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



**A WITNESS  
AND  
A TESTIMONY**

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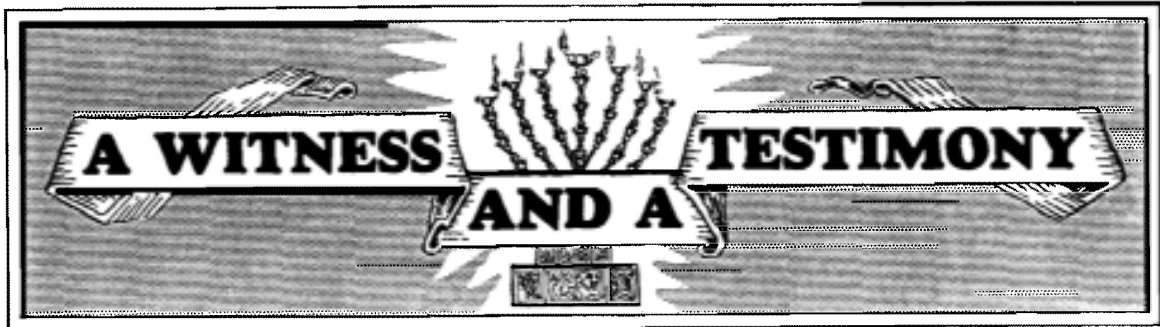
### THIS MINISTRY

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

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

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 30, Dunoon Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

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



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EDITORIAL

WITH this issue we enter upon the 44th year of the ministry of this little paper. We begin by laying a further tribute of gratitude at the feet of our beloved and faithful Lord for all the gracious enablement given by Him through that period of more than half an earthly lifetime of service. We can truly, and humbly, appropriate the words of His great Apostle: "Having received the help which comes from God, we continue unto this day." We know quite well that His help comes in answer to the prayerful and practical co-operation of His people, and, in this mindfulness, we do say that we very truly thank all those who have encouraged us to go on with this service. While we conclude from the help given by the Lord, against trials and adversities, many, and often very severe, that it must have been something which He needed, we know that it is but a supplementary and complementary ministry. There is a vast amount of

evangelistic work going on worldwide, by varied and many means; and work in other ways to help younger and older believers. This is very much in the public eye and draws a great amount of support and approbation. We do thank God for *everything* that can contribute to His one comprehensive end—"to win for the Lamb that was slain, the reward of his sufferings".

Yet, at the same time, we have—what we believe to be—a God-given burden for "the perfecting of the saints" and "the building up of the body of Christ". This may be less popular and less in the public eye, but the New Testament does not give a small and unimportant place to such ministry. We sometimes feel that such ministry is more fraught with Satanic opposition of *every kind* than anything else

The increased intensity of antagonism to Christ in the world at this time would justify the conclusion

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that the time is short, and both the completing of the number of the elect, and the preparing of them for heavenly reign and government, say that His coming is very near: to say nothing of the world-conditions and man's helplessness in them!

The Lord help us to "hold fast till (he) come", and to be faithful unto (or until) death. Pray for this ministry that it may not fail, or lose any strength as the time goes on.

In our last issue we intimated that certain changes are taking place here at Honor Oak, and that one big development is possible (in relation to the

"Centre" property). There is nothing further of a definite nature to report. We will inform our friends if anything transpires which would be of concern to readers of this paper.

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

To our great regret and disappointment our printers were not able to let us have a supply of the new book, *Discipleship in the School of Christ*, until 22nd December. We are more than sorry that many friends who ordered it did not receive their copies for Christmas.—Ed.

## THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

### 2. AN ARK OF ACACIA WOOD

**W**E are occupied with the greatness and the glory of Jesus Christ. So far we have been looking at this matter in a comprehensive way. We have been considering the immense vocation of the Son of God in this universe, and from the greatness of that vocation we have come to see something of the greatness of the Person. For so great a vocation a very great Person is necessary, and never has so great a purpose been entrusted to any other being. It demanded God Himself in the Person of His Son to do what Jesus Christ came into this world to do.

Now we are going to break that up into fragments.

There are many ways in the Bible by which the great truth of the greatness and glory of Christ is brought before us. This week we are confining ourselves to one of these ways by which God has chosen to reveal His Son, and that way is by means of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle of the Old Testament. That ark was God's temporary method of representing the greatness and glory of His Son.

Now I want to safeguard this matter very carefully. There will be a great deal said about that ark as we trace its history through the Old Testament. But this sounds like a contradiction—I am not really talking about the ark. It will be mentioned perhaps very many times during this week, and you might think that I am giving some messages on the tabernacle and the ark, but what I am really speaking about is what the ark represents. The ark is only a symbol, after all. It is one of the types in the Old Testament, and we are only doing here what God did, and what Jesus Himself did. God

took an earthly object by which to teach heavenly truths. The object is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end, so that in order to understand and appreciate typology we have to stand back from that which is used in order to see what purpose it serves. We have to see what it is that God is trying to say by using this object. So we must get behind the type to that which it typifies.

What we are going to see as we look at this ark and its history is the absolute supremacy and exclusiveness of Jehovah as God. This ark is going to say to us, if we have ears to hear and eyes to see, that God is God alone in this universe. This ark is the symbol of the rights of God in this universe.

I wonder if you have ever been impressed with the way in which the Psalmist so often addressed God? He was addressed as the 'Creator of the heavens and the earth', which was just one way of saying that God has by creation supreme rights in heaven and on earth. We shall find as we go on that this ark is set up against all other gods, and all these other false gods of the nations have to bow in the presence of this ark. Those of you who know anything about its history are at once realizing how true that is. Whether it be the gods of the seven nations in Canaan, or whether it be Dagon, the god of the Philistines, down they will come from their thrones when this ark comes into their midst. There are many gods in this universe, but they will all have to bow the knee when the ark comes into their presence. All these gods represent rebellion against the absolute supremacy of Jehovah. Therefore, in

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principle, all these other deities embody the law of lawlessness. They are against Jehovah. Lawlessness is in the heavens and in the earth, and we know that today more than ever. Lawlessness has reached its highest point in our time, but we can see it so much in the Old Testament. Very well, then: bring in the ark and see what happens when it appears on the scene!

You see, it is not just the ark: it is what the ark represents. We shall see that the ark is a type of Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh. It is the function of Jesus Christ to establish the uniqueness, the perfect holiness, the almighty power and the wonderful grace of God. All these things were features of the ark, and the Lord Jesus Christ takes them all up in Himself. The uniqueness of God—there is no other—the absolute holiness of God, the supreme power of God and the unspeakable grace of God. These were features of the ark which point to the Lord Jesus.

It may be that there are some of you who are a little sceptical about Old Testament typology. Indeed, you may be sceptical about the place of the Old Testament in our life today, but I think I shall have to bring you right to the real point.

Are you sceptical about the Old Testament? Have you *no* place for Old Testament typology? If that is your attitude, then you must close your New Testament as well as your Old Testament. You will have to tear your New Testament to pieces and throw a lot of it away. That is why, in this special connection, I asked you to read the ninth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. We will just look at it.

*“And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of holies; having a golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was a golden pot holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat; of which things we cannot now speak severally”* (Hebrews ix. 3 – 5).

Now that looks backward, but in verse 8 it is brought forward to the present time: *“The Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holy place hath not yet been made manifest, while as the first tabernacle is yet standing; which is a parable for the time now present; according to which are offered both gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect, being only (with meats and drinks and divers washings) carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation”* (verses 8 – 10).

I want you to note several little fragments in that passage. “Not yet.” Now, as you know, the writer of this Letter is saying that that ‘not yet’ is finished

—*now* it is all finished . . . “which is a *parable* for the time now present”. If you look at verse 23, it says: “It was necessary therefore that the *copies* of the things in the heavens . . .”, and verse 24: “For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in *pattern* to the true.” Now put all those fragments together: Not yet while the old tabernacle was standing. The ‘yet’ is a later time. That was a parable of the things now. That was a copy of things in the heavens, and the writer is saying throughout the Letter: ‘We are living in that time of reformation.’ This is something much bigger than the Reformation under Martin Luther! This is the re-forming of everything from types to realities, from the earthly type to the heavenly truth.

Now I am sure that has wearied many of you, because you have no difficulty in this matter, but I want you weary people to remember two things. There are here a large number of young Christians who have yet to learn all the meaning of the Bible, and there are a few present, who, because they come from a certain part of Europe, have little place for the Old Testament. So it is necessary for us to see that we cannot understand the Old Testament without the New Testament, and to understand the New Testament we must have the Old Testament. The New Testament is illuminated by the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is explained by the New Testament. Forgive me for taking so much time on that, but I think it is important.

Let us come back to this ark. You know that it goes by a number of different names, which we will just mention, and then explain them afterward. Fifteen times it is called ‘The ark of God’; fourteen times it is called ‘the ark of the testimony’; nine times it is called ‘the ark of the covenant’; five times it is called ‘the ark of the Lord’; twice it is called ‘the ark of the glory’ and once it is called ‘the ark of God’s strength’. Let us, then, look at some of these names more carefully.

Firstly, the ark of the covenant. The covenant is the basis or ground upon which God is willing to be with us. Perhaps the greatest thing that man needs is to have God with him, so it is important to know the ground on which God is willing to be with us. So the covenant is an agreement which God makes. It is a contract made by God, a charter provided by God. In the covenant God says: ‘These are the terms upon which I will be with you.’ God has made a covenant and says: ‘This is the covenant that I make: that I will be with you on this ground. If you will keep on this ground I will remain with you.’ That is the covenant, and the ark is the ark of that covenant.

In the next place it is called ‘the ark of the

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testimony', and in the Hebrew language the word 'testimony' is a different word from the word 'covenant'. The testimony is a declaration made by God, a statement and a proclamation that God makes to man. God is a speaking God, not a dumb God. He makes a proclamation. If we were using New Testament language we would say 'God is a preaching God'. You see, the Gospel is a proclamation. It is the speaking of a speaking God. "God hath spoken" is the great proclamation of the prophets. God has made Himself known in word. You must store all this up for what we are going to say in a few minutes.

The third name is 'the ark of the Lord'. This declares that He is Lord, and by means of this ark men are going to meet God. They are going to know that it is the Lord with whom they have to do, and the name 'the ark of God' carries with it a very similar meaning. By means of this ark a relationship with God is created. They truly did learn in the old days that this ark meant that men came into touch with God.

Now we need not enlarge upon the other names, 'the ark of God's strength' and 'the ark of God's glory'. We are going to see that as we go on with the history of the ark.

All this was concentrated into a small chest. I used to think that the ark was about the size of a man's coffin, and that when they carried it through the wilderness they were carrying something like a coffin—something about the size of a man. But that, of course, is not true. The ark was a comparatively small box, only just a little longer than this reading desk here, about as wide and also about as high. It was really quite a small thing.

As you know, it was made of acacia wood, a wood chosen for its strength and incorruptibility. That ark would never be troubled by woodworm or dry rot. That is not just a joke—I am thinking all the time beyond the ark. But there it was—quite a small cabinet with a basis of acacia wood.

Then it was overlaid with gold, and on the top of it was a slab of pure gold. That was called the mercy seat, and over the mercy seat were the two cherubim of glory.

Inside the ark there were three things. There were the tables of the covenant, the golden pot with a specimen of the manna in the wilderness, and Aaron's rod that budded and bore fruit.

We have to turn over from the type to the reality to understand all these details, but before we do that let us mention one other thing: the place that the ark occupied.

The ark was right at the very heart and centre

not only of the tabernacle but of the whole nation of Israel. The whole system which gathered around that ark was governed by the position which it occupied. It was there that God had His place as the centre of everything. It was there that He was heard to speak and it was there that He made Himself known.

Now we turn over. We have said that this ark was a type of Jesus Christ, and we begin with the incorruptible nature of the Son of God. He could say: "*Which of you convicteth me of sin?*" (John viii. 46). If He were not the Divine Son of God, how dared He say such a thing? There is not another human being in all God's universe who dare say: 'You cannot find any sin in me'. Mark you, we are now speaking about His humanity—we are referring to the acacia wood. No sin could register its power in His life. That is what I meant by 'no woodworm and no dry rot'. Neither sin nor death could affect Him. The testimony concerning Him was: "*it was not possible that he should be holden of death*" (Acts ii. 24), and Peter, quoting the Psalmist, also said: "*Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption*" (Acts ii. 27). His humanity was a sinless, perfect humanity, and yet it was true humanity.

Do you not wish that you were like that? Do you not wish that sin could have no power over you? Do you not wish that you had an incorruptible nature? Do you not wish that death had no power over you?

Dear friends, we are chosen to be conformed to His image that all that shall be true of us. Paul says that even these corruptible bodies are going to be changed and "*conformed to the body of his glory*" (Philippians iii. 21). The Word of God teaches us that we are not going to be just disembodied spirits floating about in the air. We are going to have resurrection bodies, from which all sin and corruption will have been removed for ever. We are chosen for that, and for that very purpose Jesus Christ, God's Son, came in the form of a man. Every time we take the loaf at the Lord's Table we are really testifying to this fact that by faith we are made partakers of that incorruptible Body of Christ. We are secured in Him unto a body that will overcome death.

We are launched out into the beginning of a mighty ocean! So far I have only just touched a little upon the acacia wood, but the ark will go through all the wilderness trials. It will overcome all the difficulties and adversities of the wilderness life and, as we shall see, it will lead the way right through into the promised land of the inheritance.

(To be continued)

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## THE TRANSCENDENT "SIGN"

*"What sign shewest thou . . . ? Jesus answered . . . Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John ii. 13 - 22).*

IN our book, *Discipleship in the School of Christ*, we have pointed out two things as to the Gospel by John. One: that his peculiar name for miracles is "Signs", indicating that John was particularly concerned with what the "mighty works" signified in each case, rather than with the works themselves as demonstrations of power. Two: that from what John calls volumes of such works (xxi. 25), he chose seven for his purpose in writing the Gospel.

In referring to the seven we were concerned with what Jesus actually did during His earthly ministry. We therefore did not refer to the greatest "Sign" of all, because it lay beyond the pre-cifixion time. It is that to which we now turn—the Sign of the Resurrection Body.

To recognize the full force of the fragment quoted above it is necessary to read the whole section, verses 13 - 22 of chapter two. Jesus went up to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. He found commercialism and merchandise in the temple, and cast it all out, calling the temple "My Father's House" . . . "His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house shall eat me up. The Jews therefore" (note the "therefore") "answered and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" (note "these things").

So, unmistakably, the setting is the temple in Jerusalem. It is therefore only natural that the blind Jews should interpret His words as a reference to the material temple (verse 20). John comments: "But he spake of the temple of his body", and then carries the whole matter over to His bodily resurrection.

Once more, as in every "Sign", John shows that Jesus related everything to Himself. Again and again Jesus postulates the great transition from the material, the temporal, the historical, the traditional, etc., to Himself. John iv. 21 - 24 is a classic example.

Here, then, Jesus dismisses the temple in Jerusalem, with all its history, its tradition, its ritual, its priesthood, its material glory, and, so dismissing it, puts Himself in its place for ever. What an immense "Significance" is embodied in this change!

His body was destroyed by men, religious men, representing the destruction of that earthly temple, in which destroying of His body the doom of the earthly was sealed, and the historic system shattered and scattered. In its place a resurrection body, Christ risen, becomes the Temple for evermore. All that was typified by the temple in Jerusalem is taken up in the risen Person—Jesus Christ; a spiritual House of God; a spiritual "My Father's House".

What that significance is will be our occupation in these pages for some time to come, if God wills. We can, at once, be introduced to this new Temple in a fresh recognition of the profound and comprehensive significance of the favourite phrase of the Apostle Paul, and see what he saw when he used it some two hundred times: "In Christ". To be "In Christ" is to be where God is, where we meet God; where God speaks; where all that is true of God is to be found; to be a worshipping and adoring people; to be where heaven and earth meet; to find the seat of mercy and the throne of grace, and infinitely more.

This is the greater, more glorious, and more abiding Temple than that which Solomon built. If all that beheld the temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod wondered and praised; if David so loved and longed for "Thy House, O God", and made it the crowning glory of his life; all that and more is transferred to, and is the true glory of, Him who said: "Destroy this temple (sanctuary), and in three days I will raise it up." The glory of Heaven filled that Temple when He was raised and exalted, and "Pentecost" had that as its supreme explanation.

No wonder that one of John's great words is "Glory"! (It occurs twenty-two times in his Gospel.) . . . "We beheld his glory." Not only did "the Word become flesh", but "It tabernacled among us" (i. 14), a transition from the tabernacle in the wilderness as the repository of the Law, or Word, of God, to Himself - God's Son.

In this preliminary word we are faced with the tremendous, challenging, and revolutionary fact that, since Jesus was raised from the dead, the Temple, the House of the Father, and all that it signifies is not a place, an earthly location, a ritual, etc., but a Person, and where He is and believers are in Him, there is the House of God; be it dungeon, garret, simple home, cave or "Wheresoever", that is "Bethel", the House of God.

(To be continued)

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## HAVING OUR EYES OPENED

*"But their eyes were holden that they should not know him"* (Luke xxiv. 16).

*"And their eyes were opened, and they knew him"* (Luke xxiv. 31).

THIS is a negative and a positive side. On the negative side there is a word of very solemn warning to us all. Because "their eyes were holden" it was possible for the Risen Lord, the Lord of life and of glory, to be present with them and they did not know it. It is possible for the Risen Lord, with all that that means, to be present with His own disciples and they not know it. And it is possible that He will be present here, speaking from all the Scriptures, and we shall not understand. It is true that the disciples said: "*Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake?*" We may have strong feelings and emotions while the word is being given. No doubt these two men were saying in their hearts: 'Isn't this wonderful? Why, we never heard it like that before! We never saw the Bible handled in that way.' All that is possible, and no difference be made in us. Really, if these two men had understood, they would not have reached Emmaus, and would not have waited until after dark to go back to Jerusalem. They would have turned back on the road and rushed straight back to their fellow disciples. But *they just continued in the way that they were going before*. Strong feelings, yes; a sense of wonder, yes; but no real revolution in their lives that turned them another way.

Now I expect you dear friends are saying: 'Well, is such a thing possible?' Perhaps you would say: 'That is not possible with us!', but let me speak to you out of long experience. There are many of the dear people of God who have had a great deal of teaching and have said afterwards: 'Well, it was all very wonderful. "Our hearts were burning within us while he spake"', but so many of them are not changed by the word. They just go on the same way as they went before, and that is possible with us, and is why the Lord is just saying this word to us. If it is to mean a change in our life, something has to happen inside.

I do not know how many of you are fond of music. If you are, you will sometimes read a critique in the paper about someone who has been giving a performance on the piano. The writer describes how wonderfully the pianist played, speaks of his wonderful hands and says: 'He rendered the Rondo and the crescendo like a master', etc. That may have been true of the pianist, but what about the

piano? Supposing some of the strings of the piano were broken? Supposing an enterprising little mouse had got into the piano and eaten all the dampers away? Well, even Rubinstein or Mendelssohn could not make that piano do what he wanted it to do. The great pianist may be all right. There is no question about him, but if there is something wrong in the instrument, he cannot do as he would.

"Their eyes were holden"—and that was the trouble. Something had to be done in the instrument.

That is the negative side—and it is just possible that that would be true of us.

But there is a positive side: "And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him".

Some people have said that when He took the loaf, gave thanks and gave it to them, they recognized something that they had seen before—it was just the way that Jesus did it in the upper room. Well, you may think that that is the explanation, but I do not, for the whole New Testament stands behind this. Paul said: "*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: . . . he cannot know them*" (I Corinthians ii. 14). Their eyes being holden was an act of God, and their eyes being opened was an act of God.

Paul prayed for the Ephesians: "*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened*" (Ephesians i. 17, 18). If all those Ephesian believers, who had had all Paul's teaching, needed a spirit of revelation, surely we do! It is an act of God whenever we really do see the Lord Jesus.

But, again, it was an act of grace. These men had forsaken the Lord Jesus in the hour of His trial, and they were men who were of an unbelieving heart. Jesus said to them: "*O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!*", but grace overcame all their failure and all their sin. Their eyes were opened by the grace of God. We do not have to be perfect Christians in order to see the Lord.

If it was an act of God and an act of grace, it was also an act of Divine power—and that act makes all the difference. The fire was burning very low before He opened their eyes, but when they were opened, the fire was rekindled. They had said to Him: 'Come in and abide, for the day is far spent and it is dangerous to be on the road.' When their eyes were opened, the night was turned into day. It is no longer dangerous to be on the road when you have



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your eyes opened! It is a wonderful thing to have our spiritual eyes opened.

Let us all pray every day that we shall not only

hear the Scriptures expounded, but that a great act of God shall be done in us whereby our spiritual eyes are opened to see and know the Lord.

## A CHANNEL OF BLESSING

*Reading: Acts ix. 36 - 42.*

AS Luke made his careful enquiries into the Gospel story he was able to put his finger on the secret of the divine power which flowed so freely through the Lord Jesus. When he continued his investigations to find subject matter for his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, he found that the same power was now flowing through the Church. He makes it quite plain that the hidden secret of this power was just the same. In both cases the power from on high was released into this earth through believing prayer. There is no doubt about his emphasis upon the place which prayer had in the life of Christ; there is equally no doubt that he attributed the spiritual vitality of the early Church to the fact that it was supremely a praying Church.

### PETER AT PRAYER

What was true of the Church was true of its individual members. Take Peter. At Caesarea he witnessed an amazing outpouring of the Spirit which astonished him. He had a few brothers with him who were equally amazed, but they all had no hesitation in accepting what happened as an act of God. This, clearly, was not what they had normally seen when sinners were converted. For some years now Peter had seen men turn to Christ and seen their lives transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this case, however, it was not only that Gentiles received that gift—a big enough surprise—but that the circumstances were only to be compared with what happened to the hundred and twenty on whom the Spirit fell at Pentecost. As we have said, Peter had witnessed many and great blessings in the intervening years, but he had obviously not seen this kind of “baptism” since his own share in the Pentecostal experience. “This was what happened to us at the beginning”, he told his sceptical brothers, “and when it did happen my mind was instantly turned back to the promise which the Lord gave us that we should be baptized in the Holy Spirit.”

We need not dwell on the special significance of the outpouring in the home of Cornelius. Our point is to emphasize the extreme wonder and importance of that happening. When Peter returned to Jerusalem he had to meet fierce opposition from those who were critical of his behaviour. His defence was a very simple one: “I was in the city of Joppa praying . . .” (Acts xi. 5). Those who pray must be prepared for unexpected answers, for no man knows what heavenly activities may be released if he really seeks God in prayer. What is more, the man who prays is not responsible for what happens when God answers. “Who was I, that I could withstand God?”

Peter himself suffered a revolution in his own thinking. Thank God that he was humble enough and adjustable enough to avoid hindering God. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of what happened at Caesarea, so that perhaps it is equally impossible to exaggerate the significance of the fact that the movement had its human origin with a man at prayer.

### GOD AT WORK IN PETER

We must first enquire how Peter got to Joppa. If we do so we shall find that he began his prayer ministry there, not by being interested in world movements, but simply by becoming involved in a situation of need. Dorcas had died. Her fellow believers were perplexed and disconsolate. Hearing that Peter was nearby they sent for him, probably not expecting that anything could be done about Dorcas or the work which she had been doing, for it was too late for that. They may have felt, though, that Peter could comfort them, or even that he might use the occasion of her funeral for the Gospel.

This is the first thing to note. Our prayer problems usually begin in a simple way. If Peter had not proved the power of God at Joppa one wonders whether he would have had the opportunity to prove it in the larger realm. Suppose that he had excused himself from going to Joppa. Suppose that he had felt it useless to pray there, or had found his prayer unanswered. Suppose!!! Thank God that

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we do not have to suppose. The true servant of Christ takes each new call from Him in simple heart obedience, and leaves the outcome to other and better hands.

### GOD AT WORK IN DORCAS

The notable fact about Dorcas was her life of "good works". Many had clearly profited from her help and they were dismayed that the work had now ceased. It seemed like a tragedy. God's ways often do seem like that. However, if for nothing else, this sad experience was justified in that it ensured that Peter prayed his prayer, saw his vision, and received his call to the Gentiles there in Joppa. God had bigger things on hand than Dorcas's "good works"; He had His own mighty work among the nations. The death of Dorcas fitted into that wonderful plan.

This does not mean that Dorcas did not matter. Far from it. She, too, was to have a new experience of the power of God, not only in her own life but in the testimony at Joppa, for when she was raised from the dead many people there believed on the Lord. Would it not be true to say that while her good works brought help to people, her experience of death and life from the dead brought salvation? It may be harder to "die" than to work, but it is often more fruitful.

Before the Lord Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He said to His disciples: "I am glad that I was not there" to arrest the onset of death (John xi. 15). He knew that by means of death there would be much greater glory for God than if Lazarus had recovered. By the time that the end of that story was reached we can well imagine that Martha and Mary, who had been so reproachful at His absence, were able to echo His words and affirm that after all they, too, were glad that He had not been there. Lazarus himself must have felt the same. Whereas at the time it seemed hard that Christ did not intervene, when death had been mastered and vanquished, then it must all have seemed so worthwhile. It must have been like that at Joppa. Dorcas herself, and the friends who mourned her, must have been able afterwards to say how glad they were to have passed through the great shadow. It was fully justified by the glorious outcome. After we have apparently been swallowed up by death, and from our almost despair have known the power of resurrection, then we can appreciate the wisdom and love which permitted the trial. God knew what He was doing with Dorcas. Yet in addition to this He was using her case in the training of His servant Peter.

## PETER AND THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

By this time Peter had often been the means of giving health back to sick people, but so far as we know there had been no precedent to this act of raising the dead. The Lord Jesus had raised the dead, but we never read that His disciples had done so, though they had been commanded to do so (Matthew x. 8). It seems that this was a challenge which Peter had never met before; it was the ultimate challenge of power over death. He had no precedent. And he had no helpers. When he reached the house he found only lamentation and despair. There is no doubt about the value of corporate prayer. Whenever we have the opportunity we should share our prayers with other believers. Yet in this case Peter had no one to pray with. The saints and the widows had to be left outside, to be called back again when the answer had been given. Meanwhile he must pray alone.

It is important to notice that he immediately got down to prayer. There were no discussions as to the why or how of this sorry state of affairs. We so often find ourselves involved in attempts at spiritual diagnosis, feeling that if we can get to the bottom of the matter, apportion the blame, decide where things went wrong and how they can be righted, then we are proving ourselves skilled practitioners in spiritual matters. Peter was not prepared to waste his time in this way, and nor should we be. The case was so urgent that he must get to God, and must get to God at once. If the sorrowing saints could only supply tears and mournful recollections, then he must exclude them and himself get to grips with this supreme challenge to the work of God.

### THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

When Peter had closed the door he knelt down. We might imagine that this was just a habit or a formal attitude for prayer. We have become so used to the posture that we take it for granted. Whether or not Peter was in the habit of kneeling we do not know, but we can be sure that this is a sign or symbol of complete submission to the will of God, for it is written: "As I live, saith the Lord, to me every knee shall bow . . ." at the judgment seat (Romans xiv. 10 - 11). And again: ". . . that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord . . ." (Philippians ii. 10 - 11). The bowing of the knee is the evidence of complete submission to the Lord's authority.

Such is the teaching, but Luke's writings illustrate how in practice this formed part of the approach

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## IMPORT OF THE MIRACLE

to the Father in prayer. Writing of Christ's prayer in the Garden, he tells us that "he departed from them about a stone's cast; and he kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father . . . not my will, but thine be done" (Luke xxii. 41 - 42). Then again, when writing of Stephen's death, Luke tells us that at the end of his stoning and calling on the name of the Lord, "he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts vii. 60). Stephen gives us a noble example of unoffended submission to the will of God. There are further examples, but this should be enough to establish the fact that when Peter prayed he was not telling God what to do, but humbly seeking the mind and will of God.

It is interesting to note that he turned away from his problem when he prayed. A lifeless corpse, already prepared for burial, was the subject of his prayer. Even after he had prayed we are informed that there was still no life in it, for he is described as "turning to the body" (verse 40). Yet though he had to grapple with this challenge he turned not to it, but to the Lord. As he prayed he clearly had his back to the need and his face towards God. How often we become so obsessed with what we are praying for, or the enemy against whom we are praying, that our prayers seem to be more directed to them than to heaven! We must not be obsessed with the greatness of the difficulty, but rather turn our attention to the supreme greatness of our God. So it was, then, that Peter was able now to turn round and face the impossibility before him; he had bowed in utter submission to the Lord, and so had received from Him the ability to speak the word of faith. It all seems so simple. He just spoke to the body, and it received new life again; he just stretched out a helping hand, and she was raised up again. So God's greatest miracles come through those whose simple faith makes them a channel for His almighty power.

It is hardly necessary to argue that the essential lesson of this story is a spiritual one. Since those first apostolic days when Peter and Paul fulfilled the command to "raise the dead" there has been no serious expectation of such a gift remaining here among men. Whatever may be said about gifts of healing (and none of us can doubt God's ability to heal as and when He so wishes), they are not now seen in relation to the bringing back to life of those so manifestly dead as Dorcas was. The great enemy among us is spiritual death, which always seems to be menacing the "good works" of God's servants. How many such works are motibund or already defunct through lack of the prayer we have been studying! Unbelief all too often wrings its hands in vain regret. Where is the faith that can bow the knee and speak the word of emancipation and deliverance?

Peter stayed on for a while at Joppa. God needed him to be there, not just to instruct the many new converts, as he might have supposed, but to be available for the great outreach to the nations. It was not enough for an angel to visit Cornelius; God needed a man to be available when the call came. It is instructive to notice that this call did come as Peter continued in prayer. Surely the raising of Dorcas was enough to get on with. Surely Peter might relax a little and even write the story of the great miracle. No, Peter got back to his knees and so the miracles of God continued. When Peter's critics objected to his behaviour he had a suitable and sufficient answer. "He began, and expounded the matter unto them in order, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying . . ." (xi. 4 - 5). Yes, that is it! Strange things may happen if we pray. God grant that we may be ready for them when they come.

H. F.

## THE VOICES OF THE PROPHETS (V)

*"They knew not . . . the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath"* (Acts xiii. 27).

## THE VOICE OF JEREMIAH

*(Continued)*

## THE TWO ROLLS (Jeremiah xxxvi)

**W**HEN the Apostle Paul made this reference to the Prophets, he was bringing their ministry right up to date some seven hundred years after the days

of the Prophets. Thus he showed that those "Voices" were of enduring meaning. The context also shows that there is a *voice* in the Scriptures

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

which is more than the words. The words could—and can—be heard “every Sabbath”, but the voice unheard. This is an indictment, a condemnation, a warning.

We have taken note of several of the double messages of Jeremiah; that is, two contrasting things set over against each other. In what we are now going to consider it is not a matter of contrast, but of duplication: the two rolls. It is the story of the king’s penknife with which he cut up the roll of prophecy and cast it to the flames.

This incident has—as far as our knowledge goes—been invariably fastened upon in relation to destructive criticism and the battle between conservative and liberal theologians or Bible interpreters. It certainly does provide a first-class instrument for such a controversy as to the authority of the Scriptures, but it is not our intention so to use it here. If we shut it up exclusively to such a connection we may miss a “voice” which has a spiritual meaning and message of—at least—equally important significance. This is connected more with the second roll than with the first.

The seriousness of this message is found in the judgment of God upon that offender. In fulfilment of the prophecy the body of Jehoiakim was thrown over the wall to the invaders by the very people who had not repudiated his action. That, however, is going a long way ahead in order to show that an action such as his does *eventually* issue in disaster and calamity; in shame and retribution, however long it may tarry.

What then is the message or “Voice” of the two rolls? The first was ruthlessly destroyed and cast away. No copy of it was kept by Jeremiah or Baruch, his scribe. There were no carbon copies of documents in those days. The reproduction had to be like the first, a direct inspiration by God. God had to speak the same thing a second time (although in the second there were additions). The point is that God *did* speak again in the same terms. Do what we may in repudiation of anything that God has revealed, either to neglect, brush aside, or—as in this case—vehemently throw to the flames, that which God has spoken will appear again, undiminished, and destiny will be determined thereby. This fact appears again and again in the Bible. Two outstanding instances are Jesus Christ, and the churches in Asia. It is quite evident that, whether or not Saul of Tarsus was actually a participant in

the crucifixion of Jesus, he was *spiritually* so, and having believed that the Leader had been well got rid of, he was going to send the followers also to their death. No doubt, when Jesus was killed, Saul’s idea was that He was for ever out of the way and had come to His deserved end. All that remained to be done was to wipe out all that remained in connection with Him. We can never, with the most vivid imagination, enter into the surprise, devastation, and shattering bewilderment of the man Saul when Jesus of Nazareth met him with the announcement of who He was on the road to Damascus: “I am Jesus.” The second roll, so to speak, had turned up and confronted him. He—Saul—had used his penknife and cast Jesus of Nazareth to the flames. He had extended that work to Stephen. Now the encounter with Jesus Himself, but with additions. We cannot imagine what calamity would have befallen Saul of Tarsus if he had persisted like Jehoiakim in rebellion.

Paul wrote—perhaps with a sob—from his prison: “All that are in Asia turned away from me” (II Timothy i. 15). Under God they owed everything to Paul. Now, at length, they have turned from him and perhaps repudiated his ministry of “the whole counsel of God”. Well, is that all that there is to it? No, only thirty or so years later and we have that matchless presentation and description of Paul’s Master given in the first chapter of the Revelation. That description and presentation needs to be considered in the light of what took place in the forsaking of Paul, and the development of the subsequent thirty years. With that detailed, symbolic presentation the churches in Asia are challenged, interrogated, and judged, with their destiny in the balances, as to their reaction to Jesus—yes—and to Paul’s “Voice”. The *second* roll came up, and it was decisive.

These instances are such as to give very forceful argument to this principle: we can never ultimately get away from anything that God has shown, whatever may be our present attitude. It will come back again, and our eternal position will be hanging upon it. This, of course, is of many-sided application.

In Acts xiii Paul is showing that Israel’s tragedy—which has lasted for these many centuries—was because they thought that their neglect, or violence, would not return upon them in judgment. But they are under the aegis of the Second Roll. “Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.”

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## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

## A MIRACLE IN THE DESERT

CHRIS came home from school bursting to share what he had just heard in his Geography lesson. "Do you know, Mother," he asked, "that the Sahara is twice the size of India? And what is more, it is still growing at the rate of thirty miles a year."

"No," replied his mother, "I did not realize that it was all that big, but of course I know that it is a great waste of sand where for the most part nothing grows." This opened the way for a further disclosure of what Chris has been learning in the Geography period, so he went on to tell his mother that at the beginning of the Christian era the whole of that part of North Africa had been green and fertile. Now it was almost all dead and barren.

Neither he nor his mother could think of the reason why those fresh fields of corn had changed into the dry sand of a desert, so the only thing to do was to wait until Father came home and ask him. Christopher's father gave the answer in one word: "Trees!" "Trees?" questioned Chris, "what do you mean? There are no trees in a desert." "That is exactly the point," answered his father. "There were trees once, and then everything was fine. The trees were cut down and then everything went wrong. Trees are necessary to hold and distribute moisture. Without them the earth becomes mere dust and sand."

Of course Chris had many more questions to ask. The first, and most obvious, was to enquire why people did not plant more trees. The answer was that they had tried, and were still trying, but so far they had not been successful. The trees could usually find enough moisture to enable them to start growing, but then the winds caused the sand to blast the bark and leaves off them and beside this it caused great sand drifts which buried the young saplings. Father told Christopher that there seemed no answer to this drifting which choked all vegetation. He had read that the sand area is constantly increasing at a yard every minute. There seemed to be no way of dealing with the winds and sandstorms.

Now Christopher liked trees very much, and it seemed sad to him that nobody had been able to solve this problem. He even had a few ideas himself, but when he mentioned them to Father he was soon told that they would not work.

Then the very next Geography lesson brought some exciting news. Trees were growing in the Sahara after all! The master was almost as excited

as Chris as he told the boys the wonderful story of how some British research workers had solved the problem. They worked for an oil company and had been experimenting with petroleum spraying when they had made an important discovery. The expert tree growers would not believe that it would work until the scientists proved it to them. They tried out the experiment in Libya on dunes that had received some rain. They planted seedlings of acacia and eucalyptus and then sprayed the dunes with a thin layer of oil film. The oil kept the moisture in, and yet could let through any more rain that fell. Even in big gales the petroleum emulsion kept the sand firm and held it from drifting.

The master read the account to the boys and told them that the impossible was happening. Once the trees are established to give the moisture, shelter and shade, then fruit trees can be planted and these can have corn growing in between them. Once again Chris could hardly wait to carry the news home to his mother. She listened with interest, as she always did, and seemed very pleased, but she did not say much then.

She did not say much then, but when Chris went to bed she chose a special Scripture for their reading. It was Romans 5. 1-5. When they had read she returned to the matter of the Sahara and warned Chris of the danger of having a Sahara in the soul. He was a Christian and really knew that his sins were forgiven, but alas! he often did not behave like one. Mother pointed out that although she had tried to make his heart fertile and fresh with goodness, kindness, thoughtfulness and other virtues, it seemed as though the storms of passion and self-will always blew them away—just as the sandstorms had choked the young trees. It seemed impossible for him to change, and indeed it is always impossible for us in our own strength, but she reminded him of how the scientists had done the impossible.

"How was it?" she asked. "Why, by spraying the earth with oil," Chris answered. "And that is just how God does it," his mother said. "You read the last verse again." Chris read: ". . . the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us". His mother pointed out that just as the trees were free to grow in the desert because of the sprayed oil, so our hearts can be free to allow God-given virtues to grow up and be fruitful by shedding abroad His love by the Holy

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Spirit. It is important to trust the Lord Jesus to forgive our sins, but it is just as important to trust Him to give us His Spirit so that His own love may be sprayed in our hearts. The gift is given to all who are true Christians. But when a gift is given it is

important for us to receive it and say "Thank you". Will you trust the Saviour to deliver you from the sandstorms of self by shedding His love in your hearts?

H. F.

## INTO THE MIND OF GOD

## 6. "ANOTHER VESSEL"

*"Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought his work on the wheels. And when the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jeremiah xviii. 3, 4).*

WE have reached the point in our meditations which is represented by that little clause "another vessel". When the clay of Israel refused to accept the Pattern of God as represented in Jesus Christ, it was broken on the wheel. And that is how Israel is today. It refused to accept God's Pattern and therefore, being marred, it was broken on the wheel, and God turned to make another vessel, of which He could say: 'In him I am well-pleased' . . . "a vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it".

The vessel, then, that God is now making is according to Christ, and this time He is going to succeed. The end of the Bible shows us the vessel perfected and glorified.

Before we go further with this Pattern, there is a general word to be said. It is important for us to realize that God always had only one vessel in mind. He never did intend to have two vessels, one spoiled and the other good. The whole of the Old Testament contains the mystery of Christ. He is hidden everywhere in it and, in reality, God was working through all those centuries on the principle of Christ. The fact that the Old Testament closes in failure only means that the earthly representation failed. The heavenly intention never did fail, so that if God has to set aside one earthly expression, He is going on with His eternal thought. God's intention concerning His Son did not begin when Jesus came into this world. Christ had been in the mind of His Father from all eternity and was appointed to be the Pattern before ever this world was created.

You must remember that the only Bible the first Christians had was the Old Testament, and Christ

said that everything in that Bible concerned Himself. He said: "*The Scriptures . . . these are they which bear witness of me*" (John v. 39). He took up all the writings of Moses and the prophets and "*interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*" (Luke xxiv. 27), and Peter says that it was "*the Spirit of Christ which was in them (the prophets)*" (I Peter i. 10). So that if you had lived in the early days of the Church the only Bible you would have had would have been the Old Testament. But it would have been your Bible. If we ask for a Bible today we get the Old and the New Testaments together, but if Christians in the early days asked for a Bible, they were given just the Old Testament. Jesus used the Old Testament for Christians, and so did the Apostles, whose business was simply to show that the one Person in the Old Testament was Jesus Christ. All the outstanding features in it point in some way to Christ. It is God's book. He wrote it, and in His Mind there is only one object, and that is His Son.

So, in the outstanding persons of the Old Testament you have to see some feature of Christ. Was it Abraham? Well, we have been seeing how Abraham leads us to Christ. Was it Moses, or David, or the prophets? It was Christ about whom they were all speaking and whom they were representing in some way.

Let us take one simple illustration. Before the New Testament was written, during those wonderful movements in the early days, Philip was in Samaria, where God was doing a great work. The Spirit told Philip that he was to leave Samaria and go down to the desert. We might just say, by the way, that it seems a strange thing for the Lord to lead someone away from what was a very evident piece of His work to a desert. If Philip had not been a man utterly committed to the Holy Spirit, he would have had an argument with the Lord. He would have said: 'Lord, You sent me here to Samaria and You have proved that that was right. There is a great

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work of the Holy Spirit going on here, and now You tell me to go to a desert. How on earth can there be a revival in a desert? The Lord does strange things, but the end of the story shows that He was right. Perhaps you would choose to stay in Samaria, where things are happening, and you might not like the idea of going down to a desert, but it might be that the Lord has something in that desert which is bigger than Samaria: Not only a town, but a whole new nation was touched in that desert. Well, that is just by the way.

You know what happened when Philip went down to that desert. He was looking round and wondering why he was there when he saw something coming from a distance. When it got nearer to him he saw that it was a chariot with some men in it. The Spirit said to Philip: "*Go near, and join thyself to this chariot*" (Acts viii. 29). Again Philip was obedient to the Spirit, and as he got near to the chariot he heard the chief man in it reading. He looked at the man and saw that he was a dark-skinned Ethiopian, but as he listened, he said: 'I know what it is that that man is reading. He is reading out of my Bible.' So he said to the man: "*Understandest thou what thou readest?*" The man was reading from Isaiah liii, and he said: "*How can I, except some one shall guide me? And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him . . . And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, preached unto him Jesus*" (Acts viii. 31, 35). I think this settles all arguments as to whether Isaiah liii related to Jesus!

This is an example of how the Old Testament, as their Bible, was used to preach Jesus. There is something here which always amuses me. Philip preached Jesus out of Isaiah liii, and the very next thing the Ethiopian said was: "*Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*" (Acts viii. 36). Please turn to Isaiah liii and tell me where it mentions baptism! You will read it a hundred times and, on the face of it, you will never discover the word 'baptism'. There is only one conclusion that we can draw. That chapter is about the death, the burial and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and Philip must have said to this Ethiopian: 'To be united with Christ means being united with Him in His death, His burial and His resurrection.' The man believed and said "Here is water . . ." I always think the next phrase is significant: "*And they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him*" (Acts viii. 38). Well, I leave that with you, but the fact is that that Ethiopian was baptized on Isaiah liii. That is just one instance of what we are saying. Whether it is the great persons in the Old Testament, or whether

it is the central nation in it—Israel—or whether it is particular places, like Jerusalem and the Jordan, or whether it is special objects like the tabernacle and the temple, the fact is that in some way they all point to Jesus Christ.

So we come back to this: that He, God's Son, is the Pattern for the vessel, and we have commenced—and only commenced!—to study that Pattern.

Now just a further word about the beginning of the showing of the Pattern. The first thing about this Pattern is the mystery and the miracle of His birth from heaven. It is such a mystery that all the great brains of theology cannot accept it. I suppose the main point of controversy about the Lord Jesus is His virgin birth, but if you set that aside you reduce Him to the level of an ordinary man. In His very origin He would be no different from other men. I say again; many of the great brains of theology have decided against that birth. Nevertheless this has been, and still is, the great point of controversy, and this is an example of the fact that "*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . and he cannot know them*" (I Corinthians ii. 14).

The birth of Jesus Christ is a mystery and a miracle. At Christmas-time we see all sorts of things set up which are called 'the Nativity'. There are some animals in a stable, a man and a woman with a little baby, and we are told: 'That is the Nativity.' There was never anything more false. Bethlehem was never the birthplace of the Son of God. He was with the Father before this world was (John xvii. 5). Bethlehem was only the point at which He came out of eternity into time. His nativity was not in Bethlehem; it was in heaven. He repudiated His earthly father and mother and always spoke about "*my Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew xviii. 10).

Do you notice that when Luke wrote the genealogy of Jesus, he said of Him: "*being the son of Joseph*" (Luke iii. 23), and then he protected that by putting into brackets "*as was supposed*". This was just what man supposed, but it was not true. He never was the son of Joseph.

What has this to do with us? This is the Pattern. The beginning of every Christian life is on the same principle as that of Jesus Christ. The Christian is not of time, but of eternity—thus the Apostle says: "*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians i. 4). Our coming into relation with the Lord Jesus is only our coming out of eternity into time, out of heaven into this world. Where is your true nativity? If you were asked that by people of the world, you would say: 'I was born in France . . . in Switzerland . . . in England.' If you

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were to say: 'I was born in heaven', the world would look at you and say: 'You *are* a funny creature!' At best they would say: 'What do you mean? I don't understand.' Jesus said of Himself: "I am come down from heaven" (John vi. 38) . . . "I am not of this world" (John viii. 23), and in that sense He is the Pattern. We do not belong here, and the consciousness of that ought to be growing stronger all the time. As we have said, there ought to be a mystery and a miracle in the life of every child of God.

I am not sure how your Bibles put this, but I am sorry that in the English Bible the words of the Lord Jesus to Nicodemus are put as they are, although in the Revised Version there is a correction in the margin. In the old Version it says: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3). That is quite good, as far as it goes, but what Jesus really said was: "Except a man be born from above". The real beginning of a Christian's life is from above, and not from beneath. Of course, dear friends, you and I have to learn the meaning of this all our life, but we just state the fact and leave it there for the moment.

The next thing that we must come to in the Pattern is what we may call 'the take-over of the Holy Spirit'. That which is born of God is taken over by the Holy Spirit. I do not want to make difficulties for anyone, especially for our young people, but for those who know their Bibles, you will remember that there is always associated with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the idea of sonship. Now it was when the Lord Jesus came up out of the waters of Jordan that He was attested the Son of God. Be careful! I am *not* saying that it was then that He became the Son of God—He *was* the Son of God. But on the resurrection side of the Jordan heaven attested Him the Son of God, and the Apostle Paul says: He "was declared to be the Son of God in power, . . . by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans i. 4—AV). There is a spiritual sense in which that was the new beginning.

Then do you notice what happens immediately after? The Holy Spirit from heaven takes over.

Now the Church went down into the Jordan when Christ was crucified. It certainly did go down into death. But when Christ was raised from the dead the Church began to live again, or, anyway, move toward life. It was like the dry and scattered bones of Ezekiel's vision beginning to move together. Something is happening in those forty days after the resurrection—there is a sound of movement amongst the dry bones. Then "they were all together in one place" (Acts ii. 1) and the Holy Spirit came upon them. Although the Church was

an eternal thing, it was born historically on the Day of Pentecost. The eternal had now come into time, and the mark of the birth of the Church was that the Holy Spirit took over. I am very careful when I use that phrase: 'He took over'. The Holy Spirit took everything out of the hands of men into *His* hands. That is why it is said: "A sound as of a rushing mighty wind" (Acts ii. 2—AV), and you know that when you get into the grip of a mighty, rushing wind, things are taken out of your hands and you just have to go where the wind is going. So Jesus said to Nicodemus: "The wind blows where it likes, and you cannot tell the wind where it is to blow." Some of us heard the wind coming down the mountains last night, and if you had been in the course of that wind it would have been silly for you to say: 'Now, wind, don't blow this way. Blow the other way.' You just have to go the way of the wind and accept that it is the master. "So is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John iii. 8).

What did this mean in the case of the Lord Jesus as the Pattern? It meant that all His acts, His words and His ways were governed from heaven. There was a mystery about it. People could not understand why He did what He did and why He did things in the way in which He did them. They certainly could not understand His words. Apparently He was like other men, and that was their problem. As they looked at Him they did not see anything different from the other men around. He was Himself as a man, but He was also *someone* else, and *something* else.

Now, when we become mastered by the Holy Spirit we do not lose our personality. We remain ourselves and we can be distinguished amongst one another because we are all ourselves. And yet we are *someone* else. There is another who is different from what we are. In a sense, there are two personalities about us. There is what we are naturally, but there is *someone* else—what we are spiritually. So it was with Jesus: He was two beings, so to speak. Under the government of the Holy Spirit we are more than ourselves, and that is how it was with the Lord Jesus. When people met Him, they met more than Him, and if we are according to the Pattern that is how it must be with us. How I would like to spend a lot of time on that! May I remind you that Abraham was more than Abraham, Moses was more than Moses and Elijah was more than Elijah. When you met Abraham, Moses or Elijah you met all Israel.

You see, "none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself" (Romans xiv. 7). As the Lord's people we represent something very much more than our individual life: we represent all the people



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of God. We are bound up with the whole life of the Church, and the vessel that God is making is the Church as a whole. It is the whole Church which constitutes the one vessel that God is seeking to form, so that our lives are intended to be a part of a much bigger whole. That truth, of course, involves us in a great responsibility.

Now, if you look into your Bible, you will see that that is exactly what it meant when the Holy Spirit took over. On the one hand, these people,

Apostles and others, were just themselves. They were not changed into angels or into disembodied spirits. They were just themselves. Peter is still Peter—and yet they represent something very much more than themselves. They have become greater than themselves, and that is what the Holy Spirit will do for us.

These are just some features of the Pattern. There are very many more, but I must leave it with you to go and learn Christ.

(Concluded)

### THE NECESSITY OF GIVING EARNEST HEED TO THE THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN HEARD

*“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will”* (Hebrews ii. 1 - 4).

*“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, when they refused him that warned them on earth, much more shall not we escape, who turn away from him that warneth from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: for our God is a consuming fire”* (Hebrews xii. 25 - 29).

THOSE words, of course, sound very terrible. They are almost like holding a threat over people, and you might feel that they are not too encouraging a beginning for a time like this. However, I have read them with one object, and I think they constitute a very good starting-point for such a consideration as is before us at this time.

No one will question the solemnity of those words. There is something almost terrible about them. When you hear them you say: ‘Well, you cannot, you dare not, fail to recognize that we are in the presence of something very serious. There really is something very serious on hand when such words have to be spoken.’ We are not in the presence of some light, superficial, pleasant matter and interest. We are evidently in the presence of something momentous, something which, if it can be put into such language of *fear*—for it says “Let us fear”: a solemn and terrible warning of the possibility of something awful happening—well, you don’t talk like that about anything unless it is something of tremendous value, something of very glorious possibility and consequence. To miss that something is said to be the most terrible thing that could happen. Therefore it must be something tremendously important.

Now, I am not exaggerating, I am not making that up, but there you are. I have started at the beginning of the Letter: “Let us fear lest . . .”. I have gone right over to near the end of the Letter where similar words occur again as summing up, and in between the beginning and the end you just have any number of these earnest entreaties, these solemn warnings and examples taken out of the life of others who did not give heed and go through, and what happened in their case?

Therefore I suggest to you that this Letter must be a very vital Letter. If that is the nature of it, the realm of it, if that is the portent, then there is something tremendous in view for Christians which can be missed. That is what it is all about.

For the present I will occupy my time mainly in talking about the Letter.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

When you have language like this, when someone is speaking in this way and it is put on record, and turns out to be (allow me to put it in this way) not man writing or speaking, but God, you surely must be in the presence of a crisis. It must be a crisis that is on hand; that is, a terminal point on which, and at which, tremendous issues are at stake, one way or another. When you hear, something has got to happen. It is the ultimate that is brought to bear upon this moment, this situation.

We know, of course, that this Letter itself took its rise from a crisis, but it is impressive to realize that not only was it related to a historic crisis, but the Holy Spirit took hold of that and introduced the ultimate crisis, and built upon that the ultimate issue. Perhaps you need that explained.

### THE HISTORIC CRISIS

The historic crisis was this. This Letter was written probably about two years before that full scattering for the whole of this age of the Jewish people: the destruction of Jerusalem which the Lord Jesus had foretold. You notice, in our reading, things which were in the first place spoken by the Lord Jesus—*"Give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard"*—and some of the things which were spoken by Him related to this crisis. He said: *"The days will come, in which there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down"* (Luke xxi. 6). That terrible twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, spoken by the Lord, was bearing upon the thing which was now within a year or two of actual fulfilment, when the Roman legions besieged Jerusalem, brought it to starvation, destroyed its temple so that literally, according to a Jewish historian, they did not leave one stone upon another. It is on record that as they went about their work, they literally left the whole thing on the ground. The temple was finished, all the temple worship was finished, the priesthood was finished, the sacrifices were finished, and the people were scattered to the ends of the earth, never to be fully recovered again in this dispensation. It has been according to the Lord's word: *"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate"* (Matthew xxiii. 38). It has been like that these nearly two thousand years.

That is the historic crisis which is here—the shaking of the things of the earth that can be shaken.

### THE ULTIMATE CRISIS

Now the Holy Spirit takes hold of the historic and superimposes upon that something bigger: the

shaking of the heavens also, the heavenly things. Christianity as a whole will be shaken at the end. This is the end of one phase, but another phase is coming when everything in Christianity will be shaken to its foundation. This tremendous, two-fold crisis is the occasion of this Letter.

Why did the Lord cause this person, whoever he was—and we won't debate who he was—to write this Letter at that time? This is where it comes to us, and it ought to come with just as much force as it came to the Jews, or was intended to come to the Jews at that time.

The time will come, and it is fixed in the counsels of God, when everything in this creation and in this universe is going to be subject to a tremendous shaking. It is going to happen. Peter speaks about it in terms of the atomic age, as you know: *"The elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up"* (II Peter iii. 10). It is coming. And the issue is this: When it comes, what have we that will abide the shaking? What will come through it all and survive unshaken? What have we got that, let the greatest shaking in this universe come, can never be moved, will never go, will come out all right, unshaken—"a kingdom that cannot be shaken"? What have you got like that?

### GETTING ON TO GROUND THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN

Now this Letter was written to these Hebrew Christians to try—and it was a great effort of the Lord—to get their feet established upon ground that could never be shaken. They were wavering, already being shaken and being moved from their steadfastness. Some of them were thinking of going back to the old associations and the old Jewish system, and the Lord inspired this Letter with the one object of getting them established, so established that when this terrific storm broke, these winds were let loose and so many and so much carried away, there would be that which would stand the storm and abide. As I have said, He used the historic as the occasion for bringing in the eternal. He leads on to this for all Christians.

### BEFORE THE STORM BREAKS

Now, dear friends, there are two things which are important for us to notice. One is this: that you cannot settle that matter when the storm breaks. If you have ever been in a really good storm you know very well that that is not the time to get things settled. If you have not got them settled

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before then, you are just going to be all at sea indeed. The forces will be far too much to cope with. You will just be thrown all over the place. An emergency is not the time to get quietly down to our foundations, for we are too much caught up in things. If it is not all settled beforehand, if you do not know where you are beforehand, you will not be able to see to it when this thing breaks. It is important to recognize that. Therefore this Letter would say: 'In the light of testings which will come, in view of that which is bound to break upon us at some time, now is the time to make sure that our position is an absolutely sound one, an absolutely true one, and that there is nothing doubtful about our position at all, no question about it and we know where we are, that we are not at the mercy of other people's judgments and ideas. We know the Lord for ourselves. We know where we are. Let everything go to pieces! We know where we are with the Lord.' That is the thing that has to be settled, and it cannot be settled when everything is going to pieces.

The other thing that is important is that we should recognize that it may not be necessary for the great ultimate upheaval and chaos and cataclysm to take place in order to bring that issue out. Is not this the heart of every trial that comes into the Christian life? Any day there can come a temptation, or an adversity, some suffering, or some thing that is just calculated to throw you all over the place. In any such experience the question arises: What have I got of the Lord that is going to get me through this? What have I really got now of the Lord that will stand me in stead in this crisis? It may be something in everyday life, a family matter, a business matter, a church matter, or a personal matter, but it is something that is most testing, unsettling, upsetting. It comes like a shock or a blow and could knock us to pieces. What have we got of the Lord which will see us through and will not go with the wind, will not be carried away in this hour of trial, but will stand and remain?

That is the issue of this Letter, whether it is a historic crisis in the life of Israel, or Jewry, or in the ultimate experience of the Church. It is coming, and has already come to multitudes of people on this earth. It is the position today in a large part of the world, where the test is: What have we got that will see us through this terrible time? It is a question for many in the East today, but it is the ever-present question.

#### LEST WE DRIFT AWAY

That is the message of this Letter, so it has to be solemn, it has to be serious, and it has to use

words like this: "Let us give—we ought to give—the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them."

Now that is a poor way of interpreting the original language. Our English language just so often fails to give us the real sense of the words which were originally used. Here it is: "Lest haply we drift away from them", but the picture there in the original language is of a ship in rough water, with strong currents and heavy winds, and that ship is having a very difficult time and is trying to make calm water. There are moorings there in the harbour. If only she can make those moorings, lay hold on them and get moored up, she will be all right. Here she comes, but those responsible are a bit careless about it, and just as she comes up on the moorings they are too careless to grasp them, to lay hold of them and to fasten them, and she drifts past on to the rocks. That is actually the picture behind the words here—"We ought to give the more earnest heed . . . lest haply we drift away." You see, on this strong, adverse current of these conditions of trial, we can drift past through not being serious enough, not earnest enough, nor meaning business sufficiently. The moment comes when all might be well and we might be made fast and sure, but we drift past, carried on to lose what was there for us.

Now, you know that this whole Letter is built up on that idea. Read it again in that light. After its introduction, that wonderful presentation of the Lord Jesus, it says: "*We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away*", and you see what the consequences of that are in this book. "The more earnest heed to the things that were heard." To me that is a key to this book. There are many arguments in it which might be taken out and used as the title, or key, to the whole book. A little further on there is this wonderful fragment: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" "So great salvation" might be a key to the book. You can read and study it in the light of that. And there are many other fragments like that which in themselves open up the whole book. "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard." What things?

#### GOD HATH SPOKEN IN HIS SON

You see how the book begins: "*God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son.*" Not by His Son. That is true, but it does not say that here.

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Yes, He spoke by His Son, but the real point here is that He has spoken *in* His Son. The Son *is* God's speech. It is not even what the Son says, but it is what the Son Himself implies, signifies, what His coming into this world, or being in eternity, represents of God's thought. God has manifested Himself, has made Himself known, revealed Himself, spoken for Himself Son-wise. Not the words of the Son only, but the Son Himself expresses God. If you or I could see the Lord Jesus, really read Him as a person, we would have all that God wants us to know, for it is all there. God has spoken in a person. He has embodied Himself for revelation in a person . . . 'hath spoken at the *end* of these days Son-wise'. You notice that the words 'in his Son' are in italics, which means that in the original those words do not exist. What is really there is this: 'God hath spoken Son-wise.' That is difficult to grasp and to understand, but, you see, it opens up everything. The rest of the book is an opening up of what Christ is, and all that has come from God in Him personally. We are not going further with that at the moment, but God hath spoken. In old times He spoke by angels, by leaders, by prophets, by priests and by numerous means and methods, signs and symbols and types, divers manners, a variety of manners, in different times and fragments. He has gathered the whole up now at the end. This is the last speech of God, but it is complete and full, comprehensive. It is the end—Christ.

"We ought to give the more earnest heed." If it was so serious when He spoke by or through angels, then it was tremendously solemn when He spoke in His Son. The angels were great beings, wonderful beings, but, as the Letter goes on to show, nothing in comparison with the Son. If when God spoke through prophets, or priests, or kings, or leaders, it was a solemn matter for the people—and it was a very solemn matter, a crucial thing for those who heard—how much more so when He spoke Son-wise! We ought therefore to give the *more* earnest heed when God speaks like this, and He has spoken to us like this. You see what it says: "*The word spoken through angels proved steadfast*". This so great salvation takes its greatness, its dimensions, its supremacy from the fact that Christ is so much greater than all. God has spoken to us in Him, but, you see, it is "*God bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit*".

## THROUGH THE APOSTLES

I think there is something more to note about this for the moment. This Letter—so-called to the

Hebrews—was written (if what we think is true) just before the year A.D. 70, when the destruction of Jerusalem finally took place. By the year 70 all the Apostles, with the exception of John, had gone to the Lord. They had done their work and had written their Letters. God had spoken concerning His Son through them all. Only John remained at this time. God had been speaking. Now it says here: "God . . . bearing *them* witness". To whom did God bear witness? To the Apostles—"by signs and wonders . . . and gifts of the Holy Spirit". God was speaking concerning His Son in and through the Apostles, so that by the time this Letter was written there existed the major part of the New Testament literature. Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians existed. You look into all those and you see that it was God speaking concerning His Son. The Letter to the Romans opens almost with that very phrase: "*The gospel of God . . . concerning his Son*", and that is the message of that big book.

Now these are the things that were heard: God's speaking concerning His Son. You and I have that. We have all that God has said and is going to say in this dispensation concerning His Son. All that I am saying is only getting into what God has said. I am not adding anything to this revelation of Jesus Christ. It would be impossible to do that, and it would be a very terrible thing to attempt to do it. We are only, as the Lord enables, getting into what God has said about His Son in His Word. We have it all: all that God has said concerning His Son. What a tremendous thing it is that He has spoken to us by His Son! "We ought to give the more earnest heed", because tremendous things are bound up with this. I am not going further into that just now, for I am only talking around and on this Letter.

## MAKING SURE OF OUR CALLING

You see, it is a very critical thing for the Christian life. Not to the unsaved, for this Letter is not written to the unsaved, but to Christians. If you look into the Letter you will find that these Christians made a wonderful start. Reference is made to what they suffered for Christ's sake when they came to faith in Him. They suffered the spoiling of their goods—they suffered terribly. They made a tremendous start and there was no doubt about them being Christians. I repudiate any suggestion that this Letter was written to professing Christians and not real Christians. You don't talk to professing Christians in this way! What have they to lose? They have not got it to lose. The whole

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Letter is on what Christians may lose, and it is not a matter of losing their basic salvation. Let us say that at once but that will lead us further into the Letter. There is some tremendous thing that Christians have got to make sure of. It is not just their being basically saved, getting into heaven. The Corinthians were there, but to them the Apostle said: 'Look here, you Corinthians, the foundation is laid in you and you are on the foundation, but you may be putting up a tremendous superstructure which will go up in flames and in smoke and you will just get into heaven *so as by fire.*' Do you know what that means? Well, you may get in, but everything you have got will be lost and go up in smoke. You will get in naked. What kind of *abundant* entrance into the everlasting kingdom is that?

Well, of course, if you would be of this indifferent kind and say: 'Well, as long as I get into heaven, that is all that matters' you are completely out of tune with the New Testament. This Letter is saying: 'That is not enough. There is something immensely more than that to which you were called in Christ, and you have to make very sure about that . . . "Give the more earnest heed . . . lest".' *Lest!* How often that little word occurs in this Letter! *Lest* so-and-so be the result which God never meant for His people. He meant something so much more than that.

Well, I think we are going to leave it there now. We just stand on the threshold and survey this, and conclude with this word.

#### THE LORD WANTS BETTER CHRISTIANS

Dear friends, the Lord wants much better Christians than many of us are. He does want a more solid type of Christian than is represented by the majority. Oh, the poor shape that the majority of Christians make of this matter! What a poor representation and expression of Christ we are! Many know it and are not satisfied. Inside they

know that all is not well. They know a lot of things, have a lot of teaching and doctrine, and church work, but there is such a poor measure of Christ. The Lord wants much better Christians, a better type, a better calibre, and this Letter is the Letter to make known what it is that the Lord wants, and therefore what it is that is possible, and to bring this tremendous emphasis: "Give the more earnest heed". That attitude is essential to being a better kind of Christian. It is not how it is put here, but it is what it amounts to. There are Christians and Christians, but the Lord would work hard with us to make a better kind of Christian. I would sooner put it this way—to have a far bigger expression of Christ in us than there is. He would work hard for that. That is probably why He allows us to have difficulties, trials and adversities. We have to secure a position where, without any kind of interference, of arguments and circumstances, or what the consequences would be, we are with the Lord, at any cost, for all that He ever meant when He called us into fellowship with His Son. An attitude like that will make tremendous things possible, and that is really the upshot of this Letter. Get right into line with all the purpose of God concerning His Son and you will be a different kind of Christian, and you yourself will count for very much more. The Lord will be with you and will commit Himself.

So we can see why the Letter opens up with putting the Lord Jesus in all His greatness right there in front. What a revelation of Christ is that first chapter! The Holy Spirit puts Him there, right at the beginning, in the first, supreme place, and then He says that everything else has to do with that, relates to that, and all these entreaties, exhortations and warnings relate to this: God has an immense purpose concerning His Son, and you are called into that.

May the Lord at least impress us with this: that the salvation into which we are called is a very much bigger thing than perhaps we have realized. It is a "so great salvation".

#### THE KEY TO PRAYER

"*He that seeketh findeth*" (Matthew vii. 8).  
 "*I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth*" (Isaiah lxii. 6, 7).

**I**N the spiritual life of a Christian prayer is a matter of great importance. Every true Christian realizes this and gives himself to prayer. And yet, though some of the Lord's children spend time praying over many matters, they do not seem to get through in prayer. The reason is that they have not discovered the key.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

No matter what we take in hand to do, we need to know how to do it. It is this know-how that is so important. If we want to enter a room and the door is locked, we can find no way in unless we possess the key. Or if we want to carry a table through a door, provided we know how to go about it, we shall carry it in without a hitch; but if we do not know how to handle things, we shall carry it awkwardly, bumping and banging in a vain effort to get it through the door. The trouble is not the weight of the table, nor is it the width of the door; it is the lack of this know-how on the part of those who are doing the job. People who have learned the art of doing things do things well: people who have not learned the art labour in vain.

So it is with prayer. Matthew vii speaks of principles relating to prayer, one of which is: "He that seeketh findeth." Seeking requires time. Anyone who looks for a thing in a half-hearted, easy-going manner is not likely to find it. Seeking involves patience and perseverance, and unless we are thorough-going we shall not find what we seek. If God does not answer our prayers, we must exercise patience and diligently seek the key to prayer.

The reason why God answered the prayers of many of the saints in past days is that they had the key to prayer. If you read the biography of George Muller you will see that throughout his entire life he was always receiving answers to prayer. George Muller had discovered the key. Many earnest Christians pray at great length; they pray wordy prayers, but they do not receive answers from God. In prayer words are essential, but we must not be wordy. Our words must be to the point; they should be words that touch the heart of God and so move Him that they leave Him no alternative but to grant our requests. Words that are to the point are the key to prayer. Such words are in perfect keeping with God's will, therefore He cannot but respond to them. Let us look at a few scriptural illustrations that we may learn the art of prayer.

### ABRAHAM'S PRAYER FOR SODOM

(Genesis xviii 16 - 33)

When God had made it known to Abraham that He was about to execute judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness, Abraham still waited before God. Then he began to pray for Sodom. He did not just open his mouth and say: "O God, have mercy on Sodom!" He did not with

great intensity beseech God saying: "Oh, forbid that Sodom should be destroyed!" Abraham laid hold on the fact that God is a righteous God; and that was the key to prayer concerning Sodom. In deep humility and with great earnestness he proceeded to ask God one question after another. His questions were his requests. And as he proceeded in prayer he stood steadfastly on the ground of God's righteousness. At length he said: "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: peradventure ten shall be found there." That was Abraham's final request. After God answered it we are told that "the Lord went his way". Abraham did not try to hold on to God; he did not try to go on praying. We read, "Abraham returned unto his place". Some people say he should have continued beseeching God, but the Scriptures show that Abraham knew God, and he knew the art of prayer. He had heard the Lord say: "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great and . . . their sin is very grievous . . . the cry of it is come unto me." If there are not so many as ten righteous persons in a city, what kind of a city is it! Hebrews i. 9 tells us that the Lord loves righteousness and hates iniquity. He cannot cover sin and refrain from judgment. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was the awful consequence of their sin, and it was the manifestation of God's righteousness. When He overthrew those cities He did no injustice to a single righteous person; He "delivered righteous Lot, sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked" (II Peter ii. 7). Abraham's prayer which was to the point was answered. There was no unrighteousness with God. He did not "consume the righteous with the wicked". We worship and we praise Him.

### JOSHUA'S ENQUIRY ABOUT AI

(Joshua vii)

When the children of Israel attacked the city of Ai "they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: and they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them at the going down: and the hearts of the people melted and became as water." How had it come about that after so mighty a triumph at Jericho the children of Israel suffered dire defeat at Ai? There was only one thing Joshua could do. Prostrating himself before the Lord, he enquired into the cause of this defeat. Naturally Joshua was grieved on account of the danger into which Israel had fallen; but what grieved him more

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was the dishonour that had been brought to the name of the Lord, therefore he enquired: "What wilt thou do for thy great name?" This was the key to his prayer. He honoured the name of God. His concern was what God would do for the sake of His own name. And God answered Joshua's enquiry. He said: "Israel hath sinned . . . therefore the children of Israel cannot stand before their enemies . . . I will not be with you any more except ye destroy the devoted thing from among you." God was concerned for His own name and could not therefore tolerate sin among His people. He heard Joshua's prayer and instructed him to discover and do away with the sin that had caused the trouble. When Joshua was clear about the reason for Israel's defeat, he rose up early in the morning to deal with the matter and discovered that the trouble was Achan's sin of covetousness. When all Israel had dealt with this sin their defeat was turned into victory. To tolerate sin is to cause God's name to be blasphemed and to give Satan occasion to attack God's people. When Joshua prayed about the defeat at Ai he did not just open his mouth in undiscerning zeal and plead with God to save His people and make them victorious. It was the dishonour brought upon God's name that grieved him and his plea was that God would take up the case for His own name's sake. His prayer touched the crux of the matter and consequently brought an answer from God. And God's name that had been dishonoured was glorified.

#### DAVID'S ENQUIRY ABOUT THE FAMINE

(II Samuel xxi. 1 - 9)

"And there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David sought the face of the Lord." David did not simply open his lips and pray: "O God, this famine has lasted three years; we beseech Thee to have mercy on us and grant us a rich harvest this year." No, David did not pray like that. "David sought the face of the Lord." He sought to find out the cause of the famine. David had the key to the situation. His enquiry was direct, and God gave him a direct answer. God said, "It is for Saul and for his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonites." God will not permit the breaking of a vow, and David had to deal with this sin. He did so, and the word of God records: "After that God was entreated for the land." David possessed the key to prayer, and his prayer brought God's answer.

#### THE PRAYERS OF THE LORD JESUS

(John xii. 27, 28; Matthew xxvi. 39 - 46)

The prayers of our Lord were always perfect prayers. He possessed the key to prayer. When He refused to see the Greeks who sought Him, He said: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?" He turned the matter over carefully and thought: "Shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'?" No, He knew He could not pray that prayer. He realized, "For this cause came I unto this hour." So He prayed, "Father, glorify thy name!" That prayer was answered immediately. "There came therefore a voice out of heaven saying, I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." If the Son of God when He was on the earth stood on the ground of a Son of man as He prayed to God, how dare we on the impulse of the moment open our lips and utter rash prayers? It is essential that we learn the art of prayer.

That night in the garden of Gethsemane our Lord Jesus was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death". How did He pray under those circumstances? "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." He had the key to prayer. He had no fear of death; at the same time He had His own thoughts. But He did not wish to go His own way. He wished to go in the way of God's appointing. So He prayed a second time: "O my Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done." And He prayed a third time, "saying again the same words". By this time He was utterly clear what the will of God required of Him, and He said to His disciples: "The hour is at hand . . . arise, let us be going." If our Lord as Man on the earth, possessing the key to prayer, had in this deliberate way to set aside His own will and seek the will of God, how dare we at random utter a few words in prayer and conclude that we have discerned God's will?

#### THE PRAYER OF THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

(Matthew xv. 22 - 28; Mark vii. 24 - 30)

This Canaanitish woman was in distress, and she cried out in her need: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David." Was she not earnest in prayer? Truly she was. But the amazing thing is that the Lord "answered her not a word". And the disciples seemed to be in sympathy with the Lord, for they said to Him, "Send her away, for she crieth after

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

us." But how did our Lord reply to them? He said, "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That reply of the Lord's enabled the woman to discover the right approach to Him. She saw that the son of David was only related to the house of Israel, not to the nations. So she came and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" She now called Him "Lord", not "Son of David". She realized that only the house of Israel had a right to use that title, so she forsook the wrong ground on which she had been standing and addressed her prayer to Him as Lord. This prayer brought His answer—"It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." The answer seemed so cold, it sounded as though the Lord was rejecting the woman. Actually He was seeking to show her where she stood so that she might know the meaning of grace. The woman saw her own place and saw also the grace of the Lord, and having now the key to prayer, she said: "Yea, Lord: for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." This called forth the Lord's commendation and He said to her, "O woman, great is thy faith!" It was because she had found the key that she quite naturally exercised faith. In Mark vii we read that the Lord said, "For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter." Her brief prayer was answered because she possessed the key and prayed to the point. This is what we need to learn. Often we put forth tremendous effort in prayer without getting any answer from God, yet we do not seek to discover why. Brothers and Sisters, how can we expect God to answer prayers that are wide of the mark? In all our praying we must first find the key, for only as we do so can we expect to have constant answers from God.

Having looked at these illustrations relating to prayer, let us bear in mind that we should heed the inner voice and not be governed by our circumstances, or thoughts, or affections. When that still

small voice within tells us to pray, when in the deeps of our being we have a sense that we should pray, then let us respond at once. Circumstances should only be a means of driving us into the presence of God to wait on Him; they should not control our prayer. And thoughts should only serve to crystallize our inner registrations; they should not be the source of prayer. Prayer according to the will of God is only possible when we ourselves are in harmony with His will. Unless our affections have been dealt with we shall not readily follow the inner leading in prayer, because we shall be influenced by our own desires and shall be seeking to bring God into line with what we want. Whenever we find ourselves praying ineffectively, we must seek to discover the cause. As we enquire of the Lord we shall reach a point where the still small voice within says, That's it! Then we shall be released, for we shall be in possession of the key. And as we use the key and pray on we can be assured of God's answer.

Isaiah lxii. 6 says: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day nor night." These watchmen are men of prayer. They have to be unwearingly on the watch if they are to see what is happening and cry out. They have to be the Lord's remembrancers continually. It is not the individual who is spoken of here. "They shall never hold their peace day nor night." There are companies watching together, and together bringing their requests to God. And their prayers do not cease "till He establish and till He make Jerusalem a praise on the earth". We must persevere in prayer until the Body of Christ is built up. God needs our prayers. We must have the spirit of prayer: we must have an atmosphere of prayer: we must have the key to prayer. Brothers and Sisters, let us arise and learn to pray. Let us seek the key to prayer so that we may meet God's need today.

W. N.

## LITERATURE NOTICE

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JANUARY — FEBRUARY, 1966

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BY WATCHMAN NEE

The above book, recently published by Church Book Room (5 Observatory Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong), contains the substance of a series of messages given by Mr. Watchman Nee to a group of fellow-workers in 1948, now translated into English. Though the messages are specifically addressed to those engaged in the work of the Lord, little is said about the work: the whole stress is on the character of the worker. A man of God is appealing for men who will be God's true co-workers—not supermen, nor men who have a certain Christian status; but men according to the Christian norm, who through discipline have been brought into harmony with God's own nature and can therefore meet His need in the world today.

Copies of this book can be obtained direct from the publishers in Hong Kong and in the United States from P.O. Box 18782, Los Angeles, California 90018.

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**A WITNESS  
AND  
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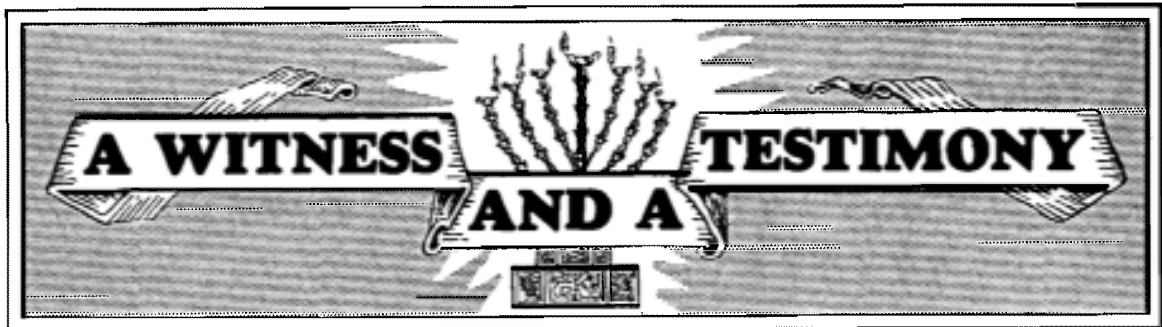
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'Personal' letters should be addressed to Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



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## FROM THE EDITOR

WE are now well launched into this year which we, and many others, feel may be a very crucial year. While we are so glad that the work of the Kingdom of God is being pressed forward in many ways and by many means, and our hearts are with every effort to bring to Christ all that is to be His, we do recognize how critical are the times, and with what severe trial of faith so many of the Lord's people are being called upon to 'Hold fast'. We all feel that *anything* could happen at *any time*. So, in the conflict we greet one another with the words of the old hymn born of the American Civil War:

“Hold the fort, for I am coming!”

Jesus signals still.

Wave the answer back to heaven:

“By thy grace we will!”

In times of uncertainty like these, one of the difficult things to do is to foresee the future and

arrange accordingly. There will be many plans and arrangements which will never have been carried out when the Lord comes, and it would be easy for those who look for His soon return to stop making plans, especially as to His work and ministries. But He has definitely told us not to let go, slacken our hands, or fail to “occupy till I come”; and so, leaving issues with Him, we seek to *complete* our testimony and relinquish none of the trust. This has a particular bearing—in our case—upon a further conference in Switzerland this year. We have had *very* serious exercise about this since the last conference. Because those conferences have grown so much year by year, we believe by the blessing of the Lord, we have quite seriously had to ask big questions. The limited accommodation in the actual conference hotel, necessitating locating many friends in other hotels, has made for a number of difficulties, particularly in the limiting of the close

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

fellowship which is a major value in such times. We have seriously thought of moving away from Aeschi, much as we love that little place, and such a move *may* have to be made. But, with some absolutely necessary changes, we are moving in faith toward another time there this year, from 3rd to 12th September, and we trust that, this being another precious time in the blessing of the Lord, it will mean life and strength to many of the Lord's people who need the help of the spiritual food and fellowship. The changes which we feel that we must make are:

1. This year we can only take actual responsibility for the number which can be accommodated in our own hotel.
2. When that number is complete, we will advise other friends who desire to attend the gatherings where they *themselves* can apply for accommodation locally.
3. This means that friends will have to apply quite early. We cannot reserve more than our own limited accommodation. (There are very few single rooms in our conference hotel.)

4. The accommodation in the hotel will have to be reserved for friends staying for at least seven days.
5. Swiss hotel rates have been increased recently, and we now have to raise the prices in the Hotel Blümlisalp to Sw.Fcs.22 per day for single rooms and Sw.Fcs.20 per person for two- and three-bedded rooms.

All this does seem to be difficult, and we would much prefer to say: 'Come, all of you who can, and do not worry about anything!' We are sure that you will understand the situation, and will co-operate as much as possible. After all, our object is to meet the Lord, and "in His presence is fulness of joy".

May Aeschi 1966—in His will—be the most blessed ever!

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

Please write to:

The Conference Secretary,  
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## THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (III)

### 3. OVERLAID WITH PURE GOLD

**N**OW we come to the second thing about the ark. We have seen that the ark was made of acacia wood, and that it was overlaid with pure gold. If you make a study of gold in the Bible you will see that it always speaks of glory, and you will also see that God was always jealous about the gold. He claimed the gold, and said: 'That is Mine. It belongs to Me.' It was that which represented the glory of God, about which He is very jealous, and Satan tried from time to time to steal the gold away from Him.

When Moses remained in the mountain forty days and forty nights the people said: 'Well, we don't know what has become of this Moses. Let us make us gods', and they called upon the people to bring their gold and out of that gold they made a golden calf. Then they said: 'This is thy god, O Israel', and they worshipped the calf.

You see, Satan had stolen the glory from God—God's glory was taken from Him by Satan. There is so much in that incident about which we have no time to speak, but there was one man who dis-

cerned the meaning of it, and it is that man's connection with the ark that we are going to look at more fully. When Joshua heard the noise of shouting in the camp, all this noise of worshipping the calf, he said: "There is a noise of war in the camp" (Exodus xxxii. 17). There was registered upon the spirit of Joshua a conflict that was going on. That was how he interpreted the situation, and he was more right than he knew, for it was a battle between the glory of God and the glory of Satan. You know that Joshua was a man of war. His whole history, as you will see, had to do with warfare, and that warfare was in relation to the ark. This spirit of conflict in Joshua was for the jealousy of God's glory.

You will remember that later on, when they were in the land, they came to the city of Ai, and there Israel met their first defeat. Joshua fell *down before the ark* of the Lord and asked Him why this defeat, and it was as though the Lord lifted up His finger, and that finger came down upon a wedge of gold. Achan had stolen a wedge of gold and hidden

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it in his tent. He had taken what had belonged to God alone and made it his own. In another way, you see, Satan had taken the glory of God and given it to man, and God says: 'My glory will I not give to another.'

Satan always has his eye on the gold: that is, he is always concerned to take the glory from God to himself. Oh, what a lot there is in the Bible about this! I am tempted to spend hours on the gold in the Bible, for it is a wonderful revelation of what belongs to God alone.

This ark, then, is covered with pure gold, and that speaks of how very precious Jesus Christ is to God, and how jealous God is for His Son, Jesus Christ. The Scripture says that all should "honour the Son, even as they honour the Father" (John v. 23). If we want to be in the good pleasure of God we must make everything of the Lord Jesus. If we want to know why it was that God was so wonderfully with the first Christians and Apostles, the explanation is that they only had one Person in view, and everywhere at all times, they were magnifying the Lord Jesus. They knew something about the value of gold in God's sight. Wherever they went people glorified Christ. The Apostle Paul was able to say about certain Christians: "They glorified God in me" (Galatians i. 24).

Now will you notice that this gold of the ark and of the tabernacle was only seen from the inside. There was very much gold in the tabernacle. It covered all the boards, there were crowns of gold upon the pillars, there was the golden altar of incense, there was the golden lampstand, there were the gold vessels, and then there was the golden ark, the golden mercy seat upon the ark and the golden cherubim over the mercy seat. There was much gold, but it was all covered over by the many curtains and you could see none of it from the outside. If you had looked at that tabernacle from the outside you would have seen something very plain and ordinary. The outermost covering was just made from skins of porpoise, and if you had looked at it from the outside you would have said: 'There is no beauty that we should desire it.' Do you know where those words come from? "And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected of men . . . and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised" (Isaiah liii. 2, 3). You know those words were spoken about the Lord Jesus, and that is exactly how He was to the world outside, but, thank God, that is not the whole story. Let us get inside. Let us go into this place where God is, and what a changed scene! Wherever we look it is

sparkling gold. There is that golden altar, that golden table of shewbread and that gold lampstand with its seven branches. From the inside we can see the gold upon the boards of the tabernacle and there are all the golden vessels. And right at the centre, and more than all, is the golden ark. But the gold can only be seen from the inside. What a lot of meaning there is in that!

See how the world looked at Jesus! See what value the world placed upon Him! See how they despised and rejected Him! And then hear John crying: "*We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John i. 14). But you have to be on the inside to talk like that. That is the privilege of the Lord's people. There is now no veil between—it has been taken away, and we are all privileged to enter within the veil and to behold His glory. Are you on the inside? Have you come to see the glory of Christ? Are you seeing more and more as life goes on of that glory in Christ? Can you join with John and say: "I behold His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth"?

Dear friends, as we go on in the Christian life we ought to be seeing more and more of the glory of Jesus Christ. You see, the gold was that which was mostly to God's pleasure; it was that which gave God His true satisfaction, and the thing which satisfies God most of all is the glory of His Son.

You know, the last picture in the Bible of the new Jerusalem describes it as having one street which is all of gold. It is the last picture in this dispensation, and the street is not just something to look at. It is something to walk in, and this symbolism is just saying: 'In the end you and I will be walking up and down in the glory of Jesus Christ.'

Well now, you can see that that opens the door to the great subject in the Bible of our being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Peter says that 'the trying of your faith is more precious than gold'. True faith which has been tried and purified in the fire is the most precious thing to God, because it is the faith of the Son of God. It is reproduced in us from Christ through fiery trials. I think that of all things precious to God faith is the most precious, because unbelief is the thing which is most against God.

Abraham is the embodiment of gold tried in the fire. He was the 'father of the faithful' and a man of gold, that is, when God had finished with him. And you and I, through the fires of trial, difficulty and suffering, are being made precious to God.

Well, I did not expect to take so much time on that one thing, but I should not be exaggerating if I



## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

said that I could spend more than this whole week on gold alone. However, there are many other things to say—but not tonight.

May I ask you, please, before tomorrow morning, to read the first chapter of the Book of the

Revelation. I am not sure that we shall get to that tomorrow—those of you who know me best wonder when I shall get anywhere! However, sooner or later we shall reach that chapter.

(To be continued)

## THE VOICES OF THE PROPHETS (VI)

*"They knew not . . . the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath"* (Acts xiii. 27).

## THE VOICE OF JEREMIAH

(Continued)

## THE PERIL OF SELF-INTEREST

*"Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not"* (Jeremiah xlv. 5).

WHEN the Apostle Paul used the words of our title to the "Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and God-fearers" in Antioch in Pisidia, as the context shows, he was relating the "Voices of the Prophets" particularly to Israel's attitude and actions to Jesus of Nazareth: "A Saviour, Jesus". In these chapters we have, so far, widened the application of the statement, but, we feel, not illegitimately. The voices of the Prophets do speak to many needs and situations, but it will be understood that we are all the time keeping in mind the possibility of a discrepancy between hearing words and hearing the "voice". Jeremiah had definitely said something like this. "To whom shall I speak and testify, that they may hear? behold their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken . . ." (Jeremiah vi. 10).

Jesus Himself said something with the same meaning. "Why do ye not understand my speech? because ye cannot hear my word" (John viii. 43). This gap between hearing all the words of teaching and hearing the voice in it, as we have said, can account for the lack of life and power even where there is much knowledge of the truth. It can also account for violent contradictions, as in the case of Israel.

We proceed to our next "Voice"—the peril of self-interest.

The story of Baruch's association with the Pro-

phet Jeremiah is a very touching one. Baruch was younger than Jeremiah. His relationship with the Prophet was more than an association: it was a friendship; it was no empty attachment, but his loyalty to his older friend cost him almost everything. From the first time that Baruch appeared on the scene he never seemed to have been far from the Prophet's side. When Jeremiah was shut up in prison, Baruch was a constant visitor and helper; and when Jerusalem was at last captured, he refused the option of release and stayed alongside his worn-out old friend. When, finally, Jeremiah was carried off into Egypt, Baruch follows in his train. Baruch goes down in history, and in immortal records, as "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother". Oh, for more Baruchs!

This friendship survived one of the greatest tests that any man, and especially a young man, could be put to. The Roll had been written by him at Jeremiah's dictation, and it had been cut to pieces and destroyed in the fire by the king. The second one had been written, with additional judgments. Chapter xlv indicates that Baruch had gone down deep in despair at what had been written; then Jeremiah (or the Lord) added to the woes. Then follow these warning, and could-be desolating, words: "And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not."

If we feel that this was too hard and cruel and unkind to say to a young man of such fidelity and devotion, our answer will come along the line of a wider horizon. We must look further and take in

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the long view. Perhaps we may find the most satisfactory answer to our question if we leave Jeremiah and Baruch for a moment and look a long way ahead to another situation which had many features similar to theirs. From vales of Galilee and vicinities of Jerusalem querulous voices can be heard:

"Lord, who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" . . . "And they disputed who was the greatest" . . . "And there arose a contention among them, which of them is accounted to be the greatest" . . . "Lord, grant that one may sit on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand when thou comest in thy Kingdom" . . . "Jesus began to show unto his disciples how that he must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things . . . and be killed . . ." . . . "And Peter began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be to thee" . . . "All ye shall be offended because of me, this night" . . . "And they all forsook him and fled" . . . "We had hoped that it had been he who should redeem Israel" . . . "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?"

How very appropriate it would have been for Jesus to have used the warning words of Jeremiah over all the above:

"Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not."

We must remember that, as with Jeremiah and Baruch, so with Jesus, dark clouds were on the horizon. Many things had been said by both which pointed to ominous and distressing days. The great ordeal by fire was prophesied. For the disciples that was to be the Cross. For Israel, the devastating and desolating ordeal of A.D. 70 had been definitely intimated by Jesus. In view of both these pending

tragedies it was no time to seek great things for themselves. But, there, in the last two words, we have the clue: "For *thyself*."

In the sovereign counsels and righteousness of God, both Jeremiah and Baruch have been vindicated. Baruch has greater things than he could have had in a perishing kingdom of this world. And we have only to read Peter's first Letter to know whether he thought that the loss of all earthly and temporal "great things" for the 'preciousness' of Christ was a poor exchange, a bad bargain. Everything turned upon the object of ambition; "thyself" or the Lord. When their Lord became the object and the end of all their seeking, they came into the *greatest* things of all! "Great things"? Yes; a thousand times, Yes! Not for ourselves, but for Him.

Israel lost *everything* by holding to themselves and denying Jesus His rights. It was a desolating self-interest. Peter, John, Paul, and ten thousand others have gained the transcendent things of eternity and glory by that change of object. "No longer I", 'not myself', but "unto him be the glory for ever and ever".

"As the serpent beguiled Eve . . ." (II Corinthians xi. 3). The key to all beguiling is selfhood. It is as subtle as the serpent and intrudes into the most sacred things. Hidden beneath our most convinced sincerity and devotion to God (as we believe, and as Peter believed) there may lurk that element of desire for place, for power, for self-realization. Only a shattering defeat can disclose this hang-over of the original 'Fall'. Herein, then, lies the imperative of a real and deep work of the Cross at the root of the self-life.

(To be continued)

## MINISTRY TO THE HOUSE OR TO THE LORD

LET us note at the outset that there is little apparent difference between ministry to the House and ministry to the Lord. Many of you are doing your utmost to help your brethren, and you are labouring to save sinners and administer the affairs of the church. But let me ask you: Have you been seeking to meet the need around you, or have you been seeking to serve the Lord? Is it your fellowmen you have in view, or is it Him?

Let us be quite frank. Work for the Lord undoubtedly has its attractions for the flesh. You may

find it very interesting, and you may be thrilled when crowds gather to hear you preach, and when numbers of souls are saved. If you have to stay at home, occupied from morning to night with mundane matters, then you think: How meaningless life is! How grand it would be if I could go out and serve the Lord! If only I were free to go around preaching, or even to talk to people about Him!

But that is not spirituality. That is merely a matter of natural preference. Oh, if only we could see that very much work done for God is not really

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ministry to Him! He Himself has told us that there was a class of Levites who busily served in the Temple, and yet they were not serving Him; they were merely serving the House. Service to the Lord and service to the House appear so much alike that it is often difficult to differentiate between the two.

If an Israelite came along to the Temple and wanted to worship God, those Levites would come to his aid and help him offer his peace offering and his burnt offering. They would help him drag the sacrifice to the altar, and they would slay it. Surely that was a grand work to be engaged in, reclaiming sinners and leading believers closer to the Lord! And God took account of the service of those Levites who helped men bring their peace offerings and their burnt offerings to the altar. Yet He said it was not ministry to Himself.

Brothers and Sisters, there is a heavy burden on my heart that you might realize what God is after. He wants ministers who will minister to Him. "They shall come near to *Me* to minister unto *Me*; and they shall stand before *Me* to offer unto *Me* the fat and the blood. . . . They shall minister unto *Me*" (Ezekiel xlv. 15).

*The thing I fear most is that many of you will go out and win sinners to the Lord and build up believers, without ministering to the Lord Himself. Much so-called service for Him is simply following our own natural inclinations. We have such active dispositions that we cannot bear to stay at home, so we run around for our own relief. We may be serving sinners, and we may be serving believers, but we are all the time serving our own flesh.*

I have a dear friend who is now with the Lord. One day, after we had had a time of prayer together, we read this passage in Ezekiel. She was very much older than I, and she addressed me like this:

"My young brother, it was twenty years ago that I first studied this passage of Scripture." "How did you react to it?" I asked. She replied: "As soon as I had finished reading it I closed my Bible, and kneeling down before the Lord I prayed: 'Lord, make me to be one who shall minister to Thee, not to the Temple.'" Can we also pray that prayer?

But what do we really mean when we talk of serving God or serving the Temple? Here is what the Word says: "But the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, *they shall come near to Me* to minister unto Me; *and they shall stand before Me* to offer unto Me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord God." The conditions basic to all ministry that can truly be called

ministry to the Lord are—drawing near to Him and standing before Him.

How hard we often find it to drag ourselves into His presence! We shrink from the solitude, and even when we do detach ourselves physically, our thoughts still keep wandering outside. Many of us can enjoy working among people, but how many of us can draw near to God in the Holy of Holies? Yet it is only as we draw near to Him that we can minister to Him. To come into the presence of God and kneel before Him for an hour demands all the strength we possess. We have to be violent to hold that ground. But every one who serves the Lord knows the preciousness of such times, the sweetness of waking at midnight and spending an hour in prayer, or waking very early in the morning and getting up for an hour of prayer before the final sleep of the night. Let me be very frank with you. Unless we really know what it is to draw near to God, we cannot know what it is to serve *Him*. It is impossible to stand afar off and still minister to *Him*. We cannot serve Him from a distance. There is only one place where ministry to Him is possible and that is the Holy Place. In the outer court you approach the people; in the Holy Place you approach the Lord.

The passage we have quoted emphasizes the need of drawing near to God if we are to minister to Him. It speaks also of standing before Him to minister. It seems to me that today we always want to be moving on; we cannot stand still. There are so many things claiming our attention that we are perpetually on the go. We cannot stop for a moment. But a spiritual person knows how to stand still. He can stand before God till God makes His will known. He can stand and await orders.

I wish to address myself specially to my fellow-workers. May I ask you: Is not all your work definitely organized and carried out to schedule? And has it not got to be done in great haste? Can you be persuaded to call a halt and not move for a little while? That is what is referred to here—"stand and minister to Me".

None can truly minister to the Lord who do not know the meaning of this word: "They shall *draw nigh to Me* and minister unto Me." Nor can any minister to Him who do not understand this further word: "They shall *stand before Me* to minister unto Me." Brethren, do you not think any servant should await his master's orders before seeking to serve him?

There are only two types of sin before God. One is the sin of rebelling against His commands, i.e. refusing to obey when He issues orders. The other

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is the sin of going ahead when the Lord has not issued orders. The one is rebellion; the other is presumption. The one is not doing what the Lord has required; the other is doing what the Lord has not required. Standing before the Lord deals with the sin of doing what the Lord has not commanded.

Brothers and Sisters, how much of the work you have done has been based on the clear command of the Lord? How much have you done because of His direct instructions? And how much have you done simply on the ground that the thing you did was a good thing to do? Let me tell you that nothing so damages the Lord's interests as a 'good thing'. 'Good things' are the greatest hindrance to the accomplishment of His will. The moment we are faced with anything wicked or unclean, we immediately recognize it as a thing the Christian ought to avoid, and for that reason things which are positively evil are not such a menace to the Lord's purpose as good things. You think: This thing would not be wrong, or, That thing is the very best that could be done; so you go ahead and do it without stopping to enquire if it is the will of God. Oh, we who are His children all know that we ought not to do anything evil, but we think that if only our conscience does not forbid a thing, or if a thing commends itself to us as positively good, that is reason enough to go ahead and do it.

That thing you contemplate doing may be very good, but are you standing before the Lord awaiting His command regarding it? 'They shall stand before Me' involves halting in His presence and refusing to move till He issues His orders. Ministry to the Lord means that. In the outer court it is human need that governs. Just let someone come along to sacrifice an ox or a sheep, and there is work for you to do. But in the Holiest Place there is utter solitude. Not a soul comes in. No brother or sister governs us here, nor does any committee determine our affairs. In the Holiest Place there is one authority only, the authority of the Lord. If He appoints me a task I do it; if He appoints me no task I do none.

But something is required of us as we stand before the Lord and minister to Him. We are required to offer Him "the fat and the blood". The blood answers the demands of His holiness and righteousness; the fat meets the requirements of His glory. The blood deals with the question of our sin; the fat deals with the question of His satisfaction. The blood removes all that belongs to the old creation: the fat brings in the new. And this is something more than spiritual doctrine. *Our* soul-life was involved in the pouring out of *His* soul

unto the death. When He shed His eternally incorruptible blood, He was not only pouring out His own life, He was pouring out the whole of the life man had by natural birth. And He not only died: He arose from the dead, and "the life that He lives He lives unto God". He lives for God's satisfaction. He offers "the fat and the blood". We, too, who would minister to the Lord, must offer the fat and the blood. And that impossible thing is possible on the basis of what He has done.

But such ministry is confined to a certain place: "They shall enter into My sanctuary, and they shall come near to My table to minister unto Me, and they shall keep My charge" (v. 16). Ministry that is "unto Me" is in the inner sanctuary, in the hidden place, not in the outer court exposed to public view. People may think we are doing nothing, but service to God within the Holy Place far transcends service to the people in the outer court. Brothers and Sisters, let us learn what it means to stand before the Lord awaiting His orders, serving at His command only, and governed by no consideration but the consideration of His will.

The same passage tells us how they must be clothed who would minister to the Lord. "They shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. They shall have linen tires upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins." Those who minister to the Lord may not wear wool. Why not? The reason is given below: "They shall not gird themselves with anything that causeth sweat." No work that produces sweat is acceptable to the Lord. But what does 'sweat' signify? We all know that the first occasion when sweat is mentioned was when Adam was driven from the garden of Eden. After Adam had sinned God pronounced this sentence upon him: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life . . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Genesis iii. 17-19). It is clear that sweat is a condition of the curse. Because the curse rested on the ground it ceased to yield its fruit without man's effort, and such effort produced sweat. When the blessing of God is withheld, fleshly effort becomes necessary, and that causes sweat. All work that produces sweat is positively prohibited to those who minister to the Lord. Yet today what an expenditure of energy there is in work for Him! Alas! few Christians can do any work today without sweating over it. Their work involves planning and scheming, exhorting and urging, and very much running around. It cannot be done without a great deal of fleshly

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zeal. Nowadays if there is no sweat, there is no work. Before work for God can be undertaken there is a great deal of rushing to and fro making numerous contacts, having consultations and discussions, and finally getting the approval of various people before going ahead. As for waiting quietly in the presence of God and seeking His instructions, that is out of the question. Yet in spiritual work the one factor to be taken into account is God. The one Person to make contact with is God. Oh! that is the preciousness of spiritual work—it is related to God. And in relation to Him there is work to do, but it is work that produces no sweat. If we have to advertise the work and use great effort to promote it, then it is obvious that it does not spring from prayer in the presence of God. Please bear with me when I say that all work which is truly spiritual is done in the presence of God. If you really work in God's presence, when you come into the presence of men they will respond. You will not have to use endless means in order to help them. Spiritual work is God's work, and when God works man does not need to expend so much effort that he sweats over it.

Brothers and Sisters, let us in utter honesty examine ourselves before God today. Let us ask Him: Am I serving You, or am I serving the work? Is my ministry "unto the Lord", or is it "unto the House"? If you are pouring with sweat all the time, then you yourself can come to the conclusion that it is the House you are serving, not the Lord. If all your busyness is related to human need, you may know that you are serving men, not God. I am not despising the work of slaying sacrifices at the altar. It is work for God and someone has to do it; but God wants something beyond that.

God cannot secure everyone for service to Himself, for many of His own are reluctant to leave the thrill and excitement of the outer court. They are bent on serving the people. But what about us? Oh that today we might say to the Lord: 'I am willing to forsake things, I am willing to forsake the work, I am willing to forsake the outer court and serve You in the inner sanctuary.'

When God could find no way to bring all the Levites to the place of ministry to Himself, He chose the sons of Zadok from among them for this special service. Why did He select the sons of Zadok? Because, when the children of Israel went astray, they recognized that the outer court had been irreparably corrupted, so they did not seek to preserve it; but they made it their business to preserve the sanctity of the Holy Place.

Brothers and Sisters, can you bear to let the external structure go, or must you persist in putting

up a scaffolding to preserve it? It is the Holy Place God is out to preserve—a place utterly set apart for Him, a place where the standard is absolute. Oh! I beseech you before God to hear His call to forsake the outer court and devote yourself to His service in the Holy Place.

I love to read in Acts xiii about the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, that "as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said: Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." We see there the one principle that governs work for God in the New Testament dispensation. The Holy Spirit only commissions men to the work as they are ministering to the Lord. Unless ministry to the Lord is the thing that governs us, the work will be in confusion. In the beginning of the church's history in Antioch, the Holy Spirit said: "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." God does not want volunteers for His work; He wants conscripts. He will not have you preaching the Gospel just because you want to. The work of the Lord is suffering serious damage today at the hand of volunteers; it lacks those who can say as He did: "He that sent Me . . .". Oh, Brothers and Sisters, the work of God is God's own work and not work that you can take up at your pleasure. Neither churches, nor missionary societies, nor evangelistic bands can send men to work for God. The authority to commission men is not in the hands of men, but solely in the hands of the Spirit of God.

Serving the Lord does not mean that we do not serve our fellow men, but it does mean that all service to men has service to the Lord as its basis. It is service Godward that urges us out manward.

Luke xvii. 7-10 tells us clearly what the Lord is after. There are two kinds of work referred to here—ploughing the field and tending the flock—both very important occupations; yet the Lord says that even when a servant returns from such work, he is expected to provide for his master's satisfaction before sitting down to enjoy his own food. When we have returned from our toil in the field we are apt to muse complacently on the much work we have accomplished; but the Lord will say: "Gird yourself and give Me to eat." He requires ministry to Himself. We may have laboured in a wide field and cared for many sheep; but all our toil in the field and among the flock does not exempt us from ministry to the Lord's own personal satisfaction. That is our supreme task.

Brothers and Sisters, what are we really after? Is it only work in the field, only preaching the Gospel to the unsaved? Is it just tending the flock, just

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caring for the needs of the saved? Or are we seeing to it that the Lord can eat to His full satisfaction and drink till His thirst is quenched? True, it is necessary for us also to eat and drink, but that cannot be till after the Lord is satisfied. We too must have our enjoyment, but that can never be until His joy is full. Let us ask ourselves: Does our work minister to our satisfaction or to the Lord's? I fear that when we have worked for the Lord, we are often thoroughly satisfied before He is satisfied. We are often quite happy with our work when He has found no joy in it.

Brothers and Sisters, when you and I have done our utmost, we still have to admit that we are un-

profitable servants. Our goal is not ministry to the world, nor to the Church, but ministry to the Lord. And blessed are they who can differentiate between ministry to sinners or saints, and ministry to Him. Such discernment is not easily acquired. Only by much drastic dealing shall we learn the difference between ministry to the Lord Himself and ministry to the House.

Nevertheless, if the Holy Spirit has His way in our lives, He will prove equal to the need. Let us seek grace of God that He may reveal to us what it really means to minister to Him!

W. N.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### ALL ARE PRECIOUS IN HIS SIGHT

MR. LEARNER looked down with satisfaction at the new hearthrug which lay at his feet. It was his own work, and there it lay, with its bold, colourful design, and it was finished. He felt that he had reason to be satisfied, for he had been working on it for about three years. Not that three years was much in comparison with the future which it would have. It would last! Oh yes, it would last his lifetime. More than that, one might almost think that it would last for ever.

It would be very useful. But not all useful things are nice to look at. This, however, was beautiful as well as useful. A few years ago it had been not much more than an idea. There had been an empty canvas and very many packets of short lengths of wool of various colours. Now it was finished, and Mr. Learner was content.

During the hours of working on the rug he had learnt some valuable lessons about more important things, lessons concerning the love of God and His purpose of love to us. He had thought much about the wonderful way in which the Saviour can take up human lives and make them a part of His beautiful plan for the future. For God is preparing a Church which will be both useful and beautiful, a Church made up of those who have been given eternal life through the Lord Jesus. And His work really will last for ever!

The wool had been bought ready cut, which meant that Mr. Learner had filled a drawer with about 25,000 short pieces of wool. These seemed very small and insignificant in themselves, as indeed

they were. They could not have been used for anything else. This reminded Mr. Learner that he himself was so small and worthless in himself that there could be no hope of any values coming into his life unless he were taken up by the heavenly Master and made to be a part of His great work. Every piece was important. Not for its own sake, but because it was meant to have a place in the master plan. This was his first lesson, and it is one which we should all learn, too, for though we may be just one among thousands and thousands, yet the Lord has a place for us to fill.

The finished rug showed that every piece was useful. More than that, it showed that every piece was precious. When Mr. Learner first started there seemed to be so many pieces that it did not matter much to him whether one or two were lost or thrown away. But after many months, when the rug was getting nearer to being finished, he began to wonder if after all there would be enough wool to last out. What a pity it would be if the rug were spoiled for lack of a few strands of wool! So every single piece became precious. If it dropped on to the floor it had to be picked up again. If it fell down the side of a cushion then Mr. Learner could not rest until he had moved the cushion and searched for the missing piece of wool. Every piece mattered very much, and in this rug each piece had a value far greater than the actual cost.

Now that the rug was finished Mr. Learner had no more fears on this account. There was no longer any possibility of a single piece being lost. You

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could pick up the rug, turn it over, shake it as much as you liked, but still not a single piece would fall to the floor. They were all quite secure. A rug, you see, is not just a collection of various coloured pieces of wool; it is the result of careful work on each piece, to make it a part of the whole. Mr. Learner knew this very well, for he knew how carefully each piece had been placed in the hook which was waiting to receive it, how the hook closed on the wool, and how it turned and tied each strand to make it safe in the rug. This was a lesson which Mr. Learner liked very much, for it was a reminder to him of the wonderful eternal security which all those enjoy who have put their lives into the hands of the Saviour.

Every piece important! Yes, that is true of the Church of Christ. Every piece precious! Yes, that is also true, for the Lord Jesus paid a great price to buy us back to God, and in that sacrifice of His made it possible for us to have a place in His eternal plan. And every piece safe! This, too, we may be sure of, for we are not held by a hook of man's making, but by the mighty hands of the Father and the Son. This can be proved by John x. 28-30. I wonder if you are held firmly in those wonderful hands! You may be, for it is God's will that you should commit your life to Him, and let Him fit you into His great design of love.

H. F.

## HOW IT SHOULD BE AND THE WAY TO IT

THESE two things are the supreme and all-inclusive concern of the New Testament. Ponder that statement carefully. The whole New Testament (Bible, if you like) is concerned with how things ought to be. This is applied to the individual Christian, the local church and the Church universal. There is a state, a condition, a position which God both desires and has provided for. Upon the degree to which this state is approximated everything that is of God depends. There is nothing willy-nilly, casual, mechanical, and matter-of-course with God. Throughout the Bible all that God most earnestly desires for His people is governed by an "If ye". Jesus very definitely affirmed this law "If ye", and it is implicit in every transition from potentiality to experience. What it amounts to is that a position is *essential* to inheritance. A *position* is essential to everything that God wants us to know and have.

There is one fundamental law which decides whether things are as they should be, could be, and as God's most gracious will would have them to be. If this is true, then we shall realize that some things will surely arise to neutralize that one thing. That basic reality, because of the immense and numerous issues resting upon it, will be the object of every possible kind of opposition. We ask the Lord why any one of a thousand wrong things exists to such harmful effect in Christianity, and the answer, in practically every case, can be traced to one thing. That one thing is so universal in its range and contact that it touches everything outside of heaven. We shall come to that one thing later. Here we are going to confine ourselves to its application to

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and how things ought to be in any such.

We are not going to flit over the surface in this matter, but be analytical and meticulous.

#### I. *A local church should be throbbing with life.*

The impression given and received should be one of livingness. The testimony should be that, although you may go jaded, weary, too tired, almost, to make the journey; disheartened and despondent; physically, mentally, and spiritually drained, you come away renewed, refreshed, reinvigorated, and lifted up. The activity of Divine life, whether by or without the teaching given, has just resulted in a spiritual uplift.

Now, note the way in which that has been said. "The activity of Divine life." We have *not* said: 'the life of human activity'. There is an illusion or delusion in much Christianity and in many churches that activity is essentially spiritual life. Hence stunts, programmes, attractions, 'special efforts', campaigns, and an endless list of 'specials' and events. All this is so often with a view to giving an impression of life, or even creating or stimulating 'life'. It may be the 'life' of works, and not the works of life. Life will work, but works are not always life. That was the indictment of the church at Ephesus in Revelation ii. 2: "I know thy works . . .". Divine life in release will show itself, not necessarily in the bigness of numbers (although Divine life will attract) but in the genuine spiritual fruits, beginning with new births. Are the dead

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really raised? Does the power of life present result in conviction of sin, and a crisis of 'turning from death unto life' (or *positive* refusal to do so) without artificial apparatus? Life is spontaneous. As the Lord of the Church is the risen Lord, and His attestation is resurrection life, His presence in the local church should be attested by the power of life. So often we quote His own words when we come together, almost as a formula: "Wheresoever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I." At the same time, the atmosphere may be heavy, uninspiring, and devoid of a ministration of Divine life. Is this really consistent with His presence in the midst?

II. *A local church should be a place where, and through which, those meeting should be individually and together increasing in the measure of Christ.*

Let us hasten to say that we do not mean increasing in knowledge of doctrine, the teaching of the Bible, the things of Christianity, its work, methods, interests, and so on. It is something so common amongst Christians that, when they meet anywhere, at any time, they can use all the time in talking about their 'church', their minister or those who minister, the different branches of the work, the people, the happenings, but little or nothing about the Lord Himself and spiritual life. It is often the most difficult thing to turn the conversation into spiritual channels and feed upon what He is.

The criterion of a church's real value is the measure of Christ Himself in its members which registers itself in contacts. The testimony of a church as it should be is that it is possible for people who come into contact with its members to say: 'My word, that person (or those people) really have something of the Lord. You know it when you meet them. It is just what the Lord *is* to them.'

III. *The local church should be a place of living and abundant light.*

This means that it should be a real house of bread. If it is as it should be there will ever be food for spiritual satisfaction. Because of spiritual anointing the ministry will be as from an open heaven. Not studied and 'got up' addresses, but a *message* from God, and if people are hungry they should never go away unsatisfied. It should be possible for people to say: "We have been truly fed today, and strengthened for the journey."

IV. All this means that *a local church is a place of warm fellowship*. Not even just social interchange. It is a family atmosphere in which people who are disposed to fellowship find themselves 'at home'. This atmosphere is created by a deeper reality than just 'friendliness'. This deep reality is that—more than belonging to a community, a society, a 'group'—they are sharing one life, and one Lord is the living supreme concern of their very existence.

What we have said regarding these four characteristics of a local church as it should be, could be extended to other matters. We could speak of finance. In a local church as it should be, there ought *never* to be the necessity to appeal for funds. Not even that abomination, hand-to-hand collections, should exist. We say nothing of special money-raising efforts. All such things are a betrayal of a low and defective spiritual life.

By these five things alone it can be determined whether a local church is upon a right foundation.

Having said all that, it is incumbent upon us to come as quickly as possible to show what the foundation is that will produce such conditions.

You may be expecting something new, something extraordinary, something surprising. If so, you may be disappointed. Much will depend upon how seriously concerned you are, and therefore, how ready you are to brush aside prejudice, or familiarity, or superficiality, or even scepticism.

It is the old resort and recourse of the Apostles. Were things *not* as they should be in their days? Was there a condition in the church in Rome that demanded such a tremendous Letter as that written to them by Paul? Not only the great doctrinal correction, but the many practical matters.

Was there a state of things in Corinth—divisions, carnalities, disorders, rivalries, dissensions, and much more; all of which cried aloud: 'This is *not* as it should be!?' Was there an incipient movement away from grace, back to legalism, with all its loss of glory, in Galatia? Was there a 'fly in the beautiful ointment' to spoil its sweet fragrance at Philippi? Was there threatening the exalted level of spiritual knowledge at Colossae an insinuation of spurious spirituality, a false spirituality in the form of mysticism?

Yes, all this, and more, was making for a loss of real testimony, power, influence, and effectiveness in the local church of those times. But the Apostles did not condone, excuse, or accept it. Their whole attitude was: "These things ought not to be." How did they approach these situations? Had they one common basis and means of approach and attack? Yes, they had. In every case it was the same.



## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

To Rome: Romans vi. 3-10.  
 To Corinth: I Corinthians ii. 2.  
 To Galatia: Galatians ii. 20; v. 24; vi. 14.  
 To Philippi: Philippians ii. 5-8.  
 To Colossae: Colossians ii. 11-12; iii. 3.

Well, there it is; plain, clear, and positive: the Cross of Jesus Christ brought by the Holy Spirit right to the root and foundation of the life of every believer. A fundamental—foundational—crisis, and thereafter an inworking and an outworking. "We", "Ye", "I"—all the pronouns of direct application. Christians believe in the Holy Spirit. Very many desire to know the Holy Spirit as a reality and power in their lives. But it should really be understood and recognized that the Holy Spirit is committed and wedded to the Cross. His coming awaited the work of the Cross. Only after the symbolic representation of the Cross in death, burial and resurrection with Christ by baptism did the Holy Spirit take His place in power in the lives of the first believers. Because the taproot of everything that the Cross was meant to deal with is the self-life, the self-principle, the New Testament word for which is "the Flesh", the Holy Spirit leads those under His government into the experiences which are calculated to expose and bring to the Cross the self-life of the child of God. It is a primary and inseparable part of the Holy Spirit's business to make good and real the meaning of the Cross.

This is not popular truth, but the Cross is the gateway to fullness, and the deeper the Cross the greater the measure of Divine life, power and light. This is the only way for things to be as they should be, and as God wishes them to be. Life, food, light, fellowship, and much more depend upon the degree in which the Cross is a reality in the individual and in the company. This touches the whole realm and range of Satan's power and work. Power, authority, over him is inseparable from the Cross. Therefore he will do everything to undercut, to set aside, to belittle, and discredit the Cross. The Person of Christ and the Cross of Christ have been the two grounds of the most bitter controversy in the history of Christianity. Of course, they are really one thing. It is the Person Who gives the Cross its real meaning, and it is the Cross that vindicates the Person, provided that by the Cross is meant the death, burial, and resurrection.

What we have said about the Cross and fullness in its several aspects—that is, abundance of life, food, light, fellowship, finance, and victory over Satan—is not just theory or idealism. We have

written history and experience in our own time. We have seen this in reality, and have also closely studied the course of things in many Christian communities.

This calls for a further very important word of reminder. It has to do with what we may call the 'spread-over' of the Cross. The Scriptures cited earlier, and many others, make it quite clear that the Cross of Christ is something that has to become very real in the *experience*, and not only in the doctrine, of the Christian. But who could survive the Cross in what it meant in the case of Jesus Christ? It rent, devastated, and desolated Him, soul and body, heart and mind. For Him it was a going out into outer darkness and forsakenness. All the eternal agony was concentrated in a few hours and a last terrible moment. There is no other creature in God's universe who could go through that and survive. Thank God, no other creature is ever required to go all that way. He went it for us. And yet, that does not mean that the whole teaching concerning our being "united with him in the likeness of his death" (Romans vi. 5) is a contradiction. Nor does it mean that the Cross is only an objective historical doctrinal matter. Paul spoke of "always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus" (II Corinthians iv. 10). This working of His death in the history of a believer, and in a local church (if it is on a right foundation) will be progressive and periodic. The law of nature is more life, more fruit, more growth, by recurrent winter, alternating experiences of death and life, and every cycle unto increase. This is the law of the Cross. God is not a God who believes in theories; He is immensely practical. The theory of the Cross is universally held. We sing about it.

"'Tis the way of the Cross",

and

"'Tis the way the Master went;  
 Should not the servant tread it still?"

But the meaning of the Cross is to displace one entire kind, in order to make room for Another—capital A.

One of the greatest enemies to things being as they should—and could—be is our superficiality. This is an age of 'quick returns', easy gains, least trouble, everything with as little effort and cost as possible. Depth is a lost dimension. Stamina is a minus quality. Who today would take the pains to read such classics on the Cross as Dr. Mabie's *The Divine Reason of the Cross* and *The Meaning and Message of the Cross*? This superficiality is costing

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the Church and Christians very dearly, and so there is artificial life, artificial food, artificial fellowship which will not go through in the time of testing.

There is such a depth, power, fullness, in the Cross of Christ as to spread over all time and all

eternity. So saw the Apostle when, at the end of the fullest life, he still cried: "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings; being made conformable unto his death" (Philippians iii. 10).

### "MORE THAN CONQUERORS"

"Nay, in all these things we are more, than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans viii. 37).

"**M**ORE than conquerors." The very expression reminds us indeed that we are in a battle. This Letter to the Romans begins by reminding us of our lost condition as sinners in darkness, and goes on to point to the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ which, thank God! we have come to know and have found ourselves at peace with God. It proceeds through those chapters which speak of baptism and its meaning, holiness and its reality by faith in Christ, and then it passes into this splendid eighth chapter, which is full of the glories of the Christian life—and it *is* a glorious life! But at this point we are reminded that it is nevertheless a life of conflict. The assertion is that we are victorious in that conflict. However, none of us would wish to evade the sharp challenge of the Word of God and just take these great affirmations for granted when, in fact, they are not working out in our lives. Perhaps we think it should read: 'In all these things we *can be* more than conquerors', for that is true, and, because we can be, we ought to be. Let us, then, look again at the verse and allow the Holy Spirit to search us as to whether it is true that we are proving the power of Christ to give us the victory.

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." You notice that the issue of love is brought up. It is not my intention to dwell upon that, yet it does seem that in the verses which precede, as well as in those which follow, the crux of this whole conflict is love. If there is a breakdown in love there is defeat. If we can be separated from the love of God in Christ we are defeated. If we are not separated, even through the darkest moment and the bitterest trial; if it can truly be said that we abide in the love of God, although perplexed, bewildered and bruised; if we are still trusting in His love, then it may be written, to His glory, 'We, too, are more than conquerors in all these things.'

You will not perhaps need to be reminded that it says: "In all these things we are more than conquerors"—not by evading them, not, in the first place, by being extricated from them, and not by avoiding the issue. Indeed, that is when we are *not* more than conquerors. It is defeat to run away and not to face up to the present need and prove the Lord in the midst of it.

I have been going over in my mind the names of some of those in Scripture who were defeated, at any rate temporarily, and ran away because things were too much for them, and they said—as people say today—'We cannot go on.' Be honest: do not say: 'I cannot go on', but 'I am being defeated.'

I think of Naomi. You know, she had to come back to Bethlehem before she proved the Lord again. I think of Jonah. The Word of the Lord came to him a second time, yes, but not with a second mission, nor with a second best, and not to a second place. It came back saying: 'Nineveh, Jonah!' How gracious the Lord is! How often we have run away, or have wanted to do so! Well, the Lord is very tender, very sympathetic, but at the same time He holds us to the issue. It may be that there is some other place, or some other way, but until we have proved victorious where we are how can our Commander-in-chief move us to some other part of the battle? Would any general in his senses look for wanderers, stragglers behind the line, listen to them when they said 'I could not go on there', and post them to another place? No, He does His posting from those who are standing where they are, and although their companions may say: 'We cannot spare him, or her', the Commander-in-chief has the right to say: 'I move *that* one!' Dear friends, He moves us from victory, not from defeat.

In the New Testament I think of John Mark, who could not go on. We blame him, but I do not suppose either the Apostle Paul or Barnabas were perfect, and it may be that they were very difficult men to go on with—I do not know. However, he could not go on, and he left them and went back to Jerusalem. Well, we thank God that John Mark also recovered. He found an honoured place among

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the servants of the Lord, but if you will turn to the Book of the Acts you will find that he was not sought out in Jerusalem. Indeed, he did not stay there: it was not so nice there after all, and he had to go all the way to Antioch. That is where they found him, and he had to go again with Barnabas on the same journey into Cyprus. You may have your ideas as to the clash between Barnabas and Paul, and who was right and who was wrong. That is nothing to do with my present point, which is that Mark found his way through by going back to the very scene of his defeat and proving the Lord once again.

"In *all* these things we are more than conquerors." That makes the text very searching, does it not? We may have had many previous victories, and may often have triumphed, but most of us have had at least one or two exceptions. We may blame ourselves, but we are far more likely to blame other people, for that is what we usually do. Anyway, we have an exception, and we feel that all our previous victories should be put to our credit and the present defeat overlooked. There is no provision for such in the Word of God! "In *all* these things we are more than conquerors."

I think of Elijah, who under the juniper tree, and later on the Mount, expostulated with the Lord as to how faithful he had been, how true—and he had. But all the past victories could not compensate for the fact that now, at this moment, he was in defeat, and after the Lord had very tenderly and graciously refreshed, renewed and blessed him, He sent him back again. And when Elijah went up to glory he went up from victory, not from defeat. God grant that if the Lord Jesus Christ comes speedily, as we believe He will, we may go up from victory and not from defeat!

"In *all* these things we are more than conquerors." How great is our Christ! The Apostle, in this chapter, enumerates in general terms all that he can think of which is capable of defeating the Christians. Having given the list as he knows it, and fearing lest there be some exception which he has overlooked, he puts at the end: "Nor any other creature". There is nothing conceivable, imaginable, possible in human experience for which Christ is not the answer, and the *full* answer.

"*More* than conquerors." I suppose that strange way of describing a victory, that superlative method of speaking of this triumph, is because for the Christian there is such a welter, a tempest, a storm of opposition and enemies, that for *him* to get the victory is no ordinary, human thing: it is a miracle.

I glory not only in the miracles of God described

in the sensational stories of the Bible, but in the daily miracles of God in those for whom defeat seems inevitable and then, by the grace of God, I find they are in triumph. I say that they are 'more than conquerors', for theirs is no normal victory.

I think that this expression also suggests that it is the very thing that would defeat Christians, and is calculated to do so, that they lay hold of and make the very occasion for a new triumph in Christ. That, perhaps, would throw new light on any experience of ours. Our experiences must be very varied, but there is not one of them, however perplexing it may be to us at the moment, however deeply it may wound us, from which we can not only be delivered, but which cannot be the very occasion for something more of the glory of God in our lives: the turning of that which is intended for our downfall and making it rather for our uprising in the name of the Lord.

"In *all* these things we are more than conquerors." The man who wrote those words was not indulging in any idle fancy or preaching any mere theories. Those who received the Letter were those who followed his afflictions, trials and triumphs, and they knew very well that he spoke not only from the heart but from a personal proving of the Lord. As one who observes the lives of fellow-believers, and sometimes knows some of the secrets of those lives, I would give glory to God for the great victory in the lives of those who have taken the very things that could have brought their defeat and downfall and made them the occasion for a new advance in spiritual life and effectiveness.

"More than conquerors." Well, of course, that is because it is not our victory—it is *His* victory. Every victory in the Christian life is Christ's victory, and His victories are always superlative, always more than anyone could possibly expect. How one magnifies the grace of God as His triumphs are expressed in the lives of His people! I have seen brothers and sisters taken from us and would like to testify that I have seen not death, but life, even in their last moments. That is what the Apostle says: 'I am persuaded that death itself for the Christian need not be a defeat', and I am persuaded also, for I have seen it. There is a triumph of life, even in the moment of death, and I say that this is 'more than conquerors', and magnify the grace of God. I have seen bereaved ones, who expected that their way would be otherwise—that the Lord would preserve and not take to Himself—and to His glory I would say that in the moment of what should have been their bitterest disappointment I have found in them a triumph of the grace of God

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that has melted my heart. That is victory, and I ascribe the glory, not to man, but to my Saviour. Thanks be to Him who gives such victory to such weak and failing men and women as we are! To every cry of unbelief, of doubt, of gloom, of despair, of question, let us answer: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

In closing, may I point out that it says 'We'. You might have thought that that was the apostolic 'we' but for the fact that in the very next verse the Apostle says 'I'. He was getting the victory, but, thank God! he is not the only one, and the victory is not only for an Apostle. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors." It is a shared victory. We have to be reminded sometimes that our victories are not victories over the other man, and at the expense of our fellow-Christians. That is not the triumph of Christ! Whatever triumph it may be, it is not that. If we feel ourselves to be the conquerors and can rejoice over the defeat of a brother

or sister, that is a cause for dismay and not for pleasure. If our brothers and sisters are being defeated in any matter, it is our responsibility to help them up. Their defeat in a measure is our defeat, especially if we gloat over it, or add to it. "We are more than conquerors." We must help our brothers and sisters to prove this victory of Christ, and at the same time we must recognize that we need their help. We, helping one another in the love of Christ, have this prospect set before us of a triumph, an emergence in victory, an expression of the glory of Christ that will surprise us all and make us wonder. We say: 'This is not just victory: it is *more* than victory.' "Nay, in all these things . . ." whatever they are—and let the enemy add up the list, press them upon us, seek to bow us down under them—let us in faith rise up in the name of the Lord, and say: "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

H. F.

*It is many years since the following was printed in A Witness and A Testimony, and later in booklet form, and it has long been out of print. We feel*

*that it may be of timely help to the Lord's people, and so reprint it here.—EDITOR.*

## THE SPOIL OF BATTLE

*"Out of the spoil won in battles did they dedicate to repair the house of the Lord" (I Chronicles xxvi. 27).*

FROM this passage of Scripture we gather that the House of the Lord is constituted out of our conflicts. The Lord builds from the fruit of conflict. Thus it was in the temple, given through David to Solomon. When that temple was completed it stood as a monument to universal victory; its very substance declared triumph on the right hand and on the left. The silver and the gold, and all the precious things which it comprised, had been taken in battle and wrought into the House of God. What is an illustration in the Old Testament is true in the reality of the New. The greater Son of David, the greater than Solomon, who "is here", builds the House from the spoil of His own warfare, and the warfare of His saints.

I was impressed as I read in this first book of Chronicles, chapter xvii, verse 9. The Lord is speaking to David, and one of the things which He says is: "And I will appoint a place for my people

Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more; neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the first, and as from the day that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel; and I will subdue all thine enemies." You notice that the Lord refers to the judges over Israel. The Lord raised up judges, as you will remember, to do that which Israel had failed to do completely under Joshua. Under Joshua they were meant by the Lord to destroy utterly all the nations in the land, and completely to subdue every enemy. They failed to do that. They suffered enemies to remain, they compromised, and then the Lord raised the judges to save them from the terrible results of their having failed to make a complete work of destroying all their enemies. But the judges failed, and the book of Judges is a sad story of the work still incomplete. The Lord raised up the judges to do that which had not been done, but again the judges did not perfect the work. And it is tremendously interesting and illuminating to notice in I Chronicles xviii and xix, when the Lord had spoken to David

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about building the House, how he definitely and positively took in hand to overthrow all those other nations which the judges had not overthrown; and they are mentioned in these two chapters. Go over them and you will find a list of the very nations and peoples mentioned in the Book of Judges; and David, through the vision of the House of God, seems to be moved instinctively by the Spirit of God to see that the House can never be realized until these enemies are subdued, until they are entirely overthrown. The Lord fulfilled His word to subdue all his enemies, and those very nations were taken in hand and dealt with. When the Lord had given David victory on every side round about, then he handed the plan to Solomon to carry out the building of the House, and the spoil of those battles was the material for the House. The enemy had the resources for the House of God, and the enemy had to be despoiled that the House might be built. That could lead us a very long way and be very illuminating. I want to seek to reduce it to a few words and a small compass which, nevertheless, will provide a great deal for future helpfulness and contemplation.

### THE TWOFOLD BUILDING

There are two aspects of the building of the House of God. We are rather inclined to take more account of the one than the other. There is the numerical side. When we think of building the House of God, we think of the gathering in of people, the adding of souls by their salvation and their being brought into the truth, and so we think only of the House of God being built in the sense referred to by Peter: "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house . . .", that is, we think of the numerical side, the gathering of the individual stones and their coming into their place in the spiritual edifice. Well, that is a true side to the building of the Lord's House, but it is only one side, and only half of the truth.

There is another side which is equally important, without which the House will be altogether incomplete, and that other side is the spiritual and moral side of the building of God's House. You may have a great number of individuals saved and still fail to have the truest meaning of the House of God. You may have a congregation and not have a church. You may have numbers, and not have the House of God spiritually. The House of God is not only a numerical thing; it is a spiritual and moral thing. That is, it has a character, and that character is what makes it in very essence the House of God. It takes its character from its Head and will eventu-

ally, in its consummation, be recognized, not as a great multitude merely of saved souls, but as something which bears the character of its Head, the Lord Jesus. The time is coming when the Lord will cause His Name to be upon His own; that is, we shall receive a white stone, and in that white stone a new name; we shall have a new name, and we shall be called by His Name. His Name will be in our foreheads.

That is symbolic language, and its meaning is just this: The Lord Jesus will be so fully manifested in His own that as you look at them you will say: 'That speaks of the Lord Jesus.' You will recognize so much of Him, He will be so much in evidence, that you will simply have to say: 'That is the nature of Christ.' You have met Him in them, and in meeting them you met Him. And so He will be universally revealed through His own. His Name is His character, what His Name embodies spiritually and morally will be resting upon them, they will take their character from Him, and so there will be one universal displaying of the character and nature of the Lord Jesus. It will not dispense with His own individual personal being, but His people will be a channel of His own universal expression.

### CHARACTER THROUGH CONFLICT

The building of the House of the Lord, therefore, is not only a gathering of people, but it is a spiritual and a moral building up, and that is only brought about through conflict. The Divine economy has been so ordered that, although the Lord Jesus has in Himself secured a universal triumph over all His foes, the foes are still left for us to deal with. The enemy, although defeated, has still been left for the saints to have something to do with, and the Lord has not put our foes out of the universe, though in Himself He has triumphed. He has left them for us to deal with in His triumph, and it is thus that you and I get our spiritual and moral development. It is by conflict, by battle, by grim and terrible warfare spiritually, that the moral excellencies of our triumphant Head are brought out in us. We triumph in His victory, but we know that faith is so tested in a conflict, so deeply tried in a battle, that it is something more than just objectively holding on, or believing in something in Christ; that very exercise of faith brings out from Him, into our own souls, the strength of His victory. We are made morally one with Him in His triumph by a test of faith which is so grim and so terrible that nothing that is not of Him in us would

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be sufficient to carry us through. It has to be wrought into our very being, and that is done through conflict in which faith is drawn out; and so, spiritually and morally, we build through conflict, through adversity, in the Divine and sovereign ordering of our lives.

The moral side of things is that which comes out in exercise, exercise of faith in the value of Calvary's victory. It is one thing to have a theoretical appropriation of Calvary's victory and say in an hour of emergency: 'I take the victory of Calvary'. But very often nothing happens, and although you take a position like that, you find yourself called upon to hold on, and hold on, and hold on, and during that time of being called upon by the Lord to hold on, faith is being tested, Calvary's victory is becoming something not objectively taken hold of but inwardly established, and at last that victory is in us as it is in the Lord. But it has become a moral quality in our being, and in the next time of testing it is not a trying to get hold of something; it is there with its roots in us; something has been done in us and it has been made a part of us.

#### THE BATTLE OVER ENLIGHTENMENT

Now this works in various ways, and in numerous directions and connections. You receive an enlightenment, an unveiling from the Lord in relation to truth; an opening of the heavens to see Divine truth as you have never before seen that truth; perhaps it is a new, an entirely new thing, or perhaps it is new light upon an old thing. In any case, it is a new illumination; enlightenment which comes to you with all the freshness, and all the joy, and all the inspiration, and all the uplift of the opening of the heavens; and for a time you delight in it, you glory in it, you bathe yourself in it, and you have nothing else to talk about but the new revelation which has come to you. And then a point comes where you go right into an awful conflict in connection with that very light. It seems that the first glory of it has gone and you are left asking all sorts of questions about it. You are cold, dead, dark; the thing has lost its grip, and looking at it now from this standpoint, the standpoint of this experience, you wonder whether after all it was right or not. What strange creatures we are! Things which have come to us as the mightiest things in our experience can, in given circumstances, be the things which are questioned by us as to whether they are really true at all, or whether we simply picked up something and ran it for a time; there was a freshness about it, and its freshness was its own momen-

tum to carry us on; now it is all unreal, and we go into a time of conflict over truth given to us by the Lord. In that time of conflict we are searched, our hearts are looked into, we are tried. Remember Joseph: "Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of Jehovah tried him." The Word of the Lord tried him; and we have to go over the things which we have been saying and believing, and have to ask ourselves all sorts of questions about them.

The Word of the Lord tries us, but it is in that conflict that spiritual and moral elements are developed, features are brought out. Conflict secures the spoil for further building, and then we come back again, not only on to the original ground of our apprehension of that truth, but on to a very much higher, and into a much deeper and stronger apprehension of that thing, so that it is more to us than it was before, because we have gone into the battle with it, and we have come out with spoil for building; there have been fresh heavenly factors put into it. Something has been introduced into the original thing, through the conflict, which has given it extra value; it is the power of resurrection. Thus the truth of God comes as from God, with all its Divine glory, beauty, strength, and we rejoice in that light for a season, and then we go into death with that very light; but in the battle, in the conflict, the death, the being searched, tried, tested, found out, and driven down to the place where, if that goes, we go, because it is our life, then the power of resurrection begins to operate and we come back with that thing stronger than ever, and in addition with spoils for building. We know the value of that thing as we had never proved it before, because we had never been into conflict with it, we had never tested that armour, never tried that sword; but now something of value has been given to it which we never knew until we went into the conflict with it. It does work that way with an enlightenment.

How many people we have seen leap to the light! They have embraced it, and could talk about nothing but the new revelation that had come to them. We are very glad, we are delighted when people do this, but we say: 'Yes, presently they will be tested on that, and that thing will test them.' Then they go into a time of awful conflict and darkness, full of questions as to whether or not, after all, the thing is true, is right. Now the Lord is putting the thing inside. Before it was very largely on the circumference; it was, in a sense, in a measure, objective; but now the Lord is planting the thing into them, and them into it. They will come through and say:

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'Before, it was something given to me but it belonged to someone else. Now it is mine.' Thus they begin to build with the spoil resultant from the conflict.

### THE BATTLE OVER VOCATION

The same thing is true in the matter of service and purpose. The Lord gives a burden as to His intention, the purpose unto which He is calling us as His servants, and the vision captures us, the purpose lays hold of us, and for the time being we have nothing to think about or talk about but the burden which He has laid on us; the whole sense of vocation and service has mastered us; we have a vision. Well, we go on with that for a time, by the momentum of the vision, and then it seems that the vision fails, or we get into such a realm of conflict over that vision, and such a battle rages, that the thing seems to go into death, and we pass through a deep and dark experience in which the whole question comes up again: Was there anything in it after all? Have we not been mistaken? Is this the thing to which the Lord has called us? Was it not something we leaped at and, after all, the Lord did not mean it for us? Have we been wrong? I expect most of us know those experiences of conflict, of battle over the vision, but it finds us at length in a stronger place than ever before in relation to that Divine purpose.

Our history is just that. Many times we have been into death and conflict with our vision, in which experiences it seemed that the vision went altogether. Many questions arose about it, but we came through and found ourselves more solidly bound up with that Divine purpose than ever we were. We have gone into conflict and there have emerged spiritual and moral elements by which there is a building up as a result of the trial.

### THE BATTLE OVER A POSITION TAKEN

We take a position, we declare ourselves—and how easy it is in meetings and in conferences to take positions, amongst the fellowship of the Lord's people to declare ourselves—that we are going in a certain direction, that for us this is to be the course for ever: 'I never, no never will leave Him.' We can sing these things glibly in hymns: tomorrow may find us reviewing the whole thing, looking round to see if there is not some back-door way out. It is true: these hearts of ours are at best inconsistent. We take our attitudes, we take our positions, make

declarations, and for the time being, in the strength of that, we go on, and then we are challenged as to our position.

See how this is illustrated in the history of the children of Israel: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel . . .". They got to the other side of the sea and all Israel sang. What did they sing? A song of absolute victory. You would have thought that they were in the land already, but it was not long before they were murmuring against the Lord and Moses. They were tested, challenged, tried by the position which they had taken, and then they went through a dark time.

So we, whenever we make a declaration, shall sooner or later be tested by it. (I hope the effect of what I am saying will not be that you will say: 'I will never declare myself again!' If you do take that attitude it may simply prevent the Lord in His purpose.) It is necessary, in order to get the spoil, that we go that way. The qualities are only going to be drawn out in that way, and it is quite right that in the measure of devotion we have, we make a declaration, take a position; the Lord calls upon us to do that, for it gives Him the ground for testing us out. Somehow in the order of things it seems that the Lord requires declarations before He can do much. If you have never declared yourself, have always had a reservation, have been so cautious, the Lord has never been able to do anything with you. It is when we take our feet off the bottom and launch out into the deep, and say that we are out with the Lord, that the Lord can begin to do things. We are tried by the position we have taken, and tested by our commitment, and those qualities are brought in which are building qualities, the spoil of battle.

Recently I was reading the following:

"Many people are wanting power. Now how is power produced? The other day we passed the great works where the trolley engines are supplied with electricity. We heard the hum and roar of the countless wheels, and we asked our friend: 'How do they make the power?' 'Why,' he said, 'just by the revolution of those wheels and the friction they produce. The rubbing creates the electric current.'

And so, when God wants to bring more power into your life, He brings more pressure. He is generating spiritual force by hard rubbing. Some do not like it and try to run away from the pressure, instead of getting the power and using it to rise above the painful causes.

Opposition is essential to a true equilibrium

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of forces. The centripetal and centrifugal forces acting in opposition to each other keep our planet in her orbit. The one propelling, and the other repelling, so act and re-act, that instead of sweeping off into space in a pathway of desolation, she pursues her even orbit around her solar centre.

So God guides our lives. It is not enough to have an impelling force—we need just as much a repelling force, and so He holds us back by the testing ordeals of life, by the pressure of temptation and trial, by the things that seem against us, but really are furthering our way and establishing our goings.

Let us thank Him for both, let us take the weights as well as the wings, and thus divinely impelled, let us press on with faith and patience in our high and heavenly calling." (From *Streams in the Desert*.)

That is only another way of stating the case. Light and power come from conflict. And so the Lord builds His House with the spoils of battle, and allows the enemies to remain for our overcoming, inward enemies and outward enemies, in order that He may get the beauty and the glory for His House.

The Lord lay His finger upon this word, and show us that when He gives a vision, an illumination, a call, we respond and then reverses come in. Difficulty and opposition are no contradiction of God's revelation or call, but are intended to bring us into something which is more than merely an emotional realm in relation to truth and service; they must bring into a place of strength where we can be counted upon. Says the Lord Jesus: "I will build my church; and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it"—because of its moral quality. Because of its moral virtue it is established for ever.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PERSON AND MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PETER (I)

"Therefore say I unto you, 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).

"Ye are . . . a holy nation" (I Peter ii. 9).

Reading: I Peter i. 1-4.

WE are going to be occupied at this time, with the Lord's help, with the significance of the person and ministry of the Apostle Peter. The Apostle Paul occupies such a large place in the New Testament that we are perhaps in danger of losing the great values of the Apostle Peter. This may be partly due to the fact that so little is on record as to the life and ministry of Peter. He passes out of view almost entirely, so far as the history of the Church is concerned, after the council recorded in Acts xv, and Paul seems to eclipse everyone else from that point onward, right to the end of the Book of the Acts, which is the historical record of the growth, the development and expansion of the Church. Peter, while he has not gone by any means, does cease to occupy the place that he had, once Paul comes in.

I must confess that I have often been a little puzzled as to why, seeing that there were twelve Apostles called, appointed and commissioned, only three or four of them are on record. The rest are

hardly mentioned at all until you get right to the last chapters of the Book of the Revelation, and then they are only spoken of as the twelve apostles of the Lamb. They are not in view at all in that great gap in the New Testament, and you do not know very much of what is happening to them. You do not know very much, so far as the record is concerned, of what Peter was doing during all that time.

Of course, here, when Peter opens his Letter, he lets us know that he has not been inactive, and the elect in all these parts of the world have come under his influence. However, it is strange, is it not, that the history of the Church, so far as the New Testament is concerned, is very largely confined to Paul.

But we have to think again about this matter, for there are very great values indeed in Peter, and we shall do very well if we give ourselves to a consideration of these values.

Of course, in the first three Gospels, Peter always has the first place, and is the most prominent of the twelve disciples. I have made a list of some thirty-eight incidents in which Peter figured most prominently. I am not going to trouble you with all those thirty-eight, but there they are, and that does not cover the whole ground by any means. I am simply saying that, right up to the time of that council in



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Jerusalem concerning what had happened over the Gentiles, Peter occupied the foremost place, and it is quite evident from his Letters that something very deep and very real was wrought into this man.

I have been tremendously impressed—I cannot tell you how much—as I have carefully read through this comparatively short first Letter of Peter with my eye on one thing, and that one thing is: Where did Peter get that? How did that come to Peter? Why is Peter saying that? As I have looked I have found that the Lord Jesus wrought Himself into this man, that you can trace the Lord Jesus in this man so deeply and so richly, and I have no hesitation in saying that this first Letter of his is full of spiritual riches. We shall, of course, only be able to touch the surface, but let us begin with some little consideration of the significance and the value of Peter's ministry.

We shall at once discover how Peter has come to understand the Lord Jesus. What was Jesus doing? Peter did not understand in the days when the Lord was present in the flesh, but He was doing something. The wonderful thing is this: that while the Lord Jesus was working, teaching, living and moving right under the eyes of this man Peter, Peter was not grasping it, was not understanding it, was not seeing it, but here in his Letter he has it all. That, I think, contains something we should lay hold of. We can hear, see, have under our eyes and ears even for years, the Lord Jesus in what He is saying and what He is doing, and He being really present, and we not grasp the significance of it all. That is a terrible possibility. It is one of the problems that we may come up against. It is almost disconcerting to see Christians who for years have been receiving all the teaching about the Lord Jesus, before whose eyes and ears He has been brought over a long period, and then, when you really come up to practical matters, they do not know it, they have not got it, it is not in them. Or shall I say: the Lord Jesus is not there in a way commensurate with all that they have heard. They have missed it. That is a possibility, and it is one of the big tragedies in Christianity that it is so, and that, like Peter, at a certain crisis point, after all they have received it, it can be demonstrated under trial that they are not really in the good of the teaching. They break down, after all, in the hour of the ordeal.

But that, of course, leads to this: How important it is that what we have heard, what we have seen and what has been brought to us shall be put right into us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Is that not necessary? That we have not only been where it is, but it is in us by the Spirit.

And that is the tremendous change from the Gospels, with all the place and prominence that Peter held there, into his Letter. Something has happened to the man, and that is what it is.

That is the first thing about his significance, his person and his ministry: that he is not retailing things that he has heard. He is not 'dishing up' (if I may use the expression) that which has come to him second-hand. Here is a man who, through a deep crisis and experience, has himself moved right into the spiritual meaning and value of the teaching and the work of the Lord Jesus. That is a very important thing, and it is the first thing about his significance.

## THE NEW ISRAEL

But I ask the question: What was Jesus doing when He was here? Of course you would answer: 'Well, He was doing this . . . that . . . and a whole multitude of things.' Yes, but what was the comprehensive thing that He was doing? What was it that embodied all His teaching, all His work and activities, signs and parables? What was it that comprehended the Lord Jesus when He was here?

We have answered the question in the passages which we have just read together: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof . . . Ye are . . . a holy nation." What was Jesus doing? He was building, constituting a new Israel, a spiritual, heavenly Israel in the place of the old one.

## JESUS—THE MESSIAH

Who was Jesus? His name is Messiah, which is the Hebrew form of the Greek 'Christ'. It is the same thing in two languages. It might help you, and throw light on things, and make something quite real if, wherever you find the name "Christ" in the New Testament, you put there "Messiah".

Now think what Messiah meant in the Bible! Both "Messiah" and "Christ" mean 'the Anointed'.

The Old Testament had just one Person in view. It was moving toward, looking for, longing for, the day of the appearing of the Messiah. What was He going to do in their expectation? He was going to save their nation. You remember the words of Simeon, when he took the babe Jesus in his arms? He spoke of Him as being for the salvation of God's people, Israel. Messiah would save the nation. Of course, they had their own ideas as to what that

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would mean, for their whole conception of the coming Messiah was that He would constitute and establish the Kingdom of Israel. From the beginning of Genesis, right up to the end of the Old Testament, the one Person in view was the One who was coming, whom the Jews called the Messiah.

You remember even the woman of Samaria, when she got to that point of discovering something of the truth of who He was who was speaking to her, went back to the city and said: "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: *can this be the Messiah?*" (John iv. 29). This showed that even in the Samaritans there was this deep-rooted hope and expectation: the coming Messiah, who would establish the kingdom of Israel and save it—and much more, of course.

Well, when He came we know what they did with their Messiah. We can leave that, but Jesus said: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof", and Peter says: "To the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion . . . Ye are . . . a holy nation." "You are the inheritors of the Kingdom of God. You are the ones who have taken over from Israel. You are the new Israel." As you know, the Apostle Paul speaks of "the Israel of God" (Galatians vi. 16). This is a new conception.

Here, then, is the Christ, the Messiah. Now, I have said that Jesus was building a new Israel. How was the old Israel built?

You remember that charming little Book of Ruth? At the end of that romantic story of Divine sovereignty, when Naomi has come back and Ruth is married to Boaz, people say to Boaz: "The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and Leah, which two did build the house of Israel." The nation was built upon the twelve sons of Jacob, and was composed of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now, with Jesus that has passed and been taken away, and He begins with twelve Apostles, building, you see, on the same principle. There are twelve Apostles, of which Peter is the first, and, quite evidently, the most conspicuous to begin with. Twelve! You know what the number twelve means? It is the biblical number of heavenly government and rule—it is the Kingdom number. Well, here you have the twelve Apostles, and to sum it all up you come at last to the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city coming down from God out of heaven. It is a figure, a symbol of the new governmental centre of Jesus Christ in the age of glory. But the characteristic number of the city is twelve: twelve thousand furlongs, twelve foundations, twelve

gates, twelve pearls, twelve angels. Twelve is the dominating number of that symbolic representation of the centre of government for the coming age.

Peter is the first in this, and Jesus is very consistent with what is in His mind and in His principles. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, is using the keys of the kingdom, and keys are the symbols of authority, of government, and they are entrusted to Peter to open the Kingdom on the day of Pentecost. It is all so consistent.

#### A HOLY NATION

The point is—without being too detailed—that Jesus was building a new spiritual Israel, a 'holy nation'. You and I belong to that new Israel. We are of that holy nation—but what kind of nation is this?

If you look now at Peter's first Letter, not only verse by verse, sentence by sentence, but almost fragment by fragment, you will see what Peter is doing—he is transferring the old Israel to the new at every point. That is why we read those first four verses.

What kind of 'holy nation' is this? What kind of an Israel are we? Here it is: "Elect . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." You know those were the words that were used so often in the old dispensation about the old Israel. God chose them, and that is only another word for the same thing—He *elect*ed them, or, if you like, *selected* them. They were an elect people, a chosen people. That is how the old Israel is spoken of even to this day—"the chosen people". But here Peter has followed up Matthew xxi. 43, transferred from the old to the new, and says: "You believers, scattered abroad throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, over the world, and over the nations, you are the elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. God has foreseen you before all time. He has had His eye on you, and His hand on you in foreknowledge before ever you were."

Of course, Paul has much to say about this. "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians i. 4). Peter and Paul agreed on this, at any rate, and understood the same thing, although Peter did say once about Paul's writings: "Wherein are some things hard to be understood" (II Peter iii. 16). However, that did not apply here. This Israel to which we belong is "elect . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father". That is where the new Israel begins.

But note! I said 'fragment by fragment' . . .

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

“into sanctification of the Spirit”. What is that? What is “sanctification of the Spirit”? You can put it this way if you like: ‘Sanctification *by* the Holy Spirit’. What is that? What is the meaning of sanctification?

Well, you see, sanctification is just another word for ‘separated unto God’, and that is the thing that happens *in time* . . . ‘elect . . . through the sanctification of the Spirit’. The eternal *fact*, *now* the time *act* of being set apart for God. ‘Sanctification’ basically means ‘set apart’, consecrated, given to God. Put it how you will. When we use the word ‘sanctification’ we usually concentrate our thought upon a condition. That is the working out of the sanctification, but sanctification itself is a basic thing that at a point the life is separated unto God, set apart for God, by the act of the Holy Spirit; made the Lord’s—there is a race which is the Lord’s, a nation which is the Lord’s, a people which is the Lord’s of which every unit, individual, is the Lord’s.

You get a tremendous amount of New Testament teaching into that! “Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price” (I Corinthians vi. 20). You belong to the Lord—not to yourself, or to anyone else. That is the meaning of sanctification: Set apart, made wholly unto God.

This sanctification matter was the real battleground of the Old Testament where Israel was concerned. It does open the door to an immense amount of what happened in the Old Testament, because the one thing, more than anything else where Israel was concerned, was to break down their separation, and in some way bring about a link with what was not the Lord. This is where all idolatry came in and why all intermarriage was forbidden. You know it was a battleground. It was a battleground in Nehemiah, in Ezra, in the Prophets—this broken-down distinctiveness of this people as belonging wholly to the Lord, and the work of the evil powers to make them to belong to someone else. To put it the other way, to take away the absolute proprietorship and possession of the Lord of this people. On that issue there is battle all the time.

You are in it every day, are you not? The real battle is to keep wholly the Lord’s and to refuse to compromise where the Lord’s rights are concerned. Peter recognizes that battle. “Your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom *he* may devour” (I Peter v. 8). He is all the time taking away from the Lord, drawing away, forcing away, enticing away somehow, and this ground of sanctification in its deepest meaning—being wholly the Lord’s—is a battleground.

“In sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood . . .”—of goats, rams, lambs? *No!* Peter has transferred from that realm. All that is finished. The old Israel has gone. “Sprinkling of the blood of Jesus the *Messiah*.” And when Peter uses language like this, it is amazing what has happened. When you think that Peter was a Jew, a born, bred, dyed-in-the-wool Jew, with all that Hebrew background of tradition and ritual, sacrifices and all that hope and expectation of the Messiah—and now he says: “The blood of Jesus the Messiah”! The one thing that Israel could not accept about their Messiah was that He had died in this way. ‘But’, you say, ‘what about Isaiah liii?’ We all know what is in that, but how does it begin? “Who hath believed our report?” They did not believe that their Messiah was going to be the Messiah of Isaiah liii. They could not. Why, this man hanging on the Cross? No, He could not possibly be the Messiah! His being crucified was full proof that He was not the Messiah. Peter, one of that nation, says: “the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus the Messiah”. Is it not impressive? Something has entered into the heart of this man, he has now seen something new—the suffering Messiah! Peter goes on in this Letter to say a lot about the sufferings of Christ. “The sprinkling of the blood of Jesus the Messiah.” That is a transfer, is it not, from the old to the new? And that is ours!

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, who according to his great mercy . . .” We are going to see, as we go on, some of the weight of those words. Peter speaks of “his great mercy”. Well, Peter knew something about that! He is the first one of this new Israel, the outstanding one of this holy nation, and he must know, perhaps more than anyone else, His great mercy.

If you and I are members of this heavenly Israel, our membership rests upon this: His great mercy. It will never rest upon anything else—He will see to that.

How do you feel about that? I wonder what your exercise has been about that? I believe, you know, that that is the sort of thing the Lord will do with His heavenly people. He will make them know that mercy is not just a word in the Bible, and they will realize that but for the mercy of God they would be nowhere. That is going to be brought home. But, mark you, there is the other way of looking at it: If you are there, where the mercy of God is your only hope and ground, you are an inheritor of the Kingdom. You are an heir. We come to that almost immediately. Ah, yes, that is safe ground, and Peter is there right at the beginning of his Letter.

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“According to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah from the dead.” Did I say that Peter had the whole thing wrought into him? Well, think of him again. Cast your eye back to that episode down there in the lower hall, when the accusing finger of the servant maid pointed at him and she said: ‘Thou art one of them’, and he denied it: ‘I know Him not’; a second time, more vehemently; and a third time, with his fisherman’s old bad language, oaths and curses, he denied it. Then Peter went out and wept bitterly. It was this that necessitated the angel sending a special message through Mary: ‘Go to his disciples, *and Peter*, and tell them . . .’ That man is in despair. He has come out into the dark, he is smashed, desolated, devastated, hopeless. Perhaps his thoughts at that time were: ‘What a hopeless, hopeless fellow I am!’

“Begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah from the dead.” That man knows what he is talking about! He has been through it—and he is the first of the heavenly Israel.

Do we know it like this? We go on: “The resurrection of Jesus the Messiah from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” Here is another point of the great transition. The old Israel had an inheritance, which was the land of promise, the land of Canaan. It was defiled, corrupted and faded away. They lost it. It is not theirs now in fullness, and for many centuries they had

little place in it. You know the Book of Joshua, when their inheritance was divided up, apportioned and made over to the tribes. There is a lot about it, but they lost it all. It faded away and was corrupted and defiled. That is why they went into Babylon, and why they went under Roman domination. They defiled the land. That is the whole accusation of the Prophets, is it not? It was lost . . . “unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away” . . . but now not on this earth, subject to all the changes and influence of a world like this . . . “reserved in heaven for you.” A wonderful nation, is it not? Well, this is the kind of nation it is.

“Reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

That is only opening the door to Peter’s significance in person and ministry. I think it is opening it enough—even if it is still only just open—to see that there is something here of riches, and we are going to agree with Peter when he says: “For you therefore which believe is the preciousness . . .” Of what? Of Christ, yes, but of the new inheritance, of what He has brought us to, and what He is bringing us to.

May this have a very practical application to us! Go out from this place and say to yourself, if you have never said it before: ‘As a member of the new Israel I inherit in Christ all that the old Israel lost through unbelief, through disobedience. I am of the Israel of God.’

(To be continued)

#### CONFERENCE IN SWITZERLAND

1966

For information about the conference at Aeschi, Switzerland, from 3rd to 12th September, please see *From the Editor*, pages 25 and 26.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We regret that, owing to lack of space in this issue, we are obliged to hold over our acknowledgment of gifts received during December 1965 and January 1966 until the next issue.

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### THIS MINISTRY

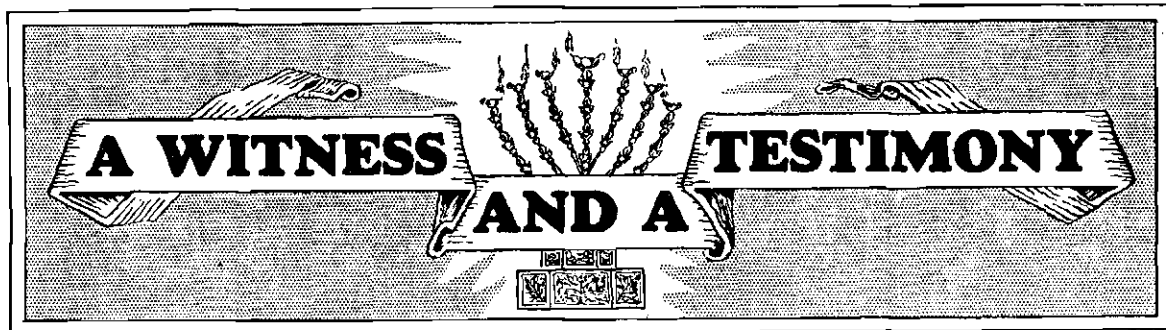
**T**HE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13—" . . . till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown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

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

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 30, Dunoon Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

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





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## THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (IV)

## 4. THE MERCY-SEAT

WE go on with the next thing about the ark, and that is the mercy-seat. There rested upon the ark this solid plate of gold which was called the mercy-seat. It is mentioned twenty-three times in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament it is taken up as referring to the Lord Jesus. It is so set forth in the Letter to the Hebrews. The mercy-seat on the ark of the Old Testament is one other aspect of the glory and greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You notice that it is called 'the seat of mercy', and that word 'mercy' in the Old Testament is a very rich and strong word. It means 'the loving kindness of the Lord'. A new translation of the Bible has translated that word 'mercy' into 'steadfast love', and that is the nearest definition to the Hebrew word that we have. It is covenant love, loyal love, a covenant of love made in the blood which was sprinkled upon the mercy-seat. Because we are so familiar with the old versions, which give

this word simply as 'mercy', we love that constant repetition of the statement: "His mercy endureth for ever", or "How great is Thy mercy!", or from the prophet: "He delighteth in mercy" (Micah vii. 18). Perhaps we do not easily take to a new translation, but when we stay to think about it, the new translation is still richer. Perhaps, as we come more deeply to understand it, we shall be willing to accept this translation 'His steadfast love'.

It is a very impressive thing that, right at the very centre and heart of this whole great system of the Old Testament, represented by the tabernacle, is the mercy-seat. Everything else pointed toward the mercy-seat, and it gave its value to everything else. The mercy-seat governed and gave character to everything. It is a wonderful thing to think of that. Yes, the mercy-seat governs everything for the people of God. We turn to a little phrase in Psalm lxxxiv. You know that that Psalm is the Psalm of

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the House of God. It begins with: "How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord". It is sinful man saying that! This is poor, failing man who is speaking. Why is it that the poor, sinful, failing man speaks like that? Why is it that he so longs for the courts of the Lord's house? The answer is found in this little phrase: "*The Lord will give grace and glory*" (verse 11). The throne of grace, the mercy-seat, was right at the centre of the House of the Lord. The gold of the glory was there at the mercy-seat, but it was not a throne of judgment; it was a throne of grace.

We pass from the type to the Lord Jesus Himself. We said that the Lord Jesus takes the place of the mercy-seat in the New Testament. Now look at the Letter to the Romans, chapter iii, verse 25: "*Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by his blood*". We can understand the difficulty of the translators, but their difficulty has deprived us of something very precious. It would have been difficult for the translators to have put: 'God hath set forth Him as a mercy-seat'. In the original it is not what God has done, but what Christ is. In that literal translation it would not be: 'God has set Him forth as a propitiation', but 'as a propitiatory'. It is what He *is*, although it is also true of what He has done. So it ought really to read: 'God hath set Him forth to be the mercy-seat'. Jesus occupies the central place in the whole scheme of redemption, and that place is the mercy-seat. It was there at the mercy-seat that God met the people in the representative person of the high priest. You will remember that when Aaron, the high priest, went in to the ark, he had the breast-plate on him with the names of all the tribes of Israel, so that in the person of the high priest all the people of God were present, and there, at the mercy-seat, God spoke and made Himself known to His people. Aaron went in with the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it upon the mercy-seat, making an atonement for the people, and by that covenant in blood God made Himself known. It was a perpetual testimony to the grace of God. In that régime it was every year. It was maintained throughout all their generations, but with our Lord Jesus it is once and for ever. All who come unto God by Jesus Christ stand on the ground of His steadfast love, and for such people it is everlasting love.

The Apostle Paul had a great knowledge of these Old Testament types. He was perfectly instructed in all the things of the tabernacle of old, and in ways which we do not always recognize he was alluding

to that Old Testament system. I believe that those words which we love very much, but understand very little, are an allusion to the mercy-seat. Let us read them in the light of the mercy-seat, for they will throw much light upon it.

*"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."* That is the High Priest who has gone into the heavenly tabernacle with His own blood to make intercession for us. Now the next words explain the mercy-seat, that is, the steadfast love: "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans viii. 34 - 35, 37 - 39).

That is the mercy-seat, the steadfast love of God for His own. That is the greatness and glory of Jesus Christ; and surely we can speak of that as grace and glory. That is what Jesus Christ has been made unto us.

Are you not more and more amazed at the steadfast love of God for Israel? You have only to read that long record of their history in the Book of the Psalms—Psalms cvi and cvii. They are very long Psalms, but it is a long, long story of the steadfast love of God, and that love is set over against the long story of Israel's failures. Oh, how those people disappointed the Lord! They never had one little trouble but they turned against Him. It seems that they only wanted some little occasion to grumble at Him. When we come to the Prophets we are greatly impressed with the love of God for Israel. Indeed, it was steadfast love. How loyal God was to His people! His love for them often made Him close His eyes to their wrong. When I remember what Israel was really like I am amazed at those prophecies of Balaam. Balak, of Moab, called for Balaam to come and curse Israel, and perhaps you might think that if there were any people who ought to be cursed, those people were Israel! Balaam came to try to curse Israel, but the curse would not come out of his mouth, and he had to say: 'God has commanded me to bless. How can I curse?' But what did Balaam say, or rather, what

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did God say through Balaam's mouth? "*He (God) hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel*" (Numbers xxiii. 21). Oh, what does this mean? There was plenty of iniquity in Israel, but God says: "I have not beheld iniquity in Jacob". Why did God speak like that? He was looking at Israel through the mercy-seat, and was being true to His covenant of steadfast love.

If you really love someone, you usually make a lot of excuses for their failures. If someone else points out the failures and the wrongs of the one you love, you always say: 'Well, perhaps that is true, but . . . but . . .'. You cover up the faults of the one you love because you are loyal to them. Loyalty is a great virtue. I wish that we Christians were more loyal to one another, simply because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have to go a long way to be like God in this matter. There is an old saying that love is blind. Don't you believe that! Love sees everything, but love loves in spite of everything, and that is like the love of God.

We are poor sinners and we cannot accuse Israel. We are a very poor lot in ourselves, and God knows all about that, and much more than we know about ourselves, but with all His knowledge of us He loves us.

What do you think of this world? What do you think about those Congolese people who have done all that wicked work? They are only representative of humanity. What do you think of this world? Well, we are saying that this is a poor kind of a world. Man is a poor kind of creature. Do you think God does not know anything about that? He knows far more about man than you or I know, and yet it still stands—"God so loved the world that He

gave His only begotten Son", and God has set Him forth as a mercy-seat. We shall never exhaust the wonderful fullness of this mercy-seat! We find all the patience and the long-suffering and the forbearance of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is not a low kind of love, that is, a kind of love that does not care whether a person is bad. That is why there are two cherubim over the mercy-seat, and if you study the history of the cherubim you will see that they always relate to one thing—the holiness of God. The first time you meet them is at the gate of the Garden when man has sinned. Those cherubim say: 'Man in his sinful state cannot dwell in the presence of God. Something must be done about it.' When you get to the end of the Bible you find redeemed man in the midst of the Paradise of God. Yes, he is back in the Garden now, but God has done something about it. The Mercy-Seat has attended to this whole matter. The precious Blood has made a full atonement for man's sin.

The point is that the cherubim always speak of the holiness of God's love. The cherubim in Isaiah's time are heard chanting: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." His love is a holy love, and by the mercy-seat He lifts us from our own unholiness to His holiness. That blood on the mercy-seat always speaks of the great price that God paid to redeem man from his unholiness.

Forget the mercy-seat and remember Jesus Christ. He is all and more than ever the symbol represented.

We said that this is just one other aspect of the greatness and glory of Jesus Christ. May God give us a new appreciation of our Lord Jesus as our Mercy-Seat!

(To be continued)

## THE VOICES OF THE PROPHETS (VII)

"*They knew not . . . the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath*" (Acts xiii. 27).

"*Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?*" (Acts vii. 52).

**T**HUS far we have been occupied with the many notes in the voice of the Prophet Jeremiah. Before we leave this Prophet we want to say a word regarding Jeremiah's representative and inclusive posi-

tion. Perhaps some readers have wondered why we should have taken Jeremiah first in prophetic ministry. Most writers would—most probably—have put Isaiah first. "Jeremiah" is not an easy or happy Prophet to read. Isaiah is so much more likeable and readable. We may have our preferences among the Prophets, but—preference apart—there are reasons why we have commenced with Jeremiah, and there will be reasons why we do what we do in other cases.

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Our main reason for this priority is that, in a fuller way than any other, Jeremiah accentuates the features of all the Prophets. What variety of features there is when we look at all the Prophets! Sorrow, hope, despair, joy, bitterness, light, darkness, love, anger, etc. While each Prophet may have more than one aspect, each one has some predominant feature. It is possible to say of each one: 'This is the Prophet of . . .' (and give a respective definition). When we look at Jeremiah we are impressed with many characteristics. But there is an inclusiveness here. If the predominant impression is tears and sorrow, this is alternated with hope, promise, God's sovereignty, and day of Salvation to come. The point is that many aspects go to make up the calling and vocation of prophetic ministry. Let us note some of these, to which Jeremiah is a pointer. We have dealt with this matter much more fully in our "PROPHETIC MINISTRY" and "GOD'S REACTIONS TO MAN'S DEFECTIONS", but it will not be unhelpful to indicate some points here. The Prophet and his ministry is the focal point of

### GOD'S RECOVERY MOVEMENT.

That means that the function of prophetic ministry is introduced when things have departed from God's full intention. But it means more than that. The departure is marked by an element of strength which involves the Prophet in *positive* conflict. In such a ministry there is no passive accommodating to the situation, no compromise or appeasement. There may be appeal, entreaty, tears and sorrow, but there is no truce with spiritual decline. This is very apparent in all the Prophets from Samuel onward. They are fighting men, and the Chief of all was Jesus Christ Himself. God has a mind, and it is a full mind. This mind had been intimidated, and the Bible is the history of the battle for its full realization. There is an intense downgrade element in creation. Left to itself nature declines, runs wild and loses character. Nothing rises—ascends—without a counter to this propensity. The Bible sees this element introduced as a part of one tremendous downward step by man; thorns and thistles for ever became symbols of a wrong direction, and toiling by the sweat of the brow the warfare to overcome that tendency. This inherent strain has marked man's relation with Divine things, and the history of the things of God has been: God moves—man countermoves—God moves again.

As we have said, the prophetic function stands at the centre of this conflict. It is here that the second of the two Scriptures at the head of this chapter has

its place. Indeed, it is here that Stephen's martyrdom comes in.

"Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?"

Because the fulfilment of this kind of ministry means an unrelenting stand against the incorrigible desire to play down to the easy level, those who have this ministry committed to them are not popular, and—like Jeremiah—are looked upon as really not concerned for people's interests. This is probably why Jeremiah, like Moses and Isaiah, did shrink from such ministry. When Jeremiah said to the Lord: "I am a child; I cannot speak", he referred to his sense of not having the prophetic qualifications of the prophet—to "speak". The ministry for him held none of the attraction of preaching, as preaching has for so many. It had to be thrust upon Jeremiah against his own sense of insufficiency, for Jeremiah well knew what he would be up against as a Prophet; and he got what he expected. But, the very survival of these Prophets through all that they encountered shows that God was with them; that He had called them; and that their ministry was of particular importance and value to Him.

The ministry of recovery of lost values, lost standards, and lost spiritual measure is a lonely way for those in it. The Prophets were very lonely men, and their ministry was very costly.

If Jeremiah did feel himself to be so inadequate and such a "child" alongside of the big situation to be met, the Lord—while doubtless appreciating his sense of insufficiency—would not allow His servant to limit Him (God) to Jeremiah's measure. It is one of the paradoxes of Scripture that, while the Lord takes care to have His servants weak and empty in themselves, He will not permit them to excuse or exempt themselves on the ground of this insufficiency. So, an Apostle will cry out of an overwhelming sense of inadequacy: "Who is sufficient for these things?" and then answer his own cry: "Our sufficiency is of God." Jeremiah had the answer to his cry of weakness in: "I have this day set thee over the nations." The voice of this Prophet, and all the Prophets, says:

"My strength is made perfect in weakness."

We must not forget that the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, and more, are the definite result of the ministry of Jeremiah. (See II Chronicles xxxvi. 22 and Ezra i. 1.)

But remember also that Jeremiah's ministry and sufferings were vindicated in the Remnant. First the Remnant that returned to rebuild the temple and wall, and Jerusalem. Yes, but not only that tem-

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poral Remnant, but an eternal spiritual remnant, for the Apostle Paul uses this very truth in his argument concerning the inclusion of a remnant of Israel in the heavenly Zion, the New Israel (Romans ix. 27 – 33). True, he quotes Isaiah, but, as we have indicated, the whole of the ministry of all the Prophets related to God's recovery movement; and that recovery is always in Remnants. May not the Overcomers of the Revelation be the Remnant at the end, embodying God's full mind? It is in those early chapters of the Revelation that we see that downgrade tendency so evident. Let us beware of playing down the full purpose of God. The false Prophets of Israel were not false in the sense that they never had been called to the Prophetic min-

istry. They were men who had been in the School of the Prophets; academically trained, and heirs of the tradition of Elijah, Elisha, etc. They were false in the sense of declension, compromise, time-serving; using their office officially and not spiritually; to gain popularity; men of policy and not principle; seeking to be men-pleasers, and to keep on pleasant terms with the people; not true at great cost to their trust and responsibility.

The criterion of our ministry at the end will be: 'Did the people of God really gain eternally by our having been with them, or did they lose what God wanted them to have?' Is the responsibility with us or with the people? This is the inclusive "voice" of all the Prophets.

(To be continued)

## "LOOKING UNTO JESUS"

*"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up"* (Isaiah vi. 1).

*"I have set the Lord always before me"* (Psalm xvi. 8).

*"Looking unto Jesus"* (Hebrews xii. 2).

THE only thing that matters in this life, and the next, is Christlikeness. I suppose Isaiah is one of the most Christlike men in the Bible, not only in his personal demeanour, for that is only a part of Christlikeness, but in his speech, which is another part, and in his work and ministry. Was there ever one who with such power—not only in his day, but right up to our day—has made Christ so real to us as Isaiah has?

### CHRISTLIKENESS BY LOOKING AT THE LORD

Now spiritual things, like natural things, work on a basis of cause and effect. We are always seeking after the effect. We want to be Christlike, and we want to make Christ real to others. Isaiah did that, but in his sixth chapter he discloses the cause that produced the effect, and the cause is very simple, though, at the same time, very profound: "I saw the Lord". There is no other way. We are not made Christlike by looking at others, however godly they

may be, nor by condemning others because of their faults.

There is a difference of opinion as to what Isaiah meant when he timed this vision by saying that it was 'in the year that king Uzziah died'. Some think that Isaiah had a great admiration for Uzziah, and it was not until Uzziah was taken out of the way that he could see the Lord. Others think that, because of Uzziah's sin, Isaiah was very critical and apt to exalt himself at Uzziah's expense, and then, when Uzziah died, he found that, after all, he was no better. Both of those things may be true of him. They are certainly true of us. We do not become Christlike by looking at men, however much we find of the Lord in another, and however much we may admire and be attracted and feel that we are inspired by others. When we are in their presence we are at our best. They mean so much to us that they somehow seem to draw out something in us. But that does not last when they are not with us, and we would not like them to know just what we are like when they do not see us. Is it not strange that we are so sensitive to the opinion of others whom we admire, and yet we seem to be so unmoved by the fact that the Lord has His eye upon us all the time? No, looking upon others will never make us Christlike.

Nor will being busy in the service of the Lord make us Christlike. Isaiah was that. Chapter vi was not the beginning of what we may call, in New Testament terms, his active Christian life, but it

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was for him an altogether new beginning. Preaching and witnessing and serving the Lord did not make Isaiah the man that he became, and they will not make us what we should be.

So I could go on. Isaiah was a man, we are told, of high connection, of good birth, of great accomplishment, but he tells us that the secret was in none of these things, but in the fact that he saw the Lord.

### THE PRACTICAL OUTCOME OF THE VISION

And what a practical effect that vision had upon him! If, by seeing the Lord, you are thinking we are just talking about visions, or dreams, or ideas, something to write about or to pray about, get that right out of your head. When Isaiah saw the Lord, he went out from that vision (if these chapters are in chronological order) and from that temple to find that the city in which he was, and the people to whom he belonged, were in great danger by the immediate activities of a confederation of enemies who were going to overthrow them. You read into chapter vii, and you will find that it is just like that. 'It came to pass that there was war against Jerusalem.' And even if these chapters are not in strict chronological order, there is obviously some spiritual chronology which has a meaning to us.

#### (a) CALM IN CONFLICT

"I saw the Lord" . . . and then it was not that everything went smoothly and happily and he became a great preacher, but he found himself involved in a very fierce and bitter situation of conflict, and all around him were losing their heads. "His (Ahaz's) heart trembled, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest tremble with the wind." They were shaken by this new situation, from Ahaz downward. But you will find that Isaiah was not shaken. He came forth to Ahaz and said to him: "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not." A very practical effect of seeing the Lord is to be calm in conflict, to be steady when it is so easy to lose your head, to be unmoved when everybody else is bankrupt. I have said already that these are matters of cause and effect. We want to be like that, but we have to go back to chapter vi and find, with Isaiah, that it is not because of a rocklike character or of temperamental advantages over the others, but because he had seen the Lord.

Cast your mind back. Have there been any such situations in your life, in your home, and around

you? Have you been moved as the trees are moved by the wind? Alas, I am afraid we have. How much more satisfying it would be if we could look back and say: 'No, thank God! Though I am the weakest of them all, I have been steady. I have been triumphant. And I have not only been steady, but I have had an influence and a ministry of strength to others who were being moved.' Well, the secret is for us all, for it is an open one: "I saw the Lord". Keeping Christ in view makes you like that, and nothing else will.

#### (b) THE PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST

Before you have read many more verses in chapter vii you will find that Isaiah is launched on his full ministry of making known the glories of God's Christ: "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." In chapter vi Isaiah thought he was finished. By verse 14 of chapter vii he is launched on such a rich ministry that there is not one of us here, or any of the Church of God throughout the earth and throughout the ages, who does not thank God for Isaiah. Oh, that men might be able to thank God for our ministry! Well, Isaiah tells us that there is no mystery about it. He was what he was in the world because of what had happened in the sanctuary, and so are we. He came out into the conflict and into his ministry as one who had been alone, face to face, with the Lord. That is the secret: "I saw the Lord . . . high and lifted up."

### THE EFFECT OF THE VISION

#### (a) *Humbling*

I suppose that one of the reasons why we evade this vision is that it is very humbling. Isaiah, when he saw the Lord, became a man who hated himself. When you see the Lord in this way you see yourself, and you never do see yourself until you see the Lord. That self that you see in a mirror is not the real one. That self that you want to be, or that other people think you are, or that even (given a certain number of faults and failings which we recognize) we think we are, is not the true self. No man and no woman has ever really seen himself or herself if they have not seen the Lord in this way. It would drive us to despair and we would lose all hope for ever if we saw ourselves as we really are, apart from Christ. And so, while this is not a despairing vision, it is a very humbling one, and Christlikeness is the fruit of having a humbling vision of the Lord.

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*(b) Transforming*

But it was not only a humbling vision. As we know, it was one of mighty transformation. That is the wonderful thing about being humbled by the Lord. In the days of the Gospels, whenever any sincere-hearted soul caught a real glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ, they fell down in a deep sense of their own personal need, but they never ran away from Him, however sinful and vile they felt, and however pure and holy they realized Him to be. Somehow there was born in their hearts the sense that they must come closer. Because they are so vile and because He is so holy, they must come closer, and whenever they did their vileness disappeared and the Lord communicated His own life and healing to their needy souls. If any other man touched a leper, he caught the leprosy. When Christ touched the leper He banished the leprosy, and it is like that—a transforming vision.

*(c) Inspiring*

And it is an inspiring vision. Isaiah went out in the strength of this. Those three little words that are found throughout the chapter present, in quite a striking way, the phases, the aspects, of this vision. First of all, it is 'woe' (verse 5)—the way of his own humbling. Then it is 'lo' (verse 7)—the 'Lo' of His transforming power. And then it is 'go' (verse 9). Isaiah went, and wherever he went he was inspired by this vision of the Lord.

We should be exercised in this matter: that we should be those who go in the strength of such a vision, that we should see the Lord for ourselves. Not just seeing Him in other people, for that is not enough; not knowing the presence of the Lord in a meeting, for that is not enough; and not just in some way seeing the Lord through a message. These are all converging on the point, but the point is higher than them all. It is a matter of personal, face to face, heart to heart, dealings with our blessed, risen Saviour and King. Isaiah spoke, and he spoke with power in a way which made the Lord so real to other people because the Lord was so real to him. And I pray that we may never speak in terms of some general idea of vision, but may learn to speak as those who have come hot from the presence of a personal vision of our risen Lord. Otherwise we are wasting our time—and how much time we have all wasted! Not that we did not give the truth, and not that we were not doing something sincerely, but it lacked that blessed element that comes, not from seeking and praying over a mes-

sage, but from having a personal maintained vision and relationship with the Lord. Every day in which you go out to face life, to touch other people without being in the strength of such a vision, is a wasted day. I do not care whether it is a good day or a bad day. I do not care whether you are feeling that you have made a mess of it and it has been a failure, or you feel you have done rather well. In either case it is a wasted day unless you can in honesty say: 'When I went out to that, I went out as one who was seeing the Lord. "I saw the Lord" for myself.'

A MAINTAINED LOOK AT THE  
ENTHRONED LORD

This was the one basic experience of Isaiah's life, and it needs to be ours. But, as we read in the Psalms, it is not merely a past experience in the background, but it has to be a constant attitude of heart. Isaiah, as it were, came up against the Lord, and we need to do that. But the Psalmist says: 'Every day, every hour, my attitude is that I keep the Lord well in view'—"I have set the Lord always before me", and it is that which the Apostle is exhorting us to do when he says: "*Looking unto Jesus*". It is keeping the enthroned Lord in view.

As I have said, we somehow are very indifferent to the fact that God sees us; it does not seem to make any difference to us. Man is such a fallen creature, so out of touch with heavenly things, that, regenerate or not, the fact that God is everywhere does not make any difference. What Isaiah saw exactly I do not know, but I do know that for us it is not merely that God is everywhere in a general way. It is that the Lord Jesus, who bled and died for us at Calvary, is now given that place in the throne high and lifted up, and that every deviation from holiness and every act of self-will, every harsh thought and every unsanctified part of our lives, is a direct affront to Him and to His throne, and He is our King. "I saw the Lord . . . high and lifted up", but that Lord 'high and lifted up' is Jesus. "Looking unto Jesus." It is not just in general terms. We have come to know God in the person of Jesus Christ. Your Jesus who loves you and whom you love has been put by God high above everything, high above everybody, and we need to be constantly exercised to keep Him in view in that way, and to see that everything really is brought into subjection to Him. It is a maintained vision in which the Lord Jesus is always given the first place.

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Surely that is the secret. We can trust the ministry with the Lord, and we can trust our whole life with the Lord, and, according to this pattern of Isaiah, we can trust the enemy with the Lord. This is the place of power, this is the place of transforming of character, this is the place of a fruitful ministry—the place which keeps the Lord Jesus in view.

As we face a new situation we most of us look to God for a promise. We look to Him in the sense of asking Him and trusting Him that He will do something for us. That is right, but I want to suggest to you that we shall find the Lord doing all sorts of new and wonderful things if we can co-operate from our side, and instead of saying: 'Well, will the Lord do this?', or 'Is it possible that He will do

that?', we say: 'Lord, by Thy grace, I am going to keep Thee in view.' May we not have that as our holy purpose: by His grace to have a new awareness of the eminence and the glory of the risen Christ? We shall find that Christ will be known and exalted and manifest through us. I think perhaps the responsibility is not so much on God's side as on our side, and that is what the Lord is saying: 'You can leave this matter of faithfulness with Me. I will see to that. You can leave the promises to Me. You can choose one, and you shall have it, but leave that with Me. But there is one side that belongs to you . . . "Looking unto Jesus".'

God help us, for His Name's sake!

H. F.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PERSON AND MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PETER (II)

**WE** have already seen that Peter, as the first of the twelve Apostles, represents the link between the former Israel, which forfeited the Kingdom of God, and the new Israel, which inherits the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus said to the Israel of old, in the culmination of that dispensation: "*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). Peter represents that transition, and in a very real way is the link between the two.

In turning to Peter's first Letter we have begun to see something of what this new Israel is: its nature, character, position, function and vocation. All of these are so clearly set forth in Peter himself, both as to his personal history and his ministry. We are not going over the ground again which we have already covered, but will just take the matter up where we left off.

### THE TRANSITION

I must, however, repeat and re-emphasize one thing which must be kept very much to the fore in our minds in this matter. It is how Peter himself in his own life, in his being, through his experience and spiritual history embodied all that which Jesus came to initiate: this new heavenly and spiritual

Israel. It is a matter that has impressed me so greatly, and does so more and more as I read what Peter wrote. At almost every point in his letter, not only in the verses, but in the very clauses, there is something of what the Lord Jesus intended by His teaching and His work, by His coming, in relation to this new Israel. This is very impressive, and I do want you to keep that in mind all the time, because, while it is very interesting to know that one Israel belongs to a past dispensation and another one has taken its place, the important thing is that every one who belongs to this new heavenly nation, this Israel of God, has to embody the truth of that Israel, for that is the first and fundamental thing that Peter says. What Peter went through in order to become a personal expression of this great new dispensation reality! What pains the Lord took with that man in order that he should pass from the realm of mere teaching—though it were the teaching of the Lord Himself—into *being* that teaching! So that is what we must underline to begin with, and it is the thing that really concerns us. I think you will see how real and true that is, both in Peter's case and in ours, as we proceed.

We have read the first verses of Peter's first Letter and noticed the beginning of this wonderful changeover, this transition, this passage from the old to the new. The wonderful thing, of course, which covers it all, includes it all, is the change



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from the temporal to the spiritual. It was at that point that Peter, with the others, had his first battle. Don't fail to recognize that! It was just there that the battle began and had to be won before he, and they, could get any further.

You see, right up to the point after the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to the disciples during those forty days, coming and going and speaking the things of the Kingdom, their question was: "*Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts i. 6). Their Old Testament ideas about the Messiah and what He would do are still there! They are still there in their own hopes and in their own interpretation of the kingdom, and what a battle it was for them, and no less a battle for you and for me, to make that transition! The most difficult thing for the believers of this dispensation is really to accept and settle down on this: that everything now is spiritual and not temporal.

This is where the battle began. What were they expecting? What were they wanting, hoping for? Just everything, again, in the temporal realm. The temporal kingdom of Israel, an earthly world power—perhaps *the* world power—with a temple, and everything else that belonged to the old. But all that has gone. All that is finished with, and now there is introduced something that is wholly spiritual. That is one of Peter's words—"a *spiritual* house . . . to offer up *spiritual* sacrifices" (I Peter ii. 5). We read that, we quote it, we use it in our worship, and we know it, but really it represents the battleground of our lives. The Lord is not dealing with us, in the first place, on temporal grounds, of things seen and things that we can handle. He is putting it all away from that realm of our own ability to grasp, to have, to hold, and to understand, and putting it in another realm altogether.

This spiritual life is a very difficult life! Is it not true that it tests us every day? But it is the basic and inclusive thing about this transition, and the marvellous thing that had happened in this man Peter, who, perhaps more than all the others, was out for this temporal kingdom of God. My, he had a great business in letting it go! We will see that as we go on, but here that has happened and he is now altogether occupied with the spiritual side of everything in the Kingdom.

The transition, then, is from the temporal to the spiritual. We noted that Peter says: "God . . . begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance". An *inheritance*! Think back again to the saints of the Old Testament, and their whole mental hope

and complexion of their inheritance! A parcel of ground for each tribe in the land of promise. Their inheritance was on the earth, flowing with milk and honey, and every temporal and physical benefit and blessing that heaven could give, and they were saying: "That is coming back again with the Messiah. That is going to be ours when Messiah comes. That is what we are looking for!"

Peter, however, has gone through something that makes him say: "Unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in *heaven*". It has gone from this earth. It is somewhere else, and if you read through this Letter you will not detect the slightest tone of remorse in Peter. There is no sorrow about this. It is not: "We have lost something". Oh, no! "Ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory." That is the tone of this Letter. It is about the gain of the heavenly, and how superior this inheritance reserved in heaven is to all that the old Israel had.

### THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS

"Who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a *salvation* ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold temptations, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, might be found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ: whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even *the salvation of your souls*" (I Peter i. 5-9).

The end, the culmination, the consummation, is "the salvation of your souls". That end is reached through manifold trials, but it is the explanation of the trials, the defining why the trials, and the nature of the trials—"the salvation of your souls".

What has Peter in mind? What is behind this? As we have said, all the way through this Letter, in almost every sentence, there is some reference to something in the past, the old dispensation, which has now been taken over. That is the background.

Look at Hebrews iv. 12: "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit . . ." Do you notice that that verse begins with the word "for"? It is a conjunction and links with what has gone before. And what is

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that? "If Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken afterward of another day. There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God." And that throws back to, what? The wilderness, and the intended rest of the land. It is saying: 'In the wilderness the whole nature of things was manifold trials.' Was that true? There were indeed manifold trials in the wilderness, and how many those trials were! They were supremely trials of faith every time. If you saw that wilderness you would understand that from the sheer physical side it could well be a place of manifold trials. I have crossed it quite a number of times by air, and have looked down and said: 'My word, forty years in that!' That could put you to the test even physically, and to be tried in relation to God in an arid, desolate desert like that for forty years was something! But what was happening? It was a battle with their souls through the trials. You know what the soul is! It was a battle with their minds; their minds about God, their thoughts, their ideas, their reasoning, their judgments, and all that goes on in the mind. It was a battle with their feelings, and there is plenty of ground for feelings to have a very large place there! It was a battle with their choices: what they would choose. How truly it was a *soul* battle; whether their souls were going to be saved, that is, delivered, brought out from all this, or whether through their souls they were going to be defeated and lost. And so it proved for that generation—their souls were lost in that wilderness, and not saved.

Peter is referring to this when he says that 'the end of your faith, through manifold trials, is the salvation of your souls.'

Now, you need not go back to Peter, nor to the old Israel, nor to the wilderness. Come back here into yourself. Is it not true, dear friends, that the whole battleground of the spiritual life is here in our minds, in our feelings, and in our choices? Is it not a battle between *ours* and *God's*? "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isaiah lv. 8). There is a vast expanse between God's thoughts and ours! "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." There are two kingdoms, the earthly and the heavenly, and naturally we belong to the earthly. And I say that on this side is the mentality that is ours—and that is only another word for one of the three aspects of our souls: the mentality, the thought realm, the reasoning realm, the way we judge things, we interpret things mentally. That alone is a battleground through all trial.

Get into trial, be put to it, and see what a battle you are precipitated into as to how you look at it, how you judge it, how you explain it! In the end you simply have to throw it on one side and say: 'If I lean to my own understanding I am lost, for I cannot. I have no understanding here to lean to. I am lost, but either I go out with my inability to understand God's ways with me at this time, or I believe God. I have faith in God where I cannot understand.' Is that easy? Is that a battle? You know it is if you are put in manifold trials!

It is the same over our feelings when we are in the trials. How they get worked up! What we feel about it, about God's ways and dealings with us, and what we would do, how we would exercise our power of choice and volition if it were left with us. Oh, we would quit this to start with, and then we would do a lot of other things rather than this. That is the soul! And Peter says here: 'The end of the manifold trials is the salvation of your souls.'

We must understand this, though it is very difficult. But I am saying this out of a little experience—it is not just theory.

The soul has been the seat of all the trouble since Adam capitulated his soul to Satan. All the way through, in human life and in human nature, the soul has been the seat of all the trouble since the beginning, when Satan made his focused attack upon the soul, the reasoning, the thinking power, and drew Adam out in his mind and upon his desires, his feelings. 'It is good. It will be good for you.' And then, of course, his act, when he captured Adam's soul. Adam capitulated his soul into the power of Satan, and the soul has been under that power ever since and always is in unregenerate humanity. In the believer, the regenerate humanity, the discipline begins here in the soul. The change-over begins here by manifold trials.

The soul is just our selfhood. That is a big word! Selfhood—self-interest . . . a thousand 'selves' all in one. Our minds, our feelings, our actions all being governed, controlled by a principle in our human nature which is self.

Now look at what Peter is saying! Does this represent a big conversion in the case of this man? Jesus said to him: "When once thou art converted" (Luke xxii. 32)—and what a conversion of a disciple who had had all the teaching, and seen all the works of Jesus, but who had not yet been converted in the real sense. The translation says: "When once thou hast *turned again*", but that is the same word. It is conversion, and a tremendous conversion had taken place in this man. Now he is on the other side of it, but he is still in the battle and is telling the

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believers that this is the nature, the meaning of the manifold trials. What is it? Every trial in some way raises this selfhood, this 'I' of ourselves, and it takes so long for us to get to the point where in trial, under the testing, we can really say: 'It does not matter to me. It is not what I feel about it at all, but what the Lord is after.' That is growing in grace, as we shall see. 'It is not what I think about this at all. The Lord has another mind altogether from mine. It is not what I would do or will. The Lord is after something else in this trial.' I say that it takes a long time to get there, but, you see, that is the nature of things, and that is what is meant by the salvation of the soul, because in every one of the manifold trials, in some way, this selfhood gets up. It is a battle again: 'Not my will, but thine. Not my way, but thine. Not my thoughts, but thine.' That is the battle all the time in any time of trial.

Now you see that Peter says that this is the deepest, the profoundest work of salvation, the salvation of the soul. How does he say that? "Which things angels desire to look into" (verse 12). Angels are not human beings, and they do not understand what is the salvation of the soul because they are not soul beings. But they are able to discern, as spiritual beings, that there is something here which embraces all between that first act of capitulation to Satan and this last act of the salvation of every human soul in Christ, that right down deep there in human nature something is going on. They cannot enter into it in experience, but it is something immense which even "angels desire to look into". It is something beyond them, for it is so deep. The deepest, profoundest work of salvation relates to this recovery of the soul entirely and finally, and this salvation of human nature and for human nature is the battleground between heaven and hell. There is no doubt about that. That is where all the battle rages: around our souls.

Well, that is why Satan attacked the soul of the Lord Jesus, and Peter has come to understand something about that. Oh, it is impossible to say it all, but listen:

A little later on (in chapter v. 8) Peter says to these believers: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour", and he has preceded that statement by saying: "Be sober, be watchful!" Peter, where did you learn that? Where did you get that from? Listen to a voice coming from afar: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat." Why? Because of Peter's

soul! 'No, I will not forsake Thee. Though all the others forsake Thee, I will not. I will go with Thee to death.' This was the asserting of Peter's own selfhood, his self-confidence, his self-assurance, his self-sufficiency. Right in the face of that outburst of that man's soul Jesus said: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you" . . . (literally that is: 'Satan hath obtained you by asking') . . . "that he might sift you as wheat." And so Peter says: "Be sober". He has learned his lesson! 'Be sober, be watchful . . . be careful about this self-sufficiency, this self-strength, this self-assertiveness. Be sober. Don't get exalted ideas of yourself and what you can do. Be sober, be watchful!' And he is only saying—as he could have said in more words —'I have been through this and am saying to you something that brought devastation to my soul. Satan was allowed to sift me as wheat because of my selfhood, but I have come through. But you be watchful against any strength of selfhood of any kind, the rising up, the asserting itself of human nature. That happens in the time of trial, of manifold trials.'

Now I said that the trials explain the salvation, define the salvation. Why are they? What are the trials for? Well, on the one side they do precipitate this whole question of whether we are going to stand on our own ground and have it our own way, or whether we are going to let go our souls, deny ourselves and stand on the ground of the Lord's will and thoughts.

You see by this what a tremendous thing had happened to this man! What a tremendous thing had been done in him! There is more to see yet, but here is this and our point, dear friends, is just this: that Peter is Number One in the new heavenly Israel. He is the most prominent of the twelve who are the foundation of the Kingdom, which is what the new Israel is. It is not a temporal thing, but a spiritual thing, and we are tested all the time by the spiritual nature. Oh, if only we could let ourselves go and fight back all the opposition, fight back in the flesh, using carnal weapons, we think that perhaps we would come out on top. At least we would die in the effort! But the Lord says: 'Not a bit of it!', and Peter says: 'You will be treated wrongfully. Your reactions must not be: Wrong for wrong, and flesh for flesh. No! Take it patiently.' That is something for our human nature, is it not? When we are being thoroughly wronged our human nature does not take it patiently!

May the Lord give us understanding.

*(To be continued)*

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

## MAKING CONTACT

**C**RASH! Our beautiful kitchen clock lay on the floor at my feet. I had thought that it was hanging securely on the wall, but I was wrong, for as soon as my hand was taken away it had fallen to the ground with a crash. But the glass was not broken! I was glad to see that. Thankful to see; too, that as it lay there it was still ticking away. Could it be that it was none the worse for its fall? I hoped so. My hope, however, was a vain one, for as I picked it up again the hand stopped moving and the battery dropped out.

This dry battery had provided the power to keep the clock going, but in the fall a small connection had broken off, and now the battery would not stay in its place. I tried my best to fix it, but without success. There was the clock—apparently quite unharmed by its fall—and there was the electric power to make it work, but there was no contact between the two. So the clock was useless, and not worth hanging on the wall again.

For some days we were without it, and all the time looking up at the wall from force of habit, only to be reminded by its absence of the broken connection. Then I took it to a watchmaker. He examined it but had to admit that there was nothing that he could do. There was no way of replacing the broken connection. I asked him if the clock could be sent back to the makers so that they could mend it, only to be told that they would not undertake the work. For them the clock was finished and the only thing to do was to buy another one.

Suddenly the watchmaker had an idea. He picked up an odd strip of metal which was lying on his counter, cut a small piece from the strip, and then doubled this small piece over to make it into a "V" shape. He then put the battery back into the clock, pressed the bit of metal into the gap which the broken connection had left, and then looked up at me. I looked at the clock. The battery was now wedged in its place and was staying there, but, what was more, the electric circuit was restored. Yes, the clock was going once again.

Gladly I prepared to pay for this unexpected repair, but when I asked how much it was the man

waved my money aside, "It is not worth anything," he said. "It is just a piece of scrap."

"A piece of scrap!" "Not worth anything!" I certainly did not feel like that about it, and now when I go into the kitchen and see the white second hand going merrily round the large red face, and know that I can rely on the clock to give me the right time, I feel that the despised little bit of scrap is far from worthless. It is doing a valuable work.

It so happened that about that time I came to II Kings v in my daily reading, and read how the Syrian leper was healed by dipping seven times in the Jordan. What an important figure Naaman was! And what a mighty servant of God was Elisha! Their coming together meant such a blessing to Naaman, and such glory to God through Elisha, that the Lord Jesus made use of their story as an illustration for His first sermon at Nazareth. If you read the story you will agree that Naaman would never have been healed if he had not met Elisha, but have you noticed who it was who brought the two great men together?

It was a little domestic servant, a displaced person, and quite possibly an orphan. Instead of complaining about her difficult life or giving way to self-pity, she gave her help just when it was needed. She is not named but just called "a little maid" (II Kings v. 2). Men would have said that she was of no value, just a scrap. Remember that it was a scrap of metal which made the contact in my clock. This makes me think of the little captive girl who was the link between the needy master where she worked and the Man of God in Samaria. She did what no other could do.

We do not know much about her, but we know enough to be sure that she had faith and that she had love, too, and she used them both. If we have love and faith we shall surely be able to be the contact to bring the Saviour into touch with those who need His cleansing power. People may think we are too insignificant to serve God, but there is a wonderful opportunity for such service to those who can just make a contact. God will do the rest.

H. F.

*During the years of the ministry of this little paper, while the bulk of its messages has been that imme-*

*diately connected with what the Lord has given us particularly, we have on many occasions passed on*

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to our readers something which we felt to be of special value from other servants of God. This goes as far back as Dr. F. B. Meyer. In recent times, more than once the voice of Dr. Tozer has echoed through these pages.

In 1918–1919 a series of books appeared from the pen of a then well-known teacher of the Word.

From one of these, "Liberty In Christ", we have taken the following. We believe that it will be a help to many of the Lord's people, and has a real message for the present time. (The books referred to are long out of print.)

EDITOR.

## LIBERTY IN CHRIST (I)

### "THE GRACE OF CHRIST" (Galatians i. 6)

THE substance of the message of Paul to the churches of Galatia is found in the words "Our liberty which we have in Christ" (ii. 4). We purpose, therefore, to inquire into the meaning of that expression. As one meditates upon it, such questions as the following arise in the mind: What is the nature of the "liberty" referred to? How is it secured, and how enjoyed? What are the dangers that threaten it? and how may one who has received it be brought again "into bondage"? or be "entangled again with the yoke of bondage"? It will surely be found both interesting and profitable to seek light from the Word of God upon these matters; and in this quest the reader of these pages is invited to join.

There is special need for such an inquiry as this, because of the uncertainty among God's people as to the precise nature of their liberty in Christ, and as to what they have been freed from.

That the Epistle to the Galatians has to do chiefly with our liberty in Christ, and that its purpose is to safeguard that precious liberty by raising a warning against the dangers which threaten to rob us of it, is easily seen. The contrast between "liberty" and "bondage" runs all through the Epistle. Moreover, the conclusion which the apostle draws from the remarkable "allegory" in chapter iv is that "we are not children of the bondwoman but of the *free*"; he having shown by the comparison between Abraham's two families, that whereas the earthly Jerusalem "is in bondage with her children", the "Jerusalem which is above is *free*, which is the mother of us all" (iv. 25, 26, 31). Furthermore, this allegory gives occasion for the stirring exhortation addressed to the people of God: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (v. i). And again a little further on it is said: "For, brethren, ye have been called *unto liberty*" (v. 13).

The same idea of the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free is expressed in other forms of words. Thus, a parallel to the phrase "called unto liberty" is found in chapter i, verse 6, in the expression "called . . . into the grace of Christ". These parallel expressions afford much help in our efforts to arrive at the meaning of the Spirit's message in this portion of Scripture. Believers are "called into" (or unto) something which is described as "our liberty in Christ", and also as "the grace of Christ", as "the truth of the gospel", and again as "the faith of the Son of God", and by yet other phrases. That which *calls* them into this new state of existence (a state as different from the old as liberty is different from bondage) is "the gospel".

The one who thus "called" the Galatians was Paul the apostle, as appears by the words: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ" (i. 6); and by the words: "This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you" (v. 8).

It further appears that the word "liberty", as used in this portion of Scripture, defines the conditions of life and the privileges that pertain to *children* in a household, as contrasted with the condition of *bondservants*. By taking notice of these leading points we shall find it comparatively easy to understand the scope of the Epistle as a whole, and to understand also certain passages which otherwise would be obscure or even meaningless.

But there is a matter to which we ought to give earnest heed, and which is of greater importance even than the *meaning* of the Scriptures we propose to study; and that is the *lesson* those Scriptures are intended to convey. By the *lesson* we mean that which is given for the purpose of shaping our conduct, of directing us in the *doing* of the will of God, and conforming us in our behaviour to the image of His Son. God's communications to men have ever a

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*practical* object; and this important fact we deem it necessary to emphasize as strongly as possible, since it is often overlooked. It is natural for men to seek knowledge or information for its own sake, for the pleasure which the quest of knowledge gives, and for the satisfaction which the possession of it imparts. For "knowledge puffeth up" (I Corinthians viii. 1); and this is true of Bible knowledge as of other sorts.

On the other hand, it is *quite contrary* to the nature of man to seek information from God *for the purpose of doing God's will in place of his own*. Hence man will listen with interest and even pleasure to addresses in which Scriptures are expounded, dispensations are explained, prophecies interpreted, and the like; but "they will not endure sound doctrine" (II Timothy iv. 3). A writer, commenting on Stephen's address and the quiet attention given by his hearers to the first part of it, says: "Up to this point the argument was interesting. *People will always admire an academic sermon which leaves themselves untouched.*" And this trait of human nature is well understood by preachers who have an eye to the advantages of popularity. There are those who, by judicious selection of themes, and care in the manner of preaching them, can even be to a certain extent *scriptural* and at the same time "please men". But Paul was not a preacher of that sort, and here we have the striking proof of it in that the Galatians, whom he had called into the grace of Christ, were being removed or drawn away from him, and for the reason that he sought not to please men; "for", he said, "if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (i. 10).

We are deeply convinced that the people of God are suffering woefully at this present moment for lack of *teaching*; and not only for lack of real "teaching" in the Bible sense of that word, but because also they are being plentifully supplied from pulpit and platform, and by means of books and magazines, with something called "teaching", which in fact is *not teaching at all*. There are at this time in their hands many readable and interesting expositions of Galatians, Ephesians, and other portions of the Word of God, which practically *ignore the lessons thereof*. Such expositions are worse than useless; for they make the people of God *think* they are being *taught*, when in fact the teaching, which is the *vital thing*, is slighted, if not altogether omitted.

We believe that what is chiefly lacking in the ministry the people of God are receiving at the present time is *teaching*, and that the evils which are manifest among us are due largely to that lack.

We read of Ezra that he had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to *do it*, and to *teach* in Israel *statutes and judgments*" (Ezra vii. 10). So likewise the Lord Jesus Christ, when He opened His mouth and "taught" His disciples, gave them—not expositions of the Scriptures or interesting addresses thereon, but—the *commandments* which they were to *keep* (Matthew v. 2). And it is recorded that when He had finished His sayings, "the people were astonished at His *doctrine* (i.e. teaching); for He *taught* them as One having *authority*" (Matthew vii. 28, 29).

Briefly, then, "teaching" consists in telling the people of God what they ought to *do*; and the qualified "teacher" is one who *himself* does the things which he teaches. Ezra sought the law of the Lord first to do it himself, and then to teach others. Christ promises rewards to those who "*do and teach*" His commandments (Matthew v. 19). He Himself is the great Example in all things. He spent thirty years *doing* the things that were well-pleasing in the sight of God before He began to *teach*. Hence Luke refers to "all that Jesus began to *do and teach*" (Acts i. 1).

Paul was such a teacher. He wrote to the Corinthians concerning Timothy, saying: "He shall bring you into remembrance of *my ways which be in Christ*, as I *teach everywhere in every church*" (I Corinthians iv. 17). Timothy was equipped for this task, for Paul could write to him: "Thou hast fully known my *doctrine, manner of life, faith*", etc. (II Timothy iii. 10). To the Philippians he said: "Those things which ye have both learned and received and heard, and *seen in me, do*" (Philippians iv. 9).

The *teaching*, then, or in other words, "the *doctrine of Christ*" which Paul pressed so earnestly upon the Galatians, had to do not with orthodox views concerning the ground on which sinners are forgiven, but *with the manner in which the children of God ought to live*. Such indeed is the "doctrine" of all the Scriptures; for while that which is variously called "the doctrine of Christ" or "the apostles' doctrine", or "the doctrine of God our Saviour", or the "sound doctrine", is one complete body of truth, it comprehends many details, some being found in one part of the Word and some in another. But whosoever they be, and wheresoever they are found, their purpose always is *the perfecting of the saints in the doing of the will of God our Father*. For God purposes to have a family of children having the family likeness of His own Son, as He Himself said: "For whosoever shall *do the will of My Father which is in heaven*, the same is My

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brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew xii. 50. Compare John vi. 38; and Hebrews x. 9).

The Lord Jesus puts before our eyes the strongest possible inducement for the doing of His commandments, saying, "Ye are *My friends* if ye *do whatsoever I command you*."

In the case of the Galatians it is recorded that they were "all the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ"; but the trouble was that they were being misled as to their "walk" or behaviour. They had come under the influence of teachers who were leading them into the *doing* of certain things which were contrary to "the truth of the gospel". It was not at all a question of orthodoxy, that is to say, correct opinions, or right views *about* the truth, but altogether a matter of "*obeying* the truth". Right views of truth are indeed essential, for without them there would be no rules for right conduct. But correct views and information as to Divine things are of no avail at all, except so far as *they are wrought out in the life*.

What we have thus indicated as to the lesson of Galatians will become quite clear as we examine the text of the Epistle, which we now proceed to do.

It is noticeable that Paul lays great stress at the outset upon the fact that his apostleship, or in other words, his commission and authority as a messenger to the nations of the world, was bestowed upon him, not by or through the agency of man, but directly by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. There was no pride in this assertion of and insistence upon the Divine Source of his apostleship; for nothing was farther from his thoughts than to demand or to accept any honour from men, or to exalt himself in any way. Paul's own estimate of himself as an apostle is expressed in what he wrote to the church at Corinth: "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (I Corinthians xv. 9).

It was highly important, however, for *those to whom Paul delivered his message*, that they should know with certainty that it (the message or "gospel" which Paul terms "my gospel") was altogether Divine in its origin, in its authority, and in its substance. Hence he is at much pains in chapter i to make it plain first *negatively* that the gospel he preached was "not after man", since he had not received it of man or been taught it by man; and then *affirmatively*, that he *had* received it "by the revelation of Jesus Christ". This, indeed, was part of the Lord's purpose in appearing in Person to this "chosen vessel", who was to bear His Name "be-

fore the Gentiles, and kings, and the people of Israel" (Acts ix. 15). It was His wise plan that Gentiles, equally with Jews, should hear the truth of the resurrection from one who was an eye-witness and an ear-witness of Christ. The words spoken to Paul by Ananias in Damascus make this very plain. Ananias said: "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst know His will, and *see* that Just One, and shouldst *hear* the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast *seen* and *heard*" (Acts xxii. 14, 15).

It is sometimes supposed that because Paul used the expression "my gospel" (Romans ii. 16; xvi. 25; II Timothy ii. 8), he preached a different gospel from that preached by the other apostles of Christ; but there is quite enough evidence in the Epistle to the Galatians, without reference to many other Scriptures, to prove that there is but *one* gospel—"the gospel of God concerning His Son"—for all the world. For the preaching of "another gospel" is here denounced in the strongest terms. In chapter ii. 14, Paul, speaking of Peter and others, says: "But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel", etc. This shows that there was but one and the same gospel for all. The expression "my gospel" as used by Paul means simply that message to which he had been "separated" or specially set apart by God (Romans i. 1-4). Any other of the apostles, and any other man whom God may call to the preaching of the gospel, could with equal right use the same expression.

What the apostle says of the Lord Jesus Christ in his introductory words gives a clear indication of the subject with which he was specially burdened. These are the words: "Who gave Himself for our sins that He might *deliver us* from *this present evil world* (or age) according to the will of God and our Father." It is not Christ's delivering us from judgment and the wrath to come (I Thessalonians i. 10) nor yet His bringing us to God (I Peter iii. 18), that the apostle here mentions in speaking of the Lord's death for His people; but that He might deliver us *now*, during the time of our existence in the mortal body, from this present evil world. The special purpose of Christ's death on our behalf that is here pressed upon our attention is that we might be brought into a state of being free from all the influence of this evil age, wherein our "walk" or manner of life should be not only different from that which is shaped by the customs and conventions of the world (particularly the religious world), but in fact *directly contrary thereto*. And this is

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"according to the will of God and our Father". The words "our Father" are significant, since they point to the fact that the Epistle is, in a special way, a communication to the Lord's people in their relation to God as His *children*.

The "bondage" therefore from which Christ died to set us free, is *bondage to the world and its ways*. Even the law of God could not deliver from that bondage, for Paul says that they (the Israelites) before Christ came, "were *in bondage* under the elements of the world" (iv. 3).

That the apostle was writing under a strong pressure, and was deeply stirred because of the grave danger to which the churches of Galatia were exposed, is apparent from the abrupt manner in which he plunges into his subject. "I marvel," he says, "that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel, which is not another."\*

Close attention should be paid to these words, for their purport is sometimes misunderstood. What is chiefly to be noted is that the term "gospel", as here used, has a much broader signification than is ordinarily given to it in modern usage. By the word "gospel" is now usually meant God's message to the unsaved, which declares the forgiveness of sins through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and calls upon all men everywhere to repent. But "the gospel" includes much more than God's message and call to the unconverted; and in the Scripture before us it plainly refers in particular to the doctrine or truth of God *whereby His saints are to live*. "The gospel of God", in the broad sense of that word, embraces *God's complete message* for this age, both to the saved and the unsaved. The error into which the Galatians were being led was not in regard to the message which sinners are to believe in order to receive forgiveness of sins—that Christ died for our sins, and was buried, and rose again the third day—but was an error concerning that part of the gospel *which is to be obeyed by the saints of God*, and which is to shape their entire manner of life. The teaching to which they were giving heed was designed to lead them—not into a denial of the fact of Christ's sacrifice for sin, or of its sufficiency as a ground of forgiveness, or of His bodily resurrection from the dead, but—into the *doing* of things that were contrary to "the truth of

the gospel". Therefore we should take careful note of the things against which the Spirit of God raises here so strong a protest.

In chapter ii Paul refers to the fact that, while he was in Jerusalem, he had refused to yield to those who insisted that believers from among the Gentiles be circumcised, and his declared object in withstanding that doctrine was "that *the truth of the gospel* might *continue* with you" (ii. 5). It was not that circumcision mattered either one way or the other, for "circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing"; but that a vital principle was involved, since "*the keeping of the commandments of God*" is everything (I Corinthians vii. 19). We should therefore spare no effort to lay hold of the principle for which the apostle was at that time so zealously contending; for the principle is of as much importance now as it was then.

Further light on this point (namely, that we have to do here with the gospel for *saints*, not with the gospel for *sinners*) may be had from verse 14 of chapter ii, already referred to, where Peter's conduct, which Paul was constrained in faithfulness to the Lord to rebuke "before them all", is spoken of as not walking "uprightly according to *the truth of the gospel*". Here again it is clearly seen that "the truth of the gospel" which was at stake, concerns not the good news by which sinners are brought to Christ, but the *commandments* in which the saints are to walk uprightly all their days on earth.

Such being the point of God's message through Paul to the churches of Galatia, it should be easy for all who have spiritual discernment to perceive the great need for the preaching of the same message to His people who are now in the world. For there be many who, though they are quite clear as to God's way of salvation for sinners, display nevertheless a very imperfect comprehension of the way in which His saints should walk, according to "the doctrine of Christ", recorded in the Gospels as coming from His own lips, and unfolded, amplified and applied in specific details, in the Epistles inspired by the Holy Spirit.

For centuries of time (during the middle ages) the christianized nations lay in utter darkness as to God's way of salvation for perishing sinners. But at the Reformation the knowledge of that way was recovered; and during the subsequent centuries it has been set forth with ever-increasing clearness. For this we cannot be too thankful. But at the same time it behoves us to take notice of another tendency that has accompanied the recovery of light as to God's way of salvation. Prior to the Reformation the universally accepted doctrine of Christendom

\* The apparent contradiction "another gospel which is not another" does not exist in the original, where two different words (both translated "another") are used. The sense is "a *different* gospel which is *not another*"—for there is but one gospel for all the world of sinners, whether Jews or Gentiles.



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was that of the Church of Rome, namely, that salvation was to be had solely through the sacraments and ceremonies of "the church", and through the religious "works" (penances and the like) of the sinner himself. In other words, the knowledge of salvation from sin and judgment *by grace alone*, to be received through simple faith, had been virtually blotted out. Inasmuch as the religious works which the false "church" laid upon the sinner for the attainment of his own salvation were called "good works", it is not to be wondered at that the recovery of the doctrine of pure *grace* had the effect of producing, in many, an aversion even to the very mention of "good works". This reaction against "good works" on the part of those who came to understand that salvation is by God's grace alone, apart from the works of law, was foreseen; and hence the very Scripture which says: "For *by grace* are ye saved *through faith*, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God", goes on immediately to declare that those who are saved by God's

grace "are created (anew) in Christ Jesus *unto good works* which God hath before ordained (i.e. prepared) that we should walk in them" (Ephesians ii. 8–10).

We establish therefore the fact that "the grace of Christ" into which the gospel brings us is a *state of being*, or a *manner of life*, which (according to God's plan) is to be characterized by "good works". Those works, however, are not works of law, but works of *faith*—things done in obedience to "the law of Christ" (vi. 2). They are to be done, moreover, not in order to secure the forgiveness of sins and the bestowal of eternal life, but for the very different reason that pardon and life *have been already secured to us* by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for us. Therefore we keep His commandments *because we love Him*, remembering His words: "He that hath *My commandments and keepeth them*, he it is that loveth Me", and "He that loveth Me not keepeth not my sayings" (John xiv. 21, 24).

## THE DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (I)

"NEITHER . . . NOR . . . BUT"

"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John iv. 20, 21, 23, 24).

That is our basic passage for this time, and we are going to gather some other passages around it:

"But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come . . . then it shall come to pass that the place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there, thither shall ye bring all that I command you; . . . If the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to put his name there be too far from thee, then thou shalt kill of thy herd and of thy flock, which the Lord hath given thee, as I have commanded thee, and

thou shalt eat within thy gates, after all the desire of thy soul" (Deuteronomy xii. 5, 11, 21).

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew xviii. 20).

"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . . and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age" (Matthew xxviii. 19, 20).

"Do not they blaspheme the honourable name by which ye are called?" (James ii. 7). The marginal alternative to the latter phrase is: "the honourable name which was called upon you".

"That the residue of men may seek after the Lord, and all the nations, upon whom my name is called" (Acts xv. 17).

Now back to the Gospel by John: and before we come to the particular matter which is to occupy us at this time, there are one or two quite simple, yet I think very helpful things to point out.

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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIVIDUALS

This Gospel, as you know, is very largely a story of individual contacts with the Lord Jesus. There is quite a series of such personal and individual contacts with the Lord Jesus, or contacts of the Lord Jesus with them, recorded in this Gospel. It is very instructive and very helpful to note the use of individuals and of individual history which the Lord made and took up, to provide some of the most significant things that He ever said. We are not going, of course, to follow this through, but I want to point it out, because I feel that it holds something of great value for you and for me.

You will recall some of these individuals, the first of whom was Nathanael. That interview between the Lord and Nathanael produced something very wonderful. The Lord took up that man's history and used it for values which continue to this very time. We will leave that for the moment.

Next was Nicodemus—and everybody knows about Nicodemus! How the Lord took up that man's personal history and used it for tremendous purpose, very great value. Everybody will agree that that part of the Gospel which is now marked off as chapter iii, if it were taken out of the Bible, would represent a very great loss indeed. But you must remember that all that we have in that wonderful so-called third chapter of John, so rich, so full, so deep, is the product of the contact of the Lord with an individual. The Lord is taking hold of one person's spiritual life and history and using it.

You come next to that which is going to engage our attention especially at this time, in what is marked as chapter iv: this woman of Samaria. *What* an interview! And what a lot the Lord made of that woman's history! What a lot came out when that woman, who might never have become a part of history on record, came into touch with the Lord Jesus! And it was all because He came into touch with her. It was a tremendous thing. A person like that, of so little worth and account amongst the people of this world. She would be utterly despised, ignored, set aside. But because the Lord Jesus came into touch with that life she is on record for two thousand years, and we don't know how much longer—certainly for eternity.

We pass from chapter iv to that poor fellow at the Pool of Bethesda. Indeed, he was a neglected man. He was not counted of much significance. Everybody forced their way in front of him and pushed him into the back, out of sight and out of account. But when the Lord Jesus touched that man's life he comes into history.

And so you go on, coming on to the man born blind—and what a story that is, occupying this large section covered by the whole of chapters viii and ix! There is the man—and you know what the people of the day thought about him! As the story unfolds you see that they had not much room for him. Indeed, they said: "*Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?*" (John ix. 34). 'Who are you to have anything to say at all? How dare you!' Well, that was the value of that man in their eyes. But the Lord Jesus came into touch with that life, and here he is—one of the Bible characters. And when the Bible takes up a person that is no small thing, is it? The Bible gives eternal values.

And through you go until you come to Lazarus. Here is another individual—and what an immense thing that the Lord came into touch with a man in a little village some five or six miles, or perhaps less, outside Jerusalem, and in that little home! It is an immortal story, but is made that because the Lord Jesus touched that life.

Now, I think you see the point. There are tremendous values to be taken up and carried on from any life and any personal history when the Lord Jesus really gets His hand on that life. It is a simple thing, but very encouraging. If all these people were amongst the world's great and recognized and honourable, well, our hearts would sink and we would say: 'All right—but that does not apply to me.' But when you take up some of these people, at least (even if you are not an important Nicodemus), the thing still applies because it is just what the Lord is doing now. And all I am wanting to say about this at the outset is that it is something to note in this Gospel: that when the Lord Jesus gets His hand upon a life—and it may be an insignificant life—and when He gets His hand upon a man or a woman, who may be of no account, humanly speaking, He makes eternal history out of that life. He lays hold of their own history and turns it into His history. That is tremendous! Your history, perhaps, could not be poorer than that of the woman of Samaria or that man at the Pool of Bethesda, but He will take hold of it and turn it into the history of Jesus Christ. That is what it amounts to.

Well, that is something to begin with. But another thing I would have you note is what Jesus said to these people. Not only His touch upon their lives, but what He said. You know, dear friends, we have not yet fathomed the depths of what Jesus said to any of these people. That is no exaggeration—it is quite true.

To Nathanael: "*Ye shall see the heaven opened,*

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and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John i. 51). Have you fathomed that? Have you exhausted that? I am coming back to that in a moment.

To Nicodemus: Oh, what shall we say about all these things that the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus? About the work of the Holy Spirit in new birth, the nature of new birth—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit" (John iii. 6)—and all the other things. And what tremendous things they were! You and I have not exhausted them. I just wonder how many sermons have been preached on John iii. 16 in the last two thousand years, and *still* they are doing it! And it is very rarely that exactly the same thing is said over and over again. There is always something new and something more. Then: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness . . .*" and so on. Perhaps the profoundest thing that He said to Nicodemus was: "*If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?*" (John iii. 12). Things beyond the capacity and possibility of the learned man in Israel! That is what it amounts to. Have you fathomed that? Have you got to the bottom of that?

Now, my point is that wealth like that is brought out of a touch with an individual. The hand of the Lord Jesus upon an individual can bring all that out.

And what about this woman of Samaria and the things the Lord Jesus said to her? We are going to see something of that, because we shall be focusing upon that particularly.

And so you go on—and how true it is in the case of Lazarus! For it was out of this episode of Lazarus that there came that mighty statement: "*I am the resurrection and the life*" (John xi. 25). Resurrection and life: not some *thing* or some *happening*, but a Person. We have never fathomed that yet! The Church has been drawing upon that for these many centuries, and you and I should be drawing upon it. Some of us have been doing so for many years unto living experience—the Resurrection and the Life as a Person indwelling us, *now, here*. The rebuke, you notice, was to the sister of Lazarus. She said: "*I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day*" (John xi. 24). Are you putting it to the future? Are you making it something remote from the present? "*I am*". There may be a great resurrection day, but for spiritual values resurrection and life are a present experience to be drawn upon every day.

I say that these are wonderful things that the Lord Jesus said to these individuals. I want to make

this application because I feel it is quite right to do so. It is not error, not false, and not a mistake to say that the Lord Jesus is making history by His hand being upon us. And if He can get His hand upon us He will draw out spiritual values from these lives which will be for the good of His people. Just as these people were made to produce these values of light and revelation and truth and power for the church for all the ages, so, in a measure and in a sense, the Lord can draw values out of your life and mine for His people, beyond anything that we could produce—but for that hand of God upon us. Have you got hold of that? Is it not helpful? It is encouraging.

Well; when we have said that—and you can see that it is a good field in which to work quite profitably—we come to this particular case of the woman at Samaria to learn something from these words which we have read in John iv.

#### THE GREAT CONTRASTS

I want to focus your attention upon these contrasting words: "Neither . . . nor . . . but". "*Neither* in this mountain, *nor* in Jerusalem . . . *but* in spirit and truth." Not this, nor that, *but* . . . Not here, nor there, *but* . . . That is the heart of things here. Now let us analyse this whole statement. "*The hour cometh, and now is.*" The hour? The hour has arrived. That word 'hour', as you probably know, is used in different ways in the New Testament. It is used literally of the hour of sixty minutes. It is also used in the same way as the word 'day' is used—of a dispensation: "*In that day*" (John xvi. 23), referring to some longer period of time than twelve hours. It is a dispensational day. In the same way as 'day' is used figuratively, so the Lord was using here the word 'hour'. "*The hour cometh, and now is*"—it has arrived. A new dispensational period has come. It is here. Note that.

All this is very much in keeping with the way in which the Lord used this phrase: "*In that day*", when He was speaking about the coming of the Holy Spirit. The 'hour' and 'day' are identical in the Lord's meaning.

Now, what is this day that had come with the Lord Jesus but the coming of the Lord Jesus Himself? He says it quite emphatically: a new day, or a new hour, has come. We have now entered upon a new period in this world's history. What is it? Of course, as to the actual period, it is undoubtedly from the first advent of the Lord Jesus to His coming again. That is the dispensational new day, or hour, to which the Lord Jesus referred. He was

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saying, in effect: 'My coming into this world has introduced a new period, a clearly marked-off period, in the history of this world, and that period is bounded by My first coming and My last coming.' That is the day, dispensationally. But that is just a statement of simple fact.

Dear friends, most of the errors, the confusions, the contradictions that abound in Christianity are due largely to the failure to recognize and accept the essential change which has come with this particular dispensation. It is not necessary for me to dwell upon the errors and confusions and contradictions that abound in Christianity. The state of things! Sometimes it appals us, sometimes it perplexes us, and sometimes it makes us ashamed, this thing called 'Christianity' in general, as we know it. And I repeat: A very large proportion of all that which is a contradiction to Christ is due to the failure to recognize and accept the immense change in dispensation that has come about with the advent of the Lord Jesus. That is a statement which we must follow up.

We used the word 'dispensation'. It is a New Testament word, and is, in itself, illuminating. The Apostle Paul used it four times. It is a Greek word, 'oikos', which means 'the house', and 'oikonomia' is the order of the house, that is, the regime that exists in the house. If yours is a proper house, home, or establishment, there is an order about it. That is, you have a time when you get up in the morning, and, if you are properly ordered, you have a proper time for getting up. You don't get up at any time: you have a certain time. And then you have breakfast at a certain time. That is your order. And then the day in your house is so ordered. This is the way you do it, and if some stranger were to come and begin to interfere, changing your times and ways of doing things, you would, I think, raise a good deal of trouble! You would say: 'Look here, this is not the way we do it here. Please don't interfere with our household arrangements.' You may be more or less jealous about it. Some people, of course, are just careless, but in a careless establishment there are all sorts of difficulties and troubles. You know quite well that it is the well-ordered house, or home, that makes the best progress, gets on with the least friction, and gets the most done, saving the most time.

That is the meaning of this word 'dispensation', or 'oikonomia': the order of the house. With the coming of the Lord Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit, which two things are one in effect and meaning, as we shall see, the order of the house has been changed. The order in the Old Testament was one

order, and the order in the New Testament is an entirely different order. The house order, or regime, has been completely changed. I have said that if somebody comes in and begins to change the order in your home there is usually trouble, and that is exactly what happened in the New Testament. Tremendous battles and troubles arose because the Old Testament order was being upset and put aside. Look at it—again and again! Paul's whole life was a battle on this matter. He was the man who used this word 'house order', or 'dispensation' and because he was now recognizing and accepting the setting aside of the whole Mosaic order, the order of the law, and was pointing to the new order that had come in with the Holy Spirit, what a time he had everywhere! His battle for Galatia, for instance, focused upon this very thing—the change in the order from the old to the new. That wonderful Letter to the Hebrews was written on this very thing. There is an order in the Old Testament of angel messengers, of priests, of sacrifices, of covenants, and so on. The writer says: 'That order is finished. A new order has come in with Christ'—"*God . . . hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son*" (Hebrews i. 1, 2), and this is the new order that has been introduced. A heavenly order, not an earthly one. The old one was earthly, but the new is a heavenly one.

May I repeat, at the risk of tiring you, that it is failure to recognize and accept that that lies right at the root of most of our troubles. There are many people who are still living on a pre-Pentecost basis, trying to live an Old Testament kind of order in a New Testament day, and it does not fit with the Holy Spirit. There are many people who are living on a sub-New Testament basis, altogether below this, and not coming up to the high standard and level of this new order that has come in. There are some people who are trying to combine both, and the result is terrible confusion.

You can leave that if you don't understand and cannot follow what I mean, but it is all an emphasis upon this: the necessity for a recognizing and accepting of this tremendous change that has taken place in the dispensation, in the house order, by the coming of the Lord Jesus and of the Holy Spirit.

## THE NATURE OF THE NEW ORDER

There is no doubt, to come back to this fourth chapter of John, that Jesus was speaking to this woman of Samaria about the day or the hour of this new order. He spoke to her about the water which He would give, about the well which would be opened, and the stream within, about the life which

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He would give—but it is always with a forward glance and a forward look. He is thinking of that hour when the Holy Spirit would come, and this really did take place. The well was opened within, was it not? The spring welled up within when the Holy Spirit came, and the life was within at that time. He was looking forward to that, just as in chapter xvi He was saying: 'In that day when the Spirit is come.' I repeat, there is no doubt that the Lord was speaking to this woman about what He was calling 'the hour'. He said: 'This has been inaugurated by My coming, but now I am going to tell you what it will be like, what that new hour is like.'

But let us note—and this, dear friends, is the foundation of it all—that this new dispensation, this new order of things, is a spiritual dispensation. That is the thing the Lord has been trying to emphasize. That is what He meant with Nathanael. It was a figurative way of speaking: "*Hereafter*"—that is, when this hour is come—"ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John i. 51). What is meant by that? Are we to take it literally? We know what it means—that Jesus Christ is the way of communication between heaven and earth, between us and God. That it is by Him, through Him and in Him that heaven and earth are united. We here are united with heaven, and all the communications of God, by the Holy Spirit, with us are in Christ. We understand something of that, don't we? But that requires this new order.

Nicodemus: Is this a new spiritual dispensation? Yes, Nicodemus could not understand it. "*How can a man be born when he is old? . . . That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" That is the new order. It is a new spiritual régime that is introduced in this hour, this dispensation. It is the dispensation of the Spirit, and, therefore, it is a spiritual dispensation.

And that is what He is saying to this woman. This hour, this dispensational hour, lasting all these centuries, is a spiritual order of things.

You focus, you see, right down on this: 'The hour . . . neither . . . nor . . . but'. 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and they have always said that if you want to meet God you have to come to Mount Gerizim and our Samaritan temple, for that is where you will meet Him. You Jews say: If you want to meet God you must come to the temple in Jerusalem and that is where you will meet Him.' Jesus said: 'Neither . . . nor'—just wiping out the whole thing. By one sweep of the

hand dismissing the whole old order and bringing in an entirely new one and telling you what it is. Yes, it is the new order of the Spirit. And it is not focused locally at all, in the way that you are going to be bound by any localization of this thing, but "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*". That is the new order. In John iii. 16 it is: "*whosoever believeth*", wiping out all racial distinctions, all geographical limitations, all differences here on this earth, with a great 'whosoever': throwing that at Nicodemus, who said: 'No. Israel are the chosen people, the elect, the special people, the spiritual aristocracy. No, no!' . . . "*Whosoever, Nicodemus!*"

That is what came out in Acts xv: "*All the nations, upon whom my name is called*"—"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name"—"*Gathered together in my name*". That is John iii. 16—"Who-soever".

And in Matthew xviii. 20 it is 'wheresoever'. This is not a matter of geography, of certain structures, edifices, places, kinds of meeting-places, or anything temporal at all. It is nothing of this earth. 'Neither . . . nor . . . but in the Spirit.' This is a spiritual dispensation, and everything that belongs to this dispensation is a spiritual thing.

In the Old Testament it was the old house order. If you are going to have a tabernacle it is going to be a temporal, earthly thing, made with hands. If you are going to have priests with their vestments, their beautiful garments, and Levites, and all the system of sacrifices and feasts and orders down here—well, that has gone for ever with the coming of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. What is the new house order? Are there going to be people in the Lord's house who minister, serve? Be very careful of how you use that word 'office'—'holding office'—for in this new order there is nothing official. Everything is spiritual, and everyone who ministers, everyone who serves and everyone who has any place and does anything, does so because they are spiritual men and women, and on no other ground at all. The measure of their spirituality is the measure of their usefulness to the Lord, and nothing else. 'Oh, but in the New Testament'—you say—'we are told about elders and others. Are we not to recognize that?' Here again I would remind you that in the places where the Apostle Paul speaks most about these things, he is doing it correctively, not provisionally, because things at the end of his life were already taking that ecclesiastical form where they were introducing the kind

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

of system of priesthood that we know so well today in Christianity. It was coming in then at the end of Paul's life. It was not so long after he went from this earth that you have the Book of the Revelation and the messages to the churches, and if the Lord lays Himself out to hit with great force against anything in those letters, it is against formalism. When Paul begins to speak to Timothy about elders in the church, he is saying: 'These men must be spiritual men.' And you see what he calls 'spiritual men'! He is not saying: 'These must be ecclesiastics, and important, religious figures in the religious world.' No, he is saying: 'They must be spiritual men.' He is getting back to the real essence of this whole new order, the House of God, and the real nature of it is spiritual.

### THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCHES

That is very important, dear friends. What is the Church, and what are the churches? It is just this—nothing less and nothing more than this: the aggregate of those upon whom the Name has been called, whether it be two, or three, or more . . . 'Where I put My Name, there will I meet you' . . . "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*". That is the Church: nothing less than that and nothing more than that. 'Neither . . . nor . . . but in the Spirit', and *wheresoever* that happens, there the Church is, in essence, in principle.

There is nothing legal about this at all. It is a spiritual matter entirely. And so everything else to do with this new order is spiritual. That is what the Lord is saying to this woman.

But do you know, dear friends, that in these things that the Lord said to these individuals He was only planting a seed? Here is the seed dropped into the ground. What is the history of that seed? If it is a normal history it will not come back as a single seed, but in a multiplication of seeds. From that one there will be many, it may be a whole host. The Lord Jesus dropped the seed principle into these individual lives, and the rest of the New Testament is the development of that seed. What I mean is this: Here you have something in germ form, and in the rest of the New Testament you have all the meaning in that developing, and you can trace from the later part all the enlarged teaching and revelation . . . 'Oh, this is what the Lord said!'

### THE HEAVENS OPENED

I have pointed this out with Nathanael . . . "*the heaven opened*". Oh, what a wonderful thing

it is for you and for me, dear friends, that through Calvary *heaven* is opened to us! I don't mean that we are going to heaven. That is quite all right and true, but *now*, here in this place, we have an open heaven. There is a way through. The communication is going on in Christ because He is here, the great Ladder—if I may say so—between heaven and earth, between God and us, the communication of the Spirit is going on with us in this very place. We can be here all night under an opened heaven, with the blessed communications of the Spirit to our hearts, because heaven is no longer closed against us. Calvary has rent the heaven for us. Just as the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom when Jesus died, so the way is opened into the Most Holy for us now.

I repeat: We say these things, but what an immensity there is in a simple thing said to Nathanael! Something that you did not quite understand, but you come into spiritual life and you know what it means to have an opened heaven . . . Do you? Do you know what personal communication from heaven into your heart means? Do you know what personal communication direct with heaven from your heart means? Why, that is the birthright of the child of God! That is why it is the first thing in the Gospel by John, for an opened heaven is the first thing that a child of God comes into. And that heaven, as in Christ, is for us, because of the rent heaven. But you want all the rest of the New Testament to explain that, and that is what it does.

It is the same with the words to Nicodemus, and to this woman, and to all the others who are here. It was put in a simple, symbolic way to these people by the Lord Jesus, but though He puts these things in that way, He never reduces them to anything less than the eternal measure of value and meaning. When the Lord Jesus said something, there was vastly more in what He said than anyone ever recognized at the time. I give you a simple example. We are perhaps more familiar with what is called the parable of the Prodigal Son than with any other story in the Bible. Take a fragment from that. The Lord Jesus is telling this story, using this illustration about this son, his father and his home, and when at last He gets that son to the point of returning home to the father, what is it that the Lord Jesus puts into the mouth of that son? Note: it is only a part of the whole, but it is a very interesting and significant part . . . "*Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight*" (Luke xv. 21). What might He have made him say if He had just been talking in an ordinary man's language? 'Father, I made a mistake and did wrong. I have

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suffered for it and have had a miserable time, and I have lost everything. Have pity on me!' That is not good enough for God! Sin is sin, and sin is against heaven, and sin is something before God. Jesus never confused and confounded these great principles by just reducing them to a human story. "*I have sinned*"—and sin is against heaven, an affront and an offence to heaven, and sin is against God, an insult to God. He made the son say that, and do you see what I mean? When the Lord Jesus says something, it sounds very simple, but there is the profundity of eternity in anything that He says.

And so He said to this woman: "Neither . . .

nor . . . but"—and in that 'but' there is the whole dispensation in spirit and in truth, and the whole nature of this new order. The whole nature of the Church, of all the Church's functions and service and everything, is—what? It is a spiritual order, and we will only get into terrible confusion, spoil everything, and make any amount of trouble if we try to bring this down to some earthly thing, earthly system, earthly order, some (as brother Nee used to say) earth touch. It is death. That is the explanation. Keep everything in the Spirit and out of touch with this accursed world, and there is life, there is progress, and there is growth.

(To be continued)

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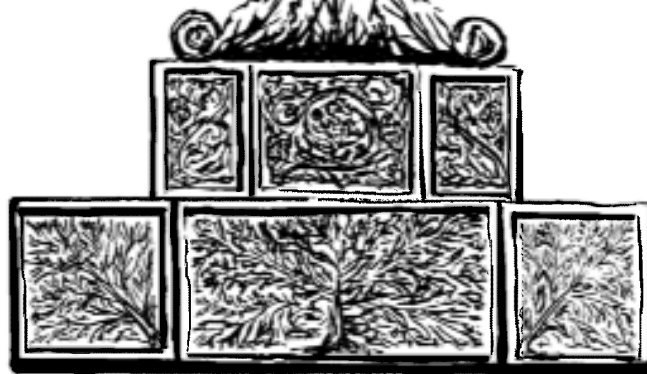
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Vol. 44. No. 4.

July-Aug. 1966.

### THIS MINISTRY

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

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

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 30, Dunoan Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

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



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## EDITORIAL

DEAR FELLOW-TRAVELLERS,

It is only occasionally that we write personally. Our desire has always been to avoid drawing attention to persons and things in the ministry, and to occupy our readers with the Lord and the ministry of His Word. But, from time to time, we have felt it to be both wise and important to definitely remind our readers of *the* purpose which governs this ministry, and has always done so. We receive many kind letters after every issue of the paper. Many of these express appreciation of "the teaching", the "new light", the "special emphasis", etc. We much appreciate this motive to encourage. Many go deeper and speak of the spiritual values in bringing the writers into a new position with the Lord. There are those who seem to think of us as seeking to propagate a particular and peculiar teaching or theory, and to form a new and peculiar sect or body of Christians as separate from the whole Church of Christ. This, of course, is wholly

wrong and a misapprehension. God has taken very strong action to keep the *means* used, both personal, people, and place, on a basis of weakness, simplicity, humility, and utter dependence upon Himself. We know *very* well that He will not have His glory given to men or places or things.

What, then, *is* this ministry? We must go back. The name of this little paper, which has been the printed expression of the ministry for the past almost forty-four years, embodies the meaning—"Witness and Testimony". "Witness": the instrument or vessel used. "Testimony": the ministry in and through the vessel. The Testimony has ever been—but growing as light has increased—to the greatness and fullness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man. This greatness has been centred and unfolded in (1) His Person; (2) The immensity of God's eternal purpose as centred in and exclusively related to Him; (3) The greatness of His Cross as basic and essential to the greatness of

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

His Person and work both *for* and *in* believers; (4) The greatness of the Church which is His Body as essential *to*, and chosen *for*, His ultimate Self-manifestation in fullness and government in the new heavens and the new earth; (5) The necessity that *all* the people of God should know, not only of salvation, but of the immense *purpose* of salvation in the eternal council of God, being brought to "full growth" by the supply of Jesus Christ in ample measure. We feel that the New Testament contains a tremendous urgency in this matter; such urgency is summed up in the words of the Apostle Paul: "Admonishing every man and teaching every man . . . that we may present every man perfect (complete) in Christ" (Colossians i. 28). We believe that all the sovereign activities of the Holy Spirit are directed to and dictated by this end and object. There may be different aspects, but the end is single and one. The great evangelizing and missionary efforts, in so far as they are governed by the Holy Spirit, have this end in view. There may be the *big* net cast into the sea into which fish of every kind will be found, but a great sorting out is going to be done by heaven. There may be a very general sowing of the seed, but the ultimate value will be but a proportion, which itself will be comparative. These are parables of Christ with principles inherent. It is not a little impressive that the evangelist who—in *his own lifetime*—has spoken to more people about Christ than any other man in history, has written the following:

"Thousands of loyal church members . . . are beginning to meet in prayer groups and Bible Study classes. Multitudes of Christians within the church are moving toward the point where they may reject the institution that we call the church. They are beginning to turn to more simplified forms of worship. They are hungry for a personal and vital experience with Jesus Christ. They want a heart-warming personal faith. Unless the church quickly recovers its authoritative Biblical message, *we may witness the spectacle of millions of Christians going outside the insti-*

*tutional church to find spiritual food*" (italics ours).  
—Dr. Billy Graham in *World Aflame*, page 89.

While we can honestly say that we have never felt it to be a part of our commission to tell people to leave their church or their missions, old readers will know how much the food question has been a burden with us. The matter of spiritual feeding has such a large place in the New Testament, and if we can rightly be said to be a 'ministry' and not a 'Movement' or organization, this feeding of the hungry world-wide can rightly interpret our concern. This explains the "Conferences" or "Conventions" held in many places throughout the years, and surely it explains the Lord's blessing upon them. But, *after all, it will be 'broken bread' resulting in what is found of Christ in the numerous lives and places represented.*

With large areas of the world unable to have Bibles, and the very great extension of the discrediting of the authority and integrity of the Scriptures, it is not difficult to foresee a 'famine of hearing the Word'. Hence there *is* a need for 'solid food'. The New Testament shows a tremendous concern for the feeding and building up, not only of more mature saints, but of the young converts. We do not know how much longer the ministry of *this* instrument will go on, perhaps for only a short time, but God will have other instruments for what He needs. We are concerned, however, that 'our bow may abide in strength' until it is laid down, and we need your prayers that it may do so.

Our Lord Jesus had a passionate compassion on hungry people and His great miracle of feeding was a "sign" of His estimate of the importance of spiritual food. Anyone who has not this concern, or who by their action cuts off supplies of such food, is certainly contrary to the mind and heart of Christ.

Please remember to pray for the conference in Switzerland in September.

The Lord fulfil all His purpose of grace in you all.  
Yours in the fellowship of His Son,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

## THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (V)

### 5. THE ARK OF THE TESTIMONY

"Who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation i. 2).

"I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in

Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation i. 9).

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and

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*judgement was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast” (Revelation xx. 4).*

**I**N our consideration of the greatness and glory of Jesus Christ we are seeing how God used the ark in the tabernacle of old to set forth that greatness and glory of His Son. Among the number of names by which that ark was called is “The Ark of the Testimony”. The ‘testimony’ there referred specifically to the tables of the covenant within the ark, but it came to have a much larger meaning than that. The testimony related to the ark itself as well as to all that which was in it, so it was a very comprehensive thing. We saw that when we looked at the many names by which the ark was called.

There is a link between the ark of the testimony in the tabernacle and this phrase which repeatedly occurs in the Book of the Revelation, and which we have just read three times: “The testimony of Jesus”. That was what the ark of the Old Testament represented. It was in very truth the testimony of Jesus.

Now it will be noted, as we follow the history of the ark, that its progress was always connected with conflict. As it went forward through the wilderness and into the Promised Land it was always an object of conflict. There is a great word by both Moses and David, the Psalmist, about this. It says that when the priests took up the ark the word went out: “Arise, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered” (Numbers x. 35; Psalm lxviii. 1). The testimony was always an object of opposition, and the very presence of the ark of the testimony caused opposition. Then, when you come to this Book of the Revelation, you will notice that every time the testimony is mentioned it is connected with persecution. John says: “I . . . was in the isle that is called Patmos . . . for the testimony of Jesus.” He was in exile because of the testimony of Jesus. He was in the isle of Patmos under one of the great Roman persecutions of Christians. Then, in chapter xx, he says: “I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus”.

So it will be noted that the testimony of Jesus is connected with persecutions and martyrdoms, but we shall understand that phrase ‘the testimony of Jesus’ better if we know the cause of the persecution.

There is no doubt whatever that the cause of all the persecution of the Christians was emperor-worship, and here, in this Book of the Revelation,

we are in the presence of the persecutions which arose over emperor-worship. The Roman emperors were worshipped as deities. They posed as gods, and did the work of the devil. One of the titles of the Roman Caesars was ‘our lord god’, so that right over that vast Roman empire, over all the world, Caesar reigned as god. Only Jews and Christians were persecuted by the Romans, and the reason for that was that they would not acknowledge any other god than Jehovah. The Jews would worship no other god than Jehovah, and the Christians would acknowledge no other god than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Roman world said of Caesar: ‘Our lord god’. The Christian world said of Jesus: ‘Our Lord God’. That explains the phrase ‘the testimony of Jesus’, for the testimony of Jesus brought the Christians into immediate and direct conflict with the whole Roman conception of who was God.

So the ‘testimony of Jesus’ is the testimony concerning the truth as to who and what Jesus is. History is repeating itself. If you are saying: ‘Of course, that was long centuries ago. That belongs to the time of the Roman Empire and the Christian persecutions, many hundreds of years ago’, I would remind you that that same thing, in principle, is spreading like a great wave over the world today. The systems and ideologies may not take the *name* of God, but they are taking the *place* of God. They are in opposition to all that is His right, and in a very great part of the world you dare not speak of Him. It is forbidden, with great persecutions, to worship God. Even the great world of Islam may recognize Jesus as a good man and a prophet, but you mention Jesus as God and see what you meet! We have reason to believe that this anti-God movement is far more widespread than we know. Even the Western nations are undermined with it, and those in the movement are only waiting for the day when they can spring up and put God out of this Western world.

We are all, in some way or another, in some measure or another, involved in the testimony of Jesus. If the outward persecutions and martyrdoms are not yet our experience, every truly devoted Christian knows that it is becoming more and more difficult spiritually to be true to the Lord. We are all involved in the conflict of the testimony of Jesus in one way or another. There is an antagonism to Jesus Christ in the very atmosphere. If you are not conscious of that, there is something wrong with your spiritual life. The more utterly consecrated to Jesus Christ you are, the more conflict will there be in your life.

The ark of old times is a wonderful foreshadow-

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ing of this conflict. It is the ark of testimony, and it is the testimony of Jesus. Of course, if you are not prepared to testify to the Lord Jesus, you may have an easy time. Many Christians are afraid to testify because they know it will bring opposition. It will bring opposition in business, or in the home, or in social life. There is a mighty opposition in the very spiritual realm, and because of that opposition, many Christians keep their mouths closed. Do you think that *makes* them neutral Christians? It may look like that, but, really, they are defeated Christians *already*.

Now let us look at this testimony of Jesus more closely. It is the testimony as to who and what Jesus is. What did these Christians of the New Testament believe concerning Jesus? The first and basic thing that they believed and declared was: Jesus is the Son of God. That, of course, brought them at once into conflict with the Jews, who persecuted the Christians on that one point. You have one instance of this in a parable of the Lord Jesus. He said: 'A certain man planted a vineyard and let it out to husbandmen. At the time of the fruits he sent his servant to receive the fruit of the vineyard, and the husbandmen cast him out of the vineyard. So he sent another servant, and they treated him in the same way. After he had sent a number of servants, whom they killed, the Master of the vineyard said: "I will send my son. They will honour him." They saw the son coming and said: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours."' The Lord Jesus spoke that parable in the presence of the Jewish leaders, and whatever else you may say about their intelligence, on this occasion they saw the point, and the writer says: "They perceived that he spake of them" (Matthew xxi. 45). You would have thought that they had been discovered and so would go away and do nothing, but "they sought to lay hold on him". They did the very thing that the Lord had said about these wicked husbandmen. They would not have it that Jesus was the Son of God, and anyone who claimed to be that must die. That was the basis of all the persecution by the Jews.

We have seen how true that was in the case of the Romans. If anyone was said to take the place of Caesar, he must die. So the Christians were persecuted because of their testimony that Jesus was the Son of God.

However, that is only one of seven things.

The Christians believed and preached that Jesus, as the Son of God, was the destined Lord of creation. Both John and the Apostle Paul put that into words: "*In him (Jesus) were all things created . . . through him, and unto him*" (Colossians i. 16).

. . . "All things were made *by him*" (John i. 3). The wicked husbandmen of the spiritual world sought to take His inheritance from Him, but although they killed him on the Cross, the Apostles and the Christians went through the world preaching that Jesus was the destined Lord of creation. If they had had our hymn-book, one of their favourite hymns would be:

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Doth his successive journeys run . . ."

Yes, they would sing that most heartily!

"His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more."

Jesus is God's Son, appointed to be the heir of all things.

But the Christians believed something even deeper than that. They believed and taught that Jesus, as the Son of God, was the pattern of all the creation. We have often said that if we understood the spiritual principles of the material creation we should understand Jesus Christ. The sun, the moon and the stars are used as symbols of His kingdom. The sun is Jesus Christ Himself reigning high; the moon is His Church living and reflecting His light over the world in a dark night; the stars are the local churches showing His light in a dark world. And where shall I stop if I go through the whole universe? If we understood all the sciences and their spiritual laws, we should see Jesus. He is the spiritual pattern of the whole material creation. That is why the Apostle Paul used the human body as a model of the Church.

Now go out into a pagan world of unbelief and begin to preach those things! Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the living God; Jesus of Nazareth is the destined Lord of creation; Jesus is God's eternal pattern for the creation, and eventually the whole creation will reflect Him. Well, say those things in a pagan, hostile world, and see what happens! You are not surprised that Caesar rose up against Jesus. Jesus said: "I am." Caesar said: 'The world is mine. It was made for me. I have conquered the world, and I make it according to my mind.' I said that because Caesar claimed that position he did the work of the devil, for behind the rulers of this world is Satan. Satan says: 'I am the god of this world. I am going to make this world according to *my* mind. I am going to take possession of the whole creation.' This is not fiction; it is spiritual reality, and this is the conflict of the testimony of Jesus. You notice that the sole object and the theme

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of testimony by the early Christians was: 'Jesus is Lord'. The preaching of that brought them into conflict with the lord of this world.

Now I said that there were seven things that the Christians believed. I do not think that it is necessary for me to overstep my space by dealing with all of them, but there are two things which we must mention as we close.

The Christians proclaimed that God had attested Jesus Christ on all these points by raising Him from the dead. They said: 'You killed Him, but God raised Him', and they went everywhere preaching Jesus and the resurrection. The raising of Jesus from the dead was God's seal upon all that we have said as to the testimony of Jesus.

The last thing for the present is this—and it is something that we must all take very careful notice of. All this was the meaning of Christian baptism. Baptism was baptism into Jesus Christ. It was baptism into the Name of Jesus, and that meant into all that was true of the Lord Jesus: into Him as the divine Son of God, into Him as God's

destined Lord of the universe, into Him as the pattern of the creation that is yet to be, into Him as *Lord*. Is that what baptism means to you? Baptism has lost very much of its meaning in our time. In many realms it is just a ceremony, a part of Christian practice and teaching, but, as God sees it, it is an immense thing, and anyone who goes to this matter of baptism really seriously knows that there is a conflict related to it. The testimony of Jesus is the cause of all the trouble, the suffering and the martyrdom, but it is the testimony of the glory. The greatness and the glory of Jesus Christ is the testimony of Jesus.

I must close, but I am quite sure that you all feel that the immensity of this demands a great deal more time. I was speaking in India once, and after I had been speaking for one and a half hours, I looked at my watch. An Indian in the company shouted: 'Throw that watch away!' Well, we are going where there will be no clocks or watches, and when we are where time shall be no more we shall still be talking about the testimony of Jesus.

(To be continued)

## THE VOICES OF THE PROPHETS (VIII)

*"They knew not . . . the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath"* (Acts xiii. 27)

### THE VOICE OF ISAIAH

*"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up . . ."* (Isaiah vi. 1).

*"While ye have the light, believe on the light, that ye may become sons of light . . . though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him: that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake,*

*Lord, who hath believed our report?*

*And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"* (John xii. 36-41).

LET us be reminded that what we are considering is the great difference between hearing Divine words and messages, and seeing Divine works, and really seeing through those things to their meaning. There is indeed a great difference between seeing and seeing through; between hearing with outward ears, and hearing with the inward ear.

The context in history of our governing reference—Acts xiii. 27—is the context of an unspeakable tragedy related to this difference. Both the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament are built upon this difference in seeing and *at the same time* not seeing, and hearing and yet not hearing. That is what we are coming to with Isaiah.

It is very impressive that John links together Isaiah vi and Isaiah liii in relation to the presence, ministry and work of Jesus—the Christ. John says that when Isaiah set down what he did, firstly: "Lord, who hath believed our report?", and the rest of chapter fifty-three; and then about his vision of "the Lord of Hosts", and the resultant commission as to Israel, "He spake of him" (Jesus) and it was when "he saw his glory". There is plenty to think about here. John says that the Lord whom Isaiah saw high and lifted up, and sitting upon a throne, "the Lord of Hosts", was Jesus. And in linking chapter fifty-three with



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chapter six John clearly affirmed that the "Lamb" of chapter fifty-three was "The Lord" of chapter six. We come back to that later.

What John is clearly saying is that, contrary to the great Prophet, Israel could have in their midst—in one Person—"The Lord" and "The Lamb"—with all their meaning, and yet not see, not hear, not recognize. All the wonderful enlightened ministry of Isaiah, and *its actual fulfilment* could be right amongst them and yet they not see. What is still worse: it could only result in a hardening rather than a saving. That is something terrible to contemplate! It is such a possibility, and—in Israel's case—such an actuality, which Paul carried over from Israel in general, in warning, to the Synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia; thus narrowing it down to a local company.

What was it that accounted for the judgment of blindness and deafness pronounced by Isaiah and made so evident in the days of Jesus Christ? There are at least three things that led to this, and will always lead to it.

### 1. Prejudice

The dictionary defines it as 'judgment reached beforehand'. It is drawing a conclusion before giving honest consideration. It is the closed mind and a closed heart. It is, not wanting to, and not intending to. It is, not being disposed to. The Prophets called it "Hardness of heart".

The closed heart will always result in closed eyes.

It is Henry Drummond who has—as a scientist—so forcibly illustrated this principle. In speaking of: "How shall we escape if we neglect . . ." he says: "There are certain burrowing animals—the mole, for instance—which have taken to spending their lives underground. And nature has taken her revenge upon them in a thoroughly natural way—she has closed up their eyes. If they mean to live in darkness, she argues, eyes are obviously a superfluous function. By neglecting them, these animals make it perfectly clear they do not want them. As one of nature's fixed principles is that nothing shall exist in vain, the eyes are presently taken away, or reduced to a rudimentary state. This is the meaning of the favourite paradox: 'From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' The presence of Jesus Christ among men, and the advent of the Holy Spirit, meant—and means—the possibility of *seeing* that which the natural eye cannot see; but 'neglect' or refuse 'the Light' and the judgment of double blindness is in the very nature of things; it is a law."

The terrible verdict to '*will not*' is *cannot*.

Prejudice is a cruel and evil thing; it is a robber, a spoiler, in whatever realm it exists.

### 2. Self-interest

Israel's blindness was due to their fear of losing something if they yielded and obeyed. John quoted Jesus as saying: "How can ye believe, which receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?" (John v. 44). Self-interest was the original sin of Adam, and by it the devil duped man into losing his spiritual faculties in relation to God. Pride it is that supports self-centredness. It was Israel's fall, as it was Satan's and Adam's.

### 3. Inaction

So often there is a large and fatal gap between knowing and doing. This is really the responsibility which the "Voices of the Prophets" laid at the door of Israel. The Lord has never judged people for what they did not know, or *could* not know, but always for not doing what they knew. Paul quotes Isaiah fifty-three in his great chapter on Israel's failure—Romans ten. He cries: "Did they not hear?" and answers: "Yea, verily." "But as to Israel he saith, All the day long did I spread out my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." This voice of the Prophet (Isaiah) has a large place in this paragraph, and it has to do with the blindness and deafness resultant from doing nothing about what they knew.

We are often greatly dismayed, distressed, and disconcerted by the great amount of preaching and teaching which has so very little outworking, and we wonder how much longer the Lord will allow the light to shine. We commenced this chapter with John's quotation of the words of Jesus: "While ye have the light, believe on the light." To believe is to walk in and obey the light. Too often the congregations and meetings of the Lord's people, after an earnest and challenging message, just dissolve into a noisy rabble of talk on anything *but* the message, and so the message is dissipated and lost. How often is the reaction: 'What can we do about what the Lord has said to us just now?' This, then, is the point in Isaiah's voice: "Who hath believed our report?"

Before leaving this for the time being, we must just return to that point of "the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up", "the Lord of Hosts", and the Lamb, of Isaiah six and fifty-three. It was in the year that earthly authority—as represented by King Uzziah—failed and departed that the

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authority in heaven was revealed to the Prophet. From that heavenly throne went forth the terrible judgment of double blindness and deafness. That state led on to not hearing the "report" and the consequent 'slaughtering of the Lamb of God'.

But ultimately the course of things is reversed. The Lamb is at last seen in the midst of the throne (Revelation v. 6), and that throne is seen to be the full and final authority in this universe. But what does the Lamb on the throne mean?

Hear Dr. F. B. Meyer:

"How does the Lamb come there? Surely meekness, humility, gentle submissiveness are not the virtues that win thrones! Perhaps not in man's world, but they are in God's. In the eternal world the passive virtues are stronger than the active: sufferers wield more might than wrestlers; to yield is to overcome; to be vanquished is to conquer. It is because Jesus was the Lamb that He is now God's anointed King."

This is the voice of the Prophet Isaiah.

### "NOAH WALKED WITH GOD"

*"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord . . . Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations: Noah walked with God"* (Genesis vi. 8, 9).

OUR Lord Jesus told us that the days preceding His coming would be very similar to the days of Noah, and the few verses which precede these which we have just read remind us of how similar indeed our day has become to those dark days. They were days of great overspreading, increasing, shameless corruption—and is that not true today? Days of heedless pleasure seeking, wilful determination not to face the grave issues that everybody senses to be so near, preferring rather to indulge in the empty merrymaking pursuit of the normal things of life with increased feverishness, as though nothing of that would ever happen. It was so in the days of Noah, and you have only to take up your daily paper any day of any week to discover that it is so today.

In the midst of all that we have the example of a man of God, a man of faith, and so we look at him afresh that we may know how to live in our day as men and women of God, men and women of faith.

Three things are said about Noah here. First of all: "*Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*" We are always rejoicing over the ever wonderful, and ever more wonderful miracle of God's grace even to us; the grace that seems to single us out in a world ripe for judgment and promise us mercy, though we do not deserve it. Thank God that we can read ourselves into verse 8 and say: 'But I have found grace in the eyes of the Lord!'

Secondly, "*Noah was a righteous man, and perfect (or blameless) in his generation.*" Not only had

grace undertaken to preserve him, but grace was manifest in him. And with all that the Gospel promises and gives to us, we can read our names into this part of the verse also as righteous men and women with the righteousness of Christ, so freely given to all who believe and receive. "Perfect in his generations" seems to me to imply that he had not had any part in the mixture of which the chapter speaks—the mixed and impure origin of the many round about him. He was a true son of Adam and of Seth. There is nothing very pure or perfect about us, but, thank God! we have a pure 'seed of life' in us if Christ is in us. There is no mixture in Him. That, then, is the second thing that we can claim by grace: to be of pure descent of God by new birth through Christ, having His righteousness.

The third thing is what I wish us to consider for a little while: "*Noah walked with God.*" The first is true. Thank God that we have 'found grace in the eyes of the Lord'! The second is true. Thank God for the pure and spotless life, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ! Is the third thing true? Can it be said of us in our generation, as of Noah in his, "Noah walked with God"? As we read this story it will help us to understand what it meant for him to walk with God.

#### KNOWING GOD'S VOICE

The first thing we notice is that it meant that Noah knew God's voice. God spoke to him: "And God said unto Noah" (vi. 13); "And the Lord said unto Noah . . ." (vii. 1), and so on. God spoke personally to him and he knew God's voice. How important it is to know the Lord speaking to us personally! Noah was not the first man of faith,

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but he had to go a way which was different from the way of any who had gone before. The first one, so we are told, was Abel. Abel walked with God, very briefly, and he paid for that faithfulness with his life's blood. The next in the sequence of faithful men came along, and it was Enoch . . . "And Enoch walked with God" (vi. 24). Enoch probably expected the same thing to happen to him, and was prepared to be slain and give his life for his faithfulness. But God never repeats Himself. There is no routine in His dealings with men, so Enoch was not slain. There could hardly be a greater contrast between these two men, for Enoch never died at all—he was caught up to be with the Lord. Now, in the same heritage of faith, comes Noah and he walks with God. If Noah was like you or me, he would begin to draw his own conclusions, to make his comparisons and to expect that he would imitate other people's experiences. So, no doubt, as things grew darker, he would have the hope that as he walked with God he, too, would be caught away out of the trouble, as Enoch had been. But it did not happen like that. He had to go through it all, and to go through with God.

I mention these matters because I fear that so often our spiritual life can be, unintentionally, an imitation of somebody else. We copy, with the best of intentions. We might say: 'Who better could we copy than Abel, or Enoch?' Well, copy their faith, by all means, but do realize this: God has something to say to you personally, and you must learn to walk with Him and know His voice for yourself. It is not what God said to Abel, nor what He said to Enoch, but what He says to *you*. How important that is, though so very simple. Noah heard and knew God's voice, and he managed to distinguish that Voice from all his own ideas, his own thoughts, and his own reasons—and so must we. Moreover, Noah had to distinguish that voice from the voices all around him. Apparently, he alone heard God speaking at that time, but he was surrounded by others with all kinds of ideas. We get the impression that it was a time full of men's projects, plans, and thoughts. We are told that there were giants in those days. We do not know quite what they were, but we do know that those very same giants (as we read in Numbers xiii) made the spies feel themselves to be very insignificant. It says: 'We were like grasshoppers in their sight, and so were we in our own sight.' Exactly the same word was used here—'Nephilim' (verse 4). Whatever they were, they made you feel like a grasshopper. But, grasshopper or no grasshopper, Noah heard the voice of the Lord, and was not overshadowed, overawed, or influenced by all the

imposing great things and people around him. He knew God speaking to his own heart.

That does not mean, of course, that Noah was a man of no intelligence and could not think for himself. Far from it! When we come to the story of the experience after the flood, when the waters were abating, it is very interesting to note that we are not told that it was God's idea to put out the raven or the dove. It simply says that Noah did it, and he showed a good deal of initiative and intelligence in what he did. It was not that he could not think for himself and that he had not a mind of his own—he had, and so he put out the raven and he knew what its absence meant. Then he put out the dove, took it back, and took it back again. He had all his own ideas. When the ark settled on the earth he "removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dried" (viii. 13). He used his eyes, and he used his reason. But you will notice that, although that happened on the first day of the first month, it was not until the twenty-seventh day of the second month that God spoke to him and said: 'Go forth out of the ark.' He did not move until God spoke. The raven gave his message; the dove gave her message; and his own eyes could see that everything seemed ready for their emergence. But God had told him when to go in, and God told him when to go out. He heard the voice of God. How important it is, in a day like ours, for each one of us to walk with God and to hear His voice for ourselves!

## OBEYING GOD'S VOICE

Secondly, Noah obeyed God's voice. He not only heard; he not only knew what to do; he not only told other people what was going to happen . . . "Thus *did* Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so *did* he" (vi. 22); "And Noah *did* according unto all that the Lord commanded him" (vii. 5). The fact that that is repeated means that it is something of importance; you do not walk with God unless, on hearing His voice, you obey it. Noah *did*.

Indeed, Noah is largely remembered for his deeds. Peter informs us that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (II Peter ii. 5), but we are not given any indication of what he said, or how he spoke, and I take it that the real force of what Peter was saying was that Noah, by his life, by his actions, by his procedure, and by what he did, gave the world a message. That is the thought behind that particular word 'preacher' which Peter uses—a herald'. Noah heralded righteousness by what he did, and that was his message.

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We are told (in Hebrews xi. 7) that Noah "condemned the world", and I do not think that that means that he went around condemning people in actual words, but that his life was a rebuke—as our lives should be—to corruption, a challenge to ungodliness, a condemnation to unbelief. No doubt the people asked him what he was building and why he was building it, and no doubt he had a good deal to say by way of explanation, but what are words if there is no life behind them? It is far better that they should not be spoken! What a foolish man Noah would have been had he got up every day, gone around among his neighbours talking about the great flood that was coming, and yet had lived precisely as they did, taking no action to prepare for that day! Put like that, of course, it *is* foolish. He believed God (Hebrews xi. 7 says that he was "moved with godly fear") and he prepared an ark for the saving of his house and "condemned the world". It was his procedure which said, louder than any words could, that his hope was set on God—and that was the message that the world received.

Even to detail Noah must have been very obedient. The measurements are given in detail, and he was told where the window was to be put. He needed that window, by the way, for the raven and the dove. God knew better than he did how to construct the ark. And there were the creatures; not only the cattle and the fowl, but 'the creeping things after their kind'. And the end of the whole record is: 'As the Lord commanded, so he did'.

Dear friends, it is high time that we all had a new sense of the need for faithful obedience to the Word of God, and it is high time that the Word of God should be given a new place of sovereignty and majesty among us all—not in some legalistic attendance to mere detail, but as the speaking of God. You will notice the word that is used: "As God *commanded* Noah". He did not request him, or advise him, or put out some thoughts before him for him to decide whether he liked them or approved of them, or whether somebody else approved of them, or whether that was usual, or whether that was what they had done before. God said: 'This is My Word!', and Noah said: 'Yes, Lord.' Noah walked with God. It is not a harsh thing. It is a blessed life of communication to be sensitive to God's least speaking.

#### SHARING GOD'S OBJECTIVE: THE NEW DAY

Noah knew God's voice, he obeyed God's voice, and he shared God's objective. There was nothing merely negative about Noah's life. He was not

known for the things that he did not do, though I am quite sure that there were a lot of things that were current in his time which he did not do, but they are not given any place of prominence in the Word of God. When the Lord Jesus described those days He said: 'They married and were given in marriage.' Well, Noah married, and he gave all his three sons in marriage at this very time. 'They ate and drank'—well, he would have to do that if he was going to work hard. 'They planted'—well, you will notice here, in Genesis vi. 21, that he was able to gather into the ark food for the whole community, and that meant that he had put some work into it. But what I am saying is this: This is not the peculiar, strange, eccentric life of a man who is marked by the bans, and the forbiddings, and the taboos of the things that he does not do, but (and this was the important point) he was a man who had one central governing concern, and people could see it, for it could not be hid. Whatever else he was doing and however much he did, and all the time he was doing it, there at the centre of his life, overshadowing and governing all, was that ark which he built. And that to him was an indication, not of judgment, but of the hope and glory that lay beyond judgment.

Noah was to come to the day when he saw a rainbow. He was to emerge to a new earth with new promises, and a new covenant. This ark was not merely some preparation to be able to withstand judgment, though it was that; but it was God's way through judgment out into the glory—and he went through. But for years (and we get the impression that it may have been a hundred and twenty years) Noah stood out from all others and was remarkable for this thing: that he would not be distracted, or taken out; that he could not be drawn aside by the things of earth and of time, and of the day in which he lived. His heart was set on God's new day, and God's glory.

For us, of course, that means the coming of the Lord. Noah's new day did not last very long, for, alas, the new world into which he went soon fell into failure again, the reason being that Noah himself was a faulty man. Our new world does not depend on a faulty man, but on God's dear Son. The rainbow that shines around His throne is a rainbow of everlasting hope. The sweet smell that will come up to God in that day will be the smell of a whole world in which the knowledge of God and the love of God will fill all things. Praise God that we have such a hope! Noah had a hope, but we have a far greater hope. Noah let his hope govern and dominate his every moment and movement. Do we? I wonder!

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Noah walked with God. They were looking at the same thing, and walked along, step by step. God spoke to him and Noah listened. God commanded him and Noah obeyed. God looked on, and Noah looked on, at the same objective.

We must remember what Noah's name was—'Rest'. There was no strain in his life. Though so different from the world around, it was a restful life, and, dear friends, there is no more restful life than a life walked in true harmonious company with the Lord, and in complete submission to Him.

So Noah, in this way, became a man of hope and a man of unity. On more than one occasion you will find it mentioned that the whole family were gathered around him and were influenced by him. The whole family went into the ark, and the whole family came out of the ark. A man who walks with God becomes a factor of unity to hold people together.

In the light of the soon coming of our Lord we

need to be men of hope and men of unity. But even before that coming there are storms and floods and evil days that come upon the people of God, and in those times, in order that there may be a way through them and beyond them, and that on the other side there may be something new and more precious to the Lord, He calls for men and women to walk with Him. He calls them to keep the hope ever in view, and to realize that all their lives, and all circumstances in them, are intended by the Lord for a preparation for that Day which lies ahead. At the same time, He calls them to be factors in holding together, so that, whatever the judgments may be, however much the disintegration that goes on all around us, and however much the destruction, we may, like Noah, stand on the other side of the flood in God's new Day, and say: 'Thank God we are all here together—not one missing!'

The Lord grant that it may be so!

H. F.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### HALLOWED BE THY NAME

AT first Mr. Shepherd had not thought of using a BILLY GRAHAM sticker in his car. When he filled up the form for his church's requirements he listed posters, handbills and other printed matter, but he did not ask for any stickers. As the Crusade drew nearer, however, he wondered whether he had been right and soon he knew that he had not. One evening, as he parked his car before going into an Advisers' Meeting, he found a man who looked lost. Seeing that the man had a label marked "Billy Graham" on his car, he was able to guess that he was going to the same church and so was able to show him the way. So it seemed good to have this identification sign, and Mr. Shepherd wished that he had ordered a sticker.

Happily he did not have to wait long. As he left the meeting stickers were being offered at the door, so he took one and the next day fixed it on the inside of the rear window of his car. At that moment it seemed a very small thing, but really it was a big one, as we shall see.

Motorists have their own special faults. Even when they are nice enough people in everyday life, a car seems to bring out all their hidden faults. It was certainly the case with Mr. Shepherd. He some-

times did silly things, not because he meant to, but just for lack of taking care. The very first day out with the sticker he was so busy talking to a friend that, without giving any signal, he drove out into the middle of the road, so making the driver of an oncoming car swerve out in order to avoid him. He did not know what the other driver said or thought, but he had an uncomfortable feeling that he had brought discredit to the name of Dr. Graham. Normally, if he did something foolish he got a black look or an indignant 'toot', and then it was forgotten. But Mr. Shepherd began to imagine the driver going home, or to his friends, and telling them what had happened, and perhaps saying: 'You see what those "Billy Graham" people are like! They only think of themselves and do not care what happens to other people.' This, of course, was not true, but it would be sad if he had made it possible for that to be said.

He did not mean to be a selfish man, but somehow car driving can have this effect on people. Others push forward, greedily asserting their own will, and it is so easy to have the same spirit. The more Mr. Shepherd thought about his car sticker, the more he realized that if he gave way to any such

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selfishness now he might easily let down the name of Dr. Billy Graham.

And it was not only a question of something silly or something selfish, but even of something wrong. Many motorists only obey the law when there is a policeman watching. Take the matter of speeding. Mr. Shepherd knew that if he wanted to drive faster than the legal limit he must keep looking into his mirror to make sure that he was not being followed by a police car. When he got out into an empty road he did look up into his mirror, and he got a great shock! It was not a policeman—oh, no! The first thing he saw was the name BILLY GRAHAM. It was on his sticker, which, although the wrong way round inside the car, was the right way to him because of the mirror. Immediately it had the same effect on him as the law would have had. It did not threaten him as the law does, but it did something better. What a disgrace to the name of Dr. Graham if someone carrying it were to be found breaking the law!

Mr. Shepherd was being reminded of the importance of not letting down the Name. Not the name of Dr. Graham, for he had never spoken to him and could certainly not claim him as a friend. No, it was because Dr. Graham preaches Christ and

because his name and the Crusade are so closely associated with the Gospel of Christ that to bring disgrace to the name of Dr. Graham might mean to expose the holy Name of the Lord Jesus to evil thoughts and words.

Mr. Shepherd was not in the habit of using the Lord's Prayer very much, but now he began to understand more of what lies behind those words: "Hallowed be Thy name". To him it now became an earnest prayer for help that he might not let the Name of the Lord down. Every time he got his car out he had to stay and pray: 'O Lord, help me not to be silly or selfish or sinful, for that might dishonour Thee. Hallowed be Thy Name.'

Not all Christians are motorists, and true Christians certainly do not need labels. But all who truly belong to Christ carry His holy Name around with them wherever they go. It is their privilege so to act and so to live that they 'hallow' or keep holy that great Name.

This is true Christian living for all who have found salvation through that Name; not to do right for fear of the law but always to seek help from God to bring honour to our Saviour's Name.

H. F.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PERSON AND MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PETER (III)

WE continue our consideration of, and meditation concerning, the significance of the Apostle Peter and his ministry. As we have seen, and shall continue to see, he was the one who introduced the new dispensation, and fulfilled in himself the work of the Lord Jesus in laying the foundation for the new spiritual, heavenly Israel which was to supplant and take the place of the old Israel, according to the word of the Lord. Peter, as we have said, is himself a representation of that spiritual Israel, which we are, and in his own person and life he so clearly sets forth the nature of this new Israel.

There is one thing that I think will be very helpful to us, and we will mention it here, before going further.

#### THE LORD'S TRAVAIL WITH PETER

I have already said that I have collected some forty instances in the life of Peter when he was with the Lord Jesus, and in many of those instances he

did not show up very well. It was only just occasionally that he came out brightly. So often he emerged rather—perhaps it is a strong word to use—dishonourably rather than honourably. I will not take you through all those forty instances, but if I put my finger upon a few examples, you will see what I mean.

Take the first, a quite simple one: Peter coming in from a fishing expedition, and the Lord standing on the shore, commanding him to let down the net for a draught. It was the *Lord* who said that, but Peter immediately answered: "Master, we toiled all night, and took nothing" (Luke v. 5), implying, of course, that it would be altogether contrary to an experienced fisherman's reputation to let down a net in broad daylight, for it was night when they did their business. So, although he subsequently obeyed, he did so with a question, and with some reserve—almost as though he said: 'All right, you want me to do it, so I will do it'. And no one was more surprised at the result than

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Peter was! There is some weakness here in his attitude.

Then on the lake again, during the storm, with Jesus asleep in the boat, it is Peter who comes to Him and wakes Him, saying: "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark iv. 38). The Lord's answer indicates that here again Peter has failed to grasp the real significance of the Lord Jesus: "Have ye not yet faith?"

Again on the lake: Jesus coming out in the night, walking on the water. This time Peter seems to begin well: "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters" (Matthew xiv. 28), and he stepped out. But then, seeing the big waves and the wind, he began to sink . . . "Lord, save me!" He has broken down again in the middle.

The Lord Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees, and Peter as good as rebukes the Lord for doing it. He is dismayed that the Lord Jesus should rebuke the Pharisees. Why? Well, obviously, if He gets into the Pharisees' bad books, it will go ill both for Jesus—and for Peter. 'Keep on good terms with these people!' You see the principle that is governing him? He is quite annoyed with the Lord Jesus for taking this attitude toward the Pharisees.

Then again: Jesus speaks of His going up to Jerusalem and of what is going to happen to Him there. He would be betrayed into the hands of wicked men and crucified. Peter takes Him and begins to rebuke Him: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee" (Matthew xvi. 22). Again there is this whole idea of self-preservation, and Jesus rebukes him: "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumblingblock unto me."

Once more: on the Mount of Transfiguration, with all the wonder of it. Poor Peter! "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Matthew xvii. 4), putting them all on to an equal basis. Evidently the voice out of heaven which rebuked him made that point; "This is my beloved Son . . . hear ye *him*" . . . 'He cannot be put on a level even with the greatest men of the old dispensation. You hear *Him*!' Peter is rebuked, for here is presumption. Yes, he is failing all the way along.

Peter had a quarrel with the other disciples as to who was to be the Primate, the principal man in the Kingdom. They were quarrelling for primacy, showing lack of humility, and, again, ambition. He had a wrong, false idea of the Kingdom.

On we go. Jesus said: "All ye shall be offended in me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad" (Matthew xxvi. 31). Peter said:

"If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended." . . . "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." . . . "Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." The point, of course, is so obvious that we need not mention it: Peter's self-confidence, his pride, his boasting as to what he could do.

In the Garden Jesus said: "Abide ye here, and watch with me" (Matthew xxvi. 38). He went a little way away, prayed His great travail prayer, and then came back—and they were asleep. He said to Peter: "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

Then came the arrival of the mob and the soldiers, and Judas. That was Peter's rash hour—out with his sword and off came the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. Rebuked again! Then in the hall, denying Jesus. Jesus emerging from the trial—so-called—and they all forsook Him and fled.

Even that was not the end of things with Peter. We meet with something afterward. You will remember that Paul had to say: "I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned" (Galatians ii. 11).

Now why all this? You say: 'It is a pity to point out the man's faults. Is it fair to talk about him in this way? Would the Lord Jesus do what you are doing, pinpointing all these breakdowns in this man's life?' Well, dear friends, that is not quite the point.

The point is a very glorious, blessed one. I feel sure, and have no question whatever, that when the Lord Jesus bent down (if we may speak in this way) and saw Peter writing his first Letter, and saw what he was writing, sentence by sentence, and clause by clause, He said: 'It was not in vain. My patience, forbearance, and longsuffering in all that I had to put up with in that man, and My loving him unto the end, were not in vain. This is worth all, and more than what I suffered from that man.'

When I thought of that, one little verse of a hymn that we sometimes sing floated into my mind:

"And oh, that He fulfilled may see  
The travail of His soul in me,  
And with His work contented be,  
As I with my dear Saviour."

I am quite sure that the Lord was contented, and satisfied, as He saw the fruit of His travail in this man.

Now, why? Why, for you and for me. I think that again and again, in those three years of Peter's life with the Master, you and I would have said: 'It is no good! That man is no good. He is a failure, and it is no good expecting or hoping any-

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thing from him. You had better give him up!' I think that is how we would have felt—for we do feel like that about people, when they repeatedly behave like this. We say: 'Well, they are no good. What do you expect? Don't reckon on anything from that man or that woman!'

Look at Peter now! My, he has really imbibed the Lord Jesus. All that we have in this first Letter of his says: No one is hopeless. If such a man can come through to this, there is hope for me, and for anyone. Is that not true? Pick out only one of Peter's great failures—and that is enough to take the heart out of us!—his denying the Lord three times. If you had done that as vehemently as he had done (and it is amazing that a man who had been on the Mount of Transfiguration, and seen all the miracles and wonders, could say so vehemently: 'I know not the man, I tell you!'), you would say: 'That is the end. There is nothing possible beyond that.' But no: here he is.

Is that not a word of encouragement? We sometimes despair of ourselves, but that is in order that we may learn that our Lord does not despair of us, nor of any man. And here is such a man inaugurating the new Israel on the basis of the life, work and teaching of the Lord Jesus—not as a blue-print, nor as a blue-book of instructions, doctrines and techniques—but on the basis that that life, work and teaching have come right into this man's very being.

#### THE MANNER OF LIFE IN THE NEW ISRAEL

Now we can, perhaps, go on a little further with this matter of the new Israel, what it is and what is its nature. We will read from chapter one of this Letter, verses 13 to 17, for it seems to me that the next thing that we should look at is here:

*"Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in the time of your ignorance: but like as he which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear."*

The two clauses for the moment are: "all manner of living" and "the time of your sojourning". Peter is now referring to the new realm, and the new manner of life which the new Israel occupies. He is saying: 'We, this new Israel of God, are in a new realm altogether, and therefore in that

realm there is a manner of life which belongs to it—the manner of life which belongs to the time of our sojourning here. The manner of life, or manner of living, in this time of our sojourning.' And then, on to the end of the Letter, he touches upon many practical points in the manner of life.

I imagine that some of these points may not apply to anyone here, but I am going to mention them for one reason: to show how practical is the manner of life in this new Israel. I used the phrase: 'a new Israel', 'a spiritual Israel'. That to you, perhaps, is something objective, something out there, an idea, a conception, as so much teaching is, but Peter does not leave it there. He brings it right down to the most practical points in our lives. He makes this new Israel business relate to so many things which he calls, in this inclusive phrase, "all manner of living". What a comprehensive phrase that is!

First of all, you will notice that he has something to say about women who have to live with unsaved husbands. I do not know whether that applies to anyone here. It may be that someone has to live with a not altogether saved husband—a difficult man. But Peter is speaking about a marriage relationship which was contracted before one of the partners was saved, and then the question arises: What should the woman who has been saved since her marriage do? Because she is saved, and her husband is not, ought she to get a separation? Should she find some ground of divorce? Should she live a separate life altogether and isolate him? What is she going to do? That is a practical problem, you know. It may not be in your life, and it is not in mine, but I am constantly presented with that very problem. I have met it only in recent days—a really serious case of this very thing: the difficulty in a marriage relationship because one is going on with the Lord and the other is not. It sets up complexes, strains and difficulties for the one who is. So what are you going to do?

Now Peter says that in the new Israel that saved woman has to live *with* her husband, and *before* her husband, in the grace of God, so that he may be won by her very manner of life; not driven away from the Lord because she isolates him, or nags him, or constantly tries to get at him, letting him know that he is not saved, but just living. Oh, this is a practical problem, for it is not easy to live before such a man in such a way that if ever he is going to come to the Lord, he will do so on this ground: 'Why, I have seen what God can do. He has done it in my wife. The conviction of my sinfulness has come by the purity, the patience and the goodness of my wife.'



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Now, as I say, that may not apply to you, but what I am saying is this: This new Israel is no mere myth, idea or abstract thing. It is very practical, and comes right down here.

Then Peter goes on with this marriage relationship, but this time he is not speaking about unconverted husbands and wives, either or both. He is saying another thing: 'Husbands, give honour to your wives, as unto the weaker vessel.' Now, of course, the wife may not think that she is the weaker vessel. That is the trouble so often! But how does Peter cover that? He does so in a very beautiful way. You must know that at the time Peter was writing there was a very big difference in this relationship between husbands and wives, wives and husbands, socially, and the wives were looked down upon as an inferior class, and were not honoured by men. How does Peter bring in this matter? "*As being joint-heirs of the grace of life.*" I am always sorry that our English translation so often fails to give us the real meaning of the original words. Again and again you just cannot translate, and that is why we have so many versions. We have a Phillips, an Amplified, and a Modern English, and so many others—a whole bookshelf full of translations. Why? To try to get the real meaning over from the original, and I do not know that they have succeeded yet.

"Joint-heirs of the grace of life." The compound Greek word just means: 'Because you husbands and wives, wives and husbands, have both received the life of the Lord in your salvation, there is no discriminating in that life. You are on one basis, one level. You are fellow-heirs. There is a perfect oneness in life which has been constituted basically, and to despise one is to despise the life of the Lord and say that it is lower in one than it is in the other.' Do you see the point? How impossible it is to put that into English! It is translated 'joint-heirs' here. Peter is saying a beautiful thing, and it meant very much in those days with the strong social differences, especially in the domestic circle. This is a new realm of things, a different manner of life altogether, that husbands should honour the wife as the weaker vessel, recognizing that, after all, whether the man is stronger and the woman is weaker, they both share one life and have to live on the basis of that one life which they share. That is beautiful, is it not? But is it not very practical?

Peter goes on, and our next point again may not apply to you, but it does apply very much in Christianity. He has something to say about how the women get themselves up, and dress. Now, of course, you here are not going to come under any condemnation about what I am saying: but how

does Peter put it? What a pity that our English fails so utterly at this very point! Notice that it says: "Whose *adorning* (speaking of Christian women) let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing jewels . . ." You will see that the word "adorning" is in italics, and in this case it does not mean that there is no word there in the original, as italicized words usually do. It means that the translators do not know what to do with the word! You will see their difficulty at once if I point it out. What was the original word there? '*Kosmos*', the Greek word. 'Whose *kosmos* let it not be the plaiting of the hair, and the wearing of jewellery . . .'. What is '*kosmos*'? 'Whose *world*—the world in which you live.' What is your world? Peter is not saying that it is wrong to plait your hair, and I do not know that he is saying that it is wrong to wear some adornment. That is not the point. He is saying: 'Is your hair your world in which you live? Is this jewellery your world?' Is this not *à propos* to our time? My word—*hair*! Well, the least said the better, I think! And the adornments, the get-up, the make-up, the whatnot in these days! That is the world of many people. They spend so much of their time on that—how they look, what impression they make, and so on. Now do not believe that Peter is saying: 'Be slovenly in your appearance. Be careless about how you dress.' God forbid! A lot of women, I am afraid, do go to the other extreme in this matter and let the Lord down by carelessness, but Peter is saying: 'What is the world you live in?' '*Kosmos*' has several meanings, and one of them is 'manner of life', the world that occupies you and takes you up. Is this your world?

Peter says that in the new Israel you are in another realm, and are not living in that world. That is the world of the *world*, and where others outside of Israel live all the time. I sometimes think that if only some of these people in our time who get themselves up as they do could have a look at Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, they would get scared. And yet they are copying Jezebel, with their eyelids, eyelashes, and everything else. Oh, it is frightening, for it has come from there. It is that world. Peter knows all about that and says: 'Dear sisters, don't let that be your world! The holy women of old who hoped in God did not do that. They did not behave like that'; and he cites Sarah. The beauty of life is not the beauty that we try to make. Peter says: 'The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is priceless.' That is the world of the new Israel.

When Peter has pinpointed these various matters (I assume that he takes it that it is not necessary to

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distribute his exhortations over a lot of other practical points), he gathers them all up and says: 'And all of you.' Whether it be husbands, wives, servants and masters, in particular, and these relationships in particular, their particular problems, and their particular manner of life, behaviour and conduct before the world . . . he says 'all of you'. All husbands, all wives, all servants, all masters, all of you, whatever you are, you all belong to a new realm with new behaviour and a new manner of life.

Peter gathers it all up in this way with, mark you, another allusion to the old Israel which failed and now has to be taken up in the new: "That ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." That is the all-inclusive object that God has in view, for which the Israel of old was brought out of Egypt's darkness into the light of God—to show forth the excellencies of Him who brought them out. So Peter gathers everything up into this: We have been brought out of all this darkness into light with one purpose and one object—as the new Israel which makes good what the Old Israel lost, fulfils what the old Israel failed to fulfil—showing forth the excellencies of Him.

This is very exacting and very testing, is it not? 'I have to be careful how I live in my home before

my family, in the midst of the Lord's people, and before this world as I pass the time of my sojourning here, in order that the excellencies of Him who called me out of darkness into light should not be veiled, not be beclouded, but be seen. That those with whom I live shall not see too much of me naturally. They are bound to see a little before I am perfected, but not obtruding itself, or forcing itself, so that it is the thing that they meet, and they say: "That is just her—or him. She has made up her mind to do that and nothing will stop her" . . . thus veiling the excellencies of Him who called me out of darkness into His marvellous light.'

I hope there is nothing depressing about this, but, you know we have to stand up to our teaching. We have really had so much teaching, and it is necessary for us to measure up to what has been shown to us. It is very practical in everyday life and everyday relationships, and it all amounts to this: 'Are those who are observing me seeing me naturally, or—if they are at all sensitive to spiritual values and have eyes to see—are they able to discern the grace of God in me, neutralising *me* and making Christ in His preciousness manifested?' If something of this emerges from our little time together we shall not have met in vain—it will have been worth while. The Lord make it so!

(To be continued)

## THE DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (II)

### 2. ITS NATURE

**I**N the first message of this series we laid the Scriptural foundation with John iv. 21, 23, Matthew xviii. 20, Matthew xxviii. 19–20 and Acts xv. 17. We concentrated our attention upon the very great significance of three words spoken by our Lord to the Samaritan woman in the context of the great transition: "*The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth . . . God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*" In that context Jesus used these three words: "Neither" (in Samaria), "Nor" (at Jerusalem), "But" (in spirit and truth).

We pointed out that this indicates, and postulates, first, a change of dispensations; second, a change of order; and third, a change of nature. "Neither . . . nor" dismisses one dispensation with its form and

order. "But" introduces a new and other order and nature.

Before proceeding to the new nature of worship inaugurated by the coming of God's Son, Jesus Christ, we must lay further stress upon this change. To a very large extent this challenges Christendom and Christianity as it exists now. The very words used by Jesus above carry with them such a challenge: "Spirit and truth". Can we deny that He implied—at least implied that what had obtained as represented by the Samaritan temple in Mount Gerizim, and the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, was not "Spirit and truth", but, at most, a type, a figure, and a man-made representation? It was form, not spirit; it was artificial, not true. An immense amount of the New Testament opens up when we get this John iv. 21, 23 key intelligently

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into our possession by the Holy Spirit. Our minds faint in the presence of so much, and we feel confronted with an impossible task as we contemplate coping with it. We can do no more than give hints and indications. May the Holy Spirit do the rest!

In the first place, we must remind ourselves that Jesus said of Himself that He is the Truth. He said also: "To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John xviii. 37). By implication He said that He was the true Temple (John ii. 19). In contrast with the Jewish 'false shepherds' He said that He was the *true* Shepherd. In contrast with the old Israel as the Vine (Psalm viii. 8-16, Isaiah v. 1-7, Jeremiah ii. 21) He said "I am the *true* Vine."

This conception of truth in relation to His own person and work is one of the major features of His coming into the world. If we take up this word in its seventeen occurrences in John's Gospel alone we cannot fail to be immensely impressed. Then follow it through into John's Letters; and finally see it in the great consummation in the Revelation—"The faithful and true". Paul speaks of the truth—"As truth is in Jesus" (Ephesians iv. 21). Jesus, as the Truth, is contrasted with Satan, the liar. But He is also contrasted with all representations, types, symbols, outward forms, etc., which were—and are—not the true, the real. When our Lord spoke of His body as the Temple, deliberately refraining from the fuller explanation because of the fixed prejudice of His hearers, He introduced the great truth of the transition from one dispensation to another, and the complete change in the nature of temple and worship. It was because Stephen saw this and declared it that he was murdered by these very people. Said he: "The Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands" (Acts vii. 48). Paul said the same to the Athenians (Acts xvii. 24). This does not mean that God never came into representations when they wholly corresponded with His thought. Both the Tabernacle and the Temple were "made with hands" and God came into them in power and glory, but not to commit Himself to the *thing*. The time came when He forsook both and He was no longer found there. They were only temporary representations and His presence was conditional. The "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (Hebrews viii. 2) is "not of this creation". The whole Letter to the Hebrews has to do with this change from the earthly and temporal to the heavenly and spiritual. Hence, He is no longer in "temples made with hands".

To come right to the point: the New Testament teaches that the Temple in this dispensation is a Person, and persons incorporated into Him through death, burial and resurrection, and 'baptized into one body by one Spirit' (I Corinthians xii. 13). We must also remember that Jesus foretold the passing away of that entire temporal system, with Jerusalem as its centre and representation. This actually came to pass, and it has not been recovered so far as Jewry is concerned. That Letter to the Hebrews takes up the prophecy of Haggai (Haggai ii. 6, 21) wherein is predicted a two-fold shaking of all things with a view to testing their temporal or eternal nature; and Hebrews xii. 27 says that only the things which cannot be shaken will remain. This is a kind of summary of the Letter. The things which *can*—and will be—shaken are the figures, representations of heavenly things, the "things made with hands". The things which *cannot* be shaken are the spiritual, the heavenly; which are the *true*!

May it not be (and we put it in question form just to draw consideration), may it not be that we are now really in the *universal* shaking? There are large realms in which it is being said, and believed, that Christianity has failed. In Christendom there are many who have abandoned faith in the old teaching and beliefs of Christianity. There is a great sifting and falling away. There is an intense testing of all who are *in any way* connected with Christianity. Yes, 'shaking' is the right word, both as to things earthly and things heavenly. The issue will be just as to what is *true*, and what is otherwise; what is really of the Spirit, and what is of man, tradition, and outward form.

If this great shaking is going to head up to what Peter said, with prophetic illumination as to the nuclear age, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up . . . these things are thus all to be dissolved . . ." (II Peter iii. 10-11) (a thing which we know to be all too possible in our time) what will remain but what is "spirit and truth"? This issue is being forcibly pressed in the nations, in Christendom, in evangelical Christianity, and in the experience of the Lord's own people.

This is the first and basic thing as to the fact and nature of the present dispensation, and of the great transition from the past. It will be intensified as the next transition of dispensations get nearer. With His foreknowledge of the passing of the earthly, temporal and material things; places, systems, fixed locations, and outward forms, the Lord Jesus put the whole matter of survival upon

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Himself as *the* constituent of a spiritual structure against which the very powers of hell would not prevail. Against fixed localizing and systematizing of Himself and His presence He was emphatic, and history is evidence of how right He was. If, according to John iii. 16, salvation is a matter of "whosoever", the Lord's presence and true worship, according to Matthew xviii. 20, is "wheresoever". The Lord is no more sympathetic toward *being bound* to this or that location than He is to making Paul or Apollos, or Cephas a gathering centre. Over against this very tendency in Corinth Paul wrote: ". . . with *all* that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ *in every place*, their Lord and ours" (I Corinthians i. 2). Exclusiveness, with its tragic entail of endless divisions, can only result—*sooner or later*—from a violation of this fundamental principle! That is all on the negative side, as warning and admonition; but

what blessedness there is when—all *things* apart—it is only the Lord as the definite and consistent gathering object and delight! "Neither" . . . "Nor" . . . "But" in spirit and in truth.

Let it not be thought that, in dismissing one tight legal system governing His presence, He was putting nothing definite in its place. His thought is far from a nebulous generalization, a nondescript go-as-you-please kind of 'liberty', an independent free-lance unrelatedness. The law of His presence is a very definite and positive one; it is *government* by the Holy Spirit. This will not allow us to do as we like or go as we please—the misuse of the "wheresoever".

This is strictly—the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and the measure of Christ, the measure of life, the measure of power, and of fruitfulness depend entirely upon how much we recognize and move into this essential nature.

(To be continued)

## LIBERTY IN CHRIST (II)

(Continued)

### THE ADOPTION AND THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

ONE of the declared purposes for which God sent forth His Son, made of woman, made under the law, was "that we might receive the adoption".\*

It is unfortunate that the English word "adoption" has in our modern usage a very different meaning from that of the Greek word used in Galatians iv. 5, and in other Epistles of Paul. The "adoption" of a child into a family where he does not belong by birth is a very different thing from that "adoption" which we receive as a result of the redemption accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ. The word means the *placing of a son*, and it points to the purpose of God to bring His children into "the inheritance" whereof they are made, by grace, the joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, "Whom He hath appointed *Heir of all things*" (Hebrews i. 2).

The word "adoption" occurs only five times, all in the writings of Paul. A brief sentence to each occurrence will suffice for a clear understanding of the meaning of the word, which is of much importance.

\* There is but one word in the original represented by the three words "adoption of sons".

In Ephesians i. 5 it is recorded of us whom God has blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, and whom He had chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, that He had "predestinated us *unto the adoption* (of children) by Jesus Christ unto Himself". This does not tell us what the adoption is, but tells us that God had it in view from before the foundation of the world, and that it was to be accomplished by Christ Jesus. The context also connects the adoption with our "inheritance" (verse 11), and with the gift of the "Holy Spirit of Promise, who is the *earnest* of our inheritance" (verses 13, 14).

In Romans ix. 4, 5, is a list of the wonderful things which pertained to *Israel*, which list is headed by "the adoption". Hence, as *Gentiles*, we should have no part in these things were it not that "the Israel of God" includes believing Gentiles, as well as believing Jews, the former being just as truly the seed of Abraham as the latter.

In Romans viii we find the other two occurrences of the word "adoption", and from these its meaning is clear. The prominent subject of this great passage is the Spirit of God (given to and dwelling

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in the children of God), and the several ministries of the Spirit on their behalf. We find in this Scripture the same characteristic words as in Galatians—children, bondage, liberty, the inheritance, the heirs, the flesh, the Spirit, the adoption. Verse 15 reads: “For ye have not received the (a) spirit of *bondage* again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, ‘Abba, Father’.”

This verse speaks plainly (as does Galatians iv. 5) of the work of the Spirit in making real to the children of God His relation to them of “Father”, so that they can intelligently and confidently address Him as “Father”. But here the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of *Adoption*”. As such He enables us to anticipate, and look forward to, and patiently wait for, *the adoption itself*, mentioned in verse 23, which tells us that we are “waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”. The adoption, then, is still *future*. It is that which we “hope for”, the “glory” into which the children of God are to be brought in association with Christ at His coming again. It includes the taking possession of the redeemed creation, which shall then be “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God” (Romans viii. 21). It is what is referred to in the corresponding passage in Ephesians (i. 14) “as the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of His glory”.

All these Scriptures present the Spirit of God as the present possession of God’s children, as the “Earnest” or “First-fruits” of the eternal inheritance which they are to share with Christ as His co-heirs; and they all speak of the Father sparing not His own Son, but sending Him forth to redeem those for whom the adoption is prepared, thus making way for the coming of the Holy Spirit into their hearts.

The adoption is therefore a comprehensive term embracing all those glorious things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man—“the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him”. And it is only through the Spirit and by faith that these things can be known, for “God hath revealed them unto us *by His Spirit*; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God”. For “we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we *might know the things that are freely given to us of God*” (I Corinthians ii. 9–12).

When a child is born heir to vast possessions and properties his human spirit—“the spirit of man that is in him”—enables him to know those things, to

appreciate to some extent their value, and to enjoy their prospective possession; for they are “the things of a man”. But “the things of God knoweth no man; but the Spirit of God”. In proportion, therefore, as we are filled with the Spirit, and yielded to the Spirit for the purpose of a heart-interest in the things of our Lord Jesus Christ, to that extent will the Spirit take of that which is Christ’s and show it unto us; and to a corresponding extent will we be set free from interest in and affection for the things that are seen—the things temporal.

The foregoing Scriptures reveal further that the inheritance promised to Abraham was far greater, more vast and more glorious, than appears by the Old Testament records. To the same effect are the words of Romans iv. 13: “For the promise that he should be the *heir of the world*, was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” There is nothing in Genesis to show that God promised to Abraham that he should be the *heir of the world*, but to us has been given by the New Testament Scriptures certain information of great value which in other ages was not made known to the children of men. God communicated to Moses and inspired him to write only so much of what He had promised to Abraham, His “friend”, as He was pleased to make known to “Israel after the flesh”. Hence the record of His promise of possessions in the world extended no further than the land bounded by the Mediterranean Sea on the West and the Euphrates River on the East; for the promise to the *earthly* people was confined to that. But God had in view also a *heavenly* people, for whom He had in store things of surpassing value and glory; and it is evident that He spake to Abraham of those things also. For it is written of Abraham and others of the household of faith that they saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, to such an extent that they showed by their lives that they were seeking “a better country, that is, an *heavenly*; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath *prepared for them a city*” (Hebrews xi. 13–16).

Evidently that city—the heavenly Jerusalem, which in Galatians iv. 26 is spoken of as “the mother of us all”—was a very bright prospect in Abraham’s outlook. It was because he was looking for the city which hath the foundation, whose Architect and Builder is God, that Abraham shunned the cities of earth, “dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the *same promise*” (Hebrews xi. 9, 10). The promise of the heavenly Jerusalem, the eternal home of God and His redeemed people, is the greatest of all promises. There can be nothing higher, greater or

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more glorious than that, whether for the saints of this dispensation or those of any other. It is a great mistake, therefore, to assign to Abraham (as some of our modern expositors do) a position of inferiority in the glory to that of the saved of this present age.

It is a mistake also to exclude the earth from the inheritance of the saints. Heaven and earth will not be separated then as now; for the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God; and the kings of the earth will bring their honour and glory into it. (Revelation xxi. 2, 24.)

In the passage in Ephesians which speaks of our inheritance in Christ, and of the Holy Spirit being given as the Earnest thereof until the redemption of the purchased possession, we read of the purpose of God which He hath purposed in Himself, "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together *in one* all things in Christ, both which are *in heaven and which are on earth*" (Ephesians i. 9-14). Heaven and earth will be "one".

The "purchased possession" of Ephesians i. 14 is plainly the ransomed creation now groaning under the bondage of corruption (Romans viii. 19-21). It is "the field" of the parable, to purchase which the Man (Christ) "went and sold all that He had" (Matthew xiii. 44).

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, wherein the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth as "the Heir of all things", it is "the world to come" (literally, *the habitable earth to come*) which is presented as the most prominent feature of the inheritance of Christ and of "the heirs of salvation" (Hebrews i. 2, 14; ii. 5-10). Furthermore, it is declared in the same passage that, for the purpose of possessing and governing the earth, God laid not hold of angels, but laid hold of the *seed of Abraham* (Hebrews ii. 10, margin). And these seed of Abraham are declared to be, as in Galatians, *the children of God*. Finally, this prospective inheritance of the earth on the part of those who are "joint-heirs with Christ" is spoken of as "the *heavenly calling*" (Hebrews iii. 1).

## UNTIL CHRIST BE FORMED IN YOU

(Galatians iv. 19)

It would be a grave error to suppose that God's purpose in calling out of the world a people for His Name is merely to save them from eternal judgment and to have them with Him in heaven. It would be equally an error to suppose that the purpose of the ministry of the gospel is merely to

bring sinners to Christ that they might receive from Him the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. The reconciliation of the sinner and his regeneration, making him a child of God, is but *the beginning* of the work of the gospel and of the Holy Spirit in his heart. The regeneration of a repentant sinner is the work of but a moment. There remains, however, a work which, in the mind of Paul (who understood its importance), called for an intensity of effort, and awakened an intensity of anxiety, beyond anything displayed by him in preaching Christ to the unconverted.

The false teachers referred to in Galatians were not hindering the preaching of the gospel to the unsaved. They were hindering the work of the gospel and the ministry of the Spirit of God *in the hearts of God's children*. We can form an idea as to God's estimate of the value of that work from the earnestness of utterance which characterizes the Epistle as a whole, and particularly from the verse containing the words of our chapter-heading: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until *Christ be formed in you*" (iv. 19). The entire verse is an impetuous outburst of feeling. It interrupts with startling abruptness the course of the exhortation the apostle was giving, showing that he could not refrain himself from the expression of what was in his heart, even so long as was needed to finish the sentence. There is, moreover, deep tenderness and affection in the words "my little children". Then the acuteness of his solicitude and his strivings for them are likened to *travailing in birth*. And a protracted period of labour-pains it was, since it was to continue until the desired work should be accomplished in them. Finally the object of his striving on their behalf is declared in the words "until Christ be formed in you".

This, then, is *the full object* that God has in view for those whom He calls into His household—that Christ be formed in them. And the means employed for that purpose are, the Holy Spirit working in the saint, in co-operation with a faithful ministry of the Word.

Again we observe the close parallel between the teaching of Galatians and that of Romans (chapters v-viii especially). For in Romans viii the passage which treats of the Spirit of God, the Adoption, and the Inheritance (to which we have referred) is immediately followed by a clear statement of the *purpose* of God for those whom He has saved and made His children, and for whom such a glorious inheritance has been prepared (verses 28-30). Speaking of them as "the *called according to His purpose*", the apostle says: "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be *conformed*

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to the image of His Son, that He might be the First-born among many brethren" (Romans viii. 29).

We have here the purpose of God for His children, namely, that they should be conformed in character or "image" to His Son; but in Galatians we have the Divine Agencies by which this great purpose of God is to be carried out—the Spirit striving against the flesh, and the ministry of the Word, which works effectually in them that believe.

From Ephesians vi. 7–16 we learn that to the same end the gifts of ministry from the risen Lord have been bestowed, those gifts being "for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect (i.e. fully developed) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

It is well for each of us to have as clear an idea as possible of what God purposes to work in us, so that we may give our hearts to that purpose, seeking to be fellow-labourers with God in its accomplishment, and using whatever gifts He has bestowed upon us to that end.

The same matter is very strongly presented in Colossians, where Paul speaks of the ministry committed to him to make Christ known among the Gentiles, in which connection he says: "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"—that is to say, fully conformed to His image, or (as in Galatians) "till Christ be formed" in each one. Then he adds this strong statement: "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily" (Colossians i. 27–29).

From this we learn that Paul regarded his ministry as not merely making Christ known to sinners for their salvation, but more particularly as preaching Christ for the perfecting of saints; and that his ministry was not fulfilled even by preaching, warning and teaching, but required also labouring, and even striving, and that not in his own energy merely, but in the working of the Spirit of God, working in him "mightily".

Manifestly, then, the perfecting of the saints is a matter of the greatest moment; and there is need to emphasize this because it is virtually lost sight of and ignored at the present time. God requires full-grown men in Christ, not only for service, testimony and fruit-bearing in this age, but also for important administrative duties in the age to come. It may be well to bring again to mind that the final aim of God's dealings with the people of His choice is that they may bear fruit, and that their

fruit may abound. Since maturity, or full growth, is essential to fruit-growing, we clearly perceive why so much importance is attached to the perfecting of the saints. God's purpose in sowing the good seed is not attained in the blade, nor even in the ear, but in the full corn in the ear (Mark iv. 28).

We should therefore give earnest heed to the warnings found in Galatians and Colossians concerning things that tend to defeat the working of God, in the carrying out of His plans for the perfecting of His saints. Those in Galatia were being put on the wrong track altogether; for notwithstanding that they had begun their life as children of God "in the Spirit", they were now thinking to be "made perfect in the flesh". This is called by Paul a turning back to the weak and beggarly elements, and as manifesting a "desire again to be in bondage" (Galatians iv. 9). When they knew not God they did service (literally, were in bondage to) them which by nature are no gods. But now, after coming to know God, or rather having become known of God (accepted and acknowledged as His), how surprising that they should turn back to the old observances! For as heathen worshippers of idols they had observed "days, and months, and times, and years". And now, notwithstanding their deliverance from that and every other form of "bondage" through the cross of Christ, they are returning to it again! This leads Paul to say: "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Galatians iv. 11).

Why should the apostle fear lest he might have bestowed upon those Galatian converts labour in vain? Was he doubtful of their salvation? Evidently not; for he had just said they were "all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ", that they were heirs according to the promise, and that God had sent forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts. He had even declared their present and eternal relations with God in the most emphatic language, saying: "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son then an heir of God through Christ." That was all settled when they repented and believed in Jesus Christ.

No, it was not his labour in preaching to them as sinners the gospel of God concerning His Son, that Paul feared might prove fruitless. His anxiety was solely in regard to the labour he had expended in ministering Christ to them for their spiritual growth. The anxiety, the care, and the incessant labours of the husbandman begin when the seed has sprouted into the tender plant, and continue during all the period of growth. The toil and cost of

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ploughing and planting might all be lost through *neglect in cultivation*. It is evident therefore that what filled the apostle's heart with anxiety, causing it indeed to overflow into a letter which (contrary to his usual custom) he wrote with his own hand (vi. 11), was the prospect that, through the meddlesomeness of zealous teachers of law-works, all his own labours might be rendered fruitless. Thus our attention is called sharply to the fact that *God's work through the Holy Spirit is needed for growth in Christ*—leading on to the bearing of fruit for God—*just as much as for regeneration*. It is *only by the Spirit* that one of Adam's fallen race is re-born into the family of God, "the household of faith" (vi. 10). So, too, it is *only by the Spirit* that the child of God can be conformed to the image of Christ (II Corinthians iii. 18), and can bear fruit, "the fruit of the Spirit" (v. 22, 23), for the glory and acceptance of God.

Having all this in view, Paul now turns from *warning and rebuke* to earnest and tender *entreaty*, saying: "Brethren, *I beseech you*, be as I am; for I am as ye are" (iv. 12). Paul was free in Christ from the bondage of religious ceremonial such as mentioned in verse 10—observing days, and months, and times, and years. He was separated by the cross of Christ from the world and all its barren doings whereby men in the corruption of the flesh, and having not the Spirit of God, seek to perfect themselves through religious rites and observances. He was living his life then in the flesh "by the faith of the Son of God". Hence he besought them *to be as he was*.

Moreover, he says for their encouragement, that he was as they were. We are apt to regard prophets, apostles and other holy men of old as if they were of a different order of beings—not common clay like ourselves. We need therefore to be told that "Elijah was a *man*, subject to like passions as we are" (James v. 17), and that Paul was, in himself, just as weak as we ourselves. They were all but "earthen vessels" even as we. What was it then that made them different from other men? Simply and solely the grace of God given to all who believe. Thus in another place Paul testifies, saying: "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle . . . but *by the grace of God* I am what I am" (I Corinthians xv. 9, 10). Yes, it was the grace of God toward that "chief of sinners" that made all the difference; and what we should by all means lay hold of is the fact that *God's grace is for us as much as for him*.

What Paul specifically refers to in this connection is that he was like them in being *weak*. He reminds them of this, saying: "Ye know how through

infirmity of the flesh (*bodily weakness*) I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation (the trial he had to bear) which was in my *flesh* ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel (messenger) of God, even as Christ Jesus" (see Matthew x. 40).

In other places the apostle mentions the "weakness" of his "bodily appearance", and his lack of gifts of oratory, explaining that his deficiencies in these endowments (which are regarded by many as special qualifications for successful preaching and ministry) were in reality a part of his equipment for the work to which God had called him, the purpose being (to quote his own words) "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (II Corinthians iv. 7)—that is to say, that men might be forced to admit that it was Divine power working through this frail, defective instrument, and not the mere power of nature; and that the glory of the results accomplished through his ministry might be given to God, the real Doer, and not to the instrument which He was pleased to employ. There is surely encouragement for all who wish to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in the fact that natural abilities, eloquence of speech, education, learning and other things greatly prized by "the flesh" are not essential, and may be even a hindrance rather than a help, in that service.

Paul appeals also (verse 15) to their devotion and love for himself at the first, bearing them witness that they would have been willing even to have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him. "Where is then", he sadly asks, "the blessedness ye spake of?" His ministry had brought them into the "blessedness" of knowing their sins forgiven (Romans iv. 6-9) and their gratitude to him at that time knew no bounds. What had made the difference? Had *he* changed in any wise toward them? "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (iv. 16). The truth is often resented if it demands a change of our ways; but the faithful servant of Christ will risk even the loss of friendship where the truth is needed for correction of saints who have departed from it.

Again, in verses 17 and 18, Paul refers to those teachers who were misleading the Galatians. We give a free rendering of those verses: "They are zealous after you, but not for your advantage. Yes, they would even exclude you from me, that ye might be zealous after them. But it is good to be zealous always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you—". Here the apostle, overcome with tender concern for them and by his acute distress at the thought of his "little children" being thus beguiled away from him, breaks off the



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unfinished thought in order to declare his anxious care and the travail of his soul for them in the words upon which we have already commented.

\* \* \* \* \*

*In our last issue we announced that these messages on Liberty in Christ are taken from one of a series of books by a well-known teacher of the Word in America published in 1918-1919, and now long out of print.*

GOD'S QUIET CONQUESTS

**G**OD'S quiet operations are like Himself, they are deep and quiet, and seem to be slow and circuitous, and have to be searched into in order to be appreciated.

When we stand upon the margin of a swift river, it often happens that there are whirling eddies near the shore, where the water runs back up the stream, which looks as if the river is going the wrong way; but when we look out into the channel we find the current speeding towards the ocean. This is a picture of the way God works. In many things it looks as if God is being defeated, and that the movements of His grace and providence are failures, and that all His purposes are going the wrong way. It is only

when we lift our eyes and look farther away from the shore of the present moment and take account of the entire stream of God's government that we see that He constantly gets the victory, as it were by strategy, and in quiet circuitous ways. He works in a hidden way, under what we call second causes, and by forces which are spiritual and not mechanical. Have you noticed that great rough old sinners are usually captured and conquered in most unexpected ways, exactly the opposite of what we would expect to be essential to produce such a result? God's great power is often so simple and undemonstrative in its workings. He makes no noise.

SELECTED.

BOUND COPIES OF "A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY"

New readers of the paper, and others, very often ask us for back issues and many friends have had to be disappointed because our stocks of quite a number of issues have been exhausted. We have, however, kept a certain number of copies in sheet form and these are now being made up into bound volumes which we hope to have available by the time this issue is mailed. These are for the years 1954 to 1961 (inclusive) and 1964 and 1965. Any or

all of these volumes can be ordered at a cost of 5s. (\$0.70) per volume, plus postage of 10d. (\$0.13) per volume.

A certain number of bound volumes for each year will be set aside and reserved for readers outside of the United Kingdom, some of whom do not receive the paper until a number of weeks after it is mailed.

AN APPEAL TO OUR READERS

It will be noted in connection with the above notice about bound copies of *A Witness and A Testimony* that the years 1962 and 1963 have been omitted from the list. If any of our readers have

a copy of the March-April, 1962, and/or March-April, 1963, issues which they no longer require and would send them to us, we could have copies bound up for the missing two years.

"THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE MYSTERY"

Volume II

As many of our readers will know, Volume Two of *The Stewardship of the Mystery* has long been out of print and there have been many requests that it should be made available again. This book has now been entirely re-written and is in the hands of the printers who have promised that copies will be ready by mid-August. The subject matter of this new Volume Two has been confined to the specific revelation given to the Apostle Paul concerning the

Church and we regard this book as being of special importance to the Lord's people at the present time.

Orders may be placed immediately and will be dealt with as soon as the book is delivered to us.

Price: Cloth bound: 7s. 6d. (\$1.60) plus postage 7d. (8 cents).

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## IN PRINT AGAIN

We are glad to be able to say that the little booklet, *The Blood, the Cross and the Name of the Lord Jesus*, which has been out of print for some time,

is now available again. Price: 3d. (\$0.05) per copy, plus postage.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia £8 5s.; Algiers, N. Africa 14s. 5d.; Amstelveen, Holland £25; Amsterdam, Holland £1 5s. 3d., 12s.; Ashburton 10s.; Auckland, New Zealand £1 5s., 15s.; Barry 7s. 6d., £1 5s.; Belfast £1; Bideford £1 1s.; Birmingham £1; Bolton £3 3s., 10s.; Brighton 10s.; Bristol £1; Bromley £2, £2; Brynmawr £10; Burnley 5s.; Cabinteely 9s. 10d.; Canterbury 10s. 6d.; Cape Town, S. Africa £1; Chesterfield £3; Congleton £5; Cullompton 10s., 10s.; Deal £5; Dover 5s.; Dublin £2, 11s. 9d.; Dunning £1; Eastbourne £1 10s., 10s.; Edinburgh £1 16s.; Erith 6s. 6d.; Felixstowe £4, 10s.; Gateshead £3 19s. 9d.; Glasgow £2, £2, £5; Greystones £3; Harlow £2 6s.; Harrow 7s. 6d.; Hassocks £2; Hastings 10s., £5, £5; Hove £1, 10s.; Hull 10s.; Inverness £3; Ipswich 10s.; Ispringen, Germany £2 10s.; Kaleden, B.C. £1 12s. 11d.; Kings Lynn £3; Lancing 10s.; Leask, Sask. £3 6s. Id.; Lentrant 10s.; Lessines, Belgium £1 4s. 2d.; Llanelli £1 1s.; London N.7 £1; S.E.5 £1, £1; S.E.9 £5; S.E.12 13s.; S.E.15 £1; S.E.21 £1; S.E.22 6s.; S.E.23 £5, £1, 10s., £1, £5, 5s., 10s., £5, 10s., 10s., 10s., £5, 10s., 7s. 6d.; S.E.26 10s.; S.W.4 £3; Loughton £2; Madras, India 14s. 6d.; Makwiro, Rhodesia £5; Maldon £5; Malton £1; Manchester 10s.; Montreal, P.Q. 13s. 2d.; Newcastle-upon-Tyne 5s.; Newport £1; Northampton £1; Norwich £10; Norwood, South Australia 4s. 11d.; Oldham £1; Orpington £1 7s. 4d.; Penticton, B.C. £1 6s. 4d.; Polbeth £1; Port Jervis, N.Y. 17s. 10d.; Pretoria, S. Africa £2; Reading £2; Rickmansworth £1, 5s.; Rozenberg, Holland £1; Ruislip £10; St. Ann, Mo. £1 15s. 8d.; Scarborough, Canada £1 13s.; Sheffield £3; Shirley 3s. 10d.; Slough 5s.; Somerset, Tasmania £2; Southampton 10s., 10s., £1, 10s.; South Shields 10s., 5s., 10s., 7s. 6d.; Swansea 5s.; Tadworth £1 5s.; Thornlands, Queensland 15s.; Trout Creek, Ontario £1 12s. 11d.;

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### THIS MINISTRY

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

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**MR. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.**



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1966

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EDITOR'S NOTE

WE feel that the many friends who pray for this ministry should know of the Lord's very gracious help in our recent visit to the United States. The conference at Wabanna Camp, Maryland, was one of great blessing. A large number of friends gathered from over a wide area; from Canada to Florida, and from Central, Western and Eastern States. It was a joy to meet so many Witness and Testimony readers. The ministry in four sessions each day was full, being shared by Mr. DeVern Fromke, Mr. Stephen Kaung and the editor. The fellowship was free and precious. All expectations as to numbers were well exceeded, and it was generally felt that, the Lord

willing, the conference should be repeated next year.

From Maryland we went to Indianapolis, where we ministered twice daily for four days. The visit was concluded with a gathering at Jamaica, New York, where we had a warm welcome and the Lord again made us know His help in ministering.

By the time this issue of the paper reaches you the conference in Switzerland will have taken place, or be doing so. There is much prayerful expectation in that direction. We will report in the next issue. Our very warm gratitude for all prayer fellowship and support, and greetings to all our family.

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

6. THE HISTORY OF THE ARK

WE have been considering the greatness and glory of Jesus Christ, and have been looking at this matter through the ark of the testimony in the tabernacle of old. We have seen the glory and

greatness in the materials of the ark, and in relation to the mercy-seat over the ark. Now we shall begin to look at the history of the ark.

The ark began at the time when Israel was formed

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

into a nation. They were constituted a distinct nation at Mount Sinai. Of course, they were a chosen seed before that, and as Hebrews they began with Abraham, but there is always a difference between the Hebrews and Israel. Israel is the national name for the people. So it was at Mount Sinai that they were constituted a distinct nation with their own national constitution, and it was then and there that the ark was made by direction of God. And that ark goes right through their national history, from the beginning until at last it comes to rest in the fulness of the kingdom under David and Solomon. It had a long journey, and a very varied history.

We have been seeing that the ark is the Old Testament means of revealing the Lord Jesus Christ, and what we have now is that very varied and long journey that the testimony of Jesus has to take. How many different situations the ark came into! How many strong forces it had to contend with! All the way through the wilderness, and all through the battles in the Promised Land, the ark was governing everything until at last it came to the end of its journeys in the house of God. There the staves were drawn out, the journeys were all over, and the testimony had reached its end.

The Letter to the Hebrews takes up all these things and translates them from the Old Testament to the New. It tells us that what was true in a material and literal way in the Old Testament is now true in a spiritual and heavenly way. So the Letter begins with the statement that God, having of old times spoken in many different ways, has gathered up all those different times and ways into His Son, and He has spoken fully and finally in His Son, so that everything led on to the Lord Jesus, and we have the explanation of all that was through those times in Jesus Christ.

This Letter to the Hebrews has two sides. On the one side it tells us that the end has already been reached in Jesus Christ. In Christ all the journeys have come to an end. He has come to His rest in the heavenly House, and personally the Lord Jesus has no more journeys to take. He has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, and, so far as He Himself is concerned, He will remain sitting down. He has reached the end in fulness. That is what this Letter teaches. Fulness and finality have been reached in the person of Jesus Christ. He has no more work to do for Himself, no more journeys to take Himself, and He has nothing to add to Himself—He is perfectly full. In Him all the fulness dwells and He has reached the end of all His journeys. That is one side of this Letter to the Hebrews.

The other side is that what is true about Him has to be made true in His new Israel. He is now forming a new heavenly Israel. The kingdom has been taken away from the earthly Israel and, as Jesus Himself said, it has been given to "a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew xxi. 43). The true vine is that which is bringing forth the fruits of Jesus Christ, and if we are in Jesus Christ we belong to the new heavenly Israel which He is forming. That is what is going on in us now. What is true and final of Jesus Christ in heaven is now being made true in His Israel on earth.

I expect you are familiar with the truth that the New Testament teaches. It looks as though there is a contradiction, and almost as though Paul and Peter do not agree. Paul says: "(God) made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians ii. 6), while Peter says: "I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims" (I Peter ii. 11). Paul says: 'You are in heaven', and Peter says: 'You are on earth', but there is no contradiction. You see, Paul says that we are in the heavenlies *in Christ*. It is a spiritual position. In Christ all the work has been done for us, and we are already sanctified and perfected. That is the great spiritual truth, but we know very well that we are still on the earth. The other side is that what is true of our position in Christ is being made true of our position in this world.

That brings us back to the journeys of the ark, that is, that what is true concerning Jesus Himself has got to be made true in our experience. What we have to see clearly is that the journeys of the ark were not only literal, material, earthly journeys, but were spiritual journeys. It was the journey from what the ark was in itself to what it had to become in the life of the people.

You see, I can take up this Bible and say: 'Now, that is a very literal book. It is something that I can see. It is something that I can feel and move about.' I can say that that Bible is a real thing, and I can also say that I believe in the reality of the Bible. I can do all those things with the Bible as I hold it away from myself and look at it. In that way the Bible is objective, but for that Bible to be really a power in my life, it has to take a journey. It has to take a spiritual journey, and that journey is from the objective to the subjective. It has to get inside me somehow. I must have what is written in this book written in my heart, and what is written in this book has to be an experience in my life. Now I ask you, does that happen in half an hour? Does that happen in one day, one week, one month, one year? Well, I would not like to tell you how many years ago it is that I took the Bible in my hand, but



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all through these years of my life this spiritual journey has been taking place, and I am not at the end of the journey yet. I have a long way to go for all that is in this book to be made true in my experience.

#### THE JOURNEY FROM THE OBJECTIVE TO THE INWARD

That is how it was with the ark in Israel. There was the ark, a material thing. The people knew that it was there as a definite object. They knew what it was made of and what was in it, and they could see it being carried on the journeys in front of them, but what was the real history of that ark? It was not just the history of the movement of an objective thing. God was making them know that that ark was a power in their lives. God was saying something to them through the ark, from place to place and from time to time, and through all their difficult experiences they were learning something about the meaning of that ark. They were learning that what was true of the ark in itself had got to be made true in their own lives, and that was never accomplished by preaching about the ark. Neither Moses, nor Aaron, nor the priests just gave them daily expositions on the ark. It was only as they came into situations that they learned by experience the meaning of that ark. Experience is the only school in which we truly learn.

I expect the experience of many of you has been similar to my own. You see, for some years at the beginning of my ministry I was occupied with Bible teaching. I took all the books of the Bible, analysed them, and put the outline on a blackboard. By that method I got to know what was written in the Bible. Well, of course, that is of some value, for it is a good thing to know what is in the Bible, but after some years of doing that kind of work, God took me personally in hand and through deep, deep experience He brought me to know the *meaning* of the Bible. Well, I could tell you that the Gospel by John has mainly to do with life, and I took my coloured pencil and put a coloured line under every occurrence of the word 'life'. This matter of eternal life was a wonderful thing—in the Gospel by John. Then the Lord began to work in my life in such a way that the only thing I needed was divine life. Spiritually I came into a situation of death. In my ministry I came into a situation of death, and physically, too, and it was then that this whole question of life became a very serious matter for me. My whole future, spiritually, physically, and in ministry, depended upon whether God gave me new spiritual life. And through that deep experience the Gospel by John was no longer in a book. It got

inside me. Divine life moved from the position of teaching in the Bible to become a reality in myself. If that were not true I should not be talking to you now.

And so I could go on. I could have given quite a good analysis and outline of the Letter to the Ephesians, and could tell you on a blackboard all that that Letter has to say. It is the great Letter about the Church as the Body of Christ. Well, I thought I knew all about that. And then God took me in hand, and through a very deep experience He brought me to see the real heavenly nature of the Body of Christ, and all this other idea of the Church seemed to me to be like nonsense. Putting up buildings and calling them 'The Church'; going to services and saying 'I am going to Church'. That whole system became empty. I had come to see that the Church is, after all, only an earthly expression of the heavenly Lord Jesus.

Now, I did not start out to speak about the Church, but I am just emphasising one thing: We only come into spiritual reality through spiritual experience, and it is in experiences that we come to *know* what Christ is.

That was the history of the ark in Israel. It was not only going from Mount Sinai to the next place . . . to the next place . . . and so on, to the Land. It was going more and more from the objective into the very life of the people as a power, and we are going to see, as we go on this journey of the ark, that when the people put those two things apart—that is, when the ark was only something objective and separated from spiritual reality—then they got into trouble. There were times when Israel used the ark only as a superstition. They thought that if they took the ark into battle against the Philistines, then it would work like magic for them, but it did not do so—the Philistines captured the ark and Israel were defeated. You see, they had separated between the ark as an object and the ark as a spiritual reality.

But I have gone a long way ahead. Our great lesson for now is that the work of the Holy Spirit is to make true in us what is true in Christ, and things will go all wrong in our lives if we separate those two things. It is therefore most important that we really understand the spiritual nature of the ark, or the spiritual nature of Jesus Christ. We are dealing with the true testimony of Jesus in the Church, in the people of God, and for the present I will just put my finger upon one thing.

#### BY REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

In the beginning the ark was made as the result of revelation and inspiration. In other words, God

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

allowed no man to think of this, and to make it according to his own ideas. The ark was the first thing in all that belonged to the tabernacle, and therefore, right at the beginning, this thing had to come from God Himself. This is not man's idea. God did not say: 'I just want you to make Me a box and you can make it of whatever materials you like. You can choose just what size it is, and you can decide what shall be in it.' God never did anything like that. He did not leave one *thought* about this to man. In a very meticulous and particular way He revealed what this ark was to be made of, its shape, its size, and everything to do with it, and, having given the pattern, He divinely inspired the men who made it. It says that the Spirit of God came upon Bezalel and Oholiab, and it was made by revelation from heaven and by inspiration of God. The testimony of Jesus is *not* something that man makes. Man has nothing to do with this in the first place. It comes by revelation and inspiration from heaven.

Do you know that in Christianity there are a number of different kinds of arks? Do you understand what I mean? Man's interpretation of Jesus Christ, man's ideas of what to preach, and man's conception of the Church. Nearly all the hundreds of different bodies of the Lord's people have a differently shaped ark. You see, the Baptists say: 'It must be like this', the Methodists say: 'It must be like *this*', and the Lutherans say: 'No, it must be like *this*.' There are hundreds of different arks in Christianity. No, God never, never meant that. We shall only come to oneness, to unity, as we have it straight from God, that is, as the Holy Spirit Himself reveals Christ in our hearts.

There was no greater denominationalist or sectarian in this world than Saul of Tarsus. Indeed, he was a bigoted sectarian. He had no room for any other denomination, and so strong was his sectarianism that he would persecute to the death anyone who did not agree with him. What a mighty miracle it was that *that* man became the Apostle to the Gentiles! That *that* man could say: 'Now the Church is not just a Jewish Church, but whether it be Jew or Gentile, whether it be barbarian, Scythian, bondman or freeman, in Christ Jesus we are all one man!' I say, what a mighty miracle! What brought

that miracle about? Only one thing that he says explains it: "It was the good pleasure of God . . . to reveal his Son in me" (Galatians i. 15, 16). He no longer spoke of 'Jesus of Nazareth, that false prophet', or 'those heretics called Christians'. He would say: 'I have seen Jesus. I have seen God's Son, and that has worked the miracle', and he could speak of all those who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity as being 'my brethren'.

I am just saying that, when this spiritual journey takes place, the movement from the objective, even Jesus, to the inward Son of God, everything changes. Man cannot make that! He may have all his committees and his conferences on Christian unity. He may get all his own ideas about Jesus Christ, but in the end it gets nowhere. The true testimony of Jesus is not of man, nor of this world. It is by the Holy Spirit revealed in our hearts.

## FROM CREED TO REALITY

If I said to you: 'Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?', I am sure that most of you would say: 'Yes, certainly I believe in the Holy Spirit.' If any of you belong to the State Church, every time you go you recite the Creed and say: 'I believe in the Holy Ghost.' But whether you belong to the State Church or not, you believe in the Holy Spirit. But, really, do you? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit objectively or subjectively? Do you realize that the very coming of the Holy Spirit was to make Christ, in all that He is, real inside us? Jesus said: "He shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak . . . he shall take of mine and declare it unto you" (John xvi. 13, 14). The Holy Spirit shall cause you to take this spiritual journey from the objective to the subjective. What a wonderful inheritance we have in the Holy Spirit!

May the Lord show us the meaning of this spiritual pilgrimage! It is going to be a longer or a shorter journey according to the openness of our hearts. Israel could have got into the Land in eleven days, but it took them forty years, and that was because their hearts were not wholly over for the Lord. We shall come on to that again later.

(To be continued)

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## THE VOICES OF THE PROPHETS (IX)

*"They knew not . . . the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath"* (Acts xiii. 27).THE VOICE OF ISAIAH (*continued*)*"And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah . . ."*  
(Matthew xiii. 14).

IT is very impressive that the Prophet Isaiah is quoted so many times in the New Testament. Over fifty-five times is Isaiah cited. Perhaps still more impressive is the fact that so many of these quotations are related to Israel's antagonism to God's messengers, and particularly to His Son, Jesus Christ. In the Gospels, where Isaiah is quoted so often, there are only two exceptions to this fact.

If this Prophet alone has such a very large place in the New Testament, which is the record of Christ; in other words, if there was so much Christ background to this Prophet, how *very* true it must have been that the Lord said so early to this Prophet as to his ministry:

"Tell this people, Hear ye indeed (*marg. continually*), but understand not; and see ye indeed (*marg. continually*), but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart . . ." (Isaiah vi. 9, 10).

"Read every sabbath," said Paul, but not perceived, not understood.

We, who now have the cumulative story, are amazed and cry: 'O, can it possibly be that Jesus, the Son of God, could be so imminent, both in prophetic ministry and His own personal presence, speaking, living, suffering, working, for so many years, and people be in close approximation without really perceiving and understanding?'

Yes, it is all too possible that, after years of hearing and being in touch, the final verdict should be: 'After *all*, they have not seen, the root of the matter is not in them, and they can persecute and discard without a pang.' There is no Prophet who brings Christ more into view than Isaiah. Probably no Prophet has suffered more at the hands of Biblical criticism. It is always significant that where Christ is brought most to view, there the opposition of every kind is fullest and fiercest. The work of discrediting will be found to reach its strongest when and where the glorifying of Christ is most

present. We have heard it said in our own time: 'We don't want prophetic ministry; we want simple preaching!'

Tradition has it that the Prophet Isaiah was sawn asunder, and that the reference in Hebrews xi. 37 is to him. If this is true, it alone would indicate how vehement is the hatred of the exaltation of Jesus. A focal point of this rejection is the pre-incarnate Divine sonship of Jesus Christ. One of the most remarkable statements in the New Testament relates to this. Quoting Isaiah vi. 10, John says: "These things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory; and he spake of him" (John xii. 41). This means that "The Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple . . . the Lord of hosts . . . the King, the Lord of hosts" is identified by John with Jesus. It is an astounding statement, and makes the matter of spiritual perception and understanding quite an acute one. Nevertheless, John understood it, and it is a part of that tremendous difference between the old Israel and the new spiritual Israel. The blindness of the former, due to pride, prejudice, and jealousy, has meant for them this closed heaven and has cost them dearly.

Hearing the *voices* of the Prophets, and not only the words, is thus no less a matter than one of life or death, salvation or condemnation. We repeat what we have said before: the New Testament, Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation, is built very largely upon this faculty of the new creation of 'having an ear to hear, and hearing'. It is a faculty, like that of seeing, which—through new birth—gives capacity for knowing *meanings*, and not only theories or "the letter of the word". It is a simple fundamental of the Christian life; hence it stood right at the inception of things relating to the Kingdom, as in the interview of Nicodemus—the scholar and teacher—with Jesus. New birth means a new entity with new faculties.

Israel, as a nation, not believing and being born again, was doubly deaf by a judgment. This is the first thing that Isaiah says and 'voices' in relation to the Son of God. We have heard, read and said much about Isaiah vi, the Throne and the Lord upon it; the Train and the Temple; the Seraphim and their thrice Holy chant. Also the cry of woe from the Prophet, and his call and response to

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God's appeal. But we have learned little of the terrible issue of his commission. We know that Isaiah was read in the synagogues of Israel, for at Nazareth the ruler of the synagogue handed that Prophet to Jesus to read publicly. The Ethiopian eunuch of Acts viii had been to Jerusalem and probably secured from the Temple or synagogue a copy of Isaiah's prophecies and was reading it in his chariot. He confessed his blindness as to its meaning, and confessing in humility, his blindness was removed. "He went on his way rejoicing," while Israel—who had the same scrolls—went on their way to perdition. It is not what we have, but what we know that we have, and whether what we have changes our lives, that matters.

The Holy Spirit, who inspired the Prophets (I Peter i. 11), made the Apostles and believers understand that it was as the *Spirit of Christ* in them (the Prophets) that they wrote of Him. Thus they saw Jesus by the Holy Spirit where those who had not the Spirit were blind. This is not only a statement; it is a test.

Prophetic ministry, which is just the proclamation

and presentation of God's mind, always has a threefold meaning:

(1) It brings that presentation of the mind of God into the presence of men.

(2) It challenges to the humble obedience of faith, with which is offered the new capacity and faculty of spiritual understanding.

(3) It determines destiny according to—not the hearing of the words, but—"the hearing of faith", and the consequent walking according to 'knowledge', or otherwise.

The serious and solemn question must be honestly and sincerely faced: 'How much of all that I have heard has really changed and shaped my life?' 'Is it so much teaching, doctrine, theory, or is it the truth of God?'

The right answer will be the ground of life and salvation.

The wrong answer will be condemnation and judgment.

The voices of the Prophets have a stern as well as a comforting note. This is peculiarly true of the voice of Isaiah.

(To be continued)

## "WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY APPEARANCE"

Reading: Numbers iv. 1-20; vii. 6-9; x. 11-21.

THE onward march through the wilderness of the people of God must have been an imposing spectacle. Led, perhaps, by a band of priests with their silver trumpets, the first three tribes, under Judah's standard, formed the vanguard. They were a great and wealthy people, whose passing would be an impressive sight to the spectator. There was still more to follow, for after them came the eldest family of the Levites, bearing the curtains and coverings of the Tabernacle. The Gershonites had two ox carts, laden high with rich materials, whose blue and scarlet and fine embroidery would rejoice the eye and give colour to the cavalcade. These were the important people, surely, for they had the high privilege of bearing the fabric of the House of God. Next after them came the sons of Merari, who shared in the Levitical ministry. Their four wagons bare the boards and bars, while possibly some of the lesser articles, the sockets and the tent pins, were carried by hand. What brilliant gold and silver were here, and what flashing brass! Who would not

envy the Levites as they triumphantly bore along the glorious burdens of the Lord's House! Next came Reuben's standard with three more tribes, thousands upon thousands in bright procession. A pause, and then there followed a band of men whose appearance was striking only in its sombre contrast with what had gone before. Humbly marching along on foot, they carried drab bundles which were completely covered by skins. The casual spectator might have ignored them as being of very little worth, especially in comparison with those who had gone before. They had no wagons, no bright colours, and no glittering silver and brass. They just plodded along in rough simplicity, bowed under their skin-covered burdens. These, the world would say, are insignificant nonentities who come on behind; they are to be pitied, even if not to be despised. But how wrong the world is in spiritual matters! In appearance the Kohathites were mean, but in fact they were the Lord's most honoured servants, for they bare the burdens of the sanctuary.

It was with regard to service that Paul wrote: "We walk by faith, not by appearance" (II Corinthians v. 7). Although such a walk is characteristic

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of all spiritual life, the apostle applied it particularly to the matter of ministry in II Corinthians. The onward progress of the people of God depends on the devoted ministry of spiritual Kohathites who are willing to walk by faith rather than by what they see.

## NO DIVIDED HEART

Such a faith attitude is necessary for all holy service. In measure it was true of all the Levites. Their position was clearly defined: they had to leave their own affairs and concerns in order to devote themselves entirely to bearing the burdens of the Lord. The Israelites in general were able to give their undivided attention to their own families and goods as they travelled along, while the Levites, who also had their personal possessions and cares like the rest, cared only for the affairs of the Lord. They, too, were human and must have felt concern for their own property and loved ones, yet such were the demands of their holy office that personal interests had to be discarded so that they might be free to serve the Lord. So far as private matters were concerned they had to walk by faith, leaving everything that was their own that they might attend unhindered to the affairs of the Lord. This also must be true of us who are called to be Levites in Christ. "Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew vi. 33). We cannot truly serve the Lord if we are *distracted* by personal interests and cares, even if these are related to spiritual matters. We must find a basis of rest about all that concerns ourselves, so that we may be devoted to the things of Jesus Christ. We, too, have many legitimate cares and concerns. In the present days these tend greatly to increase and multiply. Do such personal interests *obsess* our minds, *absorb* our conversations, or even preoccupy us in prayer? We must learn to cast our burdens upon the Lord.

## NO EARTHLY GLORY

But the need for faith becomes far more evident in the case of the Kohathites, for they never saw the true nature of the burdens which they bore. Their burdens were screened from their gaze, not only by the coverings of blue or scarlet, but by the outer wrappings of sealskin. They could not see the golden furniture of the sanctuary; with the exception of the Ark, they could not even see the heavenly blue; they only saw the shapeless burdens of rough skin. Had they walked by appearances they would

not have been able to continue carrying their rough-looking loads mile after weary mile. They would have felt that it was not worth while. It would have seemed so onerous and so unnecessary that they would have refused to lend their shoulders to the task. We may object that, of course, while they could not see the candlestick and the golden altar and the rest, they knew that they were there. That is true, in theory; but it is also the case that theoretically we know the heavenly nature and the preciousness to God of the burdens we bear. Nevertheless we often despise them because of their harsh exterior, feeling that they are unnecessary and without value to Christ. We are called upon to shoulder that which seems to have neither meaning nor value, but only weight; and so we are tempted to despair. How drab and repulsive our burdens seem! We cannot see the meaning of our suffering, or the value to God of our service. Everything is so different from our natural expectations of what it means to serve the Lord. Let us remember that the most holy service was rendered by those who appeared to count for nothing. Only faith could pierce the sealskin, reminding the Kohathites of the extreme preciousness to God of that which they bore. Only faith saw the glory of Christ, with the scarlet of His costly sufferings and the blue of His heavenly beauty, beneath the rude coverings. Only faith! The natural eye can never perceive the true value to God of the burdens of the sanctuary.

## NO HUMAN CHOICE

A further distinction in the service of the Kohathites was that each burden was specifically assigned by Aaron and his sons. There is a realm of service in which we can "take up" that which we like, and enjoy ourselves in whatever particular aspect of ministry appeals to us. It was not so with the Kohathites. All the burdens were prepared and covered before ever they appeared, and then the high priest appointed each man to his burden. They were not consulted; they were not allowed to choose; it is possible that they were not even told what they were to carry. The high priest showed to each man his burden, shapeless and harsh as it might seem, and required him to take it up in faith. There was no place for questioning. The servants of the Lord put their shoulders to the burdens, and set forth in the obedience of faith. And in so doing they rendered the highest service. They carried that which spoke most of Christ. They made the whole people of God indebted to them. Dear fellow-believer, may it not be that your problems and complaints would cease if you could thus walk by

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faith? You are being honoured by being treated as a son of Kohath. Our great High Priest appoints to you some burden which seems repulsive and without any spiritual import. You see no glory in it; nothing of gold or heavenly blue. It is harsh. It is, you think, more than flesh and blood can bear. That is the sealskin exterior. The High Priest has seen what is underneath the skin, though you never have, and He knows how infinitely precious the burden really is. Can you not trust Him, walking by faith, instead of by appearances? When the day's march is ended, and the House of the Lord complete, your trying burden may be found to have contributed that which is most valuable and sacred in it.

### NO PROMINENT POSITION

The Kohathites came behind. Of course, there was a reason for their position, as there is a reason for every divine appointment, but the fact remains: they came behind. That is very galling to the flesh. They were the most privileged of the Levites, and yet they marched behind. The wagons went on before. God ordered it to be so. The more spiritual our position the more are we called to take the place behind, while the impressive forms of service gain the prominence. In quite another allusion, but on the same principle Paul wrote: "For, I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all" (1 Corinthians iv. 9). There are plenty who will go on before, and enjoy a prominent position. There are many "wagons" in Christian service, and there is not a little brilliance and colour. There is, however, a dearth of those who are willing to bear heavy and ugly burdens, and bearing them, to come on behind. So many walk by appearance: so few are ready to walk by faith. The people of God are arrested in their progress for lack of Kohathites, who bear the burdens of the sanctuary on conse-

crated shoulders, and are willing to come humbly on behind.

### BARNABAS THE LEVITE

I think, perhaps, that it was in this last respect that Barnabas failed. He is the only Levite mentioned by name in the New Testament, and he exhibited the true features of his tribe. Like the Levites, he laid aside all personal interests for the Lord's sake (Acts iv. 36-37). Like them, he realised that divine interests are furthered not by machinery, but by a man (Acts xi. 25-26). Like the Kohathites he had his own specific task appointed to him by the great High Priest (Acts xiii. 2). But as time went on he seemed to find it irksome to lose his prominence, and to come humbly on behind another. He had sponsored Saul at his beginnings; he had brought him to Antioch; and he had been the first of that band of ministers there, while Saul was the last. At first it was "Barnabas and Paul", then later the order was sometimes varied until finally Paul clearly took the lead with Barnabas falling into second place. It all culminated in a bitter quarrel, when Barnabas cast off Paul's yoke and went away to serve the Lord on his own. In the absence of revelation we hesitate to give an opinion, but it does seem that Barnabas was to blame. Paul was clearly the elect apostle to the Gentiles, and his position was manifestly supported by the church at Antioch. Is it possible that Barnabas, "a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith", could stumble at having to give place to another? It is only too possible. May the Lord enable us, His spiritual Kohathites, to bear even this for His sake, being content in humble faith to be those who come on behind. It is only thus that the most precious burdens of the sanctuary are borne.

H. F.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### HIDDEN HANDICAP

**T**HE *Queen Mary* had had a nice long rest. The great liner usually leads a very busy life, hurrying backwards and forwards across the Atlantic, but owing to the seamen's strike she had been lying idle for weeks. As we have said, hers had been a nice long rest.

She was one of those transatlantic liners which

travel to and fro, carrying thousands and thousands of passengers. Some of these are busy people who need to get to some other part of the world on their business. Some are serious travellers who wish to visit families or friends and want to arrive as soon as possible. Others are just pleasure seekers, happy to enjoy all the advantages of life aboard a big ship

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and not particularly anxious to arrive. It was the *Queen Mary's* privilege to carry and care for many of these, and normally she only stopped when she herself needed attention or repairs. This time, though, it was different. For six weeks she had been out of use, just lying idly at anchor, doing nothing and going nowhere.

When the strike was over it did not take long to prepare the liner to receive her passengers, who found everything ready for their journey. The crew seemed to be glad to be back on duty, and had the ship spick and span, ready to set out once again on the trip to New York.

They had hardly got out to sea when it became clear that something was wrong. The whole ship began to vibrate in a most uncomfortable way. Those who were more experienced gave it as their opinion that the ship was going much faster than usual and that the vibration was caused by the extra strain being put on its great engines. It turned out, however, that far from going faster they were in fact not going so fast as usual and almost certain to be late at their destination. Yet the sea was not rough, nor was the wind causing difficulties. What could the trouble be?

Then they were told. It was all being caused by barnacles which had encrusted the liner's hull. A barnacle is just a kind of shell-fish which attaches itself to underwater objects. One barnacle could not delay the smallest boat, but when there are thousands of them they can make a lot of difference. In the case of the *Queen Mary* there was such a fantastic number that they actually added hundreds of tons to the great ship's weight, so slowing its speed and forcing it to put such extra demands on its engines that it shuddered with the strain.

What had given the barnacles their opportunity? It was, of course, that the *Queen Mary* had been lying idle. She was made to keep moving, and so long as she did that the barnacles could not stick to her. It was only when she came to a halt that she became a victim of the heavy handicap of their weight.

It was a hidden weight. When she took on her passengers they could not see it. When the engineers confirmed that the engines were in good condition they could not see it. As the captain stood on his bridge and looked around he could not see it. All

the trouble was underneath and it was out of sight. But it was very real. Ask the stewards who had to deal with the complaints of the passengers. Ask the passengers themselves who had to bear the discomfort. Ask the captain who tried so hard not to be late in his arrival on the other side. Yes, the weight was a very real one, and it was a great handicap.

Christians, like ships, are meant to be always active. All kinds of perils come to an idle Christian. Take the matter of Bible reading. The well-known chorus which reminds us that "the best book to read is the Bible" goes on to say:

"If you read it every day,  
It will help you on your way . . ."

which is very true. But if you stop reading it? Ah, that is when the spiritual barnacles collect. You may seem just the same person outwardly, but underneath, in the hidden part of your life, all sorts of weights accumulate to spoil your progress and usefulness. Perhaps we might add another verse to the chorus about "the best book" by saying:

"If you leave the Book unread,  
Don't expect to go ahead! . . ."

It is important to beware of idleness in our Bible reading. The spiritual barnacles soon collect. The same is true of prayer, of public worship and of witness. If we neglect these we shall soon be weighted down by sin. We are told that Sodom's sin was due to "abundance of idleness . . ." (Ezekiel xvi. 49—AV).

How did the *Queen Mary* shake off her barnacles? She didn't! She could not get free by just pushing on and hoping for things to get better. No amount of effort or vibration could get rid of her trouble. The only thing is for her to stop so that workmen can get underneath her and clear away the barnacles. If our progress is being hindered by spiritual barnacles we too must stop and ask the Lord in His mercy to set us free. How good it is to know that He is ready to do this for us! He is only waiting for us to pray to Him in the psalmist's words: "Clear thou me from hidden faults" (Psalm xix. 12). But there must be no more idleness!

H. F.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PERSON AND  
MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PETER (IV)

WE proceed to a further small fragment in this great matter which has been opened to us concerning the change from the old Israel to a new Israel, which was declared by the Lord Jesus Himself when He said to the leaders and representatives of the old Israel: "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). This actually has taken place. As the last many centuries of history have made perfectly evident, the Kingdom of God has been taken away from that former Israel, and they are without it all through this present dispensation. It has been transferred to a new Israel—"a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof".

We have been seeing how Peter is the bridge between the two Israels, standing in the gap between the old and the new, and how by him the old passes and the new is established, both in his own person, and what was done in him by the Holy Spirit, and in his ministry. The fruits of a nation, of the kingdom of the new Israel, are manifested, and we have been looking at some of the fruits as seen in and through the life and the ministry of this first of the twelve, the Apostle Peter.

If you have any doubt whatever about the truth of this, you only have to look at his first Letter again. We have said a lot of things, which are true, but there is that which gathers it all up and presents it to us concretely. You will find it in his first Letter, chapter ii, verses 4-10:

*"Unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame. For you therefore which believe is the preciousness: but for such as disbelieve, The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner; and, A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; for they stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."*

(Note in verse 9: "But ye . . ." There is the transition to the new.)

That section does not leave us in any doubt that the old has been transferred to the new, but in a different realm and with a different nature. Peter, who had all the tradition of the former Israel, has come to see that now all that was there in a temporal way has been passed over to a spiritual realm. Now all is of a spiritual, and not of a temporal, character.

There are many things here that would be helpful for us to dwell upon. We could take up this whole paragraph bit by bit, for there is so much wealth in it. I am not intending to do that, but I want to point out one thing in that connection before passing on to the thing which I feel is the Lord's word for this time.

## THE LOCATION OF THE NEW ISRAEL

Here the Apostle says: "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Do you notice that is all in the singular? "*An* elect race, *a* holy nation, *a* royal priesthood."

In the old dispensation that was all concentrated in a place on this earth: in the temple at Jerusalem. That Israel had its focal point, its unity, in that geographical centre. The elect race was represented, gathered into, Jerusalem, and its focus was there. The holy nation was synonymous with Jerusalem, whither the tribes went up. The royal priesthood was centred in Jerusalem. That was where Israel went to see the priesthood, for it functioned in the city of the great king. They were 'a people for God's own possession': one thing, with that focal point in the nations.

Now, how does Peter begin his first Letter? "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect*" . . . who are centred in Jerusalem? No, not at all! . . . "*who are the sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*"—and anywhere else you like to mention. Do you see the point? Wherever this people is there is a representation of all this. If it is anywhere in the world, dispersed amongst the nations over the earth, there it represents, or is intended to represent, all that is here about the new Israel.



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## AN ELECT RACE

If we were to dwell upon that it would take a long time, but there is one thing that we will say.

You know that the elect is something very, very precious to God, so precious that it is going to be saved (Matthew xxiv. 22). It says that at the end "there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, *if it were possible*, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew xxiv. 24—AV). Logically, of course, the elect is not going to be deceived. It is something very precious to God, wherever it is, but it is no longer something concentrated in some place on this earth, whether it be Rome, or Jerusalem, or anywhere else, but it is scattered abroad in the nations. Not only is it representative of the new Israel, but it is called upon, and expected, to function there in this capacity.

## A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

The priesthood in the new Israel is not a cult of men wearing certain kinds of robes, performing a certain ritual, and going through a certain performance of religion. There are no outward robes on the royal priests in the new Israel. You, dear friends, if you are in this, are as much a priest as ever there was a priest in the Israel of old, and your function as such, therefore, is to "offer up spiritual sacrifices", to be a sacrificing priest in union with the King. A royal priesthood is a priesthood of kingship, of Divine rule, authority, majesty, and united with the Throne, to function as such.

## A HOLY NATION

Do you remember what we have said about holiness? 'Holy' in the Bible means being completely separated from all that is not God to all and only what is God, being separated unto God. 'Holy' and 'sanctified' are the same word, with the same meaning—completely God's, with every other link severed. God's holy people are a holy nation among the nations, but different from the nations, a holy nation in the world, but different therefrom. Peter says: "You are not now a temple made with hands, built with stone, after the old order, but you are a spiritual house, wherever you are scattered, and God only sees one. However so many parts there may be, with very many miles between, God only sees one spiritual house, composed of spiritual stones. Jesus Christ is not so many corner stones, but one corner stone of the whole."

There is here another one of these remarkable

allusions to Peter's former life in the days of Christ's flesh, and it is more than interesting. I sometimes feel that these allusions almost touch a vein of humour as Peter in his mentality is picking it all up and transferring it. He says here about this new spiritual house that is being built in this dispensation, that this is the fulfilment of the Old Testament statement: "I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious . . .", and then he goes on: "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; for they stumble at the word."

"Peter, I am going up to Jerusalem, and there I am going to be delivered into the hands of wicked men. They will crucify Me . . ." "No, Lord, *never!* This shall never come to Thee!" "Get thee behind me, Satan: *thou art a stumblingblock unto me.*" "They stumble at the word." This is wrought into the very fibre of Peter's spiritual life. How the word of the Cross was a stumblingblock to Peter! What Paul said about the Jews was true of him: "The word of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness . . . we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumblingblock" (I Corinthians i. 18, 23). It was an offence to them, and the word 'offence' is, as you know, the same word in the original as 'stumblingblock'. The Greek word is 'scandal', 'offence' or 'stumblingblock'. Peter fell headlong when the Lord Jesus spoke of the Cross, and He said: "You are an offence, a stumblingblock. You are a scandal to Me. Get thee behind Me!" Ah, Peter has pulled over here, and to the unbelieving people he says: "This whole new spiritual house, and all to do with it, is not believed and therefore you stumble at the word. You go headlong over this. It is a rock of offence. The word of the Cross is an offence. But to you who believe is the preciousness." That is the difference between the old and the new.

Well, I have said that we could see so much more about this change from the old to the new—the new house, the new sacrifices—but I want to give the short remaining space to one special thing in this Letter.

## THE RETURN OF GRACE

First, we note how Peter himself represents this new Israel in the transition, and the tremendous thing that had to be done to make that transition from the one to the other. We have been seeing what a transition it was in Peter's case. We have really only been glimpsing it, but it was a tremendous thing that happened in this man! Look again at the former Peter, the Simon Peter before what the Lord Jesus referred to as his conversion—"when once thou hast turned again" (Luke xxii. 32)—and

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remember the fulness of selfhood, and his assertiveness. If anyone is going to speak first, it will be Peter, and if anyone is going to speak loudest, it will be Peter. If anyone is going to take the floor before anyone else, it will be Peter. He was asserting himself all the time. "Thou shalt never wash my feet" (John xiii. 8), and then, seeing that there is a possibility of losing something and that by changing his attitude he would get something more: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." . . . 'I will have all that I can get.'

You see this strength of self-assertiveness, his self-sufficiency all the time: 'I will never forsake Thee. Though all men forsake Thee, I will never do so. I will go even unto death with Thee.' Such self-sufficiency: and we could enlarge upon this side of the man—how full he was in himself! Then see this man being undone, really taken to pieces and emptied. It was a terrific thing! You would hardly believe that in so short a time after making these assertions, these bold, self-confident assertions, this man should be found totally unable to carry out what he said he would do. He was stripped, emptied of it all, undone; and the last word of that scene is: "And he went out, and wept bitterly." He was broken, shattered, desolated and emptied. But that was necessary for this passage through into the new realm, this new Israel, this new spiritual position. And so I say Peter himself is a representative of the kind of thing that has to be done to make the transition from one Israel to the other.

With you and with me it may not all happen between the morning and the evening, and it may not ever go like that in one day, but, believe me, the principle holds good. Dear friends, it is going to be just in the measure in which you and I are emptied of ourselves that we know the meaning, the power, the glory and the preciousness of the new Israel and of the Lord Jesus. That is why the Lord takes pains to empty us. It may be spread over many years. Indeed I think that when it starts, and we do not so rebel that we bind the Lord's hands so that He cannot go on, it goes on until the end of our lives. On the one side making us say 'NO!' to our own weakness and our own foolishness after all, to our own emptiness and undone state. That is on the negative side, but on the positive: our utter dependence upon the Lord, so that if it were not for the Lord the situation would be hopeless. That is Peter, representing this new thing that has come in.

That leads me to the thing that I want particularly to emphasize at this time, in the light of what I have just been saying, and in that setting—the undoing of this man.

What is Peter's characteristic word in this Letter? I have no doubt that Bible students would give it to me at once! It is the word 'grace'. It does not take more than about ten minutes to read this Letter, and when you have done so you have read the word 'grace' twelve times. Unfortunately it is not always translated as 'grace'. I do not know why the translators changed the same word into another English word. Twice they have translated this same word into 'acceptable', but, including those two occasions where the original word is still the same, the Apostle uses the word 'grace' twelve times in this very short Letter.

You know how he begins his greeting: "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: *Grace to you and peace be multiplied*" (I Peter i. 2).

Then in verse 10: "Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the *grace that should come unto you.*" The prophets looked forward to what we have, and there it is: the grace purposed for this new Israel. It is the inheritance of this new Israel, and the prophets prophesied about it long before.

We turn to chapter ii, and here we come upon the other unfortunate translation, but in putting it right we have something very rich:

"For this is *acceptable*, if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is *acceptable* with God" (verses 19, 20).

Now put it right:

"For this is *grace*, if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is *grace* with God" (RV margin).

You will see at once that Peter uses the word 'grace' in an altogether different way from Paul. Paul uses this word tremendously; indeed, it is almost a characteristic word of his, but his use of it is always 'God's grace toward us'. We call it 'unmerited favour', justifying us, who are not just at all. "The riches of his grace, which he made to abound toward us" (Ephesians i. 7, 8).

Peter has a different angle on this matter. Of course, he would agree with Paul, for this whole experience of his is based upon God's favour toward him. Just think of the grace of God toward this man! But what is he saying? 'Out of the grace which has been so marvellously shown in my case,

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I have to show grace from myself outwardly in this world of difficulty and of suffering. That grace has to have a reaction toward people and toward things. That grace which God has shown to me I have got to show now when I am under stress, trial and difficulty, buffeted for being right and doing the right thing, and unjustly accused and made to suffer. There must be no retaliation. I must endure patiently.' That is the return of grace—the grace of God in us as a return action, in order to 'show forth the excellencies of Him'.

That is a wonderful way of using the word 'grace'! But it is very practical—Peter is very practical. He says: 'Look here, you are being treated unfairly, unjustly, and you do not really merit what you are having to put up with. It is not because of wrong in you. You can be bitter, rebellious, resentful, if you like. You can give as good as you get. You can retaliate.' But Peter says that is a breakdown of grace. If, when things are like that, you take it patiently, then that is grace. You see, this word 'acceptable' is quite a good word: "acceptable with God". The meaning is there, but it is not so apparent, is it, as when it is translated correctly? 'This is grace with God: suffering wrongfully and taking it patiently.'

Now we are all put on the spot over this! This human nature of ours is not like that! Mine is not, at any rate. Is yours? Have you got any fighting nature? Have you any self-strength? Have you any soul strength? Do you say: 'I am not going to take that lying down'? Well, that is just what is here. Grace is: Taking it lying down and letting them go on.

This is a new order of things, is it not? So different from the old Israel! It is a new realm: grace in its reactions to persecutions, misrepresentations, slanders and everything that is unfair and untrue, keeping your tongue still, your lips closed and refusing to vindicate yourself. This is grace with God.

In the last chapter I mentioned one other thing and I am not going to return to it in detail—the relationship between husbands and wives and wives and husbands when the situation is difficult because either may be having to put up with something difficult from the other. The Apostle, as you remember, said (in chapter iii. 7) that the basis of that relationship is that they are 'fellow-heirs of the *grace of life*'. If they are true, both of them being born again, they have a common ground—Divine life, the grace of life, and they must always seek to react to one another upon the common ground of what is of the Lord in each other. It is not always easy, but it is a very different kind of life from the old realm.

We just mention that, and pass on into chapter iv. 10: "Good stewards of the *manifold grace of God*". Here we are again on very practical ground. The Lord has given you a gift of some kind. It may be a gift of a temporal kind, such as means, or a gift of influence, or it may be that you have a spiritual gift of some kind. Whatever it is, you have, by the grace of God, some resource, something in your hand, something that you possess. It is something that the Lord has given you, and He has given it to you to use. Whatever it is, it is a stewardship that has been committed to you, and that stewardship has to be exercised upon the principle of grace. Grace does not mean keeping to yourself what you have, and withholding from others what you could give. It does not mean letting others suffer loss when you could do something to meet their need, whatever it may be, spiritual or temporal. Grace in us demands that we do all that we can to see that others are ministered to. That is grace—"as good stewards of the many-sided grace of God", which just means that to one the grace of God has given this, and to another that. It is not the same to everyone, but everyone in this new Israel has something to give.

I could take you back to the Old Testament and illustrate that. What about the building of the tabernacle? Everyone had to give something—gold, silver, wood, fabric. Everyone had something to contribute, and they were called upon to minister what they had. Now we have passed over into this new spiritual Israel, and what have we got that others would benefit by? It is a violation of the principle of grace to keep it to ourselves and not let others have it. Well, perhaps that is too self-evident to need emphasizing, but you see that Peter uses the word 'grace' in this connection, meaning that every member of the spiritual Israel should be a contributing member in some way or other, and not just a receiving one. There are far too many passengers in the Church, far too many who just sit with open mouths, taking it all in, and never giving anything. I hope that does not apply to anyone here. Grace means that we are a giving people. We have something to give, and we are giving it, and we *ought* to have something to give.

"Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, *but giveth grace to the humble*" (v. 5). I like this very much! You would miss it very largely, except for the obvious surface statements and words, unless you knew exactly what lies behind this in the original language, and then you would see at once

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

what Peter is talking about. Supposing I give it to you: "All of you gird on the apron of humility to serve one another." Now where are you? You are back in John xiii, where Jesus laid aside His robe and put on the apron of the servant—girded Himself with the apron of the servant. Peter has not forgotten that! "Now all of you put on the apron of the servant to serve one another; for God resisteth the proud." Peter was very, very near to that at that time: "Never wash my feet!" Why not? Peter was too proud. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." Grace is donning the servant's apron to serve one another. Need we say anything more about that? This is the true grace of God.

"And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever" (v. 10, 11).

Grace triumphant through suffering. Peter is at the end of the Letter now and is only going to have one more use of this word. But he has said a lot in this Letter about suffering—the sufferings of Christ being shared by the members of this new Israel. . . . "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, as though a strange thing happened unto you" (iv. 12). Yes, he has a lot to say about sufferings, and they were sufferings! You do not perhaps know that when he wrote this Letter the great persecution under Nero had broken out. Paul was beheaded, and how long there was between that and Peter being crucified we do not know, but he remembered and mentioned it here, in II Peter i. 14, that he was to put off his tabernacle even as the Lord had shown him. And where did the Lord show him that? In John xxi. 18: "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. Now this he spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God." Although it is not recorded in the New Testament, the tradition is

quite strong that Peter was crucified. The difference between Paul's death and Peter's was this: the Romans could not crucify a Roman citizen, and Paul was a Roman citizen, so he could not be crucified. But anyone of another nation could be crucified, so Peter was crucified and Paul was beheaded.

So now it was the time of suffering. Paul meets the ultimate of that suffering and Peter is about to meet it. It was a time when all the Christians everywhere were being terribly persecuted, but here Peter says: "Through the suffering of this little while there will be grace sufficient to make us triumphant." Grace triumphant in suffering! I would say that we are not always overwhelmingly conscious of that triumphant grace, but what I could say is this: After a fairly long life, and knowing a little bit about this, the marvel of the triumph is that we are still found going on with the Lord, when a hundred times, if it had been left to us, we could have gone out. It is a terrible thing to say, but it is possible to come to such a place that you would wash your hands of Christianity altogether when you come to know the real state of things in the realm of Christendom. Well, that is a shocking thing to say—but for the grace of God where would we be through all the sufferings? However, here it is: "After that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you."

Now, with all this about grace in this Letter, what is the final word? "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Peter iii. 18). "Grow in your patience, in your forbearance, in your being silent under provocation, in your enduring suffering, in the difficulties of your relationships—let it be growing in grace."

You will see how hurried one has had to be and how much one has had to leave out, but that is enough! I can say more in an hour than you can fulfil in a lifetime!

Let us go away and ask the Lord for *grace*, that the word which He has spoken to us shall really be, as with this man, in our very being, and that this shall be the kind of people that we are.

(Concluded)

## A NEW PUBLICATION

The new Volume Two of *The Stewardship of the Mystery* is now available and we would underline the fact that this is an entirely new publication, the outcome of a growing burden to put into writing the *essence* of that particular ministry of "The Mystery" which was committed to the Apostle Paul. It is our hope and prayer that this

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## THE DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 3. THE MAINTAINING OF THE LORD'S TESTIMONY ON THE EARTH

*Reading:* I Kings xix. 19-21  
 II Kings ii. 9-15 (1st part)  
 Acts i. 1-3  
 John xi. 44

THESE passages of Scripture, taken from the Old and the New Testaments, are a part of a revelation of the Lord's will as to the maintaining of His own testimony on this earth. The Old Testament story of Elijah and Elisha contains this truth and this principle, although it is an illustration. The New Testament passage in the Book of the Acts is no illustration: it is the actual, literal fulfilment of the illustration. Put together, you can quite clearly see that the thing they both say is this: The Lord desires to have a testimony concerning Himself maintained here in this world while He is in heaven. During the time that He is away it is His will and purpose that His testimony shall be maintained here.

That is the meaning, of course, of the spirit of Elijah resting upon Elisha when Elijah had been translated to glory. Elisha, by that anointing and endowment and clothing with the Holy Spirit, was to carry on—but even in greater fulness—and maintain the testimony of Elijah after the latter had gone to heaven.

Now you can say quite truly that the whole of the New Testament focuses upon this. Up to the time of His ascension the Lord Jesus was always pointing forward to that day. As we have seen in our earlier meetings, He was saying: "*I go away . . . if I go*" (John xvi. 7). He was always thinking in terms of that time when He would leave them, and was seeking to prepare them for that time. It was hard work for them to accept it, just as it was for Elisha to accept the departure of Elijah. He clung on to him just as long as he could! And these disciples found it exceedingly difficult to accept the fact that their Lord was going away. He had said: "*It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I go, I will send him unto you*" (John xvi. 7).

So the Lord was looking on to this time of His ascension and translation to glory, and was preparing His vessel for that time.

And then the vessel being found in place. That is a very important factor: to be found in place, prepared and on the spot when the Lord went up. Not many days afterwards the mantle of the Lord

fell upon the disciples, and He made it perfectly clear to them that the purpose of their calling was to maintain His testimony in this world while He was away. And, of course, that is the very purpose, object and vocation of the Church and of the Lord's people.

Now, that is the setting, the basis of everything. It is well for us to grasp now, immediately, the inclusive implication of that. Why are we here as the Lord's people, individually and collectively? Why have we received the Holy Spirit, as we have done—or ought to have done if we are truly committed people? For one thing, all inclusively—that the Lord may be able, by means of us, to maintain His testimony in this world while He is away, and that He will come back to find that testimony not only intact and undiminished, but enlarged, increased, expanded, deepened and strengthened. That is the answer to the question: Why are we the Lord's people? And in that sense we are just as important to the Lord as Elisha was to Elijah, and as these disciples were to the Master.

Having set the background or basis of things, there are a number of details which come out in this connection.

#### CALLED ACCORDING TO PURPOSE

Let us look at the figure, the type, the illustration, in the case of Elijah and Elisha. (We shall find the corresponding truths in the New Testament.) First of all, there was the most definite act of choosing. We read: "*So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat . . . and cast his mantle upon him.*" Here is a crisis in the life of a man, and a very definite crisis indeed; a turning-point; the end of one phase and the beginning of another. It is clear cut. And although Elisha did make that request about going and kissing his father, he knew in himself that the day of transition from one phase of things to another had come for him. The hour had broken when one order was past and another order was beginning. And when Elijah seemed to give him his liberty and discharge (and it is very interesting to note that the Lord sometimes does that, to try us out. He says: 'All right, what have I done to you? Go back.')

Elisha found he could not take it. Something had happened to him and he just could not take his liberty. He could not return to the old order of things. He went aside, slew his

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oxen, made a fire of the wood of the instruments, offered his sacrifice, gave to the people to eat, and went after Elijah. Something had happened. He knew that he was a chosen vessel. He knew that the hand of the Lord had come upon him. He knew that that mantle signified a succession to his lord here on this earth, the endowment with a heavenly vocation.

So it proved. And, dear friends, if that sounds very specific and too wonderful, I want to remind you that the New Testament teaches us that that is true of every believer. "*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians i. 4). Who is the 'us'? That is not an exclusive call according to the order of Elisha or Paul, or Peter or John. The 'us' is the inclusive 'us' of the Church into which we are baptized in one Spirit.

I could quote much more. This choice, this election, falls upon all those who come under the apprehending hand of Jesus Christ when they, like Elisha, let go, capitulate, and commit themselves. They know that from that time onward they are not their own proprietors. They are the bond-slaves of Jesus Christ. They are the captives of a great and heavenly purpose.

That is not only something stated. It is a challenge to you and to me. There should be something like that, in the nature of an experience or a crisis, a definite transition, in the life of every child of God, where that child knows that 'something has happened and I am no longer the master of my own life. I am no longer the master of my own destiny. I am no longer free to go the way that I have been going, even if it has been with twelve yoke of oxen—a very thorough-going, all-out kind of life in that world. It is finished now, however big and great it was. I am in another realm and belong to another Master. I am called with another calling. There is another vocation resting upon me.' I do not mean that you have to give up your business in this world, but over and above everything else rests this heavenly vocation, wherever you are. The point is, dear friends, that we are "*called according to his purpose*" (Romans viii. 28), chosen "*in him before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians i. 4), an elect vessel as "*members of his body*" (Ephesians v. 30) the Church.

I don't want to smother everything by putting a lot on top of these things. I do want the full force of every fragment to come upon us. If you are not aware that this hand has come upon you, that you, as Paul put it, have been "*apprehended by Christ Jesus*" (Philippians iii. 12)—apprehended, arrested, taken in charge was how Paul thought of himself, and that is how it ought to be with every one of us. We have just been taken in charge by Jesus Christ—

there is something defective in your committal to the Lord and in your relationship. And be sure that there will be a defectiveness in your testimony, or in the Lord's testimony in and through your life. That is where things begin.

But note: that was but the beginning. You may think that is enough. No, it is not, and you will find that other things follow.

## TESTED AS TO REALITY

And the next thing that will follow this call, this outstretched hand of the Lord toward you, this apprehending, this encounter with the Lord, will mean that He will try you out as to whether you really do mean business. He is not going to have anybody in this great business of maintaining His testimony who does not really mean business. "*Go back again; for what have I done to thee?*" Can you go back? If you can, then do. I always say that to people. It means that you really have not come into anything very real if you can. That is a test on every matter which can be followed through to a thousand details. If you can say: 'Why can't I? May I not? Is this not allowed? Can I not go here, go there?' If you *can*, go . . . if you *can*, do it! But I venture to say that if something has happened, as you go to it you begin to have a bad time and say: 'No, I cannot. I just cannot.' You know that! However, the point is that you will be tested.

And then follows this. Elijah said to Elisha: "*Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me as far as Bethel. And Elisha said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel.*" We don't know what happened at Bethel, but it seems as though Elijah immediately moved on further. He said: "*Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.*" And yet again: "*Tarry here, I pray thee: for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan.*" And Elisha said: "*As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee*" (II Kings ii. 2, 4, 6).

You have heard this many times before, but the point is this: The Lord is going to prove us right up to the hilt, to the fourth dimension, as to whether we mean business with Him, how far our relationship with Him, for the sake of His testimony, takes pre-eminence over everything else, and how necessary this is to our life. Can we let it go? Can we be put off? Can we put something else in its place?

Dear friends, the question here, or the issue involved in this whole matter, is the issue of spiritual capacity for this great thing to which the Lord has

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called us. We need capacity, you know. We know quite well that we are not going to get through with this thing just willy-nilly, superficially. We are finding all the way along that we need more and more spiritual life, spiritual increase and spiritual measure, and it is a matter of our capacity in this thing for going on to the end. There are many who are falling out by the way, many who are returning, and many who are giving up and are put off and discouraged. The Lord knows that. Many went away from Him. "*Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away?*" (John vi. 67). You see, it is this testing all the time as to how much this really means to us, whether we are just camp-followers, as we say, whether we are just religionists, attenders at meetings, listeners to addresses, readers of books, members of some Christian fraternity; whether we are nominally bearing the name 'Christian', or whether we are of this order, able to say truly from the heart: 'Look here, I have no alternatives. There is no other way for me. This is very life, and the alternative, if there is one, is death.'

The Lord will bring us, as Elijah brought Elisha, to that severe testing in which Elijah took great risks of being misunderstood. I cannot dwell upon that, but he did. He could have involved himself in a lot of misunderstanding with Elisha, and Elisha might have said: 'Look here, this man does not want me. He is trying to get rid of me. Evidently I am mistaken about this whole thing', and, offended, he might have turned away. Well, Elijah took risks like that, and the Lord takes risks like that with us. I don't know how many of you have got to the place (if you haven't, don't worry. You may get there sooner or later) where the Lord's dealings with us sometimes make us wonder whether He really wants us after all. It does seem as though He is trying to put us off. The ways of the Lord are to our flesh sometimes very discouraging! We don't find a great deal of natural, soulical zest when we are passing through times of trial.

Well, leave that. Now, then, how much do you really *need* what you are in by the call of God? How much is it really *vital* to you in consequence? Is it a matter of life or death? Now, you will need capacity, depth and spiritual enlargement, and you will need to be brought to the place where you are spiritually competent, reliable, able to take responsibility, and the only way of coming there is as Elisha came there, under the full enduement of the Holy Spirit, for this great vocation is being tested as to whether you really do mean business.

In the course of many years I have had quite a lot of letters written to me about the ministry in print, and this is one type of letter that I have often

received: 'When I first came into possession of this ministry in print (referring to the magazine) I could not understand it, I could not appreciate it. It did not mean anything to me, so I just put the thing away. But then, for a year or two, or more, I went through deep waters and into such spiritual trial that I had to cry out to the Lord for something to help me in my difficulty. And then perchance I came on that printed ministry. My word, I would never have believed what was in it! It just met my need because I had gone through something that made it necessary.'

Forgive me illustrating in that way. I am not drawing attention to anything in particular, but am simply saying this: that we come to this place of evaluating our calling and setting a right estimate and value upon it only by way of deep trial and testing, where it becomes absolutely necessary to us, and if we don't know the Lord in some new way, it is the end of everything. The Lord tests us, you see, to enlarge our spiritual measure and capacity unto the going through with this great thing to which He has called us, to lay the deposit at His feet at last, undiminished, but rather increased.

This is what Paul said to Timothy: "*O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee*" (I Timothy vi. 20). Translated more literally that says: 'O Timothy, guard the deposit. Something has been committed to you, deposited with you, and you have got to hand it back to the Lord at the last day. See to it that nothing is lost.'

Well, we come to the capacity for that along this same line as Elisha, and you can see how it was with the apostles. How discouraged they might have been, especially during those strange forty days! Indeed, I think Peter showed some signs of giving way. It was so strange, this coming and going of the Lord during forty days! You could not be sure of Him. It all seemed so unreal. He was here one moment, and then He was gone, and you never knew when He would be here again, if ever. It was all so intangible, and, you know, this flesh must have something it can hold on to, and can see and be sure of. This spiritual life is such a trying thing to the natural man, and at last Peter said: "*I go a fishing*" (John xxi. 3) . . . 'Fishers are more tangible. I know something about fishing, but I don't know much about the spiritual life. It is too much for me, so I go a fishing.' And the others said: "*We also come with thee.*" But you know what happened and I need not follow that through. It did not work. They had been called to something more than that—fishers of men.

However, the point is, dear friends, that you and

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I are put through very real testing and trials to find out whether we really mean business with God, and how much spiritual things count with us. Can we hold them lightly? Can we dispense with them easily, or has this become a master thing in our lives? Do we really know the bond of the Spirit, the bond of the mantle which has laid hold of us? We are men and women who are in the charge of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and it must be like that to fulfil this vocation.

## ALIVE, BUT IN BONDAGE

Now, there is another thing. And this is a thing that you and I must be very clear about; we must be on very sure ground in this matter. That is why I took that little fragment from John xi about Lazarus. The Lord had called him out of the tomb, and he came forth "*bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin*". I don't know anything about that, as I am not a mortician. If there is one here he will understand why it is necessary to bind a dead man's hands and feet and tie up his face. We will leave that. But Lazarus came forth like this, bound hand and foot, with a napkin round his face, and the Lord Jesus said: "*Loose him, and let him go.*" He is raised, brought back into life, and is out of the realm of death and of the grave, but he is still terribly tied up. He must be loosed, freed from all traces of that old realm, with all its ties, bonds, limitations, frustrations and burdens, and be a man at liberty, set free for God. There is no need for me to point out that Lazarus was here standing in relation to the testimony of Jesus in a very vital way. Read the story again. "*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby*" (John xi. 4). Here is the testimony—"that the Son of God may be glorified"—and the testimony has these phases and aspects.

First: being brought out from the realm of death into newness of life. Then it has the other aspect of being completely set free from all that which is of the past, a person absolutely at liberty . . . at liberty? Yes, at liberty, but a liberty in a bondage such as has never been before. It is the bondage of the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ, the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. A lot of Christians are saved; they are born anew; they pass from death into life; but, oh! what a lot of trappings they have brought with them into the new realm! A lot of the old ties still follow them through, and hold them bound—hand and feet and head. You know what I mean without my illustrating, and it is true.

Let me put it in another way. There are many

Christians who have not yet come into and under the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. What do we mean by the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit? Well, this is a thing that the Lord Jesus was constantly trying to press and impress. Take that fragment with Nicodemus. Undoubtedly, here is a man in bondage, all tied up with natural ties. He is not even yet through from death to life. And the Lord said to him: "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit*" (John iii. 8). You see what He was saying? Have you ever tried conclusions with a hurricane? Have you ever tried to set yourself against a mighty, rushing wind? Well, look at the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit came like a rushing, mighty wind, and see who can stand up to that! Who can hold on his own independent way when that is happening? The wind blows where it likes, and you cannot say to it: "You must come this way, or go that way. You must do this, or that." It just does as it likes. That is all. The wind is sovereign. And if you know anything about it, you know quite well that the only thing to do is to set your sails and let that wind carry you on. To try to withstand it means trouble.

Now the Lord is speaking about the Holy Spirit, and the words to Nicodemus illustrate the day of Pentecost and what followed. He is saying: "Now, look here, Nicodemus, you are all tied up with your legalities, your traditions, and your natural life. You will have to come to the place where you let go to the Spirit of God and completely capitulate to Him. You will never get into the Kingdom at all until that happens. Capitulate to the Spirit, and do not say this, or that, or the other thing. That is all taken out of your hands and put into the hands of the Holy Spirit to say which way, and what, and so on." The sovereignty of the Holy Spirit means that all our old ties are removed and these old bonds are taken off. We are brought into a new captivity.

That is just the theme of Paul's letter to the Galatians. On the one side there are the bonds, and ties, and graveclothes of the law. On the other side, how much Paul is saying to them about the Spirit! "*Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?*" (iii. 3). He is appealing to them not to be brought again under the yoke of bondage, but to remain under this mighty mastery of the Spirit, which he calls liberty, real liberty.

Now, you see, with Elisha it came to the point of a final committal, or commitment, at Jordan, and that is what Jordan always means. It is a type of the Cross, where for ever the bound is met and passed through, or over, from the old self-governed,



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self-directed life and way to the absolute mastery of the Spirit. When Elisha got through that, to that point of complete committal, the mantle of Elijah came down on him, as everybody recognised. "*The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha*" (II Kings ii. 15). The final committal is at Jordan, at the Cross, where there is full abandonment to the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, for Him to say: "This way, or that way. Hither, or thither", never allowing us to dictate anything at all.

But, oh! What a lot of limitation continues in our life because, well, we want to say which way, what it is to be, and what it is not to be. We have arguments with the Lord and we have controversies with the Holy Spirit, but once He gets that complete sovereignty you see what happens.

We spoke earlier of the inestimable blessing of an opened heaven. Well, Elisha came into that, didn't he? "*Chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.*" An opened heaven and the Spirit coming through the opened heaven, as the master went into glory. It is the parable of this truth that we have here in the Book of the Acts, and that book is the continuation of this testimony. It has so often been pointed out that it is a book which was never finished. Perhaps you, like me, have often wished that Luke had written his third volume and carried it somewhere nearer to completion, telling us what happened afterwards. But, no, the Holy Spirit never allowed that story to be ended, because it is not ended yet. We are in the third volume of the Acts of Jesus Christ now! That volume of the doings and teachings of Jesus Christ is being written now, and we will read it later on.

But, dear friends, the truth is the same. The same Lord is in heaven. The same Holy Spirit has come forth from heaven to us. The same testimony of Jesus as was committed to those disciples and apostles has been committed to us. The same glorious endowment is ours, the endowment of the Holy Spirit. What an endowment!

I wanted to take you to some of the things in the life of Elisha, to talk to you about that poor widow and her oil, the collecting, the borrowing of very many vessels from all her neighbours, and the miracle of the never-ending oil while there was a need. Well, you can see yourself what that means.

The blessed, wonderful sufficiency of the Holy Spirit to meet all need, to pay all obligations and to get through with the testimony to the glory of God. One passage from Paul is enough to include that: "*God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound*" (II Corinthians ix. 8). That is the woman and her pots of oil overflowing—the all-sufficiency of the Holy Spirit, however long we live, to meet the last demand. What a blessed thing that is!

And I wanted to talk to you about Naaman and his mighty experience of this power of the Spirit, but we must leave him.

And, then what about the sons of the prophets of Jericho, who said: "*Behold now, the place where we dwell before thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan . . . and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell*" (II Kings vi. 1, 2). The question of enlargement again, of capacity for usefulness and service. You know they went down to Jordan, and as they were cutting down the trees for this enlargement, the axe-head of one came off and fell into the water, which was evidently so deep that they could not see where it was. Elisha said: "*Where fell it?*" And then the result—and by this act of Elisha "*the iron did swim*" (II Kings vi. 6—rv margin). That is the focal point of it: that, dear friends, which by nature would always sink and go to the bottom, is made to reverse its course and swim. What a story is in that of spiritual experience through the centuries! You and I by nature are always ready to sink. That is our way! Even in the work of the Lord our way is so often the down way. We say we get down—"I am down today." We are gravitating downwards—the forces of gravity are too much for us. And then, by the miracle of the Holy Spirit, ascendancy comes in and takes charge, where the natural course would be downwards. I have no space to enlarge upon that—I just indicate it.

These are things which become very true in the spiritual life when the Holy Spirit is in charge. The order is reversed. You and I naturally have a great propensity for getting down. The Holy Spirit reverses that natural way and brings us up again and again. This heavy iron of our natures is made to swim. You know something about that!

(To be continued)

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## EDITOR'S NOTE

*In continuing these chapters of a book by an American writer, long out of print, our object is twofold. One, because of the persistent gravitation toward, and vogue of, formalism and ritual. The other, the peril*

*and limiting effect of exclusiveness. These two things cover a large range of variety in kind and degree, but they are as crippling to spiritual growth as was Judaism of old. Deliverance from them requires a mighty work of the Spirit of Life.*

## LIBERTY IN CHRIST (III)

THERE is no need to dwell at length upon the historical incidents to which reference is made in chapters i and ii of the Epistle to the Galatians, which we are considering, since the bearing of those incidents upon the matters in hand is easily seen. We shall therefore give them but brief notice.

Paul refers to his "conversation in time past in the Jews' religion", or, in other words, to his manner of life in Judaism,\* during which time he was devoting himself zealously to persecuting the Church of God and ravaging it. He was therefore thoroughly informed as to Judaism, and knew perfectly the antagonism between that system of legal bondage and the free church of God. He knew, too, that it had required a miracle of Christ's mighty power to deliver him from his blindness as a Jewish zealot, to bring him, like a little child, literally *led by the hand* (Acts ix. 8), into the Kingdom of God's dear Son, and to make him willing to accept and obey commands brought by the very ones he had come to persecute at Damascus. Therefore he could clearly foresee the disaster that would fall upon the saints in Galatia if they should be enticed into the observance of Jewish rites.

This, of course, is not in any wise a reflection upon Judaism as originally established by God, and as it was before it became corrupted through the traditions of men. As originally established it was a marvellous witness to the coming work and glories of Christ. It owed its entire value, however, to the fact that, in all its various and elaborate details, it was "a shadow of *good things to come*". For that very reason the actual coming of Christ, and His fulfilment of those types and shadows, of necessity *abolished Judaism*. Therefore, to revive or to return to those fulfilled types and shadows was a slight upon the work of Christ, and hence a grievous thing in the eyes of God. It follows that it is a thing even more grievous in God's eyes for His people to

\* The word "religion" does not occur in this Epistle. It is found only in Acts xxvi. 5; and James i. 26, 27. Christianity is not a religion. Human religions are like costumes, prepared for special occasions, with various trimmings for different seasons of the year. Christianity is a *life to be lived every day of the year*, a life which only they *can* live who have been born of the Spirit and are indwelt by the Spirit.

engage in religious observances of purely *human* origin. For if there be now no place for Jewish ceremonial religion—its ritual, priesthood, vestments, feasts, rites, etc.—how much less is there place for any other? How grievous then in God's sight must be the atrocious mixture of Jewish and pagan liturgical arrangements and services, ceremonies, vestments, sacerdotal orders, holy days and seasons (largely derived from the idolatrous worship of the heathen) to which modern Christendom is almost wholly given over? The tendency to return to these things is deeply rooted in the human heart; and there is need of constant watchfulness against it.

Paul refers also to the fact that as a young man his prospects in Judaism had been exceedingly bright, beyond those of others who were his equals in age (i. 14). This is a further evidence that nothing short of the mighty power of God could have changed him from the chief persecutor of the church into its most efficient apostle and minister.

Paul speaks of himself as having been "separated" to the service of God from his mother's womb. In Romans i. 1 he says he was "separated unto the gospel of God". In Galatians i. 15 he adds: "from my mother's womb". In like manner God made known to Jeremiah that, before he was born, He had sanctified him (i.e. had separated or set him apart) to be "a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah i. 5). God foresees the service which His called ones are to perform. Jeremiah was to be "a prophet unto the nations" to pronounce God's judgments upon them; and Paul was to be an *apostle* unto the nations to bear to them the message of God's pardoning love in Christ Jesus. And both were selected for God's service from their mother's womb.

The first visit of Paul to Jerusalem after his conversion is described in Acts ix. 26-30. It was preceded by a period of active and effective witnessing in Damascus. His second visit, after a further interval of fourteen years, was the momentous occasion when he went "by revelation" (Galatians ii. 2), accompanied by Barnabas, Titus and others, to bring before the apostles and the church at Jerusalem the great question whether converts from

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among the Gentiles should be circumcised and taught to keep the law of Moses. A full account of this event is given in Acts xv. Referring to this visit, Paul points out (in writing to the Galatians) that not even Titus, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. In order to get the sense of this passage it is needful to observe that verse 3 is parenthetical, and that verse 4 continues the recital begun in verse 2. The sense is this: "I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles. And the reason for my going up to Jerusalem was that false brethren, stealthily brought in, had come among us to spy out our liberty in Christ", etc. That is to say, the reason why Paul went up to Jerusalem and communicated to the apostles the substance of what he was preaching among the Gentiles, was because of the coming of those referred to as "false brethren", who had come in among them by stealth to spy out the freedom which the saints enjoyed in Christ Jesus, and to contrive to bring them again into "bondage". Those "false brethren" are referred to in Acts xv. 1, as "certain men which came down from Judea" to Antioch, and who "taught the brethren and said, 'Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved'."

What was involved in this attempt to seduce believers in the Lord Jesus Christ away from "the truth of the gospel" is forcibly declared by Paul's words in Galatians v. 2-4:

"Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are (being) justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

We withhold our detailed comment upon this passage, desiring at present only to point out that for believing Gentiles to submit to circumcision as insisted upon by the "false brethren" referred to, would have placed them under obligation to observe the whole law of Moses, with all its rites, ceremonies, sacrifices, offerings, feasts, and other holy days and seasons. It would amount to a *complete abandonment* of the truth that a man is not justified by doing the things appointed by the law, but solely by the work of God, and upon the ground of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul mentions also the fact (Galatians ii. 6-10) that upon comparing his preaching with that of the other apostles, it was found that he had the complete message of God, insomuch that they could add nothing to what he had already received of the Lord.

The fact that Paul was at pains to communicate the gospel as preached by himself to the other apostles shows that he fully recognized that they had the true gospel for all the world in this dispensation, and that it would never do for him to be preaching anything different. In fact, he said he communicated his gospel to the other apostles lest by any means he "should run, or had run in vain". Furthermore, his statement that they "in conference added nothing to me"—that is to say they found nothing lacking in his preaching—proves that he and they had *precisely the same gospel*. Again, Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, after first declaring the gospel which he had preached and they had received, referred to the preaching of the other apostles, and said: "Therefore, whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed" (I Corinthians xv. 1-11). In other words, they all preached the same gospel.

It was also made evident to those at Jerusalem that Paul had been expressly chosen of the Lord for the apostleship to the Gentiles; for Paul says, "When they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter . . . they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." With that perfect understanding they parted, taking up severally the labours entrusted to them.

Reference is next made to an event of great significance which took place during a subsequent visit of Peter to Antioch. It appears that, at first, Peter had walked according to *the truth of the one and only gospel*; but afterwards, through fear of some who came up from Jerusalem, he withdrew and separated himself from the Gentile believers.\* This influenced other Jews to dissemble in like manner, insomuch that even Barnabas also, who had been chosen by the Holy Spirit to be Paul's companion in the ministry among the Gentiles, was carried away with them.

Paul describes this conduct of Peter, Barnabas and other believers, as walking "not uprightly according to the *truth* of the gospel" (ii. 14). What then was that "truth of the gospel" which was being set aside by the conduct of Peter and the others? It was nothing less than the great fact, hidden during previous ages in the secret counsels of God, that *the fulness of Christ was for Gentiles equally with Jews*. It was that great and precious "mystery" of which Paul so often makes mention.

It is clear then that what was involved is a matter

\* Showing how "the fear of man bringeth a snare" (Proverbs xxix. 25).

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

vital to Christianity. That, indeed, could be inferred from the unparalleled spectacle here presented of one apostle—the last and “least of the apostles”—administering severe rebuke (before all the company of saints) to another apostle, and he *the chief of them all*. Furthermore, from the fact that the extraordinary occurrence in question has been recorded by inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the instruction of the church throughout this age, we may gather assuredly that we have here a matter of permanent importance to the saints of God. Therefore we dwell for a while upon this strange happening, in order to get a clear idea of what was involved.

Many passages of Scripture declare that one effect of the death of Christ was the breaking down for evermore of the separating wall—“the middle wall of partition”—which God Himself had, in the preceding dispensation of “the law and the prophets”, reared up between Jews and Gentiles. But the now revealed truth of the gospel, which previously had been a “mystery”, is that Gentiles, who in the past dispensation were “afar off” are now in Christ Jesus, made nigh by His blood. We quote in this connection the words of Paul in Ephesians ii. 13–15, where, after referring to the state of the Gentiles in the past dispensation as aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, without Christ, without hope, and without God, he says:

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace”—that is, the peace or perfect oneness between believers from among Jews and Gentiles—“Who hath made both”—both Jews and Gentiles—“one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances”—which had been given to Jews but not to Gentiles—“for to make *in Himself* of twain (Jew and Gentile) one new man, so making peace” (that is, bringing into accord or oneness).

Enough appears by this one Scripture (out of many that bear on the subject) to show that Peter, Barnabas and the others who dissembled\* “likewise” were setting aside the work of the Cross, reopening a breach which the Lord’s death had closed, and were dividing the *one* body of Christ. It was a most serious matter surely.

This great “truth of the gospel”—namely, that “the unsearchable riches of Christ” were for Gentiles equally with Jews—which Paul had been

\* *Dissemble together*—to act a feigned part or to act hypocritically in concert with others.

specially called and commissioned to preach (Ephesians iii. 8), was *well known* to Peter and the rest. The Lord had plainly told His disciples, in explaining the parable of the wheat and tares (and doubtless on many other occasions, some of which are recorded), that the field in which the Word of the gospel was to be sown was not merely the land of Israel, but “the world”. After His resurrection especially He spoke to them of “the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God”, and commanded them to go into *all the world*, to preach the gospel to *all creation*, and to disciple *all nations*. For He sent them not into Judea only, but “into *the world*”; and He charged them that repentance and remission of sins (the *gospel*, in a word) should be preached in His Name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem (Matthew xxviii. 19, 20; Mark xvi. 15; John xvii. 18; Luke xxiv. 47).

Peter in particular had been instructed as to this “mystery”. In preaching on the day of Pentecost Peter had said that the promise of the Spirit, bestowed upon those who repent and believe on the risen Christ, was given not only to the children of Israel, but also “to all them that are *afar off*, as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts ii. 39). Also God had revealed “the mystery” to Peter by means of the vision of the great sheet let down from heaven (see Acts x. 9–16 and 28).

Peter had previously quoted the prophecy of Joel which foretold that “*Whosoever* shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts ii. 21). Furthermore, Peter had been, in a most remarkable way, prepared and commissioned to act upon this very “truth of the gospel”, as recorded in the tenth chapter of Acts. That he well understood the lesson conveyed by the vision of the great sheet let down from heaven clearly appears by his words to the centurion Cornelius, when he entered the latter’s house, thus associating himself with the abhorred “Gentile”. To Cornelius and his company he said:

“Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation; but *God hath showed me that I should not call ANY MAN COMMON OR UNCLEAN*” (Acts x. 28).

Some years after this great event which in a formal and impressive way declared *the full equality of Gentiles with Jews for all the purposes of God’s gospel of grace and pardoning love*, Peter himself set forth this “truth of the gospel” before the assembled apostles and elders and the “multitude” of believers gathered at Jerusalem, using these words:

“Men and brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among us, that *the Gentiles*

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by my mouth should hear the Word of the Gospel and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts xv. 7-9).

Notwithstanding this clear statement from the lips of the man who had been expressly chosen of God to carry out the truth under consideration, we find that same apostle, shortly thereafter, walking in direct contradiction to that very truth, and himself putting a difference where God had removed all difference, thus, in the language of Paul, building again the very things which God had, and that through Peter's own ministry, completely "destroyed".

There is much to learn from this incident. We have spoken already of the testimony it bears to the immense importance, in God's eyes, of that "truth of the gospel" upon which depends God's "eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (see Ephesians iii. 11, and verses preceding).

But it teaches also that even the servants of the Lord who have been most used of God may be found walking in ways that are contrary to the very truth they have clearly proclaimed. This lesson is greatly needed in our day; for often when some truth of the gospel is urged for the obedience of saints we are referred, as a reason for non-compliance, to the example of certain prominent leaders, it may be men whom God has gifted for His service and has even used in a conspicuous way, who nevertheless have chosen to walk in a broad and popular path, thus escaping in some measure "the offence of the cross" and "the reproach of Christ", or have otherwise failed in "doing the truth" (John iii. 21; Galatians iii. 1; II John 4; III John 3, 4).

Let us then give earnest heed to the fact that "the truth of the gospel" is a thing not merely to be committed to the memory, but to be manifested in all our walk and ways. And let us bear always in mind that we are to follow those who teach and minister the Word of God, only so far as they themselves walk in the truth thereof.

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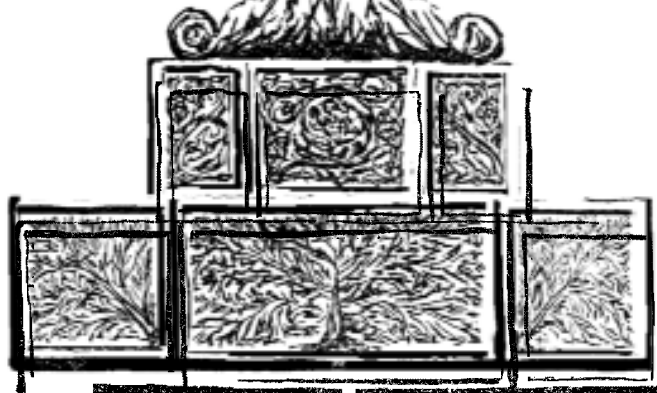
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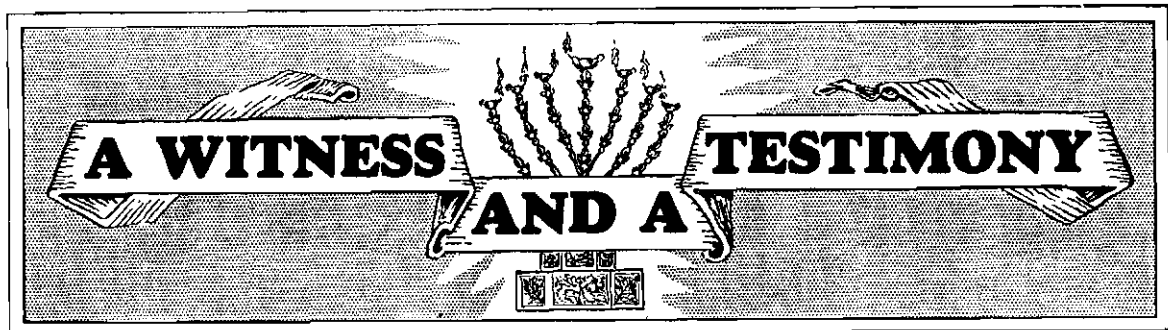
### THIS MINISTRY

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

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

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 30, Dunoon Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

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



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## FROM THE EDITOR

DEAR CIRCLE OF FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Firstly, as promised, a brief report on the conference in Switzerland. To the many friends who assured us of prayer for that time we can say, without reserve, that the Lord answered very truly. All our fears as to insufficient accommodation proved unnecessary, for no one had to be refused; extra accommodation came to knowledge when we arrived, and the company was provided for in a number of places. It was a good company, representing quite a number of countries. The spirit and fellowship were very good, and the Lord graciously helped in the ministry. We were glad to have with us our brothers Lambert of Richmond and Thompson of Bombay. Both ministered at morning prayers, and brother Thompson spoke once in the evening.

Without reference to the matter, quite spontaneously, six of the company asked if they could give testimony in believer's baptism, and the Lord, quite wonderfully, arranged for this to be possible. It was a highlight of the conference.

We were led to be occupied throughout with the last two chapters of the book of the Revelation, and

the Lord put His finger upon many very practical matters relating to the full end toward which He is working. As to weather, it was the best week that we have ever had at Aeschi. It was not easy to leave this literal and spiritual mountain time, but we trust that "the God of the Mountains" will be as real in the valleys as there.

And now, after the conferences in U.S.A., Holland, and Switzerland, we are much before the Lord for the future. Not with the Lord, but with us there are big questions in the place of prayer, and issues in the balances. He already knows the answers but we wait.

The whole matter of our future base and sphere is a major issue, and we ask for fellowship in this connection. Our work *seems* to be finished at Honor Oak and the new orientation does not seem to need our particular ministry and function. We, however, have no intention of moving without definite leading by the Lord. We remain His "ambassador in bonds".

The Church of God is passing into, or through, some very big changes, and there is much "overturning, overturning, until he comes whose right it

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

is" (Ezekiel xxi. 27). While there is very much confusion in every realm, the lines of demarcation and definition are being drawn in Christianity. Categories are being made manifest and destinies fixed accordingly. While the great net of evangelism spreads, the haul will be sorted out and the winnowing fan of reality and utterness will test "of what sort it is". Perhaps one of the most testing discriminations will be between the *big* and the intrinsic.

There is one thing that is giving me a good deal of anxiety and apprehension. In this time when a twofold movement is taking place on a wide scale: that is, on the one hand the great movement toward union (not unity), as in the World Council of Churches, on the policy of the combine and monopoly, with all the necessary compromises and sacrifice of distinctiveness of message; and on the other hand the unrest, dissatisfaction, and loosening of ties with the established system of churches and institutions, resulting in many leaving their old associations and either meeting in groups, or drifting without anchorage in their disappointment—my disturbing fear is that there will be a movement, or some movements, toward the *formation* of another undenominational or interdenominational denomination, this coming about also by *policy*, *expediency*, or *seeming* necessity. Such a movement would only be another tragedy and incipient sectarian calamity, which history would show to have been not of God but of man, although with the best of motives. May the Lord save from this so serious mistake! It would be a starting at the wrong end; a *trying to form something*, instead of an organic growth from a living illumination, a revolutionary encounter with an unveiling of the true nature of the Church. For this latter God would have to lay an apprehending hand upon a man, or body of men, and, by a devastating showing of the true, universal, and spiritual significance of Christ, as effectively emancipating them from all the historic *accretions* of Christianity as the Apostle Paul was emancipated from historic Judaism. The growth of

this organism would be as other emancipated men sprang from the essential root, and not just adhered or sponsored. The power of such an organism would be the all-conquering life of resurrection: "The power that worketh in us." There is nothing artificial, imitation, or manufactured about this, and it requires no propaganda. The Holy Spirit is the great Propagandist of what is of heaven.

The above is written out of a very deep concern; a longing and a fear. It should be remembered that when God made His "new thing", His "new cruse" as the foundation of this dispensation of the Spirit and the Church, He did so with a nucleus of deeply disciplined men who had been broken by the Cross and reunited by the Resurrection. These two things were wrought deeply into their very constitution and were the ground upon which the Holy Spirit built in every place. This is the only *positive* ground for the Church and the churches. Anything other will be negative. They were men who had *seen!* It may be that, if the Lord is to have such a spiritual impact as was then made on the world, it will be necessary to sift down to that basis the conglomeration of the man-made and start—or go on—with the small but intrinsic seed-plot.

This may be like "a voice crying in the wilderness", but perhaps some wind of God would carry it as a guide or warning where it is needed.

It has always been contrary to our principle to advise people to leave this or that; rather have we said: 'Stay until your very spiritual life is at stake'; but, as things are, it is becoming more and more evident that God *must* "do a new thing" if His full end is to be reached. May He raise up His Prophets to "*show* the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed"; and may some Josiah (personal or corporate) arise to lead to such a taste of the real thing as to result in the leaving of all that is false. We can only resort to prayer!

Yours for His full satisfaction alone,  
T. AUSTIN-SPARKS,  
Editor.

*May we remind our readers that all letters relating to A Witness and a Testimony (change of address, gifts and so on), orders for literature, and any other matters to be dealt with by the office staff, should be addressed to THE EDITOR. Only personal private letters should be addressed to Mr. T. Austin-Sparks by name. When he is away from London it may not always be possible to*

*forward mail to him and letters addressed to him personally may remain unopened for a while. However, for the benefit of any who may not like the more impersonal form of address, it should be said that Mr. Sparks does see and read all correspondence received and greatly values the many expressions of appreciation.*

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## GLORY AT THE END

*Reading:* Haggai ii. 1-9; Ephesians iii. 20, 21; Revelation xxi. 10-11.

*"The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former."*

*"Unto him be the glory in the church . . . for ever and ever."*

*"The holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God."*

IT is something of which we should remind ourselves continually, that the end is going to be in glory, with glory—the end will be glory. Sometimes our answer to an interrogation might very well be that of the people in the time of Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai: The present glory is nothing! but "the latter glory . . . shall be greater than the former". The end will be with glory. We must tell ourselves that, when things look anything but glorious, when the glory seems to be entirely hidden, when there seems to be no glory at all in our experience and we are passing through a deep and terrible time of trial and affliction, this is not the end; it just cannot be the end. Though we think the end has come, it cannot be identified as the end, because the Word of God says that the end is glory. This is not glory; therefore it cannot be the end and we have not arrived at the end yet. We are not going down in shame, in dishonour, in reproach, in despair. We are going up in glory, for the end *is* glory.

## THE GLORY OF GRACE

What is this glory? Well, quite clearly, according to these passages which we have read, and others, it is the glory of grace. "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former", and in that very connection the prophet says: "He shall bring forth the top stone with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it" (Zechariah iv. 7). The words from the letter to the Ephesians—"unto him be the glory in the church"—are set in a whole encompassment of grace. The incomparable words concerning grace are found in that letter: "That we should be . . . to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (i. 6); "According to the riches of his grace" (i. 7); "(By grace have ye been saved) . . . that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace" (ii. 5, 7); "Unto me", says the writer, "was this grace given, to preach among the Gentiles the

unsearchable riches of Christ" (iii. 8). The last words concerning grace are in connection with the glory. So it is quite obviously the glory of grace. The Lord, in order to get the glory, will see that everything is kept on a basis of grace, that is, that everything that is not grace will be smitten hip and thigh by Him. In the end there will be no other element whatever in the situation. We shall just have to say it is His grace—the glory of His grace.

## THE BATTLEGROUND OF GRACE

The enemy is always trying to get us off the ground of grace. If he cannot do so by accusation, he will do so by false grace, which is presumption. In this way he makes grace a way of living as you like. It does not matter what you do, how you behave, grace will cover anything. "Once in grace, always in grace", so do not be troubled with responsibility. So grace is subverted. In many ways grace is a battleground, not a play-ground.

## GRACE A POWER IN THE LIFE

The only answer to these things is this: That while grace is that favour of God which asks for no merit, no earning, and is freely bestowed on us, as Paul says, *in the Beloved*, grace is also a power in the life. It is a vital force to make us live according to the good pleasure of God, the grace of God not only manifested in our acceptance, but in our lives, the acceptance begetting a response to the pleasure of God. Grace is a character, a nature, as well as a standing; grace unto glory, His glory, primarily the glory of what grace has done in our acceptance, in our standing, in our position, but also what grace has done in conforming us to the image of His Son, what grace is doing in us. It is a working thing. The glory of His grace at the end will be the manifestation of what grace has done.

## THE GLORY OF HIS SOVEREIGN WISDOM AND POWER

It will be the glory of His sovereign wisdom and power. You go back to these books of Ezra and Nehemiah and you find a people very much in need of the grace of God by reason of their own helplessness, the remnant being stripped and shorn of everything, unable to provide anything at all, so that it must all be of the Lord. And then you see the enemies, all the enemies. No sooner does God's purpose come into view, and a people in it, than,

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

as from nowhere, enemies spring up. You have never heard their names until now, you never knew anything about them and you did not know of their existence until now. How these people were beset on every hand by opposing forces who would make the work to cease by every means! You know the many forms of opposition in the book of Nehemiah—the enemy comes in from the deepest subterfuge to the most open and violent persecution. But there is a wonderful revelation of the sovereign wisdom and power of God; wisdom in outwitting the cunning of men and devils; wisdom in finding ways for the accomplishment of the purpose which men could never find; yes, and wisdom in turning the very work of their enemies to be complementary, spiritually complementary. Sovereign wisdom and sovereign power—and the house filled with glory at the end. The glory is the glory of that wisdom and power of God. “Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”, which goes beyond our ability to imagine how it can be done, or that it can be done at all, “according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church”. The story of the people of God is just that story of the power and wisdom of God, finding ways where there are no ways, finding means where there are no means, outwitting all the cunning of the enemy and turning the enemy’s very work to advantage. . . . “I would have you know . . . that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel” (Philippians i. 12). The wisdom of God, the power of God, the glory of that is manifested in the end.

### THE GLORY OF LIFE

And then it is the glory of life, the inherent qualities of Divine life being fully manifested at the end; life with its inherent power of transcendence, for the supreme and inclusive enemy is death, for death, while destroyed and defeated in the Cross, is still allowed to work against the Lord’s people. The destroyer is always on the track of one who has the life of God within. It is a part of the Divine order and economy to put the Divine life within and then allow it to be assailed by death and the powers of death in order to bring out what is inherent in that life. You and I would never know what we have got until it is drawn out and forced out by adverse conditions. We will never know what a Lord we have until we have to prove Him as the Lord of hosts. Notice that this whole matter of glory and grace is kept closely in touch with that very phrase, which is almost monotonously re-

peated: “The Lord of hosts”, “Thus saith the Lord of hosts”. You have to know Him in that absolutely supreme sense as the Lord of *hosts*, which means that you have to come up against other hosts to know Him in that way. Death is allowed to assail the possessors of Divine life just with this object of showing what that life really is, and in the end the glory will be the glory of the absolute ascendancy of that life in nullifying all the power of death. When it says: “The last enemy that shall be abolished is death” (I Corinthians xv. 26), it is a very significant statement, because there are other statements which say that the Lord did destroy death in His death. He tasted death on the behalf of every man, and destroyed death in order that there should be no more fear of death, and yet the last enemy still, yet, to be destroyed is death. What was done in the Head is going to be done in the whole Body. The Church is to come into its inheritance, and it is an inheritance of life. We have within us, in the gift of Divine life, such a wealthy inheritance, and we know little about it. The Lord is trying to teach us what we have in hand, what we can trade with, and in the end it will simply be the blazing forth of that which has been there all the time.

### PROGRESSIVE GLORY NOW

I have said these things, but my object lies at the end of this. It is the glory of grace—“Grace all the work shall crown”—the glory of His sovereign power and wisdom, and the glory of His triumphant life, but do not let us think of glory as something detached and given, placed upon, at some future time. We are always using the phraseology about going to glory, which is imperfect at least. We are looking forward to the day of glory; we are putting glory on there. Somewhere in the future, in some realm, it is going to be glory.

My point is just this: that, while there is a future somewhere, sometime, when the glory will be manifested, the Lord’s whole object is to bring about that glory in His people progressively now. That is why He is so careful to undercut everything that would take from the glory of grace, for, you see, grace is the great antidote to that terrible poison called pride. Pride was the ruin of the creation and it is an abomination with God: “God beholdeth the proud afar off”. The strongest things that can be found in the Word of God are said against pride in all its forms, under all its names—arrogance, conceit, and all the rest. God hates pride, and that is why He will make everything a matter of grace. You and I can produce nothing and never will

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produce anything, and while we try to produce something as a merit in our favour to give ourselves a standing, God stands afar off and will reduce us to pulp to bring in the glory of His grace. He will break, shatter and empty us; and remember that our spiritual progress, our spiritual growth and our spiritual gain will always be in the measure in which we are aware that it is only by the grace of God that we have any place of recognition, or anything else by Him. God is very, near to the humble and to the broken in spirit, but to the proud He is afar off. We will make progress as long as it is a matter of grace, and that is altogether contrary to this human nature in its fallen state. We can even be proud of our humility. Somehow or other this accursed thing will come up, seep in, to bring about self-congratulation. It is horrible to God, so He will have it all of grace.

So remember that the measure of glory at the end will be the measure of grace now. God will bring us into many perplexing, bewildering situations where there is no way through at all for human wisdom, and human strength and power fail us, in order that by His sovereign wisdom, doing what could not be imagined, and exercising power so great as to remove the greatest difficulties with the greatest ease, we wonder that we ever thought the thing so difficult. It has so easily disappeared. God's power is so overwhelmingly great, and what we

think requires the very moving of heaven and earth to accomplish is done so quietly that we hardly recognize it when it is done, and afterward we wonder that we were in such a state of distraction over that thing. Then we worship and give glory to God. The glory of His wisdom and His power.

And He brings us into situations of death—be they physical or be they spiritual; be they positions that we have to occupy in this world where it is all spiritual death—in order to show us that there is a life which is more than sufficient for these conditions. There is another life which is not dependent at all upon our physical fitness or upon the situation in which we are placed being helpful. There is another life which overcomes death, and it will be the glory of that life in fullness that breaks out. The thing is going on now, and the glory is already inherent. God is only preparing in us the glory which shall be manifested in the end. In the end we shall have to say: 'Well, I was learning all the way along the grace of God, the wisdom of God, the power of His life; I see now that that was the pathway of glory and that has issued in the effulgence; it is that that has led to this glory at the end.' It is inevitable; it must be because God has placed our lives upon this basis of the need of grace so utter, the need of wisdom, the need of strength, the need of life, in order that His glory should be manifested in meeting that need out from Himself.

## THE VOICES OF THE PROPHETS (X)

*"They knew not . . . the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath"* (Acts xiii. 27).

### THE VOICE OF EZEKIEL

WE would remind our readers that these messages are constituted by a principle which governs so much of the Bible. It is that, deeper than the *words* of Scripture, there is a *voice*; that it was—and is—possible to hear the words and miss the voice. The words are the statements; the voice is the meaning. We have proved this to be the case by such a statement as that in Isaiah vi. 9: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed (margin: 'continually') but perceive not." This is the condition lying behind our basic quotation in Acts xiii. 27.

The "voice" of Ezekiel has its own particular significance, and is very rich and challenging in the context of religion, and Christianity in particular as it has become.

Isaiah is mentioned many times in the New Testament, but this is not so with regard to Ezekiel, who is not quoted *by name*, but there is a profusion of allusions to his prophecies. On the surface of much of the New Testament his symbolisms are obvious, and beneath the surface his spiritual principles are not far to seek. It is this significance which constitutes the tragedy of Israel and the pathetic weakness and ineffectiveness of much that is called Christian. It is the failure to discern

### THE ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LITERAL AND THE SPIRITUAL

What a lot of labour has been spent upon trying to explain this book, and what a lot of explanation

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proves futile, if not foolish! This Prophet, more than any other, conveys his message in symbols and parables, and, while some of these can be easily interpreted by history, there is much which cannot be so interpreted literally without entering upon the realm of the impossible and the ridiculous. The only answer to this latter lies in spiritual principles, not in literal fulfilments. We will instance this shortly. But here we immediately find ourselves confronted with an imperative necessity: it is to point out another fundamental distinction. The literalists have resorted to an evasion of enigmas by launching a charge of 'spiritualizing things away'. In so doing they leave much without a satisfactory explanation, and—worse than that—they fall into the very deception which gives so much falsehood to so much 'Christianity'.

It is therefore necessary, before we can understand Ezekiel, to give space to this vital distinction which so few are able to recognize. It is

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MYSTICISM AND SPIRITUALITY

How terrible, and at what loss is this failure! Between these two things there are all the differences of two worlds, and if the contrast were understood there would be greater care in the use of the word 'mystical' in relation to such things as 'the body of Christ', 'Christianity', 'the elements of the Lord's Supper', etc. Perhaps the chief distinction between the two things is that mysticism is rarely—if ever—practical (in spite of a common phrase: 'Practical mystic'), while spirituality is most positively practical. Let us explain.

Mysticism has to do with the soulical senses, and usually relates to emotional and aesthetic impressions. It is the effect of music, pictures, ceremonial, ritual, vestments, pageantry, dramatic episodes, solemnities of voices, sounds, intonings, regalia, lighting (or the opposite), and all such things. The effect is transient and confined to the occasion. We have known the most vicious explosions of rival hatreds to take place immediately after those concerned have been in attendance at a celebration of the Festival of Corpus Christi, with the Elevation of the Host. This may be an extreme example, but it serves to define the nature of mysticism, for, during the 'Celebration', we heard those concerned groaning and swaying as if they were in the throes of Christ's physical agonies—which were being portrayed. Whether it be in such extreme form, or in much milder, mysticism is not practical in the sense of changing fundamental character, but puts people in a false realm, and deceives them into an

idea as to themselves. It is an illusion, a *false* spirituality, and is—in its finest and also most evil forms—the devil's delusion. Religion, as such, can be just mysticism, without life-changing power; whether it be 'Christian'(?), Hindu, Buddhist, or any other.

On the other hand, what the Bible (particularly the New Testament) means by the spiritual is immensely and unavoidably practical. Basically it means a change of nature, as, said Christ: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit", and *thus* "Ye *must* be born anew" (John iii. 5, 7). That is a statement of *fact*. The classic on the difference is by Paul in I Corinthians, chapter two. The contrast there is, in the first case, between the intensely religious, intellectual Ruler in Israel, Nicodemus, and a man born of the Spirit. In the second case, the contrasting of the 'natural' (Greek 'soulical') man, and 'He that is spiritual', and the focal point in both cases is *understanding*. Spirituality, therefore, according to the Bible, is essentially practical both as to the origin and the progress of the true Christian life. It is nothing less than a difference of species. The New Testament is founded and built upon this differentiation and contrast.

Herein, then, lies the tragedy of Israel and of much that is called Christianity. It is here, at this focal point, that failure to 'hear the *voice* of the prophets' is found. That is an essential preface to the understanding of Ezekiel's symbolism, and with that introduction we can proceed.

The key to *everything* in Ezekiel's prophecies (the whole book) is the characteristic word. From chapter one to chapter forty-two reference is made twenty-four times to "the Spirit". The Spirit is the energy, the guide, the revealer, the life, etc. The Prophet attributes everything to the Spirit. No book in the Old Testament gives anything like as large a place to the Spirit by name. While the same word is used for wind or breath, it is impossible—without being absurd—to use such words in all the connections in this book. We are compelled to relate the Spirit to God—the Spirit of God—in the ultimate conclusion of this book. God is taking the initiative; God is manipulating the Prophet; God is showing His servant; it is God speaking to the "son of man" (another characteristic term). The inclusive conclusion is that the great issue for the people was that they were confronted with a work and speaking of the Spirit of God, and they neither saw nor heard. The result was that—as a *nation*—they were lost in captivity and *only a remnant* was saved. With more to say as to the message of this book, we have already reached the climax in principle.

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We, in history, have before us in full view the fulfilment of terrible words uttered by the Lord Jesus. We can see a nation, from the year A.D. 70 until our own times, in the "outer darkness, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth". This was said by Him to be the consequence of "the sin against the Holy Ghost", for which there is "no forgiveness". But we are also in Romans: "But a remnant shall be saved". The "Son of Man", anointed and filled with the Spirit, came first to Israel, speaking and working "by the finger of God" (the Holy Spirit). His words and His works were discredited and repudiated, and He was charged with "having a devil". They "killed the Prince of Life", demanding a form of death so shameful as would never be imposed on a Roman by Rome. This was *the sin*, and the centuries have told the story.

To conclude this introduction, what is the point? Is it not that particular issue raised by Jesus in His time among men, and later to the churches: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith"? It is sometimes positively amazing and staggering what even Christians—and Christian

leaders—can do and say because of this deaf ear to the Spirit. They can take up and pass on most pernicious reports which are sheer lies and do untold harm to others and the Lord's interests because they do not so walk in the Spirit as to have Him say within: "That is not true." It is one thing to include belief in the Holy Spirit as a tenet of Christian doctrine, and it may be quite another thing to know when "the Spirit of truth" witnesses within the heart to the truth or the falsehood. It is significant that both the Remnant and the Overcomer are marked by this 'hearing the *voice*'. Jesus placed the ultimate issue of life or death upon this 'hearing the *voice* (not just the words) of the Son of Man'.

"Every sabbath" they heard the *words*, but not the *voice*.

Ezekiel has so much to say to us which demands an ear for the Spirit. Let us pray for the ear of Samuel—

"Oh, give me Samuel's ear—  
An open ear, O Lord!  
Alive and quick to hear  
Each whisper of Thy word!"

(To be continued)

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### AN OFFER OF LOVE

ABOUT three generations ago in our New England state which bears a French name, Maine, lived a farmer whose father had been a British emigrant. This farmer had two boys: Joe was 14 and Tom was about two years younger. One of Tom's tasks was to let down the bars when the cows came from the pasture into the barnyard to be milked, then up while they were being milked, and down again, and up again when the cows returned. There were four handlings of the bars every morning and four every night. Tom thought that was rather too much. He was a student of economy, like some other boys of various ages, and he sometimes left the bars down when they ought to have been up. Sometimes the cows would get out and do a bit of damage; and there would be a storm in the house.

This happened a good many times. At last the father said, "Tom, the next time you leave those bars down, I will whip you, and you will know you

are being whipped." So Tom was good for a while. But time dims the vision, and it dimmed the vision of the whip to Tom's eyes. One twilight he left the bars down when they should have been up, and the other stock came through and did a lot of damage. The father's face was clouded. Nothing was said that night. The next morning after breakfast the father went down into the lower field and was turning some hay over when the older boy, Joe, went to speak to his father.

The father did not see Joe at first, so Joe waited deferentially. By and by the father said, "Well, Joe, what is it?"

And Joe, embarrassed, said, "Father, I don't want Tom whipped."

The father said, "I must whip Tom; he has done wrong, and he must learn to obey. There cannot be strength without obedience."

"Well, Father," said Joe, shifting his weight from foot to foot in his embarrassment, "did you not



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read at family prayers: 'He was wounded for our transgressions'?"

The father looked up and said, "You have got a good memory, boy. What are you thinking about?"

Joe, flushing, said, "Well, Father, I will take half of Tom's whipping."

"No, I cannot let you do that," said the father. "Tom has done the wrong."

Then looking keenly at Joe, under his shaggy eyebrows, he said, "Did Tom send you here with that suggestion?" He knew Tom's characteristics. But Tom was not in the thing this time.

"Go and fetch Tom down," said his father. Joe found Tom on the front porch of the little white-painted farmhouse, with his schoolbooks. But he was not studying the books; he was studying futures.

"Tom, father wants you down in the lower field," said Joe.

When they reached the field they found their father leaning on his hayfork, wrapped in thought. Joe said, "Father, here is Tom." Tom's face was a study; it was bitter. In boy talk he was "fighting mad".

The father said very gently, "Tom, do you remember at prayers this morning I read, 'He was wounded for our transgressions'?"

Tom was plainly taken off his guard. That was a

surprise attack and he had no defence at that point. He flushed and said, "Yes, sir."

"Well, Tom, Joe says he will take half your whipping," said the father. You ought to have seen Tom's face now, all changed, all softened.

He swung round on his heel and threw his arms around Joe's neck and said, "No, Joe, you must not do that." Then he turned to his father and said, "I know I have done wrong, sir. I am ready for the whipping now, sir."

But the father's eyes were not very clear nor his voice very steady, as he said, "Well, boys, there will not be any whipping just now. But Tom, remember, the next time the bars are left down, Joe's offer holds good. You may go now, boys."

Before they went Tom did something very unusual for old New England; he said, "Father, may I kiss you?" Then the boys went back to the house.

It was Tom himself from whom I got this story, when he had reached manhood. Tom said the bars were never left down again. Joe's offer, Joe's love, held Tom steady at the bars.

How are the bars with you? Jesus did not offer to take half our whipping. No; he took all of it. "By His stripes we are healed." Only when it grips you that He died for you will you hold steady at the bars.

SELECTED.

## THE SPIRIT'S CALL TO ENLARGEMENT

*Reading:* II Kings iv. 8-37; viii. 1-6.

**T**HAT woman of Shunem little knew of the developments that would come, and what would be the results of her providing the prophet's chamber for Elisha! Elisha was the man of the Spirit, and wherever he went something always happened. Usually it was because people were in trouble, or in distress, or in difficulty, and he had the answer, but on this occasion, in the home of the woman of Shunem, there were no difficulties, yet it became a very different place through Elisha being there. His coming to that home brought a great change, and we might almost say that he stirred up something that seemed very nice and settled. This is the pattern for a life in the Spirit, and we want to see what the coming of Elisha meant to the home of the great woman of Shunem.

### A NEW EXPERIENCE AS TO ENLARGEMENT

In the first place, it meant for her a new exercise as to enlargement. As I have said, the coming of the presence of the Lord through Elisha stirred up the whole situation, which was a very good thing. It says that she was a "great" woman, and since the word is used similarly about others, we take it that she was a wealthy woman and a person of some importance—a good thing, but also a perilous thing. What the coming of Elisha to that home brought out into the light was the danger of being wealthy and yet limited, having so much and yet circumstances being so fixed and settled, so without prospect of enlargement, that, instead of being a glory, the situation was well on the way to being a tragedy. Her husband, we are told, was old and her own life was very limited. What was the prospect and purpose of all this substance? Frankly, there was none.

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The coming of the Spirit of God through Elisha challenged that whole situation; and maybe we need to be challenged. We thank God that we have, not earthly, but heavenly wealth, but we can be in this danger of being limited by our very wealth, and settling down. It was very nice for this woman to be able to invite Elisha to her home and to have the resources to provide a room for him, but before very long something had come to disturb the whole atmosphere of that home. She had so much, and yet the whole thing was in jeopardy because she was limited and settled and had no future.

It must, we believe, be true that what she had was by the blessing of the Lord; her home, her husband who seems to have been so thoughtful, kind and helpful, and her servants. The whole atmosphere seems to cry out aloud: 'How greatly God has blessed me!' But what Elisha put his finger on was not: 'Has the blessing come in?', but 'Is the blessing going out?' Where is the outlet and the future for this blessing? It is possible to be wealthy, rejoicing in the many blessings that the Lord has showered upon us, and yet there may be a need for Him to come and challenge the whole situation as to whether it is as He means it to be, whether this wealth can be held and whether these blessings have a meaning. Well, their meaning is very limited until they can be passed on and spread out. It is true that the woman did what she could. She gave what she had and welcomed in the presence of the Lord, but in doing that she opened a way for the revelation—not only of the poverty that was there, in spite of all her wealth—but of a new prospect that God had of enlargement, impossible though it might have seemed to her.

We do not know whether she was at all concerned underneath. She certainly was not on the surface, for when Elisha sent his servant to ask what he could do as a recompense for all her care, offering to speak to the king for her, she answered: "I dwell among mine own people"—"I am not in any difficulty". It was a troubled land, a society very different from our own, and so often people needed help from higher quarters, but, no, in her case the whole situation was not only rich and affluent, it was calm and untroubled. But, in spite of all that, there was underneath a hidden matter that, if it was not troubling her or had not troubled her hitherto, was going to do so now. There was brought to light this fact that, in spite of having so much and apparently not needing any special help from higher realms, at the heart of that situation lay a very deep and tragic need. There was no way for enlargement, no prospect for the future.

And so the call to enlargement came to her. Was

it her own idea? We are not told that it was, though it may be that Gehazi questioned and probed underneath this apparent calm and serenity and found out that, after all, deep down in the heart there was a longing, as there so often is a yearning—Oh, for expression! Oh, for enlargement! Maybe it was Gehazi's own idea, for he is the only one who is recorded as having suggested it: "She hath no son." And she was called then to be given this promise that, when the time was ripe, God would bring what made all those riches to have a meaning, what made all those blessings to realize their full end. He was going to trouble an untroubled situation, but only so that out of the trouble there might come great enlargement. 'You shall have a son.' 'No', she said, 'that is impossible.'—"Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thy handmaid."

She was called to be told that God was going to do the impossible, and the Lord calls to us to challenge us that He is able to do the impossible. When the time came round, it happened as Elisha had said unto her.

And where was Elisha when he called the woman? "It fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber and lay there"—not because he was lazy, but because he was restful. What an amazing picture of a man of the Spirit lying back on his bed and saying: 'God is going to do the impossible.' That was a wonderful bed in that chamber—a bed of restful, strong confidence in the Lord. The thing was impossible as far as the woman was concerned, but Elisha was not rushing around. He was lying back, calmly but confidently saying: 'God is going to do the impossible. He is going to see that this wealth does not perish, but is exploited, that His blessings are not all brought back and centred into the confines and limits of this house. He is going to make a living channel for the blessings to flow out.' Impossible, yes, but the man of God can lie back on the promises and assurances that he has from heaven and say: 'Impossible, but it is going to happen.'

And so there came into that home and whole situation a new thing which God had done. He had brought about an exercise—and surely that is what the Lord wants to do with us all: to bring about an exercise as to enlargement. The danger is lest the whole atmosphere of the home be so restful, so undisturbed, all the riches so gathered and centred in there, that there should be no exercise. It seemed as though it was like that with the woman, for when Elisha, through Gehazi, said to her: 'What shall I do for you?', in effect she said: 'I am all right.' There is a wrong kind of dissatisfaction, and the Lord deliver us from it, but there is a right kind of

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exercise, and it is not always the correct thing to say that we are all right.

So there came this very small, but living extra factor into the home, living and growing. The Lord keep us exercised that the key to His working shall be found not just in accumulated riches or blessings, but that there shall be born the secret of enlargement, no matter how small at its beginning as long as it is alive and can grow.

### NEW EXPERIENCE OF RESURRECTION

But as we are told so often, God's developments are never smooth, flowing steadily on, though for some years it seemed like it, and the boy began to grow and the normal course of developments took place. However, it is not really like that. The Lord's enlargements are not gradual unfoldings, but are brought about by crises. They come by catastrophes, if you like, for they must find their real expression in resurrection life. And so the catastrophe came to this home.

When the woman went to Elisha she, in effect, argued with him, saying: 'Why didn't you let me alone? I was all right. Why did you put this into my mind? Why did you suggest it? Why has it happened?' That is so often the devil's temptation when, as we get exercised about enlargement, something seems to go wrong. It was such a surprising event, such a break into the normal course of things, that even Elisha himself, the man of God, seems to have been surprised by it. He usually knew what the Lord was doing—in fact, of all men in the Old Testament, he was the outstanding one who always did know what the Lord and what the enemy were doing, but on this occasion, when the servant would have thrust the woman away, he said: "Let her alone: for her soul is vexed within her; and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." Dear friends, there are things that break in upon us that are unexpected even to the most spiritual. There is no way of knowing what God is at when once we are committed to the course of enlargement.

Why, we ask, did it have to be like this? Why must the son die? I would suggest two very simple possibilities which relate to us as much as to her. How quickly we begin to take things for granted! God had done a miracle in that home, breaking in in an altogether unexpected, unusual way, and doing the impossible. But we get used to the impossible if it is only a matter of past history. How easily we settle down and take it for granted! This is an ordinary son, just the normal course of things—and all the thrill, all the exercise, all the

prayer, all the dependence and all the praise that were associated with those early days tend to be calmed down and to lose their proper place. And so the Lord breaks in with the reminder that enlargement is His work, and not ours. Enlargement is not spontaneous, it does not just happen, and if it begins with a mighty exercise and proving of His power, then we cannot go on just taking it for granted, and the Lord makes sure that we do not.

Then how ready we are to take possession for ourselves of what really belongs to God! This was God's boy, His gift, but I have no doubt that the mother, quite naturally, was regarding him rather as her possession than the Lord's. That is a very subtle and very common temptation when the Lord leads us to any way of new enlargement in His will: we very soon take hold of it as though it were our thing, something in our hand to serve our purposes. The Lord took no risks in this case, and so the tragic (as it seemed to the mother) day came when she sat the boy on her knees till noon, and then he died.

Of course, this was also done to test the purity of the woman's faith, and of Elisha's faith, for that matter, for, if God is moving, He wants to keep us very, very dependent, and very pure in our faith that this is indeed of Him. It seems to me that this woman of Shunem did everything right, and therefore she is a good example to us when we are involved in the same circumstances. She seems to have done exactly what she should have done. First of all, she got straight back to God through His servant. She did not argue or discuss this matter with herself or anyone else. The whole story from this point onward is a prompt movement of decided action; the house is shut up, the servant is produced, the animal is fetched and she makes no delay in getting back to God. And that is the thing to do: get to the Lord about it.

But even that is not done with any sense of panic. There is marvellous peace in her soul! Has God given something? Is He on the move? Then, when things seem to go wrong, it is not for us to be getting excited and panicky. The father, when she sent for a servant and an ass, asked: "Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." She did not even say what was the matter, but just: "It shall be well", and she said it all in one word—"Peace". That is the test of faith—not whether you can have a son when it is impossible, but whether, when the impossible son, having been given, dies, you can still say: 'Peace, peace.' When the devil says: 'Calamity, tragedy, fear, fright, complaint!', if your heart can say 'Peace',

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you are right over on God's side—and that is the side to be on.

And then the bed comes into the situation again. When the child died, she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God; not on his own bed, nor on hers—though that is what we do so often. We lay it on our bed, take it all on. She laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door and went out. When you read the story it sounds just a straightforward narrative, but you put yourself in her place. She laid this one, in whom all her hopes were centred, on the bed, left him there and went out. What sublime faith! That is the kind of faith that produces resurrection. You may give Elisha a lot of credit, and he deserves it for he was God's instrument, but give the woman her credit. She put the boy where he was in the way of being raised from the dead—she put the thing back on to God. She did all that she could do, and what a big 'all' it is, though so simple!

There is a whole wealth of spiritual instruction in the sending of Gehazi with the staff and its failure, and the coming of Elisha and his great exercise over this boy. While resurrection is an act of God, it calls for something very positive on our side if we are the one with the ministry in the Spirit. Elisha had to stretch himself seven times on that boy. It is very wonderful when God gives His answer of resurrection, but you cannot be glib about resurrection. You can be trustful, but you cannot be just superficial and easy. The greatest experience that can ever come to a human life, the greatest answer of God in any work of His is for it to go down into death and then get a mighty lift by resurrection power. Only God can do it. The trouble is that we do not give Him the chance. He will do it if we give Him the chance, but make no mistake about it, when He does it it is a mighty thing.

#### A NEW PROOF OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Now we come to chapter viii, which gives us the third of the reasons as to why the boy died at all. He died that the enlargement might be made safe; he died that faith might have its full exercise; and he died because God was making provision for the future, and that death was His way of ensuring continuance right through to the full expression. It seems strange to produce continuance by allowing death to strike, but supposing death had not stricken the lad. The famine would have come just the same, they would have been away seven years just the same, the woman would have come back and she would have had her son, but she would have had no inheritance.

And so the wonderful thing about this latest and last development is to see how the sovereignty of God is at work, and to see His marvellous wisdom. He allowed that calamity to come, not only to test the woman's faith, but because He was thinking of future days. The trouble is that we can so seldom agree with Him on that matter. The Lord is making provision for a development which shall continue, shall stand the test and endure. We are quite content to have something quick and exciting, but God wants something which may be slow but is enduring and ever-increasing in its value. So the woman and her son were away seven years, which, by the way, was another test of faith. She had to leave all her possessions, just because Elisha said so. I do not know how bad this famine was—perhaps not quite so bad as was suggested—but as far as she was concerned she was told to go away for seven years and to let everything go. She had learned her lesson—would to God that we had! Enlargement and fruitfulness do not come by holding on, but by letting go. They do not come by our feeling that we have to keep something for God, but by a new exhilaration of assurance that He is well able to look after His own concerns if we are true to Him. So the household went, and, as we know, when they came back the lands were in other possession. Someone else had them and had had all the profits from them during those seven years. That is why I said that it might not have been such a bad famine. For seven years the whole thing had been accumulating in its values, but it was out of this woman's hands and there was no apparent possibility of her having it back. That was when she went to make her appeal to the king.

This is the third point that I want to bring to you. First, the exercise for enlargement; secondly, the experience of resurrection, and now, thirdly, this proof of the absolute sovereignty of God. Look at the timing here! Isn't it marvellous? Gehazi is telling the story to the king—and here she is! What a good thing she waited the seven years! We would have waited six, or even six and three-quarters, and then said: 'Well, I think I had better be getting back now.' One day too soon and the whole thing would have been spoiled. That is a tremendous challenge to us! We must not be tardy, for to have been too late would have spoiled everything, but if there is a choice then in a sense it is better to be too late than too early. To be one day, one hour before God's time has struck means that the whole scheme of things is spoiled, but, oh, how wonderfully timed it is when you walk with the Lord! All this woman knew was that she was going to put in her claim for what was really hers, but she did not

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know whether she would succeed. I do not suppose she thought of the seven years' productiveness of it, but God timed it so perfectly that everything was safeguarded and nothing was lost.

I do not know what you think of Gehazi. He seems to have had rather a chequered career, for the last we hear about him was when he went out from the presence of Elisha in disgrace because of his deception over Naaman. You remember that he himself was visited with the leprosy from which Naaman had been cured and had left Elisha's service in disgrace. Well, lepers seem to have mixed among the people fairly commonly, so Gehazi might still have been a leper when he was talking to the king. On the other hand, the Lord is always more gracious than we give Him credit for, and it may be that the leprosy did not hold to Gehazi as it might have done. But it does not matter whether either of those is true. It does seem clear that he had left Elisha and was 'cashing in' on having been Elisha's servant, getting help and hospitality here and there by telling the wonderful stories of Elisha. He had even got a place near to the king as official story-teller. What a comedown for a man who had been the servant of a man of God! Well, we know that he took the way of selfishness, and this is where he landed. But this is the marvel of it: See the

sovereignty of God in that He takes a wretched failure, a deceiver, a man who had not made good and was now wandering round trying to get some credit just by talking about the things of God, and makes him serve His purposes! The Lord says: 'All right, My man, you have chosen your way and are going along it, but I am going to use you', and when the woman came to the king he was there telling his story—and he had just got to the story about her son being restored to life.

Oh, the ways of God are wonderful! You can lie back on your bed, in spirit, if you have a God like that, can't you? I do not mean being lazy or slack, but being restful. So, because of the timing, because of the sovereign use of God even of a man who was a failure, everything came back. The command was given: "Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now."

If God breaks into a situation and says: 'I mean enlargement', it will not be an easy experience. It will have many painful, distressing and perplexing phases to it, but if we will keep on God's side He will see that it goes right through to its full end.

Let us then worship and trust the faithfulness of our God!

H. F.

## THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

### 7. THE CREATION AND CONSECRATION OF THE ARK

WE are occupied at this time with the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are seeing how that greatness and glory is represented to us in the Old Testament by means of the ark of the covenant. We have begun to look at the journeys of the ark through the wilderness and into the land, and we have pointed out that it was not only a literal journey, but a spiritual journey, moving ever more deeply into the life of God's people. The ark only went forward as it went inward. The Lord called upon the ark to stand still many times while the people worshipped, and in that way it was becoming a more inward reality as they went on with it. That is, what was true of the ark was being made true in their own history.

In that way it represents the history of every child of God. By means of deepening experiences the Lord Jesus is moving more and more from the outside to the inside, and is thus seeking to make

His people correspond to Himself. That is the great general truth about our relationship with the Lord Jesus. In the first place He is presented to us objectively, and from that time onward the Spirit of God is seeking to make Him not only objective, but subjective also. So what John said is true: "*As he is, even so are we in this world*" (I John iv. 17).

With that fact before us we went on to see the way in which the ark came into being, and, while I feel that what I have to say now is for everyone, I feel that it is especially for those who are near the beginning of their spiritual journey, those who have only recently come to the Lord, or who have gone only a little way on the journey. What I am going to say has to do with the real nature of a Christian.

The beginning of a true Christian life is the beginning of Jesus Christ in that life, and that is something that has never been made by man. When the Word of God says: "In Christ there is a new

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creation" (II Corinthians v. 17—RV margin), it means exactly that.

Now, you see, that is how the ark came into being. We have already emphasized that God did not leave the making of the ark to man's ideas. It came into being by a direct revelation from God Himself, and then it came into being by direct activity of the Holy Spirit. In the first place, it had nothing with what man did, or could do, but only with what God did. This ark was something which was altogether of God, and if the ark really does represent the Lord Jesus, that is the first great truth about Him. Man did not make the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not a human conception or idea. He is neither of man's mind nor of man's hand. He is a revelation and a creation of God, something altogether new. When the people who heard Him speak said: "Never man spake like this man" (John vii. 46—AV), they would just as truly have been able to say: 'Never was there a man like this Man.'

Now that truth has to move from the objective to the subjective with us. The beginning of a true Christian life is something altogether new. We have to say: 'I never saw it like that before.'

We must look at the Lord Jesus more closely. We are saying that He was something new out of heaven, and the Apostles who wrote about Him took very great pains to emphasize this truth. The Apostle John, for instance, continually spoke about the heavenly character and person of the Lord Jesus, and they all took great care to make it perfectly clear that everything truly related to the Lord Jesus was of a heavenly nature.

We begin with the home of the Lord Jesus. If you were asked where His home was, perhaps you would say: 'Well, Nazareth, or Bethlehem', or perhaps: 'He had no home. He Himself said: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He was born in a stable, and was buried in someone else's tomb. He was altogether without a home.' Are you quite sure that that is true? If you think again, you will know that it is not, for He Himself said: "I am come down from heaven" (John vi. 38), and that His Father was in heaven. His native land was heaven. He was a stranger in this world, but He had a home. Heaven was His home.

I wonder if you have all realized that that is the great truth about every true child of God. It is a pity that in our most common translation the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Ye must be born again" (John iii. 7—AV). That is only part of the truth. What He really said was: 'You must be born from above.' The first truth about every child of God

ought to be the same as it was of the Lord Jesus Christ, for we ought to be able to say: 'I don't belong here. I am a stranger in this world. It is not my home.' This is not because we have been told that we are going to heaven as our heavenly home, but because there is something in us of which we are conscious that does not belong to this world. Do you really have that consciousness? Sometimes when we go to Canada we meet very many people who have emigrated from Scotland, and they give us such a warm welcome. They say: 'Oh, are you from the old country? Our hearts are there! We think about it, we dream about it, and when we get together we are always talking about it. It is good to meet someone from the old country.' They are in another country, but they do not belong to it. The country to which they truly belong is inside, and that is exactly how Jesus was when He was here. He was always telling people about His wonderful Father who was in heaven, and about the wonderful heavenly home from which He had come, and He was longing to return there. You read the Gospel by John again and see if that is true!

Do you see what I mean when I say that what was true of the Lord Jesus has to be true in us? That ark of the testimony came out from heaven and was always moving toward heaven. It would never come to its rest until it came right into the heavenly country. Are you quite sure that you have that country in your heart? You remember that the Psalmist, in Psalm lxxxiv, when speaking of the pilgrim people of God, said: "In whose heart are the high ways to Zion" (verse 5). The thing that was in their hearts was going to Zion. Their feet were not only taking the way to Zion, but the way to Zion was in their hearts.

Now I am spending too much time on this one thing, but it is very important that we should all recognize this fundamental thing about a true Christian life. It must not be that when we come to the end of the journey we just say: 'Now I am going home'. That is how a lot of people think of death, but we ought really to have been going home all our Christian life, and the last step will just be over and through the door. So heaven as our home must be in our hearts and in our consciousness from the beginning of the Christian life.

When you are asked where you were born, it is only half a truth to say: 'In France . . . In Switzerland . . . In Germany . . . or, In England.' No, we were born from above. But what does that mean? What happened to you when you were born? You were born because you had received life. When you were born naturally you received French life, or German life, or English life, but it was an earthly

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life. It had a beginning, and it has an end. Those who are born from above receive a life which had no beginning and has no end. That is what John tells us about the Lord Jesus. He begins his Gospel with these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Can you tell me when that beginning was? There is no date to it. It is outside of time. John says of Jesus Christ: "In him was life" (John i. 4), and Jesus Himself said: "I came that they might have life" (John x. 10).

There are two Greek words for 'life'. One is 'bios', from which we get 'biology', and that is just natural life, but there is another word, 'zoe', and that is a different kind of life. It is a life that no one has naturally. It is called eternal life, or the life of the ages—and that is the life which was in Jesus Christ, and which He gives to every new-born child of God.

Now, you do everything by reason of the life that is in you. You think because there is life in you, and when the life has gone, you will stop thinking. You feel because of the life that is in you. Am I being too simple? Be patient, for I have not finished yet.

I find that French people behave in a certain way because they have French life, and British people behave in a certain way because they have British life. And all the other divisions of the human race behave, think and feel and act because of their peculiar life. When you go to a foreign country you are always having to excuse yourself. You have to say: 'Excuse me, but this is how we do it in our country.' You see, your whole behaviour is governed by the kind of life that is in you. Jesus did not think as the people of this world think, He did not feel as they feel, and neither did He act as they act. That was the cause of all the trouble with Him. The world did not understand Him, and John said: "The world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." He had a life in Him which made Him different from the life of this world.

We all need to recognize this more, and young Christians especially must recognize this great truth: If you really are a child of God you do not belong to this world system, and even the world recognizes that there is something different about you. We are given a life which is not the life of time or of this world. It is the life of eternity, and that is the life which we are supposed to have in Jesus Christ.

What is true of the Lord Jesus has to be made true of us in every respect.

Now I will close with just one other thing about the ark. When the ark had been made according to God's pattern, although it was an expression of God's mind it had to be consecrated to Him. You will find this consecration in Exodus xxx, and there were two things in it—blood and oil. The high priest sprinkled the ark with blood and oil. Now you notice that, as in the New Testament, blood in the Old Testament is always related to sin. It speaks of the atonement for sin, for where the blood was, sin had been removed. Atonement had been made for sin, and the blood separated that upon which it rested from a life of sin. The blood says: 'Sin is atoned for and put away.' It speaks of the death side, for that which has shed its blood has died. Oil speaks of the life side, for, because sin has been put away, the Holy Spirit can come down upon it, and because there has been a death to sin, there can now be a life in the Spirit. In that way the ark was consecrated, which means that it was separated unto God. One of its names was 'The Ark of God'. It is wholly for God. It is no longer for the world or for self, but altogether for God.

That is Jesus Christ. By shedding His own precious blood He removed sin for us, and by giving the oil of the Holy Spirit He has brought us from death into life, so that now we wholly belong to God. We do not belong to ourselves, to this world, or to sin. The Holy Spirit has come to us and made us wholly God's.

I am so glad that the old Christians are listening so carefully! That means that they are also taking this to heart and are not saying: 'Oh, that is for young Christians.' My dear friends, the older we grow and the further we go with the Lord, the more true will this become in our history.

Forgive me for saying this: I am not wanting just to give you the truth that is in the Bible. My far greater concern is that the truth which is in the Bible shall be true in us. If you go away with all this just in your note-books, or in your heads, the whole conference has failed. All the ministry of every meeting has failed. All our prayer and travail over this time is for nothing. These realities about the Lord Jesus must be realities in our experience. Therefore I beseech you to have prayerful exercise about these messages.

*(To be continued)*

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*The following is the first message given at the Aeschi (Switzerland) Conference this year—September, 1966***“THE HOLY CITY, NEW JERUSALEM”****1. THE NATURE OF GOD**

*“And there came one of the seven angels . . . and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation xxi. 9, 10).*

*“Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews xii. 22).*

*“But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother” (Galatians iv. 26).*

**W**E are going to occupy the first part of our time with trying to see where we are, and those passages do tell us quite precisely where we are. The Word says: “Ye are come unto . . . the heavenly Jerusalem”, and that “the Jerusalem that is above” (that is, the heavenly Jerusalem) “is our mother”. Well, that says where we are, but it does not explain, and this week we are going to be occupied with that to which we have come.

Now when you read these last chapters of the book of the Revelation you are inclined to think that it is all in the future. “The holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” —surely that belongs to some future time? Well, it may have a future aspect, but these Scriptures say that we have come there already. I know that that sounds rather mysterious, but in these hours which we spend together I think we shall be seeing exactly what it means. At the beginning, then, we must lay the foundation for our studies.

**WHY WERE THESE CHAPTERS WRITTEN?**

First of all, we must understand why it was, and when it was, that the Apostle John wrote all this about the new Jerusalem. This was written at a time when Christians were undergoing very severe persecution. The great wave of persecution of the Christians was proceeding, and Christianity was being subjected to very strong opposition from this world, so that Christians were finding that it was a matter of very great cost to be faithful to the Lord Jesus. As you know, the Apostle John himself, who wrote this, was in exile on the isle of Patmos for the testimony of Jesus.

That very first thing makes these chapters very contemporary. A new wave of persecution of Christianity has already begun on this earth, and it is spreading from the east to the west. While we are here in this place quite a number of the Lord’s servants are in prison for the testimony of Jesus. So this book does not just relate to something which happened centuries ago, nor to the future, but we are going to see that it has a very real application to our own time.

The second thing about the writing of this vision of the heavenly Jerusalem was that it was written in a time when the churches were losing their first love. A change was coming over them, and the first chapters of this book show us what that change was. The first love, the first life, the first glory were being lost. Surely we all realize how true that is in many places in our own time! The great cry today is: ‘Let us get back to the things of the beginning!’

The third thing that led to the writing of these chapters was this: It was a time when many false prophets and teachers were bringing confusion into Christianity, and the faith which was ‘once for all delivered unto the saints’ was losing its purity. One Apostle, who wrote a very short letter, said he was constrained to write in order “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Is that not another condition in which we are living today? Many false teachers are bringing the people of God into confusion so that they hardly know what to believe.

Perhaps there is no book in the Bible which is more confused than this book of the Revelation. Many Christians have given up reading it, saying: ‘I don’t know what to think about it. This Bible teacher gives this interpretation, while that one gives another.’ If I tried to do so, I could not tell you how many different interpretations of the book of the Revelation there are!

Well, that is how it was in the time when John wrote. You know that in his Letter he said that many false Christs had arisen (I John ii. 18). We must remember that this revelation of the heavenly Jerusalem was given because of all these conditions.

But let us note one more thing. This book was written at a time when judgment upon this world was beginning. You have only to read through it to see the judgments that were coming upon the world,



## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

and they began at the earthly Jerusalem. I think there is nothing in literature so terrible as the account of the destruction of Jerusalem given by the historian Josephus! But when the earthly Jerusalem is destroyed and removed, the heavenly one comes into view.

The judgment upon this world began at Jerusalem, and then it came upon the Roman Empire, and upon Rome itself. The time was not far ahead when great and wonderful imperial Rome would be devastated. From all its wealth, its luxury and its plenty it was reduced to famine and pestilence, and the economic situation became so bad that the most wealthy people were begging for food. And so you read in this book of these pestilences, famines and wars, and all these conditions which were coming upon the world. The judgments of God upon this world were beginning—and who shall say that those judgments are not beginning in our world today? We leave that for the present.

So we have here conditions of suffering and corruption and loss of glory, the decline of the Lord's people from their first love, a state of falsehood and spiritual weakness—and when things were like that, and are like that, the heavenly Jerusalem is presented and is the answer to all those conditions. It is just exactly the opposite of all those things.

Now we leave that for the moment and move nearer to the heart of these last chapters in the book of the Revelation.

### WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

We want to know what is the meaning of this holy city, and I think that before we get very much further many of your ideas are going to be thoroughly upset! We are going to spoil many of the hymns that you sing, but we are going to have something better, and I hope that you will be singing a new song before we have finished.

The Christian who takes his, or her, Christian life seriously is always seeking for something which will explain his experience. Such Christians may not be actually searching for this, but in their hearts they are asking for something which will explain everything. In our Christian lives we are asking: What does it all mean? What is it leading to? Men in the world are asking the question: What does it all mean? When I was in hospital some years ago there was a man who had both his legs amputated, and I heard him groaning in his bed almost every day: 'What does it all mean?' You remember that in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans

the Apostle Paul speaks about the groaning creation—"the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together" (verse 22)—and if you put your ear to the groaning creation, what do you hear? I feel sure you would hear this: What does it all mean? And then the Apostle Paul goes on to say: "We ourselves groan within ourselves" (verse 23). We have a deep question in our hearts: What does it all mean? What does all this difficulty, trial and suffering in the Christian life mean? What is it all leading to?

Now, of course, it is the business of the Christian teacher to provide the answer to that question and so to help God's people to understand what it means. So we have to ask this question: Is there an explanation which can be found in the Bible which will provide us with light upon the way?

### THE KEY TO EVERYTHING

I want to say that there is an explanation, and I think these last chapters of the Bible are the best explanation in the Bible. If only we understood these two last chapters a great light would break upon our hearts, and we would say: 'And now I see. I have the key to everything.' Now that is making a great claim for two chapters—the key to everything!

I am not just using words. I have dwelt upon this for many days and weeks, so that these are not just empty words. What is the explanation of everything? There is one thing which governs everything in the Bible, and it is that which comes out in fullness in the last chapters. What is that key to everything? When I put it into a short phrase, of course, you will not grasp what it means, but the more you think about it the more you will see that it is true. The thing which governs everything in the Bible from beginning to end is the nature of God. Have you got that phrase? The nature of God governs everything, and by 'the nature of God' we mean the very constitution of God Himself. We say about people: 'Well, he, or she, is constituted that way. That is how he thinks, how he feels and how he speaks, and because he is made like that, he speaks and thinks like that. That is just his constitution.' It does not matter what you do, you cannot get away from your own constitution. It is your constitution that makes you behave as you do.

That is what we mean by 'the nature of God'. If I may put it in this way: It is just how God, because He is what He is, looks at everything.

Well now, one of the real lessons of our Christian life is that we learn that God looks at everything

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quite differently from ourselves. He looks at things from the eyes of His own nature. If anything satisfies the nature of God His eyes fill with life, and He says: "In whom I am well pleased", but if anything does not satisfy the nature of God and He does not accept it, His eyes become dark. God judges everything according to His own nature, and He decides everything according to His own nature. The value of anything is always decided by God as to how it answers to His nature. God determines destiny for eternity on the standard of His own nature. Is that too difficult for you to grasp? You will never understand this city until you understand that, and you will never understand why Jesus Christ came into the world until you understand that. God is deciding the destiny of this world from the standpoint of His own nature, and His Son Jesus Christ is His standard of decision.

There is one question which stands over everything, and that is: Does it satisfy the nature of God? The Bible begins with the *fact* of God and ends with the *nature* of God in perfect expression, and this perfect expression of God's mind and nature is presented to us in the symbolism of a city and a garden. Do you notice the word that I have used? The *symbolism* of a city and a garden—and this is where we upset your hymns and you have to have an absolute revolution in your mentality. Have you the idea that you are going to the heavenly Jerusalem as to some thing and some place? I am sorry to tell you that you are wrong! When you sing:

"Jerusalem the golden!  
With milk and honey blest,"

what do you mean? When you sing:

"We're marching upward to Zion"

what do you mean? When you sing:

"We shall tread the streets of gold"

what do you mean? When you speak about "drinking at the river" and "taking of the fruit of life", what do you mean?

If I did not see the real meaning I should be very sorry to spoil all your lovely pictures! There is no such thing as a literal new Jerusalem and there is no such thing as a literal heavenly city answering to John's vision, but there is something very much better, and that is what we have to consider more fully.

#### WHY THIS SYMBOLISM?

I will just close by telling you why all this book of the Revelation, especially the last chapters, was written in symbolic terms. This book throughout is almost entirely symbolism. Why? Because so much of it was not only prophetic as to a more distant future but had to do with the history of those times. Supposing that, instead of speaking about a great dragon or a terrible beast coming up out of the sea, John had said: 'Caesar is an awful dragon and wild beast. Caesar is like *that*.' Well, you know what would have happened! So these historic truths were presented in symbols, and the Christians understood. You know that Peter called Rome 'Babylon'. Well, the Romans, in reading that, would have said: 'Oh, he is talking about Babylon. Where is Babylon?', but the Christians understood that Peter's Babylon was Rome. So it was all written in symbols and the Christians were the only ones who understood, and that is true of the holy city. It is not something literal; it is something which represents something spiritual, and it is for Christians to understand that this is not some imagination but some *spiritual* reality. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to the rest in parables" (Luke viii. 10). That is: You understand, they don't. So these chapters are for spiritual understanding. This city, this heavenly Jerusalem, is that which fully answers to the nature of God. Every detail about it represents something of the Divine nature, so the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says to Christians: "Ye are come unto . . . the *heavenly* Jerusalem."

Now that introduction was very necessary. It might not be very inspiring at the moment, but we must understand what it is that we are having to deal with, and why this has such an important message for our own lives and our own times. If you forget all that I have said this morning, try to remember one thing and take it away with you, think about it and keep on thinking about it: All God's work in our lives is on the basis of His own nature. We are called to be "partakers of the Divine nature", and when God has finished with us—if we let Him have His way—we shall be a full expression of the nature of God. Then, when you have a great multitude of people like *that*, a full, living expression of God's heart, then you have the heavenly Jerusalem.

Now you can sing again, if you like, "We are marching to Zion", but be sure of what you mean!

(To be continued)

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## THE DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

4. SPIRITUAL ENLARGEMENT UNTO THE MAINTAINING OF  
THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

I WANT to take you back to the point where Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha, which meant that Elisha was called, apprehended for that ministry of succeeding his master after the master had gone up to heaven. Then there were those journeys of the two, the testing out of Elisha, from Gilgal to Bethel, from Bethel to Jericho, from Jericho to Jordan, the passage of the Jordan, the ascension of Elijah in the chariot of fire, and the falling of his mantle upon Elisha, Elisha having already made the request that there might be a double portion of his master's spirit resting upon him. This verily came to pass, so that the sons of the prophets, when they saw Elisha return from the ascension scene said: "*The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha*" (II Kings ii. 15).

From there we take up some of the impressive incidents which were the outworking of that anointing, that double portion of the Spirit, which fell upon Elisha: that maintenance and extension of the testimony of the master in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is difficult not to see the correspondence between that Old Testament story and what we have in the New Testament: our Lord, Master and Head, through the Jordan (that is, through the Cross), ascending to the right hand, the majesty in the heavens, and His mantle falling upon His waiting, expectant and committed servants, the Church, and from that time the wonderful things which transpired in the pursuance of the testimony of the Lord in and through His Church on the earth.

Now I am going back to the Old Testament story again, just to pick out of that considerable number of impressive incidents the three to which I have referred, and to add a little further word to them, reminding you that this is not just Old Testament history, Bible story, interesting and instructive as it is, but that we stand at this time in that very position. We are here as the Lord's vessel—a part of it—in this very place. It may be a small part, but it is a part of that vessel that is left here on this earth while our Lord is away, in order to maintain His testimony, or that He may maintain His testimony, here in this world until He returns. That is our wonderful calling, but that is our great responsibility, and everyone here is involved in that responsibility if we belong to the Lord. This ought

to come upon us with great force. You and I, taking it individually, are entrusted with no lesser thing than the maintaining of the testimony of Jesus on this earth in His absence. That is our calling, that is our business, that is our responsibility, but, blessed be God! that is provided for abundantly by Him in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There are just a few further words to say on these three particular incidents that we have lifted out from the larger number in the ministry of Elisha.

## ENLARGEMENT UNTO SPIRITUAL FULLNESS

Firstly, the story of that widow who had just two sons and was in a state of great poverty. The creditors came and, she being unable to meet her liabilities, they were about to take her sons away, put them into servitude, and make them, by servitude, pay her debts, leaving her alone in destitution and desolation.

Elisha came to her, and she made her appeal to him, telling him of her sad plight, and he said: "*What has thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil*" (II Kings iv. 2). "That is all I have." He said: "Go to all your neighbours and borrow vessels, empty vessels, and borrow not a few." Well, we can use our imagination if we like. We can see that woman hastening—and sending her sons—in all directions, collecting all the empty vessels that she could borrow, bringing them to the house. The prophet said: "Now pour out." You know the rest of the story. She poured and poured, every vessel was filled, until she had no vessel left. The prophet would have said: "Go on! Go on!", but she said: "There is not another vessel", and the oil stayed.

It is a wonderful story. It is an impressive story when we read it in the light of the so much larger revelation of the Lord's provision for maintaining His testimony. Of course, there are many things in that story which are instructive, but we are not going to dwell upon those details. I just want to put my finger upon the one thing which seems to include all the others, and there is so much in the New Testament that is related to this in principle and in spiritual value.

When the Lord is moving in relation to His testimony, when He is really moving to do some-

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thing, He does not do it—as we say—by halves. He does it abundantly. Now what I want especially to underline in each of these stories, or accounts, is this matter of spiritual enlargement. You will notice that that is the governing thing in every one of these instances: spiritual enlargement unto all that this testimony of Jesus requires.

If you like, you can put yourself into the place of those borrowed vessels. Let this meeting place stand for that widow's home, and we are all here as vessels, borrowed vessels, if you like. They must be empty vessels, as we shall see. But here we are. Now, so far as we are concerned, and so far as you find the Lord's people anywhere are concerned, the Lord's great thought is *fullness*, spiritual fullness. The Lord does not believe in vacuums. He does not believe in leaving things empty. Look at His work in creation. The earth was without form and void. However, God's thought is not to leave anything empty and void, but to fill it, and you and I know how abundant creation is. How it spreads itself, spontaneously! You cannot cope with the fullness of the natural creation. But in the spiritual realm we have the higher thought of God, which is fullness.

On the Day of Pentecost the disciples were in an upper room, gathered together, and it says that these vessels "*were all filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Acts ii. 4). Go through the book of the Acts and you will find that it is repeated again and again: "*They were all filled with the Holy Spirit*" (e.g. Acts iv. 31), and you know that that was always the teaching of the Apostles. Paul says: "*Be filled with the Spirit*" (Ephesians v. 18). At the marriage in Cana of Galilee the vessels were empty, and the Lord said: 'Fill them', "*and they filled them up to the brim*" (John ii. 7). The Lord's idea for His people is that they should be filled.

That, of course, is the first lesson about the testimony. You will never be able to maintain this testimony unless you are a filled vessel, full of the Lord, full of the Spirit, full of His Divine life. It is essential, but it is blessedly possible because it is the Lord's will and the Lord's provision. "*He giveth not the Spirit by measure*" (John iii. 34). Fullness is His thought and His will. Are you quite sure that you are a filled vessel?

Now, then: one thing is essential: before you can be filled by the Lord you have got to be emptied of everything else. 'Borrow *empty* vessels,' said the prophet, "*not a few*" (II Kings iv. 3). Before the Apostles could be filled on the Day of Pentecost they had to be emptied at the Cross—and they *were* emptied! Ask Peter how he felt on that day! Ask the two on the way to Emmaus how they felt! Ask

Thomas how he felt at that time! I think the one thing they would all have said was: 'Utterly empty. Everything has gone.' But that is the kind of emptying that is necessary—the emptying of our own selves, our own self-confidence, our own self-strength, our own self-wisdom, our own self-will. Until that emptying of ourselves has been done there will be no fullness of the Spirit. "*Empty vessels . . . not a few*"—as many as you like.

And the other thing is just that it is we who put the limit on the Lord. The Lord never puts the limit on us. Elisha might have said to that woman: 'Come on, let us have more vessels. We can go on.' The Lord can go on if you will offer Him the facility, if you will make the provision, if you will give Him the opportunity, if you will let Him have what He wants—as many as you can bring. If only you will go on *He* will go on. The oil never stayed until the woman stopped. And the Lord never stops until we stop. If we are ready to go on, He will go on.

I repeat—we put the limit on the Lord. It is such a tragedy that we do so and limit Him. You know, that was the charge that was levelled against Israel: "*They . . . limited the Holy One of Israel*" (Psalm lxxviii. 41—AV). It was a judgment that they did that, for they said: "*Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?*" (verse 19), and in doing so they limited the Holy One of Israel.

The Lord will go on while we are conscious of need and while we put no limit of unbelief or of any other kind upon Him. Fullness is His thought and intention, and you can have continual fullness. John's testimony, after a long life, when he was an old man of about ninety—and he had started with the Lord Jesus as a young man—was: "*Of his fullness we all received, and grace for grace*" (John i. 16). That is a long life of testimony, to be able to speak at the end about fullness.

Do not think that it is necessary, when you get old, that you should get empty. That is just the opposite of what the Lord intends. He wants fullness at the beginning and fullness at the end. This is what should mark our lives: that we have always got a margin of that which is of the Lord to draw upon.

Well, that is the simple, yet far-reaching first lesson of the Old Testament story. And you can read your New Testament again in the light of that.

## ENLARGEMENT OF VISION

The second incident was that of Naaman, the leper commander-in-chief of the Syrian army. You will recall the story, so I will not give you details.

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We will just take him up where he set out with his great retinue to visit Elisha with a quest for his healing, having been advised by the little captive servant maid in his home that there was a prophet in Israel, and if he would go to him she was sure he would heal Naaman, her master, of his leprosy. Well, he arrived with his retinue, and you will remember that Elisha did not even go out to meet him, did not make any fuss of him at all, and did not even see him. He sent his messenger, his servant, to find out what it was all about, and then gave his command: "*Go and wash in Jordan seven times*" (II Kings v. 10). Poor Naaman had a lot of trouble over that! "*Are not Abanah and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean?*" (II Kings v. 12). He had to get down very low, off—as we say—his high horse of personal importance and pride in order to receive. That is by the way, and you can take all these details in as we go on. That is not the message.

Having at last had his pride overcome, and having come to see that it was either his pride, on the one side, or his healing on the other—he could choose which he liked—he came down on the side of healing, and went and bathed himself in the Jordan seven times, and was made whole.

Now, I say there are a lot of details in the story; it is full of instruction. But I want to get to our one thing, this matter of enlargement, the way of the enlargement of the testimony, and I want to take you over to the Gospel by Luke, chapter four. You will remember that the Lord Jesus had come to Nazareth, where He was brought up: "*He entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach . . .*" (Luke iv. 16-18). There we are on the ground of the Holy Spirit. We have come right back to Elisha, to this double portion of the Spirit, this anointing of the Spirit: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me."

Now note! After He read the portion, stopping at a very significant point, He said: "*Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears*" (Luke iv. 21). And then He went on to say: "*No prophet is acceptable in his own country*". "Anointed . . . prophet"—we are in spirit with Elisha all the time. Now listen: "*There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed but only Naaman the Syrian*" (verse 27). "In Israel . . . the Syrian", the outsider, the one of another nation. They saw the point in Nazareth

and were filled with anger. They thrust Him out and took Him to the brow of the hill upon which their city was built, intending to cast Him over. Mark, in referring to this incident, said: "*He marvelled because of their unbelief . . . and he could there do no mighty work*" (Mark vi. 6, 5).

This is the point. The Lord deliberately struck a blow that day at the narrow prejudice and exclusiveness of Israel, and said: 'In the days of Elisha the Lord went outside of Israel.' Israel had plenty of lepers, but the Lord went outside of Israel to meet Naaman, the Syrian. The Lord's thought is not some little, narrow, exclusive, bigoted thing that thinks it *is* everything and *has* everything, as Israel did. The Lord's thought is as big as everybody who is in need, be he Syrian or Jew, or any other. Christ is big enough for all the nations.

That was the great trouble. You see, they were filled with anger when He struck at their exclusiveness and said: 'Really, what you people need is spiritual enlargement, to get away from this narrowness, this littleness, this straitening of your Lord and making Him so much smaller than He really is. You need enlargement.' They were angry!

You notice that almost exactly the same thing happened when this same Holy Spirit made Peter go right away up north country to the house of a Gentile, Cornelius, the centurion. The Holy Spirit made him do it against his own will. Peter had said: "*Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean*" (Acts x. 14). But the Lord said: "*Arise . . . go with them.*" The Holy Spirit was in charge, as sovereign. He is going to extend the bounds of this testimony, and is not going to tolerate this little thing, with its smallness and exclusiveness—shut in. He is removing the grave clothes. Fullness is His thought for all. Now Peter had to go because the Spirit made him go, and when he was there the Spirit let him know very effectively that this was what He was doing, because later Peter says: "*As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them*" (Acts xi. 15). Well, when Peter got back to Jerusalem he went into a pretty hot fire! The Apostles at Jerusalem hauled him over the coals for breaking the bands of Israel, for forcing open the nations. All Peter could say, almost apologetically, was: "*If then God gave unto them the like gifts as he did also unto us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God?*" (Acts xi. 17).

You see, that is what brought about the death of Stephen. That is why they gnashed upon him and stoned him to death. Why? Well, if you read Stephen's address to them you will find that it was

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all against their nationalistic limitation and smallness and prejudice, and Stephen gathered it all up in this one phrase: "*Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost*" (Acts vii. 51). The Holy Ghost is for enlargement, and is against littleness, smallness, narrowness and exclusiveness, and if He is, we ought to be against it. To make Christ smaller than He is is to resist the Holy Ghost. There were many lepers in Israel, but to none of them was the prophet sent, but to Naaman, the Syrian. I think we should see the point of that.

Enlargement is the Lord's thought. Not only fullness of the vessels, but enlargement of vision to embrace all for whom Christ died, and to love all who are subjects of His grace.

## ENLARGEMENT OF MINISTRY

The third story is that of the sons of the prophets coming to Elisha and saying: "*The place where we dwell before thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell*" (II Kings vi. 2).

Here is the question of enlargement again, from another standpoint and in another way. What is it this time?

Well, first, enlargement is the vessel being full, and all the vessels being full.

Secondly, enlargement is the enlargement of vision, the end of all personal and collective introspection. It is a most fatal thing to be turned in upon ourselves, and all the time to have a narrower vision than the Lord's vision.

Now we come to the sons of the prophets. What is this? The testimony is again involved, and it is involved in the matter of service. You see, they are the sons of the prophets, and now it is the question of service amongst the Lord's people: an enlargement unto service for the testimony of Jesus. I think the best way in which we can get at this is to come right over to our New Testament at once.

We have two letters in the New Testament—of course, we have several twin letters in it—but we have this set of twins in the Corinthian letters, and I need not tell you what is in them. I think everybody knows what is in the first letter to the Corinthians! It is a sorry state of no testimony in the city. Oh, what an appalling spiritual smallness there is in the Corinthian church in that first letter! The second letter? Well, it is the enlargement of ministry, isn't it? "*Therefore*", says the Apostle, "*seeing we have this ministry*" (II Corinthians iv. 1), and he gives much light on what the ministry is. I am not going to deal with those details, but it is

all a matter of enlargement unto ministry. The cry of the Apostle to the Corinthians is this: "*Our mouth is open unto you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged . . . be ye also enlarged*" (II Corinthians vi. 11, 13). 'Your trouble is that you are too small, too little in yourselves, and too petty in your spiritual life and your spiritual measure.'

What was it that made them small and destroyed their ministry? Well, read the first chapters again and you cannot miss it. "*Each one of you saith I . . . I . . . I . . . are ye not carnal . . . after the manner of men?*" (I Corinthians i. 12; iii. 3). And then he speaks about the natural man—"Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . he cannot know them" (I Corinthians ii. 14). He is under a veto, an embargo, a limitation. Live on the ground of the self-life, whatever form it may take, intellectually, emotionally, volitionally, or in any other way, and you will be a little person spiritually. You will be a petty person spiritually, all tied up, limited, and you will have a very small testimony. But "*he that is spiritual judgeth all things*" (I Corinthians ii. 15).

It would seem that between the two letters something happened, that they had escaped from the littleness of the natural life and the natural ground unto something more of the Spirit. They had become enlarged in their spiritual life, in their hearts and in their minds, enlarged by the power of the Holy Spirit—and then you have the ministry: "*We have this ministry*" ("We have this testimony") "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God*" (II Corinthians iv. 7).

Oh, we need this basic work to deliver us from ourselves! That is it, isn't it? In every form, in every way—our self-estimates, our self-will, our self-strength! All that, and then the place of our habitation will be enlarged, we will build something bigger, and the testimony will go on and there will be a ministry.

I know how simple, perhaps elementary, are the things that I am saying, but they are basic, and very important.

## THE PLACE OF JORDAN

In closing I want to remind you of the place that Jordan had here in the life and ministry of Elisha. He started at Jordan with Elijah; it was at Jordan that he came into his ministry. Naaman had to go and wash seven times in Jordan before he came into the enlargement that the Lord was bringing about. The sons of the prophets went to Jordan to cut down wood, and it was there that the axe-head

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

came off and went to the bottom, and the iron was made to swim.

Well, here you are. I Corinthians is the natural life which goes downward. II Corinthians is the spiritual life of resurrection which comes upward. There is no service in our downward gravitation, is there? We are no use to the Lord like that! Get down, and you are no use to the Lord at all. Follow your own natural life and you get out of the Lord's use. But when His Divine resurrection life comes in by the Holy Spirit, the iron swims. That which would otherwise always go down is made to rise. The power of His resurrection is at work. It is the reversing of our natures, bringing us into the life of the Spirit and the ministry, and the testimony goes on.

May the Lord write these lessons deeply in our hearts and make us really understand His thought for every one of us: His spiritual fullness—nothing less. That is your birthright—to have of His fullness. There are no special classes for this. It is for all—"they were *all* filled". That is the Lord's thought for you and for me—to be filled. It is His desire, and He desires that we should have our vision

continually enlarged. Oh, God save us from becoming smaller in any way than the thought of the Lord Jesus! The Lord save us from becoming exclusive, shut in, tied up with limits that He does not put upon things! Christ is so great. We need never fear that we shall out-measure Christ, especially if we live in and walk by the Spirit. We shall not find that the Spirit's way is cramping, closing in. The Spirit's way is unto Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth, the fullest bounds of Divine grace. And our testimony—it is only another word for ministry—ministry sometimes seems very professional. We think of the ministry as being that of some special body of people. Call it 'testimony', and then we are all in it. Our testimony will be effective, will be released when we are ourselves delivered from what we are naturally. Do you know yourself? Oh, the terrible limitations there are in our natures and temperaments! We are all made in one way or another, and there are terrible limitations in our make-up. The Holy Spirit can lift us free of ourselves and our natural make-up, and enlarge us with the enlargement of Christ.

May it be so!

(Concluded)

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We are most grateful to those friends who responded to our appeal in the July issue of the paper and sent us copies of the March 1962 and March 1963 issues. This means that we can now offer bound volumes of *A Witness and a Testimony* for the years 1962 and 1963 and also for 1966. These should be available by the end of November.

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