that He stooped to encounter Saul of Tarsus. The Man on the Throne: Christ glorified, Christ exalted, Christ in possession of all authority in Heaven and in earth. If God is going to reach the end—"The Lord is there"—that has to become a practical reality in all matters and in all details. This is a fundamental, governing principle: that the Lord will be 'there' in the measure in which it is true that Jesus Christ is exalted, that Jesus Christ has His place as the Exalted One, that He is on the Throne, and that the authority is recognized as being in His hands.

There are many ways in which that can be put. In the Church at the beginning, and in the churches, it meant this, that they never had meetings, committees, councils, for deliberating on what they were going to do: they had prayer meetings, and submitted everything to the Holy Spirit, and took all their instructions from Heaven. It proved to be a very effective thing, did it not?! God was there! That was the effect; that was *reality*: the Lord was with them—the Lord was there! The place where they were gathered was shaken by His presence. And it was all on the ground of their testimony that this Jesus had been set at the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens. But that was not just an objective fact, or even teaching, or truth: it was a practical reality in all the details of everyday life. Jesus was referred to, and Jesus was deferred to, in all things—His authority was *applied* authority, not theoretical.

### THE ALTAR

We move on, and we find a man whose appearance is as the appearance of brass, with a measuring line and rod in his hand (Ezek. xl. 3). And then we come to the great Temple area, the great square of the Temple precincts; and we find that if we draw diagonal lines from the uttermost corners of that great square, at the point where those lines meet and cross, right at the centre of that area, is a great Brazen Altar: central and universal, governing all things within and without. A Man of brass—an Altar of brass. Now brass symbolizes righteous judgment: righteousness unto judgment, judgment unto righteousness. At the very heart and centre and core of everything is the Cross: the Cross, where everything is brought to judgment and judged according to God's standard of righteousness, of holiness.

That is the ground on which He will be present. We are so familiar with the teaching of the Cross;



but we can only rightly appraise, and understand the meaning of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, when we see that it relates essentially to this one matter—God's presence. Everything must come to judgment according to God's standard: what cannot pass must be consumed upon the Altar, and what is of God can be established in Heaven. This is the great discriminating work of the Cross: on that, God will be present. Yes, 'Jehovah-shammah' comes right back to this: how far has everything been brought to that great judgment of Calvary, and determined as to its acceptance by God?

How searching this is, for all things—in us, in you, in me, in our fellowships, in our assemblies, in our churches, everywhere! Can this pass the judgment of the Cross? What does the Cross say to this and that? How does this stand in the light of Calvary? The answer will determine just how much God is going to commit Himself. That is most important; we cannot get away from that. This Man of brass will see to it: He will measure the Altar, and He will measure all things according to the Altar—God's thoughts of righteousness.

### THE HOUSE

And then we move with that Man to the House. If you know the vision of the House, and all that is said about it here, you will be familiar with its dominant feature. The dominant feature of this vision of the House is 'measurement': this Man of brass with His rod, His measuring reed, is moving everywhere within and without, around and about, so meticulously. What is He doing with this House? He is defining it according to Christ; He is measuring according to Christ; for Christ is going to be the measure of everything. "God . . . hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained" (Acts xvii. 31)—it is the Man of brass, to bring everything in the world to judgment, according to Himself. If that is true of the world, and judgment is coming to the world, it must begin at the House of God.

Now, to resolve that into one statement, it just means this. If it is to be 'Jehovah-shammah'—if it is to be 'The Lord is there', it will be according to the measure of Christ—just how much there is of Christ there. Neither more nor less will God commit Himself. It is not this or that, or many things, that men think constitute a place for God; it is only one thing—how much of Christ is there there? Let that go right into our hearts: how much of Christ is there in you and in me? Does this not

explain the infinite pains that God takes, and His preparedness to sacrifice so much, in order to increase our measure of Christ? It is the explanation of so much. Why will He take a very busy and useful servant of His away from His work, and shut him up?—why? We say 'loss', we say 'tragedy', we say the Church suffers; but God knows. It matters more to Him that there should be an increase of Christ there for eternal purposes, than perhaps the doing of a lot of busy things for Him.

There *must* be an explanation of the strange providences of God. May this not be it? I put it again in the form of a question. The Lord is prepared to take any pains to increase the measure of His Son; to make any sacrifice—not just for its own sake, but in relation to the thing to which He has given His heart: that of finding a state suitable for His own presence. And you and I are prepared to say immediately that, where there is most of Christ, there you meet the Lord indeed—"the Lord is there"; the two things go together—though it often means the ruination of ourselves to make place for Him.

So the House is measured, not just as a whole, but at every point, at every corner. As we know from the letter to the Ephesians, it is just the measure of Christ.

### THE RIVER

Finally, in the visions, we come to the river. When He is on His Throne and has His place, and when the Altar is in its place, judging and governing everything according to God's righteousness; and when the House is measured according to Christ—well, what do you expect? Out from that House will emerge and break a river, fulness, to make 'everything live whithersoever the river cometh' (Ezek. xlvi. 9). That happened on the Day of Pentecost. The Lord has got His House; Christ is on the Throne; the Cross has done its work, and the river proceeds spontaneously.

I raise one question in conclusion. It is no criticism, it is no judgment of mine; it is really an exercise. Christians have been praying and pleading for years for revival, revival, revival—that is the word. Well, it happens when God has His conditions. May its delay be explained by the fact that He has not got His conditions? This is not merely an objective question, a subject of interest; it has very immediate application. What you and I desire is that out of us should flow rivers of liv-

ing water. Oh, that there might issue from us this stream that makes everything live, so that when we pray with people, when we speak to them, life comes into them; they feel refreshed and renewed: when we move about the world, the effect is that people are helped to live anew. Life comes.

That is true also of our churches, our assemblies, our companies. There can be life flowing out, reaching far out. If God has His conditions, there is no limit to the possibilities of a little company ordered of God, no limit to its range. The influence of that little company, hidden in some little corner, may go to the ends of the earth, may be ministering Christ far, far beyond its own borders. If God has His conditions, it just happens: you do not have to organize great campaigns to do it—it happens! Note: the river comes out of a

measured sanctuary; it comes down by way of the Altar; it is from the House according to Christ, which House has been judged by Calvary as to how it stands before God, that the Spirit comes, the Spirit of life.

Let us now sum up. The deciding factors as to the presence of God, more or less—God grant that it may be more and ever more—the deciding factors are: the absolute authority of Christ in everything; the centrality and universality of the Cross; the measure of Christ in believers, individually and collectively. These are God's conditions, for that which answers to His own heart and satisfies Him, so that He can be present without restraint or fear—'Jehovah-shammah, the Lord is there'!

## CHRIST — THE GREAT SERVANT OF THE LORD

*"Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye peoples, from far"* (Isaiah xlix. 1).

HERE is the servant of God calling upon us to listen as he recounts the story of his experience as a servant. However, though the words came through Isaiah, it is not he who is calling upon the people to hearken to what he says, but, speaking prophetically, he is bringing to them, and to us, the words of the Lord Jesus about Himself. I would like to say that it is the Lord's own testimony, His testimony about Himself and His experiences as the Servant of Jehovah.

Let us, then, listen to Him, and hearken to what He has to say.

*"The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name"* The first thing, then, is the conviction that He is in this world for this one purpose—to serve the Father. Of course, we know but this speaks of that birth and of the immediate awareness, which never left Him, that He was in this world, not to get, but to give—*"The Son of man also came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Mark x. 45).

Here is the beginning of the experience of any servant of God: an overwhelming conviction that there is but one meaning to his life and to his presence here which is different from that which characterizes all other human life and all other procedure. He is here for one thing, and one thing

alone—to pour himself out in service to God.

Now he goes on from that initial understanding to tell of the dealings which the Father had with Him in view of this call to service: *"He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me: and he hath made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he kept me close"* (Isaiah xlix. 2).

It is not enough to be called to serve the Lord. That call must be followed by the discipline, the suffering, the experiences under His hand which make us fit for His service. You notice that the Lord Jesus says, 'He has made me', and He speaks of the sharp sword, of the polished shaft, and all that tells us of the work of discipline under the hand of the Father, that even He had to endure as He was being sharpened on the harsh grindstone of circumstances, as He was being polished that He might be a fit instrument for the Father's will. What meekness, patience and graciousness are expressed in these words—"He hath made me"! When the Prodigal Son went away from home he said: "Father, give me . . ." (Luke xv. 12). All right! Pray like that. But when he came home he said: "Father, make me . . ." That was a different kind of prayer, the prayer that the Lord Jesus always prayed, and it was answered. "He hath made me a polished shaft".

Do you notice the emphasis upon the hiddenness? "In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me . . . in his quiver hath he kept me close". A servant of the Lord does not force himself out into prominence, but waits the Father's time. The Lord



Jesus waited thirty years in the drudgery and obscurity of Nazareth, but even when that time came to an end and He was released into service, this was true of Him all the time. "He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me." So much more could be read into these verses as to the experiences which Christ passed through: to be sharpened, to be polished, as He was being hidden, held in the quiver ready for use, but we come to verse 4 of this chapter and find, very strangely, the reactions and the heart-searchings of this perfect Servant: "*But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and vanity*".

You will say: 'That is just what I feel like!', but you never realised that that was just what the Lord Jesus felt like. You never thought of the servants of the Lord like that, let alone the greatest of them. Being called, appointed, prepared, fitted, commissioned and sent forth—as verse 3 says: "*He said unto me, Thou art my servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified*"—and the next thing you find is a man almost overwhelmed with perplexity, bewilderment, disappointment: "But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought". The Lord Jesus is opening His heart to us: 'Listen!' He says, 'You isles, right down through the centuries, across the worlds, *listen!* Don't get your own foolish, carnal conceptions of what it means to have God saying: 'You are My servant. I am going to be glorified in you.' Listen to *Me!* Oh, don't listen to men, listen to *Me!* And this is what you will find: that I, walking this path of absolute devotion to the will of God, patient under His disciplining hand, held like a polished shaft in His quiver, said: "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought". You say: 'But that is despair.' Oh, no! It is where we often despair, and where anyone less than the perfect Servant could and would perhaps have despaired, but you see how the Lord Jesus goes on in verse 4: "*Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord*". 'I am not My own Servant—I am His Servant; if *He* brings Me into these circumstances I am still His Servant. Though the whole thing is amazing and perplexing to Me, He knows what He is doing. I commit it back to Him. I refer it back' (to use modern language)—"*yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my recompence with my God*". It is God's business to work it out, not mine. It is My business to keep a heart of unwavering faith in Him and devotion to Him.'

Now the Lord answers that—He always does.

Read the next verse: "*And now saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant*". If only we would take our problems to the Lord instead of to one another! If only we would refer the thing back to Him instead of puzzling over it, straining over it, spending sleepless nights and troubled days trying to disentangle it! The Lord Jesus said: 'My judgment is with *Him*. I refer it back to the One who sent Me', and immediately the answer comes: "*And now saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, and that Israel be gathered unto him: . . . yea, he saith, It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth*". Praise God for the answer that He gave to His dear Son in the hour of His humiliation and His troubledness of soul! Here is a problem that baffles, that seems impossible, and God says: 'Nay, that is much too small. There is going to be a bigger outcome than that. That is far too small, far too light a thing.' It did not seem it! Is it not strange how differently God views things? We think it is so heavy, a mountainous weight of impossibility, and God says: 'That is too light to satisfy Me. I have bigger things than that in view . . . a light to the ends of the earth, salvation to the nations.'

We know from the Book of the Acts how the Apostles fed on this, not, I believe, so much putting themselves in the place of Isaiah and saying: 'I am the servant of the Lord and He will stand by me', but putting it back where it belongs, into the Person of the Lord Jesus, and saying: 'Our service is in association with Him, the great Servant of God, and if we are involved in difficulties, in problems, they are His difficulties, His problems. He is the pioneer. He has gone this way and God's answer to Him is God's answer to us. Out of this will come fulness and enlargement beyond anything that could have been dreamt.' That is God's answer to the servant who takes his problems and his bafflement back to the One who sent him.

Did you notice that I left out a parenthesis in verse 5? This is the inward witness and what God makes real to His Servant, even in the hour of His humiliation: "*I am honourable in the eyes of the Lord*". "Despised and rejected of men", but "honourable in the eyes of the Lord". The Lord Jesus never lost that consciousness. He never took on the contumely and shame: He never became



apologetic; for He had in His heart the witness that He was well-pleasing to God: "*I am honourable in the eyes of the Lord, and my God is become my strength*". What an answer!

We go on in verse 7: "*Thus saith the Lord the redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth*". We are still, then, on the Calvary side of things. We have not reached the real enlargement which has been spoken of. Indeed, it is by Calvary that all this is to be accomplished. And it is always to be like that. The Lord Jesus is the outstanding, supreme example that if a man puts his life into the hands of the Holy Spirit, He will lead that man to the Cross. We always think: 'You begin with the Cross and then you go into the fulness of the Holy Spirit.' You notice that God's Servant began filled with the Spirit, but all through His life that Spirit steadily, gently, graciously but firmly was taking Him back to the Cross. Why? Because that is the key to all service. Out of that will spring this great enlargement.

Listen! "*Thus saith the Lord, the redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom men despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers*". Jesus might have said: 'I did not come here to be the servant of rulers. I came here to be a Servant of God.' I have heard a lot of people talk like that: 'I don't serve men; I serve the Lord.' That is not the spirit of the Master, the One who washed the disciples' feet. The service is committed to this One of whom it is said: 'He is despised; He is abhorred; He has become a servant; He has lowered, emptied Himself.' This is what the Lord says to that One: "*Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall worship*". Why? "*Because of the Lord that is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who hath chosen thee*" When the Lord Jesus took the way of emptying, the way of the servant, the way of being nothing, the way of being despised, God wrought a mighty miracle that makes the world wonder. He took Him up from the grave to which the Cross had led Him, raised Him, and set Him on high, and the disciples, filled with joy, were able to say, not only: 'How wonderful is Jesus!' but 'How faithful is God!' That is why their hearts were so thrilled as they moved into this world-wide service. They saw in the Person of the Lord Jesus the miracle of the faithfulness of God. The resurrection is that because of the Lord that is faithful. The Lord Jesus, as a Servant of the Father, was tested right to the last extreme point as to whether or not the One who had sent Him was faithful.

We know how the question, the difficulty, the

pain, the suffering, swept over Him. We have read how, in the midst of this thing, He said: "*I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought*" . . . 'Where is the One who sent Me? Where is the authority that I should have as His Servant? Where are the fruits of My labours? Where is the seal of the power of God upon Me?' . . . "One whom men despise, whom the nation abhorreth, a servant of rulers". But we know, and how we rejoice to know it, that right to the last extreme test of faith, the Lord Jesus never questioned the absolute faithfulness of the Father. He said, in prophetic words from another Psalm: "*Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption.*" (Psalm xvi. 10). . . . "*Kings shall see and arise; princes and they shall worship.*" The ages which have followed that day, and the countless ages of eternity, shall be ages in which the great ones of the earth marvel, in the Person of the Lord Jesus, at the amazing faithfulness of God. That is good enough for you and for me, is it not, to serve God in that way—as a testimony to His faithfulness?

Now we move on and find the enlargement spoken of. We pass from the Calvary to the resurrection side, from the humiliation on earth to the enlargement in the heavenlies.

In verse 8 we read: "*Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I answered thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee*". The great feature of the new life into which our blessed Saviour emerged when He was raised from the dead—so we are told—is that it is a life of intercession. To use yet another prophetic Psalm: "*The Lord said unto me . . . Ask of me, and I will give thee . . .*" (Psalm ii. 7, 8). Of course, God always heard His prayers, but spiritually He had passed through an experience and had been brought into a place where prayer could be answered in a very full and wonderful way. It was not prayer for Himself. He no longer needed any help, but it was prayer for the fulfilment of the purpose of God in Him and through Him.

It is the kind of prayer, dear friends, that we long to pray. Oh, to emerge from our own problems and difficulties and to be brought into a realm where God can say to us in Christ: 'Now, look out on the world and its needs, and on My purposes . . . ask of Me' . . . "*Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I answered thee*". Here is the answer: "*I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to raise up the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; say-*

*ing to them that are bound, Go forth*".

Now read the Book of the Acts in the light of that! Did it happen? Oh, the people who were bound! Bound with sin, bound with self, bound with the love of money, bound with idolatry, bound with the power of Satan, bound with religion, bound with pride, bound in bitterness of spirit and hatred of others, and this is the story of the Lord going to the bound, here—and there—and there—and saying, 'Be free!' and they were free.

"*To them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves*". What a book of light dawning in the darkness is the Book of the Acts! We think of the stock example, the Ethiopian eunuch, dark in skin and in mind, even with the Word of God in his hand. The Lord Jesus came to him. It is true that He came through Philip, but it was the Lord Jesus who came, who swept away the darkness and in came the light. Do not think that it was Philip's arguments and explanations! It was a work of Christ . . . and it is always a work of Christ to bring light into the darkness. These men were the associates of Christ, called into His service, but the Book of the Acts is not a book of a lot of servants of the Lord. The story of the Church is not the story of a number of instruments being used separately and apart from Christ in God's service.

This is the marvel of the wonderful Servant of the Lord who passed through the way of humiliation and trial and suffering, through the Cross, and was brought out into a large realm. And now, not only in those early days, but through the centuries and to-day, with the authority of God committed unto Him in heaven and on earth, He uses the testimony of one here and one there—but who are we? The Lord can easily find another if Philip won't go, and can raise up someone else if Paul disobeys Him. He is going to do His work. But wise Philip says: 'I am going to be there if there is a place for me'. Oh, the wisdom of these men who knew that Christ was working and gave themselves gladly to be in His service! But it is not Philip who is saying: 'See the light'—it is Christ. It is not the apostolic argument or teaching, nor the Church itself that is setting men free. This is the ministry committed to the Son. The Father said: 'I have answered you. I have answered your prayer. I have given you the authority. Now you can say: "Go forth" to them that are bound. You can say: "See light" to them that are in darkness. You can lead them in the ways and give them their pasture.' "*They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them*". It is not

enough to set the captive free. He has a long and arduous journey in front of him. Thank God for a ministry which not only brings the captive out of the dungeon, but cherishes, cares for him, refreshes him, feeds him, strengthens him all the way along the journey! What a romance is the story of the Church! What a wonderful story we can tell of finding food on the bare heights, streams in the desert!

Dear friends, the Lord Jesus is not sitting back and leaving us to fend for ourselves, nor is He committing us into the hands of God to care for us. He has received the mandate, and He is fulfilling it, to feed His flock, to tend His sheep, and He uses men, and He will use you and me, that we might share with Him in this His service:

"*And I will make all my mountains a way, and my high ways shall be exalted*". With the working from heaven there are no obstacles that come in this path. Indeed, the things that are obstacles prove in the end to be the things that prospered the journey. It is a wonderful story!

"*Lo these shall come from far; and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim*". But did it not happen? It happened the moment Jesus was exalted. The work of gathering in the scattered ones took place, and is still taking place. We are here from our norths, our easts and wests, and are gathered together not to a place, a person, or a ministry, but to Christ, which is the only legitimate gathering that I know of for the Church. They shall come gathering together to this great Servant of the Lord. And the effect of it? This is the right place to end! "*Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have compassion upon his afflicted*".

Well, let us get singing! If we see Christ as the great Servant of the Lord, prospering in His divine commission, we can do nothing but wonder and worship. Take up the Book of the Acts, wherever you like, and whatever there is in the chapter—and there are some dark and harsh things as well as good things—I warrant that by the time you come to the end of it you are praising the Lord. Take the Letters in the New Testament. There are many grievous things, many situations which were not pleasant, but I challenge you to find one single letter which does not in the end point the way to Christ as the answer, glorify Him as God's fulfilment, and bring praises spontaneously from the hearts of those who read.

Come to the last book of the Bible, which is



the darkest one. The churches are all failing and in confusion, the world is under the darkness of the most extreme expressions of evil and of Satan's power, but by the time you get to the end of the Book of the Revelation you have outstripped all the others in praises. What Hallelujahs sound forth! The Lamb is seen, this same Lamb, this same Servant of the Lord, to have achieved His end after all, to have glorified the Father, to have

finished the work and to have proved, not only in His own personal experience, but in *all* the experiences of *all* the saints through *all* the ages, that the Lord is faithful to His promises.

'Sing, O heavens, O earth'! Shall we keep the song going, for it is the song of the triumph of the faithful Servant, our blessed and wonderful Lord Jesus.

H. F.

## FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY

"Give ye them to eat" (Matt. xiv. 16; cf. Mark vi; Luke ix; John vi.)

IT is significant that the feeding of a multitude by Jesus is something recorded by all four writers of the Gospels, even if the two occasions are not reported by each.

This significance in its general meaning can be easily recognized, although John focuses the occasion upon the particular point of the Person of Christ; that is the statement of Christ—"I am the living bread", and carries upward to the "Father" and right back to Israel in the wilderness.

There are some points in this universally recorded work of the Lord which are to be noted.

1. The deep and heartfelt concern of the Lord that people should be fed. "He had compassion on the multitude". John very carefully, meticulously, and fully transfers this, as from the lips of Jesus, to the *spiritual* life, as of far greater importance than the physical. But the physical necessity is an illustration of the spiritual.

God has so constituted the human body that its very life, strength, growth, energy, and usefulness depend upon food. The very *fact* of the New Testament is a powerful declaration that, what is true of the physical body, is—at least—true of the spiritual life in every respect.

Multitudes of Christians seem to think (if they do think about it at all) that, once they are born again, work is the only thing that matters, and that this can be done without sound, solid, and ample food. Growth does not matter. Energy can be found without feeding. Endurance does not depend upon nourishment. This is a mistake which will find such people out, sooner or later.

Jesus did not so think. The very survival of the multitude depended—in His judgment—upon their being fed. It was a precaution against "Lest they faint". Such a possibility and probability gives immense significance to the spiritual food question.

A weak, feeble, poor, stunted, dissatisfied condition in the life of the Christian is certain to follow—at some time—poverty, scarcity, or meagreness of spiritual food. There was a generation of strong, robust, and fruitful saints, the values of whose lives have come down to us in their written lives and ministries. It is impressive to note how the substantial nature of that generation is being called back in the reproduction of that ministry to-day. That was the generation of such men as A. J. Gordon, A. T. Pierson, A. B. Simpson, F. B. Meyer (to mention only a few), and it was the time of the *inception* of the convention movement which had as its basic motive "the deepening of the spiritual life".

What a galaxy of stalwarts "Northfield" (in America) and "Keswick" (in England) represented and produced in those days. The repercussions and momentum of those times and ministries lie behind much of the original missionary work in many lands. Missionary work in its strongest and purest nature sprang out of—indeed was an extension of—those days of spiritual solidity and strength.

The names of Pierson, Gordon, Simpson, Hudson Taylor, Inglis, Andrew Murray, etc. are tied in with the two aspects, the convention movement and the missionary movement. These have been largely separated in our time, and the solid background or foundation is lacking in the greater part of missionary work and workers.

Let us recover and bring forward the attitude and concern of our Lord, as demonstrated in the multitude-feeding on record for the recognition of the Church in all ages. His very Person and glory are bound up with a people well fed and satisfied! Do not let us allow ourselves to separate compassion from the food question. Jesus did not!

2. Then note the time factor in the act of Jesus.

Jesus did not intervene casually. He did not just



say: 'Perhaps we had better let the people have something to eat now. Let's have a little interval and diversion, and eat something.' There would probably—in such case—have been those who were not particularly interested in feeding. Or there might have been those who were more interested in temporal food than in spiritual. But Jesus moved when, and because, the situation was critical, essential, and imperative.

The Lord may be generous in His provision, but He is neither casual nor wasteful. The record shows that He conserves even in His bountifulness. There was real hunger and felt need. The Lord only provides when this is true of those concerned. Little hunger—little food. Little appetite—frugal provision. The Lord's compassion is for those who are consciously hungry to the point of real necessity. It is a fixed way with the Lord that He does not move until something like desperation makes it evident that it is *His* move, and is supernatural. The disciples would say, "Send them away"; 'Let them fend for themselves'. But Jesus knows when things are beyond that point, and buys the situation for Himself.

3. Then we note the intermediaries of provision.

Human agency and instrumentality was drawn into responsibility. The resources were definitely *not* with the disciples, and they knew it to be so. They were extended and taxed as to their faith and obedience. Their responsibility was not to provide but—*knowing the Lord*—to form a link between the need and the supply; between scarcity and abundance.

Many who take positions of responsibility amongst the people of God are themselves a limitation. The people are starved, but the intermediaries stand in the way. They have not got the resources themselves, but they do not move to bring them from where they are.

Like the story of 'the friend at midnight' in Luke xi, it is necessary to know where bread is to be found, and then, even if at considerable personal inconvenience, see to it that the need is brought into touch with the supply.

Jesus would teach us that:—

1. He is really concerned about the spiritual food question.
2. He will provide when—and only when—there is a real need.
3. He lays the responsibility upon intermediaries, and that the state of His people lies at their door.

*"Give ye them to eat".*

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE

IT was in a Manse in the Islands of Scotland and the Minister was moving study. For some years he had used a downstairs room for this purpose, but now little Donald was two-and-a-half, and his mother wanted him to have that as a playroom.

There was a nice light room upstairs which would make a good study, so the matter was decided and the move was being made. All the furniture had to be carried up to the new study.

Young Donald longed to help. He felt sure that he could carry something. Of course, the chairs were too big for him and the bookcases too heavy, but as he looked round at the piles of books he felt sure that he could manage some of them.

He was about to pick up some books, but when his father saw him he said, "No, Donald. You cannot carry them." "Yes I can", pleaded young Donald, 'please let me Father, I know that I can.' "All right!" said the Minister, "have a try if you like."

Have a try! This only made Donald more determined. He had meant to carry two books but now he picked up three quite large ones, and walked towards the staircase, saying to himself "I can." Yes, and so he could so long as he walked on the level, even though the books were heavy. But his difficulties began when he reached the bottom of the stairs. The trouble was that he had no free hand to help him climb the first stair. If he freed one hand for that, then the books would fall, and that must never happen. If, however, he held the books tightly he could not get more than one foot on the first stair.

It was then that the truth began to dawn on him. He could not do it! His lip began to tremble. He was just about to say, "I can't" when something happened to him. Someone came from behind and lifting him by the elbows, carried him right to the top stair, with the books still clasped in his hands. So there he was, safely at the top of

the stairs, and all that he needed to do was to walk proudly into the new study and hand the books to his mother. As he did so, he said, "I can".

To be truthful he ought to have said, "I can, through Father", because of course it was his father who had lifted both him and the books to the top of the stairs.

The Christian, also, is one who may say, "I can", but in his case he should add "... through Christ". We may often be faced with what seems impossible and like Donald may lose our confidence and be almost ready to give up. It is then that we ought to prove the power of Christ to lift

us and carry us through. He works not from the outside, picking us up by our elbows, but from the inside, giving us His strength within. "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4. 13).

"Jesus' power is boundless, boundless as the sea ;

He is always able, able to keep me,

Power bring from my meekness:

Glory from my meekness:

I can all things, all things do

Through Christ, which strengtheneth me.'

H. F.

## FROM HEAVEN OR FROM MEN ?

(Matthew xxi. 25)

WE do not propose to discuss the subject raised by the Lord in connection with this interrogation ; that is, "the baptism of John". Nor do we concern ourselves here with the dilemma which He created for those interrogated. It is this alternative with which we are concerned—"From heaven, or of men?" It is something which arises definitely on more than this occasion in the New Testament. On one occasion the Lord rendered a sound rebuke to Peter, saying: "Thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew xvi. 23). The wise and astute Gamaliel warned the Council that "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown: but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God" (Acts v. 38, 39).

In handling the complicated, confused, and carnal situation at Corinth, the Apostle Paul attributed the divisions to this very thing: "... for whereas there are among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men?" (I Cor. iii. 3). It is quite clear from these passages alone that what is of men is forbidden in the things of God, and this is of very wide and varied application.

The two things are not complementary, they are inimical. They are two sources and natures set over against each other. They belong to two worlds. The springs are totally different.

1. They represent two systems of thought and mentality. It is not only in specific instances when a mistake is made, a wrong judgment is given, a questionable decision or course is followed. It is the very constitution, basic and fundamental, which

governs those concerned. The natural—just what we are by nature—is set over against the spiritual, that is, what God is, and what we are *basically* by being born of the Spirit.

2. This represents two governments. Heaven's standard of values is quite different from that of this world. This world governs entirely horizontally. It is just flat, earthly. Christ's government in His life was wholly vertical; always upward. He judged "not after the seeing of his eyes", neither reproved "after the hearing of his ears". Too close a touch with this earth involves in its contradictions, and confusions. Never was He in confusion. "Of heaven" was the watchword of His life. "Of man" is too often the realm and nature of our judgments.

3. The divide between the two is the basic effect of the Cross. The Cross cuts clean between the natural and the spiritual. We have only to mark this fundamental difference in the disciples before and after the devastating experience of the Cross and the Heaven-opening experience of the Resurrection and Pentecost.

It is because we men, in what we are naturally—not necessarily viciously, or of evil intent, but just plain nature—have irsinuated ourselves with our judgments, ideas, standing, conceptions, strengths, etc., into the things of Heaven, that there is so much confusion and frustration in Christianity. In Paris there is a pair of scientific balances so delicately poised and finely balanced that even the warmth of a human body near the glass case in which they are kept sets them oscillating. We get too near to the sensitive things of the

Spirit. With our heat we often disturb the spiritual balance.

Our great lesson is to learn how to stand back in the flesh from the things of the Spirit.

## THIS PSYCHIC AGE

THE feature of intensification is inherent in all realms; the physical, the metaphysical, and the spiritual. In nature, harvest is the intensification of a process. The end is but the full outworking or development of what was inherent in the beginning. We are living in an age when, in every realm, this process has reached an enormous proportion. It is not new potentialities. All that we are now seeing is but the discovery of what has been present all the time. Atomic energy, for instance, is not something newly created in the twentieth century. It has been in the constitution of things from the beginning; it has only been discovered and appropriated in this century.

The same is true in every other connection. Sin is no new thing, it is in the nature of man. If sin has become intensely more pronounced and more widely and wickedly expressed, it is but the full development of what was 'original'.

We are living in a time when the psychic element in this universe and in creation is manifesting itself in colossal proportions. If 'psychic' means soul; and if soul means mind (reason), feeling (emotion), and will (volition), then it can be seen that soul is developed to a degree that dominates this world in every realm. It is true that this wheel sometimes develops a bulge at one of its three sections, or even two, and the wheel becomes unbalanced. Emotion and will may become out of proportion. Sometimes reason takes control and predominates. But when we have said all that can be said on this matter, let us hasten to add that all this is but the human ego.

It is what the New Testament calls "the natural man". Translators have so worded it because it would sound strange to translate literally and say 'the soul', or 'the soulical man'. This may be a simplification resort, but it may also gloss over a very serious matter. The gloss may be to weaken and conceal the contextual contrast between this species and category of humanity and "he that is spiritual", or 'the man of spirit'.

This difference of categories and 'species' is traceable back to the very beginning of human life. If "God is Spirit" as Jesus affirmed; and if only spirit can communicate with Him, and He with spirit, as Jesus also declared (John iv. 23, 24), and if it is true that God walked and talked with man before he offended and separated himself from

God, it is not only the solid implication of the whole of Scripture but the clear teaching of the Word of God and of history that the injury and separation took place in what man was then, that is, in the realm of his spirit. He must have previously been preeminently a man of spirit, by which all his communications with and government by God proceeded. If the spirit was violated, or man as a man of spirit was changed, then man became a changed order of being, and that was, a man of soul, with his spirit closed to God. The Bible calls it "separated from God". Therefore he became a soul-and-body man or species, with his spirit nullified in its true functions.

So man, in the 'Fall', fell out of his true union with God into himself, his *ego*, and thenceforth was a man wholly of natural mind, feelings, and decisions and volition. This nature and consequence can be seen quite clearly in the fact that, in order to interrupt the true normal relationship with God for all Divine purposes and interests, Satan made his attack at the point of the soul: firstly, reason—"Hath God said?"; then, feeling—"it is pleasant". Then the will followed reason and emotion which were put into the act, the choice and deed. This changed the order of man's nature, and, as we have said, made of him another kind than God made him.

This, then, was the beginning; man became preeminently a soulish, psychic creature. The process has gone on with ever-increasing strength and range. The whole commercial world is built upon this nature. Every advertisement contains the three features—reason why; an appeal to the advantage; and the capture of the act. But in every other realm a Satan-inspired and -energized soul-force is his method of controlling his captured kingdom.

In our times the principle of 'dictatorship' has reached abnormal proportions. We have seen men of almost uncontrolled soul-force sweep nations into the vortex of unspeakable destruction and carnage. We are seeing a swift and unrestrained movement towards 'Antichrist', that is, the 'super man', the man or system of psychic powers which simulate the miraculous and the supernatural. The Bible tells us all about this. But for this present we have two things in mind; this development as an intensification of what came in through Satan at the beginning gives very strong evidence of the



hastening harvest when the sickle will be plunged into the field of this humanity and it will be cut down. Intensification in any realm is always a warning. Abnormality is always a symptom that there is danger in the body corporate.

But our special emphasis is on the need to note that there is, and will be, an increasing invasion of this soulical, psychical character into the realm of 'Christianity'. We have seen this especially in the past century in the matter of reason or rationalism. The enthronement of 'liberalism', rationalism, and human judgment in the things of God has done an immeasurable amount of damage to the true life in the Spirit, and has almost entirely set aside the supernatural, especially in the matter of new birth; which, of course, is the new birth of the *spirit* of man.

In the work of God too often an autocratic and abnormally strong human control has been asserted; bringing everything and everybody under a domineering and legalistic mastery. But we are seeing an immense amount of the appeal to soul along its emotional line, with much imitation of the supernatural. All this is leading, as the Devil would have it, to confusion in the things of God, and to no small amount of discredit to the Lord. It all ministers to suspicion and fear. Anything that is abnormal, the pushing of things to an extreme, is to be suspect and feared. It is in this way

that the great deceiver and subverter discredits the truth and brings dishonour to the Lord's name.

Sooner or later this abnormal asserting of the soul-force will bring its own nemesis of judgment, as we have seen both in Bible history and in recent times in the case of 'dictators'. Our mental institutions tell a sorry tale in this matter, and there are all too many who, having so projected *themselves*, their *ego*, into Divine things, are mental, nervous, and spiritual wrecks. This is possible in all human personality.

Saul of Tarsus could have been a very real case in point, for he had such force and strength of soul naturally. The Lord's precautions for him were brokenness: ". . . lest I should be exalted above measure". The Lord saw to it that there was plenty of ballast in Paul's life to keep him balanced and moving only by dependence upon God.

Brokenness is a great safeguard against ourselves and the Devil. The Lord never ministers to our self-sufficiency, and certainly never does anything to inflate us. Rather is it the other way. Christ is the offset to Antichrist; and that means that Christ must become our only strength, wisdom, and understanding.

We have dealt with this whole matter in much greater fulness in our book *What is man?*, but there is a place and need for this supplementary word.

Let him that reads take note.

## THE LINE OF CHRIST

### II. CHRIST — GOD'S ETERNAL WAY

THE cry of all godly hearts is that of the Psalmist: "*Teach me thy way, O Lord*" (Psalm lxxxvi. 11) . . . "*Shew me thy ways, O Lord*" (Psalm xxv. 4).

We who know the Lord know that He has answered that cry in fulness in His Son. Christ is the answer to that cry. He Himself said: "*I am the way*" (John xiv. 6). Christianity very early became known by the name of 'The Way', and, as we know, it was because the substance of all the preaching was Christ.

Now here is this comprehensive fact that right from the beginning God has marked out a way, a particular way, a specific way. If we could draw a map of all the ways of men, of nations, of things, through history, how many lines there would be on it indicating the various and numerous ways which make up this world's history! But if we looked on that map with God's eyes we should see a

straight red line, undeviating, running right from the creation to the consummation of this world's history, and, following that line to its end, we should find that it is Christ, it ends in Christ. God has drawn that line, that red line, straight, direct, through all the deviations of this world's life, experience and happenings—the line of Christ.

If we want to find God we have to get on to that line. It is the touchstone of human blessing, the life-line of men.

That is a key both to the Bible and to our experience in our relationship with God. God put Adam on that line when He created him. He put his feet, so to speak, immediately on the line of Christ, in order to take a course which would bring him eventually to all the meaning of God's Son, conformity to His Son: conformity to His image. Adam went off the line of Christ, with all the disastrous consequences which we know.

The next move was to bring man, who in Adam had deviated from that line, back on to the line of Christ. God laid hold of Abraham and brought him right on to the line. Watch carefully all his movements under the hand of God, and you will see that every divine step in that life related in some way to Christ. The great culminating point of these activities, the offering of Isaac and receiving him again as from the dead, as you know, speaks as loudly as anything in all the Bible of the Lord Jesus. God put Abraham on the line of Christ. Abraham deviated from that line once or twice, and immediately he lost the Lord, and the Lord was not with him until he got back to the point from which he had departed, the line of Christ.

God put Israel on to that line. When He brought them out of Egypt by the Passover, the sprinkled blood, the shared lamb, He put them as a people on to the line of Christ, initially. They got off that line and trouble followed. They lost the Lord. Later, as you know, when they went out of the land into exile and captivity, they were off the line of Christ. There was no blessing, no Lord. The glory had departed, and not until they came back on to that line did they find the Lord and come back into blessing.

Ultimately, the tragedy of Israel is that of the Cross; nay, to-day we have to speak, as far as they are concerned, of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. It was their most disastrous departure from God's line, Jesus Christ. They went off that line with the result that there have been two thousand years of the most awful consequences that people have known. They will not find God until they get back on to the line of Christ.

God has put the Church on that line. He put the feet of the Church on to the line of Christ right from its birth on the Day of Pentecost, and while it has remained on that line He has been with it. Every deviation from Christ to something other has resulted in tragedy.

It is instructive and impressive to note how selective God has been in His activities. He has been undeviating in the matter of His selectiveness. He selected a land, a little land, the size of the Principality of Wales or the County of York, and no bigger. He selected that land, out of all the countries of the world, in relation to His Son. His Son was to come from heaven into this world through that land. He brought His people into that land.

Now note the battle! It is the story of Ruth over again—the battle to force out, to draw away, to

rob of, and in some way to get them off, that ground, that they should lose that ground. Oh, the history of that circles round that little country! God selected that land, and when His people went out of it they lost the Lord. They lost the purpose of their being chosen of God. It is impressive! Abraham had to fight that battle, and he went down to Egypt under pressure.

So we could put our finger upon this selective activity of God. As He said: "*In every place where I record my name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee*" (Exodus xx. 24). There, just there, and *only* there!

Now that, of course, is Old Testament. What has it to say to us?

Well, this is a governing matter in the Christian life. It is the thing which governs the very purpose and meaning of our being the Lord's people. He has chosen us from the foundation of the world *in Christ*. He has selected One in whom we shall find Him, and in whom *alone* we shall find Him. All the forces of hell will be at work, in the first place, to keep us out of Christ. They rage to prevent people coming into Christ, and when once they have come in, these forces are unceasing and relentless in their efforts to get them off the ground of Christ, on to things, possibly, or on to any other ground. There is an immense meaning in Christ's word: "*Abide in me . . . except ye abide in me . . .*" (John xv. 4). It is a warning, governing word. Where and how shall we find the Lord? Only on the line of Christ, where *Christ's* interests are the object of our being here, where it is true "*For me to live is Christ*" (Philippians i. 21). You find the Lord there. Get off that ground, be driven off, be allured off, and you lose the Lord. It is there, on that ground, that the explanation of the Christian life is found. It is on that line that the very purpose for which we are created will have its out-working. It is on that line that we shall find divine guidance.

This Divine law of God's way has many practical applications in the life of the Christian. How many spiritual tragedies we have known brought about by human selectiveness apart from the first and supreme interest of Christ. It might be the choice of residence, location, for instance, for reasons of convenience, pleasure, escape, or *seeming* necessity, as in the case of Abraham to which we have referred. No less a question than having the Lord with us is bound up with such choices and decisions. We cannot move off the Lord's ground without the consequence of spiritual disaster. How costly it was in the case of Elimelech!

If Christ is the Way, the Directive ; then He is the Example. How meticulously careful He was not to move, or be moved, by any consideration but the directive of the Father!

Many motives were put to Him for action and movement, but He abode in the Father, and, often

at great cost, refused other considerations.

We must seek to know that we are where we are because God has put us there in the interests of His Son, and then it must be God who just as definitely moves us when the time to move has come.

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## HOLD ON

Hold on, my heart, in thy believing.  
Only the steadfast win the crown.  
He who when stormy waves are heaving  
Parts with his anchor, shall go down.  
But he whom Jesus holds through all,  
Shall stand, though heaven and earth shall fall.

Hold out ; there comes an end to sorrow :  
Hope from the dust shall conquering rise.  
The storm foretells a Summer's morrow,  
The Cross points on to Paradise.  
The Father reigneth. Cease all doubt.  
Hold on, my heart, hold on, hold out.

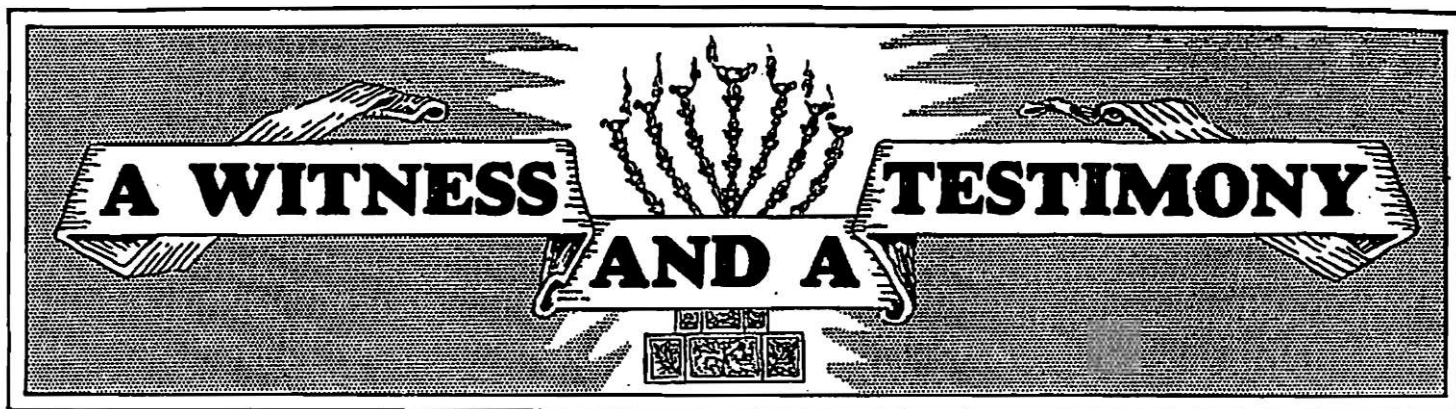
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## " AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING "

## THE GREAT TRANSITION

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

"In the year 33 A. D., a few Galilean fishermen were seeking liberty of speech in Jerusalem, and were hardly handled as men poor and ignorant.

In the year Paul died (about 30 years later), how did the matter stand? There were churches in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Caesarea, in all Syria, Antioch, Ephesus, Galatia, Sardis, Laodicea, in all the towns on the west coast throughout lesser Asia, in Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Rome, Alexandria, in the chief cities of the islands and the mainland of Greece, and the western Roman Colonies."

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



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

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

In their first twenty years (twenty years only, mark you) they actually sent out more missionaries than *the whole Protestant Church* had done in *two hundred years*. Of the closed lands entered, the sufferings gladly endured, the range covered, the lives lived and laid down, the grace of God manifested, it stirs wonder and shame to read. Someone has said that if members of the Protestant churches had gone out in corresponding numbers there would have been a force vastly in excess of the number estimated as necessary to evangelize the whole world.

What was the secret and what were the factors?

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

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

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

"To seek for the Lamb the reward of His sufferings."

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*"I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I, if it is already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"* (Luke xii. 49 - 50).

('Straitened' there means 'under strain and stress'.)

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

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

under heaven" in Jerusalem on one day. What a story follows that release! How the fire spread!

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

(To be continued)

## THE TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

*II Corinthians i. 8, 9; iv. 7-10; vi. 8-10; xii. 7-10.*

AS we read II Corinthians carefully we seem to meet two persons—Paul in himself and Paul in Christ. Everything Paul speaks of, from the opening chapter of this epistle to its conclusion is in one strain. There is one governing principle throughout, which we might summarise in his own words: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." In the very first chapter we see "this treasure" in an earthen vessel; and right to the last chapter we keep meeting the treasure too.

II Corinthians is the most personal of the New Testament books. Other epistles bring the revelation of God to us, but II Corinthians is unique in this respect, that it shows us the kind of man he is through whom God imparts His revelation. Had we not this epistle we might still know what work Paul accomplished, but we should not know what kind of man he was who accomplished the work. He was an earthen vessel.

### THE IDEAL CHRISTIAN

When I first became a Christian I had my own conception as to what a Christian was, and I tried my utmost to be that kind of Christian. I thought, if only I could attain to the standard I had conceived, then I should have attained perfection. To be perfect was my ambition, but I had my own mentality as to the standard of perfection. I thought a perfect Christian should smile from morning to night; if at any time he shed a tear he had ceased to be victorious. I thought a perfect Christian must be a very courageous person; if under any circumstances he showed the slightest sign of fear then I said he lacked faith, he could not trust the Lord, he was not perfect.

### PAUL WAS A MAN

I retained these clearly defined ideas as to what a Christian should be like until, one day as I was reading II Corinthians, I came to the passage where Paul said he was sad. I was arrested. Paul sad? I thought. Then I read that he shed many tears, and I thought, Can it actually be that Paul wept? I read that he was pressed, that he was perplexed; and I thought, Was Paul really pressed? Was Paul really perplexed? This also I read: "We were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, so that we even despaired of life." And I wondered, Can it be that Paul despaired? It had never occurred to me that a person like Paul could have experiences such as these. But as I read on I gradually awakened to the fact that Christians are not another order of angelic beings, and that Paul was not so very remote from us. In fact, I discovered that Paul was a man and that he was the very kind of man I know.

Here is a man who is afraid, yet he is strong: he is encompassed by foes, yet he is not bound: he looks as though he is overcome, yet he is not destroyed. You can see he is weak, yet he declares that when he is weak he is strong. You can see that he bears in his body the dying of Jesus, yet he says the life of Jesus is also manifested in his body. You hear his "evil report", but you also hear his "good report". He appears to be a "deceiver", nevertheless he is "true". He seems to be "unknown", yet he is "well known". He is as one "dying", and still he "lives". He is "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing: as poor, yet making many rich: as having nothing, yet possessing all things". Here is a Christian!

### A SPIRITUAL PARADOX

Do you realise what it means to be a Christian? To be a Christian is to be a person in whom there



is a fundamental inconsistency. A Christian is one in whom there is an inherent paradox. This paradox is of God. Some people conceive of Christianity as being all treasure and no earthen vessel. If they meet the earthen vessel anywhere, they feel things are all wrong. But God's conception is totally different from man's. Here is God's thought: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." So it is not a hopeless case if the earthen vessel is in evidence. God's purpose does not nullify the earthen vessel; it puts the treasure there. It is always in the earthen vessel that the treasure is found.

Let me say that there is not a soul whose earthen vessel is so earthen that the treasure cannot appear in it. The beauty of the treasure is enhanced by the earthen vessel in which it is placed. Paul was a man, a real man, but the life of the Lord shone out through his life. He was not an automaton; he had feelings. And he was neither invariably sorrowful, nor was he invariably glad. At the very time when he was sorrowful he was also glad. It is characteristic of Christianity that even while the tears flow the face can relax into a smile.

We keep hoping that when we meet Christians we shall see no trace of the earthen vessel, yet when we meet some of the Lord's truest children we immediately recognise their distinctive personalities. We recognise what kind of persons they are in themselves and also what kind of persons they are in the Lord. I knew a sister who had a very quick temper. She was quick at everything—quick to speak, quick to rebuke, quick to write letters, and quick to destroy the letters she wrote. You could see at once what sort of person she was, yet at the same time you could see the Lord in her. You could see her suffering under trial, but at the same time you could see her spiritual wealth. You could see the treasure in an earthen vessel.

Many people tell me they have prayed for a certain thing; they affirm they have faith in God and are absolutely certain He has heard their request. Yet nothing happens. Why? Because their faith is too wonderful. The treasure is not in an earthen vessel.

Many other people have come to me and told of their fears and misgivings even while they sought to trust the Lord. They made their requests, and they laid hold of the promises of God; yet doubts continually arose unbidden. Let me tell you that true faith cannot be killed by doubt. The treasure of true faith appears in an earthen

vessel of doubt, and the earthen vessel does not nullify the treasure. In such an environment the treasure shines forth with enhanced beauty. Do not misunderstand me, I am not encouraging doubt; but I do wish to make this clear, that Christianity is not a matter of treasure only, nor of earthen vessels only, but of treasure in earthen vessels.

I love to recall the prayer of the early church for Peter's deliverance from the hands of wicked men. When Peter returned and knocked at the door the believers said it was his angel. Do you see? There was faith there, true faith, the kind of faith that could bring an answer from God; but the weakness of man was still present, and that weakness was clearly manifest. To-day the faith exercised by many of God's people is greater than that exercised by the believers gathered in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. And they are so positive about it. They are certain God will send an angel, and every door in the prison will swing open. If a gust of wind blows, there is Peter knocking at the door! If the rain begins to patter, there is Peter knocking at the door again! Those people are too credulous; their faith is not the genuine article. In Christianity the earthen vessel is always in evidence, though the question is never one of the earthen vessel but of the treasure within it. In the life of a normal Christian, just when faith rises positively to lay hold of God, a question may simultaneously arise as to whether he might be mistaken. When he is strongest in the Lord he is often most conscious of inability: when he is most courageous he becomes aware of fear within: when he is most joyful a sense of distress breaks upon him. This paradox is evidence that there is treasure in the earthen vessel.

#### GOD'S POWER IS MANIFEST IN MAN'S WEAKNESS

Paul tells us that he had a thorn in the flesh. What that thorn was I do not know, but I do know that it was a weakening factor and that Paul prayed three times for its removal. But God answered: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is made perfect in weakness." How can the Lord's power be manifest to perfection in a weak man? Christianity is that very thing. Christianity is not the removal of weakness, nor is it merely the manifestation of divine power; it is the manifestation of divine power in human weakness. Christianity does not bring in a marvellous new



order of angelic beings, but human beings in whose weakness the divine power is displayed. Let me use an illustration.

I was once seriously ill. During a period of two months I was X-rayed three times, and each time the report was very grave. I prayed, and I believed. I had hoped God would heal my sickness, but though several times I experienced a great increase of strength, the root of the trouble remained, so the possibility of relapse was always present. I was annoyed. What was the use of a temporary increase of strength? One day, as I was reading the Bible, I came to the chapter in II Corinthians where Paul prayed three times that God would remove his "thorn". God would not do so, but said: "My grace is sufficient for thee." Because of the presence of the thorn he was granted an increase of grace. Because the weakness persisted, grace was added. I saw—This is Christianity! I prayed for a clearer seeing, and the thought came to me of a boat that could not pass because of a boulder jutting out five feet from the river bed. I had been praying in effect: "Lord, if it please Thee, remove the boulder." Now a question arose within: Whether would it be better to have the five foot boulder removed, or to let the Lord raise the level of the water by five feet? I answered: It would be better to have the level of the water raised. From that day many of my difficulties were gone. I dare not say that I was never tempted; but, praise God! I discovered that He has resource to deal with difficulties other than by their removal. Christianity is not a matter of removing boulders, but of raising the level of the water. Have you difficulties? Yes. Have you weaknesses? Yes, we all have. But do bear in mind that what the Lord is after is not, on the negative side, the removal of our weaknesses; nor is it even, on the positive side, the indiscriminate bestowal of strength. All the strength He gives is manifest in weakness. All the treasure we have is in earthen vessels.

**MAN'S WEAKNESS DOES NOT LIMIT GOD'S POWER**

It is cause for great gratitude to God that no

human weakness need limit the divine power. We are apt to think that where sadness exists, there joy cannot exist: that where there are tears there cannot be praise: that where weakness is present power must be absent: that where there is doubt there cannot be faith. But let me proclaim this with a clear voice, that God is seeking to bring us to the point where we recognise that all that is of man is only intended to provide an earthen vessel to contain the divine treasure. Henceforth when we are conscious of depression let us not give way to depression, but to the Lord; and the treasure will shine forth all the more gloriously because of the earthen vessel. I am not theorising here; I know what I am talking about. Herein lies the glory of Christianity, that God's treasure can be manifest in every earthen vessel. Christianity is a paradox, and it is as we Christians live this paradoxical life that we get to know God. The further we go on in the Christian life, the more paradoxical it becomes. The treasure becomes increasingly manifest, but the earthen vessel is the earthen vessel still. This is very beautiful. Just look at the divine patience in a man who by nature is impatient, and compare the sight of that with a man whom nothing can ever move. See the divine humility in one who by nature is haughty, and compare that with one who is always of a retiring disposition. See the strength of God in a person of weak temperament, and compare that with a naturally strong character. The difference is tremendous.

People who are naturally weak are always apt to think they are no good because of the earthen quality of the vessel; but there is no need for dejection since the treasure within the vessel is of such a quality as to shine forth with added splendour from within such a vessel. Brothers and Sisters, let me say once again that the whole question is one of the quality of the treasure, not of the quality of the vessel that contains it. It is folly to stress the negative aspect: our concern is with the positive. The Lord is able to manifest Himself in the life of every one of us, and when that comes to pass many will behold the treasure.

W. N.

(from page 103)

Norbeck, S.Dakota \$10; Orange, N.J. \$6.80; Orlando, Fla. \$2, \$1; Pasadena, Calif. \$3; Red Oak, Iowa \$1; San Antonio, Texas \$10; San Pedro, Calif. \$4; Seymour, Iowa \$4.75; Trussville, Ala.

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## HORIZONED BY LIFE

"The tree of life also in the midst of the garden"  
(Gen. ii. 9).

"The tree of life, which is in the garden of God"  
(Rev. ii. 7; margin).

"The tree of life" (Rev. xxii. 2, 14).

THUS the Bible, first and last, makes life its horizon. It would not be wrong to say that all that is within the covers of the Bible is related—in some way—to this particular issue. It certainly was the governing matter in the creation record, and all human history is shown there to turn upon it: we shall see that life is *the* predominant issue in redemption. This being the case, it *must* be the paramount question in creation and human history.

But we have to begin our consideration of this vast matter by noting the Bible comparison and contrast between

### TWO KINDS OF LIFE.

In the main the Bible uses the word 'life' in two different ways and kinds. It uses the word to define the common life of all animate creatures. The Greek word for this kind of life is that from which we derive the word 'biology', which is simply 'the science of life'.

Genesis (the Book of Beginnings) tells us that God made living things—

Trees; flowers; vegetables.

Creatures; beasts, birds, fishes.

Man; a living soul having "the breath of life".

Life, of this natural kind, was the basis of animation, growth, propagation, etc.

But, into the midst of this life in all its forms, intimation, representation, and presentation, another kind of life is represented. It was possible to have animal and human life without having this other—and altogether different and superior—life. Indeed, to fail to possess this 'altogether other' life was (and is) to fail of the true Divine intention and destiny. To possess it would lift mankind on to a higher level altogether, and mean immortality to the creation. We leave that point there for the moment while we emphasise the fact that life is the criterion of everything.

### LIFE, THE CRITERION

Up to a little over one hundred years ago it was generally believed by scientists that the universe—

living creatures included—was explained on mechanical lines. It was all a great machine, wound up, moving by certain laws, and after millions of years, would run down and collapse or disintegrate. Mechanization was the inclusive law of all motion, processes, progress and relativity. That interpretation has now been completely and positively discarded and abandoned. Its place has been taken by biology, which, in its enthronement, is called 'The Queen of Sciences'. This is thought to be progress, but it is really just a return to Genesis and the Bible. Biology means that *life* is the basis and explanation of the whole animate creation or universe. Moreover, there is a wide acceptance that, far from chance, hap, accident, there is a Mind behind the universe, and that things are organic rather than mechanic.

This is all good, and a wonderful step 'backward', but there is another very big step required; for, good and significant as this biological fact may be, it does not solve the problem of man's destiny. So far, we are established on a basic fact, that *life* is the criterion, the law and principle of all being, development and reproduction.

But when we have said that, with all its vast ramifications, we need the other half of the Bible to carry us further. So, another quite different and distinct word is introduced with the New Testament. Sometimes it stands alone, but often something definitive is given to it: it is termed 'Eternal Life'. Seeing that the word 'eternal' is applied to God and to what is characteristic of Him, it must mean more than an age, a measure of time even beyond the human span; it must go outside of time altogether. But the word as used and associated is not only an extension, it is a kind, a quality, a nature, altogether different from and superior to life as we know it naturally. This life, the Bible teaches, is something that no man possesses naturally. If this is the only *true* life, then, by nature all men are dead while they live (biologically), as the Bible teaches.

Well, this just states the simple basic truth and position.

One more thing before we open out to the wider field. If, as we believe, there is a Mind behind creation, and particularly the animate creation, then we are ready to see a further great truth taught by the Bible.

This truth is that the natural, the material and



organic creation is intended to embody and represent a vast counterpart of intangible thought and principles. In a word, the created universe is a vast symbolism. Just as a potter expresses his thoughts in the vessels he makes, so that those vessels are ideas in representation, so God has wrapped up His thoughts in His creation. If we could read what is within the product of God's hands and interpret with the mind of God, we should know what God is like and what He means.

This being true, we must carry the truth into the realm of life, and see that natural life—as it came from God—is the part of which spiritual or Divine life is the counterpart. What is true of human life is a representation of something much higher—Divine life. That is what we hope to see as we proceed with these meditations. Life in the natural is itself a marvellous and mysterious thing. It certainly is a mystery. No one has ever yet explained what life is. Only by its presence and expression do we know of its existence, but we can never explain or define it. That is, perhaps, the first parable of life. Even natural life is capable of endurance and manifold expression beyond all calculation. Let us consider

### THE VARIETY OF LIFE.

It only needs to be suggested that any attempt to count the number and variety of life in its different realms to show how hopeless such an undertaking would be. In some realms this has been done. For instance, it is computed that there are at least 25,000 named backbone animals; ten times as many backboneless animals, and as many plants. There are 100,000 flowering plants. When we take vermin and insects—rats and rabbits, etc.—the rate of multiplication, and the way in which survival overtakes mortality, figures defeat calculation. Every single *one* of these has life after its kind.

When we turn to the power, energy, and endurance of life, we open the door to the necessity of volumes to be written. As a hint, just consider that we find animals among the snow at a height of 10,000 feet; and they are found on the floor of the sea six miles deep where Mount Everest would be much more than engulfed. It is hard to say what great difficulties are encountered and overcome by living creatures—insects in hot springs where you could not keep your hand; living things under fifteen feet of ice.

The story is positively fascinating and amazing. Life, filling every niche, finding homes in extra-

ordinary places, mastering difficulties, adjusting to out-of-the-way exigencies; persistent and intrusive; spreading everywhere, insinuating itself, adapting itself, resisting, defying, surviving everything! A tiny seed, dropped or carried by the wind into a crevice of a great rock will, as it grows, split that rock open until a large tree declares the power of life. The Grand Canyon of Arizona has many an instance of this. That canyon itself is now one mighty testimony in its foliage and beauty to the way in which life can take hold of the devastation and desolation caused by volcanic eruption, and turn its carnage into an attraction to the whole world. This is but a faint, distant approach to the marvels of life. If what we said earlier is true, that the natural is a symbol of the spiritual, what immense and outstanding things must be true of the higher and greater, the life which is supernatural! What a story the past two thousand years tell of the miracles, wonders, triumphs, survivals, endurances, and expansions of the life of God, given in and by His Son, Jesus Christ, to His Church, and to individuals who have received Him as 'the Life, the Eternal Life'! What a challenge this is to the Church's testimony! What a call to clear the way of what is spiritually and morally inimical to that Life in the Church and the Christian!

This is but introductory. We have to break this great matter into its relevant parts; but, with this little, surely we can begin to see that God has horizoned everything by life; in the natural, but immensely more so in the spiritual. The criterion of all is livingness!

In the organic creation everything depends upon whether life is present or not. If a thing or a person is without life, the door is closed; hope ends; there is no prospect (unless a miracle intervenes). We just say: 'Well, that is that, and there is no more.' The only remaining thing is burial. The departure of life means the reign and triumph of corruption. If there is life, and it can be stimulated and ministered to effectively, as in the human body or the garden, then corruption is held at bay and set back.

Which of these two issues was to prevail—the entrance and reign of corruption, mortality, and hopelessness, or the defeat of that intrusion with the entrance of an incorruptible, deathless and age-abiding life—is said by the Bible to have been decided at an early point in human existence. It was decided in a probation, the probation of choice, and choice based upon warning, caution and counsel. Clear, precise, concise and strong was the situation presented. The alternatives were



God's will and way, or man's will and way as contrary to God's. It was the alternative of man's selfhood as against God's supreme right to be trusted and obeyed. It was the question of God's exclusive and unique authority, and His beneficent disposition toward man, or the mind and will of another making man's independent and self-centred judgment the directive motive. On these two issues the question of two things hung; one, the obtaining of an incorruptible and deathless life, or, the missing of that and the blight of corruption falling upon the very natural life of man and creation. This alternative was set forth symbolically in two trees with their respective fruits—'The Tree of Life' and 'The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil'.

If you do not want to regard these as two literal trees, it will not affect the issue, for, after all, it is principles which govern, and what arises is just the laws of life and death. The Bible records the choice which was made; the side upon which man came down; the use which he made of his great trust—choice, free will; but choice with an exhortation and warning; not in ignorance!

History is the record of that choice; it is also the history of man's endorsement of, and adherence to that choice as against a way which God made forthwith out of the entanglement. I have

said that it was principles that governed. That is quite true, but I had better hurry up and introduce what is going to be the inclusive, ultimate and pre-eminent reality.

The Old Testament is mainly built upon a great and detailed system of types, symbols and parables. This method runs on into the New Testament so far as the four Gospels and the Apocalypse are concerned, but with one over-ruling difference. The New Testament expounds and explains the Old, and, in this supreme matter of life, it overwhelms us with the revelation that that Tree of Life is but a type and symbol of a Person, namely, God's Son, Jesus Christ. On this point—focal point—a precise and inclusive statement is made by the Apostle John in his first Letter: *And the witness [or testimony] is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life*" (I John v. 11, 12). That is categorical. The whole letter must be read in the light of that statement. It makes *everything* Christo-centric. It puts human destiny upon His being the centre. It sums up the whole issue of life—or death—in Him!

Life in Christ, and Christ as the Life, is the horizon of all things.

(To be continued)

## HOW TO BRING A BLESSING

*"Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh."*

*"Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh"* (Genesis xlvii. 7, 10).

IT had taken God 130 years to make Jacob into this kind of man. The scene was a remarkable one. To any onlooker it must have seemed remarkable that a crippled old farmer should be in a position to confer a blessing on the greatest monarch of his day. But the wonder was even greater than that, for this bringer of a blessing was Jacob. It was remarkable indeed that Jacob, of all people, should have become a man with a ministry of blessing, both willing and able to convey to others a divine benefit in God's name.

This double mention of his blessing Pharaoh was no isolated act. Seventeen years later he was able to bless the two sons of Joseph (xlviii. 20), and the story makes it clear that his pronouncements over the two lads were no merely human

expressions of goodwill, but words uttered under divine inspiration and even contrary to Joseph's own ideas. Subsequently Jacob pronounced individual blessings on the twelve sons who would form the tribes of Israel (xlix. 1 - 28). We can understand the great Moses being competent to bless the twelve tribes, for we would expect such a man of God to have the power to bless, but we find it indeed remarkable that Jacob should have this same ministry.

## WE ARE CALLED TO BLESS

Yet this is the criterion for human life, and by this will the earthly history of each one of us be judged. Was that man an instrument for bringing God's blessing into the lives of others? Was that woman one who had a ministry of blessing? This is the ultimate question. It may take years of God's instruction and discipline to make this possible in our case, as it did in the case of Jacob, but the

verdict on our lives will be as to whether God was able to pour out His blessing through us. As we have said, it took God 130 years to bring Jacob to that point, but His patience prevailed. Not until seventeen years later did Jacob, in his final act of worship, reach the great climax of faith which is referred to in Hebrews xi: 21. This, however, marked a point of real attainment—"Jacob blessed Pharaoh".

It was not that the patriarch felt in a position to do so. He did not *feel* the dignity and authority which he displayed. It is clear from his words to Pharaoh that he was painfully aware of his own shortcomings. In his body he was a cripple; in his self-judgment he felt grievously insufficient and unworthy to be compared with other servants of God. Yet this was the man who could stand before the great Pharaoh in his own utter weakness and pronounce a blessing on him. When Jacob thought himself clever and successful he had no blessing to give. It was now that he was so acutely aware of his own inadequacy that his real spiritual ministry was made possible. It is always like that. God is constantly working with us, as He was with Jacob, with the one purpose in view of so dealing with us that out of our own nothingness we have power with God to bring blessing to others.

### GIVING NOT GETTING

An outstanding feature of this new phase of Jacob's career was that he no longer was a man grasping at possession, but one who took pleasure in giving to others. All Jacob's life had been occupied with the matter of divine blessing. He had always realised that this is the most important factor in life, as indeed it is. But in those earlier years he had been intent on getting rather than giving the blessing. The blessing seemed so important to him that he had to grasp at it with all his might; indifferent to the effect of his action on others, only intent on getting and holding the blessing which he felt should have been his.

A big change had taken place. Sometimes you may read of the change of name from Jacob to Israel and wonder if anything had really changed in the man except his name. It certainly had. Although he is here called Jacob, he was also Israel. It was as Israel that he had decided to join his son Joseph (xlv. 28) and it was as Israel that he took the journey (xlvi. 1). Consider how the old Jacob would have entered Egypt. Think of how he would have planned to exploit this unexpected prominence of his son. Advantage-seeking and self-inter-

est would have led him to look for every opportunity of making use for selfish ends of the great influence which Joseph had with Pharaoh. The extent of the transformation can be measured by the fact that he seems to have had no such thoughts but only to have been intent on giving. He asked Pharaoh for nothing: he gave him the best that he had, a blessing from God.

In this he anticipated the words of the Lord Jesus Himself who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xxii: 35). We do not know when the Lord said this. It does not matter. The great thing is that He lived out His own words. All too sadly, most of us have to confess that while we accept the idea we do not put it into practice.

Christian fellowship means giving as well as receiving. The Lord joins us with other Christians that we should be able to bring a blessing to them. It is possible to have great sympathy with those whose complaint is that they are not helped by the messages which they hear from Sunday to Sunday. Every minister of the Word must take such complaints against himself very much to heart. Nevertheless, the complainers must also face a challenge. What is their objective in gathering together with other Christians? Do they come only to receive? Is their complaint only that *they* fail to get a blessing? If so, would it not be wise for them to consider again those words spoken by the Lord Jesus Himself? "It is *more blessed* to give . . ." The fellowship in which we are found by the will of God should never be looked upon as provided only for us to *get* a blessing. In the purpose of God it is meant to be a place where we contribute spiritual values to others. We need to beware lest, like Jacob, we should only be intent on getting, and getting. Instead, like the true Israel, we should have something to give in His Name.

Perhaps it may help us to learn something of how to exercise this ministry of blessing if we look closer at this transformed man.

### A TRANSFORMED MAN

As we have said, Jacob felt himself to be a weak man. In this lay the secret of his power with God and men. If we ask how he became weak in this way, the answer is that it all began when his natural strength was broken under the hand of God as he struggled all night at Jabbok. Before that occasion he had passed through twenty years of discipline and trial. In his relative, Laban, he found a man who was hard enough and sufficiently like



himself to cause him endless distress. Those were twenty years of suffering, yet there is no indication that the suffering made any change in Jacob. It is quite a mistaken idea to imagine that trials of themselves have any power to mature us spiritually. No, even after twenty years Jacob was still Jacob. Whether or not he had been prepared for his encounter with God by the things he had passed through is not stated. Perhaps he had. What he needed at that stage, however, was not more suffering but a real meeting with God from which he might emerge a truly broken man. This is what happened at Jabbok. When he had made all his plans and put them into execution, in his loneliness God met him and wrestled with him. The outcome, as we know, is that Jacob was reduced from what he had been to a weakened man who was no longer scheming or fighting for the blessing, but clinging to the Lord for it. That night, or rather as dawn broke on the following day, he received his new name of Israel.

At times one has imagined that the complete transformation took place in a moment, that from that hour the old Jacob ceased and an entirely new man called Israel took his place. It is clear from the narrative that this was not the case. Not only can one detect traces of the old nature still in operation but it is evident that the writer wished to make it clear that this is not what happened. Under the Spirit's inspiration he constantly changes from the name Jacob to Israel, and then back to Jacob again. No, there had not been an instantaneous change at Jabbok, though what had happened was radical in its outworking. That experience marked a new beginning for Jacob. Now he was a man in the hands of God and the work of transformation could proceed.

For this reason he still had to suffer. He had suffered much in the years before he met God in this way. After his new position of yieldedness one might perhaps imagine that his sufferings were over. Here again, the narrative shows plainly that God's ways with His servants are not what we think they should be. For the next period of more than twenty years, Jacob passed through a succession of much deeper trials, until at last he exclaimed in almost despair, "All these things are against me." (xlii. 36). They were not, of course. Even while he spoke in this way Joseph was ruling in Egypt and planning to provide comfort and a home for his old father. This was hidden from Jacob's eyes. The future usually is hidden from us. All we know is what Jacob felt, that one trial succeeds another, making life more difficult since we

capitulated to the absolute mastery of the Lord than it was before we had so yielded.

After Jabbok Jacob had to suffer from the bad behaviour of his sons (xxxiv), from the sad loss of Rachel, a loss which left a scar to the very end of his life (xlviii) and from the disgraceful conduct of Reuben (xxxv). Finally the worst blow of all fell with the apparent death of Joseph (xxxvii). This may seem hard and unnecessary for a man now called Israel, yet in reading the story one has a sense of a new mildness and submissiveness in his spirit. The old Jacob would surely have reacted in a much more violent way to those sons of his! It seems that the transformation was going on all the time, and most of all when he was least conscious of it. What had happened at Jabbok was becoming more inward, a kind of inward brokenness which is the real secret of spiritual transformation. So it is with us all. We are not made 'Israel's' in a moment, however sacred and significant that moment of encounter with the Lord may be. That is only the beginning. From then onwards we must be led through circumstances of testing and disappointment in order that in the end we shall emerge as those whose whole life is a benediction, a means of blessing.

#### GOD WAS WITH HIM

There is, however, still one factor of supreme importance in that fruitful last period of Jacob's life. He was where he was in the will of God and God Himself was with him.

When Israel decided to go down into Egypt to be with Joseph he made a significant pause before actually leaving the land of promise. He got as far as Beer-sheba, and there he called a halt. It is clear from what God said to him that he was halted by very real fears. He may well have wondered whether it was right to go down into Egypt under any circumstances. Abraham was a greater and a better man than he, and it had been manifestly wrong for him to go there. What should he do? Joseph was there and he longed to see his favourite son. Transport had been provided and it seemed so right and reasonable to proceed. Moreover there was famine in Canaan. But it was famine which had governed Abraham's decision. Jacob was not happy. It may be that he had set off rather impulsively, as we so often do, taking it for granted that God would be with him in his going. It is dangerous to take the presence and blessing of God for granted. Jacob perhaps realised this, and so made the whole party pause for a while at Beer-sheba



while he had new dealings with God over the matter.

So he set up an altar. We do not know what he offered, but we know from the rest of Scripture that the pattern for such an offering was that it should be a "whole burnt offering". He had to put all on the altar and to show, in this symbolic way, that everything belonged to God and was to be held in trust for Him. Jacob wanted to go into Egypt, in fact it was now the only thing on earth that he did want. But he needed to test his wishes against the will of God. He not only wanted to go, he may have judged it a right thing to do, but the natural mind can never be trusted to determine the way and the will of God. So on that altar Jacob handed back to God his own ideas and his own desires, and waited to see what God's response would be.

It does not seem that he had to wait long. Was it on the following night that God spoke to him? Or did he have to wait some days after making his

offering? We are not told. But we are told that in the night God spoke to him, calling him by that old familiar name of "Jacob", and giving him all the reassurance he needed to be freed from question or fear.

Here, then, is a further secret of Jacob's life of blessing. He waited for God. He made sure that his place of living and service were ordered by God, and he had the supreme comfort of God's own presence. "I will go down with thee into Egypt" (xlv. 4). Thus it was that Jacob who was really Israel, stood in the presence of Pharaoh and conveyed God's blessing to him. He was a weak man. He was a broken man. He was a deeply dependent man. But he was a transformed man. God had sent him. And God was with him.

So may we all be found in our sphere of work and witness, delivered from our own grasping for blessing, and living only to pass on blessings to others in the Lords' Name.

H. F.

## TO THE PRAISE OF THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE

*Ephesians i. 6, 12, 14.*

THREE times in this first chapter of the great epistle of the Church is the Divine objective for His people expressed. The Saints are "fore-ordained unto the adoption of children . . . unto the praise of his grace" vv. 5, 6. Again we are told that they are "predestinated according to the purpose of him . . . unto the praise of his glory" 11, 12. And again "ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise . . . unto the praise of his glory" vv. 13, 14. Adopted, predestinated, sealed—unto the praise of his glory. Exactly the same thought is set forth in Rom. viii. 29: "For whom he did foreknow, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son . . ."

The most dominant characteristic of the Eternal Son in the days of His incarnation was—not His power as shown forth in mighty miracles, not His wisdom that needed none to tell Him *what was in man*, not even His love and compassion, so abundantly shed abroad, but—His complete conformity to the will of His Father. "I delight to do thy will, O my God", was the key of His earthly life. The will, the motivation, the mind of the Father as manifested in Him, was the *ultimate*, the *highest* display of the moral glory of God. This was the genius, the all-inclusive principle that governed His life. His power, His wisdom, His love were all subordinated to and in perfect harmony with the

over-all principle of conformity to the Father's will and glory. Christ did not just *speak* holy things, He was "that holy thing" (Luke i. 35). He was "to the praise of his glory", as it is purposed that the saint shall be. There is something steadfast, unshakeable, final about the verb to *be*, that speaks of God Himself! "I AM hath sent thee"!

Christ told Pilate: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (John xviii. 37)\* He was the Truth (John xiv. 6) before He bore witness to the Truth. He *represented* God before He *presented* Him and no part of His oral *presentation* of the things of His Father conflicted in the *slightest degree* with His vital *representation* of the Person of the Father. All of His words and acts were primarily *Theocentric*—i.e. God-centred. "Christ hath once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God". His every act manward was not first of all for man's highest felicity, but for God's greatest glory. The purposes of God have never had creature-enjoyment as their end, The 24 elders and four living creatures sing in

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\* It is significant that the Greek word translated "witness" is the same as that from which we derive "martyr". In the early church the true "witness" of Christ and martyrdom were very closely related!

heaven: "Thou has created all things, and for *thy pleasure they are and were created*" Rev. iv. 11. Self-determinate man, the noblest work of that creative hand, was made in His image for two reasons. (1) That he might hold communion with God (2) That he might reflect the glory of God. Man's highest felicity and reward would be in exact proportion as he yielded himself to the fulfillment of this twofold purpose. *Certainly* man was not created to be kept out of the fires of Hell. Man would have kept out of Hell if God had left him uncreated. Moreover, Hell was never created for man anyway, but "for the Devil and his angels." In the fall of the first Adam, he and all his descendants became incapacitated to carry out God's twofold purpose, *communion with and representation of Himself*.

In the last Adam and His redemptive work and by impartation of the Spirit, the potentiality of fulfilling the twofold purpose is restored. So Christ suffered "that he might bring us to God." So God's purpose in redemption of man is practically iden-

tical with His purpose in creation, and everything is ultimately Godward. Not man's good first and God's glory second, but God's glory first and man's good second. This *must* be the order. A reversal of this order can produce nothing but a Babel of confusion, error, and wickedness. And that is just what Satan has accomplished in modern popular preaching.

We are obsessed with the idea, that Christ "left us an example, that we should follow his steps". Just as the Lord Jesus came here to do the Father's will and glorify Him first, that also is our responsibility. That as He was the "effulgence of his glory" (Heb. i. 2), so are we intended above all other things and before all other things: to "*be to the praise of his glory*". Like Him, we are placed here as saints, individually and corporately, first to *represent* Him and second to *present* Him. And our conduct and methods in *presenting* Him cannot be allowed to stultify or falsify our representation of Him or detract one iota from "the praise of his glory", else it is spurious and abominable.

J. R. G. (SELECTED)

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### WORKING THINGS TOGETHER

PULU, the forest nomad, stood at the open door of the simple missionary house which lay in the clearing by the river. He had heard of these strange white people who had come to live in his land, but he had never seen them. Nor could he see them now, for the house seemed deserted. He walked in through the open door. He was in the kitchen, and as he looked round he could see the oven and also the strange food which was laid out on the table.

At least he supposed that it was food. He picked up some of the white powder and put it into his mouth. It was sugar, and he liked the sweet taste. Encouraged by this he tried another white powder, but this was flour and its taste was far from pleasant. However he persevered. Next he picked up a small packet and sprinkled some of its contents into his mouth. This—though he did not know it—was bicarbonate of soda. It was horrible! He spat it out and decided not to try anything more. He passed through the door into the plantation and began to look around.

No sooner had he gone out of the kitchen than Mother came into it by another door. She had been working in another room, but now hurried into the kitchen to get busy with baking her cake. She looked at the table and, not knowing of the unex-

pected visit of Pulu, wondered who had been disarranging it, but concluded that the children must have been playing with the things before going down to bathe in the river.

The visitor wandered here and there, until he heard sounds at the edge of the forest and went over to where Father was working. It was a great pleasure to Father to see this man from the jungle. He did not know a great deal of the native's language, but he knew enough for them to talk together. They sat down on a fallen tree and talked for a long time.

For such a long time in fact, that James and Simon, the two boys, had finished their swim and Mother had baked her cake. The boys were in the kitchen with her, clamouring hungrily for food, so Mother blew the whistle which was the signal for calling Father. Father heard the shrill blast and rose up from his rustic seat, inviting Pulu to go back with him to the house.

This was a wonderful day for Pulu. He had first seen the white man and talked with him, and now he found himself in the kitchen with the white wife and the two white sons. They seemed friendly to him, and offered him a slice of the cake which had now been cut and was to be shared by the family.



Father asked him to have some, but he only replied by asking if this food had been made from the various powders on the table, and when told that it had, he pulled a wry face and declined to eat. "Not good", he said. But the white people seemed to think otherwise for they were all eating heartily. This made Pulu open his eyes widely. To him it had seemed horrible, and he could not understand how they could eat it. "Not good", he repeated, but Father would not have this, so he insisted "Good, very good." He held out a piece of his own slice for Pulu to try. Now Pulu did not want to be unfriendly, and as the piece was small he took it and put it into his mouth. To his surprise it was quite different in taste from the powders. He must have made a mistake. This food was good, and he was hungry, so without any more pressing he took a large slice and ate it all up.

Some of the cooking materials were still on the table, so he pointed to them and enquired how the cake could be good when such nasty things were in it. Simon was the first to see the reason for his perplexity. "Tell him that it is Mother", he said to his father, "tell him that the secret is in the way she mixes them together". Without waiting for his father to do this, Simon pointed to the powders and then said to Pulu, "Not good". He then pointed to his mother, made some miming actions

of mixing and then, pointing to the cake (or what was left of it) he said, "All good".

Father broke in to explain that only Mother knew how to mix the various materials in the correct way, and then of course she had to bake them in the oven. It was due to her skill that the good, the not so good, and even the nasty things were mixed and baked in such a way as to produce something which was so pleasant and health-giving. "All good", as Simon had so rightly said. It was not only Simon who had said "All good". Long, long ago, the apostle Paul had said the same thing about the life of a Christian. He had to taste things which were nice, things which were not so nice, and things which were nasty. But he had found that God is so wonderful that He is able to mix them up and deal with them in such a way that they all bring blessing into the lives of those who truly belong to Him. He wrote that "we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose" Romans 8. 28.

Mother and Father knew this too. Pulu did not know it—not then. Nor really did James and Simon. I can only hope that they learned it. And I hope that you will learn it too, for it is one of the most wonderful facts about Christian life.

H. F.

## YE ARE . . . A HOLY NATION

*Reading : Matthew xxi. 42 - 44 ; I Peter ii. 7 - 10.*

THESE passages refer, as you see, to that very solemn and, in some respects, tragic thing: the truth that all that could and should have been the inheritance and the vocation of Israel was lost by them and to them because of their unbelief, and was transferred to the Church. The Church is here designated by Peter as "a holy nation".

It is Peter who has taken those Old Testament words, and the words which the Lord Jesus Himself took from the Old Testament and transferred to Himself. Peter has a peculiar place in this transition, an interesting and very instructive place. The Lord had said to him: "*Thou art Peter [piece of rock], and upon this rock [of Peter's testimony, undoubtedly] I will build my church*" (Matthew xvi. 18). There is no doubt that in Peter's mind "the stone which the builders rejected" and which "was made the head of the corner" was identical with the rock upon which the Church would be built. Peter was the one who

heard that statement from the Lord, and it was Peter who so many years afterward took up the thought here in his Letter—the stone, the rock, the building of the Church thereupon and there-around. The Lord had, in that very connection of the rejected stone becoming the head of the corner, said: "*The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matthew xxi. 43). To Peter He had said: "*I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew xvi. 19), and here is Peter using this very phrase "a holy nation", answering to that which was in the declaration of the Lord Jesus as Israel was set aside: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation". Now Peter speaks of "a holy nation" to "*shew forth the excellencies of him*" corresponding to "*bringing forth the fruits thereof*".

Now Peter opens this Letter by indicating that he is addressing the scattered saints of the Dispersion all over the world: the "*sojourners of the*



*Dispersion*” in all these many nations and places, or parts of the earth, and he says: ‘Ye saints, scattered in the nations, dispersed over the earth, ye are a holy nation.’ Not ‘ye are going to be’, but ‘now, as scattered everywhere, you are a holy nation in the nations, but you are different from the nations’.

Our present emphasis is upon this one word: “*Ye are . . . a holy nation*”. It was upon that word ‘holy’ that the tragedy of Israel took place, and the transference of all the divine intention was effected. It was upon that one word that the Church inherited all that. The whole change-over, the terrible tragedy and loss of Israel, and the glorious inheritance of the Church hung upon one word—holy. Everything rested upon that. If Israel’s loss of the divine intentions for that people as a nation was all due to this one thing—failure in what God means by holiness—and if the Church comes in only on that ground, then this matter of what the Lord means by holiness is a very governing thing.

The Church is “sanctified in Christ Jesus”: Israel rejected Christ Jesus.

We could go as far as to say that there is no guarantee of the Church retaining its inheritance and vocation beyond its holiness. It could very well be said of people, even in this Christian dispensation: ‘It shall be taken from you and shall be given to those bringing forth the fruits thereof. Holiness is the only ground. You, no more than Israel, can claim to stand and abide on mere tradition, mere history, mere externals, or practice and teaching.’ The basis with God is holiness and what He means by that.

No one can contemplate the awfulness of Israel’s tragedy over these two thousand years without feeling that they are in the presence of something very great and important, and, in a sense, of something very terrible—this matter of holiness. And you know that there are other words into which this one word is translated. It simply means—as we often say—sanctified, separated, set apart for God. There are many ways of expressing it, but that is what it is. It denotes something which belongs to God, solely and wholly, and, belonging to God, it is sacred, holy, sanctified, separated from all that is contrary to God. That is holiness.

For light in this matter we have to go, of course, back to the Old Testament, and we begin with the realisation that after man’s disobedience at the beginning—and that is the heart of the trouble of all unholiness, as is here stated—the whole world (to

use the phrase of an Apostle) fell into the arms of the wicked one: “*the whole world lieth in the evil one*” (I John v. 19). That is the revelation of the early chapters of the Bible. We need not stay to emphasise, illustrate or to cite. It is there. God beheld, looked down, and saw that *all* men had gone astray—“the whole world lieth in the evil one”. And then God moved to extricate from that world in the lap of the evil one a people of a different kind.

We have His move with Abraham—and here, dear friends, with all your interest in the life of Abraham, in your reading and study of that life, remember that the heart of everything where he was concerned was this one thing: to separate him from this world. So the word came to Abraham: “*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house*” (Genesis ii. 1) . . . ‘Get thee out’! This is a literal, geographical movement, but it contains a spiritual principle—a getting out of that realm lying “in the evil one”. So Abraham went out of Ur of the Chaldees. In a typical sense, he went out from this world that was lying “in the evil one”.

Then God promised Abraham a son. He made promise of Isaac, and then went away and left him, as He so often seems to do when He has made a promise. He leaves us for a long time—but, you notice, with one object. Why did God promise and then not fulfil His promise for so long, and leave Abraham to be so tested and tried by His word? For this one thing only: that son had to be different from all other sons, He could not come the natural way, could not be like other sons of this world. He must be born peculiarly by God’s act. And so God saw to it that, although He promised, the natural way was impossible. It simply closed down. There was no hope along that line. When at length Isaac was born, he was God’s miracle, something not of this world but of God. Even so, God was going to ratify and confirm that principle. The day came when the lad had grown to youth and God said to Abraham: “*Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest . . . and offer him*” (Genesis xxii. 2), and so Isaac must go to death. All the natural ties were severed and broken and Isaac, being brought back, in figure, in resurrection from the dead, was simply put on supernatural ground again. The heavenly, divine, supernatural ground of things was confirmed by God in that event.

You see what God was doing? He was putting everything on to holy ground. God can give us things, and He undoubtedly does, and we know

it at the time, but then we lay hold and impinge upon them, holding them to ourselves: our natural life comes right in on this matter. The Lord takes us through drastic experiences to sever our natural selves from divine things to keep them holy, because even our affections are not always pure and holy. God puts everything on that ground, outside this corrupt, devil-ridden, devil-governed world. And who will say that that is not the state of the world to-day?

God did it with Abraham, and that is where He made His start toward a holy nation. He laid the foundation in holiness. Then His promise and covenant with Abraham reached the stage of a nation being in existence, and Israel is in Egypt—in the world. There is no doubt about it. They were in the lap of the devil, the evil one, for Pharaoh is a type of the prince of this world. You notice that the Lord takes pains to show what a tyrant he is and how evil he is. I venture to say that there are few people in this world who would endure half of what Pharaoh endured before he let those people go! God went through plague after plague, right up to the tenth, which was death itself, for one purpose. On the one side, He was showing the nature of the evil one. On the other side—well, He met Moses, as you know, in the desert, at the bush alive with fire but never consumed, and this is the man who is going to bring that people out of the power of darkness, out of the bondage of the prince of this world, out of this evil kingdom. God met him there, and what did He say? "*Put off thy shoes from off thy feet for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground*" (Exodus iii. 5). The instrument, in figure, in type, must be separated from the evil ground, the evil earth, the evil kingdom. No one who is still in bondage himself can lead another soul out of bondage, and no one who is not separated from this world himself can help other people into a life with God. So the very instrument, Moses himself, has to go on to holy, consecrated, separated ground. With what? *Fire!* Between this world and that, between God and the evil one, there is a fire which never dies, a fire which draws the line of distinction between what is holy and what is not holy.

And so Moses goes to Egypt with his commission—and we know the story. Yes, the people are in a kingdom, in a world which has to be repudiated, and they have to be brought out, but it is by virtue of precious blood, the blood of the lamb and the blood of the Passover—by the mighty, efficacious blood of a lamb without spot or blemish.

Separated by precious, holy blood—and this is Peter speaking again: "*Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (I Peter i. 18, 19).

You would think that that had effected it! But they were in the wilderness for forty years, and what is the one thing that came out so clearly during those forty years? Although they are out of Egypt, Egypt is not out of them. Although they are separated geographically, spiritually their hearts are still back in Egypt. They are talking about Egypt, hankering for Egypt after all. And so we come to Jordan, the mighty overflowing Jordan, lying between them and that life as a nation which is to satisfy God, fulfil a holy vocation. They go over—and at last their hearts are out of Egypt.

You see, the principle is working all the time. God is carrying this thing very deep.

You pass on to the later history of that nation, when they go into captivity and exile, and a remnant comes back. Do you remember that crisis in the Book of Ezra, when the remnant comes back and the house is being restored, beautified? It was over one thing—the people had married foreign wives, and the whole work was spoiled and came under arrest. It was as though God said: 'We are not going on with this'. You read again what Ezra did over that matter! He brought everything up short on this question of mixed marriages. Again, all this is a figure of spiritual mixture, which God will not have: it is unholiness. The mark and line of distinctiveness between what is of God and what is not of God is drawn hard and fast.

Well, what are we going to say to all this? That is a very brief and imperfect survey, but, dear friends, do you see that the very beginning of the Christian life rests upon this one historic law of God, which He cannot overlook? The beginning of the Christian life is called 'being born anew', or, more correctly, 'being born from above'. What does it mean? It means all that Isaac's birth and resurrection meant in figure—that by our very new birth we are "delivered . . . out of the power of darkness, and translated . . . into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Colossians ii. 13). Our birth, our conversion, the very beginning of our Christian life is an absolute separation of two kingdoms, the transference from one to the other. The one is an unholy realm into which we are born and to which we belong by nature. The other is a holy realm—"Ye are . . . a holy nation", a nation separated from this world unto God.



New birth means that, and, oh! that that should be made clear to all! What an utter thing this is, at the beginning, right through! The Lord Jesus left no doubt about this. There must be a cleavage, utter and absolute. He would take risks with people. You would say: 'Why put people off? Why run the risk of offending them? Why discourage them, saying Except, except, except . . . all the time?' He was taking all the risks necessary over this because of its awful reality. You cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven while you cling in any way to this kingdom which is inimical to God. The two things cannot go together. The one is unholy and the other holy. At new birth we cross a line, a line as broad as the Red Sea and the Jordan, and as broad as the Cross of the Lord Jesus. At new birth we have entered into a life of holiness, of complete separation unto God. It is to be a walk in holiness—and how much the New Testament has to say about this! We are to be separated unto God in heart, spirit and life from this world, and, if we knew it, a very large degree of our spiritual education and our discipline in the Christian life, under the hand of the *Holy Spirit*, has to do with those things in us which are mixed up. We are trying to make the best of two worlds, trying to keep together in compromise things which do not belong before God and which are going to spell disaster for us as truly as they ever spelt disaster for Israel. We are going to lose the kingdom. It is a tremendous thing! The Lord calls for distinctiveness of life and destiny. Is our life, dear friends, in this world, in our connections and associations, quite distinct? Is there no mistaking to what realm and to whom we belong? Or are we mixed up, compromising, keeping on good terms with this world and its people under the devil's hand? If so, we stand to lose terribly.

What sort of testimony have you where you work, in your business and its associations? What sort of testimony have we in the church? Are we really registering and making our mark in the

church? Do we count, or are we passengers? Is there something about our lives which says: 'This man, this woman, is utter for God. There is no doubt about it. You see it all the time. He, or she, is not playing at things. There is no compromise in him or in her.'?

This sounds hard, but it is necessary. You see what is involved—the secret of power is holiness. If our lives are powerless it may be due to a lack of this utterness for God, separation unto God; due to compromise somewhere, somehow, with the prince of this world who is robbing us of our spiritual power and vitality on his own ground. The secret of power is holiness. The secret of a testimony that counts is a holy life. It is not our teaching, our truth, our practice, religious ordinances, our forms, in the first place. Our real testimony is the testimony of a holy life. It counts far more than all our words.

And remember—this is the secret of divine support. The Lord will commit Himself to His own ground—holiness. The Lord will stand by those who stand for Him in His nature. The Lord will look after such. Mark you, whatever we may have in this life, in this world—and we may have a lot—if we have not got the Lord with us at the last it is no gain, but a terrible loss. Israel had the ordinances and the oracles, the tradition and all that. They had a mighty lot, but at the last they lost the kingdom. It was no gain.

Well, now, what are we concerned about? I can focus it all down to one thing—the Lord being with us and committing Himself to us, and I am concerned about a testimony in power, a life that counts for God, leaving a mark for God, being remembered for what was of God. This is the only justification of our having come this way at all, and, as I see it, all that depends upon this utter separation unto God, gathered into this word: holiness. "Ye are . . . a holy nation."

May we answer to the description, and to us will be the preciousness.

## AT THE CROSSROADS

*"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls"* (Jeremiah vi. 16).

AT some point—not quite easy to fix—a false current had entered the stream of the life of the Lord's people. Small at first, it had gathered

momentum, until it had taken control and was carrying everything before it.

The effect was the almost total loss of a central and controlling, integrating authority; a loss of one uniting vision and objective. Out of this there arose confusion; no one knowing what *was* right or wrong. This confusion and uncertainty became wearing and wearisome, and futility took the heart



out of them. The inevitable result of all this was division.

Some wearily accepted the situation and sought to neutralize it by compromise: Some, numbed and bewildered, stood with hand on hips (metaphorically) hoping that something would come round the corner and things would improve. Others were fearful and anxious as to where it would all lead to.

To this situation God spoke in the words quoted above. It was a pointer as to the way, and a challenge to courage, faithfulness, and humility.

"Stand in the ways and see", said the Lord.

The ways were the crossroads; the place of alternatives. Go back to where you made the wrong choice, took the wrong turning, and got off the way of blessing. In the light of the unhappy present, reconsider your decisions. Ask yourselves whether 'the old paths', with all their difficulties and conflicts, were not better than this present.

"Stand". Pause, reflect, consider, relax, break the spell.

The case with Israel seems definitely to come down on the side of "the old paths". There was then an authoritative voice; a throne overhead, a vision and purpose uniting, co-ordinating; a distinctive objective, and an impact upon peoples near and far. Those days of David and Solomon were

such 'old paths'. They were days when Heaven was in evidence.

Then came that false current in the nature of tiring of the heavenly, they stooped to the earthly, the tangible, the present, the popular and less ostracized. So the realm and level began to change, until the situation in Jeremiah's time was the general. But people were weary of soul.

If it is thought that the diagnosis which we have given is strained or a mistake, look at the inclusive answer in chapter xvii, verse twelve:

"A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary".

The rule of the heavenly is the sanctuary; the refuge and rest. It was the way of the opened Heaven, which is the way of God's satisfaction. Says the Lord: "And ye shall find rest for your souls". We seem to have heard words like those before.

The reconsideration at the crossroads must lead to action. Having stood, asked, and seen—"walk therein". Repent, return, decide, do! "Walk therein".

The open mind and heart. The submissive and humble will. The honest and courageous resolve and committal.

"Stand". "Ask". "Walk". "Find rest".

## AN AWAKENED SENSE OF DIVINE DESTINY

WHAT is more tragic than to see individuals who are placed here by God to fulfil some unique and glorious destiny, still wandering aimlessly with no awakened *sense of divine purpose or calling*. Thousands who sit in church pews week after week have somehow missed that one basic ingredient which alone can give meaning, direction, purpose and dedication to life: *the sense of divine destiny*.

Man was designed as the masterpiece of creation, and as one of his greatest gifts from God, he was given a built-in mechanism which works much like a compass. This inner compass is an inner sense or consciousness placed in every man by God that He might forever have some means to tug upon the man of His creation no matter how indifferent or unresponsive he might have become toward God.

To better understand just how this inner compass works, suppose we visit a plant where mariner's compasses are being manufactured. The needles of the compasses would point in every direction if they were not magnetized. In this process of being magnetized each needle receives a peculiar power. From that moment on it points only

to the north and is constant and true for ever. The compass needle can now be depended upon; it is predictable. It no longer points toward every object on the horizon. All of the heavenly bodies try to attract it; the sun may dazzle it, meteors may beckon it; stars may twinkle at it as though trying to win its affection. But the magnetized needle remains true to its objective. With a finger that never errs in sunshine or in storm, it points constantly toward its star.

Consider what God did in that first morning of creation when He magnetized every needle (Adam's and every *man in Adam*)—magnetized them with the eternal purpose they were created to serve. Yet we know, all too well, how the Enemy slipped into the Garden and the needle was deflected toward other purposes. Now the needle, even though it still has its original pull, seems mostly unpredictable. For the most part it seems almost to have lost its sense of destiny and direction. Like an erratic compass it seems pulled by whatever is closest to it. Yet in those precarious hours when one is left all alone, in those fleeting seconds when life seems almost to ebb away—the needle some-

how flicks back to its "true north" as though to remind each one just how far he has missed or just how little he has fulfilled the divine purpose for which he was once magnetized by God.

It is indeed a crisis hour when God awakens man and he by his own choice wholly gives himself for a new spiritual magnetizing and synchronizing to fulfil God's eternal purpose. Suddenly life takes on new meaning. He realises that the most important thing about anything is its purpose and it is with purpose we must always begin. Understanding purpose gives full meaning to everything.

Look around you in the room where you sit. Consider every object that comes before your eye: the chairs, the table, the lamp, the rug. What is the most significant thing about each of these? It is not the size, the colour, the nature or the quality—though these may seem to be important. The primary thing about any of these is its *purpose*. If a chair will not hold one up as he sits on it, the size, the colour or the quality really do not matter.

If the table does not fulfil its purpose as a table, everything else about that table which seems important becomes unimportant. Its design, style, finish or condition has little significance if it will not hold a lamp, books or the family dinner.

Just think then what happens when one's life is magnetized by ultimate direction and eternal purpose! When our long-term objectives are accurately focused and fully supported by our physical industry and spiritual powers, then size, quality, condition—nothing of lesser importance can pull our needle. When one's life is really dedicated to its mission, then distractions lose their power. No moon that shines with borrowed light, or meteors that dazzle but never guide, can turn the needle of one's purpose from God's ultimate "north". It is perfectly astounding how undreamed of mental and spiritual faculties rush to our assistance when once we have committed our whole soul to one unwavering aim.

From *Unto Full Stature* by De Vern Fromke.

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## The 1965 MOTTO

We are hoping to have the next motto card ready in October. For several years we have had difficulty in meeting the demand and friends who have written late have been disappointed. We therefore advise early ordering.

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## AESCHI (SWITZERLAND) 1964

THERE is a spiritual fellowship constituted by the ministry of this little paper which can never be more than spiritual. That is, it will never be possible for the readers in so many parts of the world to meet in one place at one time—until we are in glory. But we feel that it may be a ministry of Christ to you all if we tell you something of what is experienced when a *representative* gathering takes place, as in the case of Aeschi 1964.

Through many years, there has always seemed to be a special blessing from the Lord on times when—out of the nations—His people gather together. These occasions so much savour of the goings up of the tribes of Israel in olden days as they sang their “Songs of Ascents”, converging upon Zion.

The meeting after long separation and—often— isolation ; the discovery of so much unrealised mutual experience ; the sharing of the inner history of His dealings ; the song and prayer together ; and the prepared feast of heavenly food ; all combine to result in new vision, renewed strength, and holy inspiration to leave the mountain-top for the valleys and plain again. So it has been—in the Lord's goodness—once more this year in Switzerland.

As to the place: Aeschi is a village in the Bernese Oberland, some three thousand feet (1.000 metres) above sea level above the Lake of Thun. Below, in full view, lies that lake, stretching from Thun to Interlaken. In the early morning of a Lord's Day there spring to mind spontaneously the words:

“ Oh, Sabbath rest by Galilee ;  
 Oh, calm of hills above,  
 Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
 The silence of eternity,  
 Interpreted by love.”

Above, and on either side of the village, stretching to the horizon, are the mighty mountains of the Oberland, with their year-round snows and green valleys.

The Lord has indeed given us an ideal spot for these gatherings in the last seven years. Not the least of the blessings is the Christian co-operation of the proprietors of the hotel in which we accommodate the main part of our conference guests. In addition, we exhausted all other available accommodation round about, and at meeting times we were crammed to capacity. This will raise a serious question should it be that another conference is considered.

As to those attending: some ten or eleven countries were represented, the largest contingent coming from France.

Now, perhaps, you are impatiently waiting to know about the ministry.

We started each day with "Prayers" at the breakfast-tables. A brief message was given before prayer. This ministry was shared: Mr. LAMBERT, Mr. WARKE and Mr. SPARKS taking it. Then we met for the morning session at 10.30 o'clock. Throughout the conference Mr. SPARKS had as his morning theme: "Into the mind of God". While many Scriptural references to the 'Potter' and 'vessels' were used, the basic one was Jeremiah xviii. The governing thought was that the vessel being made by the Potter is an expression of the mind of the Potter, so that all the experiences of the clay and the sovereign activities of the Potter are related to a Mind which will be fully seen in the being and service of the vessel—progressively now—and consummately in the ages to come. It will be appreciated that, for six full mornings to be occupied, much ground was covered. The afternoons—with two exceptions—were free from any arrangement.

Then the evening sessions throughout were occupied with the theme: "Into the *heart* of God". This led us by the eight stages in the life of Abraham from the repudiation of the world to that climax of oneness in the passion of God in the offering of the "Son, whom thou lovest"; in which the final step into God's heart was taken, and God was able to say "My Friend".

The two afternoons referred to above as 'exceptions' were: one when we went together in coaches to Grindelwald, so that the good of the country could be enjoyed, especially by those who were new to the country.

The other was a surprise to us all.

Without any expectation or hint of the matter, we were asked if it would be possible to have a baptismal service, as someone who had come to the Lord at Aeschi the year before was concerned to give that testimony. When it was known that the enquiry had been made, another let it be known that he was only waiting for such an opportunity. After seeking for facilities for this service of testimony, and letting it be known that it was definitely in view, two others came forward with the same request. Thus, on the Friday afternoon, we set out again by coaches to a distant small town where the Pastor had placed his church and baptistery at our disposal, and did everything possible to help. We packed the chapel, and not many will forget the so precious and blessed time of life which we had. This was a high-light of the conference, and we were all filled with joy.

Our two Lord's Day mornings saw us gathered around the Lord's Table. At these times there was a stream of spontaneous worship from many present in their various languages. Truly a testimony to the "One Loaf", the One Body, and the One Life.

All the ministry was given in three languages: firstly in English, and then interpreted into German and French. The hymns also were printed in the three languages. This created no confusion in the praise, and the singing was a very inspiring part of the conference.

This conference, although triumphant and full, was not gone through without conflict. That is not something at which to be surprised, but the forms taken by the conflict are rarely the same, and can gain some strength from their unexpectedness. However, we are not aware of anyone being able to say that Aeschi 1964 was not in life or power.

## “ AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING ”

### THE GREAT TRANSITION

(continued)

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

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

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

Dr. CAMPBELL MORGAN has a fine paragraph on this in his *Acts of the Apostles*. It reads thus:

“The martyrdom of Stephen created a crisis in the history of the Church.

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

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

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



What then was the great transition?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## GOD'S KEEPING POWER

*Numbers xiii. 25 - 33 ; xiv. 4 - 10 : Joshua xiv. 6 - 12.*

**I**T is a distressing fact that some Christians can believe in God's saving power, but they cannot believe in His keeping power. They do not realise that He Who is the Giver of grace is also the One Who maintains us in His grace. Let us see from the Scriptures how we who have been saved by God can be kept by Him.

In Josh. xiv. 11 Caleb says: "I am as strong this day as in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war and to go out and to come in." "To go out and go in" refers to everyday life: "for war" refers to life under exceptional circumstances. As Caleb's strength was in the day when Moses sent him to spy out the land of promise, so it was in the day when he uttered these words. He was able to cope with the ordinary demands of daily life and also with the demands of life under conditions of special stress. Though forty years had elapsed in the interval, he was as strong as he had been in his earlier days. Here we see God's keeping power. As Caleb was in the prime of manhood, so he was in old age. He was no less vigorous at eighty-five than he had been at forty. There is only one explanation for this, he had been kept by God. We are totally unable to keep ourselves in the grace of God. There is no guarantee that even five years after we have been saved we shall be found in the measure of faith which we had in our earlier Christian life. We cannot by our own effort abide in the grace of God; it is He alone Who can maintain us in His grace.

How did Caleb come to experience God's keeping power? Josh. xiv. 4 answers the question. "Because that he wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel." And how did he wholly follow the Lord? We are told in Numbers xiii and xiv. After the ten spies had brought back an evil report of the promised land, "Caleb stilled the people before Moses and said, Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." "We are well able to overcome" is the declaration of a person who wholly follows the Lord. He believes that victory over every foe is assured because the promises of God are trustworthy and because the Lord is with His people. Brothers and Sisters, do you believe? Many people believe, but their faith is a vacillating faith. They sing their song of praise, but though the words are

right there is something wrong with the tune. In Caleb's case it was otherwise. He sang the right words in the right tune. Listen to the clear notes: "Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome." "Let us go up at once"! A person who wholly follows the Lord and reckons Him to be trustworthy is one who does the will of God and does it at once.

What about the ten spies? They looked at the inhabitants of the land and saw that they were "men of stature" and their cities were "fenced and very great". They looked at themselves too, and in their own sight they were "as grasshoppers". Their eyes were fixed on the difficulties that challenged their advance. And herein lies the reason why so many Christians fail to experience God's keeping power—difficulties fill the vision.

God does not want us to gaze at the mountains obstructing our path, He wants us to say to the mountains: "Remove hence"! (Matt. xvii. 20). Many people are all the time thinking of their failures, and by so doing they pave the way for further failure. Defeat is certain if we are constantly contemplating defeat. If we keep thinking there is no way through, that thought blocks the way through. We are courageous only as we keep God's promises in view. Alas that so many of God's people lack the virile faith that characterised Caleb and concentrate their thoughts on the intensity of their sufferings and the insurmountable nature of their difficulties! But those who do not fear "the sons of Anak"—the giants that inhabit the land of promise—are "well able to overcome." Caleb was so unafraid of the Anakim that he actually requested Joshua to appoint as his portion in the land of promise the mountain in which they had their stronghold (Josh. xiv. 12 - 15). He was not dismayed by the fact that they were "men of great stature", nor by the fact that their cities were "great and fenced", so he overcame them without any strain. The whole question in relation to overcoming is: Are you trusting in yourself, or are you trusting in the Lord? If you are relying on yourself then of course you have to consider whether the Anakim are strong or weak, and whether their cities are well fortified or not; but if your reliance is on God, then the question of human resources does not even arise. If you are trusting in God there is no ground for fear since victory is assured to all who put their trust in Him.

There is another noteworthy matter in connec-

tion with Caleb. He exhorted the whole congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "Rebel not against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us." He sought to show the children of Israel that in the land itself there were resources upon which they could draw in order to possess it. "The people of the land . . . are bread for us", he declared. What is bread? Bread is something to eat. Bread is something that brings increased strength. The inhabitants of the land were admittedly "men of great stature", but Caleb proclaimed that they were food for God's people. He not only honoured God's promises, he despised the difficulties that stood in the way of their realisation. And every true believer, like Caleb, honours God and lightly esteems all obstacles. But this leaves no room for pride, for only they who humble themselves before God are able to take their stand on His side.

Every time you meet a difficulty, every time you find yourself in an impossible situation, ask yourself this question: Am I going to starve here, or am I going to eat the food that is set before me? If you are relying on the Lord for victory and let His overcoming life be manifested in you, you will find fresh nourishment and increased vitality in accepting as "bread" those Anakim that are contesting your progress. Do bear in mind that people who do not eat well cannot grow into maturity. Many people take the Word of God as their meat and the doing of His will as their meat, but they reject the Anakim as unpalatable food. The more we eat such food the stronger we shall become. Caleb is a grand illustration of this. Because he accepted the Anakim as "bread" he was still full of vitality at the age of eighty-five. So many Anakim had been assimilated by him over the years that he had developed a constitution which showed no trace of age. So it is in the spiritual realm. Some brothers and sisters have met few difficulties, but they are spiritually feeble. The explanation is, they have not consumed enough Anakim. On the other hand there are those who have met and overcome difficulty after difficulty, temptation after temptation; and they are full of vigour. The reason is, they have fed well on Anakim. Every difficulty and every temptation Satan puts in our way is food for us. This is a divinely appointed means of spiritual progress. The sight of any great trouble strikes terror into the heart of those who do not believe God, but those who trust Him say: "Praise God, here is some more food!" All our trials, without exception, are bread for us, and as we accept one trial after the other, we are more and more richly

nourished and the result is a continuous increase of strength.

Let us now look into the practical outworking of this. We must not forget that there is a condition attached to God's keeping power. If we do not trust Him He is unable to keep us. In order to know His keeping power we must believe whole-heartedly in His promises. If we are harbouring doubts about our ability to overcome, then we are discrediting His ability to keep us. Every morning when we rise we should say to Him: "I thank Thee for keeping me yesterday, and to-day Thou wilt still keep me. I do not know what temptations will befall me, and I do not know how I can overcome; but I believe Thou wilt keep me". I Peter i. 5 makes it clear that God keeps those who have faith in Him. It reads: "who by the power of God are guarded through faith". It is not we who have to grapple with temptations and try to overcome them; it is the keeping power of God that will get us through, and we must believe in His ability to save us from giving way to sin. Provided we rely implicitly on Him, even when we are unexpectedly assailed by temptations an amazing thing happens. In a way we cannot account for something wards off "all the fiery darts of the evil one". It is "the shield of faith". It comes in between us and Satan, so that his fiery darts cannot reach us. Instead of hurting us they beat upon the shield of faith and rebound on Satan himself.

Paul said, "I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (II Tim. i. 12). The Lord was able to keep Paul; but Paul did something that enabled the Lord to keep him. Paul committed himself to the Lord. If you believe in Him, then you must commit yourself to Him. He can only keep what has been handed over to Him. Many people fail to experience the blessedness of His keeping power because they have never put themselves into His care. They have never said to Him: Lord, I hand myself over to Thee and commit to Thee the keeping of my life. Brothers and Sisters, have you placed yourselves in His hands? If you truly have, then you will be able to say with Paul, "I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day."

If your life is truly in His hands then God will fulfil in you the promise "to guard you from stumbling and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy" (Jude verse 24). We stumble if we strike against something in a moment when we are unconscious of



any obstruction in the way. Praise God, His preserving grace operates beyond the realm of our consciousness. Brothers and Sisters, if you commit yourselves unreservedly into His care, you will marvel at the way you are kept even when you have been unaware of danger.

When temptation suddenly assails and love is required, you will find love welling up from within and flowing out spontaneously to meet the challenge. Or if sudden temptation demands patience, without your giving it a moment's thought patience will rise up to meet the need. Praise God, as the life we receive from Adam expresses itself spontaneously, so also does the life we receive from Christ. We inherit our bad tempers from Adam and can get angry without the slightest effort of

will. We inherit pride from Adam and we can be proud without any deliberate decision. In the selfsame way, all who have committed themselves into His keeping, can be meek without making any attempt to be humble. The same spontaneity of manifestation that characterises the life we have received from Adam also characterises the life we have received from Christ. His life expresses itself unconsciously and without effort on our part. Provided we trust in His promises and commit ourselves utterly to Him, we shall be kept from this day to the day of His return, and kept without blemish. Thank God, the saving grace into which He has brought us to-day is worthy of our trust and will carry us triumphantly through every trial that lies ahead.

W. N.

## THE TIME IS AT HAND

*"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (Rev. i. 3).*

*"Behold I come quickly, Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. xxii. 7).*

**D**URING the course of the book of the Revelation there are seven pronouncements of blessing. We are all familiar with some of the other and more obvious 'sevens', but we must not ignore these, especially as two of them are virtually the same. In both i. 3 and xxii. 7 a special blessing is promised for those who heed or keep the words of the book. This seems to be a very rare phenomenon even in the books of the Bible. Moreover in both cases there is a stress on the nearness of the Coming of the Lord. We who feel that the return of Christ is indeed near at hand must look again at the book to discover what is expected of us if we are to receive the promised blessing.

How can we obey the book? The seven letters to the churches contain some clear exhortations which call for obedience, but since the appeal and promises are repeated at the end of the book, we find it impossible to limit the scope of our enquiry to them alone. It is not just the seven letters but the whole book which has been sent "to the churches" (xxii. 16). We will therefore leave the call of the seven letters and consider the remainder of the book. We shall find much which is difficult to understand or impossible to identify with cer-

tainty, but if we prayerfully read through the chapters we can surely discover something of the call and challenge to us all. We can at least find three main issues.

### I. HEAVENLINESS

The whole book is a call to heavenliness or perhaps better, heavenly-mindedness. We do not mean a lack of practical sense, far from it, but that we must learn to consider events from their divine standpoint, remembering that in every happening there is always a hidden aspect behind the things that men on earth can hear and see.

### EMPHASIS ON ANGELIC MINISTRY

A striking feature of the book is the repeated use of the word "Angel". In almost every chapter we have our attention drawn to this matter of angelic service, usually, though not always, as it refers to beings who do not belong to this world of men. The simple truth is that there is much more going on in the unseen realm than we can appreciate. It is only when the veil is drawn aside that we are reminded of these heavenly activities. Not that they are remote from us—far from it. When John was so overcome as to try to worship one of them, the angel divulged that he was engaged in the very same enterprise as John and his brethren, "I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus" (xix. 10). Here

then is the first point to notice, that in this supreme concern of our lives heaven is fully committed and hard at work.

### PERMITTED EVIL

There is no mention of angels in chapters iv, vi and xiii. There is no need for it in chapter iv, since the chapter commences with a door opened in heaven and a call for John to go up through it. Chapters vi and xiii, however, are occupied with earthly events, but nevertheless these events are viewed from heaven's standpoint. Evil is there, but it is permitted evil.

Chapter six tells us of the opening by the Lamb of the seals. As each of the first four seals is broken a 'Living One' orders the corresponding horseman to 'come'. We are horrified to see the terrible effects of these rides of evil and death, but we must not lose sight of the important reminder of divine sovereignty in the phrase "There was given . . ." (verses 2, 4 and 8). They could assume no powers of their own but could only act according as they were allowed to do.

The fifth seal also treats of the reign of evil, disclosing the outcry of those slain for the testimony which they held. For them there is comfort in the assurance that God and not evil is still on the throne, and an appeal for patience while the determined period of persecution shall have run its course, "until the tally should be complete" (verse 11, NEB).

This, then, is heaven's viewpoint. It is that evil only works as God permits it; the scale and duration of it being decided not by its perpetrators but by the decrees of heaven. There is a real blessing for all those who truly believe this and order their lives in the assurance that God is over-ruling everything to bring it to His own appointed objective.

Chapter thirteen brings us to Antichrist in full manifestation. Here we may hold our breath at this amazing revelation of the extent to which evil is to be permitted. This wicked one can speak evil of God Himself with apparent impunity; he "was allowed to mouth bombast and blasphemy" (ver. 5, NEB). We find it hard to understand how this can happen, let alone continue, but we are assured that it will do so, for "power was given unto him to continue forty and two months". However puzzling such an apparent triumph of evil may be, faith may rest in the assurance that a time limit has been fixed: God is still in perfect control.

There is worse to come. Permission has not only been given him to make war on God's people (that

is not new to any of us) but now he is allowed "to overcome them" (verse 7). This is the supreme test of faith, the more so as we are told that this evil personality is to be a miracle worker, deluding the world with his supernatural energies, though we are again reminded that this is only by God's permission, for they are "miracles it was allowed to perform . . ." (verse 14, NEB). The next verse shows this strange power at its zenith. There have always been miracles of Satan as well as miracles of God, but he had never before been able to impart life. We are told that "he had power to give life unto the image . . ." (verse 15). This is the A.V. but it is not a good translation for it admits of the possibility of Satan himself having divine power. Better and more correct is the statement of the R.V. "*it was given* unto him to give breath to it . . ."

This is surely not recorded for the mere intellectual interest of the majority of the readers for whom the events are remote or unlikely. No, there is a message in all this, and a blessing for all who heed it. It is that whatever may *seem* to be the power of evil, Christ is "Head over all things to the church . . ." Evil can only exist if it is permitted. A quick glance over into chapter xvii. 17 will reassure us: "God hath put it into their hearts to fulfil his will . . ." Amid all the wicked plots and powers of Satan and men, God is seen in perfect control, working surely towards His own objective. The world may look like a rudderless ship, swept along by the storms and tides of evil, but the hand of God is still on the helm. Even the wildest waves fulfil His will.

### THE NUMERICAL KEY

Chapter thirteen presents an appalling prospect of an earth in the convulsions of a religious, political and economic dictatorship, but it also contains two comments. They are, "Here is patience" (v. 10) and "Here is wisdom" (v. 18). The first seems clear enough. It is an exhortation to the suffering saints not to take affairs into their own hands but to exercise patience and faith in God. There is always a blessing for those who will heed this advice. The second, however, is not so obvious, though it is clearly of importance and the NEB version renders it "Here is the key".

What is this so-called key? It is a numerical one, the number 666. Throughout the centuries there have been countless attempts to interpret this mystic number by the numerical value of the Greek letters. It may be that this is some sort of cypher which will in due course identify one particular



man, and those who understand at the crucial time will be spared from the universal delusion which will entrap others. This is a matter for conjecture. We want to know what is the immediate and practical value for all readers.

God's number (everywhere apparent in Scripture and notably in this book) is seven. Man always comes short of God's glory, so that his number is always six. If we could think of the Trinity in terms of numbers, we should no doubt employ the term seven hundred and seventy seven. Similarly, if we think of man in his full expression we should identify him numerically by six hundred and sixty six. Here, then, is wisdom, to be able to distinguish between what is of God and what is after all only of men. It is most important to be able to make this distinction if we are not to be deceived about spiritual things. The Lord Jesus spoke of this same period in the passage in Matthew xxiv, and He warned us that the deceptions will be so great as to lead astray, if possible, even 'the elect' (xxiv. 24). His words were a warning. This chapter is also a warning. It is a call to discrimination as well as to faith and patience.

## HEAVENLY ORIGIN OF THE BRIDE

We cannot conclude this section on heavenly-mindedness without briefly mentioning the great vision of the end of the book. This is God's objective. This is what the book is about, and indeed it lies at the heart of the whole divine revelation. There is to be a people in eternal love-union with God's Son—His bride. And when his people appear they "come down out of heaven from God". It is not only that our destiny is in heaven; our origin is also heaven and all our life flows from heaven. The true people of God are "born from above" and their present life is in the realm above, "hidden with Christ in God". Their light is from heaven, and so are their resources; they are, in fact, a heavenly people. So they stand in contrast to those who are "earth dwellers", sharing in earth's interests, deceived by its delusions and overwhelmed by its ultimate judgment. If we can learn the practical implications of our heavenly calling we shall indeed have a share in the blessings of this book.

## II. HOLINESS

The second great call of the book is to holiness, divine holiness as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. The book has Him as its central theme and in it He is known as 'The Lamb', or as the word

actually means "the little Lamb". This word is found only once elsewhere (in John xxi. 15), and in the Revelation all but one of its references are to the Lord Jesus. The emphasis seems to be on His simplicity and on His sacrificial purity.

## THE THRONE OF THE LAMB

The first use of the title stresses both the Cross and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. "I saw standing in the very middle of the throne . . . a Lamb with the marks of slaughter upon him" (v. 6, NEB). This same combination of suffering and enthronement is found in almost half of the 28 references. Revelation is the book about the coming kingdom, the kingdom of God, and it is no secret that Christ is to occupy the Throne in that kingdom. He occupies it as the Lamb. His purity of devotion to the will of God, His humbling to death, these are His qualifications to be God's King. When He was here on earth He spoke with gracious eloquence, He performed miracles of mercy, He worked unceasingly to serve God and men, but these facts do not in themselves qualify Him for the Throne. No, the kingdom is given to Him because He is the Lamb, the little Lamb. In fact, of course, the words and works were only so powerful because of the Lamb-spirit which lay behind them. It is this spirit, this character, it is what He is rather than what He has done which marks Him out for the highest Throne of heaven.

## HOSTILITY TO THE LAMB

". . . they have but one single purpose among them . . . They will wage war on the Lamb" (xvii. 13, 14 NEB). Here is the real clue to all the violence and cruelty which fill the book; there is a war on, the war of two kingdoms. This world and its rulers will never accept God's King—the little Lamb. Satan's kingdom is built on pride and independence of God, and therefore he hates the simplicity and meekness of the Lamb, for they spell his undoing.

The Revelation points back to the great conflict of Calvary, reminding us that by being "the little Lamb" Christ fulfilled all those prophecies concerning the kingly "Lion of Judah" and trod Satan underfoot. The book also deals with the future day when this victory will be pressed to its final consummation, again by the Lamb. It discloses to us what would otherwise be a mystery, the reason for this long delay in pressing home the complete victory to its logical conclusion. A glorious angel appears and as he bestrides earth and sea



proclaims "there shall be delay no longer" (x. 6, RVM). It has been a postponement with a purpose.

We who live in this dispensational period of 'delay' are not waiting for Christ to conquer Satan. This He has already done, and as the Lamb He still bears the honourable scars of that conflict, even in the Throne. Nor are we waiting for Him to be exalted, for He has already sat down on the Fathers' Throne. We are waiting—and He is waiting too—for a redeemed people who can share the kingdom with Him and on the same "Lamb" basis, a people who have the inwrought character of the little Lamb. It is this character which is true holiness, holiness which has been tested in an extreme way. So the conflict in which the saints are found is a conflict for the Throne, and that means a conflict concerning holiness, concerning simplicity and meekness.

### THEY FOLLOW THE LAMB

Here, then, is a further clue to the blessings which can be enjoyed by those who heed the words of this book, for the book tells us of those who are not only redeemed by the Lamb, but who follow the Lamb (xiv. 4). This they must do through thick and thin, for the Adversary, the Accuser, will not be restrained in his savage assaults upon them. But this they *can* do, if they will keep close to the Lord, for it is His holiness which guarantees victory. There is no doubt about that victory. The important point for us is to realise that we may have a part in it provided we learn how to live and act in purity and humility—to "follow the Lamb" in all things. No wonder that so many references to the Second Coming of Christ contain an urgent call to holy living. It is all-important.

### III. FAITHFULNESS

The third call of this book, and perhaps the supreme one, is to faithfulness. Everywhere through the book we are confronted with the great tests laid on God's people, tests which in some cases are prolonged, all with a view to giving them the opportunity to faithfulness. We are also reminded of the great rewards which are given to those who pass these tests.

The first appearance of this call to faithfulness is in the letter to the suffering church at Smyrna, for whom no relief is promised until they have completed their period of trial, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (ii. 10). We then pass to the numberless throng re-

joicing before the throne, and find that "these are the men who have passed through the great ordeal" (vii. 14, NEB). From them we pass to the two witnesses of chapter xi. Their testimony, in the power of the Spirit, involves a long period (forty two months in actual time, but for them counted in days since every day is important in the trial of faith which finishes in apparent defeat. But they have been faithful, and their reward and vindication is by resurrection and ascension. Next we come to the overcomers, whose victory is first attributed to the Blood of the Lamb, but also to the fact that "they loved not their life even unto death" (xii. 11). Mention has already been made of those who "follow the Lamb" (xiv. 4) and leads on to the description in chapter xv of the worshippers who have had to face the beast in his fury and have emerged victorious (v. 2). We had previously been informed that this victory involved both faith and patience (xiii. 10). Then in the final great conflict in which the Lamb overcomes we are told that "they also shall overcome that are with him, called and chosen *and faithful*" (xvii. 14).

There seems no place in the book of the Revelation for worldly, easy-going, formal Christianity. A kingdom is at stake, and for this nothing less than steady devotion will do. Those who read this book and through it receive an urgent call to such faithfulness will in the day of reckoning have the greatest of blessings, provided that they respond to the call.

### THE FAITHFUL WITNESS

How shall we respond? How can such frail and faulty creatures as we are pass triumphantly through such severe tests? The answer is, as always, that Christ is our sufficiency. The book opens with a revelation of Him in which He proclaims Himself as "the faithful witness", and it everywhere encourages us to wait for and count on the absolute faithfulness of our God.

In the vision of God's throne there is the remarkable statement that John saw that "there was a rainbow round the throne, like an emerald to look upon". We thank God for His rainbow-circled throne, for that assures us of the faithfulness of His dominion, but we wonder what is meant by a green rainbow. Of course the central colour of the seven of the rainbow is green. But green is not really a Bible colour. We have no difficulty in tracing throughout the Scriptures the spiritual significance of some other colours, white, gold, red, blue, etc., but we have virtually no reference to green. Is

it not probable that green is earth's colour. On this assumption we may rejoice that round the throne there is a complete rainbow circle of Gods' faithfulness to His saints here on earth. Green is also the colour of living freshness. His mercies are new every morning, ever great and ever fresh. Those who can believe this, and count always on this heavenly faithfulness will themselves have the faith and patience to take them through all of earth's

trials.

Much of this book is written in the future tense. It reminds us that we have a future, and probably a testing future to face. How wonderful to be able to face it with Christ's words ringing in our ears, "Fear not, I am the first and the last and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys . . .!"

H. F.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### INSTEAD

AS Mrs. White walked along the streets towards her home the one word 'Instead' kept repeating itself in her mind. 'Instead!' That had been the message at the Women's Meeting she had just come from. This message had been based on Isaiah 55, and the speaker had spoken with such confidence of God's ability to change our lives.

"Instead of the thorn . . . the fir tree, and instead of the briar . . . the myrtle tree" were words which were used to show how God can take the people whose lives are crooked and twisted, making them straight and true like the fir tree, and how He can make us sweet and kind instead of letting our thorny tempers scratch and tear ourselves and other people.

How Mrs. White would have liked to believe that this was true and possible in her own life! She sighed. If only she could be changed in this way! But she had often tried to live as a Christian should, only to find that she could not do it. It is true that the speaker had told them not to 'try' but to let God do it.

She sighed again as she passed through her front gate and entered her home. She was unhappy because she made other people unhappy. She was full of thorns and briars. Tired of her many failures, she longed to believe that God could change her.

That night, when she knelt in prayer, she asked the Lord to show her if it was possible, and she prayed that she might have a sign from Him before another day had passed. Next morning her neighbour invited her to go to Kensington High Street to do some shopping, and she agreed, little realising that this was where God was going to answer her prayer.

After they had looked around the store for quite a time, the neighbour suggested that they should go up on to the roof. They went up in a lift, and when they were at the top stepped out not on to a

roof but into a beautiful garden. Mrs. White followed her friend around full of wonder and surprise. They went from one garden to another, past bright flowers, over bridges spanning a stream, passing sturdy trees including one which was loaded with apples.

What a surprise! She had expected to find herself on a dull roof with dreary bricks and tiles, but instead of that she was walking through lovely gardens. Instead! The word came back to her mind and again kept repeating itself. What a transformation had been made on this rooftop! Instead of dead stones there were live flowers and fruitful trees.

From that high vantage point they could look out over the other roofs. There was not another like this. They were all hard and unattractive, while this one was lovely and alive. The two women sat down on a seat to enjoy the beauties of one of the gardens, and they began to discuss the clever idea that someone had had to make this great change, and they talked of the work and money which must have been needed. Mrs. White asked her friend why she thought that it had been done. "Why, for publicity", her neighbour replied. "People come from all over the world to see these gardens. They are the largest of their kind anywhere." "I am sure that they find it worthwhile", she added, "for it gives them a name."

It gave them a name! Now Mrs. White was beginning to understand why she had been brought to this rooftop that day. She could not altogether remember the 'Instead' verse of Isaiah 55, but she knew that the speaker had drawn attention to the fact that the Lord's reason for wanting to change us was that His own Name should be glorified.

When she reached home she took out her Bible and read the verse again. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to



the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (verse 13). Then she knelt down and thanked God for showing her the wonderful change which men could make on that rooftop to help her believe that He could make an even greater one in her life. She thanked Him, too, that she could now trust Him to do it for her. She believed that instead of what *she* was by nature, Christ should now show *His* life in her. As she finished, she not only used the words, "for Thy Name's sake", but she really meant that it should be "to the Lord for a name".

Later that evening she told her husband of her new faith in the Lord. He had been the chief sufferer from her 'thorns' and 'briars' so that it was

only right that he should be the first one to enjoy the news. Of course he was very pleased, for he had long been praying for this. As thy went on talking about the gardens he suddenly asked, "Were they free?" Oh, no, his wife told him, the price of admission was one shilling. "Then that is one more way in which the Lord's work is better than man's" said Mr. White. So they looked again at Isaiah 55 and in the first verse they read, "Without money and without price". The salvation which Christ gives to all who trust Him is not only full, it is free.

Instead! Is there a need for a change in your life? If so, Christ can make the great change if you simply allow Him to come into your heart and establish His rule there.

H. F.

## HORIZONED BY LIFE

### CHAPTER TWO

#### THE CRITERION OF LIVINGNESS

HAVING laid a foundation, and given good ground for the conclusion that life is *the* horizon of God's work in nature and grace, we take a phrase from that introduction as the key to much more—that is, the Criterion of Life. So we proceed to consider the main points of the criterion of livingness; that is, the indications and evidences of life. If life is the first and last issue, and the predominant element, apart from which there is no proof of God in anything, it is important that we should be able to discover its presence by its essential evidences. The real test is not in doctrine, theology, orthodoxy, or any of the other matters associated with Christianity, but in *livingness*; to change the language—vitality, potency, effectiveness.

Some of these major evidences of life are:

1. Freshness. (The simplest.)
2. Growth.
3. Reproduction.
4. Relatedness.
5. Persistence.
6. Purpose.

#### I. THE CRITERION OF FRESHNESS

It would be a drab world if there were no Springtime. It is not life, but only existence where there is no freshness in being and experience. Sameness is a deadly thing. Where trees never shed their leaves and produce fresh ones; where things

seen and heard never convey fresh values and meanings; such like conditions in nature or in religion are no evidence of life. Indeed, they are a contradiction to life. Nature shouts against such a state, and every Springtime holds a festival of freshness.

The human body, in normal conditions, rebuts the idea of no freshness. The seven pounds of an infant all pass away. In seventy years, ten times does the fabric of the physical body change. Death is the failure to produce a fresh body. Life is ever shedding outward garments. Its onward march is strewn with discarded forms. Once the cells become rigid and set, life declines or withdraws. Life makes an imperative demand for adjustableness. When and where there is failure to fall into line with life, life will leave those concerned behind, however much theory they may have. When anything has served its purpose it may be left behind as waste matter unless it is vitalized by fresh purpose.

A study of the word 'New' in the New Testament will quickly convince that Christianity is essentially characterized by freshness. Although there are two Greek words translated 'New'—one meaning something that was not before, and the other something recent and fresh—the same idea of freshness is contained in both. Hence: A new commandment; a new creation; a new man; a new nature; a new corporate man (the Church); new things; a new name; a new song; a new



Heaven and a new earth; new Jerusalem; all things new, etc. The vitalizing principle of all is life—Divine life; but never apart from the Person, Who is the Life.

This freshness is true freshness. It is from the life *within*, and is the expression thereof. This is true of natural life in the creation. The lobster, crayfish and crab shed their shells frequently. A lobster only two inches long has moulted ten times, and a ten-inch lobster has changed its shell twenty-five times. But *he* has not changed. The shell is reproduced from within, not imposed from without. Life produces it.

Herein lies a fundamental difference between the Christianity of the early days and that of so

much of later and present times.

In an effort to depart from 'ruts' and traditional forms, and to get 'life', many recourses are adopted. To be 'original', 'different', 'unusual', 'extraordinary', 'unique', much stunting is resorted to, 'attractions' are framed. All such subterfuges and dressing-up only betray the absence of *true* life. True life has a way of making itself known. When there is life there is never a need to put on anything. The life which is life indeed forces off dead things, whether they be in character, conduct, or forms. Like Abraham, Moses, David, Elisha, Paul, John, there is fruit in old age, and their fruit abides.

(To be continued)

## INTO THE HEART OF GOD

### 1. ONENESS WITH GOD IN HIS REPUDIATION OF THIS WORLD

NOTE. The following message is the first of one of the series given at the conference in Switzerland this year. It is printed here practically as it was spoken. In due course we expect that the whole series will be published in book form.

*"Didst not thou, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?"* (II Chronicles xx. 7).

*"But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend"* (Isaiah xli. 8).

*"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God"* (James ii. 23).

**WE** have announced that in these evening gatherings our subject is going to be: "Into the Heart of God", and when we speak about the heart of God, we mean friendship with God, for friendship means that the one has entered into the heart of the other. It is a matter of heart relationship.

It is a wonderful thing that that is possible between man and God! It was God who said of David that he was "*a man after my heart*" (Acts xiii. 22), and we have read that three times in the

Bible Abraham was called 'the friend of God'. Indeed, God Himself said of him: "Abraham, my friend" which means that he had entered into the heart of God. That entering was progressive. It did not happen all at once, but was a lifelong movement, a spiritual pilgrimage which ended in the heart of God. It had eight distinct stages—there were eight different movements in the life of Abraham which ended right there in the heart of God, and we shall hope to consider some of these stages.

First of all, however, let us remind ourselves that the Word of God reveals that there is a spiritual pilgrimage. Peter said: "*Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims*" (I Peter ii. 11), and the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews put it in this way: "*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own . . . But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly*" (Hebrews xi. 13, 14, 16). You see what that says: They all died in faith not having received the promises. They had seen them and greeted them from a long way off. All these heroes of faith mentioned in that eleventh chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews are still looking for a country, that is, waiting for their inheritance, and chapter twelve

makes it quite clear that although they have left this earth, they are one with us in 'looking'. They "*all died in faith, not having received the promises . . . God having foreseen some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect*" (Hebrews xi. 1, 40, R.V. margin). So Abraham is still 'looking' with us for the heavenly country.

There is a whole group of New Testament words which describe the believer as a pilgrim and a stranger, and these many Greek words relate to people in the Roman Empire who had no settled abode anywhere. They were just visitors to the place. They had come to stay for a night, for a week, for a month, or for a year, but no matter how long they stayed, they did not belong to the place. They had no permanent residence there, and our New Testament is built upon that truth. All these Greek words are taken over and applied to Christians. When Peter said: "*I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims*", he did not say: '*Be pilgrims and sojourners*' but '*You are*'.

The first five books of the Bible are books of a pilgrimage. The Bible opens with man at home. God had made a home for man, and he was there with God in that home. It was called 'Paradise'; but man lost his home, was driven out from it, and he became a stranger, a homeless stranger, a displaced person. He was a wanderer in the earth and a foreigner to God's home, all because he was out of friendship with God. When that friendship broke down, man lost his home, and he has been a pilgrim and stranger in the earth ever since. There is no restful home for the soul of man in this world because the world is no friend of God. That is how the Bible begins, and then that truth is broken up, firstly in the case of Abraham. All through his life Abraham was a pilgrim. We are told that he lived in a tent, and he moved up and down the land with that tent. You may think it is all right to be in a tent for a week's holiday (although that depends upon circumstances) but I doubt whether there is anyone here who would like to spend their whole life in a tent. Abraham was one of those of whom it is written: "*They are seeking after a country of their own*"—a place which they could call 'home'.

We pass from Abraham to Israel, who for forty years of their life were pilgrims and strangers in a wilderness. God had promised them all a home, a rest at the end of the journey, but they never received that promise in their lifetime—" *These all died in faith, not having received the promises*". Even when they went into the land of promise they never had rest. Why was this so? Because they

were in a world which God had rejected and repudiated, a world with which God was not in friendship, and a world which was no friend of God.

That brings us to our first stage in the spiritual pilgrimage, and we must look at other passages of Scripture.

" *Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah begat Abraham, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees*" (Genesis xi. 27, 28).

" *Now the Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. So Abram went, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him*" (Genesis xii. 1-4).

" *And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan*" (Genesis xi. 31).

God had said to Abraham: 'Get thee out of thy country, thy kindred, thy father's house, unto a land that I will give thee'. Many hundreds of years afterward Stephen said: "*The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran*" (Acts vii. 2). How I would like to stay here to tell you something about Ur of the Chaldees! What a great city it was, and what a wonderful civilisation existed right back there at that time! I would like, too, to tell you something about father Terah, and about his three sons, the eldest of whom was Abraham, and about the kind of life they were living in that great city; of how the son, Haran, died there, and of how Haran's son, Lot, joined himself to Uncle Abraham, but time will not allow us to talk about all that, however interesting it may be. We have to come to this first step into the heart of God.

God had said emphatically and precisely. "*Get thee out*"! In those words it is quite evident that God had repudiated the old world of Abraham, and, so far as he was concerned, had finished with it, and finished with it in finality. In effect, He said to Abraham: 'Now that is absolutely finished with for you'.

This marks the first step into the heart of God. God's heart was not in Chaldea, but outside of Chaldea.



Now mark carefully: this was not a *stage* in the spiritual journey, but a definite, basic *step*. There was a point at which one foot of Abraham was in Chaldea and the other was outside, and when he lifted that one foot and put it at the side of the other he had crossed the line. There was just a line between Chaldea and outside of Chaldea. In our New Testament language: between the world and outside of the world. It was intended by God to be absolute and final at that point. He was allowing no compromise—Abraham's heart had to go over the line toward the heart of God. All the phases and the stages will follow that. This basic decision and step will afterward be applied and tested all through his life. Many situations, many trials and many difficulties will arise to challenge that step, and every one of those circumstances will ask the question: Did you really mean it when you began? How far did you really mean it when you said that you were going all the way with God?

You see, there stands right at the beginning of the spiritual pilgrimage, which ends in the heart of God, this crisis: the crisis which is in these words of God—“*Get thee out*”! All God's intention and purpose are bound up with our reaction to that first command.

Perhaps many of you older Christians do not need this word, but there are a number of young people, and there may be some older in years who are young in the journey. What God is saying is this: If you are at all concerned with finding a place in the heart of God, this is where you must begin. You must come to this first step of oneness with God in His repudiation of this world.

You see, what we are concerned with is the *heart* of God, that is, friendship with God. It is said of Noah that in building the ark “*he condemned the world*” (Hebrews xi. 7). It was not a matter of whether the world believed that it was being condemned. The fact is that it was a condemned world, and it was only a matter of time before the flood came and destroyed it. It was a good thing that there were eight persons in the heart of God! They escaped the coming judgment.

Jesus made this basic separation from the world when He was baptized, and used His baptism as a means of declaring to heaven, to men and to hell that His heart was separated unto God. At His baptism Jesus took sides with the heart of God against this world, and declared that His heart was not in this world—it was with the Father. Every Christian is supposed to be baptized. You may have different opinions as to what it is, how it should be, but if you are going to take Jesus as your example, and what the New Testament

teaches on this matter, you have to recognize that baptism is a declaration that you have stepped over a line and that now your heart is wholly with God and out of the world. No sooner had Jesus been baptized than He began to be tested as to the step which He had taken. Those temptations in the wilderness by the devil were to test Him as to whether He meant what He had done. Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of this world and all the glory thereof, and the test was: Was the heart of Jesus out of the world or not? He stood faithfully to the position that He had taken and repudiated the world, and if you want to know what Jesus thought about the world you have only to read one chapter in the New Testament—the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel by John. There Jesus refers repeatedly to the world and prays that His disciples might be delivered from it. He said: “*They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*” (John xvii. 16).

Now notice something: What was the world to which Jesus was referring? The only world that the disciples knew was the religious world, and that was the only world that Jesus lived in in the days of His flesh. What do you mean by the world? You see, it can be a very religious thing. There can be a lot of worldly religion—there can be as much of the world in religion as there is out of it. The world is a spirit, a mentality, a power. In one word, it is all that which is not in friendship with God.

God was no friend of that religious world in the days of Jesus. The world means independence from God, being able to get on without Him in its own way. It is self-centred, not God-centred; it is governed, deceived and blinded by Satan.

Now the point is just this: We shall never get anywhere in this spiritual pilgrimage until we have fully and finally settled this one question. One of the most painful things that we see is the way in which *all* young Christians do not go on with the Lord. They come to a point where they say that they are going with the Lord, they make a decision for the Lord, and there it stops. So many do not go any further than that—and here is all this immense purpose of God. They have only taken the negative side of His command and have not listened to the positive side: “*Unto the land that I will shew thee . . .*” . . . ‘I will make thee a blessing and thou shalt be a blessing’ . . . “*in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed*”.

You see, God has called us ‘*out*’ for a mighty ‘*in*’. He did not just say to Abraham “*Get thee out*”! The separation was governed by the great purpose of being made a mighty blessing to others.



One world is repudiated, but God does not believe in vacuums, so He must put another world in its place. Abraham was God's new beginning for a new world. He was called "*the father of a multitude of nations*" (Genesis xvii. 5). The father gives the character to the family, and the very first thing about the character of this man was that his heart was wholly set on God. If we are truly spiritual

children of Abraham, we must take his character.

Well, that is where we begin, the first step in the spiritual pilgrimage to the heart of God. Whatever we may say about ourselves, in our faults and failures, may it be true of every one of us that we have a heart wholly for God, for this is the way that ends with God being able to say, of you and of me, "My Friend".

## IN GOD OR OUTSIDE OF GOD?

(A message given at the conference in Switzerland)

Reading : John xv. 1, 2, 4 : 1 Peter iii. 18.

THERE are two words to be underlined in the fifteenth chapter of John. The one word is 'true'—"I am the *true* vine"—and the other is 'abide', which occurs eleven times in the chapter.

If you look at these three chapters in John's Gospel, chapters xiv, xv and xvi, you will be impressed with one thing. (This is one way of obtaining the real message of any part of the Bible : try to sense the atmosphere of what is being said.) How do these chapters impress you? In them there is an atmosphere of crisis and uncertainty. There are questions in the atmosphere, and there is doubt and there is fear. Look back in chapter fourteen and you hear Thomas saying: 'Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?' Philip says: 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be sufficient'. You see, there are questions in the air. The disciples are uncertain, not knowing the meaning of things. They want to know what it is all about. In their hearts they are saying: 'Where is it all leading us?' There is the feeling that a great upheaval is about to take place and that everything is about to be shaken. And they were right. In a few minutes the Lord Jesus will be saying: "*They shall put you out of the synagogues : yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God*" (John xvi. 2). 'They will put you out of their whole religious system, and when they have done that they will kill you. Having killed you, they will think they have done a good thing for God.' Of course, that was their way of looking at it, but there was another way of looking at it, and it was this that was really causing the tension in the air.

What Jesus was really pointing to was the repudiation of that whole historic religious system. That whole system of Judaism was about to be put away. These disciples had already begun to

lose faith in that system, but their trouble was: What is going to take its place? Judaism may be a poor thing, but perhaps a poor thing is better than nothing, and here is Jesus saying that He is going away and leaving us. What shall we have left? It is rather impressive, is it not, that Jesus says: 'I am going away; yet abide in Me.' The disciples were asking: How can we abide in someone who has gone away and left us? That will be worse than our Judaism!

That, you see, is the setting of these chapters, and chapter sixteen is the answer to those questions and doubts.

Before we go on with this, may we not say that there is something very much like that in the atmosphere to-day? If you were living in any other part of the world than Switzerland, you would be full of questions as to what is going to happen next. The whole world is full of that question, and even Christians feel that we are coming to a great crisis. Many Christians have already lost faith in the religious system. Much that they were brought up in, much that they believed in and hoped in, and much that they thought for a long time was the true thing, has disappointed them. There are very many Christians who are disappointed with Christianity, and they are seeing that it is something that is going to be shaken and perhaps removed. The big question that is in the heart of many Christians is: Where are we going to? What is it all leading to? What really are we going to have in the end?

That is exactly how these disciples were feeling. Israel had been called 'God's vine'. The Psalmist said of God: "*Thou broughtest a vine out of Egypt*" (Psalm lxxx. 8), and at the time that the Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples, that vine had proved false. It was not giving fruit to God or to man. It was disappointing everyone. It only had the name of being a vine, and was not a true vine. Jesus said: "I am the *true* vine".

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Everyone was asking: What is truth? The common people were asking that, and Pontius Pilate will presently say: "*What is truth*" (John xviii. 38). The answer of Jesus is: "I am the *true* vine". 'Abide in Me and all your questions will be answered and all your uncertainty will be removed. Abide in Me and you will know what is true.' That is the immediate setting of these words.

But there is a much bigger context to these words than perhaps you recognize. And here is another thing that you must always try to discover when you are reading any words of the Lord Jesus. Anything that He says is not just something for an immediate local situation. What Jesus says, even though it just be one thing, has the whole counsels of God in it. It comprehends all the ages. I venture to suggest that you never saw that in these three simple words: "Abide in me"! When Jesus said that, He was getting right back behind everything to the great eternal factor, and in those simple words He was taking up the one thing for which He came into this world. It is the question with which the whole Bible is occupied from beginning to end, and the one question which comprehends everything that Jesus came to answer. The question: In God or outside of God? That sounds very simple, but it comprehends all the ages. It is the question of all time and eternity.

We must open that up a little more. In the beginning, when everything came fresh from the hands of God, the whole creation, including man, was in God. God was the sphere of everything. He was man's sphere—man lived and moved and had his being in God. I often wish that we had a fuller account in the Book of Genesis of what things were like at that time, but we have to draw our conclusions about that by seeing what they were like afterward. We have enough there, however, to show us that it had been a very blessed condition. God was man's environment—and that is a very blessed condition. It is like a beautiful garden, the Bible says. Man walked in a beautiful garden with God, and there were no weeds or thorns there. Man did not have to fight adverse things in that garden. You know, there are some gardeners who are very particular. You take them to gardens that you think are wonderful, and they are not a bit excited about them. They have such a high standard that they are bound to find some fault somewhere. Jesus says here: "*My Father is the husbandman*", and God is a very particular gardener. If He says 'It is *very* good', then it *must* be *very* good. We are told: "*God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good*" (Genesis i. 31), and that is how it was when

all things were in God. We do not know how long it was like that, but while all was abiding in God, it was all very good.

But then came the tragedy: Man and the creation fell out of God. We speak about 'the fall', but have we ever realised what a terrible thing that fall was? Man and the creation fell out of God—and they fell into Satan. So, the New Testament says, "*the whole world lieth in the evil one*" (I John v. 19). In God? Or outside of God? In God? Or, not just out in a vacuum, but in Satan?

Now that is the great question that Jesus came to answer in His own Person, and that is why we read that little fragment from Peter's letter: "*Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God*" . . . back into God!

We have pointed out that there are two sides to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. There is the one side of the Man in God. Jesus lived His life on this earth *in* the Father—He said: "*I and the Father are one*" (John x. 30). He always abode in God, and that was a lifelong battle for Him, for Satan and all his kingdom set themselves to drive a wedge in between Christ and His Father. We will not stop to look at all the ways which Satan employed, but the whole earthly life of Jesus was one continuous battle to prevent a gap coming in between Him and His Father. Satan did not trust this business to his demons—I don't think he *could* trust any of them to do this. I think Satan had said: *I must do this*, so it was always Satan who was mentioned in this connection. No doubt he drew upon all his forces for this, but he set himself personally at the head of them to try to open this gap between Christ and His Father.

Jesus triumphed in this battle. On the one side, as the Man in God, Satan could not separate Him from His Father. I do want you to recognize that this is something that you and I have to know about, for there is just one thing that Satan wants to do with you and me. It is to separate us from God, to get us away from Him, and he will use anything in our lives to do that. On the one side he will use our sufferings and our adversities. When we are going through a bad time he is always very near to whisper: 'You see, God does not love you. He is not with you—He is against you. You have evidence that He is against you, for if He loved you you would not have to suffer like this.' If we allow a doubt about God to come into our hearts when we are having a bad time, we shall find ourselves away from the Lord, and it is much easier to get away from the Lord than it is to come back to Him. It is a lifelong battle to keep

our fellowship with the Lord unbroken. If Satan cannot break it in our sufferings he will sometimes try it in our prosperity and blessings. He offered Jesus all the kingdoms of this world and said, in effect, 'I can make you great and prosperous in this world.'

But we must get over to the other side of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus—the Man out of God. When Jesus was 'made sin for us'—and He was made sin for us in the end—He went out from God. I never fail to be more and more impressed with that terrible thing that happened. Here is this Man who had fought a lifelong battle to abide in God. It had been His one great object never to be separated from His Father, and He had won that battle in Himself, but here at the end He is crying: 'My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? I am where I have fought the battle so that I should never be. I am outside. I am forsaken of God. I am separated from My Father. I am like that scapegoat away back in Israel, upon whose head the priest laid his hands and transferred the sin of all the people. He then led the goat far outside the camp, away until it had gone right out of sight. Then the priest drove it away and it was alone in the wilderness, where it died in its loneliness. I am like that now. I am not only forsaken of men, but I am forsaken of God.'

But that is where all men would be but for Jesus Christ. He suffered, "*the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God*".

When Jesus was crucified all His disciples were scattered abroad everywhere. You might have had great difficulty in finding them if you had tried to. Two of them went down to Emmaus. Where poor Thomas was hiding himself we do not know, nor where Peter had gone to after denying His Lord. They were all broken and scattered.

Do you notice what happened after the Cross, when Jesus was raised from the dead? He knew where every one of them was and He brought them all back together. He reunited them in Himself and the last picture we have of them is that they are all together in Christ. They would agree that it is nothing but desolation to go out from God. It is not a garden, but a wilderness. Peter would agree with that, and so would Thomas. When the Prodigal Son went out from his father's house, he went out to bankruptcy, from a garden to a wilderness. When he came home he came to a life of fruitfulness and of rest.

Do you see something of what the Lord Jesus meant when He said "Abide in me"? 'Outside of Me it is just a wilderness. There is no fruit

there. If you abide in Me you bring forth much fruit' . . . "*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit*" (John xv. 8). God's satisfaction is the one great thing through all the Bible. His satisfaction is now in His Son, and if we abide in Christ we abide in God's good pleasure and shall bring forth much fruit. If we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us—as we are supposed to have—we shall know in our hearts whether we are out of fellowship with the Lord or whether we are abiding in the Lord and we shall know because we shall feel that we are in the wilderness when we are out, and that we are in the garden when we are in. Jesus was very emphatic about this. He knew what a tremendous thing it was and so, eleven times in a short chapter, He said "Abide . . . abide . . . abide in Me."

May the Lord keep us abiding in Christ! All other things will prove to be false and only what is true will stand us in good stead to the end. "I am the *true* vine . . . Abide in Me".

That is only one way of saying: 'We must know the Lord and our place in the Lord'. What are you abiding in? Are you abiding in people? Are you abiding in conferences? Are you abiding in a religious system? Well, all these things will pass, and the time will be when there will not be any more conferences and when you will not be able to depend upon any people. The whole religious system will disappoint you, but if you know and abide in the Lord Jesus, it will be all right to the end.

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